PAST MASTERS 195

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and more

PAST MASTERS 195

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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J Allan Dunn

1872-1941

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1. "Typical Tropical Tramp!"

STANTON walked along the main street of Suva, painfully conscious that people looked at him as if he was a beach comber. He was not quite that—yet—though he was not many degrees removed from it, he told himself. His ducks and his linen, if they were frayed, were clean; he managed, with old blades and the horrible soap supplied by his landlady, to keep shaved; the soles of his shoes were broken, but the uppers were carefully pipe-clayed. He was still respectable, but his hair needed cutting and his browned features were beginning to wear an expression that made even the kilted native police look at him askance. Not to mention the tourists. A steamer was in. Men and women were strolling or driving, tropic clad, agog for entertainment, planning luncheon, Some had Jet garlands about their necks placed there by welcoming friends. Friends! There were certainly times when a fellow needed one, Stanton reflected. There might be Americans in that laughing crowd intent upon enjoyment. Perhaps if they knew the plight he was in, from no fault of his own—

He shoved his hands deeper in his empty pockets, crossing over from the row of stores with plate glass fronts, hotels and clubs, to the shore side of the street. He walked in the checkered, changing shadow of the palms and poincianas, which patterned the path with purple and gold.

Across the stretch of seagrass lawn the Goro Sea showed incredibly blue, blue as laundry blueing. The sky was hardly less vivid. Cliffs of pearly trade wind clouds lifted on the horizon.

The breeze raised the banners of bananas, rustled in the fronds of coconut and royal palms, sent down a drift of scarlet poinciana blossoms like carnival confetti. A glorious, gorgeous mockery of a day.

He had the makings of two cigarettes, perhaps three thin ones, and that was all. No tobacco, no money to buy any. He was three weeks in debt to his half-caste landlady, three weeks in board-arrears to Cheung Li. Broke. Stony broke.

They hadn't said a thing about it yet, but they would not, could not trust him forever.

There was the sting of it; they had trusted him. He had not lied to them about coming remittances, but had frankly said he was flat, and they had

smiled and said he was an American and they knew he would pay them when he could. That seemed a long way off right now.

A girl was coming toward him, from the steamer, unaccompanied. She was simply dressed, she was slender, but walked with a certain agile vigor that distinguished her. Stanton almost bumped into her on the narrow path in his absorption. He got a glimpse of a pair of dark blue eyes, large, clear, but not carefree; a short nose, red lips that drooped a little, a hint of coppery hair under the close-fitting hat.

He raised his own, in apology, and the girl bowed. She did not smile, but looked at him curiously, sympathetically. He did not analyze that look for a few minutes. Then he realized that her face, like his own, must have betrayed worriment, was not in accord with the gorgeous day. She was in trouble of some sort, even as he was, and she had recognized the latter fact.

ABOUT ten paces behind the girl a man was walking with a curious ease of gait, pantherish, slightly furtive for all his swagger, for all his linen tunic and pants, his silk shirt and cummerbund, the smart puggaree on his hat of woven palm fiber, the short gold-tipped malacca cane, the silken socks and shoes of buckskin and tan leather.

His skin was the color of saddle leather, splotched by darker blots, like freckles. His eyes were jet-black, set aslant, the lids smooth and unwrinkled, the mouth full-lipped, cruel. A cunning, sensual “breed,” half Chinese and half native, swaggering along with a knife under his cummerbund, and gambler’s gold in his pockets, Stanton fancied.

The American suddenly wondered, with a hunch that flashed into his mind, whether the man was following the ‘girl, For a moment Stanton halted, rolling his cigarette, looking back. The girl had crossed the. street, the half-breed kept straight on. He might be following her, but he did not seem inclined to annoy her. Too careful of his own skin, Stanton decided. He would behave himself in the open, but he was no more to be trusted in the shadows than a roving shark in a lagoon.

Stanton knew him by name—Loo Fong—and by his reputation, or lack of it, along the waterfront where Stanton had his cheap but clean room with Panakaloa, the stout half-white widow of a trading skipper.

Loo Fong, petty pirate, smuggler, gambler, half Malay, half Manchu, and treacherous as a snake, was just back from one of his occasional disappearances. He had given Stanton a look, tinged with a sneer of derision on his twisting mouth, that made the American’s fists double automatically.

He crossed the street himself, caught sight of his reflection in a store window as he checked to let a jovial group pass out of the car that had brought them from the ship and enter the Victoria Hotel.

A woman glanced at him and said something in a whisper to her escort. The man was less tactful of tone in his answer.

“T. T. T.,” he replied. “ Eh, what? Typical Tropical Tramp! Beach bum! Never has worked, can’t get work, and doesn’t want to.” The woman looked at him again and shrank a little. It was then the plate glass revealed to Stanton his mask of a face, grim, almost haggard, the long hair covering the collar of his coat, the set jaws and smoldering eyes.

"Got to snap out of that,” he told himself. “You’re nursing a grouch. It won’t get you a thing, not a damn’ thing, Bob Stanton! It’s the grin that wins.”

He was not so sure of that. He had been grinning a long time, but the grin had frayed, like the bottoms of his pants and the cuffs of his coat and shirts. There was no job in Suva, in all the Fijis, for a “Yank.” It was fair enough, perhaps. Jobs seemed to be scarce and anything that a self-respecting white man would do was held out for a Britisher.

He had come out to join a man he had known in the States. They had been comrades in the Argonne, as a matter of fact. It was after an Armistice Day dinner that Raymond had told him of his plan to log and ship the valuable hardwoods of the Fijis to American cabinet-makers. The islands off the north and west of Viti Levu were crammed with such trees, it appeared. Stanton had put in his share for preliminaries and had left for Fiji after the jubilant letter saying that the lease was secured and the prospects rosy. It had taken almost all he had by the time he reached Suva and, while he was en route, the bubble had been pricked.

The British commissioner had received word from the colonial secretary that no leases or concessions were to be granted on Fijian products to other than bona-fide British concerns. The bill had passed “as of ” a date before that of Raymond’s concessions. It was a washout. The commissioner was polite, bored, and his expressed sorrow was tinged with a suggestion that Americans had better stick to their own possessions,

There were hardwoods, the commissioner believed, in the Philippines. Whether or not he knew the Washington policies that protected the countrymen of Aguinaldo to the exclusion of all outside capital, they did not learn.

Raymond cursed heartily and ingeniously, outside the commissioner’s stately residence. He offered Stanton his fare back, but Stanton knew his friend had little enough left for himself. The lure of the tropics had gripped Stanton,

and he had no doubt but that he could get along. He had, for twelve weeks of enforced loafing, on fifty dollars.

IT looked like the bush or the beach for him, living on fruit and fish, a down-and-outer. It was getting hard to be philosophical, to believe in such platitudes as " It is always darkest before the dawn," and "Every cloud has a silver lining."

Nevertheless, after that self-revealing glance at the grim mask that was his face, Bob Stanton mentally girded up his loins and marched on, resolved to borrow a pair of scissors from Panakaloa to trim the frayed edges of his garments and essay a haircut. He was getting morbid. He whistled as he marched along. and looked a sergeant of police squarely in the eyes. Lately he had been bothering a bit about deportation, or a request to move on.

Confound that fellow with his T. T. T. What did he know about them? T. T. T.'s were the salt of the earth, often prosperous,. always efficient, cursed or blessed with the roving heel. The chap had said Stanton didn't want to work, whereas he had been hunting it high and low until he could feel the grit working through his shoes at every step. He whistled the swinging march song:

Pack all your troubles in your old kitbag,
And smile, smile, smile.

Lots of craft in the harbor, freight steamers, sailing ships, the big passenger boat, native craft, launches shuttling back and forth. Usually they made him restless, emphasized his marooned condition. Now he grinned at them. Much magic in a grin, after all. But he didn't get his haircut.

He reached the wharf and swung south to where Panakaloa's little house was set among scrubs and papaia trees on the limits of white residency. A topsail schooner was moored to bollards, her cargo of copra and turtle shell being discharged.

A black man lay on a bale, shivering in the sun. He was almost a dwarf, a Melanesian, not a Fijian. His frizzy hair was dull red from lime bleaching, his dark skin showed tribal weals and other scars. His only clothing was a scanty loincloth. The lobes of his ears were stretched to flaps of torn leather, a short clap pipe thrust through one of the convenient holes. A. South Sea savage, sick and shuddering, ugly, ill-shaped, dirty. His ribs showed like those of a starved dog. His eyes were closed and his limbs were huddled about his emaciated body.

Any blackbirder would have despised him. Stanton wondered how he had come to Suva, derelict and unhappy as a mangy cur.

A man in a peaked cap, dressed in dungarees and a grimy pyjama top was directing the last of the unloading, chewing and spitting tobacco between curses in beach-English. As the file-closer of the Kanakas he had been bossing disappeared into the warehouse shed, the man, apparently mate of the schooner, turned and saw the wretched figure on the bale. He had a rope's end tucked in his belt, a length of coil ending in a turkshead knot, symbol of authority over his Solomon Island crew.

He swung it aloft and brought it down on the cowering creature who woke to his shouted oaths. It curled with a vicious hiss and sounded like a drum-stroke as it raised a blistering mark.

"You walk along damn' quick out of this, you blasted stowaway monkey, before I flay you," he cried and swung up his arm again as the man leaped from the bale and crouched, long apelike arms wrapped about his head, jabbering something inarticulate. The rope's end writhed around his ribs with the same hideous strum. The third blow did not fall. The mate's arm remained aloft as he gazed in astonishment at the sudden appearance of Stanton between him and his victim.

"Git out of here, you lousy beach bum!" the mate yelled. He started to say more, but Stanton's fist muzzled him.

INDIGNATION at the wanton cruelty had caused Stanton to interfere, but all the resentment he had swallowed in the sneer of Loo Fong and the words of the woman's escort outside the hotel, went into that wallop when the mate called him a bum. He had been hard up, but, thanks to Cheung and Panakaloa, he had not starved or lacked decent quarters. He was husky and he knew how to use his fists. The mate didn't. He was a bucko, a good brawler, and he was tough, inside and out, but he made a serious first mistake in underestimating his adversary, and rushing him.

Stanton ducked neatly and smote him hard over the liver as the mate's haymaker swung overhead and the mate swung with it, off balance, staggering sidewise with a clip on the side of the jaw. He went to one knee and hand, and Stanton let him up, which was chivalrous but wasted.

"Get up, you coward, and take a licking from a bum!" Stanton snapped, while the mate spat blood and tobacco from his battered lips, uttered a roar and rushed again. The seaman got a straight left to his face which checked him, but he closed in, bellowing and bludgeoning. The Kanakas had come out of the warehouse and were looking on, eyes rolling, grinning. The cook came out of the schooner's galley and stood with folded arms, another spectator who seemed not opposed to the prospects of the mate's getting trimmed. '

They clinched and Stanton appreciated what a bucko might do at close quarters, The mate got his arms about his ribs and nearly cracked them as he forged on with the advantage of his weight, using his knee, trying to trip, cursing constantly, threatening, putting out his full strength. Stanton beat a tattoo on his kidneys and he didn't like it. They struck the string-piece and went down together, rolling over and over, rebounding as the side of the schooner saved them from the water.

As they rolled the mate made another mistake. Every time Stanton was on top he slogged at the bucko's head and jaws, and hurt him badly enough to make the mate try the same tactics. The bucko got home more than once, but it gave Stanton the chance to get up and away. He intended to keep away. The mate was as hard as an automobile tire, strong as a gorilla; he had the weight and superior strength. Stanton had the science and the better wind. The other was blowing as he got to his feet and, before fie got set, Stanton got in a jolt to the belly and a second smash over the mouth. The combination settled it, together with the quid the mate had neglected to eject. The force of the blow sent it into his windpipe, choking and half strangling him. Upset muscular control juggled it into his gullet and Stanton's third and final blow in that rally drove it deep. His disturbed stomach received and ejected it. His tanned face turned a sickly green. He heaved violently and was distressingly and unpleasantly sick, teetering up the gangway, using the scupperway, weaving down the companionway to his cabin.

Stanton straightened his clothes, felt gingerly a fiery ear and a bruised cheek, looking for the cause of his interference.

"You did 'm in proper, mister. You 'andled your dukes pretty. It served the bloody blighter right," said the cook. "I'm quittin' 'ere. 'E ain't got no idea of decency, 'e ain't. Called my grub 'stinkin' 'ash.' I 'ope the beggar "eaves up his spotted soul."

The miserable black was clasping Stanton's knees, jabbering at him, his eyes moist with gratitude. It embarrassed the American. The Kanakas were gathered in an uncertain eae but the cook shouted at them and they went aboard.

"Looks like you 'ad 'im on your 'ands, mister," the cook said to Stanton, "All syme stray dorg. You'll 'ave a 'ard time gittin' rid of 'im.'

"Where did he come from? What's the matter with him?"

"We figger 'e must 'ave swum off and 'id aboard, the time we watered at Tuimoto. Probably was in wrong with 'is wizard. Thought the ship 'u'd be better than the ovens. I'll bet 'e's changed 'is mind more'n once. We was glad enough to git clear without trouble. 'Tuimoto is no picnic-ground. The skipper was sick—island fever— an' mate run things. 'E, kicked the daylights out of

that boy. Come night throwin' 'im overboard to the sharks. °E, ain't 'ad too much to eat. Don't like white man's katkat an' the Kanakas wouldn't share theirs with 'im. That's part of what's the matter with 'im. And 'e's got yaws. You better tyke my tip and 'and 'im over to the police, mister. 'E belongs in the 'orsepittle, 'e does. Croak on your 'ands if you don't. 'Is nyme's Tiki and I bet 'e's full of 'em."

A muffled roar came from below and the cook winked at Stanton.

" That's the mate," he said. " Wants a nurse. I'll nurse "im!" He sauntered aft.

The miserable devil who seemed to have been wished on Stanton, ill-treated and frightened by his surroundings, groveled at his feet. He shivered like a frightened dog when Stanton put a hand on his skinny shoulder. He didn't quite know what to do with the wretch—he'd die in the hospital from sheer loneliness. Turn his face to the wall and let his soul leach out of him.

Stanton could put a meal into him, let him know he had a friend. His own plight was pleasant compared to that of this spiritless remnant of humanity. Perhaps Panakaloa would let him stay, give him something he could assimilate.

"You come with me," he said. "We get *kaikai*."

Tiki understood the meaning and followed him like a black dog, his eyes shining. Panakaloa was a bit difficult. She wanted no black fellows, she declared, but at last Stanton persuaded her to let Tiki—who stood on one bow leg, scratching with the toes of the other at his yaws while they discussed him—stay in a shed in the little garden on some old matting. He lay down, curled up, sacking over him and presently Panakaloa set down beside him a bowl of native *poi* and some dried fish. His eyes glittered. His spirit revived. He was in the house of friends and he ate avidly. Stanton went off to his own meal.

2. Cheung's Plan

CHEUNG LI'S restaurant did not cater to the social element of Suva, but it was neat and clean, the food savory, wholesome and cheap, so that he did a good waterfront business with white skippers, mates and supercargoes,

He lived above the place, a placid, stout, sphinx-faced Chinaman with a dignity all his own, getting together his fortune. Some said the restaurant was a blind for his other affairs, but no one seemed to definitely know what they might be. He extended credit from time to time and seemed to find it profitable in the long run. It was he himself who had suggested to Stanton that he need not worry about his bill.

"Some time soon, something come along," he told him. "You 'Melican. You make good bimeby."

He presided over the restaurant at rush hours, leaving its conduct the rest of the time to two assistants. One of these, Moy, long, sallow, cadaverous and chary of any speech but his own, set before Stanton his meal. There was teal turtle soup, excellent fish, turtle steak with boiled taro-root and greens, fresh coconut pudding with caramel sauce, and coffee the Ritz patrons might have envied. All for fifty cents; a dollar and twenty cents for three daily meals, seven dollars a week.

When Moy brought the pudding he had a message.

"Cheung Li like speak along of you topside when you finish up," he said.

It spoiled the dessert for Stanton. It must mean that his credit was over, It had to come. Cheung had been mighty decent. But it looked like the beach. He couldn't stay at Panakaloa's and not eat. He couldn't honestly stay there any longer and pile up a debt he saw no means of paying off. Panakaloa could always rent her rooms. He saw himself for a moment roaming the beach with Tiki at his heels, adventuring in the bush with a cannibal. Tiki would know more about making a living there than he did.

He shrugged his shoulders, his hands steady as he rolled his second cigarette. There was not enough left for a third, so he made this fat and smoked it slowly with long inhalations before he got up, unable to tip Moy. An outside staircase led to a balcony that ran all round the house, covered and awninged. At the rear it looked over a compound garden behind a high plank wall where Cheung took his ease with his family.

Stanton had never mounted before. He was surprised at the signs of comfort, of taste, even of luxury. There were easy chairs of bamboo, stands of teak that held flowering plants, big vases of porcelain with foliage shrubs and ferns in them, rugs, cushions, two Java thrushes singing in cages, a gorgeous blue macaw in a ring, statuesque, disdainful.

The front veranda, where Stanton thought the entrance must be, looked over the harbor and the shipping, and across Kadavu Passage to the distant isles of Ono and Kadavu, almost sixty miles away. The lure of the horizon, of the unknown tropics, savage but fascinating, gripped him hard. Then sliding glass doors opened and Cheung asked him inside.

He had never before seen Cheung except in white clothes, and he was surprised at the quiet richness of his brocades, the assurance of his manner, polite, unostentatious. He might have been greeting a distinguished official rather than a man whose clothing proclaimed his poverty.

He offered Stanton a deep and cosy seat and a cheroot faintly smelling of tea, gratifying of flavor. Then he poured out two tiny goblets of amber fluid

that scented the whole room as if with orange groves and tasted like sublimated Chartreuse.

His English was not perfect, but he spoke without hesitation, straight to the purpose. It was as if he guessed Stanton's interpretation of the request for the visit, and wished to relieve him promptly. The shady chamber had an atmosphere of courtesy. From the interior Stanton heard the tinkle of a stringed instrument, the sudden laughter of a child. The Java thrushes were singing madly.

"I tell you some time, soon, something come along," said Cheung in his mellow tones. "I not know then this come. One time, some one tell me about one place where there are plenty pearl, on island where nobody go. No landing there, no loadstead; no lagoon. Leef come up close, evely place. Native not live that place now. Name Motutabu. Plenty magic along that place. Bad magic. Maybe you not believe that?"

"I don't know," said Stanton simply. "I've heard a lot of curious things."

Cheung grunted as if satisfied with the answer.

"This black man's magic," he said. "Not evil to white man, yellow man. unless they too much meddle. You savvy?"

"I savvy," said Stanton. His pulses were quickening, his blood beginning to tingle. He felt that he was on the threshold of adventure, mysterious, dangerous.

"ON that island one big image," Cheung went on. "Not idol, all same symbol. Symbol of evil spilits native men speak velley soft along, make gift so he leave alone. Some one meddle along that god, not savvy how, die velly quick. Suppose you go this place, you leave god alone. I send white man I know along this Motutabu—that mean fo'bidden island. He is good man, I tlust him plenty. I send Kanaka with him to dive. No one come back. Long time now they should come back. Something happen. Maybe he meddle too much along that god, maybe all get sick, maybe schooner get on leef. I not know.

"I am lil' aflaid some one else speak along the Kanaka who tell me about that place. Li'l' while since he speak with me, they find him dead along beach. Maybe because he talk, maybe because he no talk. Nobody savvy who kill him. I no savvy. I think maybe one man, half Chinaman, he savvy something. Maybe he go along Motutabu, but suppose he did he not find pearl. If he find pearl he not come back to Suva. He go to Sigapo'. Belong that place. But I like find out."

Singapore! Stanton had the flash, half intuition, half reasoning, that is called a hunch. Singapore meant the Malay Peninsula. In his mind's eye he saw the lithe figure of the Malay Manchu, swaggering but furtive, like a stalking

panther, trailing the girl. He did not know then how illuminating his hunch had been. But the name came to his lips. “Loo Fong!”

Cheung grunted again.

“I always think you smaht,” he said. “Li'l bad luck, maybe, jus’ now. Loo Fong come back. I think he been along that island. Maybe he kill. But I think he no find pearl. I like send you.”

“I'm no sailor,” Stanton disclaimed. “I’ve knocked about in a pleasure boat or two, yachting, but I’m no navigator."

“I give you ship,” Cheung purred on. “Captain and clew all same, they lun ship. Chinamen. On island you boss. You find out what happen. Mari I send to island is ’Melican, all same you 'Melican. Suppose I send Chinamen, suppose Loo Fong been that place, my man no tlust any one but white man. His name Haines. I pay you good. Suppose you bling back pearls, I give you plenty.”

“You don’t know anything about me,” said Stanton. He was not demurring to the proposition, but it had taken him off his feet a bit. It sounded like a large order.

He did not lack confidence in himself, but this was a strange situation he was asked to take command of. He could not immediately see himself on a boat manned by Chinese, going to an island where some god, some symbol of evil, was supposed to reign with malign influence; where murder might have been done. He wanted to think it over, though he wanted to go, aside from obliging Cheung.

“I savvy plenty,” Cheung went on suavely. “You have bad luck; you live cheap, not dlink, not lun up big bill at big hotel. You tly all time find any kind of job. Not easy fo’ ’Melican along this place. Li’l’ time ago you fight mate of Lehua. I like ’Melican who not blag, not dlink, can fight. I like you velly much to go this tlip.”

Stanton wondered a little at the other’s knowledge of the fight, but it was not surprising. Such news traveled fast. The restaurant was a sort of club, in some ways. He was to wonder more how closely Cheung had studied him.

“To-day steameh come,” Cheung went on. “Haines, he had bad luck too, long time. He tlade in copla, have bad luck. He go fo’ shell an’ pearl, have bad luck. Lose schooneh, find shell eaten by oyster worm. His wife die in United States. Then he catch job with me. He lite back to his daughteh, pletty soon he make money. She no heah flom him long time befo’. Now velly glad. She come to Suva. Come to-day. She nice gel. I tell about her fatheh. She wollied, but she keep up chin all same you, ’Melican fashion. She want to go look fo’ him. I say she can go along with you.”

Stanton gasped. Things were developing fast. He knew who the girl was. She would recognize him when she saw him. He guessed why Loo Fong had

trailed her. Loo Fong knew of the island if he had not been there. It was likely he had tried to pump the native who had first given Cheung the information, and killed the poor devil. Why the latter had chosen to confide in Cheung did not matter now. It was Cheung's affair. Probably the man was indebted to him.

"I saw Loo Fong following a girl who came in on the *Austral*, I think," he said. Again Cheung gave one of his soft grunts of comprehension.

"Loo Fong plenty slick," he said. "I think he savvy gel ask fo' me. She go along hotel now she come my place. Mo' betteh she stay this place. Loo Fong savvy that, savvy you come see me, maybe savvy why. Maskee! I think maybe you have to kill Loo Fong some time."

HE spoke placidly enough, but, to Stanton, the room seemed suddenly filled with a mist in which vague, battling figures moved, while in the background there loomed the statue of a great, gray god and the suggestion of fantastic cliffs and jungle.

He was looking on, now, but he was about to be involved in this. Pearls, magic, murder. Mystery and sudden death. Romance. 'The girl's face with the big eyes that had changed when they saw him, as if there had been between them some affinity, was plain before him. He heard Cheung clap his hands, and then the girl herself was in the room, in the flesh, gazing at him as he rose.

"Missy Haines," Cheung was saying. "This Misteh Stanton. I think he go along Motutabu fo' me."

Her hand was in his, cool and firm, her gaze was searching him, frank, friendly.

"You don't mind if I go along?" she said. "I want to know what has happened to my father, I want to see him again. He left me in school, six years ago."

"Mind?" Stanton was filled with an idiotic desire to say the things that crowded his brain, to give utterance to the impulses that thrilled him. To acknowledge the joy that surged through him at the prospect of being her knight-errant, her champion. There was no question now of his not going. If Cheung had reserved this argument for the last, he had chosen wisely. Stanton's actual answer was stiff, awkward.

"I shall be glad to serve you, if I can, to help your father, to be of use to Cheung Li, who has befriended me."

"As he did my father," said the girl. Stanton thought he heard Cheung chuckle, but his face was immobile.

"That settled,' he said. "Now Stanton, talk business along with me. Much to fix, quick as possible. Tomollow, maybe nex' day, you go."

The girl left and Cheung talked business. His schooner, with the Chinese skipper and crew, were at Levuka on the island of Ovalau, former capital of Fiji. It was not far away, less than fifty miles, and he had sent word to them, expecting them tomorrow. He gave Stanton money to buy necessary personal things, promising to furnish him weapons. Motutabu was not on the regulation charts. It lay far to the south and west, below the Kermadec Islands. Cheung showed its position on a chart. At the end of the interview he gave certain grave warnings.

"I think Loo Fong go that place," he said. "Not find pearl. If he savvy I send you I think he go back. Follow you, make plenty tlouble. Much betteh he stay along that place."

There was a grim note in his voice that more than hinted his meaning. Cheung had not attempted to dodge the fact that the trip was dangerous. He seemed at once to value life and consider it of little value, like the money changer who promptly throws out spurious coin. The crew of his schooner would be armed. He had not sent Chinese in the first place because natives were better divers; his own men were unused to pearling, he used them for inter-island trading. But they were fighters. They were his men.

Stanton was convinced that those who worked for Cheung were loyal, bound by a fealty that went beyond pay. He saw depths to this man who was running a lowly restaurant and living in something close to luxury. He realized that the restaurant was a clearing house for gossip, valuable to such a person as Cheung; shrewd, daring, efficient, he bent .his energies toward fortune, but was endowed with philosophy, a mode of thought and life that raised him far above the ordinary.

"You not meddle along that god," Cheung said, the last thing. "And you look out along of Loo Fong, You look out along that mate you fight. Suppose you want take along that Tiki, can do. Maybe he can be useful along in bush. 'That mate name Johnson. Schooneh *Lehua*. Captain Fenwick, he sick, he stay in Suva. Cook quit too. Loo Fong he hold share in *Lehua*. You look out. Take this now."

He took from a drawer in a lacquered cabinet a flat automatic of German make, a vicious-looking thing of heavy caliber. As it lay cold in Stanton's palm it seemed like some sort of fetish that was a tangible link connecting him with the adventure, making it real, Cheung gave him extra clips.

"Knife betteh," he said. "Make no noise. Suppose you have to shoot, may make tlouble. But knife need plactice. You take. Johnson got no use fo' you. Loo Fong may think you savvy where to find pearl. I no savvy that. I think Haines hide all time, but I not know what place. Suppose he dead, you tly find pearl. I see you this time to-mollow."

STANTON slid the automatic away into his hip pocket, and Cheung shook his head.

“Pocket no good,” he said. “Wait, I find.”

He opened a chest and produced a spring clip-holder and leather shoulder harness which Stanton fitted then and there, taking off his coat. The flat weapon lay close to his chest, snug and handy. There would be other revolvers on board, with belts and holsters for open use, but this manner was best, when one wore a coat, in Suva:

The police did not like foreigners to swank about with visible weapons. It was an orderly and peaceful town, but many strange things went on near by. There was the Rewa River, up which there was said to be a hidden headquarters for fugitives and outlaws of all kinds and races, waiting for secret transportation beyond extradition. Back of that, in the mountains, drums sounded on certain moonlit midnights, and the natives were still said to practice ancient and horrible rites of cannibalism and sacrifice.

Suva was civilized. Fiji was pacified. But savagery lurked on every hand.

Stanton made his purchases unostentatiously. He held the notion that he was shadowed. He saw nothing of Loo Fong, but that crafty individual had his following, who might be trailing Stanton for him. Stanton was barbered, reclothed, reshod, his own man again. His account with Cheung’s restaurant was wiped out. He paid Panakaloa, together with a present of a vivid scarf which she draped proudly across her ample bosom, tears in her eyes as she thanked him and applauded his turn of fortune. :

He had native tobacco and a new pipe for Tiki, with cloth for a sulu kilt with which to replace his inadequate G-string. The old pipe had been smashed on the wharf, he had not tasted the flavor of tobacco or its smoke for weeks, and his gratitude was inordinate. It was dark by then, and Stanton left him curled up on his mats, smoking blissfully.

Stanton stayed close that night, sitting in Panakaloa’s little garden, smoking and thinking over the swift changes of chance. He had turned a sudden corner and he did not know what lay ahead, save that it was a man’s work, savored with excitement and peril, heightened by the entrance of the girl.

He slept with the automatic on his chest, over his pyjama top. It was heavy but handy, and he did not take Cheung’s warnings lightly. Loo Fong might well believe, as Cheung had suggested, that Stanton was going to Motutabu and knew where to find the pearls Cheung was sure Haines had gathered. In such a case they might decide to try to force that information out of him, kidnap and torture him, rather than risk losing a race to the island.

So Loo Fong had a share in the *Lehua*. The mate was in actual charge of the schooner, to all intents and purposes its skipper. Loo Fong and the mate would almost certainly get together. Johnson had his own grudge against Stanton, which might materialize on its own account or join forces with Loo Fong in his plans.

It seemed very likely indeed to Stanton that the *Lehua* might have been to Motutabu on the trip from which she had just returned, with Loo Fong in her. The cargo was more or less of a blind, picked up after the trail for the pearls had failed.

If Tiki had been able to talk anything but his uncouth dialect Stanton might have been able to find out from him. The cook would know; he was probably leaving for some more definite reason than Johnson's slurs on his cooking. If anything serious had happened on Motutabu the cook might have decided to draw the line at piracy and quit while his neck was still un-stretched, in which case it was not likely that he would talk. He had not been very prepossessing, as Stanton recollected. It was a rough outfit.

CHEUNG would undoubtedly find out all that it was possible to gather. Stanton felt that. Cheung had not fully divulged himself in their talk, that he knew or suspected far more than he had mentioned. And Stanton was convinced that there had been grim doings on Motutabu and would be more. It seemed doubtful if the girl's father was. still alive. If he were not, it would be no easy task to find the pearls. There would be the girl to comfort and protect. If Loo Fong followed and was again frustrated of the gems, he might consider the girl a secondary prize, so much loot for his personal gratification and disposal.

Small doubt of that, Stanton fancied, remembering the way in which the half-caste had trailed her. This mission was not the sort in which a girl should be involved, but he knew that she was fully committed to it, that Cheung was either willing she should go, or had tried to dissuade her and failed. Tonight she was safe enough at Cheung's. Cheung's measure of precaution would baffle even Loo Fong, Stanton felt certain, and took comfort from it.

Panakaloa's house was far from a fortress, built in flimsy, tropic fashion. It held no treasures, the window fastenings were light, the doors had no bolts. The one to the back garden did not even have a key, and the garden fence was easily scaled.

Stanton was a light sleeper. He held a hunch that the night was breeding some sort of attempt, and he hoped to be ready for it when it appeared. He dozed in cat-naps, waking intermittently, dropping off again. Then, a little after midnight, he was roused by some unusual sound that brought him standing to

the floor, gun in hand, listening, watching. Whatever had wakened him was veiled by sleep, but his consciousness insisted there had been something.

There was no moon. The garden lay in mellow, tropic starlight, filled with deep, soft shadows that shifted shape as the land wind moved fronds and leafage. He saw nothing else; he stole to the door and listened, opening it suddenly, finger on trigger.

It looked as if a great dog were lying down on the threshold. In the vague light from the window he saw the faint glint of uprolled eyes. It was Tiki. From gratitude or fidelity, prompted perhaps by some sense developed in his savage subconsciousness of impending peril, he had come in from his shed to get as close to his protector as he could.

"All right, Tiki,' Stanton said quietly. "Good boy." It was like talking to a dog, using tone to convey meaning. Tiki clucked something in his throat as Stanton closed the door.

It was not easy to doze again after the thorough rousing. The actions of the day, filmed in his brain, were automatically projected on the mental screen.

He was no longer a derelict. No one would venture to call him or describe him as a beach bum now. He had decent clothes, money in his pocket, had fought and won, acquired a cannibal Man Friday, met a girl who stirred feelings within him that he had never before experienced, and he was embarked upon a wild enterprise in a savage setting. At last the flickering flash-backs died out, and his mind became a blank.

The next thing he knew was a faint draft of air. The door was open, a dark space where its paint had shown gray. The windows, opening lengthwise, were apart. He could smell the night blossoms, *ylang-ylang*, frangipani. As he swung off the bed something touched his arm. It was Tiki, crouching low, hardly visible, pointing an arm, vaguely silhouetted, at the window. Then he darted off, merging into the gloom, back toward the open door.

THE tops of croton bushes came above the sill. The wind moved them, or was it something else?

Stanton sat on the edge of the bed, his gun ready to cover any intruder, remembering Cheung's caution that shooting would bring trouble, wondering if he could be plainly seen. He felt eyes watching him from the shrubbery, thought he could make out some solid bulk amid the leaves. It was so still, so charged with suspense, that he could hear the ticking of his watch,

Then there came a scuffle in the passage. Tiki had attacked, or been attacked. At any rate, fed, and fortified by having a friendly master, Tiki was fighting fiercely. Two struggling figures, locked in desperate battle, rolled into the room.

Stanton caught the gleam of steel. Tiki had no weapon. He launched himself from the edge of the bed, smashing at the hand that held the blade with the muzzle of his gun, trying to locate the intruder's head. It was an impossible task in the darkness and the fury of the combat. He could tell only that the man was far bigger than Tiki, and at that, like Tiki, he was practically naked. He could smell the rank sweat of him.

For the moment he had forgotten the window, been forced to leave it unguarded, suddenly aware of forms rising, writhing over the sill as he whirled. One of them was clothed and burly, the other a stinking savage, rancid with palm oil, slippery as an eel. A sleeved arm was flung in front of Stanton, thrust hard against his throat to cut off his wind. He broke into tumultuous action, grasping the thick wrist with both hands, turning, stooping, putting all he had into a heaving pull of his back and shoulders, The weight of his adversary bore him down to one knee, but Stanton flung him heels over head, crashing into the flimsy bureau; then Stanton dived for the legs of the third man, and brought him down across the bed, close to the foot of it, bounding on the springs beneath the mattress.

Stanton leaped on him before he could get up or free the knife he surely carried in his loin-cloth, The native's hands clawed for Stanton's throat, lacerating the flesh. Stanton gripped one arm, bent it backward on the iron railing of the bed, bent it until it cracked. The savage yelled, leaping convulsively in his pain, and rolled to the floor.

Tiki and his man were in the doorway again. Stanton heard their panting grunts, and marveled at Tiki's resistance. The big man he had thrown was getting up. There was electricity in Suva, and Panakaloa had bulbs in her house. Stanton had no chance to get at his switch, but suddenly the passage was illumined and an Amazonian voice angrily demanded what was going on.

Panakaloa appeared, a shawl over her voluminous nightgown. She was brandishing a club that had been part of her skipper husband's collection of island weapons. The man had Tiki by the throat, squeezing him until his eyes bulged from their sockets, his tongue protruding. Panakaloa's club thudded down, and the seeming victor collapsed. Stanton saw the other native scramble over the sill dangling his broken arm. The clothed man rose from the ruins of the bureau and flung a chair at Stanton before he followed. It came legs first, hard enough to check Stanton's leap.

The two were gone, smashing through the shrubbery, up to the roof of Tiki's shed by means of the rainbarrel Panakaloa used for watering her garden, and over the fence.

PANAKALOA and the light had routed them, aside from her by no means to be despised club. They had no desire for the publicity her indignant voice and arm might evoke. Stanton did not get a clear look at the face of the man who had thrown the chair, the room was still in partial shadow, but he was almost certain it had been Johnson, mate of the Lehua, and the other two were Solomon Islanders, members of the crew.

The one still lay senseless from the blow of the hardwood club. He was as black as Tiki, but bigger; his sharp filed teeth showing in the relaxed jaw. For a moment Stanton thought Panakaloa had killed him, and said so. She shook her head.

“Too much thick, that skull,” she answered. “ Maybe I crack it lil. Serve him right. You want I call police, Sanatoni?” she asked shrewdly.

“Td rather not,” he answered; and she nodded.

“ We take that trash outside, then,” she said. “A fine cheek they got to come along my house.” '

“It’s my fault,” he told her. “ They were after me.”

Whether the mate had been bent on private reprisal or was in league with Loo Fong to knock him senseless and take him prisoner was uncertain, and not pertinent now they were foiled. Tiki had balked their attempt in the beginning; Panakaloa, with her unexpected sortie, had completed the rout.

Tiki was massaging his throat, but he grinned. The fights had not exhausted him. Now that he had become attached to some one, he had shed much of his misery like an old garment. He helped the two of them bear the sagging body of the still unconscious man out into the deserted street and set it down in the lee of a cereus hedge that topped a stone wall. There was no one in sight, no sound of the other two, and they left him there.

“I owe you a bureau, Panakaloa,” said Stanton. “I owe you more than that. You came just in time.”

“Ugh!” grunted Panakaloa contemptuously. "That bureau not much good. I pay four dollar for that along of junkman.” She sat down and began to laugh, her stout body shaking like a jelly, her eyes rolling upward while Tiki surveyed her in awe and amazement. “Too much I fool that *kaikanaka*. My old man, the *kapitani*, one time he hit me with that club. This time I get even. When that black trash wake up he think the house fall in on him.”

Tiki did not understand what she said, but he grinned widely at her tone. She insisted upon opening beer for herself and Stanton, and she gave Tiki a glass, which he tasted suspiciously and then swallowed it with a comical grimace of surprised delight as he rubbed his stomach. Native fashion, Panakaloa had strengthened the brew with a slug of Hollands gin.

It was beginning to get light when she left them, still chuckling over her prowess, vastly pleased with herself. Tiki was too proud at what Stanton said to him, patting his shoulder the while. It was Greek to the islander, but he knew it for praise.

3. The Race To Motutabu.

CHEUNG'S schooner arrived from Levuka early the next morning, mooring in the stream at first,

Then, as the tide served, going to a wharf remote from the main one where the *Lehua* still lay. Stanton did not go near her, but stayed at Cheung's house after breakfast, at the latter's suggestion, talking with Lucy Haines. From behind the tatties of split bamboo they saw Loo Fong pass by and glance up, later to return again.

Stanton said nothing of what had happened the night before. It did not seem necessary. Cheung had gone to see about getting the schooner ready. Tiki was in his shed, waiting to be called for, smoking his new pipe, a stray no longer.

Stanton and the girl told each other something of their early life. Mention of the impending trip made her grave, brought worry to her eyes. He could tell that she was fighting off doubts of finding her father. Several times they sat silent, but not out of accord.

Cheung came back at noon and said they would leave on the ebb after nightfall. He too had seen Loo Fong. A scout he had sent out reported that they were taking stores aboard the Lehua. The skipper had gone to the hospital, Johnson was -in command, and the cook had left.

" They savvy *Fahine*, my ship," said Cheung. "They savvy she come in. They watch all same we watch along of them. Maybe we get staht. Long way to Motutabu; Fahine mo' fast than Lehua. My captain good man. Suppose wind blow light, you leach island befo' them."

It was dark when they went on board. The Chinese skipper talked " pidgin" that was comprehensible. He found a few words of dialect that Tiki understood, to the black's delight, and sent him forward. The Chinese sailors, naked above the waist, their feet bare, their heads bound with bright bandannas, were a piratical-looking lot though their ordinary occupation was peaceful trading. But they were efficient, getting the schooner under way to singsong orders from mate and boatswain, with his whistle, as the captain showed the girl and Stanton to their quarters.

The schooner was plainly fitted up, and it smelled of ancient cargoes of copra, of béche-de-mer, sharks' fins, turtle shell and pearl shell, but Cheung

had evidently been at some pains to make them comfortable. There were two cabins aft for them, and the girl's, especially, had been brightened with rugs and cushions.

In the main cabin there was a rack for rifles, filled with well oiled weapons. Stanton had noted appreciatively the tall masts, the narrow beam, the clean entry and fine lines of the ship. Speed evidently counted in Cheung's business. In a rush for competitive trade or to be the first at a new pearling ground, the Fahine would not be a laggard.

She was well-found, decks clear and clean of litter, ropes coiled, the ends seized and the rigging well set up. He could hear the quick tread of the yellow-skinned sailors as they went about the familiar tasks. Soon she was under way, the wharf sliding past, the lights of Suva gleaming through the ports.

The captain came below, deferential.

"Suppose you likee go topside?" he said. "Can do."

He was in Chinese clothes, his feet shod; a muscular man with a typically Mongolian face, sure of himself and authoritative, but plainly considering them as allies, friends of Cheung Li.

The wind was fresh from the land, striking them a little abaft the beam, and they slipped fast through the water, with sheets well started. Stanton, watching the way she answered helm, surmised that her bottom was clean. She showed no lights anywhere. The captain took night-glasses from a hook in the companionway and surveyed the reach behind them. They were well out of the shipping.

"No one come," he said laconically. "You like look-see?"

Stanton took the binoculars, focused them, swept the water between them and the land. There was nothing moving there. They had got a start, at least.

He wondered if the Chinese skipper had been to Motutabu before. Probably not. But he would have its position, and the *Lehua*'s previous trip would not advantage them much.

Their direct course was southeast, the distance something over six hundred miles. It might take them anywhere from a week to a fortnight to cover it, for the winds were variable, there were tantalizing calms and strong currents set up by the action of the tides over the varying depths and con- . tour of the bottom, where vast expanses of shallows suddenly changed to vast abysses cleft by submarine peaks and ranges. Neither schooner had an engine. Luck or fate was going to enter largely into the affair.

They lost the land wind and ran into a calm inside of two hours, working through it at last to strike the southeast trade. The Fahine was close-hauled and clawed into it, making eight knots, slogging along at a lively clip with the sheer bows buried at every plunge. It stiffened to a squall, and the schooner

leaned against it, the mainsail reefed two points, and only a small staysail forward.

Stanton was a good sailor, and the next morning proved Lucy Haines was another. All that day they sailed fast under a bright sky, the crested seas dark sapphires, save where the foam creamed or was blown in spindrift, and the sun flashed back golden from the facets of the waves. All day the horizon stayed clear of smoke or sail. The girl's spirits rose. It began to look as if the Lehua had not got away. Flying fish rose from the brine, pursued by rushing dolphins; frigate birds soared free,

THE trade set them down, and they regained their easting with short legs. They had crossed the Kudavu Passage north of the Astrolabe Reefs, passing between Totoya and Matuku. Now there was no land in sight, would not be if they kept anywhere near their true course until they sighted the island of their quest. The Tongas were far to the north as they headed to cross the Tropic of Capricorn. The wide expanse of ocean, the run of sparkling water, the clean wind blowing between sea and sky—it was all physically exhilarating, mentally stimulating, a tonic for doubt, strengthened by the lonely horizon.

The two of them had their own mess. The rest ate Chinese food, but they were served a menu to suit their occidental tastes. Cheung's orders, no doubt. It was excellently cooked and served. Things aboard the Fahine ran like clockwork. There was never any confusion. The yellow men went about their tasks with a will the moment an order was given, without fumbling, knowing what was wanted.

It blew harder, the seas mounted, still under the blue sky and bright sun. They had to lower the mainsail at last and mount a storm staysail between the two masts, balanced by a rag of a jib. They made more leeway now. The wind remained southeast, blowing from the quarter they sought to penetrate as if it was determined to hold them off. It might have been the breath of the great gray god defending his *tabu*. But any wind was better than no wind, unless they had to run before it, and it did not come to that. The weather modified swiftly with a blazing sunset. Stanton came on deck at midnight to find a heavy swell running, the schooner under full sail but with only a few flaws of wind that sent her forward spasmodically. The captain was aft by the starboard rail, motionless. Stanton offered him one of the cheroots with which Cheung had supplied him, and the other took it silently.

He lit it before he spoke.

"Lil time ago we see ship," he said. " All same this. Gone now. Long way off."

"You think it was the *Lehua*?"

"No can tell. Maybe. Maskee."

It was not indifference. Only the tacit acceptance of conditions, the Oriental touch of fatalism. He pointed to where a new moon hung like a nail paring.

"Wind go soon. Maybe they get, maybe we catch. *Maskee*."

The word summed up Chinese philosophy. The equivalent of the Russian *nitchevo*. It was not the time for direct action, save for the handling of the ship, which was the plaything of the weather. But later in the night Stanton, restless, unable to share the *maskee*-ism of the skipper, smelled incense. The captain was burning punk sticks before the joss in the gilded shrine in the cabin. He had his superstitions, or his faiths.

The next three days saw them almost motionless. The sea had gone down and was like glass, reflecting the fiery glare of the sun. Now and then they saw distant squalls, bursts of rain, ruffled patches of sea, but they got no breath of wind.

The horizon was clear again. The *Lehua*—Stanton held no doubt that the vessel they had sighted was that schooner, with Loo Fong aboard— might be experiencing the same conditions, or she might be bowling along out of the baffling strip.

A current was steadily setting them east. He envied the imperturbability of the Chinese; they were used to the vagaries of the sea, and accepted what they could not alter; but he chafed with impatience. Lucy Haines kept to her cabin, her meals served there. Stanton did not disturb her. She was sick, not of body, but of heart. The punk sticks burned constantly.

On the fourth morning trade clouds appeared aft, in the northwest. It was the time of the monsoon changes of wind caused by the difference in temperature between air and water. There was wind in those vaporous heights. It revealed itself in a dark line on the water that came fast toward them as the skipper gave an order and they swung out the booms in readiness. The breeze caught them, urged them on, sailing wing and wing, the canvas bellying taut as drums, the lively sea seething all about them, a broad wake behind, on their course once more, headed straight for Motutabu.

STANTON noticed Tiki at his usual post, far forward, his eyes always turned south. He was a different looking savage from the sick creature curled up on the bale. His skin was glossy and his eyes were bright. His broad nostrils dilated as if he smelled familiar odors. Stanton wondered what he was thinking about. If the cook of the Lehua had spoken truly, his own island held peril for him, but there was no fear in his eyes. Whenever they looked at Stanton they held gratitude, but there was a difference, a measure of pride.

That afternoon the captain cast a light on Tiki.

“I speak with Tiki,” he said. “No savvy too much, but he say one time he live along Motutabu. His father *tahunga*, all same wiza’d. Tiki all same *tahunga* himself, He speak Motutabu velly bad place stop along. All time too much bad magic along of big god live that place.”

There was more than that that the skipper had found out by signs and certain words they both understood. Stanton retailed it later to the girl, who was again on deck.

Apparently Tiki’s father had run the tribe. Tiki seemed to have been trained to take his place. Then the god had turned malignant. It was one of the deities of the South Sea pantheon that had to be placated, and the sacrifices had failed. There had been an earthquake— “Velly much shake that island,” was the way the captain interpreted it. The top of a mountain had fallen off and a cape had slid into the sea. The wizard was blamed. The population escaped in canoes, after killing the man whose magic had gone wrong, Tiki had been spared for some reason which was obscure, perhaps because of his youth or because the women hid him,

On the tribe’s new home he had been suffered to live. A new wizard manifested himself. There was no god on this island. All went well save that Tiki was in bad odor. He was an hereditary *tahunga*, of an ancient line of wizards, and the new one feared him. Tiki had lived by himself in the bush, periodically hunted and sought for a sacrifice, blamed by the new tahunga for every sickness and death. So Tiki had stolen aboard the *Lehua*, hoping to escape to some friendlier place at which they might touch, not knowing what sort of man was in command or what kind of men were on the ship.

The curious thing was that he did not seem alarmed because they were going to Motutabu. The god was an evil god, but he believed fully in the magic of his dead father. It was the plotting of the man who later set himself up as *tahunga* that had annoyed the deity. His father had understood the god, had taught Tiki secrets concerning it. None but the ancient line of wizards dared approach it. Its shadow was death to all others.

Stanton could see no particular bearing in all this concerning the finding of Haines and the pearls. But he remembered the warnings of Cheung not to meddle with the god, and it was evident that the skipper had gone to much pains to talk with Tiki. Tiki seemed to be acquiring importance, a card whose value Stanton could not judge, though he sensed that he might have done something far more significant than he guessed when he rescued him from the cruelty of the mate. He had much to learn about Motutabu, much to learn about the god. Even now he could not quite shake off the feeling that Cheung had not spoken idly.

Strange things happened in the South Seas.

He understood it a little better with his first close glimpse of Motutabu.

4: The Jungle Trail.

THEY sighted it at dawn. It revealed itself in the growing light, before the sun rose above the sea-line, like an image developing on a negative in the dark room, somber, gradually acquiring definite shape, a blot against the purple-black of the sky where the stars were winking out.

The skipper had found it unerringly ; he told them he expected to pick it up at daylight, and here it was, darkly sinister, spray booming along ironbound cliffs, heights veiled in mist. The sound of the surf rolled back to them as they skirted the coast to the east, seeking for some place to land. It was not going to be easy, and they held off until the light strengthened.

It came with a rush as the disk of the sun rolled up from the tumbling sea rim, day instantly proclaimed. The island woke to life. Myriads of birds rose from the cliffs and from tiny, outlying islets; gulls and gannets, skuas and boobies, whirling and screeching, then winging out to sea to some shoal where they would find good fishing.

There were other birds, of the land, squawking parrots above the thick forest that verged the iron walls rising sheer from the spouting sea. Above the bush lofted three torn pinnacles, fangs that tore the vapors writhing about them. There were deep canyons here and there, dark in shadow; small coves; waterfalls, leaping to the beach over sheer precipices.

Then they saw the god. A cliff was sharply set back, and they only saw the upper part of the image, flaring livid red in the sunrise, carved, it seemed, from the living rock. It was of gigantic proportions, the art primitive, so primitive it might have been the work of some futurist, striving to simplify curves and lines, to crystallize expressions,

The face was long, a long nose, flattened, bridgeless, but with flaring nostrils. A wide mouth, thin-lipped, austere, yet subtly sensual, with the hint of a cruel sneer at the corners. The eyes were carved so that they suggested a malignant glance as the crimson light blazed full upon them. The ears touched the narrow shoulders.

The body, what they saw of it, was misshapen, out of all proportion, small arms, with the hands resting on knees far apart, deep shadow between them. It stood out of the cliff in full and startling relief, infinitely evil, leering. It had a sort of crown, hewn from the summit of the cliff and the foliage back of this looked like plumes, The whole aspect was baleful, brooding, gazing out to sea

like the old gods at Easter Island, whose origin and purpose no man has yet discovered.

The Chinese gazed at it stolidly. The man at the helm paid no attention and the captain was occupied with the shore line, looking for some spot where he could send a boat ashore. There was no indication of a lagoon. The island rose straight from the waves that ravened all about it.

Tiki's attitude was curious. He squatted on deck and bowed his head to the planks, in deference rather than fealty. This was his fetish, but he did not seem to be afraid. The priests of Moloch may have felt no terror at their horrible, blood-demanding image.

The girl shuddered, and Stanton had to tell himself sharply that here was only a thing hewn from lifeless stone. It glared at them and, as the morning clouds dissolved under the sun, its lips seem to quiver scornfully.

"Lifeless, I am," it seemed to say, "yet man-made from things he sensed, the brooding influences of this solitary isle, born of fire and smoke, delivered in water. Influences that may still be conjured from the sea, the sky, the core of the earth. I represent them and I bid you beware."

Bizarre and fantastic thoughts these; but the image itself was only concrete thought. It seemed to proclaim the place dangerous, cynically warning the intruder. It appeared to hold many tragic secrets, reaching back through the centuries,

A SPUR of land, a cape like a high fin, reached out far into the sea. As they passed it a putrid smell enveloped them. It was like the odor of a glue factory and it pursued them on the breeze until distance made it bearable. This was the stench from piles of shell set out long since to rot so that the shells might be more readily searched for pearls. The shell itself was valuable.

Here there was a deep indentation in the island, and placid water showed behind a foaming barrier of lava reef, not coral, that paralleled the shore. This must have been the diving ground for the precious bivalves. 'The skipper surveyed it narrowly, seeking an entrance. The reef ended presently, and he came about, hugging the land, one -man casting the lead from the bobstay and chanting out the depth. It was satisfactory and the tide was with them as they glided along between the barrier and the shore, once more encountering the foul odor of decay until they tacked into the cleft and made slowly up it, foresail down and mainsail peaked, with the current.

THEY were in a somber water canyon, still in shadow, though, higher up the fanged peaks glowed in the sunrise and the timber on the loftier slopes took on vivid coloring. 'The ravine turned sharply and they saw a narrow beach lined

with dark-green mangroves from which a stream issued. There were signs of habitation here, a long shed of thatched roof and wattled walls, two houses of the same type. But there was no indication of life, no hail. The place lay wrapped in silence as the *Fahine* glided slowly on.

The masts of a vessel showed their tops above water a hundred yards out— a sunken schooner. It was a depressing sight, but Stanton twisted a measure of hope from it which he handed to the girl.

"Loo Fong didn't find the pearls," he said. "I think this means that your father is still on the island. They sank his ship to prevent his leaving."

He tried to make it convincing, and Lucy Haines essayed a pitiful smile.

"I hope so," she replied, " but why doesn't he show himself? Why doesn't some one answer?"

"They may be asleep," he said, and shouted. The echo came back from the cliff, rebounded from the opposing one, The Chinese captain found bottom to his liking, the cable slipped out to twelve fathoms, and a boat was lowered. It was impossible to tell from those yellow faces what they thought of the situation, but the rowers took rifles with them, pistols holstered at their belts. Stanton took his automatic and another revolver. He had shortened a belt for the girl and she also carried a gun at her hip.

She had dressed for the landing in breeches and high-laced boots, and she looked like a tight-lipped boy, her expression much as Stanton had seen it on the street in Suva. Tiki slid down the fall rope and squatted in the bows. The captain had given him a knife and a leather belt in which he thrust it above his sulu kilt.

The silence was profound. The sea birds had gone, the land birds settled down. The only sound was the melancholy cooing of doves. In the water appeared the scything fins of sharks on some mysterious patrol.

The boat grounded and the rowers hauled it beyond the rise of the flooding tide. Crabs scuttled along the shingle. Blocks of lava protruded here and there. Beach vines straggled over black sand.

Stanton tried to save the girl the sight of the skeletons. There were six of them, the bones scattered, picked clean by crabs, in front of the long shed. They lay in plain view, and she uttered a low cry and halted, then started to hurry forward, checked by Stanton's hand on her arm.

"There's no clothing," he said. "Your father's not there." It was scant comfort. There were a few lengths of cloth, but he thought these the loin coverings of the men Haines had with him. 'The grisly objects were separated as if they had fallen making a stand against invaders. The yellow men investigated as Stanton led the girl aside. Tiki looked at the skeletons incuriously.

The captain reported briefly :

“They all Kanaka. Some got hole in head. Bullet make. No white man there.”

Nor anywhere else, it seemed, as they searched the shed, half full of lustrous shells; the two houses, one of which held some of Haines’s belongings that brought tears to the girl’s eyes, though she strove to check them. Both huts showed signs of search. The winds had erased all footprints. The shell was valuable, but it had been disdained. It looked as if the dead men had been wantonly shot down at the first encounter.

“He got away,” said Stanton. “We'll find him somewhere.” But he held faint hope of finding Haines alive. The atmosphere of murder and sudden death possessed the place.

“We'll stay here until we've searched the island,” he said to the captain.

“Can do,” the skipper answered. It seemed a stupendous, futile task. Towering cliffs, dense jungle and barren, precipitous crags, deep clefts, hidden valleys, caverns: a myriad places where a man might stow himself away, or lie dead.

They spread out, hallooing, looking in all likely spots. The captain made Tiki understand what they were seeking and he nodded, came to Stanton, took his hand and set it on his breast, starting off on a quest of his own, trotting along the beach, disappearing up a ravine choked with guava scrub. They saw no more of him that day as they searched without finding any trace of Haines, living or dead. Night fell with tropic swiftness on their utter lack of success.

THE skipper, at least, looked also for the pearls. He had his own instructions. To Stanton, the discovery of Haines was more important, even aside from thought of the girl, who had stayed beside him all day as they tried in vain to solve the riddle of what had happened to her father. Let them find Haines and, if he was alive, the pearls would be forthcoming.

The fear grew on him—he knew it grew on the girl also—that Haines had been killed by the raiders because he refused to give them up or tell where he kept them. Only the lack of a body offset this dread and a body was easily disposed of. He did not try to comfort Lucy Haines; to do that would be practically an acknowledgment there was no hope. He got her to eat on the plea that she must keep her strength for renewal of search the next day.

They slept aboard. No sail had been in sight up to nightfall. A lookout had been maintained on a cliff and, since the search had extended to the crags, they had seen the whole circle of the horizon. They had won the race down, but their advantage was checked by the search. When Loo Fong arrived, with Johnson, there was going to be trouble.

Stanton was up at dawn. He dressed swiftly, going on deck. The girl was already there, pale from a sleepless night. She was gazing at the island with an expression of hopelessness that she tried to banish as she saw Stanton.

“I’m not going to leave here until I know what has happened to him,” she said, her voice firm, her mouth and chin resolute as she finished the determined sentence. He did not answer her. There was nothing to say. He was not going to let her stay alone. The question of conventions did not enter into the matter. Conventions vanished in these latitudes,

“He’s all I have,” she said. It was in his mind, his heart, to deny this, but it was not the time for it. Complications were likely to settle matters, not as they would have them, but as the fates willed. Motutabu lay in sunshine, but it was emphatically a savage place. The Chinese had buried the skeletons, but they were not to be forgotten, Tragedy brooded over the island.

“We'll have to arrange some sort of systematic search,” he said, foreseeing how impossible was the task. An army, seeking for weeks, might not hope to unearth the secrets of the wild jungle, impenetrable in most places. ‘The seabirds were winging out, others shrilling their morning ecstasy; fish leaped in the water while, up and down, two sharks roved as if they had tasted blood and scented more.

“We've got to eat,” he said. "It’s just a question of fuel.”

“I suppose so,” she answered wearily.

They went below and breakfast was served. Overhead the crew padded about their tasks, washing down the decks, ordinary duties that they carried on. Stanton saw two tears on her cheeks as she tried to drink the strong coffee. She wiped them away, but the drink choked her.

There was a singsong cry on deck that had a stirring note in it. Stanton thought that the Lehua must have been sighted.

“Something’s happened,” he said. “I’ll see what it is." The girl looked at him, startled. For a moment hope flashed in her eyes and died out at the sight of his grim face. The captain came hurrying down the companionway.

“Tiki!” he said. “ He come along beach. I think he find something.”

They raced on deck. The shore boat was ready, the armed rowers in it. Tiki was at the water’s edge, gesticulating, pointing to the heights. The girl was trembling as the oars bent to the short, sturdy strokes. She set her hand on Stanton’s arm, and he laid his own over it. Her lips moved silently. He knew that she was praying that her father was still alive, fighting off the thought of other news.

“Call to him, please,” she asked the skipper. “ Ask him if—if—”

The captain stood up in the stern, handling the steering sweep, and shouted a few syllables. Tiki shouted back.

“He alive,” said the skipper, and the girl broke down as Stanton put his arm about her and she set her head against his shoulder and wept in the revulsion of relief.

Tiki had found him, with his knowledge of jungle craft, looking for sign by instinct, finding it where others would have sought in vain. He pointed out certain places as they trailed him up the ravine in which he had vanished the night before. Stanton could see little. A fragment of broken lava, a snapped stem, but the savage had read all unerringly.

THEY climbed high, following an ancient path hacked through the bush, the ground hard-beaten, a relic of the time when Tiki lived on Motutabu. The trees, matted and bound together with undergrowth and vines, rose on either side like walls. Great orchids swung, brilliant butterflies hovered about them like living flowers. They came to where the trail forked and here was a pyramid of crumbling skulls. Tiki took the right-hand path. It led to a deserted, half-ruined village back of walls of coral, in which bamboos grew along the top. There was a heavy gateway, sagging now, stilted houses, whose roofs had decayed, the wattled walls torn by the weather, rotting from the rains.

There was a sing-sing ground with a great banyan tree, whose boughs were decked with strings of skulls. One great building had collapsed. Two stone images had fallen on their faces, tall drumlogs, carven like totem poles, lay prone. The earthquake had flung them down. ‘The place was littered with signs of hasty, frenzied flight.

Tiki led them through this abandoned capital of Motutabu, pressing on ever upward by paths that the jungle was already reclaiming. They climbed above the forest and crossed a plateau of high yellow grass that terminated at a great rift, at the bottom of which was a lake of dark water, divided into unequal parts by a sharp ridge that led to the other side. There the crags began.

It was a narrow and perilous crossing. The volcanic rock was badly decomposed and it scaled and broke as they passed, the fragments bounding down to the still water, far below.

On the other side they came to a ledge and Tiki turned and made gestures, nodding at them, talking in excited gutturals.

“He speak we soon find,” the captain interpreted.

They had to go in single file along that narrow way. Once Tiki pointed to some dark marks on the rock.

“That blood,” said the captain. The girl shuddered and Stanton steadied her. It was the dry season. Such stains would linger. Haines had been wounded. Suddenly Tiki stopped where a tangle of vines cascaded down the

cliff that backed the ledge. He drew them aside and disclosed a narrow cleft, a fissure made ages past in some upheaval.

It led to a little glen that was merely an oval enlargement of the fissure. Its sides were thick with moss. Water trickled down and formed a pool. There was shrubbery, a few trees, guava scrub, The sun never reached this hidden place in which Haines had found sanctuary. They saw a little shelter of boughs by the pool and saw him lying there, gaunt, haggard, his face covered with a beard, his eyes deep sunken, but with light in them, as the girl gave a cry and ran forward to kneel beside him.

He was reduced almost to skin and bone. One shoulder and a foot were crudely bandaged. His voice was barely audible.

Stanton had brought along a first aid kit and a flask of brandy. Lucy gave some to her father and a faint flush came into his hollow cheeks.

“I thought you were a ghost,” he said faintly. “How did you come here? It was just in time. I wouldn’t have lasted—much longer—my dear.”

He closed his eyes and Stanton thought he was gone, but the pulse still fluttered feebly. The girl gave him more brandy.

“He’s starved,” she said, “We must get him down to the boat. Thank God he’s still alive!” The pearls were forgotten. The Chinese captain had got a fire started. One of the crew put on some water to heat.

“We'll-have to be careful how we feed him,” said Stanton. “I’ve got some beef cubes. We'll have to make a litter, and those wounds should be looked to. He doesn’t seem to have any fever.”

In the hope of Tiki’s discovery they had brought up certain equipment, including the utensil in which the water ‘was warming. The girl dissolved the cubes and added a little brandy, while Stanton unbound the foot. A bullet had gone through the small bones. The wound showed in a purple pucker. There had been inflammation, but, with the fever, it had been starved out of him. The lead had passed through and there was no infection. It was the same with the shoulder. Haines was terribly weak, but he had been a strong man and he had survived.

He managed to swallow the beef tea. It was all they dared allow him. Stanton cleansed the wounds and temporarily dressed and bandaged them. The litter was being made by the sailors. Haines insisted upon talking. Stanton thought it might be better for him than repression.

“THEY nearly got me,” he said. “They got my men. They'd have had me but for chance. They came early in the morning expecting to catch us all asleep, and they butchered my boys, without giving them a chance. I saw it and could do nothing. They were after the pearls. They couldn’t have found them. They

tortured two of my men to find out, but they didn't know. It was the *Lehua*. They were all in it, but it was Loo Fong who brought them. I nearly got him. It was this way—let me talk, Lucy, I haven't talked for days, not since I went out of my head.

"I wanted meat. There are goats up here in the crags and I came up overnight to get a kid or two. We were running short of grub, you see, and were pretty well fed up on fish. We were going back in a few days. We cleaned the patches and were rotting out the last of the shell. A lot of pearls. We're rich, Lucy. Luck's turned, after all.

"I saw the schooner coming in. I didn't recognize it. Thought at first Cheung had sent it. I didn't suspect anything, but started down the mountain. There's a place across the grass where you can see the beach. Time I got there, they had anchored and were sending a boat ashore. They were all like ants from the height. I saw my men come out of their hut and run back again. 'Those devils were armed, of course, and they didn't even wait to parley. Some of them went to my house. Then the butchery started. My boys were not armed. I had my rifle with me. I had one extra clip along. It was all over in a few minutes and I couldn't help them. They'd have got me if I had been there. I ran down the trail when I saw what was happening and then they started up after me. I suppose they got out of one of my men that I was up here after goats. They burned the men's feet in the fire, damn them.

"One has to keep to the trails. I started back for the crags. 'They beat all through the grass and then they started to cross the big gap. I fired at them, hit 'one of them. He fell into the lake. That was a mistake, I suppose; it gave me away; but I was seeing red. On the next shot my rifle jammed. 'They came over and they hunted me all day, spreading out. The crew were black men and it was easy work for them. They sighted me three times. Once they hit me, in the shoulder.

"I saw they'd get me sooner or later. I couldn't stay in the crags. They had me nearly surrounded, but I got past them, down to the ledge just below here. My only chance was to bolt across the ridge. But they spotted me. They had me on the ledge. I knew who they were then. It was Loo Fong who hit me in the foot as I bolted for cover. I didn't feel it for the moment, though I had a shoeful of blood. I was bleeding from the shoulder, weak. I dodged out of sight and then I saw my last chance. I knew the cleft, though I had never been up it. A wounded dove flew into it one day and I had gone after it. I thought the vines might hide me. There was a loose boulder on the ledge and I shoved it over and dodged into the crevice. The rock went crashing down to the lake and they thought it was my body.

" They came down to the ledge and looked at the place. I heard Loo Fong cursing. They stayed there for a little while and then went away, swearing. I suppose they tried to find the pearls, but they couldn't get down to the lake. I crawled up to this place presently, bandaged my foot at the pool, and my shoulder. They both got pretty bad after awhile. I made this shelter, I got some guavas, and lived off them and the *olehau* berries. I couldn't walk, and fever set in. I don't know how long I've been here; I was delirious."

The litter was ready. They set Haines in it, a light weight for all his big frame, and he lay there exhausted as two of the crew swung him up and they started down, Lucy as close to her father as the trail permitted."

They crossed the ridge and the grassy plain, coming to the place he had spoken of where they could see the beach and their schooner. There was another ship coming round the bend—the Lehua! They saw the two men left on board the *Fahine* jump into a small boat and row ashore. They were fired at from the *Lehua*. The reports came up in tiny cracks of sound, but the two reached the beach and bolted for the jungle.

A boat crammed with men put off from the raiding vessel.

They were hampered with the wounded Haines, They had to get him into safety. Stanton's blood boiled at sight of the invaders.

"We fight them," said the skipper. "Can do. If not, they sink ship, all same his." Tiki was jabbering.

" He say take him along god," said the captain. ' He speak it safe place. He speak God fixee. Cave along that place."

Tiki nodded emphatically. Stanton thought of Cheung's warning, spoke of it to the captain.

"I savvy. All same I think Tiki talk plopeh."

5. The Shadow of the God.

HERE was no time for delay. They had to do something. To take the offensive was the best plan. Tiki pointed out the opening of an almost closed jungle trail. They went into it, going as fast as they dared, working toward the far side of the promontory, making for the image.

They came out beneath it at last, at the foot of the towering sculpture. It stood facing a paved terrace, set with flat stones. Great stones had been piled in two walls that left a passageway to the feet of the god. There was a space between his knees. Tiki led the way in.

It was a high chamber into which light filtered down from some opening above where growth masked it. The sides were roughly hewn here and there — into dim shapes. There was a flat rock near the entrance on which was set

another one from which protruded long timbers, capstan fashion. ‘Tiki pointed to these.

"He say can fixee tlap so no one come in,” said the skipper.

Tiki nodded, gesturing. Stanton thought he grasped his meaning.

“ All right,” he said. “ Better send out your men to try and flank that outfit. I’ll stay here with Miss Haines and her father. We'll keep Tiki.”

They went out, going along the terrace, disappearing in the trees, yellow men intent on battle. The litter was set down on the cavern floor.

Tiki caught hold of one of the timbers set in the stone, motioning to Stanton who set his chest against one opposite. The girl did the same thing with a third. They heaved, without result, put out all their strength in straining effort. The stone began to turn, more readily after the first movement. There was a grating sound beneath their feet.

Tiki stepped back, grinning. Sweat covered him. Stanton and the girl were panting with their efforts, their clothing wet with perspiration. Tiki beckoned Stanton to come to the mouth of the cave and he followed him. There was nothing to see but the empty terrace, the waving woods. But Tiki was satisfied. He pointed at the great slabs before them, gesturing.

Doves cooed. ‘The girl was ministering to her father who was saying something. Then there came the sound of shots, close at hand. Report after report, singly and scattering volleys. They were quite a distance off, but they came nearer. Then died away. Again they broke out, down by the beach, it seemed.

Then the two Chinese who had come ashore bolted out of the bush, carrying their rifles, glancing back. They looked toward the image and sped on without seeing Stanton or Tiki. Tiki grasped him by the arm and drew him in the shadows. He did not want the Chinese to enter the cavern. The girl came and stood beside Stanton.

“Father is sleeping,” she said. "I heard the shots.”

“ We're safe, so far,” he said. “ Tiki and the god have set some sort of a trap. The trouble is, it may work both ways.” Whatever the device was he could see that they might be besieged, held there, without provisions, without water, unless the yellow men conquered.

The Chinese were willing enough, capable enough, he fancied, though he had never seen them shoot. On the other hand, the crew of the *Lehua* were Solomon Islanders, used to brush warfare, trained fighters, a savage and blood-thirsty outfit, though the Chinese might match them there. When they took to piracy or banditry they were ruthless enough. He imagined the forces might be about evenly matched, but the nature of the ground would break the fighting up more or less into individual skirmishes.

There was silence again. Haines was resting. With care there would be no question of his recovery, but if Loo Fong got the best of it their fates would all be sealed. What would happen to Lucy he dared not consider. They could put up a desperate fight at the last, if they got a chance. There was no exit to the cave, no possible way to climb to the rift.

Doves cooed. The shadows shifted. Once in awhile they heard a distant shot. The forces were split up now, it seemed. Stanton thought of the captain's fear their schooner might be sunk, as Haines's had been. It was a very real peril. He wanted to be out in the vessel, but he could not leave the girl or Haines alone.

Tiki was complacent. He seemed assured that the god in whose belly they. were hidden, would properly protect them. He had gone inside, to squat in front of one of the carved figures, passing from that to another. They could hear him chanting monotonously. He had come back to his old home again and he was renewing fealty. This had been the fetish of his father, the wizard, and Tiki was a born *tahunga*, in his veins the blood of generations of sorcerers who had served a weird priesthood to this ancient statue which far ante-dated their own original migration to this island.

IT was cool inside. Without, the sun blazed down fiercely. The shadows retreated as the fiery orb mounted toward the zenith. It wheeled out of their sight and the shadow of the cliff, the shadow of the image, began to stretch out over the paving between the walls of stone that shut out much of their view.

Tiki came back to the entrance, hunkering down. From some place known to him he had taken weird paraphernalia. He had daubed himself with white and yellow and black, there was an apron about his middle that was made of human hair. He wore a necklace of knuckle-bones, a skullpan hung upon his chest and his arms and legs were decked with circlets of shell and bone and fiber. He had been in his father's make-up repository, Stanton thought.

With him he had brought something that looked like a queer-shaped basket of plaited strips of pliable cane, like matting. He took no notice of them apart, remote, droning out some incantations, watching the creeping shadow.

Stanton remembered something Cheung had said about the shadow of the god. The shadows of all sacred things, even of chiefs, were *tabu*. To walk in them was death. Yet the shadow of the god fell only at certain hours. Tiki could not have timed any attack that might take place. The combatants seemed to have lost sight of each other, hunting along the trails, hiding in the bush. But Tiki seemed waiting for something with a curious certainty. To him the god was infallible.

Stanton told himself that it was only a barbaric, colossal carving, but even as he held the thought, another came, suggesting that he should have faith. Civilization seemed now to be an unreal thing. They were back in the stone age, to which the island and its departed inhabitants belonged. A superstitious feeling possessed him, not one of fear. ‘The shadow lengthened and still the island was wrapped in silence.

Suddenly he thought he saw the solid forest waver to and fro. The legs of the god, portals to the cave, appeared to move. A tremor ran through the ground and there was a low muttering as of thunder, a hollow rumbling from inside the cave. The girl started up and would have gone inside to her father, but he restrained her. The place might fall in.

Montabu had once flamed, been thrust up with its riven crags in smoke and steam. Lava had flowed. Now those fires were clogged, the craters choked, but, far below, the interior wrath still raged. This was a temblor, one of the earthquakes that intermittently shook the peaks that had been lifted from the sea. This was a slight shock. No other followed and he let her enter. Haines was still sleeping.

Tiki had risen. To him it was a manifestation that the god was pleased that a faithful believer had returned. He stood erect with the dignity of an oracle. As Stanton watched him he took the strange basketry and placed it over his head. It was a hood that fell below his shoulders. It had trunklike appendages, two holes for eyes that were glazed by fish bladders. It turned him to a grotesque and terrible figure, like a great squid. As he moved, the wicker tentacles writhed.

Something was going to happen. Stanton felt it in his bones, Not another quake. He saw the shadow vanish, melt away, as if the sun had been veiled. Then it appeared again, sharp and distinct. Tiki’s chant grew louder, ceased as there came the sound of a brisk fusillade.

Men were coming from the woods, firing back at enemies still hidden. They came into view between the walls. The Chinese captain and his men— fewer now—retreating, kneeling to take aim, then running to kneel again. They passed and, with savage yells, the black men from the Lehua burst into view, charging, Johnson and Loo Fong at their head.

Tiki sent out a yell of defiance, ululating, weird and shrill as it issued from a reeded mouthpiece in the mask. Loo Fong halted and turned, Johnson with him. They stared for a moment and then they saw the girl, who had come, unnoticed by Stanton, to the entrance. Stanton swept her aside, flattening her against the curve of the image’s colossal leg, taking place himself on the opposite side as bullets came whining toward them. Tiki had seemingly betrayed them.

He had not moved. He was untouched and again he sent out that piercing challenge as Loo Fong cried out an order and the savage outfit came racing up between the walls, firing their pistols. Now Tiki stepped inside, un-hit.

STANTON fired back to stem the stampede. They came leaping on. Lucy Haines fired with him and a black staggered and fell. Johnson was struck, but it did not check him. Their bullets were entering the cave, splaying gray streaks on the rock. Stanton pulled trigger on his last cartridge, missing Loo Fong whose evil face was lit with triumph. They were on the last great slab when Tiki reappeared, sounding his whistling howl.

Stanton saw the rear half of the big slab tilt upward. The whole stone was balanced and it rose smoothly, inexorably. A gulf opened and out of it came a moaning sound like the wash of the sea, far below.

Johnson and Loo Fong were pitched forward, their faces. twisted with sudden terror. The angle became acute, and they slid down, dropping their weapons, crouching, clawing uselessly. The mate pitched forward, plunged into the gap. Loo Fong made a desperate spring as he squatted there like a toad. His fingers clutched the nigh edge, the sill of the cave entrance, clung there.

The stone swung on, up and over in a complete revolution. Its edge smashed the fingers of the half-caste and the slab closed him in, leaving bloody smears and remnants on the threshold. There were only the black men left and they stood in a huddled mob before they broke and ran, some trying to climb the walls, appalled at this manifestation of the god.

It was the slab of sacrifice, used on ceremonial occasions where victims were demanded; set as a trap for the unwary, for meddlers.

Tiki had lured them on. He had provided sacrifice. He had appeased the long, unsated appetite of his god, and thus established his priesthood. He had saved Haines, his daughter and Stanton, but they had been bait for the victims.

He had won the day.

The yellow men were coming back, firing at the terrified blacks. The fight had gone out of the islanders. They could not battle with gods. Man after man went down, and then the slaughter swept past and out of view.

Tiki touched Stanton on the shoulder. He had taken off the mask and he went back to the moving capstan stone that had triggered the trap. They took hold of the pole and revolved it.

The grating sound died away and Tiki walked through the entrance, out on the slab, now firm again, turning to crouch and lower his head to the rock in salutation and obeisance.

A hail came from the end of the causeway. It was the Chinese skipper with two of his men. Stanton advanced to meet them.

"They all dead!" he said complacently. There was blood on his clothes and his hands, but his face was clear of all emotion. "Tiki, he fixee. All samee stone give way, I think."

It was over. Two of the Chinese were wounded, one seriously. A third was dead. The captain mentioned it casually. It was all in the day's work.

"Now we catch pearl and go," he said. "Mo' good we sink *Lehua*. No can take. Too muchee talk, too muchee bobbely that make."

Stanton had forgotten all about the pearls. It had probably been the prime issue in the mind of the skipper. Haines was an incident. He possessed a share if he lived, but that was Cheung's private business. Bringing back the pearls was the captain's affair, whether he found Haines or not. Stanton and the girl, Haines and Tiki, were pawns to the captain.

Cheung, Stanton fancied, was not so cold-blooded, but Cheung was an exceptional Chinaman.

They took up the litter as the rest arrived and marched back, past the outsprawled corpses of the black men, more sacrifices to the great, gray god. Haines awakened from his semi-stupor, seemingly refreshed. He would re- . cover, though he would probably be lame. Stanton ordered him sent off immediately to the ship with Lucy, to occupy Stanton's own cabin.

"Catch pearl first," said the captain.

Haines smiled for the first time.

"I think they're safe," he said. "There in that pool over there. It is only half-filled at high tide. Moisture wouldn't hurt them, anyway. But there's a crevice near the top, on this side. They're in there, in an oilskin sack. The hole is plugged with seaweed."

They were safe, a bag half-filled with softly shimmering gems of the sea, slightly iridescent, oval, round, pearshaped, symmetrical, a few of them pink in luster. Stanton could not estimate them, but he knew they represented a fortune. Haines fingered them.

"You can keep some of them, my dear," he said to Lucy. "A third of them are mine.' We'll sell what you don't want."

"Sell all of them," she said. "They have cost too much. I couldn't wear them."

The skipper talked with Tiki, who stood apart. Then he came to Stanton. "Tiki speak he stay along this place," he said. "He like we set up those dlum and those image topside along sing-sing glound."

Stanton looked at Tiki who walked toward him and once more took Stanton's hand and placed it over his heart. Then he pointed to the mountain, toward the god, now hidden by the cape.

The gesture, the desire, were unmistakable. He had come home. Solitude did not bother him. Later he might adventure, bring back a woman, or a dusky harem, but this was his land, his god.

He did not belong in Suva, nor on the other island from which he had fled. Motutabu was his abiding-place, as priest to the graven image.

They left him later, his wishes carried out, standing on the beach, motionless. Stanton felt that they owed him much, but he had owed a debt to Stanton for his rescue. He would have died in Suva. And he had paid his debt. He and the god.

The sunset was flaming back of the island when they made out to sea, two sunken schooners in the bay. Tiki had been presented with the stores of the Lehua, all that he selected.

The face of the image was no longer flaming as they had first seen it. It was gray now, somber but serene. From the mountain came the deep sound of a reverberating drum.

"WHAT you going to do now?" Cheung asked Stanton as they sat in the chamber over the restaurant. Haines was under medical care, a rich man, content to limp, since he could well afford to ride.

"I don't know," Stanton answered. "I'm at a loose end." Cheung smiled, nodded toward the inside rooms where Lucy Haines was talking with Cheung's wife.

"Suppose you ask missy?" he said, "These belong along you. If you like I buy them flom you. Give good plice."

He took a leather sack from his capacious sleeve and poured out pearls into a lacquered bowl. They filled a third of it with milky radiance.

"You, me, Haines, all same divide," said Cheung. "These velly fine pearl. Fifty-sixty thousan' dollah. Why you not ask missy?"

"I think I'll take your advice," said Stanton. The trip back had been a happy one. He was not without foundation for the hope that Lucy might be interested in what he did and where he went.

He was no longer a derelict, no longer in danger of being a beach bum. He was a man of substance.

"You ask now," said Cheung. "I call my wife. I wish you plenty luckee."

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2: The Back Trail

H. Bedford Jones

1887-1949

Adventure Jan 1937

THE old man who came ashore from the island steamer was rather a queer piece. And you saw some queer ones in Balikan these days, what with the oil boom and everything.

Watch his eyes, as he walked along the river front to the rickety hotel, perched on its stilts over the mangrove roots and the pigs. What he looked at, what he passed over, might tell a story. He had no eyes for the Dutch officer and the brown sepoys, or the Arab and Chinese bazaars, nor even for the Red Hot, which was comfortably filled with drinkers at this cool of the afternoon.

He did look at the oil men, stalwart Americans, Australians, Dutch. He gaped at the oil tanker along the new wharf, and the shining oil tanks ashore. His glance touched here and there, reflectively, as though mildly amazed by the looks of things. But— and this was significant— while he took no interest in the natives, he did look twice, and even again, at a Malay who came along with a *kris* tucked into his sarong. Not one man in a hundred, here, would see anything odd about the Malay or his *kris*, except that he was an old sort of chap. The one man would know that the weapon was a "*kris* of honor," as the Malays call it, carried only by a chief. There were not many Malays here in Balikan, or around the new Celebes oil field.

The old man went on to the hotel. Only when you looked him in the face did the impression of age come. Otherwise, his whites fell about a straight-backed figure, and his step had a spring. The face, with its gray mustache, its gray hair under the sun-helmet, was lined and drawn and gnarled, and oddly white. Only the eyes were young and alive.

At the hotel desk, he paid the native who had brought his bag from the steamer and registered his name: John Schmidt. He seemed in no haste to seek his room, but looked at the sleek Dutch hotel clerk and spoke amiably.

"Twelve years has made a lot of changes in Balikan, eh?"

"Yes, *Mynheer*," said the clerk. "That, and the oil discovery. You're interested in the oil fields, perhaps?"

"No," said Schmidt, with a slight smile. "Did you ever hear of a man named Voorhis, who used to be a trader here, when Balikan was only a settlement?"

"You must mean Mynheer Piet Voorhis," said the clerk. "Yes, he is a wealthy man now, with a fine tobacco plantation. It is next to the plantation of Mynheer Hoorn. Two days up-river."

"So? Jan Hoorn is still alive, eh?" Schmidt lifted his shaggy gray brows. "There was an English planter here in the old days. What was his name— yes, I have it. Ferguson! I suppose you never heard of him?"

"Ferguson?" The Dutch clerk mouthed the name and nodded. "Oh, yes! Mynheer Voorhis has his plantation now. The Englishman died or went away. I forget the story. I think he was sent to prison for illegal trading. His wife died; his son is-still around here. Someone was talking about him only the other day. He'll come to no good end, they say. A wastrel who's gone up in the Dyak country most of the time, and spends his days here hanging around the Red Hot with these Americans. Yes, I remember now. It was an oil man talking about him. The fellow was in jail yesterday for being drunk."

"So?" said Schmidt. "When do we dine— oh, at eight-thirty? Thank you."

He went to his room. The ramshackle hotel was a rickety structure, the flooring laid over ironwood poles, the partitions thin. Even with the windows closed, one could hear the talking trees outside, so thin were the walls and full of chinks.

Schmidt changed into fresh whites, slicked back his iron-gray hair, looked at himself in the broken mirror and smiled grimly. Nobody who had known him twelve years ago would know him now, he told himself. This old man's face was security against any recognition. Old and bitter, even sinister, with that puckering scar on the check. It changed him completely.

He dressed with care and went out, heading for the little old town along the river. The newer town, with fine bungalows and beautiful compounds, stretched farther back; but here between the hotel and the Red Hot sprawled the little old huddled streets of bazaars and huts and trading posts, their godowns extending along the wharves, with the walled compound of the Dutch Residency just beyond.

Under the lordly flame-trees thronged Chinese and natives, seamen and Arabs, oil men and sepoys. Schmidt threaded his way among them and turned in at the bazaar of Lim Toy— Lim the "talented," who did a general trading and banking business. He spoke to a clerk in the bazaar, and presently was taken to the office in the rear. Here sat Lim Toy with an accountant who nimbly fingered an abacus. Lim was a fat old yellow man, who wore his hair in a queue like his ancestors and affected the coral-buttoned cap of a mandarin, to which he had no right whatever. He was a Straits Chinese and not from China itself.

Lim glanced up at his visitor, then heaved out of his chair and extended a plump hand. His fat countenance was wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, this is joyful!" he said in English. "I am glad to see you again. Be seated, and this ineffective gosling who tries to learn the business will serve us tea."

Schmidt, who had not uttered a word, sat down and lit a whitish Borneo cheroot. The clerk scuttled out. Lim turned to his visitor, his face creased in anxious lines.

"It is all right?" he inquired.

"Quite," Schmidt said dryly. "I've served my time. I'm surprised you knew me."

"The eyes and the thumb-prints never change. I keep the one in my memory, my records keep the other."

"I'm using the name of John Schmidt, for my own reasons. Have you the money I deposited with you years ago?"

"And the interest. It has grown to a large sum," said Lim Toy.

"Didn't my wife or my son need it?"

"No. Your wife died. Mynheer Voorhis claimed she had sold him the plantation and had a paper to prove it. He gave the boy some money, and the boy went up-country with your servant Ali. Since then he has done very well, trading. I buy much from him. He is here in town now."

Schmidt nodded reflectively. "Ali was always a wise man and true. Where is my wife buried? Here in town?"

"No. I think she was buried on the plantation. When he made money, the boy had me send to Batavia for a tombstone, I remember."

The clerk came in, bringing tea things, and arranged a table. Lim Toy lit a sleeve pipe, puffed out its brief life, laid it down again. Schmidt sat smoking, his grim face relaxed into lines of meditation. Then Lim spoke again.

"You will want some money."

"Yes. A thousand guilders, if you have it handy. But I don't want to sign for it. I can trust you, of course; we were once friends."

"We are still friends. A thumb-print signature is all I require," said Lim. "Let me give you tea; it is very poor stuff and unworthy of you, I regret to say."

A polite man, Lim Toy. The tea service was of Canton enamel, very fine and old and delicate. The two sipped tea and spoke of the old days before Dutch rule had been pushed so far up-river, before the oilfields had civilized everything.

"You have plans for the future?" asked Lim Toy blandly. Schmidt gave him a look; the old face hardened, the glittering eyes grew sharper.

"No— for the present," he said harshly. "I've waited twelve years for this day, Lim. Now I'm going to get the man, or men, who framed me. Understand?" A savage ferocity edged his voice suddenly. "Get them! That's why I'm here."

His gnarled brown fingers tightened on the empty cup, as he spoke. It gave way. It fell on the table, a crushed mass of thin copper and enamel.

"Oh! I'm sorry," he exclaimed, in dismay.

"It is nothing," said Lim blandly, but for a moment his eyes were mournful as they touched on the crushed ruin. "It is nothing. There is something much more important, my friend. Haste is the destroyer of cherished dreams."

"True. I know that, Lim; I've learned it. Cherished dreams— well, that's one word for it, anyhow! There's one man I aim to put in hell."

From former days, Schmidt remembered the tea ceremony well. Presently he himself pressed for the third cup of tea, which meant dismissal. Lim Toy sighed and agreed. Schmidt pocketed his money, made his thumb mark on the receipt and took his departure.

AS he emerged from the bazaar entrance, a low voice halted him.

"*Tuan-ki*! I am here."

Schmidt looked down at the brown figure, squatting respectfully yet proudly. It was the same Malay whom he had seen in the street, wearing a scarlet sarong with a *kris melala* thrust in it, a *kris* of ceremony. An old and wrinkled face like his own, a strong, springy body like his own.

"You have made a mistake," Schmidt said in Malay. The squatting man showed his betel-blackened teeth in a grin.

"Tuan, I saw you when you came from the ship."

"You have another master. I do not know you," and Schmidt turned away.

"May fire be upon my head, but not shame!" drifted the soft voice after him. He paused, glancing back at the Malay with his twisted smile.

"Neither fire nor shame, Ali, but wisdom." he said, and went his way.

His course took him to the Red Hot.

Here he found the air blue with smoke and oaths and loud talk. Oil men were ranged along the bar; the gambling rooms would not be open until the evening. Men blethered of Sydney and Texas and Oklahoma. Two machinery salesmen from Singapore talked women with a Dutch commercial traveler. The officers from the steamer were drinking steadily, and the American bartender was kept busy with his native helpers.

Schmidt gained a place at the bar, ordered gin and ginger beer, and looked into the big fly-specked mirror. On his right, a young fellow stood discussing freight rates with the steamer's supercargo; a young man, brown, hawknosed, unsmiling. Schmidt's gaze gripped the hard, alive face, and his own thoughts rioted.

They bridged the gap of twelve years, the gap of emptiness. They went back to the first tobacco plantation in these parts, two days up-river. He had carved it out of the jungle himself, when the Dutch did not have so much as a fort up there. His thoughts toyed with those days of budding prosperity and

golden future, before Piet Voorhis came to Balikan. They touched on the smiling woman— and shrank away. She was gone now. Only the twelve-year gap remained, and Voorhis, and this young man with the brown hard face— his son, but a stranger.

Then Schmidt forced everything back and down, came into the present again and here remained. One day at a time; thus had run the orders of his brain. Thus it must still be. One day at a time. Life held nothing more than this.

"Him? Oh, young Ferguson. Quite a lad, they say. Been here most of his life. His old man was sent up for illegal trading and murder, a long time ago. Can't get a better man than Ferguson to handle anything up-country."

Schmidt heard the words subconsciously. He was thinking of the twelve year gap, with no letters, no word, no communication. Across the island seas and buried. No one here would even know that he was pardoned and free and out. No one would care, except possibly Hoorn or Piet Voorhis. Then, wakening to the words, he looked for the speaker but could not locate him. Just a chance remark. Sent up for illegal trading and murder, eh? True enough. Tried and convicted and plucked out of life into a living hell. And for nothing that he had done.

A smart fellow, Piet Voorhis. Claimed he had bought the plantation, and had a paper to prove it. Yes, he would. Hoorn would have helped him with that. Hoorn had helped him years ago, when he wanted Ferguson out of his way. Well, well, the talented Lim was quite right about it all. Only the young should be in a hurry.

There was a fight down the room, a hammering, thudding battle of cursing oil men. Schmidt watched the crowd eddy and uncoil again, his bright eyes uninterested. The line-up shifted at the bar and brought young Ferguson next to him.

"No, I won't take the job," Ferguson said to someone behind. "Thanks all the same. I can send you a good native guide, if that'll do you. I'm heading upriver in the morning on business of my own."

"Give my love to the Voorhis girl," hiccuped an oil man. "Some day I'll take her out— "

Ferguson whipped around in a blaze, silent and deadly; he struck without warning, and the oil man went staggering. Somebody else chipped in and clipped Ferguson under the ear. He caught at the bar for support. In the shifting vortex of action, another oil man hit out with a bottle for Ferguson's head. Schmidt caught the arm in midair, and something happened; the oil man screamed and went down, writhing. A beer mug hit Ferguson squarely and laid him out. Schmidt, holding the bottle he had seized, smashed it on the edge of the mahogany and swung around, with a six inch sliver of glass in his fist.

"Come and get it," he said, not loudly. The circle of faces fell back in a hurry. From somewhere slid up a lithe brown man with naked steel in his hand, the flame-shaped blade glittering. A roar of fury started up, then checked itself uneasily. Schmidt's scarred face twisted in a smile.

"Nobody want it?' Then clear the way," he said, and turned to the Malay. "Put up that kris melala before the soldiers come. Take his feet."

Ali slid his weapon out of sight and lifted Ferguson's feet. Schmidt caught him under the arms and helped carry him into the gambling room, which was empty. Behind them, a voice broke out in undisguised relief.

"By God, that old bearcat had murder in his face! Did you see him hit Melish?"

SCHMIDT closed the rear door and shut out the tumultuous voices. He looked at Ali, across the senseless figure of Ferguson. The Malay was grinning.

"You're a fool," said Schmidt.

"Yes, tuan," Ali rejoined meekly. "Allah be praised! You will tell him?"

"I have nothing to tell him. Why do you go up-river tomorrow?"

"Everything is stored at the plantation, tuan. Everything we have brought out of the hills in six months past. We are selling some stuff to Lim Toy, and shipping more on the steamer; we wanted to be sure the steamer was here."

"Stored? At the plantation? What plantation?"

"That of Tuan Voorhis. He is very friendly to Tuan Jack."

"Get me some water."

Presently Jack Ferguson sat up and grunted, and met the keen gaze of Schmidt.

"Oh, hello! I remember now— you took a hand. Thanks. What happened?"

"A beer-mug," Schmidt said laconically. "I knew your father a long time back."

Ferguson stared up, feeling his head. "Eh? You knew him? Know where he is now?"

"Jail."

"Yes." Ferguson uttered a harsh laugh. "For life. Some damned stinking Dutch jail over in Java. Buried alive. And you know why? Murder and illegal trading; lost his head and got caught at it."

"That's what you think," said Schmidt calmly. "You were only twelve then. Twenty-four now. Come on, get on your feet and move, will you? Have dinner with me at the hotel. Who's this native?"

"The best friend I ever had." Ferguson came erect. "I'm having dinner with this man, Ali. He knew my father. Meet me at the boat at sunrise; have the men on hand."

"Yes, Tuan Jack," said Ali.

They went out, the old man and the young, and on to the hotel together in the fading daylight. A wash in Schmidt's room, a drink at the bar, and they went in to dinner. When their order was given, Ferguson squared away and surveyed the older man critically.

"You knew him well, Schmidt? Tell me about him."

"Nothing to tell, much," said Schmidt. "Your mother didn't believe he was guilty?"

"No. She died soon afterward. I was sick then, too— fever." Ferguson frowned. "I don't remember much about it all."

"Your father left some stuff buried in his house. Did your mother get it?"

"I think not; she never mentioned it that I recall." Ferguson eyed the other, puzzled by his words. Schmidt enjoyed his bewilderment.

So the stuff was still there! Not likely that Voorhis had found it, either. That would be bad news for Hoorn, too.

"You must have known him pretty well, Schmidt."

"I did, sure. I hear Voorhis has his plantation now. The same house?"

"Yes."

"Still got that big hearth with the blue tiles in front of the fireplace?"

"Yes. I remember when dad built that, too."

Schmidt laughed a little. "Right. Tell me about yourself. Are you going upriver in the morning? Why the rush?"

"I've got a tremendous lot of stuff waiting there: camphor, a little gold, native truck of all kinds," Ferguson replied. "I've been trading for the past six months and sent everything down to the Voorhis place. He has a couple of go-downs I'm using now. Out of the tobacco season. you know. I want to get some of the stuff on this steamer. She's going to be here three days, so I can just make it nicely."

"You and Voorhis are friends, eh?"

Ferguson hesitated. "I pay him, of course."

Schmidt changed the subject. They talked on general matters during dinner. When the coffee came in, Ferguson brought up what lingered in his mind.

"You spoke of something my father had hidden in the house. Do you know where it is?"

Schmidt nodded. "What about taking me with you in the morning?"

"Can do, sure," assented Ferguson cheerfully. "Glad to have you along. And— "

"Must you talk about it?"

Ferguson looked into the glittering eyes and smiled abruptly.

"I get you. Do you know Voorhis?"

Schmidt shrugged. "Did it ever occur to you that your father might have been — shall we say framed?"

He spoke almost casually. The question evoked a startling response; not in words, not in any emotion, but in the way Ferguson seemed to stop dead-still, to freeze in every nerve and muscle, even in thought, as a wild beast or a savage hunter may do, but seldom a white man.

For a moment, Ferguson looked into Schmidt's face, then silently got out his watch, pried open the case, and from within it took a small round-cut photograph. He passed it over.

"If," he said quietly, "you think such a man as this can be sent to jail, and his son not think there's something queer about it— well, that's your answer. Unfortunately. I was too young to know much then. And it's been a long time."

"A long time," Schmidt echoed.

He looked at the photograph. His own face— as it had been, not as it was now. He could scarcely believe he had really looked like this at thirty-five. A smooth, hard, brown face, like that of young Ferguson. Now, with his thinned hair, his scarred and lined features, the down-drawn line of his curving lips, he was a different person entirely.

A smile twitched at his mouth. Hoorn would know him, yes; Jan Hoorn had been his clerk and assistant. Lim Toy had known him, and Ali; Ferguson simply did not know him. Hoorn was a sharp 'un, and would recognize him, having a mind for petty detail. Piet Voorhis would not, would not have been thinking or wondering about him. Voorhis had more important affairs and always had been breezy, superficial, even careless.

He handed back the photograph with a nod. Desire clutched at his heart, momentary madness and longing; he crushed it back. Twelve years had trained him in a hard school. No, Tuan Jack must not know now, perhaps ever.

"Let's see. Voorhis married a Frenchwoman, didn't he?"

"She died last year," Ferguson said. "His daughter Aline runs the place; came back from school in Batavia when her mother passed away. A fine girl, Aline— woman, rather."

"Must be a hard life for a woman up there."

"Not for her kind of a woman."

"I see. Then, do we start together in the morning?"

"You bet." Ferguson leaned forward, intent. "What did you mean— about framing?"

"That," said Schmidt, "depends on what we find at the plantation. Just a notion I had in the back of my mind."

"I think," Ferguson said slowly, "you're a damned liar."

"You're right." The older man chuckled. "Let's leave it like that."

2: The Man From Nowhere

SIX men rowed the boat. Ali steered, squatting like a monkey in the stern. The craft was wide, of shallow draft, with a shelter amidships where the two white men rode.

The first day passed with little incident. Schmidt was calm, unhurried, satisfied. He had Ferguson's liking. What was more, he had the younger man's respect; not alone for his taciturn evidences of knowing the river and the country, but for something apparently trivial yet of huge significance.

Ferguson broached it when they had hauled up for the night and made camp. "Funny," he observed. "Twice I've heard Ali address you as *tuan-ki*. He never calls me that. In fact, he never uses the suffix except to a chief."

Schmidt shrugged lightly. "Malay custom. You don't run up against Malays of the old stripe in this country. He probably appreciates, my handling his lingo."

"No. I know Ali. He must think you're tops."

"Eh?" Schmidt frowned. "What does that mean?"

"Oh, that's slang; I picked it up off the radio," and Ferguson laughed. Then he frowned. "I suppose you never met Jan Hoorn? He used to be with my father."

"Once or twice. He was pretty young then."

"Oh, he's well over thirty now. Getting on rapidly," Ferguson said. Schmidt stifled a smile. Getting on, eh? To this young hill trader, a man of forty-seven, who looked nearly sixty in the face, must be a doddering old relic.

"Is he married?"

"No. Kept a native woman or two, I understand." Ferguson's brows came down into a dark bar, as at some disturbing thought. "Hoorn," he said slowly, "is a bad one."

"Hm! Heard you were in jail yourself the other day."

Ferguson grunted. "Drunk. Complete, too. Just in from the hills; it feels good then."

"Depends on what's a-crawl in your brain."

"You know a lot," and Ferguson flushed half-angrily.

"Yes. I do."

Something wrong, Schmidt thought. Something about Hoorn. Was that pallid devil up to tricks with the boy? But Ferguson could not be pried into talking about it. He, too, could be reticent. Getting nowhere with his probing, Schmidt turned the subject.

"Does Voorhis do well with his tobacco?"

"Last year was poor; he's looking for a big cleanup this year, with prices booming. He's got a tremendous big clearing, now. There used to be swamps north of the plantation. He's drained 'em and expects big crops there. Then there's a whole village of natives, a couple of miles from the house, who work for him and Hoorn. Doing things in a big way all around. A regular *patroon*, Voorhis is."

"He always was. Too bad if he ever lost the place."

"Never fear. Voorhis is careful with his money."

Not his, thought Schmidt; mine. Well, money isn't everything after all. He smiled his twisted smile, then realized that Ferguson was addressing him sharply. "If you know anything, if your hints about my father having been framed have any fact basis, I'd like to know it, Schmidt. Yes or no?"

"I talked to your father when he was in jail," Schmidt replied placidly. "It was quite true, he said, about the illegal trading and the killing of a native, an Achinese in Dutch service. Quite true— but he hadn't done it. He didn't know who had, either. He merely suspected."

"Whom did he suspect?" Ferguson asked in a low voice.

"I'm not fool enough to say until I learn something definite. That's why I came. I know where to find the man if I want him."

"You're damned mysterious."

"No. Just playing safe."

"Then why wait all these years?" exploded Ferguson hotly. "If you've known this, if he suspected something, why the devil didn't you come here straight off?"

Schmidt regarded him for a moment.

"Just suspicion, that's all. And I've had to work. What about yourself, playing around here while your old man rotted in jail all these years? You never went near him, did you?"

"No. That took money. I had none— worse than none," Ferguson said bitterly. "I grew up with the notion, and I've held to it. I knew Id find him somewhere. I had debts. They hung over me. Two years ago I had nearly enough to start out for Java and find him; then a fire wiped out the warehouses where my stuff was stored. I had to begin all over. Now I'm back to that point. The stuff I'm shipping now will let me go, as soon as I settle one or two things upriver. Money! You can't turn around without money. No letters from him, no word, no message until you brought it now— damnation! D'ye think I haven't been in hell myself? I've written blind, in care of the colonial authorities, and the letters came back. I'll have to go to Batavia to

learn where he's imprisoned. Those damned Dutchmen love to turn up their noses at other nations, and a convict's son—"

With an oath, Ferguson got up and walked off along the river bank.

Schmidt sat smoking in silence, his heart expanding. So the boy had not just drifted at all! He had worked and slaved, he had grown up with the one fixed idea, he had been beaten down and back, but had clung to it.

And he had grown well and true, thought Schmidt. The boy he had once known was vanished, but his probing had revealed a man after his own heart. Tell the truth about himself? No, not yet. Perhaps not at all. He held to his taciturn ways, the ways of prison life.

Moreover, Schmidt began to entertain a gnawing fear that he might have exchanged one prison for another, less tangible yet more terrible, which would hold him with unseen bars and prevent him from ever revealing himself to this son of his. Later that night, he became more sure of it. After Ferguson had turned in, he lingered for a word with Ali.

"Is Tuan Jack in love with this girl at the Voorhis place?"

"Only God knows the truth, tuan-ki," rejoined the old Malay. "He is not the only one, if he loves her. But it is in my mind that if the thoughts of this woman could be turned to Tuan Hoorn, then both these plantations would become one great property."

Schmidt knew there was shrewd observation behind this statement. Something must be afoot, yes. Hoorn and Voorhis were once more in cahoots, and once more a Ferguson would suffer. He turned in with an uneasy heart, finding himself blocked at all points. Bad enough for the story about Ferguson's father to be circulated, but worse if he were to resume his own identity. A mere wandering ex-convict was nothing to be proud of.

The best plan, he resolved, was to get that wallet concealed in the fireplace of the house. Then he would have a weapon. This damned girl! She changed everything; rather, the fact that Ferguson was in love with her. This, Schmidt no longer doubted.

MORNING found them on their way anew. They passed Jan Hoorn, bound down to Balikan, passed his big, fine, polished craft with a hail and a wave of the arm, no more. A little later, also without pause, they passed Fort Rynsdam, the old trading post, now the center of up-country administration.

Before the fort, at the wharf, lay a long and handsome launch, all glittering brass and mahogany, with an ornate canopy. Schmidt was curious about it. The launch of the Resident from Balikan, said Ferguson; the Resident must be here at the fort on a visit.

Noon came and passed. They went on up the river reaches in the hot sunlight. Here and there were plantations, but not many, for the hills were drawing down closer to the horizon. The jungle had given place to uplands.

In mid-afternoon they came into the wide, fertile valley that lay entirely in the hands of Hoorn and Voorhis. The trees along the river masked all that lay behind; all except where the native village of workmen and their families had upgrown. They went past this and headed on.

Journey's end at last. A long wharf on the left bank, with godowns looming amid the trees and boats drawn up. Nobody was in sight. The plantation, the house, the curing sheds, all of this lay well back from the river and invisible.

"My father built near a spring of good water, rather than use the river supply," said Ferguson in explanation. "But you know that, of course."

"Yes, I know it," Schmidt assented gravely. "I should like to visit the place where your mother lies, if you'll permit me."

Ferguson nodded.

They landed, left Ali to take care of the boat, and Ferguson led the other man away. Not by the well-traveled road through the trees to the house, but by an overgrown path branching to one side. Suddenly Ferguson turned, halted, and looked Schmidt in the eyes.

"Because you were my father's friend," he said slowly, "and because I like you, I've given you a good deal, Schmidt. More than any other man. But it may be a mistake to keep your tongue too close between your teeth. When you spoke of visiting her grave, just now, your voice revealed a good deal. You were an intimate friend, then?"

"I loved your mother, if you must know. I always loved her," said Schmidt calmly. "And your father knew it. And we were friends."

Ferguson's countenance cleared. He clapped Schmidt on the arm. then with a jerk of his head went on. They came to a little clump of flame trees, overlooking the river, Schmidt saw a little cleared space, and a plain stone marker. He knelt and bared his head.

When Ferguson rose from his own tribute, Schmidt was standing, immobile, no trace of emotion in his face except that it was more deeply lined and drawn than usual.

"We'd better go up to the house and find Voorhis,"' said Ferguson. "If he's got the boats and men ready, I'll have to load tonight and get 'em off."

The house broke upon them presently, nestled among the casuarina trees the Fergusons had planted; now they were broad, heavy trees. Schmidt's gaze drank in everything very hungrily, from the house to the far fields of tobacco plants.

"The lumber came from the sawmill at Fort Rynsdam," he observed. "Your mother loved the rustle of these talking trees, I remember. That's why they were planted thick. No sign of Voorhis about, eh? I see he's put up stables and other buildings, back yonder. Ah! Is this the daughter?"

She was coming out to meet them, gayly, swiftly. A lovely woman, Schmidt admitted grudgingly; deep-breasted and strong, her head proudly set, her radiant features framed in two massive braids of flaxen hair that fell to her knees. She came with both hands extended and glad welcoming on her lips.

"Jack! I thought you'd be back today. All well?"

"All," said Ferguson. For an instant he was a different man as he met her eyes and gripped her hands; a man joyous and warm and unconcealed. Then he turned. "Aline, this is Mynheer Schmidt. He came along to see the country. You can put him up?"

"Of course, of course," said the girl eagerly. "Come along in. Father's off riding, inspecting the fences. He'll be back soon. Is Ali with you? He'll have your luggage brought up, of course. Is this your first visit up-country, Mynheer?"

"The first in a long time," said Schmidt.

"I told Ali to wait until he heard from us," Ferguson said. "You'd better send someone to tell him it's all right. I brought your mail along. It's in my bag."

They went into the house. Aline summoned a servant, a dish-faced native, and sent him to the wharf, then turned laughingly.

"Excuse me, if you will. Make our visitor at home, Jack, while I see about the sheets and the other spare room. Oh! Is anything wrong?"

Schmidt had come into the big room, glancing around quickly. A queer little sound, like a whimpering groan, had come from him. He turned, one hand to his jaw.

"A bad tooth," he said. "Now it will swell. Ach! At this, of all times! We must get a bandage ready, Ferguson, and— "

"I'll get everything," exclaimed the girl. "We have some penetrating oil for that very thing. I know how it must hurt; wait a few minutes and we'll fix you up."

She disappeared.

"Go help her," said Schmidt quickly. "Keep her occupied— give me three minutes."

Ferguson glowered at him briefly, then turned and followed Aline.

Schmidt whipped out a big knife and went to the fireplace. This was surrounded by huge blue tiles of Delft ware; it was a massive hearth, and above it was set the enlarged photograph of a woman. The pictures and other things left by the Fergusons were still here. Schmidt looked at the woman's

picture. His features twisted, as though wrenched by inner hurt; then he leaned down and tapped at one of the blue tiles.

His knife-blade touched its edge and sank in. The tile, placed in putty instead of cement, came away to his hand. From the cavity thus disclosed, Schmidt snatched out a wallet. He thrust it into his pocket, replaced the tile, and was standing by the window when Ferguson and Aline came back into the room.

The bandage about his jaw gave him a grotesque appearance, which he coveted. At the last minute, it had seemed impossible that Voorhis would not recognize him.

Aline departed again, to get the rooms ready. Ferguson came to Schmidt.

"If you got it, give it to me," he said.

Schmidt produced the wallet. He opened it, ignoring the demand, and brought to light a wad of banknotes and a number of papers. From these last he took one, shoving the rest into Ferguson's hand. He opened the one, and his eyes glittered on it.

"What's that one?" demanded Ferguson. Schmidt laughed harshly.

"This? A letter Jan Hoorn wrote to Piet Voorhis, long ago. Of no interest to you, but much to me. By the way, she said that Hoorn had been here yesterday, I think."

"Yes." Ferguson, pocketing the wallet, was looking over the money and papers.

"And do you happen to know just how your father was proven to have done illegal trading, in contraband goods?"

Ferguson's gaze shot up. "I've heard, yes. He was caught with the goods."

"Precisely. Like you, he had stored up a lot of stuff to take down-river. Like you, he left it under lock and key in a godown; perhaps the same godown your stuff is piled in at this moment. And Jan Hoorn was his clerk."

Ferguson began to breathe heavily.

"By God, Schmidt! Just what do you mean?"

"It was curious," said Schmidt quite calmly. "The *controleur* of the district was at Fort Rynsdam, just as the Resident is there now. And Jan Hoorn went down river, just as he has gone now. The officials came unexpectedly and examined the godown— as they might arrive in the morning. And there the stuff was found; stuff that your father had never placed there himself, nor brought from the hills. Just as— "

Ferguson started to his feet.

"You're— you're absurd!" he said hoarsely. "Why, Voorhis has taken care of all that stuff of mine. And Hoorn— nonsense! Come out with it if you've anything to say!"

Schmidt shook his head. "No reason, eh? You don't know why Hoorn, and perhaps Piet Voorhis, might want you out of the way? Well, go ask the girl. She was so damned glad to see you arrive! Voorhis would sooner marry her to Hoorn than to you, maybe. Wouldn't hurt you to inspect your stuff in the godown before the Resident comes to do it. Hard camphor, bird of paradise skins, perhaps some diamonds or other stones— "

A horse clumped up to the verandah steps. The voices of natives rang out, pierced by a sharper, deeper voice. Piet Voorhis had come home.

3: The Voice of the Trees

TWELVE years had touched Voorhis lightly, pleasantly. A handsome, florid, fair man who thought well of himself, as the short upper lip testified. Plenty of strength in his face, and a bluff, overmastering manner. Hearty, some would call it.

"Here's the inventory of your goods," and he passed Ferguson several closely written pages. "I checked over everything carefully as it arrived. Everything's in the north godown and secure. But I couldn't get the men and boats until tomorrow."

"The devil!" exclaimed Ferguson in dismay. "To late then for the steamer! Well, let it pass. Thanks for your trouble, Voorhis. It's good of you."

Voorhis waved his hand and poured another drink. Sunset was approaching, He asked if Schmidt, who had said little, would be interested in looking over the place.

"Very," replied Schmidt dryly. "I'm sorry it is difficult for me to talk— "

"I've had bad teeth myself. Had 'em jerked out," and Voorhis laughed. "Will you come, Ferguson?"

"No," said the latter. "I've a present for Aline in my boat, and left it there. I must go down and rout it out."

"And I'm going with you," said the girl, laughing. They swung off and were gone. Piet Voorhis looked after them with a smile, but his eyes did not smile.

"A fine pair for you!" he exclaimed, lifting his glass. Schmidt grunted.

"Has he money?"

"No. That is, not to mention," and Voorhis lost his smile. "Besides, his father is a criminal, a convict. There are better men for such a woman."

"Undoubtedly." Schmidt rose and adjusted his bandage. "Shall we go?"

They left the house and the group of talking trees, looking across the broad acres of tobacco plants. "Another day or two and the work of cutting and curing would begin," said Voorhis, explaining the business affably. Schmidt

plied him with questions, and they went farther and farther from the house, until Voorhis could point to the swamplands he had drained and planted.

"Mynheer Hoorn has a plantation close by, I think?" said Schmidt. "We met and talked a little with him. He was going to Balikan. We are old friends.

"Oh!" said Voorhis in surprise. "Then you know him!"

"I used to deal with him years ago." Schmidt laughed. "A long time ago, when he was factor for some Englishman who had a plantation. I remember Mynheer Hoorn sent me by mistake a letter he had written to somebody else."

Voorhis turned.

"A strange thing for Hoorn to do," he commented. He lingered upon silence for an instant, as though framing words he shrank from uttering. Then: "To whom was it addressed?"

"Oh, I have forgotten," said Schmidt. "I haven't looked at it in years. So you have no trouble with labor, eh? You're lucky, Mynheer."

Voorhis was looking troubled. "Eh? Labor? Oh, yes," he said rather absently. "Young Ferguson helps me there; he has lots of influence with these natives."

Schmidt laughed to himself, and wiped his gray mustache. He knew well that this influence came not from Ferguson alone, but from the old Malay, an alien who had won deep respect from these brown folk of the upper country.

They went back. The sun was down, the dusk was gathering, as they came to the clump of casuarina trees and the house. Schmidt looked up at the rustling trees.

"My wife loved these talking trees," he said softly. "She was a good woman, God rest her!"

Schmidt went on, a little in advance. He heard a sudden sharp query from Voorhis, and swung around in surprise.

"What did you say?" Voorhis demanded. "Do you speak French?"

"French? No. I said nothing. What was it?"

Voorhis looked up at the trees overhead, bending a little in the breeze of evening, the leaves talking away like the voices of a distant crowd. His florid features lost their ruddy hue. A voice lingered as though from among the leaves, a soft, whispering voice that uttered French words.

"Forgery, Piet!" it seemed to say. "No luck with forgery. The deed of sale—"

His eyes starting out, Voorhis looked at Schmidt, who was adjusting his bandage.

"There! Did you hear it?"

"Hear what?" growled Schmidt in astonishment. Voorhis collected himself.

"Nothing, nothing. I fancied— it was these trees— I thought I heard something." He passed a hand across his forehead. "Time for another drink, eh? Come along Aline! The lamps— "

ALINE and Ferguson were there. A house servant came and lit the lamps. Schmidt gave Ferguson a look of inquiry, and the younger man nodded. While Voorhis was preparing a drink, they went to their rooms to look after their belongings. Once behind a closed door, Ferguson spoke quietly.

"You were right, Schmidt. Good God, I can't believe it even now! Sealed packages, all marked with my marks. All forbidden stuff. Paradise skins, a lot of them; two bales of hard camphor. And something else. The smoked head of a Hollander. He was up-country with me three years ago and was killed by the Dyaks. This was his head, dried and cured. I don't understand it."

"You're not the only man trading with the hills," Schmidt said significantly. "Where is that stuff now?"

"In the river," said Ferguson savagely. "That is, most of it. Not all. Don't worry about it. I didn't want her to know, of course."

Schmidt went on downstairs. Presently Ferguson came. The drinks were good, and Piet Voorhis a jovial host. Aline was seeing to the dinner.

"By the way, Ferguson," said Voorhis, at the second drink, "I gave you two copies of those invoices. Initial one and give it back to me, after you've made sure your stuff is all in the godown."

"I'll look over it first thing in the morning," Ferguson replied. His voice shook a little. "No need to check it over, though; I'll glance over the invoices instead, and that'll be sufficient."

He pulled out the papers, glanced over the closely written sheets, separated the duplicates, and initialled them. Voorhis pocketed them with a nod. Schmidt looked on grimly. In that close writing could be tucked away what no hasty eye would catch, a list of the sealed packages. The documentary evidence, at least, was complete.

The dinner was magnificent, thanks to Aline. Proud and flushed and radiant, she presided over the table while the house servants padded about. Ali, in a new yellow sarong, stood behind the chair of Ferguson, stately and officious.

The dinner was half over when Aline suddenly remembered the mail that Ferguson had brought up from Balikan, and mentioned it. Her father barked at a servant, who brought a number of letters from the front room.

With a word of apology, Voorhis glanced over the letters, picked one out, and tore at the envelope. He opened a folded sheet and stared at it with distending eyes.

"What is it?" demanded Aline in swift alarm. "Bad news?"

"No." Voorhis lowered the paper, and color rushed into his cheeks. "It is from Holland. From the Hague. I— We— thunders of heaven! My old aunt is dead at last. We are millionaires, my dear, millionaires! It is ended here; everything is ended. We must leave at once, in the morning. We must catch that steamer, do you understand?"

He came to his feet, then dropped back into his chair, flushed and excited, babbling in a fury of emotion, forgetful of everything except the agitation that tore at him.

"Ended!" he almost shouted, and his fist pounded on the table. "The months, the years, the struggles— oh, my God! All of it, ended! The times when a guilder was a fortune, the petty strivings, the bickering, the long hard fight— ended!"

"You seem to appreciate money," said Schmidt dryly. Voorhis wiped his lips, composed himself a trifle, then thumped the table again, exultantly.

"Champagne! There are six bottles left; get them!" he cried, excitement blazing up anew in him. "Oh, my friends, it is wonderful! Europe, Aline, and a great inheritance! We must catch that steamer at all costs. And never to see this accursed land again, never; leave this place to be sold— "

"Yes?" said Schmidt. "I might buy it from you, Mynheer."

Voorhis stared at him blankly. "Buy it? You?"

"Why not?" Schmidt asked calmly. "I suppose you can give a clear title."

"Clear? Of course, of course. Admirable!" Voorhis exclaimed, kindling afresh. "We'll talk price later. Yes, an excellent idea! The title is quite clear. You can ask the Resident when he comes in the morning— "

He checked himself abruptly.

"Why, father! The Resident? Coming here?" broke out Aline. "You never told me!"

"I just learned of it this evening," Voorhis said confusedly. "A native from the village told me. He— he had heard of it. Never mind; it's nothing. What's the Resident to me? A poor devil of a colonial administrator. We shan't see him in the morning; we must be on our way early. Hurry up with that champagne!"

Schmidt looked across the table. He met the eyes of Ferguson. They were startled, questing, probing at him. Voorhis had given himself away here. For the first time, suspicion of the full truth was wrenching at Ferguson. That Hoorn might have planted all that illegal trade, he had understood; he had not dreamed that Voorhis could actually be a party to it. Me had not credited the words of Schmidt.

All this showed in his gaze. in his face that was slowly draining of blood. The champagne was arrived, corks were popping, Aline was hastily getting glasses.

Schmidt caught the eye of Ali, and made a slight gesture. The Malay came around the table to him and leaned over.

"Yes, *tuan-ki*?"

"A cheroot. And later, I want you."

Only Ali caught the last words. Ferguson still sat there like a graven image, growing paler and paler, his gaze still on Schmidt. The latter smiled his twisted smile and lifted his champagne glass.

"Come, Mynheer!" He broke in upon Voorhis' rambling talk, which still continued. "A health to— what shall we say? To an end of it all. here, for you."

His gaze went to Ferguson, commanded him with glittering fixity, and Ferguson slowly lifted his glass and sipped the toast. Voorhis waxed more hearty and delighted with each moment; he read the letter again, gave it to Aline, and commanded more champagne. But there was no more. The six bottles had not gone very far.

"Well, well, another time, then!" he said jovially. "Come, Mynheer Schmidt! Were you in earnest about talking of buying the place? Come into the library, then. Ah, what a night! What a night! It is cool, too; a splendid breeze. All works well, now that I am leaving. The luck is all my way."

SCHMIDT accompanied him in grim silence. The library was a room off to itself, with many books. Most of them had been Ferguson's in the old days. Voorhis opened a box of cheroots and a cabinet of liqueurs.

"It is odd you should have remarked about the title," he observed. "All land titles are registered at Makassar; there is no doubt about them."

"On the contrary," said Schmidt. "Our boat stopped there for a day. There was something of a scandal being discussed, about titles up this way. I believe some forgery had been discovered. I paid little attention to it, except that it warned me."

"Forgery?" said Voorhis sharply, looking at him. Schmidt waved his cheroot.

"Yes. I paid little attention. Someone had bought a big place from an Englishwoman, as I recall, but the bill of sale or deed had just been found to be a forgery. Too bad there are no cables out this way. News travels slowly, I imagine. What price do you set upon this property, Mynheer?"

Voorhis seemed not to hear the question. He tugged at his collar, opened and closed his mouth spasmodically, then gulped at his liqueur. The eyes of Schmidt, above the gray mustache and the grotesque bandage, rested on him

with a cruel glitter. Through the open screened windows came a grateful breeze, with the continuous, multitudinous rustle of the talking trees outside.

Voorhis sank into a chair, picked up a cheroot, and forgot to light it. He sat with unseeing eyes, staring at nothing. His florid features, pallid now, were a prey to contesting emotions. Suddenly Schmidt broke the silence.

"Strange! I could have sworn there was a voice outside, a whisper! Did you hear it? Like a woman whispering something." He laughed. "Queer fancies come at night, eh? But we were talking of the price, I think."

Voorhis shot tormented eyes at the windows, where gorgeous moths fluttered against the screen. The breeze brought a scent of mangrove mud from the river.

"I am sorry." The man turned, drew a hand across his brow, opened his shirt at the throat. "I must think, Mynheer. I can decide nothing hastily. I feel a little ill— it is the champagne, perhaps. Will you leave me for a little while?"

Schmidt nodded, rose, and left the room. Outside, in the dim hallway, a shadow moved slightly.

"I am here, tuan," murmured the voice of Ali.

"Go down to the river," said Schmidt in Malay. "Cast loose every boat, unless you can hide them. Go to the village and tell those natives that a curse has fallen upon this place and a devil is in it. By morning, they must be gone to the hills. Every one."

A low gasp escaped Ali; his breath quivered and shook.

"Oh, *tuan*!" he said slowly. "*Tuan-ki*! Then, as Allah liveth, what I suspected was the truth. It was this man who did it, long ago."

"You heard my orders," said Schmidt. Like a shadow, Ali was gone, and Schmidt passed on into the living room. Here in a far corner Ferguson and Aline were sitting.

"Don't move," and Schmidt waved his cheroot. "I'm going out for a breath of air. Be back shortly."

He went out, and passed part way around the house to where shafts of light fell from the open library windows.

He could guess what agony held Piet Voorhis at this moment. With millions in his grasp for the taking, that intelligence about the forgery must have been appalling. He could not know that it was entirely false. On the contrary, it had been phrased that he must apply it to himself alone. No other plantation in this district could have been bought from an Englishwoman. And, even before dinner, that talk about a letter Hoorn had sent astray! Hoorn had done exactly that thing, a bit over twelve years ago. A letter broaching a scheme for forging trading permits— the one letter that should not have gone astray, of course.

Not that it would inculpate Voorhis in anything, but it would look bad now. It would be bad for Hoorn, of course.

Schmidt, standing back from the lighted area, looked into the library where Voorhis sat with head in hands. The man lifted his head, moved it from side to side as though in agony, and broke into a groan.

"*Gott*! *Gott*!" he ejaculated. "At this time, of all others! It is incredible. The devil himself must be in it. Perhaps this fellow was wrong, mistaken— but no. There could be no mistake. That makes it all the more horrible."

"No mistake, Piet." A thin, whispery voice came through the window in French, as the trees rustled. "No mistake. No mistake."

A hoarse cry broke from Voorhis. He leaped to his feet, and with an oath flung himself at the windows and closed them. There were no blinds. He poured himself a drink and emptied the little glass at one gulp. Then he made one sharp, abrupt gesture. With a quick stride he crossed the room and tugged the door open.

"Ferguson!" His voice came through the closed windows to the man outside. "Where are you, Ferguson! Come here. You and Aline both, in here. I want to talk to you."

Schmidt frowned, put his cheroot between his teeth, and puffed at it. The red glowing point marked him in the darkness. He frowned, wondering what Voorhis meant to say, to do.

Suddenly he swung around, at a pad-pad of feet close by; only to relax.

"*Tuan-ki*! It is I." The voice of Ali was hoarse and panting.

"Well?" demanded Schmidt. "What are you doing here?"

"I ran to tell you, tuan. There is a boat coming up-river. It is coming to the landing here; it carries a light. It is the boat of Tuan Hoorn, for I heard his voice giving orders."

"Hoorn!" For an instant Schmidt stood stupefied. "Hoorn! But he was on his way to Balikan— Ali! Was his boat alone? There was no launch, the launch of the Resident?"

"No, tuan. Just his boat."

Schmidt's hand went out. His fingers clamped on the thin brown shoulder.

"All right. Run back to the wharf. Never mind about the boats. Meet Tuan Hoorn and talk with him, delay him. Tell him the man who came up with Tuan Jack is sick, that it is plague— tell him anything, anything! But delay him do you understand?"

"Yes, tuan. And then?"

"Join me and be ready for anything."

Ali slipped away. Schmidt strode around the house again, at a quick, springy pace. He was in a hurry now. A powerful curiosity had him gripped.

More than anything else in the world, just now, he wanted to know what Piet Voorhis was doing. As he went, he took off the bandage that was about his jaw.

4: "Here Is My Answer— "

IN THE hall, outside the library door, Schmidt stood looking and listening. The door was partly ajar. Through the crack, he could see Ferguson standing there. The other two were invisible to him.

Voorhis was speaking, his voice agitated, shaken, but resolute.

"That's what she asked, Ferguson, and that's what I did. I gave her the money she wanted, and promised at the end of ten years I'd turn back the whole place to you, free. That was the bargain she made with me. When you were a man grown, you were to have it. And when the time came I— well, I couldn't do it."

His voice trailed off.

"Father!" exclaimed the girl softly. Schmidt could imagine the loveliness of her in this moment.

"I'd worked for this place, Ferguson," Voorhis went on, gathering strength, his tone more composed. His confession was over; the worst was past. "All these years I'd worked and planned here. When the time came, I couldn't give it back to you. I thought you might come and ask about it, and demand the property. Didn't you know of the agreement?"

"No," said Ferguson. The one word hurt, it was so blunt and ugly.

"Oh, I suppose I can excuse myself, in a way," Voorhis went on hurriedly. "You see, she thought that I'd profit largely during these years; but your mother didn't realize the fact. Poor crops, land to be drained— I got no more than a living out of it. But now the time's come, and I've got to clear myself, Ferguson."

Ferguson was looking down. There was a silence.

"What's that you're writing?" Ferguson asked suddenly.

"A bill of sale of this property. It belongs to you. This will be legal enough; here, Aline, sign as a witness."

Ferguson stood unmoving, silent, waiting, his brows drawn down in a dark bar. Schmidt chuckled a little, admiringly. He sensed that this young man was gathering forces for an explosion.

A good lie, a good way out of it all. Voorhis was covering his tracks, and doing it cleverly too. Now, if the forgery were actually detected, it could scarcely be a proven matter, and he was making everything right one jump ahead of the law. Yes, Voorhis was clever.

"There you are!" Relief unutterable was in the man's voice. Ferguson reached out and took the paper handed him. "There; the place is yours now— "

"Damn the place," said Ferguson slowly. "Tell me something, Voorhis. Where were you when my father was arrested?"

"I? Up-country, of course. If I'd been here things might have been different."

"I'm not so sure," Ferguson said. "Hoorn was mixed in it. My father was framed; the stuff they found was planted by Hoorn. I'm pretty certain of that now."

"Good Lord!" Voorhis gasped. "Well, one never knows! I'd not put anything past Jan Hoorn, myself; never trusted him. Why, my boy, you never thought that I had anything to do with it?"

"If I were sure," said Ferguson, "I'd— well, I don't know. Are you planning to go to Europe?"

"Yes. At once. Aline and I— "

"No. Aline stays here."

"What?" Voorhis came out of his chair, came where Schmidt could glimpse him. He was startled, scowling at Ferguson, chewing at a cheroot. "Are you out of your head?"

"No. I'm marrying Aline. She's staying with me. Tell him, Aline!"

"It's so, father," said the girl's voice. "You'll not mind?"

Voorhis stood for a space in silence, looking from one to the other. Then he took the cheroot from between his lips and looked down at it.

"No," he said at length. "No. I'll not mind. Suppose we let this go until tomorrow, and settle everything then. Talk it over calmly. Just now, the main thing is to right the wrong I've done you these two years, Ferguson. I'll account to you for every cent the place has made, these two years. Will you accept this reparation?"

Schmidt had said nothing definite against Aline's father; he had, in fact, known nothing definite. It was true that Voorhis had been away when the arrest came. And this confession of his, this outrageous lie, had been well spoken. Even so, the gaze of Ferguson was stony, undecided, hostile— until the girl's voice spoke.

"Please, Jack! Can't you see how terribly it has hurt him to say all this, to humiliate himself, to confess the truth? It's hurt me, too. And— "

Ferguson folded and pocketed the paper. He put out his hand, and his face changed. His eyes warmed.

"Let's say no more about it, Voorhis. By God, it must have hurt! You've come clean; it's forgotten. And to think she— my mother— planned it all out— "

Schmidt went back into the big living room. Even he was wondering a little whether that yarn had any truth in it. No! it was a lie pure and simple. Voorhis had thought it up on the spur of the moment. Easy enough to realize this. A clever fellow, Voorhis!

VOICES outside, a lantern glimmering, a flashlight darting. Schmidt slipped aside to the sofa in the dark corner and stretched out there, just as Hoorn's hail sounded. A tramp of feet on the verandah. Then the others came hastily from the library, as Jan Hoorn stepped into the living room, with Ali slipping off to one side.

There were amazed and delighted greetings. Schmidt wondered how Ali had delayed the visitor; Hoorn made no mention of it, however. Probably Ali had told some fancy lie.

"But I thought you were at Balikan?" exclaimed Voorhis. "Why, Ferguson here met you on the river this morning— "

Hoorn glanced at Ferguson, who looked at him with glittering eyes from a face of stone, and wiped his forehead. He was a slim, dark man with a perpetually pallid face and a long nose.

"Well, I got some newspapers at Fort Rynsdam, papers from Batavia,' he said. "I got some news and it upset me. Piet, I'll have to see you— "

Voorhis intervened hastily.

"Come into the library, Jan," he said. "You'll excuse us, Aline? We'll join you presently."

The two men vanished together, and the library door slammed.

"Confound it!" Ferguson stirred into motion. "I want a word with Hoorn myself— "

"Wait, please!" The girl checked him, "Nothing matters so much just now, as our own future, dear. After what father has just said, I don't know what to say or do; I'm ashamed and— "

Ferguson slipped his arm around her.

"Come along; we'll walk down to the river and talk it over sensibly— Ali! What the devil are you doing here?"

Schmidt moved and sat up.

"Oh, hello!' he exclaimed. "I must have dropped off to sleep. Ali, get me a drink of water. Going out, Ferguson?"

"Yes," said Ferguson. "I want to see you, too; but not now. You'd better wake up. Hoorn just came, unexpectedly. I've got more important things to

settle, so don't spill any trouble. He's in the library. Leave him to me, you understand?"

"Gladly," said Schmidt. "It's your affair, not mine."

"Right. See that you remember it." And with this admonition, Ferguson followed Aline outside.

The Malay came with a glass of water, and grinned at Schmidt. The latter drank slowly, and looked at Ali.

"His business, not mine, Ali. He knows too much; he's too young. We're wiser, you and I. It's nothing for a kris or a bullet to settle."

Ali dissented with a gesture and a silent snarl. Schmidt chuckled harshly.

"My business; not his or yours. Never mind about the boats or the natives; now we deal with Tuan Hoorn. How? I don't know."

The library door opened.

"Hold on a minute," came the voice of Hoorn. "Where are you going?"

"To find Ferguson, damn him!" Voorhis was excited, almost incoherent. "This changes everything. If Ferguson's been pardoned, then he'll be back here— "

"Don't be hasty," Hoorn said. "Young Ferguson will be out of the way tomorrow; the Resident will be here in the morning. You'll have to wait for the next steamer. You can't run away, Voorhis. None of that, with me."

"But I tell you, if the forgery has been discovered, if— "

"Where's this man Schmidt? Let me talk with him, feel him out a bit. You say he has that letter? Go slow, then. Don't think you're going to run out on me, just because you've come into money. Understand?"

The threat in Hoorn's voice was ugly.

"All right, all right," said Voorhis. "Come on and find Schmidt. Til talk with young Ferguson and give him the good news about his father— damn him!"

"I never heard of this Schmidt," Hoorn grumbled. "Certainly I never sent him that letter. I always suspected that the elder Ferguson had got hold of it. Let's find this fellow. Something queer about it, I tell you— "

They were coming.. Schmidt made a quick gesture, and Ali slipped into the shadows at the side of the room and crouched, waiting

The two came into the big room and stopped short.

"So! Mynheer Schmidt, this is my friend Mynheer Hoorn," said Voorhis.

Schmidt turned, and the light struck his face. Hoorn stared at him with an awful incredulity of recognition, tried to speak, and stood moving soundless lips.

"Yes. We are old friends,' said Schmidt. Then Hoorn broke the spell.

"Oh, you fool, you fool! Piet, you damned fool— and you never knew him!" he burst out frantically. "Look at him! The man himself— the man— "

Schmidt laughed as he surveyed the two of them. Voorhis took a step backward, eyes bulging; but Jan Hoorn seemed frozen by an access of horror and realization. He licked his lips, made a convulsive, futile gesture, and became immobile and frozen again.

"Oh, yes; that letter of yours, Jan," said Schmidt calmly. "I have it here. The Resident will be interested in it. Old, of course, and may not hurt you much; but one never can tell. So you didn't know me, Piet! Well, that was your mistake."

Voorhis roused himself, with a low, tense oath.

"You lied to me!" he exclaimed. "You lied. About everything."

"Yes, about everything," Schmidt mocked him, then straightened up. "And you swallowed it all. You wormed your way out of it, as you thought, by giving the boy that deed of sale. Well, Pm back, gentlemen. What's to be done about these twelve years, eh? Framing and forgery and treachery— eh?"

Voorhis perceived the pit into which he had stumbled and swore again. But

Jan Hoorn drew back; the stroke had passed him by, now. The horrified comprehension died out of his long, pallid features. His eyes flickered. He tensed, poised, gathered himself. Piet Voorhis, with a ghastly expression in his face, knowing that lies were utterly useless, flung out one hand in appeal.

"What— what do you want?" he said frantically. "Come on, tell us! What?"

"Nothing," Schmidt replied composedly. His glittering eyes shifted from one to the other. "You're both in hell this minute. I'll keep you there. That's enough. Don't think about Europe, Piet. You're not going to Europe. Not for a long while."

Hoorn drew back a little farther, against the wall by the door. He, in turn, asked a question, the same question; but his nasal voice was quite steady.

"Well, Mynheer, what do you intend? Is it money you want?"

"No, Jan." Schmidt spoke as though relishing the words. "No, I have money. My son has this plantation. Perhaps we'll still look into who forged that deed from my wife to Voorhis. Your letter about forging the trading permits will be interesting. Perhaps we'll look into other matters— how you obtained the illegal goods you planted on me, and the ones you planted among my son's things in the godowns yesterday."

Hoorn started slightly. Voorhis moved as though to speak, but a snarl broke from Hoorn and silenced him.

"Shut up, you fool!" The nasal voice took on an edged and sinister accent. "Mynheer Ferguson, listen to me. Don't think you can do all this and not suffer. We can make you suffer, if you want war. It's much better and wiser to have peace. Name your terms and we may be able to meet them."

Schmidt laughed, a harsh and mocking laugh. His reply was deliberate and slow.

"Now that Piet has millions, you'd like to spend them in buying me off, eh? No, Jan. No compromise. No peace. No terms except what I've stated."

Even as he spoke, he was conscious of the electric silence, of the tension in the air, the hushed and ominous concentration of the pallid man against the wall. Then Hoorn moved a little, and in his hand was the dull shimmer of blued steel.

"All right. That's your answer, Mynheer. Here's mine— "

Everything broke into energy, into flowing motion and swift action. There was a flashing glint of steel across the lamplight. Voorhis flung himself forward with a wild cry of expostulation. Then the pistol exploded, and Voorhis pitched over on his face and lay still.

Hoorn fell back against the wall. His finger had pressed the trigger blindly, convulsively; the pistol had fallen to the floor. His arm was outspread against the wooden panel; outspread, held firmly against it, pinned solidly to it by a flame-bladed kris flung with terrific force. Blood was running down his wrist and dripping from his fingertips to the floor.

But Piet Voorhis was dead.

OUT on the dark verandah, Schmidt and Ferguson stood in talk. Everything had quieted down now, except for the sobbing of Aline from somewhere in the house.

"Its simple," said Schmidt calmly. "Hoorn gets turned over to the Resident in the morning; after all, he did murder Voorhis, you know. Thai's all we need. It means a life sentence at the least. Never mind what he was trying to do; it's what he did that counts."

"Yes," said Ferguson savagely. "Damn it, didn't I tell you to wait for me?"

"Time waits for no one," Schmidt replied in a gentle voice. "There was nothing you had to do— "

"There was. everything!" Ferguson turned on him fiercely. "I was the one to do it, understand? I meant to attend to it. I wanted to show you that I could do something, that I wasn't just playing around. I wanted you to know that I could do something for you— "

He checked himself. Schmidt flung away his cheroot.

"Lord!" he ejaculated slowly. "You— you wanted to show— to show me? Then there's nothing I can tell you— "

"Not a damned thing," said Ferguson, and laughed a little. "D'you take me for a fool? I've suspected all along, from the first time Ali called you *tuan-ki*. He

always used to call my father that. But you wouldn't talk; so neither would I. D'you want to talk now, father?"

"By God, I do," said Schmidt, and their hands gripped in the darkness, and the talking trees whispered joyously from outside.

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3: Reformation of Miverson's Parrot

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 13 Mar 1897

THAT parrot of Miverson's was an example— a shocking example; a bird without moral principles or decency of conduct. This troubled Miverson, who had a sneaking regard for respectability in spite of his occupation, which was that of a publican. He had owned the parrot from the time it was a crooning nestling, and he had purchased it off a blackfellow. It turned out a wonderful talking bird, and though Miverson tried his best to keep its tongue in the ways of virtue, the customers and others led it astray, and it habitually indulged in 'language.' It was a corella, with an extravagantly hooked beak, and blue wattles round its eyes, and when excited it could look more devilish than a nightmare. At last, in spite of Miverson's efforts, it took to drink.

Rum was its favorite beverage, and if rum was not forthcoming when demanded, the place was rendered unbearable with its devilish yells and cries. It would go to sleep at dark very drunk, and pass the night muttering strange oaths, and falling off its perch at intervals. In the morning it would have a head on it. It was touching to see it standing against the side of its cage waiting, with its poor sore head resting on the bars, until some kind soul opened the door of the cage, when it could get out, clamber on to the bar, and dip its hot beak into something strong.

The oldest topers used to say that to see that bird throw its head back and take down its first swallow of rum with a grateful sigh in the morning was enough to draw tears from a tiger snake.

Miverson got an idea that the bird's falling away was laid to his score, and being a good-intentioned man it grieved him very much. He had been offered large sums for the bird, but refused them— first, because he had grown fond of the reprobate, and next, the bird brought in a good deal of custom.

It was only the small nucleus of a township on the bank of a river crossing, where Miverson had established his household gods, but there was a good deal of traffic on the road, and Miverson's parrot became known far and wide. The opposition house had vainly endeavored to get up a counter attraction, but without avail, and any attempt to injure the bird would have raised the country against the perpetrator of the outrage.

So Miverson's grew and flourished. It was a crowded time at Miverson's one day. Two or three teams were camped at the river crossing, and the coach had broken down, and most of its passengers had to stop overnight, and chose Miverson's. The coach had brought up news of the Melbourne Cup and the

victory of the favorite, and great was the rejoicing— so great that it promised to drink Miverson's dry.

But Miverson's saw it out, and next day the renovated coach departed, the teams moved on, and stagnation reigned where riot had just been. Only in Miverson's cashbox was a solid and satisfactory memento of the late invasion.

Polly Miverson had a very bad head, and he deserved it. The excitement of the many visitors, and the mixing of drinks, had been too much for him. He had to use his claw very, very gingerly indeed when he wanted to scratch his head. He sat on his perch morosely, regarding the only guest in the place, and occasionally bidding that individual to go to sheol.

The only guest was leaning back in the rough chair made of a sack, and meditatively smoking. He was about 30 years old, not bad-looking, but with two fatal defects: His eyes were set deep, and close together, and his beard and whiskers grew unevenly, and in patches. He was dressed in the usual bush style, so that it was hard to say what his social rank was. He had been there some three days spelling his horse, he said, on his way to the little seaport where the steamers called.

For some strange reason the parrot, who was usually hail fellow well met with everybody, refused all friendship with him, and heartily cursed him whenever he came near him.

The evening closed in wet and gloomy, and the inhabitants of the little cluster of houses by the side of the river betook themselves to bed early. Ah Sin, the Chinese cook at Miverson's, had gone with some other of his countrymen to have a quiet all-night gamble at the gardener's. The knockabout man, who had won £2 over the Cup, and got happy, had gone to rest in a retired lean-to against the stable; Miverson was making up his books, and he and the solitary lodger were alone in the house.

The traveller yawned over a tattered yellowback. Once or twice he wandered to the bar and invited the landlord to drink with him, but Miverson was a temperate man, and did not respond very genially, being anxious to get his work done and retire to bed. At last the man went to his room, mine host shut his books, and closed the bar, and all was dark and silent save for the heavy downpour of rain upon the roof.

It was past midnight when the traveller, who had not undressed, stole out of his room and listened attentively. All was still but for the steady patter. The man, who had surveyed his ground before, unclosed the back door and sneaked out. The room where the landlord slept opened out of the bar. To reach it from inside the bar door and bedroom door would have to be broken open, and the man thought that the roughly-shuttered window opening into the back verandah would prove the easiest mode of entrance. Twice he had

been within an ace of bailing Miverson up behind the bar when he called him out to have a drink; but a man had been hanged at Brisbane not many years before for failing to stick up a bank properly, and his courage had failed him.

Softly he crept round to the window, and commenced operations. Everything was in his favor— the falling rain, and the dark night, broken only now and again by a flash of lightning. He worked noiselessly, and soon worked the bolt of the ill-fitting, shutter back with his sheath-knife and had the shutter open.

All was easy now. Miverson had been kept up all the night before by his noisy guests and slept heavily. The cashbox, as the man knew, was in a box under the bed— one that could be carried out and opened at leisure. He got skilfully and noiselessly into the room. Soft as a cat he felt for the box, listening to the heavy breathing of the sleeper as he did so, and had taken the box out and made one step towards the window when a sleepy voice said somewhat huskily,

'You damned thief!'

The parrot, who always slept in the room, was only muttering in his uneasy dreams, but it was enough to startle the nerves of the intruder. With a start he nearly dropped the box, but managed to let it on to the ground with a good deal of noise.

'Who's there?' cried Miverson, sitting up. A quavering flash of lightning illuminated the room, and the men saw each other, and the thief saw that Miverson's hand was under the pillow as if feeling for a revolver. There was no time to be lost. His life was forfeit, and drawing his sheath-knife the robber sprang on his opponent and stabbed recklessly and furiously. Scream after scream suddenly came from the startled bird. When a parrot is properly scared it can make as much noise as a terrified woman, and mad with the rage of murder and baffled purpose, the thief tore the cage open and dragged the shrieking bird out to silence it. In the darkness he did not get hold of it property, and the bird, savagely biting, escaped from him and flew through the open window, still screaming like an avenging fiend, and disappeared in the storm.

Impelled by wild fear, the man followed, and when help arrived they only found the bleeding body on the bed. Some life was left in it, which was nursed back before morning, and they took down what they thought would prove his dying deposition. It did not, however.

Miverson eventually recovered, to live a life-long invalid. In the morning the river was flooded, and all the anxious tracking that was undertaken by black and white did not reveal any clue as to the course taken toy the murderer. Two of the searchers, a black and a white one, were, busy scouring

the bush, when they were startled by the same wild screams that had rung out and frightened the sleepers. The parrot came to them. They took it home, but from that time the bird, although it recovered from its fright, never spoke, and refused all offers of its once favorite refreshment. Whether the would-be murderer escaped or died in the bush, the people of the little cluster of settlement never knew for long years.

Miverson had a brother down south who came up, and looked after the business until he was able to leave, when he sold cut and left the district, taking the parrot who had saved his money. With him, and the superstitious people persisted in the story that the mark of the murderous hand upon his breast never died out.

Every time the bird moulted it was renewed, so they avowed.

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MISS Dare, the daughter of one of the wealthiest men about Brookstone, was locally considered equal to any professional beauty that the world could bring forward. Unfortunately, she was of the same opinion herself in consequence of the spoiling process she had undergone, which rendered her a rather disagreeable person, not very popular amongst the other girls. In reality she was a pretty woman, with a weak, silly head.

She was an only daughter; and old Dare, who had been one of the original settlers of Brookstone, was believed to be able to leave her something warm. Consequently she was much courted, and led to imagine that she had the Australian world at her feet.

Brookstone was in a state of mild excitement just at this time. Reefing had been discovered in the neighborhood, and the traffic in shares had for a time run high. Finally it settled down into one or two paying mines, and several doubtful ones.

To one of these doubtful ones came a new manager, who was going to make things hum generally. He talked glibly, and with much apparent knowledge, of the wonderful new process about to be started, of the elaborate machinery about to be erected, of the mistakes made by former managers by which one of the best-paying mines in Australia had been left undeveloped, and of the great future that lay ahead.

Shares rose, and amongst those to invest largely was old Dare. Dare was noted as a cautious man, and others followed his example; so that things looked up with the 'Purse of Fortune.' Dare and Hollingshed, the new manager, became what is known as thick as thieves, and the now popular Hollingshed rode and drove with Miss Dare when not engaged in his mining duties, to the

envy, hatred, and malice of all the other suitors. There were not wanting some to say that the wonderful new process was only a very old one, better known as blow, unlimited blow; but these were said to be men who had failed in getting cheap shares. At last it was rumored that Hollingshed had carried off the beauty and heiress— he was engaged to Miss Dare.

Meanwhile the mine exhibited no very great progress in the shape of development. It was bruited about everywhere that the proprietors were only waiting for the arrival of the new and expensive machinery from England, and some visitors from Melbourne and a champagne chivoo on the ground served to fully restore public confidence.

The marriage day was fixed, and there was to be a great celebration on the occasion, as the local paper said of 'Mr. Hollingshed, the popular manager of the "Purse of Fortune," and the lovely and accomplished daughter of our esteemed, townsman Mr. John Dare becoming united.'

The day approached as days generally do if one waits long enough, and amid much health-drinking, congratulation, and all the rest of it the daughter of our esteemed townsman was married to the popular manager. The happy couple were to go to Sydney for their honeymoon, and by the time they returned the 'new and expensive machinery' would be on the ground, and the golden stream would commence to flow.

'Don't be surprised, my dear fellow,' said the manager to the editor of the local paper in strict confidence, 'if there should be a fall in 'Fortunes.' Our people want to get as many shares as they can into their own hands. They are going to put a lot of shares on the market to bring down the price a bit, and then buy in again. An old dodge, you know. Don't you be frightened, but just hold on like grim death.'

'Trust me,' said the editor, with a wink born of champagne.

Then they started to drive thirty miles to the town, where they would take the train for Sydney, and papa Dare was to join them in a day or two. The new Mrs. Hollingshed found her husband in high spirits as they drove along the country road. They had arranged to stop for an hour or two at a pretty little township nestling in a farming district, about half way.

There was a decent sort of public house there, where the bride had stayed once before, and found everything very comfortable. They drove into the stable yard, and the horses were taken out and given a feed. The bride went to her room with a maid, and Hollingshed strolled into the quiet bar for a drink, the breakfast champagne requiring a little freshening up after the drive. It was a peaceful little place, more like a country inn in Europe than in a bush township in New South Wales. A sleek cat was asleep on the counter, a white parrot dozing in a cage, and a pleasant-faced girl came forward to serve him.

'Have you some good whisky?' asked the mining manager, with his persuasive, killing smile.

'Yes, sir,' replied the girl, putting the required article down. Hollingshed helped himself, and commenced a conversation in the intervals of lighting a cigar. Suddenly the quiet was broken by a succession of piercing shrieks. The parrot was clinging to the bars of his cage as though he would tear them apart. His wings beating furiously the while, he poured forth shrill screams mingled with oaths and curses. So violent was its rage that its body seemed suddenly animated by a devil.

Aghast the girl stared at him, murmuring, 'Uncle Dick's dumb parrot!'

Hollingshed dropped his cigar, and looked with a white face at the accusing bird. His hand trembled as he clutched the bar, and he cried out as if in spite of himself, 'Miverson's parrot!'

What passed through his mind? He saw a blood-stained figure prone on the bed, illumined by a flash of white light. He saw a barefooted, hunted fugitive fleeing through the bush amid storm and tempest, with the same shrieks ringing in his ears. He saw the same starved wanderer alone, shrinking from the night and the blackness, and always pursued by a white, shrieking spirit with a bloody brand on its breast. He saw the same wanderer come to an out station with a pitiful tale of losing his horse and everything he had in the flood, and being taken in and fed! Now, when he saw money before him, and had just married, was it all to be dashed from his grasp by an accusing and avenging sprite in the shape of a wretched bird?

The mad, blind rage he felt once more came over him. He would have sprung on the bird, and torn it to pieces, but another voice was heard. In the doorway behind the bar stood a stooping figure, pale and thin, the ghost of Miverson.

'Uncle! uncle!,' cried the girl. 'Your parrot's gone mad!'

The bird ceased its clamor when it heard its master's voice; but still flapped its wings and beat against the wires.

'The parrot suddenly shrieked out at this gentleman,' the girl explained to her uncle.

The ghost of Miverson directed his lack-lustre gaze on their visitor. Four long years had passed since the two men had confronted each other. The recognition was mutual. Miverson's eyes blazed up.

'You villain! At last! at last!' he cried. 'Lucy! quick! Call your father!'

Hollingshed stood his ground. Flight would have been fatal; his best game was to treat the whole thing with contempt.

'That's the man who tried to rob and murder me,' said Miverson to his brother when he came.

'Why, that's the manager of the new mine up at Brookstone.'

'So I am,' broke in Hollingshed, 'what's up with this old lunatic?'

'That's him right enough,' said another voice, that of the old knockabout whom Miverson had brought down with him out of charity.

The police station was but a few steps away, and Hollingshed found himself in an awkward fix. His bluff about being a mining manager did not arouse much sympathy as a guarantee of respectability. Miverson Brothers were well known and respected; the case had been much talked of at the time, and the policeman had the details that were forwarded of the missing man at the time. He felt justified in arresting him on suspicion.

When the bride descended she found that the bridegroom was in custody. As he had left the bar in company with the policeman the girl looked at the cage and gave a cry. The parrot was lying on its back, stone dead.

A great surprise awaited the people of Brookstone. The shares of the 'Fortune' certainly fell, and they did not recover again. The shares put upon the market belonged to Dare, Hollingshed, and his partner— a seedy agent in Melbourne. The new and expensive machinery, needless to say, did not turn up. No more did our esteemed townsman, John Dare, in Brookstone. His property was mortgaged to the hilt, and he left his creditors lamenting. Hollingshed was passed over to the Queensland police, tried, and got seven years. The poor beauty of the district will, doubtless, get a divorce under the act.

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4: The Stolen Body

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The Strand Magazine, Nov 1898

MR. BESSEL was the senior partner in the firm of Bessel, Hart, and Brown, of St. Paul's Churchyard, and for many years he was well known among those interested in psychical research as a liberal-minded and conscientious investigator. He was an unmarried man, and instead of living in the suburbs, after the fashion of his class, he occupied rooms in the Albany, near Piccadilly. He was particularly interested in the questions of thought transference and of apparitions of the living, and in November, 1896, he commenced a series of experiments in conjunction with Mr. Vincey, of Staple Inn, in order to test the alleged possibility of projecting an apparition of one's self by force of will through space.

Their experiments were conducted in the following manner: At a pre-arranged hour Mr. Bessel shut himself in one of his rooms in the Albany and Mr. Vincey in his sitting-room in Staple Inn, and each then fixed his mind as resolutely as possible on the other. Mr. Bessel had acquired the art of self-hypnotism, and, so far as he could, he attempted first to hypnotise himself and then to project himself as a "phantom of the living" across the intervening space of nearly two miles into Mr. Vincey's apartment. On several evenings this was tried without any satisfactory result, but on the fifth or sixth occasion Mr. Vincey did actually see or imagine he saw an apparition of Mr. Bessel standing in his room. He states that the appearance, although brief, was very vivid and real. He noticed that Mr. Bessel's face was white and his expression anxious, and, moreover, that his hair was disordered. For a moment Mr. Vincey, in spite of his state of expectation, was too surprised to speak or move, and in that moment it seemed to him as though the figure glanced over its shoulder and incontinently vanished.

It had been arranged that an attempt should be made to photograph any phantasm seen, but Mr. Vincey had not the instant presence of mind to snap the camera that lay ready on the table beside him, and when he did so he was too late. Greatly elated, however, even by this partial success, he made a note of the exact time, and at once took a cab to the Albany to inform Mr. Bessel of this result.

He was surprised to find Mr. Bessel's outer door standing open to the night, and the inner apartments lit and in an extraordinary disorder. An empty champagne magnum lay smashed upon the floor; its neck had been broken off against the inkpot on the bureau and lay beside it. An octagonal occasional table, which carried a bronze statuette and a number of choice books, had

been rudely overturned, and down the primrose paper of the wall inky fingers had been drawn, as it seemed for the mere pleasure of defilement. One of the delicate chintz curtains had been violently torn from its rings and thrust upon the fire, so that the smell of its smouldering filled the room. Indeed the whole place was disarranged in the strangest fashion. For a few minutes Mr. Vincey, who had entered sure of finding Mr. Bessel in his easy chair awaiting him, could scarcely believe his eyes, and stood staring helplessly at these unanticipated things.

Then, full of a vague sense of calamity, he sought the porter at the entrance lodge. "Where is Mr. Bessel?" he asked. "Do you know that all the furniture is broken in Mr. Bessel's room?" The porter said nothing, but, obeying his gestures, came at once to Mr. Bessel's apartment to see the state of affairs. "This settles it," he said, surveying the lunatic confusion. "I didn't know of this. Mr. Bessel's gone off. He's mad!"

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Vincey that about half an hour previously, that is to say, at about the time of Mr. Bessel's apparition in Mr. Vincey's rooms, the missing gentleman had rushed out of the gates of the Albany into Vigo Street, hatless and with disordered hair, and had vanished into the direction of Bond Street. "And as he went past me," said the porter, "he laughed— a sort of gasping laugh, with his mouth open and his eyes glaring— I tell you, sir, he fair scared me!— like this."

According to his imitation it was anything but a pleasant laugh. "He waved his hand, with all his fingers crooked and clawing— like that. And he said, in a sort of fierce whisper, 'Life!' Just that one word, 'Life!' "

"Dear me," said Mr. Vincey. "Tut, tut," and "Dear me!" He could think of nothing else to say. He was naturally very much surprised. He turned from the room to the porter and from the porter to the room in the gravest perplexity. Beyond his suggestion that probably Mr. Bessel would come back presently and explain what had happened, their conversation was unable to proceed. "It might be a sudden toothache," said the porter, "a very sudden and violent toothache, jumping on him suddenly-like and driving him wild. I've broken things myself before now in such a case ..." He thought. "If it was, why should he say 'Life' to me as he went past?"

Mr. Vincey did not know. Mr. Bessel did not return, and at last Mr. Vincey, having done some more helpless staring, and having addressed a note of brief inquiry and left it in a conspicuous position on the bureau, returned in a very perplexed frame of mind to his own premises in Staple Inn. This affair had given him a shock. He was at a loss to account for Mr. Bessel's conduct on any sane hypothesis. He tried to read, but he could not do so; he went for a short walk, and was so preoccupied that he narrowly escaped a cab at the top of

Chancery Lane; and at last— a full hour before his usual time— he went to bed. For a considerable time he could not sleep because of his memory of the silent confusion of Mr. Bessel's apartment, and when at length he did attain an uneasy slumber it was at once disturbed by a very vivid and distressing dream of Mr. Bessel.

He saw Mr. Bessel gesticulating wildly, and with his face white and contorted. And, inexplicably mingled with his appearance, suggested perhaps by his gestures, was an intense fear, an urgency to act. He even believes that he heard the voice of his fellow experimenter calling distressfully to him, though at the time he considered this to be an illusion. The vivid impression remained though Mr. Vincey awoke. For a space he lay awake and trembling in the darkness, possessed with that vague, unaccountable terror of unknown possibilities that comes out of dreams upon even the bravest men. But at last he roused himself, and turned over and went to sleep again, only for the dream to return with enhanced vividness.

He awoke with such a strong conviction that Mr. Bessel was in overwhelming distress and need of help that sleep was no longer possible. He was persuaded that his friend had rushed out to some dire calamity. For a time he lay reasoning vainly against this belief, but at last he gave way to it. He arose, against all reason, lit his gas, and dressed, and set out through the deserted streets— deserted, save for a noiseless policeman or so and the early news carts— towards Vigo Street to inquire if Mr. Bessel had returned.

But he never got there. As he was going down Long Acre some unaccountable impulse turned him aside out of that street towards Covent Garden, which was just waking to its nocturnal activities. He saw the market in front of him — a queer effect of glowing yellow lights and busy black figures. He became aware of a shouting, and perceived a figure turn the corner by the hotel and run swiftly towards him. He knew at once that it was Mr. Bessel. But it was Mr. Bessel transfigured. He was hatless and dishevelled, his collar was torn open, he grasped a bone-handled walking-cane near the ferrule end, and his mouth was pulled awry. And he ran, with agile strides, very rapidly. Their encounter was the affair of an instant. "Bessel!" cried Vincey.

The running man gave no sign of recognition either of Mr. Vincey or of his own name. Instead, he cut at his friend savagely with the stick, hitting him in the face within an inch of the eye. Mr. Vincey, stunned and astonished, staggered back, lost his footing, and fell heavily on the pavement. It seemed to him that Mr. Bessel leapt over him as he fell. When he looked again Mr. Bessel had vanished, and a policeman and a number of garden porters and salesmen were rushing past towards Long Acre in hot pursuit.

With the assistance of several passers-by— for the whole street was speedily alive with running people— Mr. Vincey struggled to his feet. He at once became the centre of a crowd greedy to see his injury. A multitude of voices competed to reassure him of his safety, and then to tell him of the behaviour of the madman, as they regarded Mr. Bessel. He had suddenly appeared in the middle of the market screaming "Life! Life!" striking left and right with a blood-stained walking-stick, and dancing and shouting with laughter at each successful blow. A lad and two women had broken heads, and he had smashed a man's wrist; a little child had been knocked insensible, and for a time he had driven every one before him, so furious and resolute had his behaviour been. Then he made a raid upon a coffee stall, hurled its paraffin flare through the window of the post office, and fled laughing, after stunning the foremost of the two policemen who had the pluck to charge him.

Mr. Vincey's first impulse was naturally to join in the pursuit of his friend, in order if possible to save him from the violence of the indignant people. But his action was slow, the blow had half stunned him, and while this was still no more than a resolution came the news, shouted through the crowd, that Mr. Bessel had eluded his pursuers. At first Mr. Vincey could scarcely credit this, but the universality of the report, and presently the dignified return of two futile policemen, convinced him. After some aimless inquiries he returned towards Staple Inn, padding a handkerchief to a now very painful nose.

He was angry and astonished and perplexed. It appeared to him indisputable that Mr. Bessel must have gone violently mad in the midst of his experiment in thought transference, but why that should make him appear with a sad white face in Mr. Vincey's dreams seemed a problem beyond solution. He racked his brains in vain to explain this. It seemed to him at last that not simply Mr. Bessel, but the order of things must be insane. But he could think of nothing to do. He shut himself carefully into his room, lit his fire— it was a gas fire with asbestos bricks— and, fearing fresh dreams if he went to bed, remained bathing his injured face, or holding up books in a vain attempt to read, until dawn. Throughout that vigil he had a curious persuasion that Mr. Bessel was endeavouring to speak to him, but he would not let himself attend to any such belief.

About dawn, his physical fatigue asserted itself, and he went to bed and slept at last in spite of dreaming. He rose late, unrested and anxious, and in considerable facial pain. The morning papers had no news of Mr. Bessel's aberration— it had come too late for them. Mr. Vincey's perplexities, to which the fever of his bruise added fresh irritation, became at last intolerable, and, after a fruitless visit to the Albany, he went down to St. Paul's Churchyard to

Mr. Hart, Mr. Bessel's partner, and, so far as Mr. Vincey knew, his nearest friend.

He was surprised to learn that Mr. Hart, although he knew nothing of the outbreak, had also been disturbed by a vision, the very vision that Mr. Vincey had seen— Mr. Bessel, white and dishevelled, pleading earnestly by his gestures for help. That was his impression of the import of his signs. "I was just going to look him up in the Albany when you arrived," said Mr. Hart. "I was so sure of something being wrong with him."

As the outcome of their consultation the two gentlemen decided to inquire at Scotland Yard for news of their missing friend. "He is bound to be laid by the heels," said Mr. Hart. "He can't go on at that pace for long." But the police authorities had not laid Mr. Bessel by the heels. They confirmed Mr. Vincey's overnight experiences and added fresh circumstances, some of an even graver character than those he knew— a list of smashed glass along the upper half of Tottenham Court Road, an attack upon a policeman in Hampstead Road, and an atrocious assault upon a woman. All these outrages were committed between half-past twelve and a quarter to two in the morning, and between those hours— and, indeed, from the very moment of Mr. Bessel's first rush from his rooms at half-past nine in the evening— they could trace the deepening violence of his fantastic career. For the last hour, at least from before one, that is, until a quarter to two, he had run amuck through London, eluding with amazing agility every effort to stop or capture him.

But after a quarter to two he had vanished. Up to that hour witnesses were multitudinous. Dozens of people had seen him, fled from him or pursued him, and then things suddenly came to an end. At a quarter to two he had been seen running down the Euston Road towards Baker Street, flourishing a can of burning colza oil and jerking splashes of flame therefrom at the windows of the houses he passed. But none of the policemen on Euston Road beyond the Waxwork Exhibition, nor any of those in the side streets down which he must have passed had he left the Euston Road, had seen anything of him. Abruptly he disappeared. Nothing of his subsequent doings came to light in spite of the keenest inquiry.

Here was a fresh astonishment for Mr. Vincey. He had found considerable comfort in Mr. Hart's conviction: "He is bound to be laid by the heels before long," and in that assurance he had been able to suspend his mental perplexities. But any fresh development seemed destined to add new impossibilities to a pile already heaped beyond the powers of his acceptance. He found himself doubting whether his memory might not have played him some grotesque trick, debating whether any of these things could possibly have happened; and in the afternoon he hunted up Mr. Hart again to share the

intolerable weight on his mind. He found Mr. Hart engaged with a well-known private detective, but as that gentleman accomplished nothing in this case, we need not enlarge upon his proceedings.

All that day Mr. Bessel's whereabouts eluded an unceasingly active inquiry, and all that night. And all that day there was a persuasion in the back of Vincey's mind that Mr. Bessel sought his attention, and all through the night Mr. Bessel with a tear-stained face of anguish pursued him through his dreams. And whenever he saw Mr. Bessel in his dreams he also saw a number of other faces, vague but malignant, that seemed to be pursuing Mr. Bessel.

It was on the following day, Sunday, that Mr. Vincey recalled certain remarkable stories of Mrs. Bullock, the medium, who was then attracting attention for the first time in London. He determined to consult her. She was staying at the house of that well-known inquirer, Dr. Wilson Paget, and Mr. Vincey, although he had never met that gentleman before, repaired to him forthwith with the intention of invoking her help. But scarcely had he mentioned the name of Bessel when Doctor Paget interrupted him. "Last night— just at the end," he said, "we had a communication."

He left the room, and returned with a slate on which were certain words written in a handwriting, shaky indeed, but indisputably the handwriting of Mr. Bessel!

"How did you get this?" said Mr. Vincey. "Do you mean—?"

"We got it last night," said Doctor Paget. With numerous interruptions from Mr. Vincey, he proceeded to explain how the writing had been obtained. It appears that in her seances, Mrs. Bullock passes into a condition of trance, her eyes rolling up in a strange way under her eyelids, and her body becoming rigid. She then begins to talk very rapidly, usually in voices other than her own. At the same time one or both of her hands may become active, and if slates and pencils are provided they will then write messages simultaneously with and quite independently of the flow of words from her mouth. By many she is considered an even more remarkable medium than the celebrated Mrs. Piper. It was one of these messages, the one written by her left hand, that Mr. Vincey now had before him. It consisted of eight words written disconnectedly: "*George Bessel... trial excavn... Baker Street ... help... starvation*." Curiously enough, neither Doctor Paget nor the two other inquirers who were present had heard of the disappearance of Mr. Bessel— the news of it appeared only in the evening papers of Saturday— and they had put the message aside with many others of a vague and enigmatical sort that Mrs. Bullock has from time to time delivered.

When Doctor Paget heard Mr. Vincey's story, he gave himself at once with great energy to the pursuit of this clue to the discovery of Mr. Bessel. It would

serve no useful purpose here to describe the inquiries of Mr. Vincey and himself; suffice it that the clue was a genuine one, and that Mr. Bessel was actually discovered by its aid.

He was found at the bottom of a detached shaft which had been sunk and abandoned at the commencement of the work for the new electric railway near Baker Street Station. His arm and leg and two ribs were broken. The shaft is protected by a hoarding nearly 20 feet high, and over this, incredible as it seems, Mr. Bessel, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, must have scrambled in order to fall down the shaft. He was saturated in colza oil, and the smashed tin lay beside him, but luckily the flame had been extinguished by his fall. And his madness had passed from him altogether. But he was, of course, terribly enfeebled, and at the sight of his rescuers he gave way to hysterical weeping.

In view of the deplorable state of his flat, he was taken to the house of Dr. Hatton in Upper Baker Street. Here he was subjected to a sedative treatment, and anything that might recall the violent crisis through which he had passed was carefully avoided. But on the second day he volunteered a statement.

Since that occasion Mr. Bessel has several times repeated this statement — to myself among other people— varying the details as the narrator of real experiences always does, but never by any chance contradicting himself in any particular. And the statement he makes is in substance as follows.

In order to understand it clearly it is necessary to go back to his experiments with Mr. Vincey before his remarkable attack. Mr. Bessel's first attempts at self-projection, in his experiments with Mr. Vincey, were, as the reader will remember, unsuccessful. But through all of them he was concentrating all his power and will upon getting out of the body— "willing it with all my might," he says. At last, almost against expectation, came success. And Mr. Bessel asserts that he, being alive, did actually, by an effort of will, leave his body and pass into some place or state outside this world.

The release was, he asserts, instantaneous. "At one moment I was seated in my chair, with my eyes tightly shut, my hands gripping the arms of the chair, doing all I could to concentrate my mind on Vincey, and then I perceived myself outside my body— saw my body near me, but certainly not containing me, with the hands relaxing and the head drooping forward on the breast."

Nothing shakes him in his assurance of that release. He describes in a quiet, matter-of-fact way the new sensation he experienced. He felt he had become impalpable— so much he had expected, but he had not expected to find himself enormously large. So, however, it would seem he became. "I was a great cloud— if I may express it that way— anchored to my body. It appeared to me, at first, as if I had discovered a greater self of which the conscious being in my brain was only a little part. I saw the Albany and Piccadilly and Regent

Street and all the rooms and places in the houses, very minute and very bright and distinct, spread out below me like a little city seen from a balloon. Every now and then vague shapes like drifting wreaths of smoke made the vision a little indistinct, but at first I paid little heed to them. The thing that astonished me most, and which astonishes me still, is that I saw quite distinctly the insides of the houses as well as the streets, saw little people dining and talking in the private houses, men and women dining, playing billiards, and drinking in restaurants and hotels, and several places of entertainment crammed with people. It was like watching the affairs of a glass hive."

Such were Mr. Bessel's exact words as I took them down when he told me the story. Quite forgetful of Mr. Vincey, he remained for a space observing these things. Impelled by curiosity, he says, he stooped down, and, with the shadowy arm he found himself possessed of, attempted to touch a man walking along Vigo Street. But he could not do so, though his finger seemed to pass through the man. Something prevented his doing this, but what it was he finds it hard to describe. He compares the obstacle to a sheet of glass.

"I felt as a kitten may feel," he said, "when it goes for the first time to pat its reflection in a mirror." Again and again, on the occasion when I heard him tell this story, Mr. Bessel returned to that comparison of the sheet of glass. Yet it was not altogether a precise comparison, because, as the reader will speedily see, there were interruptions of this generally impermeable resistance, means of getting through the barrier to the material world again. But, naturally, there is a very great difficulty in expressing these unprecedented impressions in the language of everyday experience.

A thing that impressed him instantly, and which weighed upon him throughout all this experience, was the stillness of this place— he was in a world without sound.

At first Mr. Bessel's mental state was an unemotional wonder. His thought chiefly concerned itself with where he might be. He was out of the body— out of his material body, at any rate— but that was not all. He believes, and I for one believe also, that he was somewhere out of space, as we understand it, altogether. By a strenuous effort of will he had passed out of his body into a world beyond this world, a world undreamt of, yet lying so close to it and so strangely situated with regard to it that all things on this earth are clearly visible both from without and from within in this other world about us. For a long time, as it seemed to him, this realisation occupied his mind to the exclusion of all other matters, and then he recalled the engagement with Mr. Vincey, to which this astonishing experience was, after all, but a prelude.

He turned his mind to locomotion in this new body in which he found himself. For a time he was unable to shift himself from his attachment to his

earthly carcass. For a time this new strange cloud body of his simply swayed, contracted, expanded, coiled, and writhed with his efforts to free himself, and then quite suddenly the link that bound him snapped. For a moment everything was hidden by what appeared to be whirling spheres of dark vapour, and then through a momentary gap he saw his drooping body collapse limply, saw his lifeless head drop sideways, and found he was driving along like a huge cloud in a strange place of shadowy clouds that had the luminous intricacy of London spread like a model below.

But now he was aware that the fluctuating vapour about him was something more than vapour, and the temerarious excitement of his first essay was shot with fear. For he perceived, at first indistinctly, and then suddenly very clearly, that he was surrounded by *faces*! that each roll and coil of the seeming cloud-stuff was a face. And such faces! Faces of thin shadow, faces of gaseous tenuity. Faces like those faces that glare with intolerable strangeness upon the sleeper in the evil hours of his dreams. Evil, greedy eyes that were full of a covetous curiosity, faces with knit brows and snarling, smiling lips; their vague hands clutched at Mr. Bessel as he passed, and the rest of their bodies was but an elusive streak of trailing darkness. Never a word they said, never a sound from the mouths that seemed to gibber. All about him they pressed in that dreamy silence, passing freely through the dim mistiness that was his body, gathering ever more numerously about him. And the shadowy Mr. Bessel, now suddenly fear-stricken, drove through the silent, active multitude of eyes and clutching hands.

So inhuman were these faces, so malignant their staring eyes, and shadowy, clawing gestures, that it did not occur to Mr. Bessel to attempt intercourse with these drifting creatures. Idiot phantoms, they seemed, children of vain desire, beings unborn and forbidden the boon of being, whose only expressions and gestures told of the envy and craving for life that was their one link with existence.

It says much for his resolution that, amidst the swarming cloud of these noiseless spirits of evil, he could still think of Mr. Vincey. He made a violent effort of will and found himself, he knew not how, stooping towards Staple Inn, saw Vincey sitting attentive and alert in his arm-chair by the fire.

And clustering also about him, as they clustered ever about all that lives and breathes, was another multitude of these vain voiceless shadows, longing, desiring, seeking some loophole into life.

For a space Mr. Bessel sought ineffectually to attract his friend's attention. He tried to get in front of his eyes, to move the objects in his room, to touch him. But Mr. Vincey remained unaffected, ignorant of the being that was so

close to his own. The strange something that Mr. Bessel has compared to a sheet of glass separated them impermeably.

And at last Mr. Bessel did a desperate thing. I have told how that in some strange way he could see not only the outside of a man as we see him, but within. He extended his shadowy hand and thrust his vague black fingers, as it seemed, through the heedless brain.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Vincey started like a man who recalls his attention from wandering thoughts, and it seemed to Mr. Bessel that a little dark-red body situated in the middle of Mr. Vincey's brain swelled and glowed as he did so. Since that experience he has been shown anatomical figures of the brain, and he knows now that this is that useless structure, as doctors call it, the pineal eye. For, strange as it will seem to many, we have, deep in our brains— where it cannot possibly see any earthly light— an eye! At the time this, with the rest of the internal anatomy of the brain, was quite new to him. At the sight of its changed appearance, however, he thrust forth his finger, and, rather fearful still of the consequences, touched this little spot. And instantly Mr. Vincey started, and Mr. Bessel knew that he was seen.

And at that instant it came to Mr. Bessel that evil had happened to his body, and behold! a great wind blew through all that world of shadows and tore him away. So strong was this persuasion that he thought no more of Mr. Vincey, but turned about forthwith, and all the countless faces drove back with him like leaves before a gale. But he returned too late. In an instant he saw the body that he had left inert and collapsed— lying, indeed, like the body of a man just dead— had arisen, had arisen by virtue of some strength and will beyond his own. It stood with staring eyes, stretching its limbs in dubious fashion.

For a moment he watched it in wild dismay, and then he stooped towards it. But the pane of glass had closed against him again, and he was foiled. He beat himself passionately against this, and all about him the spirits of evil grinned and pointed and mocked. He gave way to furious anger. He compares himself to a bird that has fluttered heedlessly into a room and is beating at the window-pane that holds it back from freedom.

And behold! the little body that had once been his was now dancing with delight. He saw it shouting, though he could not hear its shouts; he saw the violence of its movements grow. He watched it fling his cherished furniture about in the mad delight of existence, rend his books apart, smash bottles, drink heedlessly from the jagged fragments, leap and smite in a passionate acceptance of living. He watched these actions in paralysed astonishment. Then once more he hurled himself against the impassable barrier, and then

with all that crew of mocking ghosts about him, hurried back in dire confusion to Vincey to tell him of the outrage that had come upon him.

But the brain of Vincey was now closed against apparitions, and the disembodied Mr. Bessel pursued him in vain as he hurried out into Holborn to call a cab. Foiled and terror-stricken, Mr. Bessel swept back again, to find his desecrated body whooping in a glorious frenzy down the Burlington Arcade...

And now the attentive reader begins to understand Mr. Bessel's interpretation of the first part of this strange story. The being whose frantic rush through London had inflicted so much injury and disaster had indeed Mr. Bessel's body, but it was not Mr. Bessel. It was an evil spirit out of that strange world beyond existence, into which Mr. Bessel had so rashly ventured. For twenty hours it held possession of him, and for all those twenty hours the dispossessed spirit-body of Mr. Bessel was going to and fro in that unheard-of middle world of shadows seeking help in vain. He spent many hours beating at the minds of Mr. Vincey and of his friend Mr. Hart. Each, as we know, he roused by his efforts. But the language that might convey his situation to these helpers across the gulf he did not know; his feeble fingers groped vainly and powerlessly in their brains. Once, indeed, as we have already told, he was able to turn Mr. Vincey aside from his path so that he encountered the stolen body in its career, but he could not make him understand the thing that had happened: he was unable to draw any help from that encounter...

All through those hours the persuasion was overwhelming in Mr. Bessel's mind that presently his body would be killed by its furious tenant, and he would have to remain in this shadow-land for evermore. So that those long hours were a growing agony of fear. And ever as he hurried to and fro in his ineffectual excitement, innumerable spirits of that world about him mobbed him and confused his mind. And ever an envious applauding multitude poured after their successful fellow as he went upon his glorious career.

For that, it would seem, must be the life of these bodiless things of this world that is the shadow of our world. Ever they watch, coveting a way into a mortal body, in order that they may descend, as furies and frenzies, as violent lusts and mad, strange impulses, rejoicing in the body they have won. For Mr. Bessel was not the only human soul in that place. Witness the fact that he met first one, and afterwards several shadows of men, men like himself, it seemed, who had lost their bodies even it may be as he had lost his, and wandered, despairingly, in that lost world that is neither life nor death. They could not speak because that world is silent, yet he knew them for men because of their dim human bodies, and because of the sadness of their faces.

But how they had come into that world he could not tell, nor where the bodies they had lost might be, whether they still raved about the earth, or

whether they were closed forever in death against return. That they were the spirits of the dead neither he nor I believe. But Doctor Wilson Paget thinks they are the rational souls of men who are lost in madness on the earth.

At last Mr. Bessel chanced upon a place where a little crowd of such disembodied silent creatures was gathered, and thrusting through them he saw below a brightly-lit room, and four or five quiet gentlemen and a woman, a stoutish woman dressed in black bombazine and sitting awkwardly in a chair with her head thrown back. He knew her from her portraits to be Mrs. Bullock, the medium. And he perceived that tracts and structures in her brain glowed and stirred as he had seen the pineal eye in the brain of Mr. Vincey glow. The light was very fitful; sometimes it was a broad illumination, and sometimes merely a faint twilight spot, and it shifted slowly about her brain. She kept on talking and writing with one hand. And Mr. Bessel saw that the crowding shadows of men about him, and a great multitude of the shadow spirits of that shadowland, were all striving and thrusting to touch the lighted regions of her brain. As one gained her brain or another was thrust away, her voice and the writing of her hand changed. So that what she said was disorderly and confused for the most part; now a fragment of one soul's message, and now a fragment of another's, and now she babbled the insane fancies of the spirits of vain desire. Then Mr. Bessel understood that she spoke for the spirit that had touch of her, and he began to struggle very furiously towards her. But he was on the outside of the crowd and at that time he could not reach her, and at last, growing anxious, he went away to find what had happened meanwhile to his body. For a long time he went to and fro seeking it in vain and fearing that it must have been killed, and then he found it at the bottom of the shaft in Baker Street, writhing furiously and cursing with pain. Its leg and an arm and two ribs had been broken by its fall. Moreover, the evil spirit was angry because his time had been so short and because of the painmaking violent movements and casting his body about.

And at that Mr. Bessel returned with redoubled earnestness to the room where the seance was going on, and so soon as he had thrust himself within sight of the place he saw one of the men who stood about the medium looking at his watch as if he meant that the seance should presently end. At that a great number of the shadows who had been striving turned away with gestures of despair. But the thought that the seance was almost over only made Mr. Bessel the more earnest, and he struggled so stoutly with his will against the others that presently he gained the woman's brain. It chanced that just at that moment it glowed very brightly, and in that instant she wrote the message that Doctor Wilson Paget preserved. And then the other shadows and

the cloud of evil spirits about him had thrust Mr. Bessel away from her, and for all the rest of the seance he could regain her no more.

So he went back and watched through the long hours at the bottom of the shaft where the evil spirit lay in the stolen body it had maimed, writhing and cursing, and weeping and groaning, and learning the lesson of pain. And towards dawn the thing he had waited for happened, the brain glowed brightly and the evil spirit came out, and Mr. Bessel entered the body he had feared he should never enter again. As he did so, the silence— the brooding silence— ended; he heard the tumult of traffic and the voices of people overhead, and that strange world that is the shadow of our world— the dark and silent shadows of ineffectual desire and the shadows of lost men — vanished clean away.

He lay there for the space of about three hours before he was found. And in spite of the pain and suffering of his wounds, and of the dim damp place in which he lay; in spite of the tears— wrung from him by his physical distress— his heart was full of gladness to know that he was nevertheless back once more in the kindly world of men.

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5: For Ways That are Dark

George T. Fry

1872-1943

Adventure 15 Oct 1927

ILOBANG lay like a flower garden in an arm of the sea. The prosperous Philippine trading town had enjoyed three hundred years of prosperity. Its Capitan Chino held sway over as rich a realm as any commercial sovereign in all the East.

Every Oriental town has its Capitan Chino. He is a combination chamber of commerce, national bank, shipping agency, commercial broker, justice of the peace and adviser in general to the entire Chinese population. Old Chen Wan held that exalted post at Ilobang. How long he had held it no man knew, since none had reached his age, and he was there when the oldest of them came thither.

He was ponderous, unusually tall for a Chinaman, powerful of frame, and he displaced all of the available space in the great throne-like chair that stood in the rear of what might have passed for a general country store, decked for a masquerade. The chair was as massive and as ponderous as the dignity it was called upon to support. Its legs and arms had been carved by some master hand, long since gathered to its honorable celestial ancestors.

There hung about the walls all manner of wares. Dried onions dangled in strings. Hoes, picks and shovels were to be seen. Bags of rice, boxes of various goods— a veritable rural store that might have flourished in an Illinois river town forty years agone. Behind the store stood a great warehouse that covered what would have been an entire city block. It held the aggregate wealth of the native endeavor from all of the surrounding country. And a stockade, high and whitewashed, encircled the entire warehouse, with a huge, attack-defying gate opening on a side street only. Behind this gate sturdy Chinamen stood guard at all times. None passed that portal save the family of the Capitan Chino. Even he did not use this gate.

Nobody, for that matter, ever recalled having seen him outside of the limits of his commercial kingdom. He came to the store through a secret rear door leading to his harem. He departed through this same door, and if he, during the many years of his reign, had been one inch beyond these confines, none could remember the fact.

From time to time he had added to his supply of wives until the total now numbered seven. They were all *mestizos*— half-breeds with Chinese fathers and Filipina mothers. They were all fairly young and extremely fair to see. This bouquet of feminine attraction that lived on the floor above the warehouse, hung with rich, quaint and alluring stuff, was guarded with jealous care.

Its members sallied forth once each week, leaving silently through the side gate and tripping daintily to the Catholic church where they attended the Mass. They looked neither to the right nor yet to the left as they went and came. They spoke to no person. At a respectful distance followed a few husky Chinamen, regarding with superior disdain the little army of fighting cocks that the Filipinos had tethered by their legs the while they had their souls purged, prerequisite to the Sunday sessions of the world's biggest cock-pit.

Day by day, usually in the mornings, Chen Wan sat in his throne and scanned, through the heaviest rimmed and thickest pair of horn-set spectacles that ever weighted a nose, little notes in Chinese handed to him by an attendant. They concerned the making of crops, the financing of small farmers, the sailing of his ships for Manila, their cargoes and the general affairs of the day.

Some two miles from this strange citadel of trade a great sawmill whirred its way. Its owner, Algernon Buckingham, was no less of a personage in Ilobang than the Capitan Chino. The age of forty found him with a record of past performances that ought to have served any man for a lifetime. As the younger son of an English nobleman, he had wasted all of the money and patience the family could, or would, bestow. He had abused his friends, exhausted the moneylenders and cut a swath through Deauville, Nice, Monte Carlo and the Continent generally. He had gambled, he had loved and he had fought.

And then came scandal, and the name of beautiful Lady Alice was coupled with his own. And with the scandal came the decision of the family that he would do well to become a remittance man.

He took his sentence of banishment in good part. He cared not in the least whither he went, but took the first ship— anywhere.

"I will get off when the notion strikes me," he said.

And thus it came about that he was sitting in a café in Manila one fine afternoon when, over the Scotch, he fell in with Old Bader, a German trader who had been in the islands for a long time.

"You live here?" asked the Englishman.

"No, down the coast— a week's run by boat. I set up down there many years ago. Made some money in hemp and copra and the like— a little in rubber. But what gets me is that nobody has sense enough to cash in on that timber. Why, man dear, they've got a wood down there that is tough as pig-iron and takes a polish like mahogany. Some fellow set up a sawmill, but he let it go to nothing. If I had some white man to run it, It'd make us both rich."

"What's the matter of letting me have a go at it?"

"But would you?"

"I'd jolly well like the fling."

THUS came to pass that Ilobang shortly received a new citizen— a tall, powerfully set Englishman with a red, round face and the energy of the devil. He took the sawmill, he turned out the timber, and the money began to come in bunches. The prodigal son was supplying his own veal, with Scotch and wine on the side. Bader sold the whole plant to him and went down the coast seeking gold.

Years went by, with Buckingham acclimated in his lonely home. His one companion now was a recently acquired servant. Wu Gun was the laziest, most indolent Chinese in all the settlement; but he was likewise the best cook, and had an uncanny way of taking a basket on his arm, going to market and coming back with a wonderful supply of fine things that cost so little that his employer was prone to overlook his many apparent defects. Algie grew to half love, half tolerate his servant, who spoke no English and used a broken, pidgin-Spanish for his means of communication.

Buckingham went at times to Manila for a little fling and he became a man of such note that it became quite the thing when a worth-while Englishman wearied of Manila to run down to Ilobang for a visit to the timber lord. A strange mystery began to envelop him.

They heard of his success back in the London clubs. They wondered why he elected to remain for the rest of his days far from his early scenes. And the speculation only added to the avidity with which his fellow countrymen seized any opportunity to visit his retreat.

Captain Oliver Redmond had known Buckingham in his fastest days. He had matched his own golf skill with the dashing Englishman of other days. They had shared money and escapades. Redmond, loafing about Manila one fine morning, bethought himself to pay his ancient crony a visit. He took passage on the weekly packet and dropped off at Ilobang. Redmond had given no notice of his intention to visit his old friend.

"Did any one know where Mr. Buckingham's place was?" he inquired.

Did one? Everybody did. Each day the swashbuckling Britisher had come dashing into town on a pony that seemed hardly half his own size. He was an institution. And it was little time before Redmond found himself, duly piloted, on his way to the Buckingham bungalow.

Buckingham sat, feet on the rail of his porch, idly contemplating the vista. He recognized Redmond from afar, and he ran to greet him, throwing his great arms about the slender army captain with the affection that another might have shown a girl.

"Wu Gun!" he shouted. "Don't you know what to do for a gentleman?"

"Me no *sabe*," retorted the calm, imperturbable Chinese.

"I don't see why in hell you don't learn a white man's language," growled the master.

He turned to Redmond. "Pardon, old friend, I quite forgot that my man knows no English, and the blooming idiot never understands me in my own tongue." He turned again. "Wu Gun!"

"*Si, señor*."

"Scotch *y agua frio, muy pronto*."

Wu Gun moved as rapidly as his sedate habits permitted. He came with tray, glasses, and Scotch. Then he took from its hook an earthen vessel which, wet on the outside, hung suspended by a cord from the center of the ceiling. The men filled their glasses. They toasted one another. Redmond's artistic eye struck the earthen vessel.

"Curious bit of pottery, I'll say what," he ventured.

"Yes, it is a rare old vessel that I picked up from a rich Chinaman. It is worth its weight in gold. You know out here we get cold water by hanging a vessel like this from the ceiling. It is wet outside, and the process of evaporation does the rest." Wu Gun's dinner for the night was a gem. The old friends enjoyed it. They talked of other days and other places.

"Are you contented here?" asked Redmond.

"Supremely. I'm my own army, navy, police, House of Lords, Commons— and I'm king."

They went to the veranda to smoke. Wu Gun, the stupid, sat on the steps, peeling potatoes against the coming of the morrow.

"But you haven't told me what brings you out here," said Buckingham. '

"Same old business— arms and the hero stuff. You know, of course, the turn of affairs in China. We have some northern Chinese friends who are somewhat short of arms. They have some fifty thousand White Russians ready to join in the fun. Chang Tso-lin has the Russians under cover. They have no arms and ammunition— that's my business."

"How?"

"We bought up a lot of Russian rifles left in America after the war—fifty thousand of them. We have two million rounds of ammunition. We shipped the lot from San Francisco as machinery and it is due to arrive in Manila next week. Then we trans-ship to a tramp that is in charter and off for the Yang-tze. I am going back by the next boat and engage a crew."

"What sort?"

"Chinks— northern Chinks, of course. Nobody would suspect such a crew."

"But the Chinese are not so easy to handle just now."

"Nonsense. I've Captain Owen Thompson, Lieutenant Winston Uphill and Lieutenant Gerald Hyman with me— all modest merchantmen for the time.

And there is old Dave O'Rourke, the toughest and funniest quartermaster that ever sailed the seas. Those lads could handle a battleship loaded with Chinks, and we only need a matter of twenty-five." He paused. "By the way, old top, what time does the next boat go up?" he said.

"Week from today; that will be Wednesday at ten o'clock."

"Cheerio. We will forget China until then."

AND FOR the days that followed they were as merry as two children. They ate, drank and sang. They visited the strange spots about the quaint old town, and turned their hands to making a one-hole golf course.

And the morning following the arrival of Capt. Redmond, old Chen Wan, the Capitan Chino came, as was his wont, to the ponderous throne. He read the daily run of notes, handed silently by his attendant. He gave directions in guttural tones. The attendant handed

him a brown slip, written in Chinese. Chen Wan looked at it long and earnestly. Then he passed it slowly over a little incense-burner at his side and it crumpled into blue ashes.

The days galloped at the Buckingham bungalow. Wu Gun seemed to become more and more trifling. His shuffling feet stumbled often on the pathway of duty. Buckingham noted that the meals were not as good as usual.

"I'll have to get a new man," he said, after cursing the offending slave one day, and hearing the unmoved, bland servant merely respond, "Me no *sabe, señor*."

Buckingham had recourse to his usual formula—

"Scotch, *muy pronto*!"

Wu Gun placed the bottles. He came dutifully bearing the precious water-jug that had attracted every art lover that came that way.

A crash!

Buckingham leaped to his feet, too astonished to talk. His frame shook with anger. Wu Gun had dropped the precious jug and it lay, in a hundred bits, on the floor. Master seized slave by the collar. He rushed him to the front door, and with one mighty kick sent him sprawling down stairs to the lawn.

"All finished; *vamose pronto*!" roared the master.

The injured Wu Gun fled.

Tuesday night came. Buckingham, in honor of the last evening with his friend, with a new Chinaman as a cook, regaled him with choice food, wines and liquor. A couple of American officers, from a neighboring post, were bidden to the festivities.

"Bon voyage," toasted Buckingham.

"A lucky trip to you," 'said the American, half suspecting the destination without knowing the purpose of the guest.

A FILIPINO trundled Redmond's kit down to the dock the next morning. As the two friends came along later, no packet loomed at the accustomed place.

"Deuced queer," said Buckingham. "I've never known it to be late before."

They sauntered to the Capitan Chino's store. A dapper Chinaman, educated in the Singapore schools and speaking perfect English, greeted them.

"No, gentlemen," he said, "the boat is not late. We had a large rubber consignment that was urgently desired at Manila for transhipment to America, and the boat went out last night."

"Hell!" said Redmond.

"Extraordinary," echoed Buckingham.

"And the next boat?" inquired Redmond.

"It will surely sail on scheduled time next Wednesday," said the Chinese.

"There's nothing to do but to make the best of it," said Buckingham. "Anyway, you are in no hurry."

"No," replied Redmond, "the goods from Frisco will just about be getting in then. I only wanted to be a little ahead of time, you know."

Back to the bungalow.

Another week. Wednesday morning. Redmond stood on the deck of the packet waving good-by to his friend.

Manila. Busy little tugs darted about the harbor. Flags of all nations fluttered jauntily in the breeze. The packet made its careful way to the dock. Capt. Owen Thompson stood waiting for his chief.

"Just in time," said Thompson cheerily. "Wireless says the steamer will dock tomorrow. We've got the tramp all ready— only to pick up the Chink crew. Must be northern, you know. That's a matter of an hour only, for the town is full of them, looking for work."

And the next day, the steamer from America discharged her "machinery." A husky lot of longshoremen transferred it to the tramp, and by the time they had finished, Redmond and Thompson came back with the twenty-five Chinese who were to form the crew. Every mother's son of them spoke the dialect of the Manchu.

Two days later. The dingy tramp nosed out of the harbor, headed for the China Sea. At evening, the Chinese cook, the best they had ever seen, served excellent food. He was an artist in the officer's room. He brought dainty sugared things at the close of the dinner and lighted delicate incense wafers that perfumed the room and delighted the senses.

Two more days.

A smooth sea; the crew working perfectly; meals perfect; the incense burner playing gently upon the senses; O'Rourke, the funny, keeping the officers roaring with his imitations of officers he had known. No need to be concerned for two more days— then eternal vigilance.

It was the third evening. Uphill stood watch on the bridge while his companions gathered for dinner. The smooth-treading servitor of the dining room did his offices with his usual speed. He lighted the incense. The men at table suddenly slumped in their chairs.

When they awoke, all were securely handcuffed and manacled. Chinese with polished revolvers stood guard over them.

Uphill, meantime, was brought into the room. A rope loop had been deftly dropped over his arms as he stood at the wheel, and he was a captive before he had a chance to fight. It was a surprise affair, too quickly executed to permit him to give a note of warning.

"You will be perfectly at ease," said a natty Chinese, in perfect university English. "There is no reason to be alarmed."

"But do you know that you have mutinied against the king's officers and are likely to be hanged?" demanded Redmond.

"We are told by Confucius," retorted the guard, "that life is at best uncertain and the manner of its exit is unimportant. Besides, might I inquire why your manifest shows that you are carrying machinery when you are transporting arms?"

Redmond growled.

"And what is that to you?"

"Nothing in particular," rejoined the guard, "excepting that the kind of machinery you have is needed much more by the Cantonese than by your Russians."

Redmond started.

"And," went on the Chinese, "we are going to take the liberty of landing it on Hang-chow Bay, instead of having it diverted to the Yang-tze as you had intended. But you will be well treated. Only do not attempt to make trouble; it is useless. You see that you are guarded by Chinese soldiers."

He pointed to four men, intelligent, alert and well armed.

Four more days. Land in sight, a little inlet on the Bay of Hang-chow. The yellow men had run the gauntlet of guarding ships with rare skill— not an interfering hand from any side— British flag spanking the breeze from the stern. The ship was beached, not docked.

Chinese seemed to spring from the ground to hasten the unloading of the ship.

"Will you gentlemen oblige me by coming ashore?" asked the leader.

The handcuffed and manacled British followed his lead, under the armed guard of the alert four soldiers. A transport wagon awaited them. They went on and on for many miles through lines of Chinese who paid no attention to them, save to salute the man who rode in front with the chauffeur— for the transport was modern and gasoline supplied its horses. The wagon at length halted at field headquarters. The leader escorted his charges to the commander, he seemed to pay small attention to them. Redmond looked inquiringly at his chief captor, and at the man of executions, with his great sword and its red silk ornament, who stood ominously in the offing.

"He says Major Ing-fu will attend to your comfort," said the Chinese.

Major Ing-fu, lithe, erect and curt, received the party with much show of courtesy. He gave a quick command in Chinese. The handcuffs and manacles dropped.

"I am depending upon your honor, gentlemen," he said. "Anyway, as you can readily see, escape is out of the question. You will be shown every consideration and returned to your own government— unless you will otherwise. That, of course, is a matter for your own good judgment. Meantime, you are my guests. I shall be only too happy to have you request anything you wish."

The four Britishers found their kits from the ship carefully placed in the ancient house that served Major Ing-fu as his workshop. They found servants to attend them. In the evening they sat with the Chinese major and talked. He was a remarkably interesting person. He knew Montmartre by night, and the Louvre by day. He knew their own London as they knew it. One evening he was particularly pleased.

"You may be interested to note," he said, "that thanks to your contribution, our forces have just won a telling success fifty miles north of here."

Redmond winced.

"And," resumed the major, "I am, with much reluctance, going to part company with you. You will be conducted to a port where you will be among your own people. I am sorry that other matters engage me."

He said it with the air of a man really regretful:

"You have been a real sportsman," said Redmond, "and deucedly kind to us. Gun-running has its chances, and we took ours. But do not think that we are unappreciative. But I would like to know how you came to find our secret."

"Gladly," said the major, with a smile.

"We knew from our intelligence service that Mr. Buckingham was much sought by all worth-while Englishmen who came to the Philippines. We knew, of course, that the British, our chief enemies, would make use of Manila; and so promising a prospect as Buckingham was not, of course, to be overlooked.

"The command sent one of our men, Wu Gun, down to Ilobang where he obtained employment from Mr. Buckingham. Capt. Redmond was one of the visitors who came that way, and he told Mr. Buckingham of his mission. Wu-gun heard the conversation. He had the Capitan Chino send out his packet ahead of time, with instructions for Manila.

"Captain Redmond enjoyed himself at Ilobang while Wu Gun went to Manila to arrange a personally selected crew for him. One of them, a chemist, who came from Cornell University, had perfected a gas that might be released by the simple act of burning a joss stick. Its effect is instantaneous slumber— I think you gentlemen will testify to its efficiency."

Redmond grinned and nodded.

"You know the rest of the story," continued the major.

He lighted a cigarette.

"You are departing tomorrow," resumed the major. "One of my assistants will attend you."

He raised a glass.

"To your health, gentlemen."

"And to yours," said the four Englishmen.

"And," said the major, "if you chance to visit Ilobang again and see Mr. Buckingham, I beg that you will present my compliments to him."

"You know Buckingham?" queried the amazed Redmond.

"Very well, indeed, gentlemen. You see, I am— or was— Wu Gun."

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6: His Smile

Susan Glaspell

1882-1948

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LAURA stood across the street waiting for the people to come out from the picture-show. She couldn't have said just why she was waiting, unless it was that she was waiting because she could not go away. She was not wearing her black; she had a reason for not wearing it when she came on these trips, and the simple lines of her dark-blue suit and the smart little hat Howie had always liked on her, somehow suggested young and happy things. Two soldiers came by; one of them said, "Hello, there, kiddo," and the other, noting the anxiety with which she waited, assured her, "You should worry." She looked at them, and when he saw her face the one who had said, "You should worry," said, in sheepish fashion, "Well, I should worry," as if to get out of the apology he didn't know how to make. She was glad they had gone by. It hurt so to be near the soldiers.

The man behind her kept saying, "Pop-corn! Pop-corn right here." It seemed she must buy pop-corn if she stood there. She bought some. She tried to do the thing she was expected to do— so she wouldn't be noticed.

Then the people came pushing out from the theater. They did it just as they did it in the other towns. A new town was only the same town in a different place; and all of it was a world she was as out of as if it were passing before her in a picture. All of it except that one thing that was all she had left! She had come so far to have it tonight. She wouldn't be cheated. She crossed the street, and as the last people were coming out of the theater she went in.

A man, yawning, was doing something to a light. He must belong to the place. His back was to her, and she stood there trying to get brave enough to speak. It had never been easy for her to open conversations with strangers. For so many years it was Howie who had seemed to connect her with the world. And suddenly she thought of how sorry Howie would be to see her waiting around in this dismal place after every one else had gone, trying to speak to a strange man about a thing that man wouldn't at all understand. How well Howie would understand it! He would say, "Go on home, Laura." "Don't do this, sweetheart." Almost as if he had said it, she turned away. But she turned back. This was her wedding anniversary.

She went up to the man. "You didn't give all of the picture tonight, did you?" Her voice was sharp; it mustn't tremble.

He looked round at her in astonishment. He kept looking her up and down as if to make her out. Her trembling hands clutched the bag of pop-corn and some of it spilled. She let it all fall and put one hand to her mouth.

A man came down from upstairs. "Lady here says you didn't give the whole show tonight," said the first man.

The young man on the stairs paused in astonishment. He, too, looked Laura up and down. She took a step backward.

"What was left out wasn't of any importance, lady," said the man, looking at her, not unkindly, but puzzled.

"I think it was!" she contended in a high, sharp voice. They both stared at her. As she realized that this could happen, saw how slight was her hold on the one thing she had, she went on, desperately, "You haven't any right to do this! It's— it's cheating."

They looked then, not at her, but at each other— as the sane counsel together in the presence of what is outside their world. Oh, she knew that look! She had seen her brother and his wife doing it when first she knew about Howie.

"Now I'll tell you, lady," said the man to whom she had first spoken, in the voice that deals with what has to be dealt with carefully, "you just let me give you your money back, then you won't have the feeling that you've been cheated." He put his hand in his pocket.

"I don't want my money back!" cried Laura. "I— want to see what you left out!"

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," proposed the young man, taking his cue from the older one. "I'll tell you just exactly what happened in the part that was left out."

"I know exactly what happened," cut in Laura. "I— I want to see— what happened."

It was a cry from so deep that they didn't know what to do.

"Won't you do it for me?" she begged of the young man, going up to him. "What you left out— won't you show it for me— now?"

He just stood there staring at her.

"It means—! It—" But how could she tell them what it meant? She looked from one to the other, as if to see what chance there was of their doing it without knowing what it meant. When she couldn't keep sobs back, she turned away.

Even in her room at the hotel she had to try to keep from crying. She could hear the man moving around in the next room— so he, of course, could hear her, too. It was all as it was in the pictures— people crowded together, and all of it something that seemed life and really wasn't. Even that— the one thing, the one moment— really wasn't life. But it was all she had! If she let herself think of how little that all was— it was an emptiness she was afraid of.

The people who had tried to comfort her used to talk of how much she had had. She would wonder sometimes why they were talking on her side instead of their own. For if you have had much— does that make it easy to get along with nothing? Why couldn't they see it? That because of what Howie had been to her— and for ten years!— she just didn't know any way of going on living without Howie!

Tonight made fresh all her wedding anniversaries— brought happiness to life again. It almost took her in. And because she had been so near the dear, warm things in which she had lived, when morning came she couldn't get on the train that would take her back to that house to which Howie would never come again. Once more it all seemed slipping from her. There must be something. As a frightened child runs for home, she turned to that place where— for at least a moment— it was as if Howie were there.

She went to the telegraph office and wired the company that sent out "The Cross of Diamonds," asking where that film could be seen. She had learned that this was the way to do it. She had known nothing about such things at first; it had been hard to find out the ways of doing. It was a world she didn't know the ways of.

When she got her answer, and found that the place where "The Cross of Diamonds" would be shown that night was more than a hundred miles away— that it meant going that much farther away from home— she told herself this was a thing she couldn't do. She told herself this must stop— that her brother was right in the things he said against it. It wouldn't do. He hadn't said it was crazy, but that was what he meant— or feared. She had told him she would try to stop. Now was the time to do it— now when she would have to go so much farther away. But— it was going farther away— this glimpse of Howie— all that was left of Howie was moving away from her! And after the disappointment of the night before— She must see him once more! Then— yes, then she would stop.

She was excited when she had decided to do this. It lifted her out of the nothingness. From this meager thing her great need could in a way create the feeling that she was going to meet Howie. Once more she would see him do that thing which was so like him as to bring him back into life. Why should she turn from it? What were all the other things compared with this thing? This was one little flash of life in a world that had ceased to be alive.

So again that night, in the clothes he had most liked, she went for that poor little meeting with her husband— so pitifully little, and yet so tremendous because it was all she would ever have. Again she sat in a big, noisy place with many jostling, laughing people— and waited to see Howie. She forgot that the

place had ugly red walls and sickly green lights; she could somehow separate herself from harsh voices and smells— for she was here to meet Howie!

She knew just the part of the house to sit in. Once she had sat where she couldn't see him as he passed from sight! After that she had always come very early. So she had to sit there while other people were coming in. But she didn't much mind that; it was like sitting in a crowded railway station when the person you love is coming soon.

But suddenly something reached over that gulf between other people and her. A word. A terrible word. Behind her some one said "munitions." She put her hand to her eyes and pressed tight. Not to see. That was why she had to keep coming for this look at Howie. She had to see him— that she might shut out that— the picture of Howie— blown into pieces.

She hated people. They were always doing something like this to her. She hated all these people in the theater. It seemed they were all, somehow, against her. And Howie had been so good to them! He was so good to people like the people in this theater. It was because he was so good and kind to them that he was— that he was not Howie now. He was always thinking of people's comfort— the comfort of people who had to work hard. From the time he went into his father's factory he had always been thinking up ways of making people more comfortable in their work. To see girls working in uncomfortable chairs, or standing hour after hour at tables too low or too high for them— he couldn't pass those things by as others passed them by. He had a certain inventive faculty, and his kindness was always making use of that. His father used to tell him he would break them all up in business if his mind went on working in that direction. He would tell him if he was going to be an inventor he had better think up some money-making inventions. Howie would laugh and reply that he'd make it all up some day. And at last one of the things he had thought out to make it better for people was really going to make it better for Howie. It was a certain kind of shade for the eyes. It had been a relief to the girls in their little factory, and it was being tried out elsewhere. It was even being used a little in one of the big munition plants. Howie was there seeing about it. And while he was there— He went in there Howie. There wasn't even anything to carry out.

The picture had begun. She had to wait until almost half of it had passed before her moment came. The story was a tawdry, meaningless thing about the adventures of two men who had stolen a diamond cross— a strange world into which to come to find Howie. Chance had caught him into it— he was one of the people passing along a street which was being taken for the picture. His moment was prolonged by his stopping to do the kind of thing Howie would do, and now it was as if that one moment was the only thing saved out of

Howie's life. They who made the picture had apparently seen that the moment was worth keeping— they left it as a part of the stream of life that was going by while the detective of their story waited for the men for whom he had laid a trap. The story itself had little relation to real things— yet chance made it this vehicle for keeping something of the reality that had been Howie— a disclosing moment captured unawares.

She was thinking of the strangeness of all this when again the people seated back of her said a thing that came right to her. They were saying "scrap-heap." She knew— before she knew why— that this had something to do with her. Then she found that they were talking about this film. It was ready for the scrap-heap. It was on its last legs. They laughed and said perhaps they were seeing its "last appearance."

She tried to understand what it meant. Then even this would cease to be in the world. She had known she ought to stop following the picture around, she had even told herself this would be the last time she would come to see it— but to feel it wouldn't any longer be there to be seen— that even this glimpse of Howie would go out— go out as life goes out— scrap-heap! She sat up straight and cleared her throat. She would have to leave. She must get air. But she looked to see where they were. Not far now. She might miss Howie! With both hands she took hold of the sides of the seat. She was not going to fall forward! Not suffocating. Not until after she had seen him.

Now. The detective has left the hotel— he is walking along the street. He comes to the cigar-store door, and there steps in to watch. And there comes the dog! Then it was not going to be cut out tonight! Along comes the little dog— pawing at his muzzle. He stops in distress in front of the cigar-store. People pass and pay no attention to the dog— there on the sidewalk. And then— in the darkened theater her hands go out, for the door has opened— and she sees her husband! Howie. There. Moving as he always moved! She fights back the tears that would blur him. That dear familiar way he moves! It is almost as if she could step up and meet him, and they could walk away together.

He starts to go the other way. Then he sees the dog. He goes up to him; he is speaking to him, wanting to know what is the matter. She can fairly hear the warmth and kindness of his voice as he speaks to the little dog. He feels of the muzzle— finds it too tight; he lets it out a notch. Dear Howie. Of course he would do that. No one else had cared, but he would care. Then he speaks to the dog— pats him— tells him he is all right now. Then Howie turns away.

But the dog thinks he will go with this nice person! Howie laughs and tells him he can't come. A little girl has come across the street. Howie tells her to keep the dog from following him. Then again he turns to go. But just before he

passes from sight the child calls something to him, and he looks back over his shoulder and smiles. She sees again the smile that has been the heart of her life. Then he passes from sight.

And he always leaves friends behind him— just as he always did leave friends behind him. There will be little murmurs of approval; sometimes there is applause. Tonight a woman near Laura said, "Say, I bet that's an awful nice fellow."

She never left her seat at once, as if moving would break a spell. For a little while after she had seen it, his smile would stay with her. Then it would fade, as things fade in the motion pictures. Somehow she didn't really have it. That was why she had to keep coming— constantly reaching out for something that was not hers to keep.

When her moment had gone, she rose and walked down the aisle. It was very hard to go away tonight. There had been all the time the fear that what happened the night before would happen again— that she would not see Howie, after all. That made her so tense that she was exhausted now. And then "munitions"— and "scrap-heap." Perhaps it was because of all this that tonight her moment had been so brief. Only for an instant Howie's smile had brought her into life. It was gone now. It had passed.

She was so worn that when, at the door, her brother Tom stepped up to her she was not much surprised or even angry. Tom had no business to be following her about. She had told him that she would have to manage it her own way— that he would have to let her alone. Now here he was again— to trouble her, to talk to her about being brave and sane— when he didn't know— when he didn't have any idea what he was talking about! But it didn't matter— not tonight. Let him do things— get the tickets— and all that. Even let him talk to her. That didn't matter either.

But he talked very little. He seemed to think there was something wrong with her. He looked at her and said, "O, Laura!" reproachfully, but distressed.

"I thought you weren't going to do this any more, Laura," he said gently, after they had walked a little way.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked listlessly.

"They sent me word you had left home. I traced you."

"I don't see why you should trace me," she said, but not as if it mattered.

"O, Laura!" he said again. "Well, I must say I don't think Mrs. Edmunds was much of a friend!"

It was Mrs. Edmunds who had told Laura that there was this glimpse of her husband in "The Cross of Diamonds." She had hesitated about telling her, but had finally said it was so characteristic and beautiful a moment she felt Laura should see it.

From the first Tom had opposed her seeing it, saying it would be nothing but torture to her. Torture it was, but it was as if that torture were all there was left of life.

Tonight everything was as a world of shadows. She knew that her brother was taking her to his home instead of back to her own. He had wanted to do this before, but she had refused. There was nothing in her now that could refuse. She went with him as if she were merely moving in a picture and had no power of her own to get out of it.

And that was the way it was through the next few weeks. Tom and his wife would talk to her about trying to interest herself in life. She made no resistance, she had no argument against this; but she had no power to do it. They didn't know— they didn't know how it had been with her and Howie.

She herself had never been outgoing. It was perhaps a habit of reserve built out of timidity, but she had been a girl whose life did not have a real contact with other lives. Perhaps there were many people like that— perhaps not; she did not know. She only knew that before Howie came the life in her was more as a thing unto itself than a part of the life of the world.

Then Howie came! Howie, who could get on with any one, who found something to like in every one; and in the warmth and strength of his feeling for people he drew her into that main body of life where she had not been before. It had been like coming into the sunshine!

Now he was gone; and they asked her to be alone what she had been through him. It was like telling one to go into the sunshine when the sun is not shining.

And the more these others tried to reach her, the more alone she felt, for it only made her know they could not reach her. When you have lived in the sunshine, days of cold mist may become more than you can bear. After a long struggle not to do so, she again went to the long-distance telephone to find out where that picture was being shown— that picture into which was caught one moment of Howie's life as he moved through the world.

Worn by the struggle not to do what she was doing, and tormented by the fear that she had waited too long, that this one thing which was left to her might no longer be, she had to put every bit of her strength into establishing this connection with the people who could tell her what she must know. Establishing the connection with living was like this. She was far off and connected only by a tenuous thing which might any moment go into confusion and stop.

At the other end some one was making fun of her. They doubted if "The Cross of Diamonds" could be seen anywhere at all. "The Cross of Diamonds"

had been double-crossed. Wasn't it too much of a cross, anyway, to see "The Cross of Diamonds"?

Finally another man came to the phone. "The Cross of Diamonds" could be seen at a certain town in Indiana. But she'd better hurry! And she'd better look her last look. Why did she want to see it— might he ask? But Laura hung up the receiver. She must hurry!

All the rest of it was a blur and a hurry. Through the unreal confusion drove the one idea— she must get there in time! And that whole life of the world seemed pitted against her— it was as if the whole of that main body of life was thrown in between her and Howie. The train was late. It was almost the hour for pictures to begin when she got down at that lonely, far-away station. And the town, it seemed, was a mile from the station! There was a bus she must take. Every nerve of her being was hurrying that bus on— until that very anxiety made it seem it was Howie himself she would see if only she could get there in time.

And being late, the downstairs at the theater was full. "Balcony only," said a man as she came in. "Oh, won't you find me a good seat?" Laura besought him. "Like to know how I'll find you a seat when there ain't no seat," was the answer— the whole big life of the world in between her and Howie!

Upstairs, too, it was hard to find a place. And all those people seated there— for them it meant only a few hours' silly entertainment!

But after a moment a man directed her to a seat. There was another place beside it, and just as Laura was being seated a woman came along with two children. "We can't all sit together," she was saying, "so you just sit in here, Mamie. You sit right in here— beside the nice lady."

The mother looked at Laura, as if expecting her to welcome her child. Laura did nothing. She must be alone. She was there to be with Howie.

She was not as late as she had feared. There would be time for getting ready— getting ready for Howie! She knew this would be the last time she would see Howie as he had moved through the world. For the last time she would see his face light to a smile. If she did not reach him tonight, she would never reach him. She had a feeling that she could reach him, if only something in her— if only something in her—

She could not finish that; it brought her to a place into which she could not reach, but as never before she had a feeling that he could be reached. And so when the little girl beside her twisted in her seat and she knew that the child was looking up at her she tried not to know this little girl was there— tried not to know that any of those people were there. If only she could get them all out of the way— she could reach into the shadow and feel Howie near!

But there was one thing she kept knowing— try her best not to know it! The little girl beside her, too young to be there, was going to sleep. When it came right up to the moment for her to see Howie, she was knowing that that little girl had fallen asleep in an uncomfortable position. Her head had been resting on the side of the seat— the side next Laura— and as she fell asleep it slipped from its support in a way that— Could she help it if this child was not comfortable? Angry, she tried to brush this from her consciousness as we brush dust from our eyes. This was her moment with Howie— her chance.

But when her moment came, a cruel thing happened. Something was wrong with the machine that was showing the picture. At just that moment— of all the moments!— the worn-out film seemed to be going to pieces before her eyes. After the little dog came along, and just as Howie should come out from the cigar-store, there was a flash— a blur— a jumble of movements. It was like an earthquake— it looked like life ceasing to be life. "No!" she gasped under her breath. "No!" The people around her were saying things of a different sort. "Cut it!" "What you givin' us?" "Whoa, boy!" They laughed. They didn't care. It got a little better; she could make out Howie bending down to fix the dog's muzzle— but it was all dancing crazily— and people were laughing. And then— then the miracle! It was on Howie's smile the picture steadied— that smile back over his shoulder after he had turned to go. And, as if to bring to rights what had been wrong, the smile was held, and it was as if Howie lingered, as if in leaving life he looked back over his shoulder and waited— waited for his smile to reach Laura. Out of the jumble and blur— out of the wrong and meaningless— Howie's beautiful steady smile making it all right.

She could not have told how it happened. As Howie passed, she turned to the little girl beside her whose head was without support and, not waking her, supported the child's head against her own arm. And after she had done this— it was after she had done it that she began to know, as if doing it let down bars.

Now she was knowing. She had wanted to push people aside and reach into the shadows for Howie. She began to see that it was not so she would reach him. It was in being as he had been— kind, caring— that she could have a sense of him near. Here was her chance— among the people she had thought stood between her and her chance. Howie had always cared for these people. On his way through the world with them he had always stopped to do the kind thing— as he stopped to make it right for the badly muzzled dog. Then there was something for her to do in the world. She could do the kind things Howie would be doing if he were there! It would somehow— keep him. It would— fulfill him. Yes, fulfill him. Howie had made her more alive— warmer and kinder. If she became as she had been before— Howie would have failed.

She moved so that the little girl who rested against her could rest the better. And as she did this— it was as if Howie had smiled. The one thing the picture had never given her— the sense that it was hers to keep— that stole through her now as the things come which we know we can never lose. For the first moment since she lost him, she had him. And all the people in that theater, and all the people in the world— here was the truth! It cleared and righted as Howie's smile had righted the picture. In so far as she could come close to others she would come closer to him.

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7: The Nest of Sticks

Frederick Irving Anderson

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DALTON, the medical inspector of the Amicos division, was making one of his quarterly visits up country to the Plateau of the Three Fire Cones, where his company was varying the monotony of the eternal banana with cocoa beans— and experimenting with a cross between native and Mysore cattle to eradicate the tick. Fever was of sufficient weight in the annual dividend to make Dalton— who knew more about fever than any other man alive— something of a personage when he traveled; there was usually a private train drawn up on a sidetrack to do his bidding.

This time, however, he dodged the upholstery. He was gray, but there was enough of the boy in him yet to make him delight in the wild harum-scarum: flight through the tropical thicket of the popgun gasoline motor car, a revised one-lung edition of our ancient hand car, that can go wherever the standard Latin-gauge railroad goes— and in the banana bush the railroad goes everywhere. It is the national highway, with a well-worn path between the rusty rails for burros and Jamaica niggers. Dalton was playing hooky on this trip, with only a self-starter, in the person of a negro boy, to push the motor car until its lone cylinder fired, as a companion, and an exceedingly spare kit. He had several reasons for dodging the inevitable private car. The principal and sufficient one was that should he come on Hecsher, the division superintendent, unawares, up on the plateau, he might get a glimpse of the famous nest. Hecsher was putting together a dovecote for his bride.

Hecsher was putting off his trip north to bring her to her new home until the last orchid should be swelling in its air pot and bursting in many-colored sprays over the portals through which she was to enter in state.

This palace of dreams had become famous throughout Latin America, though the bridegroom had guarded it from chance visitors as some inviolable tomb, only the eyes of his negro artisans being allowed to profane it. The superintendent was a moody, sentimental German, the last man in the world one would have picked for a post six years alone in a tropical bush. But here he had been six years now, dreaming all the while of the paradise he was bringing to fruition. Once in a rare while he dropped a word of her—but no sooner was it uttered than he seemed overcome with confusion at being caught thinking aloud. The big Teuton was as transparent as a child; and they all wondered what type of woman she might be who was willing to wait six years for him, the gloomy, silent Hecsher, whose eyes seemed devouring pictures in every chance shadow. Finally he had begun to build.

First the giant trees came down; then the bush— all a negro could cut in two strokes of his machete; then followed the rude plow, drawn by his Mysore cattle. At last the square was cut. It lay on the saddle of the mountain, with three volcanoes facing it from across the plateau, looking at the sun. The hungry jungle crowded the square on all sides, boxed it in with dark shadows and heavy vapors. He called it Guapiles— Twins— after the twin rivers that flowed on either side. There was to be only one street in Guapiles, just as there was to be only one house. That one street was the banana railroad, and the Garden of Eden faced it through the columns of a pagoda, draped with weeping vines.

Word of his activities trickled down to the coast; and the wireless man at the point, gossiping with the four winds of heaven one day, said, quite casually, that Hecsher had begun to gather sticks for his nest. The whispering masts at Swan Island, Gracias à Dios, Almirante, Bocas, and as far south along the main as Santa Marta and Cartagena took it up and passed on the information to the army of white men whose prosperity hangs on their success in keeping the banana green until if reaches the market.

Engineers, division superintendents, commercial diplomats playing cat-andmouse politics with cheese-box states, running transits, laying railroads, draining swamps, fighting mosquitoes, paused in their efforts and smiled, and passed various remarks, sacred and profane, about Hecsher and his nest, the nest he was to call the Twins. Mendes, down in Colombia, set aside some mahogany logs from a twentythousand hectare tract he was clearing for King Banana— had them sawed into board, plank, and timber, and stamped the name of Hecsher on every piece that showed a feather. Gaylord, in Panama, back from the coast, quite on his own initiative, saved out some rosewood intended for fence posts and a green orchid he prized above even his pay envelope. Winchell, in Coldn, rescued a batch of rosewood railroad ties destined for the burning, and had them turned and squared into staircase spindles. Every ship that tied up at the wharf in Limon had some contribution consigned td “Hecsher Twins.” Whether it was their sense of humor, or their sense of fellowship, no one ever inquired, least of all Hecsher hitnself. Hardly a mother’s son of them had ever squeezed more than a half dozen consecutive words out of him— nevertheless they sent sticks for the nest. From Tegucigalpa came a pair of pot-bellied stone gods for the portals through which the bride was to enter. From somewhere back of Guatemala City came a cluster of bells of thin clay, inside of which gold images tinkled incessantly. Watson, in Honduras, found a square of quartz sprinkled with concentric agate, big enough for a table top. And from over the ridge beyond San José toiled a trainload of cedar panels for the dining room, with specific injunction that they

should be scoured with a green coconut husk one hour each day for one year. . Nor was that all— fruits, herbs, flowers of exotic hue and fragrance, rare trees, with roots boxed in palm mats, arrived to people this garden, this garden hewn in the midst of the void of jungle, with its four blank walls sullenly facing the nest. It was to be like a doll's garden in the middle of a playroom floor, all order and peace within, all turmoil and chaos without. Hecsher toiled on, struck dumb by the largesse. There were days when the precious banana had to take a sidetrack while goods consigned to Hecsher Twins were being smuggled up the line; and officials looked on smilingly through their fingers and wrote long reports home of the splendid esprit de corps of the organization. Draw an arc from Belize, in British Honduras, down to the Spanish Main, and as far east as the Windward Islands, and in every port you would find some soul pondering over what he might contribute in the way of a stick for this wonderful nest. So when Dalton, the medical inspector, came popping up the line that morning, his eyes and his thoughts were all for the nest. As he trotted. up the office steps, he was just in time to be butted out of the way by a badly shorn priest, accompanied by a sallow, leering little man in an exceedingly dirty set of linens. It was too hot to quarrel; and, besides, the welfare department of the company encouraged the idea that the white men should turn the other cheek to the irritating punctilios of native officials. So the doctor contented himself with a smile.

He didn't say hello to Hecsher as he entered, or offer to shake hands. Hecsher never said hello or good-by to his few intimates, never said much of anything, in fact. Bute the doctor loved him none the less for it, their peculiar friendship having grown out of the capacity for silence on the one side, and pleasant garrulity on the other. It was a friendship of mutual confidence, founded more on what each instinctively felt the other had of reserve than what lay on the surface.

"You will have to put in a requisition for a wider door here," said Dalton. "I suppose the honorable gentleman who looks as though he sleeps in his Sunday suit is the lord mayor of one of your mess of mud huts, eh?"

"Yes," said Hecsher wearily, thumbing his voluminous whiskers as he still gave attention to the litter of papers on his desk. "We preserve the fiction, doctor, that we have nothing to do with the civil administration. But these yellow bellies have the habit of turning us into policemen every now and then."

His tone was so casual that a listener might have thought he and Dalton had been sitting there gossiping in the heat all morning, instead of just coming together for the first time in months. Nothing disturbed the German's

systematic routine. He reached over and touched a bell, and a neat-looking colored boy appeared.

"Send George Crews here," said the superintendent, and again he was immersed in his papers. The doctor began helping himself to lime juice and ice, smiling to himself at the thought that he had arrived just when Hecsher, famous for the manner in which he handled his blacks, as the paternal overlord of the plantation, was embarking on one of his little domestic scenes. The door opened noiselessly. A young negro, not the awkward, shambling monkey of the bush, but a lithe, upright, clear-eyed black, entered and stood respectfully at attention.

"George!"

"Yes, sir, boss." The accent was the peculiar tribal guttural to which the blacks of the Caribbean Islands, from which this part of the world drafts its labor, have reverted.

"*Alcalde* Don Damon has just gone, George."

"Yes, sir, boss."

The information seemed to convey nothing to him. He waited patiently.

"He wants you, George— wants to put you in jail."

For a startled moment the eyes of the negro, instinct with flight, took stock of the doors and windows. Then his gaze came back to Hecsher, and his confidence returned.

"Have you done anything wrong, George?" asked the German, now for the first time raising his eyes and letting them rest quietly on the man before him, as though it were an animal he sought to soothe into a sense of security.

"No, sir, boss!" came the answer quickly. Then, as though reviewing the various crimes that might be charged against him, he said carefully: "I got no debt. Gin is— bad for my stummick. No beat my girl. She good woman! I buy her new red dress!"

The negro suddenly raised his arm and pointed through an open window. Dalton turned and looked. A young negress, attired in the most lurid of the reds, straight-backed and square-shouldered, was swinging by with the easy carriage and free stride of a race used to carry burdens on the head.

"Where did you get your woman, George?"

"I buy her, boss, sir! I buy her from yellow man of Don Francisco. I pay five dollar!"

The eyes of the two white men met. One might as well think of scolding Solomon for his thousand wives as attempt to persuade an island black that women are not chattels.

"But the padre tells me he married her to the yellow man." Hecsher's voice was grave, his lips unsmiling. "You cannot buy a man's wife, George."

Nevertheless, that was just what George had done, and the yellow man was perfectly satisfied. However, the duly constituted authority of a cluster of thatched bamboo huts up the line had that day expressed itself as astounded at a custom a hundred generations old, and had demanded the body of the offender.

So Hecsher, with soft patience, explained to the black that he had erred, and that he must comply with the law and go to jail. It was with the utmost difficulty that he made George understand he must go to jail because the alcalde said so, not because Hecsher said so. Suddenly the youth burst into wailings.

"What become of my dyn'mo?" he wailed.

Dalton cocked his ears. Hecsher had been training this negro as attendant of a small hydroelectric station which was to supply light and power for the plantation and the wonderful house; and the black, mastering the intricacies with an extraordinary aptitude, took an awesome pride in his mysterious office. Apparently, then, it was not the prospect of going to jail, nor even the prospect of leaving a bride, for whom he had recently purchased a new red dress, that harrowed his soul. It was the parting with his precious dynamo.

"I am afraid you will have to go, George," said Hecsher, resuming his papers again. "I'll keep the dynamo for you till you come back. Now run along."

This promise eased the torture.

"You say I go, sir, boss?" asked George, brightening.

"I say nothing of the kind," said the lord and master. "The *alcalde* says you must go. Run along, like a good boy— and don't buy any more wives."

The negro suited the action to the word. He did not stop to say good-by to the red-skirted root of all evil, who was within hail; he started blithely up the track to the jail, which was made of woven bamboo and as invulnerable as a rusty sieve.

"There goes the only boy I have who knows the difference between a cotter pin and a countershaft," said Hecsher, looking after him; and straightway he plunged into his report to the medical inspector as to the condition of his blacks, the totings of his ample store of drugs, and so on. It was brief, delivered with the harsh terseness of the silent man who has few words to waste; and Dalton listened perfunctorily. There was seldom any illness up here on the plateau. Hecsher had a knowledge of medicine, and plied simple remedies to such good effect that the duties of the medical inspector up here began and ended with an O. K. and initials signed to precise reports. Hecsher put aside his papers now, and, over their lime juice, told of a new Peruvian stallion just imported, a chestnut animal with cream-colored mane and tail, and a Spanish jack of rare price. Then they talked of alligators.

Alligators were really the common ground on which their intimacy had first begun, because Dalton was interested in nothing so much— outside of the color of a man's tongue— as the imaginary half-dollar spot just below a gator's eyes, through which a .30-.30 bullet may enter and snip out the pinhead brain.

"I have come up to see the house," said the doctor, suddenly broaching the object of his curiosity. The big German pulled at his whiskers, and turned a deep scarlet under their covering. "No," he said gruffly. "No; oh, no. Not yet."

"But when, then?" persisted the doctor, laughing outright at the confusion which overwhelmed his taciturn friend at the mere mention of this dream of his life.

"You have promised, you know," went on the doctor, still laughing. "Gad, it must be like a world's fair by this time. I hear about it every place I go."

"When do you come this way again?"

"In a fortnight. I go over to see Watkins, and then I double back through here to Limon."

"In two weeks, then," said Hecsher, rising, the ghost of a pleased smile: playing about the corners of his mouth. "In two weeks, then, doctor." And he turned and buried himself in his desk, while his guest, accustomed to this abrupt way, started on his journey up and over the ridge, and down the mountainside to the peaceful Pacific. As his motor pop-popped on its path through the close-crowded right of way, he smiled as he thought of the tales he would bear down to Limon on his return.

DALTON finished his business in pills and purges over on the west coast, and tried once more to dodge the parlorcar train that was to speed him on his way back to the center of gravity of the organization. This time he was less successful; and he had to make himself as comfortable as possible in Pullman magnificence, albeit the red cushions of his gorgeous carriage were poisoned to the point of positive danger to keep out red ants. There had been torrential rains the week before, and, as the lonely doctor bumped along in regal splendor, and sighed for his hippety-hopping gasoline motor, he caught occasional glimpses of ugly gashes cut in hillside and gorge, and hastily improvised trestles, as slender as toothpicks, over which his train passed tremblingly. Just as night settled down like a blanket, a rain squall hit him, and for hours the train laboriously crawled up grade, while the rain swished in waves across the roof, and the heavy foliage of the jungle wiped the car on two sides with the pat-patter of beating hail.

Dalton was vaguely wondering if Hecsher would press his hospitality to its usual length of meeting him halfway, when the train came to a bumping stop, and, peering out through the window, he made out, by the light of a lantern,

the big form of the German, in oilskins, toiling with a negro boy to ditch their wildcat gasoline car.

The next minute the master of Guapiles was aboard, coming in with a gust of the tempest. He had with him his Great Dane, a stately female with melancholy eyes, who strode into the compartment at his heels, and shook herself vigorously, regardless of the sacred, poisoned upholstery of the president and honorable board of directors.

Dalton knew he was expected neither to evidence surprise at the German's having coasted eighteen miles down the mountainside, in Stygian darkness, to meet him; nor indignation at the local shower precipitated by the dog. Hecsher divested himself of his oilskins, and found his pipe and tobacco, providentially dry; then, with his wet mop of a dog sitting between his knees, he began his report, with neither a how-do-you-do nor a handshake. That was his way. If he chanced on Dalton within twenty-four hours of a previous meeting, his first words would be official, filling in the gap since their last interview. The fact that the medical inspector might be coming for a shot at that vague half-dollar spot on an alligator's snout, or for a many times postponed view of the famous house, had nothing to do with the matter. Dalton put a question or two about the farm and the Mysores; and the German, talking shop, rumbled on as lurchingly as the train. They talked about the banana blight in the lowlands, and the efforts of the independent planters to get a footing; and Dalton retailed some fresh news of the outside world, the up-north world.

Then of a sudden, and with much stammering, Hecsher began talking about the house. He stroked the wet head of his great dog, and looked wistfully at the creature as he talked. He spoke of the place as one speaks of some peculiarly vivid dream, something almost but not quite possessed. He did not mention the woman; it was all about the house for the woman— but, as he painted the color of it with his few words, she seemed to Dalton to be standing beside him, listening and smiling down on him.

"I suppose your boy, George Crews, has expiated his crime by this time and got back to his darling dynamo?" asked Dalton.

Hecsher stopped abruptly in the act of saying something, and stared stupidly at his guest.

"What!" he finally ejaculated. And then dully, shaking his head and tugging at his whiskers: "You haven't heard about it down below, then?"

"No; what has happened?"

"He has turned himself into a banana tree."

This piece of information was delivered with a grimness that forbade the implication of humor. Dalton knocked the ashes off his cigar and stood up.

“So the only black man you've got who knows the difference between a cotter pin and a countershaft has turned himself into a banana tree, eh?” he exclaimed whimsically. “How did he manage it, Hecsher? If the company had the secret, they might increase the annual dividend!”

The doctor scented the unusual, the uncanny, and the somber aspect of Hecsher whetted his appetite for the details. The superintendent, in ragged sentences, told the story. The Jamaica negro had gone to jail blithely enough that morning when Dalton had stopped over on his trip to the west coast. They had put him under lock and key in their rickety calaboose; but when they carried his bread and water the next morning, they found not Crews, but the woman in the red dress. She explained, quite simply, that she would stay there for Crews as long as they desired. The *alcalde* stormed that he wanted the man, not the woman. There was no trouble in finding him, because Crews, content that the strange thing called law was being satisfied in his case by proxy, had gone back to his beloved dynamo, for which he would have paid much more than the price of a woman, even a woman willing to _ go to jail for him at any time. It was not until appeal was made to Hecsher, and the black brought before him again, that Crews consented to return to jail peacefully. But the next morning the comedy was repeated. Crews had flown, and the negress, in her gaudy frock, was waiting for his breakfast.

They didn’t find Crews that day, nor the next, nor the next. He had gone into the brush; and, when the black takes to the bush when mangoes are ripe, there is no catching him. The *alcalde* told the woman they would keep her until they found her man; she made no murmur, even when they took her out of the open-air jail, and put her in a cellar with six inches of water to sleep on, and lizards and other crawling things to people the darkness.

“This is true romance!” cried Dalton, delighted with the tale. “And yet they tell us that this tribe will have tails in another generation or two. Tell me, Hecsher, would you be willing to sacrifice yourself for a woman— take a jail sentence for her, in six inches of water, and the other trimmings our honorable *alcaldes* know how to devise. Oh, yes, you would!” he broke off, laughing. “But you are an idealist. You have been slaving, working your fingers down to the bone, here in the bush for six years— all for a woman. But the rest of us— no, I am afraid not! We are not educated up to that yet. Or we are educated beyond it; I don’t know which. Go on! What happened then?”

“The second night the woman began to scream.”

“Humph!”

“Then my black boy came back.”

“Yes."

“He went to the *alcalde*— wanted to go in there— to let the woman out. But the *alcalde* didn’t want him. Said he’d rather have Crews around outside listening, with the rest. Then Crews—"

“Crews killed him!” broke in Dalton.

“Certainly,” said the German, and he sat staring placidly at his guest. “He stole one of my shotguns— sawed it off, so long— and blew his head off.”

The doctor smoked for a full minute over this; then he said:

“I would have done the same thing, Hecsher!”

“Yes,” said Hecsher, nodding; “and I too, doctor.”

“Did he get his woman?”

“Yes. He went into the bush and sent for them to bring her to him.”

“And they brought her?”

“No; they hid. He went after her. He got her. He killed six of them getting her.”

"Six!"

“Six,” nodded the German. “Six that night. Two more, since. He has the blood lust. He is a wild man! *Himmel*! One stroke, doctor!— when I sent him to jail for something he could not understand— turned him from a creature of intelligence into a savage beast! *Ach*!"

“No; it was not that,” interposed the doctor. “It was the woman’s scream. Have they caught him yet?”

“Caught him? Pray, how? He turns himself into a banana tree, so they can’t find him.”

To turn himself into a banana tree is a common enough refuge of a negro gone fantee, at least in the gossip of the huts. Almost as common, in fact, as the horrible household duppies— ghosts. Duppies can be laid by imprisoning them in their graves under huge blocks of stone. That is why a negro funeral is so solemn a thing. Sometimes, however, they leave chinks in the masonry, through which the duppy can emerge to visit his people who thought to hold him hard and fast. If one employs a good mason, the problem of the duppy is easily solved. But with a bloodthirsty criminal gone fantee, the question is not so simple. Especially when one remembers that there are banana plantations containing fifty thousand acres of trees, one hundred to the acre; and it is difficult to decide on the particular tree. When a red-handed outlaw once acquires this faculty, the plantation negroes cease to seek him; but they leave food offerings about to propitiate the spirit of the banana tree when it assumes human shape again. There is always the same ending, however. Sooner or later the fugitive tires of his lonely, supernatural existence in the bush, and commits depredations on the whites— who are supposed to have

nothing to do with the civil law. Then comes his final incarnation, as an alligator, which, as every one knows, has a vulnerable half-dollar mark.

The rain squalls were still sweeping the roof of their car, and the drooping jungle still reaching out its detaining hands to stop the train in its flight when, they reached the summit of the rise; and three long blasts of the whistle told them they were nearing the house of the twin rivers. Dalton got into his muggy oilskins. Hecsher and the dog, standing silently waiting, betrayed signs of unusual excitement.

As the doctor and his host threw open the vestibule door, preparing to step down, Dalton was conscious of a peculiar clicking noise, which he at length located in the throat of the German. Wecsher was staring, transfixed, at the blank wall of night confronting him. He opened his mouth, but his tongue for the moment seemed stuck in his throat; then, “Boy!” he roared, and his negro ran back from the engine tender, where he had been gossiping with the driver.

“Where are we, Carson? Why stop here? We go to the house— the house, you understand!”

“We at Wopiless, boss, sir. We home, boss.”

Hecsher, with an oath, sprang down. Dalton, at his heels, flashed the rays of a pocket electric torch about him, and the thin stream of light was reflected back to them by the pagoda that guarded the entrance to this sacred shrine. But otherwise all was inky darkness and the sluicing rain.

“The lights? The lights?” cried the master of Twin Rivers.

“Lights?” repeated Dalton. "What lights?”

Then Hecsher, all but dumb with chagrin, confessed. He had planned a little surprise for his friend the doctor. He had trained a second negro as attendant at the electric station; and, before starting on his perilous journey down the mountain, he had turned on the lights in the avenue leading from the pagoda to his nest. The lamps, hidden among the trellises that spanned the path, glowed like fireflies. And now something had gone wrong! The avenue, which was to have been as light as day to welcome the guest, the first guest, of this wonderful house, was wrapped in darkness. Hecsher clapped his hands once, twice, thrice. House servants should have been at hand for the dunnage. But none appeared. Finally, seething with rage, making no effort to cloak his feelings, he started forward, Dalton behind him. Three hours before, when he had left this spot, a beautiful gravel path wound beneath these arches. Now it was a roaring gully, through which they stumbled in mud and piles of stone, in water sometimes up to their knees. A strange, sour smell was in the air. Finally Hecsher stopped like stone. Dalton again flashed his torch. Two pot-bellied stone gods at either side grinned down upon them. About and beyond was a black void. How long they stood there Dalton could not have told. He sensed

only that they were in the midst of irretrievable ruin. Then, as if the very heavens had taken part in staging this thing, the rain suddenly ceased. A patch of sky cleared as if by magic. The snow-white moon of the tropics came out and sailed placidly overhead. Everything now was as light as day.

There was no house. What remained of it, of the wonderful nest whose sticks had been gathered from forest, garden, and buried city, lay a charred heap of ruins. Fire, fierce fire that had defied even the tempest, had leveled it to the ground. And one of the twin rivers, bursting its banks and invading the desolated garden, was fast bearing away blackened timbers. In another hour the last vestige of it, save only the two stalwart stone gods, would be gone. In another month, there would be no clearing in the jungle.

Shortly after daylight, the medical inspector got the master of Twin Rivers as far as the farm office in his car; and his first work, after finding a negro boy he could trust to keep an eye on Hecsher, was to report to headquarters by telegraph what he had seen and what he had learned. On their arrival, the several hundred blacks were assembled in the compound; but they had moved off silently, and lost themselves in the dense forest at the approach of the white men, as though they bore some horrible curse or were enveloped in the aura of a pestilence. The doctor pursued; and he found that it was not he, but the master, before whom they had fled; and on threats and promises he finally persuaded the major portion of them to return to their work, although the elders continued to hide in the bush. Dalton knew the black, by virtue of his long service with them, and he traded on his knowledge that fear is almost as strong as superstition among them. The upshot of it was that he gleaned the. perfectly unassimilable information from the bolder among them that a banana tree with a flaming red sash had detached itself from the bush and entered the garden the previous night. He did not question the obvious fact that a banana tree cannot move about from place to place, because he was solemnly told that this banana tree had so moved. It seemed that the flame of the sash had ignited the master’s house; then the roaring river had seized the banana tree on its bosom and borne it away to the dark forest whither the terrified negroes might not pursue.

Dalton did not include these facts in his report by telegraph. What he did say was that Hecsher, shorn of his sole possession, was as docile as a child, so docile, indeed, that it was advisable that no one come up the line to see him until a few days had passed, at least. Hecsher had turned to tinkering in his shop; and occasionally during the day, as he returned to his office, the negroes would quietly lay down their hoes and retreat to the edge of the forest, to watch him as though he were not real.

Dalton had not specialized so long on fever as to be blinded to the indications of the present situation. It is one thing when a man robbed of everything in life at one blow raves. It is quite another when a man gives no other evidence of the force of the blow than to draw a slight veil over his eyes and to go about as if nothing were amiss. That was what Hecsher was doing now. Once in a brief trip from his shop he cleared up the odds and ends of business on his desk. He even noticed the vague awe with which the blacks now regarded him,

"They take me for my own duppy, come back to haunt them," he explained to Dalton, as they stood together in the office door eying the vacant compound. "It is quite possible that some voodoo man has decided that I am a hollow shell, and has passed the word along the line."

Perhaps the voodoo man was right. Perhaps it was only the shell. Hecsher went off whistling. Dalton had never heard him whistle before. The superintendent was still whistling as he sprang on a gasoline car, started it down grade with a rush, and rolled off noisily. as the explosions of the lone cylinder smote the still air.

"It's just as well to go along and see what he is about," thought the doctor; and a few minutes later he gave chase. But there was no need of chase, apparently. Hecsher was playing with his electric generator, at the shop, its fine hum filling the dead air. He was experimenting, too, with a set of storage batteries, which were expelling villainous gases under an overcharge which the mechanical German was pushing to the limit. There is no telling what a man may do under stress.

"I am rigging up an electric car, so that I can float through the forest like a real ghost," he explained, when Dalton had watched him fitting motor, countershaft, batteries, and driving chain in a dismantled gasoline car for a full hour. "Come, give me a hand. We will try it out."

The two of them struggled with the heavy machine and finally launched it on the rails. It operated, as Hecsher had prophesied, as softly as a ghost sailing on the wind. For an instant they pulled up in front of the pagoda. And then Hecsher spoke of his house, for the first time since the catastrophe— merely a wave of the hand and a shrug and: "There is the end of that."

For a space of fully five minutes he sat taking in the scene, and then he roused himself with a start. He threw over the lever, and their car slid softly forward. There was no accounting for his moods; it were folly to attempt to do so; and Dalton, sleepless now for thirty-six hours, was conscious only of the gentle motion of their vehicle as it plunged forward through the tunnel of ever-drooping palms. Finally night came down, and they were still speeding onward. Apparently Hecsher was bent on putting distance between himself and the

place. They came to the long grade, and with power shut off and brakes softly applied they slid down into the tunnel that became ever and ever denser black. Dalton's heavy eyes closed. He woke in a fright, but found his companion sitting as rigid as before, the car still rolling on.

"We'll turn here," said Hecsher suddenly, and the two men dismounted and sweated and swore as they tugged at the heavy machine to lift it off the track and turn it about. Then they started again, and for another hour they ran along a level. Dalton, in moments of wakefulness, tried to think where they were, but he had to confess himself lost, until they suddenly came on a clearing, and the roaring of waters, and the dull picture shown by the bright moon told him that they had come to his pet alligator grounds. He could not forbear a smile, and he was wide awake when Hecsher opened a box on the machine and handed him his pet rifle. It had a flick of white paint on the tip of the forward sight, and such is the character of the tropical moon that this white speck would become phosphorescent at certain angles, enabling a man used to the trick to shoot almost as accurately at night as in the daytime.

They worked their way afoot into the bush, Indian file. The two old friends had threaded these same paths a hundred times before, and their way was. swiit to a little thatched cover to shade them from the night vapors, where they could lie and smoke and whisper and wait for the game to appear on the mirrorlike surface of a pool just below them, where the turbulent waters of the hills suddenly became calm.

But thirty-six hours out of bed under such circumstances as had transpired this day took the fire of the chase out of even so doughty a sportsman as the medical inspector. The phosphorescent ball on his front sight, as he peered over it from his corner, began to dance and take on strange shapes. His head nodded and fell. He was fast asleep. Out of the depths of this sleep he was suddenly roused by the deafening report of a rifle at his very ear, it seemed. He would have sworn that he heard a scream, but the reverberations of the shot now drowned every other sound.

"I got him!"

It was Hecsher, flat on his belly in his corner, still peering out over the sights of his rifle off into the dull moonlight. Some creature was thrashing in the water a hundred yards away, the foam livid in the moonlight. Hecsher pulled his trigger again, and still a third time. Then he got up, laughing.

"*Gott*!" he cried, and he seized the now wide-awake medical inspector and drew him to his feet and shook him vigorously. "Doctor, I am a man again!" he fairly shouted in the other's ear. "Come! Let us go back."

"But aren't you going to try for his carcass?" demanded the doctor, who, with a pelt at one's very finger ends, could not understand leaving the trophy.

"And what would I do with it if I had it? Let the monkeys eat it?" laughed Hecsher. In another moment they were aboard their ghostlike car again, sailing through the night. Hecsher knew the division like a book. Thrice he roused Dalton to tend the brakes while he left their car to throw a switch. But Dalton, now the strain was over, each time sank back again; and the sun was well up when he felt himself roughly shaken by a cluster of white men among whom he at length recognized several of his own personal staff.

"Where the devil am I, Hopkins? And where is Hecsher?" he cried.

"Hecsher ?" said the man spoken to as Hopkins. "Were you with Hecsher?"

"I thought I was— but maybe I wasn't if you say so. Where am I?"

"You are on the cocoa siding just outside the Limon yards. Hecsher made the gangplank of the Dutch boat at seven this morning, just as she was pulling out. We have been trying to wireless him, but he won't answer."

None of the hundred and one men who contributed sticks to the famous nest ever saw Hecsher again, or heard of him. Dalton is still bobbing back and forth through his inspection bailiwick like a shuttlecock, occasionally eluding those who have a private train to tender him for the more joyous, carefree gasoline car. Last fall, one year from the day that the house of sticks was destroyed, Dalton heard some tidings about his pet alligator pool which caused him to play hooky all by himself and revisit the spot. His negro boy flatly refused to accompany him beyond the last spur— said he would wait for him there until he returned. Dalton pressed on alone; what he found was a negro woman, lithe and straight-limbed, with a red rag of a dress draped about her, living in a bamboo hut beside the pool. She was a witch doctor, practicing voodoo. Her altar was a banana tree just coming to fruit, its shaggy bole marred by three cysts about waist high. The tree was her husband, so she said.

———————

8: The Death Post

P. C. Wren

1875-1941

Help Yourself! Annual 1931

I NEVER QUITE got at the actual facts of this story— never quite got hold of it properly. Perhaps that is why it interested me so much; kept me guessing, as it were.

The peculiar circumstances in which it was told, and the handicaps which hampered both teller and listener, offer good enough excuse for any vagueness.

While listening to the story I felt that I was listening to the truth— one of those strange human documents which carry conviction.

Undeniably Krassilov had been what he said he had been. His speech, face, ankles, wrists, hair, all bore mute testimony; and his hands— particularly his hands.

AND HOW I should have liked to see the woman Katinka, and have a talk with her. I may go that way, some day, and seek her out.

There are women who are worth crossing the world to visit, let alone merely crossing Europe.

Yes, if I ever go down the Danube again, I shall go and see whether she is anything like the picture I have made of her. Perhaps I shall go down the Danube on purpose.

MOST PRISONS have their drawbacks. Some seem to aim at having little else. I am not properly acquainted with English prisons, as, upon the few occasions when I have sojourned in them, I have been a guest, not of His Majesty, but of the Governor— and none but the prisoners really know the prison.

Of French, African, Mexican, Colonial, Portuguese and Moroccan and South American "military" prisons I have had some experience, and can testify that the prisons of some of the South American Republics are not to be recommended.

Certain captious and crapulous people who speak ill of French prisons should try some of those of Central and Southern America. Thereafter they would know when they are well off— if they had a Thereafter.

Personally, I've found the military prison at G— , where I met "Krassilov", very comfortable. True, bare feet are cold in wooden sabots during the winter; and are cut till they bleed, by rope-soled sandles, in the summer; the *cachot* is not a nice place, and life is apt to be hectic in the *salle de discipline;* the *boule*

of dark saw-dust-and-acorn bread is not appetizing; but apart from cold, hunger, solitary confinement in the *cachot* underground cell, corporal punishment in the *salle de discipline,* and sleeping on the damp bare stones of a cell-floor at the whim of a warder, things are quite comfortable.

What was really delightful was the hour in the yard when, instead of marching round and round until the rope-soled *espadrilles* made our feet bleed, we were allowed, or rather ordered, to sit on the stone ledge that runs right round the four walls.

Sitting there, each man in his own numbered place, with the sun shining warmly upon the lucky ones whose seats faced it, one could close one's eyes, hear the song of a bird, and imagine that one was free, imagine that one had but to open one's eyes again to see grass and trees; a desert, the sea, the *Place de l'Opéra* at l'*heure d'absinthe,* Bond Street on a sunny morning, the hunt crossing a green field...

Well, so one might see them, some day... perhaps.

Yes, that was very nice.

Krassilov's place was next to mine. We were not allowed to talk, of course— hence the handicap to storytelling. If a warder— and they were Corsicans to a man— saw a man talking, or thought he saw a man talking, or thought he would think he saw a man talking, he would give him a dose of *cachot.*

And there he would sit in a darkness as of black velvet and a silence that could be heard, for the number of days decreed.

If he were the sort of man whom warders do not like— and the sorts of man whom Corsican warders do not like are numerous— he might receive visitors in the *cachot;* three or more.

And when he emerged, on the completion of his sentence, he would look as though he had been fighting. He had not been fighting, really. No one could call it a fight when one of his visitors held him while the other two or three hit him, though accidents have been known to happen— to warders— even under such conditions.

Anyhow, in these circumstances, conversation becomes precarious, and story-telling, however disjointed and fragmentary, really quite difficult.

Hence, as I've said before, the general unsatisfactoriness of Krassilov's story.

KRASSILOV was really clever. He would sit, with a face of stone, staring straight to his front; and, out of one corner of his immobile mouth, would talk and talk and talk— in perfect French or perfect English— until the patrolling guard was within earshot.

So long as Krassilov was not heard talking, all was well, for it would not be seen that he was doing so. I had not a tithe of his skill and cleverness. I could not talk without moving my lips nor cure myself of the natural habit of turning my head toward him when I spoke to him.

Thus I could not question him, and, as I've said before, many puzzles remain unsolved and will do until I meet Katinka— or, indeed, Krassilov himself. This is hardly likely as, if he survived his prison sentence, he has been returned to the Legion.

So I am only able to give you his story as he gave it to me, and then only after having afforded this apology and explanation.

"MARRIED?" asked Krassilov, as we sat and stared in front of us like the graven images of a temple wall.

With an imperceptible movement, I touched him twice with the little finger of my hand that rested beside his upon the stone bench.

This meant "No". Nor was I.

"Are you thinking of a woman?"

I touched his hand once, which meant "Yes".

"So am I. Katinka, the most amazing woman who ever lived. Absolutely beautiful— truly beautiful— and with such a great good heart... and such a wicked woman. Katinka!

"She keeps a sailors' dive in Galatz, and sells horrible things to ships' firemen, greasers, deck-hands, and the dock-rats and longshore scum. Horrible things; aniseed *mastika,* sawdust gin, 'Jamaica' rum made in Roumania; local 'French' cognac; imitation whisky, which is flavoured methylated spirit; and Roumanian beer which, alas, is genuine; and the most terrible *syrops, apéritifs* and liqueurs.

"She had one advertisement which she considered a special draw for English seamen, a picture of a big bulbous bottle with red cherries on the label, and, underneath it, the legend,

"'*Bestest English Cheery Brandey.*'

"I tasted it once and found it neither cheery nor brandy.

"Katinka!... Lovely, kind, sweet, savage, wicked woman— the only other person alive who knows the true story of the Double-Murder Post... the Death Post, as they call it in those parts. The Greek told her his end of the story, and I told her my end.

"Laugh! How Katinka did laugh... about the Greek. She saw the hand of Providence in it. As well as mine, presumably.

"I'm not very fond of Greeks myself, but Katinka loathed them all, for the sake of this one. He was a stranger and she took him in.

"And he took her in.

"Swindled and robbed her, in return for what she'd given him. And Katinka was a generous giver and had a lot to give.

"Mind you, she was a self-respecting woman, and, though generous with her favours, her kissing went by favour. She never..."

"*Stand!... Left turn!... March!*"... and off we went again, round the prison yard.

ON ANOTHER day Krassilov took up the tale again, and from what he told me then, I now make this:—

THE GREEK, SKIRIOS, according to the tale he told Katinka, spent his happy youth and early manhood basking on the sun-drenched cobbled quays of Piræus. His chief delight was to sit and watch the panting Levantines, sturdy brown-legged dock-labourers of every Eastern Mediterranean mixture and hue, creed, and colour, as they sweated like beasts of burden beneath their heavy loads.

It lent a brightness to the sky, a colour to the sea, warmth to the sun, to watch them trotting up and down narrow bending springing planks, on to, and off from, gaudily painted xebecs, the shapely seaworthy vessels with high in-curving stem and stern-posts, that are the direct descendants and replicas of the pirate-ships of the ancient Corsairs of the Barbary coast.

Indeed, as they bowed themselves beneath the weight of the various baled, boxed, and bottled products of the Ægean archipelago, or of imports for the Islanders, these ill-paid toilers of the deep might have taken comfort, and an added delight in their interesting labours, from the knowledge that they laboured where, twenty centuries earlier, their slave ancestors performed similar tasks for Roman masters and on Roman galleys, which, having a rounded stem and a pronounced 'tumble home', some others of these present vessels closely resembled.

The dignity of labour! What is it, compared with the dignity of sitting at ease and watching labour?

Otium cum dignitate.

And so Skirios sat, at ease with dignity, his sole support a fat and nagging wife, and enjoyed his sweet and simple life.

Well, on a soft spring morning, as this Skirios told his Katinka, he awoke as usual, yawned, stretched himself; contemplated the glorious sunshine from the balcony upon which he lived, when at home; asked the high gods of Olympus why his wife so exactly resembled what she was; gazed upon her with

distaste; ate his breakfast, and a portion of hers, with relish; and then withdrew from her the light of his countenance and the comfort of his presence.

Thinking no evil, and fearing none, he strolled along his beloved quays, passed Island *caïques,* lateen-rigged *feluccas* and assorted gondola-shaped coasting-craft, until he finally came to anchor before a slovenly draggle-tailed 'parish-rigged' *volecera.*

He chose this vessel for his contemplation as, here, the babel towered highest, and the men who laboured to and fro discharging her sacks of sand-ballast, were really working, really doing feats of weight-lifting and balancing, properly earning the appreciative attention with which he now honoured them.

Calm, content, peaceful and philosophic, gently bathed in the warmed and soothing ozone, Skirios looked upon life and found it good. All was for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

Happy Skirios.

But call no man happy until he is dead.

Into the world of Skirios an unsavoury bundle of rags precipitated itself, panted to suggest that it had been running, drew breath, gulped, and with luscious grief announced, in few words and much pantomime, that Madame Skirios, falling down the long steep flight of steps that led to the Skirion eyrie, had broken her neck and was dead.

And this was the first blow that a hitherto kindly Fate dealt Skirios the Greek.

And what a blow was this that struck from beneath him, as it were, the sole prop, stay, and support of his manhood.

Still was the hand that for so long had shielded him from the awful horror of work; that had kept him well-fed, well-clad, and clean.

A stroke of Fate indeed which, in a second, turned Skirios the Greek from a gentleman of leisure into a man who, though far from wanting work, badly needed it.

A blow indeed, that knocked poor Skirios right off the quays of Heaven into a hell of a ship, which, flying the Red Ensign of Great Britain, was owned by a Greek captain and manned largely by Greek sailors and firemen.

With heavy heart, light pocket and empty stomach, Skirios reluctantly accepted a sea-going appointment and, upon a day, left his native shores— as a Messroom Steward.

Greek met Greek when the Chief Steward tried to make Skirios work twenty hours a day.

Skirios knew there was no law against this. He also knew that, provided he avoided the heinous crime of 'refusing duty', there was no law to prevent his striving to gain the world's record for doing the minimum of work in the maximum of time.

The Chief Steward, admitting that his respect for Skirios almost equalled his dislike of him, also admitted himself beaten, and laid the matter, and the body of Skirios, before the Captain.

Captain Logodedes, a man of humour, promptly promoted Skirios to Ordinary Seaman, and put him at the disposal of the Mate.

Again Greek met Greek, and the greater set the lesser to trimming a cargo of lead ore and, with picturesque imagery, informed Skirios that he was going to make him sweat.

It is a curious and perhaps humiliating thought that, had Skirios but perspired, the deaths of two men would have been avoided.

In delicate and dilettante fashion he did toy for a time with lead ore, and, though the zealous Mate worked wonders of mateliness, he failed to hurry Skirios. So signally did he fail, that he offered heavily to back him to lose a race against an enhæmorrhaged limpet.

Upon the swarthy visage of Skirios not one drop of perspiration could he induce. Nor all his piety nor wit could squeeze out a single drop of it.

The Mate, admitting that his respect for Skirios far exceeded his dislike of him, refused to admit himself beaten. He had said that Skirios should sweat, and sweat he should, even though others should behold this portent.

In the stoke-hole— whether he work or not— even Skirios must perspire, and the Mate delivered him over to the Second Engineer. Here, Greek met Scot, and there was no tug-of-war.

The Greek was handed a heavy shovel, told to trim coal, and the Mate was justified of his faith, for Skirios took one look at the Second Engineer and the Black Squad, and sweated in anticipation. Anticipation of bad trouble, for the face of the Second Engineer prophesied it; and the tongues of the Black Squad, of whom he had already fallen foul, promised it.

During the brief day of his unjust (mess) stewardship, he, in his ignorance of sea-usage and his unawareness of its awful and ineluctable sanctity and sacredness, had made a very bad break indeed. He had given, for a consideration, *bien entendu,* scraps from the cabin tables to such of the deck-hands as sufficiently desired them.

Now a custom, as old as the mechanical propulsion of ships, decrees that the leavings, remnants, and remains of all meals served at cabin tables shall be sent in their entirety and in the second dog-watch straight to the firemen's fo'c'sle. Here a stew is made of them, a savoury mess, known in British ships as

Black Cap. Woe to the man who should endeavour to fit Black Cap to any but a fireman's head.

Woe to Skirios: for one, Mikhail Dulaspoff, had, with his own eyes, seen him do this thing; seen him sell cabin-leavings to a deck-hand.

Mikhail Dulaspoff, groping dimly in his not ill-lit nor ill-furnished mind, for something in the nature of a punishment that should fit the crime, conceived the bright idea of seeing whether the cap would fit the head— the Black Cap, that is to say— and at the first opportunity, crowned Skirios with the kid from which the luscious stew had just been poured.

The kid or pot was very hot, very greasy, and did not fit, being far too big and completely obscuring the handsome features of Skirios, ears and all.

The other members of the Black Squad, hugely amused, applauded the vastly diverting spectacle, and, unlike Skirios, did not object to the head of Skirios being inside their cooking-pot.

Doubtless it was very funny; doubtful whether the Russian would still have thought it so, had he been a thought-reader. Blank of countenance, Skirios the Greek, sitting in judgment on Mikhail Dulaspoff, passed silent sentence upon him and, in a double sense, the Black Cap was on the judge's head.

"*Stand!... Left turn!... March!*"... Curse the damned warder.

Again seated beside my friend and fellow-convict— military convict, *bien entendu*; and a man may be a military convict for daring to say 'No', or for a crime that would cost a civilian anything from five francs to nothing— my fellow-convict Krassilov, I waited hopefully to hear his soft ventriloquial voice resume its stream of witty monologue, humorous, sardonic, and amusing.

"Yes, our poor friend Skirios must have talked a lot about himself to Katinka while he was in favour.

"Oh that Katinka!... If that Roumanian girl, with her touch of *tzigan* gipsy blood, could but have had a bigger stage... she would have held it... Fit to be a King's mistress and a power behind the throne.

"And there she was, mistress of a wine-shop and a Skirios.

"That Skirios!... And Mikhail Dulaspoff!..."

My friend laughed softly. A curious laugh.

"Mikhail Dulaspoff... I can tell you something about him— from personal knowledge... oh, very personal knowledge.

"Of the true spy breed. Not the spy that risks his life in enemy countries in war-time. But the police-spy, the informer, the stool-pigeon; the double-dyed, double-damned scoundrel who'd implicate his own mother in something, sell her to the police for five roubles, and testify against her in Court for five more.

"Mikhail Dulaspoff! That dog! No; vermin that the village cur would scratch from itself in disgust.

"However, Mikhail Dulaspoff got what he earned, and, after a dog's life, died a dog's death, as you shall hear.

"And meanwhile he was leading a dog's life in hiding and disguise as a fireman on this ship— he who had been, and might still have been, a well-paid naval artificer. He was a big strong man, something of a coward, and a great bully.

"Doubtless, while hiding about the purlieus of the wharves and dock-streets of his native Odessa, he had found plenty of dock-rats, pimps, panders, crimps'-touts and such other nimble-witted herring-gutted scum, whom he could bully.

"But among seamen, be they deck-hands or firemen— I think you call them stokers ashore, don't you?— there are very few weaklings, and these few play the rôle of the bullied but poorly.

"At sea, Mikhail Dulaspoff had found the sport of bullying and baiting disappointing. In the darkness of the middle watch, the victim was apt to be careless and elusive. One such had allowed— quite accidentally, of course— an ash-bucket to fall from above on the spot where Mikhail Dulaspoff had been standing but a second before. Do you know what a ship's ash-bucket weighs?... No, nor do I, but if one fell on me now, I should never speak again.

"Then too, on a previous voyage, whilst engaged in 'scaling' the inside of a boiler, Mikhail Dulaspoff had been so grievously scalded that, when hauled unconscious through the man-hole, he had been nearly dead.

"Doubtless the steam had been turned on by accident, by mistake, or in error— but it had been done, curiously enough, by the man whom Mikhail Dulaspoff had elected to bully.

"Hence the arrival in the stoke-hole of Skirios the Greek, already marked out for punishment by reason of his simony when mess-steward, brought lip-licking joy to the heart of Mikhail Dulaspoff, as he promised himself rare sport, true sport— that is to say, sport without danger.

"The poor Johnny Greeko was so devoid of spirit, so flabby, so mean a worm, that retaliation simply need not be imagined.

"But it is a long worm that has no turning, and this particular specimen was really more of a snake.

"Nor could it be said that the sport itself came up to expectation, for the creature's very lack of spirit spoilt it. You can't hunt a beast that will not run, nor bring down a bird that will not rise. What apparently feels no pain cannot, with any real satisfaction, be tormented; and Skirios apparently enjoyed the very practical jokes which Mikhail Dulaspoff played on him.

"Did a well-aimed lump of coal hit the communal tin of oatmeal-water from which Skirios was drinking, he was the first to applaud the sureness of aim with which the bully had prevented him from moistening his furnace-parched throat.

"When Skirios suddenly leapt and wildly clutched at the burning cigarette-end dropped down the back of his neck, his own laughter was as loud as that of the rest.

"So, by cheerfulness and good temper, Skirios won the contemptuous half-liking of the stoke-hole, and gradually such crude jests as the addition of paraffin to his drinking-water, or the anointing of his luxurious curling locks with dirty engine-oil, became more and more infrequent, until at last Mikhail Dulaspoff's persecution palled, turned to boredom, and died a natural death.

"Then came the turn of Skirios the Greek, who smiled and smiled and was a villain, cunningly, slowly and imperceptibly contriving that Mikhail Dulaspoff's dead persecution should be resuscitated as cultivation. He set himself to work to win the friendship and affection of the man who had despised and bullied him."

"*YOU KRASSILOV. You spoke*."

My comrade rose to his feet, stood at attention and, as the warder bore down upon him, removed his *beret* and stood bareheaded, as is the law. Very right and proper too. Who is a military prisoner that he should stand covered in the presence of a Corsican guard?

"I, *Monsieur le Brigadier*? Talking?"

"Yes. You. Talking. Or was it that *salaud* next to you?"

I gazed to my front, apparently deaf, dumb, blind and silly.

"No, *Monsieur le Brigadier*."

*"*Then it was you, was it?"

"I, *Monsieur le Brigadier?* Talking?"

"Well, I'll report you for three days' *cachot,* anyhow. If you weren't talking then, it'll do for next time. Sit."

"WHAT WAS I saying when that crumbling crippled *cretin* of a cock-eyed Corsican corruption interrupted me? One of these days I'll smite him on the left cheek and then turn unto me his right cheek also. It would be worth what I should get. I'll..."

"Stand!... Left turn!... March!..." Off again. Great life, this.

"DO YOU KNOW Galatz? The gentle and joyless Roumanian town of Galatz? No? Well, don't. It only affords the visitor one pleasure, and that's the pleasure of getting out of it.

"A few miles east of it— I don't think any hero has ever tarried long enough to measure the exact distance— the starboard bank of the Danube (and that's a yellow, treacherous, fast-running river) is broken by an excavation known as the Baderland Dock. Here, surrounded by innumerable and colossal piles of timber, ships take on dangerous towering deck-cargoes until they themselves resemble floating timber-yards.

"Such foolish and misguided mariners as leave the Baderland Dock for the town of Galatz, must traverse a road— *sous ce nom là!*— rough, pot-holed, deep-pitted and, of necessity, raised high above the surrounding marsh land.

"On both sides, at both ends of this track, lived dock-labourers and other working-folk, and *le bon Dieu* himself alone knows why they live there, and why they live at all.

"Here the presence of sordid hovels, faced with Danube mud and raised but a few feet above the mud they deface, awful Desolation, tragic and grand, is ruined and robbed of Nature's one redeeming gift of great spacious emptiness.

"Quite oratorical that: almost poetic, *n'est ce pas?*

"But such considerations troubled not the soul of Skirios the Greek, whose ship lay in the Baderland Dock.

"On the contrary, he appeared to find this terrible road through this dreadful place peculiarly suited to his taste and particularly suited to his purpose— for he had just performed the expensive and difficult feat of almost quenching the thirst of his mess-mate, Mikhail Dulaspoff.

"In doing so they had almost depleted the stock of a Galatz wine-shop, and now, along this *Via Dolorosa,* Skirios aided Mikhail Dulaspoff's wandering and erratic way, out of the town.

"Across trackless leagues of frozen Russian swamp the North wind blew with a keenness that seared the skin, and the falling, swirling snow steadily added to the high-piled drifts.

"Under such conditions, had he not been cheerfully drunk, Mikhail Dulaspoff would have insisted that the long dark journey to the docks should be made by sleigh.

"Even for a ship's fireman, and a Russian at that, he had been unusually reckless. To mix drinks is bad, even when there are only seven kinds to mix. But to drink them mixed, and with permutations and combinations, is worse. You can make quite a number of combinations with seven, you know.

"Anyhow, his mixing efforts and labours had made him thirsty, and as he staggered along, partly supported and entirely guided by Skirios, he demanded a drink from the bottle borne, with intent, by his hospitable shipmate.

"Having emptied the bottle, and playfully endeavoured to smite his admiring friend with it, he announced his intention of retiring, for the night, upon the nice white bed— a couch of snow— ready prepared for him by the wayside... there, by that stone post... bed-post, ha, ha! . . .

"Some friends would, in the circumstances, have discouraged this idea, for, in the snow, to sleep may be to dream, but it is not to wake.

"Skirios did not discourage the idea.

"On the contrary, he applauded it.

"And, further, he assisted Mikhail Dulaspoff to carry it into execution

"Execution! Ha, a good word, that....

"Mikhail Dulaspoff laid himself down, composed himself to slumber— and instantly fell asleep....

"Skirios contemplated his enemy, and the smile that bared his teeth was a smile of the mouth only.

"'*So!*' he said. '*So!*' and stooped.

"An interesting phenomenon of natural history, of which you may or may not be aware, is the fact that the distinguishing feature of the fireman ashore is an appropriately black square muffler, which at once obviates the need for a collar and for the meticulous washing of the neck.

"This muffler is always folded at the back and the ends are crossed in front and attached to the braces.

"Thus worn, the muffler is useful, comfortable, ornamental, and fashionable.

"What more would you have?

"Nothing more— but possibly something less, for, thus worn, it is, in point of fact, admirably adapted for conversion, by an ill-disposed person, into a most effective tourniquet.

"And so Skirios stooped . . .

"Stooped, thrust his hand into the knotted muffler; twisted hard; and held on.

"'*So!*' he said, after a minute or two, '*So!*' and rose again.

"The judge had not only worn the Black Cap and passed sentence, but had himself carried the sentence into execution.

"Skirios next removed everything from the pockets of his late colleague, and substituted some Greek-stamped Piraeus letters addressed to himself, Leonidas P. Skirios, as well as one or two Greek copper coins.

"Now Skirios, while acting as Mess-room Steward and neglecting no opportunity for investigation of all things interesting and possibly profitable, had discovered the chart-room locker in which the 'Discharge Books' of the crew were kept— and it was not solicitude nor anxiety for the welfare of Mikhail Dulaspoff that had induced him to remove that fireman's 'Continuous Certificate of Discharge' and hide it in a safe place against such time as it might be useful.

"Among other information this comprehensive certificate gave the height, colour of eyes, colour of hair, complexion, tattoo-marks, and other distinguishing marks; and it bore the 'signature' of the holder.

"With the exception of '*Clasped Hands tattooed on right forearm*' the general description of the characteristics of Mikhail Dulaspoff applied equally well to Skirios; and, as it happened, Mikhail Dulaspoff, for excellent reasons, had professed to be unable to sign his name.

"Curiously enough at about this time 'Clasped Hands' appeared tattooed on the right forearm of Skirios the Greek.

"Thus, henceforth, Skirios the Greek, a mere coal-trimmer, could assume the identity of Mikhail Dulaspoff and earn the, to him, fabulous wage of a fireman; and from this so clever enemy himself, Skirios the Greek had learnt not only something of the Russian language, but much of the art of stoking a furnace... *He! he!* how amusing.

"Well, as to this foul vermin, Mikhail Dulaspoff, his body was found a few days later by a relieving detachment of the miserable conscripted soldiers, who, in Roumania, are posted wherever a ship is moored, in order to make the administration of palm-oil to the Custom's officers a little more difficult and costly— difficult and costly to the importer, that is to say. For all imports into Roumania are liable to duty. Only *liable,* you understand....

"Upon inquest, it was cleverly assumed that deceased was a seaman who had fallen asleep and died in the snow.

"The assumption was correct. He was a seaman. He had fallen asleep. And undoubtedly he had died in the snow.

"His papers were examined and, in due course, Captain Logodedes, now at the port of Kustenje, was informed that a Greek deserter from his ship had been found dead.

"BUT, FAR from dead, Skirios the murderer lay low in Galatz, found a home in Katinka's capacious heart and wine-shop; and, boastful in his cups, told her the story of his life, and of Mikhail Dulaspoff's death.

"And, after a while, seeing his chance of large profits and quick returns, he robbed her and left her.

"That was a silly thing to do because..."

"*Stand!... Left turn!... Quick march!*..."

"I'LL TELL YOU about Pierre Bordeau and how he came to encounter Skirios the Greek.

"Of course you know all about the great '*affaire* Dreyfus,' *mon ami?* Did you know that there was very nearly a great '*affaire* Dreyfus' in Russia? It would have been the *affaire*— er— Krassilov, had I not escaped— and become Pierre Bordeau. A very nasty, dirty business, as nasty and dirty as the *affaire* Dreyfus was.

"I was Engineer-Captain in the Imperial Russian Navy, and the carrion cur Mikhail Dulaspoff, beside being a parasite of the Secret Service, a police-spy, a stool-pigeon, informer and *agent provocateur,* was a naval artificer. Behind the respectable facade of his uniform, he worked his side-line of spying and informing, on a system of payment by results; the more results the more payment, and the bigger the better.

"For the low and evil knave that he was, he must have had a certain amount of brain and quite a stock of low cunning, for he conceived the brilliant idea of selling some plans and drawings to a deeply interested Foreign Power and, moreover, of earning a noble lump of informer's reward by discovering who had done this foul deed, and denouncing him to the police!

"He did it well, too, as I had good cause to know. For it was I whom he selected for the honour of being his victim. I whom he had never seen, any more than I had seen him....

"He did it so well that not only was I arrested, but my wife, who was supposed to have been my accomplice, was thrown into prison, too.

"She went into that prison a healthy young woman who had never had a day's illness in her life. She died there in a few weeks....

"I, thanks to a certain mechanical ability with tools and locks and things, escaped, and so there was no big public *affaire*— er— Krassilov.

"That vile secret-selling traitor Krassilov disappeared and Pierre Bordeau took his place.

"Later, the informer Mikhail Dulaspoff disappeared too, with the police on his track.

"Ha! ha! Let us talk of Pierre Bordeau."

IT WAS KRASSILOV who talked of Pierre Bordeau, and I was only too glad to listen as he told the absorbing tale.

This is how the amusing Krassilov talked of himself as Pierre Bordeau:—

"Clad in greasy cap, dirty ragged singlet, oil-soaked dungaree trousers, and with dilapidated shoes on his sockless feet, Pierre Bordeau appeared to spend all his waking hours in plunging a bare muscular arm into the viciously throbbing intricacies of the engines. Even to the habit of chewing the end of an open-mesh sweat-rag suspended from his neck, he seemed just typical of all Mercantile Marine greasers— those useful ratings who, promoted for industry and experience in the stoke-hole, lubricate vast engines, and generally assist the more capable and skilled Engineer-of-the-Watch.

"And what supported Pierre's claim to be typical was a 'Discharge' which certified that he had served as a fireman on the steamer *Prætoris.* A beautiful specimen of the forger's art.

"In point of fact he'd never fed roaring furnaces or scraped the interiors of boilers, but fortunately the English Port Official who gave him his first 'Continuous Certificate of Discharge' was not sufficiently curious to ascertain whether a *Prætoris* had ever been on the British Register; and, as a greaser, he'd passed from ship to ship, French, English and American.

"Aboard ship, undue reticence does not make for popularity, and it was some tribute to Pierre's personality, tact, and ability, that he was quite well liked, and had no enemies in the fo'c'sle.

"Finding that he met all queries, casual and other, with a persistent if polite evasiveness, his fo'c'sle shipmates were content to regard him as a dark horse, and leave it at that.

"No one ever suggested or dreamed that he was a Russian aristocrat, once an officer and a gentleman.

"To his superiors, Pierre, even more than to his messmates, was an object of wonder.

"A greaser who can read, write, and speak three languages, and has a working knowledge of several others, is quite rare.

"If an irate Customs Officer demanded that, in accordance with the certified store-list, five barrels of oil should be forthcoming, it was Pierre who was commissioned to explain, in the Customs Officer's native tongue, that engines must be oiled and that the fifth barrel had been used on the passage from the last port.

"When ragged and illiterate Mediterranean deck-passengers stared stupidly at the harassed First Mate, and produced neither ticket nor passport in reply to his objurgations, it was Pierre who was sent for, to interpret, and to smooth difficulties.

"A Chief Engineer, while forcefully admonishing a bumptious and careless junior, was heard to inform the young man that

"'That Frenchie, Bordeau, knows as much about engines as I do, and that's a sight more than you'll ever learn. And he's a gentleman, too, and that's a sight more than you'll ever be.'

"And in course of time and the mysterious workings of Providence, this 'gentleman' greaser found himself on board a ship bound for Constantinople, Burgas, Varna, Constanta, the River Danube and Galatz.

"And, at Galatz, he found himself, one night, in the wine-shop of Katinka.

"Oh, that Katinka... But this is the story of Pierre Bordeau.

"Well, Pierre Bordeau fell madly in love with Katinka, so it's the story of Katinka too, isn't it— at the moment?

"And one night, as he leant against the zinc-topped bar, trying to drown his sorrows in wine, and himself in the deep wells of Katinka's eyes, the door was thrown open and a man strode in...

"No, not strode in... came sheepishly inside and said, as though he and she were alone in the room— alone in all the world,

"'Take me back, Katinka.'

"Katinka raised her head and stared with hardening eyes.

"'*You!*' she said incredulously, and reached beneath the bar.

"A moment later the man leapt for the door, as Katinka levelled her pistol at him.

"I laughed.

"'Who's he?' I said as the door swung shut.

"'Mikhail Dulaspoff,' she said.

"'*What!*'

"'Mikhail Dulaspoff. D'you want him?'

"'I do.'

"'Get him, then,' snapped Katinka, as I sprang for the door almost as quickly as the man had done.

"He was outside, at a safe distance.

"'Hullo! Thrown out already? Going back to your ship? I'll come part of the way with you,' he said.

"So that was how he lived nowadays, was it? Robbing drunken sailors as they reeled and staggered from Galatz to the Baderland Dock.

"'Yesh,' I hiccupped. 'Goin' back ship. Le's get boll' wine. Good f'ler. Both good f'lers. Get two boll's. Drink all the way.'

"And, a quarter of an hour later, I and this dog— this dog and I— were outside the town and reeling along the road to the Docks.

"'About half-way,' I thought would be the best place, equally distant from the town and the Docks, safest from interruption, and from discovery later.

"By-and-by we reached a spot where stood a stone pillar or post. This place would do as well as another; very lonely and deserted, and far from the habitations of men.

"'Funny thing happened here once, old drunk,' said the animal whose arm I tightly held.

"'And another one's going to happen now,' I replied.... 'You are Mikhail Dulaspoff.'

"'That's right,' was the reply.

"The man was startled.

"'Good old Mikhail,' he went on. 'Good old Dulaspoff. Fireman. "Tattoo signs or other marks; hands clasped on the right forearm." How did you know me?'

"'Mikhail Dulaspoff,' I said softly.

"'That's me. Good old Mikhail. Good old Dulaspoff.'

"'*Ah!* And I, my good Mikhail Dulaspoff, am Engineer-Captain Krassilov,' I said, and took him by the throat.

"He hadn't a chance, for my hands are of steel.

"As his face darkened and his eyes protruded, I talked to him. I talked to him of my wife who, through him, had died in prison. I talked to him of my ruined career, my wrecked and blasted life, my shamed family, our blackened name, and— by-and-by— I dragged his corpse to the stone, gave it a last kick, and returned to Katinka.

"HOW THAT KATINKA laughed when I told her all about it— all my story!

"And how I laughed— on a different note— when I learned that I'd killed the poor Skirios who had himself, on that very spot, killed the real Mikhail Dulaspoff!

" 'OH, POOR SKIRIOS!' chuckled Katinka. 'That taught him not to delude and swindle and rob and desert me!'

"Yes, if he hadn't done that, and hadn't murdered Mikhail Dulaspoff, he'd never have died on the very same spot, and in the very same way, that Mikhail Dulaspoff died.... I do call it amusing!... Really funny, that *two* Mikhail Dulaspoffs should have been murdered on the very same spot!... That stone'll get a bad name— they ought to call it The Death Post."...

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9: Enchanted Shoes

Val Jameson

fl 1898-1938

Western Mail (Perth) 19 Oct 1907

The last reference to this author I can find is a small report in Smiths Weekly *in 1938 that she was "in poor health". She seems to have married in Kalgoorlie in 1898.*

IT HAS BEEN SAID that a sure sign of mental alienation in the lone human denizens of the bush is a fringe of corks attached to the brim of a hat. By this token Marcus Neill was afflicted, and doubly so, in the self-chosen task of tunnelling to the centre of the range where he confidently expected to unearth a Bonanza. It was twenty years since the conviction just seized him. And three separate tunnels penetrated the base of the mountain, his single-handed achievements.

Never a glint of gold rewarded his labour, but his conviction seemed to strengthen with failure. He spurned the advice of strangers who chanced on his lonely camp, or discovered his crazy quest. He would have starved but for the charity of the store-keeper at Mullockville, four miles distant. Regularly, once a week, a parcel of groceries and kangaroo meat was tossed into his camp, and Neill accepted them as the children of Israel received the manna from Heaven. Settling up, it was tacitly undestood, would be met when the laggard gold arrived.

Whatever his life had been before he drifted to the Havenport Range no one knew. He became a confirmed recluse. He shunned conversation with his fellows, and chose the companionship of a dog. Pipe in mouth, dog at heel and eyes gazing blankly through the dangling corks, was the aspect he presented in his walks abroad. However isolated and drear the life of a human being seems, something from the mysterious lap of Chance drifts into the blank, liven to the ragged camp of the lone hatter the Enchantress came, and Marcus found evidence of her visit amongst his weekly rations. He had unparcelled the sugar, the flour, some cheese and butter, also a junk of bacon, when from a mysterious brown paper wrapper there twinkled and fell a pair of dainty shoes

Marcus stared foolishly at them. Then, as if to test the fidelity of sight, he touched them reverently with his finger-tips. Pert little shoes with shiny, pointed toe-caps and obtruding tongues, how had they strayed into a hatter's camp? Even Spot, the faithful terrier, reared himself up with forepaws resting on the table, and barked at the impropriety of it, barked as if he expected them to run away. Marcus took one into his work-roughened palm and stroked it, then gently replaced it on the table. Sitting on his bunk, he filled his pipe and commenced to smoke, never for an instant shifting his gaze from the shoes—

by some conjuring power strange visions and old familiar faces. It may have been imagination, aided by the fantastic wreaths of smoke, but a girl stepped into the dainty shoes and smiled at Marcus.

"I knew them shoes 'ud fetch yer!" he said, shaking a playful finger, "jest your style Kitty! I'm glad to see yer, my gal; you've bin a long, long time away!"

Spot brushed against his master's shins in jealous alarm at this sudden fascination for a pair of silly shoes.

Next morning on opening his eyes Marcus was grieved to find no signs of his long-lost Kitty, but there on the table stood the enchanted shoes. Sudden alarm seized him on hearing the soft thuds of a horse's hoofs in approach. Hastily thrusting his precious booty beneath the bunk he waited with palpitating heart for the expected call. The rider halted without and hailed him lustily.

"Did I leave a parcel of shoes in with your stuft yest'dy?"

"No!" grunted the hatter, shaking his venerable head while the corks bobbed a fantastic jig and screened his face.

"Dash the things!" blurted the boy. "They're on order from Kalgoorlie to go to O'Shane's hotel. They've got mixed into somebody's goods. Are you sure they ain't inside?

"Look yerself!" growled Marcus.

"Right-oh!" The lad slid from his horse and proceeded to explore the shanty.

Spot had a canine instinct that the plant was in danger of discovery; although he distrusted the shoes, his keen sense of duty, was uppermost. As the grocer's boy entered he crept under the hunk and coiled his speckled body over his master's treasure. Suddenly, a freckled arm swept the space beneath the bunk. Marcus, shuddered apprehensively, then, as a shriek from the searcher proclaimed the fidelity of Spot, he chuckled gleefully.

"Mind the dawg!" he said in belated warning.

"Cuss the dawg!" returned the wounded lad. The terrier's sharp teeth had branded his arm severely. "What's 'e doin' under there?"

"That's just wot' 'e wants to know about you!" replied the hatter, "he's in 'is 'kennel an' he's advisin' you to git into yours!"

Spot's method of argument succeeded. The grocer's boy flung more harmless curses at the pair; then mounted his horse and started again in pursuit of the enchanted shoes.

Leaving his treasure in sole charge of the intelligent Spot, Marcus returned to his daily work in the tunnel. He worked cheerfully and briskly. The long void of years that stretched between present and past had been bridged in a night, his ambition to reach his subterranean Bonanza intensified. "Kitty" was written

on the Walls of his dungeon in letters of gold, "Kitty" he heard in every stroke of the pick. And when, at sunset, he strode to his lonely camp, the glory of sunlight faded because she was not in sight.

When night advanced and the shoes were tenderly fondled and placed as before in a walking pose on the table with a lighted candle on either side, as on an altar, and the air grew murky with the smoke-drifts rising from the old man's pipe, he saw again the slender ankles and befrocked figure of his former visitant. He saw her bend smilingly towards him and point proudly to her new-shod feet.

"An' plenty more I'll get ye me gal." said the old man fondly, "when I strike that reef in the range! Shoes an' gowns an' bonnets the best in the land. Kitty! An' ye've not changed in the least! Your eyes air as blue an' your cheeks as rosy an' yer hair as bonny as when I lost ye! But could ye not come closer an' give the old dad a kiss?"

At these words he saw a change in the radiant face, the eyes looked wistfully, mournfully into his, and her arms stretched yearningly towards him. His own opened wide to receive her, but there was nothing to clasp in that smoke-filled space above the enchanted shoes.

Stumbling back to his bunk the deluded man exclaimed, "Come back, Kitty, an' I'll no ask ye to kiss me agin!"

Spot wagged his tail in an effort at comprehension. Such commotion over a pair of shoes he had never witnessed before. Tears, actual tears, trickled along the furrows of his master's face, and the worst part of the situation was that he, Spot, was obviously forgotten. Gripping the end of a trouser leg in his pointed teeth he tugged away till Marcus responded with the coveted caress.

Some days after, the whining of a dog attracted the notice of some residents of Mullockville, driving past. The hatter's tumble-down camp, ambushed in foliage, could not be seen from the road, but the benevolent storekeeper called a halt, and, vaulting to the ground, went to discover the cause of Spot's distress.

Old Marcus was stretched on his bunk as if asleep. The arms folded across his breast were motionless. Clasped beneath them, close to the quiet breast were the missing shoes. The satisfied radiant expression of the lifeless fact sent the discoverer back awed and amazed to inform his friends without. Most of them filed into the camp and whispered sympathetically. The lady for whom the shoes were intended chanced to be amongst them.

"Those are your shoes. Miss O'Shane," said the storekeeper. "Will you take them ?"

"No," replied the girl, adding with womanly intuition, "they were memories to him!"

And Spot, vigilant and silent, watched the observers keenly, his sharp little teeth apart, thirsting for the hand that dared remove his dead master's treasure.

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10: "Rearguard"

Anonymous

Democrat (Perth, W. Aust.,) 8 Apr 1905

The Democrat *was a newspaper that lasted about a year, 1904-5; this story was first published in "Steele Rudd Magazine" which itself lasted from 1904-1907. Steele Rudd was a popular Australian writer of the period, and this story may be by him.*

JACK WALKER was his real name, but "Rearguard" was the soubriquet the men gave him out in South Africa. We all had nick-names those days, but I don't remember one so appropriate as his.

Rain, hail, or shine, Walker lagged in the rear. Turn in your saddle crossing the veldt, and behold half-a-mile or so behind a little cloud of dust, and Rearguard on his brown nag in the middle of it; look back as the troops emerged from a "kloof," and if your eyes were good you could count for a dead certainty on seeing Rearguard's head come bobbing over the hill at about the same rate as the moon rises. He was always behind, and like the proverbial cow's tail, couldn't help it.

Our colonel tried to wake him up a time or two, but he soon gave it up, and got used to it like the rest of us.

"The Boers will get him some day," he used to remark.

At Heilbron we had a skirmish, and the colonel was wounded, and left behind, and an Imperial officer took charge of us. He was Sharpe by name and sharper by nature.

Poor old Rearguard was soon in hot water. First time— fine; second— fine and guard tent, and outpost duty two nights running (no joke after riding all day). Rearguard naturally did not take to the new regime of things. First night he was on outpost, he saw the new colonel stealing up on tiptoe on the chance of catching some unlucky beggar asleep at his post.

Now the orders to all sentries were to challenge any person who approached, "Halt! who goes there?" three times, and if no answer, to fire.

Immediately Rearguard spied the colonel he rattled out all in one breath,

" Halt, who goes there— halt, who goes there— halt, who goes—" *bang*! *bang*! *bang*! and emptied the whole seven chambers of his magazine just over the colonel's head. To say that worthy got a surprise would be wrong. He was simply scared out of his wits, and never stopped running till, hatless and breathless, he stumbled into the nearest tent.

"What's up?" someone asked him as the camp turned out.

"That fool Walker nearly shot me," was all he said. The men laughed when they got hold of the joke, but Rearguard was not put on picket duty afterwards.

Some days subsequently the colonel's eagle eye caught sight of Rearguard lagging in the rear, as usual.

" Company, halt!" he shouted. The men grinned as Rearguard was ordered up, and sharply reprimanded by the colonel. "Didn't the bugler blow 'Walk and trot ?' " he demanded.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I could not get the brown out of a walk," Rearguard replied, and even the colonel smiled.

But next day it was just the same. The colonel, irate, rode back, accompanied by his orderly.

"Disarm that man," he said hotly. "He's not fit to carry a rifle; let him go back to Heilbron, and help look after the horses."

The orderly approached Rearguard gingerly to take his rifle. Rearguard cocked it.

"Disarm who? Not me, if I know it," he drawled.

"Orderly, disarm that man immediately!" roared the colonel.

Rearguard backed out of reach.

"Look here, colonel," he said coolly, "this 'ere rifle is all I've got if those blessed Boers come along, for I can't get the brown out of a walk. I'll be d—— if I'll surrender my rifle to anyone, and I'll shoot you or any other man who tries to take it."

The colonel swore a docker, but there was no help for it, so he galloped off, vowing he would have Rearguard court-martialled, if he had to bring the company to take him.

He was hardly out of sight when a strong party of Boers rode over the neighbouring hills, on their way to surprise our men. They seemed about as much astonished to see Rearguard as he was to see them, and, not wishing to spoil their game by firing a shot, surrounded him, and called on him to surrender. The Australian's rifle cracked in reply, and the foremost Boer's saddle was instantly emptied. Of course, the next moment the Boers fired a volley point blank, and Rearguard and the brown went down in a heap together.

Then the Boers rode for our camp. But they were too late. Rearguard's shot had alarmed our men, and we greeted those Boers with such a withering fire that they were glad to ride off faster than they came.

Poor Rearguard, we knew what his fate must have been, and every man felt sorry. A search party was just on the point of leaving when the sentry reported a Boer with a flag of truce coming over the rise.

"Boer be d——!" exclaimed the colonel, "it's old Rearguard."

He was mounted on the pony that belonged to the Boer he had shot, and carrying his handkerchief on the end of his rifle, came ambling up at a faster

rate than we ever saw him ride before. We crowded around, and offered him our congratulations on his escape.

The colonel grasped his hand. "Your shot saved the company, Rearguard," he said. "Hullo, old man, you're wounded."

For the red stain was coming through a Mauser hole about the size of a pencil, just below the knee. We helped him down.

"Where's the brown, Rearguard?" someone asked.

"Back there with six Boer bullets in him, and I've one in my leg (wincing), and that confounded Boer pony *wouldn't walk*."

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11: The Adventure of the Dorrington Ruby Seal

John Kendrick Bangs

1862-1922

From: *R. Holmes & Co*., Harper & Brothers, 1906

Meet Raffles Holmes, son of Sherlock, grandson of Raffles....

"LORD DORRINGTON, as you may have heard," said Raffles Holmes, leaning back in my easy-chair and gazing reflectively up at the ceiling, "was chiefly famous in England as a sporting peer. His vast estates, in five counties, were always open to any sportsman of renown, or otherwise, as long as he was a true sportsman. So open, indeed, was the house that he kept that, whether he was there or not, little week-end parties of members of the sporting fraternity used to be got up at a moment's notice to run down to Dorrington Castle, Devonshire; to Dorrington Lodge on the Isle of Wight; to Dorrington Hall, near Dublin, or to any other country place for over Sunday.

"Sometimes there'd be a lot of turf people: sometimes a dozen or more devotes of the prize-ring; not infrequently a gathering of the best-known cricketers of the time, among whom, of course, my grandfather, A. J. Raffles, was conspicuous. For the most part, the cricketers never partook of Dorrington's hospitality save when his lordship was present, for your cricket-player is a bit more punctilious in such matters than your turfmen or ring-side habitués. It so happened one year, however, that his lordship was absent from England for the better part of eight months, and, when the time came for the annual cricket gathering at his Devonshire place, he cabled his London representative to see to it that everything was carried on just as if he were present, and that every one should be invited for the usual week's play and pleasure at Dorrington Castle. His instructions were carried out to the letter, and, save for the fact that the genial host was absent, the house-part went through to perfection. My grandfather, as usual, was the life of the occasion, and all went merry as a marriage-bell. Seven months later, Lord Dorrington returned, and a week after that, the loss of the Dorrington jewels from the Devonshire strong-boxes was a matter of common knowledge. When, or by whom, they had been taken was an absolute mystery. As far as anybody could find out, they might have been taken the night before his return, or the night after his departure. The only fact in sight was that they were gone— Lady Dorrington's diamonds, a half-dozen valuable jewelled rings belonging to his lordship, and, most irremediable of losses, the famous ruby seal which George IV had given to Dorrington's grandfather, Sir Arthur Deering, as a token of his personal esteem during the period of the Regency. This was a flawless ruby, valued at some six or seven thousand pounds sterling, in which had been cut

the Deering arms surrounded by a garter upon which were engraved the words, 'Deering Ton,' which the family, upon Sir Arthur's elevation to the peerage in 1836, took as its title, or Dorrington. His lordship was almost prostrated by the loss. The diamonds and the rings, although valued at thirty thousand pounds, he could easily replace, but the personal associations of the seal were such that nothing, no amount of money, could duplicate the lost ruby."

"So that his first act," I broke in, breathlessly, "was to send for—"

"Sherlock Holmes, my father," said Raffles Holmes. "Yes, Mr. Jenkins, the first thing Lord Dorrington did was to telegraph to London for Sherlock Holmes, requesting him to come immediately to Dorrington Castle and assume charge of the case. Needless to say, Mr. Holmes dropped everything else and came. He inspected the gardens, measured the road from the railway station to the castle, questioned all the servants; was particularly insistent upon knowing where the parlor-maid was on the 13th of January; secured accurate information as to the personal habits of his lordship's dachshund Nicholas; subjected the chef to a cross-examination that covered every point of his life, from his remote ancestry to his receipt for baking apples; gathered up three suit-cases of sweeping from his lordship's private apartment, and two boxes containing three each of every variety of cigars that Lord Dorrington had laid down in his cellar. As you are aware, Sherlock Holmes, in his prime, was a great master of detail. He then departed for London, taking with him an impression in wax of the missing seal, which Lord Dorrington happened to have preserved in his escritoire.

"On his return to London, Holmes inspected the seal carefully under a magnifying-glass, and was instantly impressed with the fact that it was not unfamiliar to him. He had seen it somewhere before, but where? That was now the question upper-most in his mind. Prior to this, he had never had any communication with Lord Dorrington, so that, if it was in his correspondence that the seal had formerly come to him, most assuredly the person who had used it had come by it dishonestly. Fortunately, at that time, it was a habit of my father's never to destroy papers of any sort. Every letter that he ever received was classified and filed, envelope and all. The thing to do, then, was manifestly to run over the files and find the letter, if indeed it was in or on a letter that the seal had first come to his attention. It was a herculean job, but that never feazed Sherlock Holmes, and he went at it tooth and nail. Finally his effort was rewarded. Under 'Applications for Autograph' he found a daintily-scented little missive from a young girl living at Goring-Streatley on the Thames, the daughter, she said, of a retired missionary— the Reverend James Tattersby— asking him if he would not kindly write his autograph upon the

enclosed slip for her collection. It was the regular stock application that truly distinguished men receive in every mail. The only thing to distinguish it from other applications was the beauty of the seal on the fly of the envelope, which attracted his passing notice and was then filed away with the other letters of similar import.

" 'Ho! ho!' quoth Holmes, as he compared the two impressions and discovered that they were identical. 'An innocent little maiden who collects autographs, and a retired missionary in possession of the Dorrington seal, eh? Well, that *is* interesting. I think I shall run down to Goring- Streatley over Sunday and meets Miss Marjorie Tattersby and her reverend father. I'd like to see to what style of people I have intrusted my autograph.'

"To decide was to act with Sherlock Holmes, and the following Saturday, hiring a canoe at Windsor, he made his way up the river until he came to the pretty little hamlet, snuggling in the Thames Valley, if such it may be called, where the young lady and her good father were dwelling. Fortune favored him in that his prey was still there— both much respected by the whole community; the father a fine looking, really splendid specimen of a man whose presence alone carried a conviction of integrity and a lofty man; the daughter—well, to see her was to love her, and the moment the eyes of Sherlock fell upon her face that great heart of his, that had ever been adamant to beauty, a very Gibraltar against the wiles of the other sex, went down in the chaos of a first and overwhelming passion. So hard hit was he by Miss Tattersby's beauty that his chief thought now was to avert rather than to direct suspicion towards her. After all, she might have come into possession of the jewel honestly, though how the daughter of a retired missionary, considering its intrinsic value, could manage such a thing, was pretty hard to understand, and he fled back to London to think it over. Arrived there, he found an invitation to visit Dorrington Castle again incog. Lord Dorrington was to have a mixed week-end party over the following Sunday, and this, he thought, would give Holmes an opportunity to observe the characteristics of Dorrington's visitors and possibly gain therefore some clew as to the light-fingered person from whose depredations his lordship had suffered. The idea commended itself to Holmes, and in the disguise of a young American clergyman, whom Dorrington had met in the States, the following Friday found him at Dorrington Castle.

"Well, to make a long story short," said Raffles Holmes, "the young clergyman was introduced to many of the leading sportsmen of the hour, and, for the most part, they passed muster, but one of them did not, and that was the well-known cricketer A. J. Raffles, for the moment Raffles entered the room, jovially greeting everybody about him, and was presented to Lord

Dorrington's new guest, Sherlock Holmes recognized in him no less a person that the Reverend James Tattersby, retired missionary of Goring-Streatley- on-Thames, and the father of the woman who had filled his soul with love and yearning of the truest sort. The problem was solved. Raffles was, to all intents and purposes, caught with the goods on. Holmes could have exposed him then and there had he chosen to do so, but every time it came to the point the lovely face of Marjorie Tattersby came between him and his purpose. How could he inflict the pain and shame which the exposure of her father's misconduct would certainly entail upon that fair woman, whose beauty and fresh innocence had taken so strong a hold upon his heart? No— that was out of the question. The thing to do, clearly was to visit Miss Tattersby during her father's absence, and, if possible, ascertain from just how she had come into possession of the seal, before taking further steps in the matter. This he did. Making sure, to begin with, that Raffles was to remain at Dorrington Hall for the coming ten days, Holmes had himself telegraphed for and returned to London. There he wrote himself a letter of introduction to the Reverend James Tattersby, on the paper of the Anglo- American Missionary Society, a sheet of which he secured in the public writing-room of that institution, armed with which he returned to the beautiful little spot on the Thames where the Tattersbys abode. He spent the night at the inn, and, in conversation with the landlord and boatmen, learned much that was interesting concerning the Reverend James. Among other things, he discovered that this gentleman and his daughter had been respected residents of the place for three years; that Tattersby was rarely seen in the daytime about the place; that he was unusually fond of canoeing at night, which, he said, gave him the quiet and solitude necessary for that reflection which is so essential to the spiritual being of a minister of grace; that he frequently indulged in long absences, during which time it was supposed that he was engaged in the work of his calling. He appeared to be a man of some, but not lavish, means. The most notable and suggestive thing, however, that Holmes ascertained in his conversation with the boatmen was that, at the time of the famous Cliveden robbery, when several thousand pounds' worth of plate had been taken from the great hall, that later fell into the possession of a well-known American hotel-keeper, Tattersby, who happened to be on the river late that night, was, according to his own statement, the unconscious witness of the escape of the thieves on board a mysterious steam-launch, which the police were never able afterwards to locate. They had nearly upset his canoe with the wash of their rapidly moving craft as they sped past him after having stowed their loot safely on board. Tattersby had supposed them to be employés of the estate, and never gave the matter another thought until three days later, when the news of the

robbery was published to the world. He had immediately communicated the news of what he had seen to the police, and had done all that lay in his power to aid them in locating the robbers, but all to no purpose. From that day to this the mystery of the Cliveden plot had never been solved.

"The following day Holmes called at the Tattersby cottage, and was fortunate enough to find Miss Tattersby at home. His previous impression as to her marvellous beauty was more than confirmed, and each moment that he talked to her she revealed new graces of manner that completed the capture of his hitherto unsusceptible heart. Miss Tattersby regretted her father's absence. He had gone, she said, to attend a secret missionary conference at Pentwllycod in Wales, and was not expected back for a week, all of which quite suited Sherlock Holmes. Convinced that, after years of waiting, his affinity had at last crossed his path, he was in no hurry for the return of that parent, who would put an instant quietus upon this affair of the heart. Manifestly the thing for him to do was to win the daughter's hand, and then intercept the father, acquaint him with his aspirations, and compel acquiescence by the force of his knowledge of Raffles's misdeed. Hence, instead of taking his departure immediately, he remained at the Goring- Streatley Inn, taking care each day to encounter Miss Tattersby on one pretext or another, hoping that their acquaintance would ripen into friendship, and then into something warmer. Nor was the hope a vain one, for when the fair Marjorie learned that it was the visitor's intention to remain in the neighborhood until her father's return, she herself bade him to make use of the old gentleman's library, to regard himself always as a welcome daytime guest. She even suggested pleasant walks through the neighboring country, little canoe trips up and down the Thames, which they might take together, of all of which Holmes promptly availed himself, with the result that, at the end of six days, both realized that they were designed for each other, and a passionate declaration followed which opened new vistas of happiness for both. Hence it was that, when the Reverend James Tattersby arrived at Goring-Streatley the following Monday night, unexpectedly, he was astounded to find sitting together in the moonlight, in the charming little English garden at the rear of his dwelling, two persons, one of whom was his daughter Marjorie and the other a young American curate to whom he had already been introduced as A. J. Raffles.

" 'We have met before, I think,' said Raffles, coldly, as his eye fell upon Holmes.

" 'I— er— do not recall the fact,' replied Holmes, meeting the steely stare of the home-comer with one of his own flinty glances.

" 'H'm!' ejaculated Raffles, non-plussed at the other's failure to recognize him. Then he shivered slightly. 'Suppose we go in-doors, it is a trifle chilly out here in the night air.'

"The whole thing, the greeting, the meeting, Holmes's demeanor and all, was so admirably handled that Marjorie Tattersby never guessed the truth, never even suspected the intense dramatic quality of the scene she had just gazed upon.

" 'Yes, let us go in-doors,' she acquiesced. 'Mr. Dutton has something to say to you, papa.'

" 'So I presumed,' said Raffles, dryly. 'And something that were better said to me alone, I fancy, eh?' he added.

" 'Quite so,' said Holmes, calmly. And in-doors they went. Marjorie immediately retired to the drawing-room, and Holmes and Raffles went at once to Tattersby's study.

" 'Well?' said Raffles, impatiently, when they were seated. 'I suppose you have come to get the Dorrington seal, Mr. Holmes.'

" 'Ah— you know me, then, Mr. Raffles?' said Holmes, with a pleasant smile.

" 'Perfectly,' said Raffles. 'I knew you at Dorrington Hall the moment I set eyes on you, and, if I hadn't, I should have known later, for the night after your departure Lord Dorrington took me into his confidence and revealed your identity to me.'

"'I am glad,' said Holmes. 'It saves me a great deal of unnecessary explanation. If you admit that you have the seal—"

" 'But I don't,' said Raffles. 'I mentioned it a moment ago, because Dorrington told me that was what you were after. I haven't got it, Mr. Holmes.'

" 'I know that,' observed Holmes, quietly. 'It is in the possession of Miss Tattersby, your daughter, Mr. Raffles.'

" 'She showed it to you, eh?' demanded Raffles, paling.

" 'No. She sealed a note to me with it, however,' Holmes replied.

" 'A note to you?' cried Raffles.

" 'Yes. One asking for my autograph. I have it in my possession,' said Holmes.

" 'And how do you know that she is the person from whom that note really came?' Raffles asked.

" 'Because I have seen the autograph which was sent in response to that request in your daughter's collection, Mr. Raffles,' said Holmes.

" 'So that you conclude—?' Raffles put in, hoarsely.

" 'I do not conclude; I begin by surmising, sir, that the missing seal of Lord Dorrington was stolen by one of two persons—yourself or Miss Marjorie Tattersby,' said Holmes, calmly.

" 'Sir!' roared Raffles, springing to his feet menacingly.

" 'Sit down, please,' said Holmes. 'You did not let me finish. I was going to add, Dr. Tattersby, that a week's acquaintance with that lovely woman, a full knowledge of her peculiarly exalted character and guileless nature, makes the alternative of guilt that affects her integrity clearly preposterous, which, by a very simple process of elimination, fastens the guilt, beyond all peradventure, on your shoulders. At any rate, the presence of the seal in this house will involve you in difficult explanations. Why is it here? How did it come here? Why are you known as the Reverend James Tattersby, the missionary, at Goring-Streatley, and as Mr. A. J. Raffles, the cricketer and man of the world, at Dorrington Hall, to say nothing of the Cliveden plate—'

" 'Damnation!' roared the Reverend James Tattersby again, springing to his feet and glancing instinctively at the long low book-shelves behind him.

" 'To say nothing,' continued Holmes, calmly lighting a cigarette, 'of the Cliveden plate now lying concealed behind those dusty theological tomes of yours which you never allow to be touched by any other hand than your own.'

" 'How did you know?' cried Raffles, hoarsely.

" 'I didn't,' laughed Holmes. 'You have only this moment informed me of the fact!'

"There was a long pause, during which Raffles paced the floor like a caged tiger.

" 'I'm a dangerous man to trifle with, Mr. Holmes,' he said, finally. 'I can shoot you down in cold blood in a second.'

" 'Very likely,' said Holmes. 'But you won't. It would add to the difficulties in which the Reverend James Tattersby is already deeply immersed. Your troubles are sufficient, as matters stand, without your having to explain to the world why you have killed a defenceless guest in your own study in cold blood.

" 'Well— what do you propose to do?' demanded Raffles, after another pause.

" 'Marry your daughter, Mr. Raffles, or Tattersby, whatever your permanent name is— I guess it's Tattersby in this case,' said Holmes. 'I love her and she loves me. Perhaps I should apologize for having wooed and won her without due notice to you, but you doubtless will forgive that. It's a little formality you sometimes overlook yourself when you happen to want something that belongs to somebody else.'

"What Raffles would have answered no one knows. He had no chance to reply, for at that moment Marjorie herself put her radiantly lovely little head in

at the door with a 'May I come in?' and a moment later she was gathered in Holmes's arms, and the happy lovers received the Reverend James Tattersby's blessing. They were married a week later, and, as far as the world is concerned, the mystery of the Dorrington seal and that of the Cliveden plate was never solved.

" 'It is compounding a felony, Raffles,' said Holmes, after the wedding, 'but for a wife like that, hanged if I wouldn't compound the ten commandments!'

"I hope," I ventured to put in at that point, "that the marriage ceremony was not performed by the Reverend James Tattersby."

"Not on your life!" retorted Raffles Holmes. "My father was too fond of my mother to permit of any flaw in his title. A year later I was born, and— well, here I am— son of one, grandson of the other, with hereditary traits from both strongly developed and ready for business. I want a literary partner— a man who will write me up as Bunny did Raffles, and Watson did Holmes, so that I may get a percentage on that part of the swag. I offer you the job, Jenkins. Those royalty statements show me that you are the man, and your books prove to me that you need a few fresh ideas. Come, what do you say? Will you do it?"

"My boy," said I, enthusiastically, "don't say another word. Will I? Well, just try me!"

And so it was that Raffles Holmes and I struck a bargain and became partners.

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12: Thurlow's Christmas Story

John Kendrick Bangs

From: *Ghosts I Have Met*, Harper & Brothers, 1898

1

(Being the Statement of Henry Thurlow Author, to George Currier, Editor of the "Idler," a Weekly Journal of Human Interest.)

I HAVE always maintained, my dear Currier, that if a man wishes to be considered sane, and has any particular regard for his reputation as a truth-teller, he would better keep silent as to the singular experiences that enter into his life. I have had many such experiences myself; but I have rarely confided them in detail, or otherwise, to those about me, because I know that even the most trustful of my friends would regard them merely as the outcome of an imagination unrestrained by conscience, or of a gradually weakening mind subject to hallucinations. I know them to be true, but until Mr. Edison or some other modern wizard has invented a search-light strong enough to lay bare the secrets of the mind and conscience of man, I cannot prove to others that they are not pure fabrications, or at least the conjurings of a diseased fancy. For instance, no man would believe me if I were to state to him the plain and indisputable fact that one night last month, on my way up to bed shortly after midnight, having been neither smoking nor drinking, I saw confronting me upon the stairs, with the moonlight streaming through the windows back of me, lighting up its face, a figure in which I recognized my very self in every form and feature. I might describe the chill of terror that struck to the very marrow of my bones, and wellnigh forced me to stagger backward down the stairs, as I noticed in the face of this confronting figure every indication of all the bad qualities which I know myself to possess, of every evil instinct which by no easy effort I have repressed heretofore, and realized that that *thing* was, as far as I knew, entirely independent of my true self, in which I hope at least the moral has made an honest fight against the immoral always. I might describe this chill, I say, as vividly as I felt it at that moment, but it would be of no use to do so, because, however realistic it might prove as a bit of description, no man would believe that the incident really happened; and yet it did happen as truly as I write, and it has happened a dozen times since, and I am certain that it will happen many times again, though I would give all that I possess to be assured that never again should that disquieting creation of mind or matter, whichever it may be, cross my path. The experience has made me afraid almost to be alone, and I have found myself unconsciously and uneasily glancing at my face in mirrors, in the plate-glass of show-windows on the

shopping streets of the city, fearful lest I should find some of those evil traits which I have struggled to keep under, and have kept under so far, cropping out there where all the world, all *my* world, can see and wonder at, having known me always as a man of right doing and right feeling. Many a time in the night the thought has come to me with prostrating force, what if that thing were to be seen and recognized by others, myself and yet not my whole self, my unworthy self unrestrained and yet recognizable as Henry Thurlow.

I have also kept silent as to that strange condition of affairs which has tortured me in my sleep for the past year and a half; no one but myself has until this writing known that for that period of time I have had a continuous, logical dream-life; a life so vivid and so dreadfully real to me that I have found myself at times wondering which of the two lives I was living and which I was dreaming; a life in which that other wicked self has dominated, and forced me to a career of shame and horror; a life which, being taken up every time I sleep where it ceased with the awakening from a previous sleep, has made me fear to close my eyes in forgetfulness when others are near at hand, lest, sleeping, I shall let fall some speech that, striking on their ears, shall lead them to believe that in secret there is some wicked mystery connected with my life. It would be of no use for me to tell these things. It would merely serve to make my family and my friends uneasy about me if they were told in their awful detail, and so I have kept silent about them. To you alone, and now for the first time, have I hinted as to the troubles which have oppressed me for many days, and to you they are confided only because of the demand you have made that I explain to you the extraordinary complication in which the Christmas story sent you last week has involved me. You know that I am a man of dignity; that I am not a school-boy and a lover of childish tricks; and knowing that, your friendship, at least, should have restrained your tongue and pen when, through the former, on Wednesday, you accused me of perpetrating a trifling, and to you excessively embarrassing, practical joke— a charge which, at the moment, I was too overcome to refute; and through the latter, on Thursday, you reiterated the accusation, coupled with a demand for an explanation of my conduct satisfactory to yourself, or my immediate resignation from the staff of the *Idler*. To explain is difficult, for I am certain that you will find the explanation too improbable for credence, but explain I must. The alternative, that of resigning from your staff, affects not only my own welfare, but that of my children, who must be provided for; and if my post with you is taken from me, then are all resources gone. I have not the courage to face dismissal, for I have not sufficient confidence in my powers to please elsewhere to make me easy in my mind, or, if I could please elsewhere, the certainty of finding the

immediate employment of my talents which is necessary to me, in view of the at present overcrowded condition of the literary field.

To explain, then, my seeming jest at your expense, hopeless as it appears to be, is my task; and to do so as completely as I can, let me go back to the very beginning.

In August you informed me that you would expect me to provide, as I have heretofore been in the habit of doing, a story for the Christmas issue of the *Idler*; that a certain position in the make -up was reserved for me, and that you had already taken steps to advertise the fact that the story would appear. I undertook the commission, and upon seven different occasions set about putting the narrative into shape. I found great difficulty, however, in doing so. For some reason or other I could not concentrate my mind upon the work. No sooner would I start in on one story than a better one, in my estimation, would suggest itself to me; and all the labor expended on the story already begun would be cast aside, and the new story set in motion. Ideas were plenty enough, but to put them properly upon paper seemed beyond my powers. One story, however, I did finish; but after it had come back to me from my typewriter I read it, and was filled with consternation to discover that it was nothing more nor less than a mass of jumbled sentences, conveying no idea to the mind— a story which had seemed to me in the writing to be coherent had returned to me as a mere bit of incoherence— formless, without ideas— a bit of raving. It was then that I went to you and told you, as you remember, that I was worn out, and needed a month of absolute rest, which you granted. I left my work wholly, and went into the wilderness, where I could be entirely free from everything suggesting labor, and where no summons back to town could reach me. I fished and hunted. I slept; and although, as I have already said, in my sleep I found myself leading a life that was not only not to my taste, but horrible to me in many particulars, I was able at the end of my vacation to come back to town greatly refreshed, and, as far as my feelings went, ready to undertake any amount of work. For two or three days after my return I was busy with other things. On the fourth day after my arrival you came to me, and said that the story must be finished at the very latest by October 15th, and I assured you that you should have it by that time. That night I set about it. I mapped it out, incident by incident, and before starting up to bed had actually written some twelve or fifteen hundred words of the opening chapter—it was to be told in four chapters. When I had gone thus far I experienced a slight return of one of my nervous chills, and, on consulting my watch, discovered that it was after midnight, which was a sufficient explanation of my nervousness: I was merely tired. I arranged my manuscripts on my table so that I might easily take up the work the following morning. I locked up the

windows and doors, turned out the lights, and proceeded up-stairs to my room.

It was then that I first came face to face with myself— that other self, in which I recognized, developed to the full, every bit of my capacity for an evil life.

Conceive of the situation if you can. Imagine the horror of it, and then ask yourself if it was likely that when next morning came I could by any possibility bring myself to my work-table in fit condition to prepare for you anything at all worthy of publication in the *Idler.* I tried. I implore you to believe that I did not hold lightly the responsibilities of the commission you had intrusted to my hands. You must know that if any of your writers has a full appreciation of the difficulties which are strewn along the path of an editor, *I*, who have myself had an editorial experience, have it, and so would not, in the nature of things, do anything to add to your troubles. You cannot but believe that I have made an honest effort to fulfil my promise to you. But it was useless, and for a week after that visitation was it useless for me to attempt the work. At the end of the week I felt better, and again I started in, and the story developed satisfactorily until— *it* came again. That figure which was my own figure, that face which was the evil counterpart of my own countenance, again rose up before me, and once more was I plunged into hopelessness.

Thus matters went on until the 14th day of October, when I received your peremptory message that the story must be forthcoming the following day. Needless to tell you that it was not forthcoming; but what I must tell you, since you do not know it, is that on the evening of the 15th day of October a strange thing happened to me, and in the narration of that incident, which I almost despair of your believing, lies my explanation of the discovery of October 16th, which has placed my position with you in peril.

At half-past seven o'clock on the evening of October 15th I was sitting in my library trying to write. I was alone. My wife and children had gone away on a visit to Massachusetts for a week. I had just finished my cigar, and had taken my pen in hand, when my front -door bell rang. Our maid, who is usually prompt in answering summonses of this nature, apparently did not hear the bell, for she did not respond to its clanging. Again the bell rang, and still did it remain unanswered, until finally, at the third ringing, I went to the door myself. On opening it I saw standing before me a man of, I should say, fifty odd years of age, tall, slender, pale-faced, and clad in sombre black. He was entirely unknown to me. I had never seen him before, but he had about him such an air of pleasantness and wholesomeness that I instinctively felt glad to see him, without knowing why or whence he had come.

"Does Mr. Thurlow live here?" he asked.

You must excuse me for going into what may seem to you to be petty details, but by a perfectly circumstantial account of all that happened that evening alone can I hope to give a semblance of truth to my story, and that it must be truthful I realize as painfully as you do.

"I am Mr. Thurlow," I replied.

"Henry Thurlow, the author?" he said, with a surprised look upon his face.

"Yes," said I; and then, impelled by the strange appearance of surprise on the man's countenance, I added, "don't I look like an author?"

He laughed, and candidly admitted that I was not the kind of looking man he had expected to find from reading my books, and then he entered the house in response to my invitation that he do so. I ushered him into my library, and, after asking him to be seated, inquired as to his business with me.

His answer was gratifying at least He replied that he had been a reader of my writings for a number of years, and that for some time past he had had a great desire, not to say curiosity, to meet me and tell me how much he had enjoyed certain of my stories.

"I'm a great devourer of books, Mr. Thurlow," he said, "and I have taken the keenest delight in reading your verses and humorous sketches. I may go further, and say to you that you have helped me over many a hard place in my life by your work. At times when I have felt myself worn out with my business, or face to face with some knotty problem in my career, I have found much relief in picking up and reading your books at random. They have helped me to forget my weariness or my knotty problems for the time being; and to-day, finding myself in this town, I resolved to call upon you this evening and thank you for all that you have done for me."

Thereupon we became involved in a general discussion of literary men and their works, and I found that my visitor certainly did have a pretty thorough knowledge of what has been produced by the writers of to-day. I was quite won over to him by his simplicity, as well as attracted to him by his kindly opinion of my own efforts, and I did my best to entertain him, showing him a few of my little literary treasures in the way of autograph letters, photographs, and presentation copies of well-known books from the authors themselves. From this we drifted naturally and easily into a talk on the methods of work adopted by literary men. He asked me many questions as to my own methods; and when I had in a measure outlined to him the manner of life which I had adopted, telling him of my days at home, how little detail office-work I had, he seemed much interested with the picture— indeed, I painted the picture of my daily routine in almost too perfect colors, for, when I had finished, he observed quietly that I appeared to him to lead the ideal life, and added that he supposed I knew very little unhappiness.

The remark recalled to me the dreadful reality, that through some perversity of fate I was doomed to visitations of an uncanny order which were practically destroying my usefulness in my profession and my sole financial resource.

"Well," I replied, as my mind reverted to the unpleasant predicament in which I found myself, "I can't say that I know little unhappiness. As a matter of fact, I know a great deal of that undesirable thing. At the present moment I am very much embarrassed through my absolute inability to fulfil a contract into which I have entered, and which should have been filled this morning. I was due to-day with a Christmas story. The presses are waiting for it, and I am utterly unable to write it."

He appeared deeply concerned at the confession. I had hoped, indeed, that he might be sufficiently concerned to take his departure, that I might make one more effort to write the promised story. His solicitude, however, showed itself in another way. Instead of leaving me, he ventured the hope that he might aid me.

"What kind of a story is it to be?" he asked.

"Oh, the usual ghostly tale," I said, "with a dash of the Christmas flavor thrown in here and there to make it suitable to the season."

"Ah," he observed. "And you find your vein worked out?"

It was a direct and perhaps an impertinent question; but I thought it best to answer it, and to answer it as well without giving him any clew as to the real facts. I could not very well take an entire stranger into my confidence, and describe to him the extraordinary encounters I was having with an uncanny other self. He would not have believed the truth, hence I told him an untruth, and assented to his proposition.

"Yes," I replied, "the vein is worked out. I have written ghost stories for years now, serious and comic, and I am to-day at the end of my tether—compelled to move forward and yet held back."

"That accounts for it," he said, simply. "When I first saw you to -night at the door I could not believe that the author who had provided me with so much merriment could be so pale and worn and seemingly mirthless. Pardon me, Mr. Thurlow, for my lack of consideration when I told you that you did not appear as I had expected to find you."

I smiled my forgiveness, and he continued:

"It may be," he said, with a show of hesitation— "it may be that I have come not altogether inopportunely. Perhaps I can help you."

I smiled again. "I should be most grateful if you could," I said.

"But you doubt my ability to do so?" he put in. "Oh— well— yes— of course you do; and why shouldn't you? Nevertheless, I have noticed this: At

times when I have been baffled in my work a mere hint from another, from one who knew nothing of my work, has carried me on to a solution of my problem. I have read most of your writings, and I have thought over some of them many a time, and I have even had ideas for stories, which, in my own conceit, I have imagined were good enough for you, and I have wished that I possessed your facility with the pen that I might make of them myself what I thought you would make of them had they been ideas of your own."

The old gentleman's pallid face reddened as he said this, and while I was hopeless as to anything of value resulting from his ideas, I could not resist the temptation to hear what he had to say further, his manner was so deliciously simple, and his desire to aid me so manifest. He rattled on with suggestions for a half-hour. Some of them were good, but none were new. Some were irresistibly funny, and did me good because they made me laugh, and I hadn't laughed naturally for a period so long that it made me shudder to think of it, fearing lest I should forget how to be mirthful. Finally I grew tired of his persistence, and, with a very ill-concealed impatience, told him plainly that I could do nothing with his suggestions, thanking him, however, for the spirit of kindliness which had prompted him to offer them. He appeared somewhat hurt, but immediately desisted, and when nine o'clock came he rose up to go. As he walked to the door he seemed to be undergoing some mental struggle, to which, with a sudden resolve, he finally succumbed, for, after having picked up his hat and stick and donned his overcoat, he turned to me and said:

"Mr. Thurlow, I don't want to offend you. On the contrary, it is my dearest wish to assist you. You have helped me, as I have told you. Why may I not help you?"

"I assure you, sir—" I began, when he interrupted me.

"One moment, please," he said, putting his hand into the inside pocket of his black coat and extracting from it an envelope addressed to me. "Let me finish: it is the whim of one who has an affection for you. For ten years I have secretly been at work myself on a story. It is a short one, but it has seemed good to me. I had a double object in seeking you out to-night. I wanted not only to see you, but to read my story to you. No one knows that I have written it; I had intended it as a surprise to my— to my friends. I had hoped to have it published somewhere, and I had come here to seek your advice in the matter. It is a story which I have written and rewritten and rewritten time and time again in my leisure moments during the ten years past, as I have told you. It is not likely that I shall ever write another. I am proud of having done it, but I should be prouder yet if it— if it could in some way help you. I leave it with you, sir, to print or to destroy; and if you print it, to see it in type will be enough for me; to see your name signed to it will be a matter of pride to me.

No one will ever be the wiser, for, as I say, no one knows I have written it, and I promise you that no one shall know of it if you decide to do as I not only suggest but ask you to do. No one would believe me after it has appeared as *yours,* even if I should forget my promise and claim it as my own. Take it. It is yours. You are entitled to it as a slight measure of repayment for the debt of gratitude I owe you."

He pressed the manuscript into my hands, and before I could reply had opened the door and disappeared into the darkness of the street. I rushed to the sidewalk and shouted out to him to return, but I might as well have saved my breath and spared the neighborhood, for there was no answer. Holding his story in my hand, I re-entered the house and walked back into my library, where, sitting and reflecting upon the curious interview, I realized for the first time that I was in entire ignorance as to my visitor's name and address.

I opened the envelope hoping to find them, but they were not there. The envelope contained merely a finely written manuscript of thirty odd pages, unsigned.

And then I read the story. When I began it was with a half-smile upon my lips, and with a feeling that I was wasting my time. The smile soon faded, however; after reading the first paragraph there was no question of wasted time. The story was a masterpiece. It is needless to say to you that I am not a man of enthusiasms. It is difficult to arouse that emotion in my breast, but upon this occasion I yielded to a force too great for me to resist. I have read the tales of Hoffmann and of Poe, the wondrous romances of De La Motte Fouque, the unfortunately little-known tales of the lamented Fitz-James O'Brien, the weird tales of writers of all tongues have been thoroughly sifted by me in the course of my reading, and I say to you now that in the whole of my life I never read one story, one paragraph, one line, that could approach in vivid delineation, in weirdness of conception, in anything, in any quality which goes to make up the truly great story, that story which came into my hands as I have told you. I read it once and was amazed. I read it a second time and was— tempted. It was mine. The writer himself had authorized me to treat it as if it were my own; had voluntarily sacrificed his own claim to its authorship that he might relieve me of my very pressing embarrassment. Not only this; he had almost intimated that in putting my name to his work I should be doing him a favor. Why not do so, then, I asked myself; and immediately my better self rejected the idea as impossible. How could I put out as my own another man's work and retain my self -respect? I resolved on another and better course— to send you the story in lieu of my own with a full statement of the circumstances under which it had come into my possession, when that demon rose up out of the floor at my side, this time more evil of aspect than before,

more commanding in its manner. With a groan I shrank back into the cushions of my chair, and by passing my hands over my eyes tried to obliterate forever the offending sight; but it was useless. The uncanny thing approached me, and as truly as I write sat upon the edge of my couch, where for the first time it addressed me.

"Fool!" it said, "how can you hesitate? Here is your position: you have made a contract which must be filled; you are already behind, and in a hopeless mental state. Even granting that between this and to-morrow morning you could put together the necessary number of words to fill the space allotted to you, what kind of a thing do you think that story would make? It would be a mere raving like that other precious effort of August. The public, if by some odd chance it ever reached them, would think your mind was utterly gone; your reputation would go with that verdict. On the other hand, if you do not have the story ready by to-morrow, your hold on the *Idler* will be destroyed. They have their announcements printed, and your name and portrait appear among those of the prominent contributors. Do you suppose the editor and publisher will look leniently upon your failure?"

"Considering my past record, yes," I replied. "I have never yet broken a promise to them."

"Which is precisely the reason why they will be severe with you. You, who have been regarded as one of the few men who can do almost any kind of literary work at will— you, of whom it is said that your 'brains are on tap'—will they be lenient with *you?* Bah! Can't you see that the very fact of your invariable readiness heretofore is going to make your present unreadiness a thing incomprehensible?"

"Then what shall I do?" I asked. "If I can't, I can't, that is all."

"You can. There is the story in your hands. Think what it will do for you. It is one of the immortal stories—"

"You have read it, then?" I asked.

"Haven't you?"

"Yes— but—"

"It is the same," it said, with a leer and a contemptuous shrug. "You and I are inseparable. Aren't you glad?" it added, with a laugh that grated on every fibre of my being. I was too overwhelmed to reply, and it resumed: "It is one of the immortal stories. We agree to that. Published over your name, your name will live. The stuff you write yourself will give you present glory; but when you have been dead ten years people won't remember your name even— unless I get control of you, and in that case there is a very pretty though hardly a literary record in store for you."

Again it laughed harshly, and I buried my face in the pillows of my couch, hoping to find relief there from this dreadful vision.

"Curious," it said. "What you call your decent self doesn't dare look me in the eye! What a mistake people make who say that the man who won't look you in the eye is not to be trusted! As if mere brazenness were a sign of honesty; really, the theory of decency is the most amusing thing in the world. But come, time is growing short. Take that story. The writer gave it to you. Begged you to use it as your own. It is yours. It will make your reputation, and save you with your publishers. How can you hesitate?"

"I shall not use it!" I cried, desperately.

"You must— consider your children. Suppose you lose your connection with these publishers of yours?"

"But it would be a crime."

"Not a bit of it. Whom do you rob? A man who voluntarily came to you, and gave you that of which you rob him. Think of it as it is— and act, only act quickly. It is now midnight."

The tempter rose up and walked to the other end of the room, whence, while he pretended to be looking over a few of my books and pictures, I was aware he was eyeing me closely, and gradually compelling me by sheer force of will to do a thing which I abhorred. And I— I struggled weakly against the temptation, but gradually, little by little, I yielded, and finally succumbed altogether. Springing to my feet, I rushed to the table, seized my pen, and signed my name to the story.

"There!" I said. "It is done. I have saved my position and made my reputation, and am now a thief!"

"As well as a fool," said the other, calmly. "You don't mean to say you are going to send that manuscript in as it is?"

"Good Lord!" I cried. "What under heaven have you been trying to make me do for the last half hour?"

"Act like a sane being," said the demon. "If you send that manuscript to Currier he'll know in a minute it isn't yours. He knows you haven't an amanuensis, and that handwriting isn't yours. Copy it."

"True!" I answered. "I haven't much of a mind for details to-night. I will do as you say."

I did so. I got out my pad and pen and ink, and for three hours diligently applied myself to the task of copying the story. When it was finished I went over it carefully, made a few minor corrections, signed it, put it in an envelope, addressed it to you, stamped it, and went out to the mail-box on the corner, where I dropped it into the slot, and returned home. When I had returned to my library my visitor was still there.

"Well," it said, "I wish you'd hurry and complete this affair. I am tired, and wish to go."

"You can't go too soon to please me," said I, gathering up the original manuscripts of the story and preparing to put them away in my desk.

"Probably not," it sneered. "I'll be glad to go too, but I can't go until that manuscript is destroyed. As long as it exists there is evidence of your having appropriated the work of another. Why, can't you see that? Burn it!"

"I can't see my way clear in crime!" I retorted. "It is not in my line."

Nevertheless, realizing the value of his advice, I thrust the pages one by one into the blazing log fire, and watched them as they flared and flamed and grew to ashes. As the last page disappeared in the embers the demon vanished. I was alone, and throwing myself down for a moment's reflection upon my couch, was soon lost in sleep.

It was noon when I again opened my eyes, and, ten minutes after I awakened, your telegraphic summons reached me.

"Come down at once," was what you said, and I went; and then came the terrible *dénouement,* and yet a *dénouement* which was pleasing to me since it relieved my conscience. You handed me the envelope containing the story.

"Did you send that?" was your question.

"I did— last night, or rather early this morning. I mailed it about three o'clock," I replied.

"I demand an explanation of your conduct," said you.

"Of what?" I asked.

"Look at your so-called story and see. If this is a practical joke, Thurlow, it's a damned poor one."

I opened the envelope and took from it the sheets I had sent you— twenty-four of them.

They were every one of them as blank as when they left the paper -mill!

You know the rest. You know that I tried to speak; that my utterance failed me; and that, finding myself unable at the time to control my emotions, I turned and rushed madly from the office, leaving the mystery unexplained. You know that you wrote demanding a satisfactory explanation of the situation or my resignation from your staff.

This, Currier, is my explanation. It is all I have. It is absolute truth. I beg you to believe it, for if you do not, then is my condition a hopeless one. You will ask me perhaps for a *résumé* of the story which I thought I had sent you.

It is my crowning misfortune that upon that point my mind is an absolute blank. I cannot remember it in form or in substance. I have racked my brains for some recollection of some small portion of it to help to make my explanation more credible, but, alas! it will not come back to me. If I were

dishonest I might fake up a story to suit the purpose, but I am not dishonest. I came near to doing an unworthy act; I did do an unworthy thing, but by some mysterious provision of fate my conscience is cleared of that.

Be sympathetic Currier, or, if you cannot, be lenient with me this time. *Believe, believe, believe*, I implore you. Pray let me hear from you at once.

(Signed) HENRY THURLOW.

2

(*Being a Note from George Currier, Editor of the "Idler" to Henry Thurlow, Author*.)

YOUR EXPLANATION has come to hand. As an explanation it isn't worth the paper it is written on, but we are all agreed here that it is probably the best bit of fiction you ever wrote. It is accepted for the Christmas issue. Enclosed please find check for one hundred dollars.

Dawson suggests that you take another month up in the Adirondacks. You might put in your time writing up some account of that dream -life you are leading while you are there. It seems to me there are possibilities in the idea. The concern will pay all expenses. What do you say?

(*Signed*) Yours ever, G. C.

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13: The City of Dreadful Night

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

The (New York) Sunday World, 13 Aug 1905

"DURING THE recent warmed-over spell," said my friend Carney, driver of express wagon No. 8,606, "a good many opportunities was had of observing human nature through peekaboo waists.

"The Park Commissioner and the Commissioner of Polis and the Forestry Commission gets together and agrees to let the people sleep in the parks until the Weather Bureau gets the thermometer down again to a living basis. So they draws up open-air resolutions and has them O.K.'d by the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Comstock and the Village Improvement Mosquito Exterminating Society of South Orange, N. J.

"When the proclamation was made opening up to the people by special grant the public parks that belong to 'em, there was a general exodus into Central Park by the communities existing along its borders. In ten minutes after sundown you'd have thought that there was an undress rehearsal of a potato famine in Ireland and a Kishineff massacre. They come by families, gangs, clambake societies, clans, clubs and tribes from all sides to enjoy a cool sleep on the grass. Them that didn't have oil stoves brought along plenty of blankets, so as not to be upset with the cold and discomforts of sleeping outdoors. By building fires of the shade trees and huddling together in the bridle paths, and burrowing under the grass where the ground was soft enough, the likes of 5,000 head of people successfully battled against the night air in Central Park alone.

"Ye know I live in the elegant furnished apartment house called the Beersheba Flats, over against the elevated portion of the New York Central Railroad.

"When the order come to the flats that all hands must turn out and sleep in the park, according to the instructions of the consulting committee of the City Club and the Murphy Draying, Returfing and Sodding Company, there was a look of a couple of fires and an eviction all over the place.

"The tenants began to pack up feather beds, rubber boots, strings of garlic, hot-water bags, portable canoes and scuttles of coal to take along for the sake of comfort. The sidewalk looked like a Russian camp in Oyama's line of march. There was wailing and lamenting up and down stairs from Danny Geoghegan's flat on the top floor to the apartments of Missis Goldsteinupski on the first.

" 'For why,' says Danny, coming down and raging in his blue yarn socks to the janitor, 'should I be turned out of me comfortable apartments to lay in the

dirty grass like a rabbit? 'Tis like Jerome to stir up trouble wid small matters like this instead of—'

" 'Whist!' says Officer Reagan on the sidewalk, rapping with his club. ''Tis not Jerome. 'Tis by order of the Polis Commissioner. Turn out every one of yez and hike yerselves to the park.'

"Now, 'twas a peaceful and happy home that all of us had in them same Beersheba Flats. The O'Dowds and the Steinowitzes and the Callahans and the Cohens and the Spizzinellis and the McManuses and the Spiegelmayers and the Joneses—all nations of us, we lived like one big family together. And when the hot nights come along we kept a line of children reaching from the front door to Kelly's on the corner passing along the cans of beer from one to another without the trouble of running after it. And with no more clothing on than is provided for in the statutes, sitting in all the windies, with a cool growler in every one, and your feet out in the air, and the Rosenstein girls singing on the fire-escape of the sixth floor, and Patsy Rourke's flute going in the eighth, and the ladies calling each other synonyms out the windies, and now and then a breeze sailing in over Mister Depew's Central—I tell you the Beersheba Flats was a summer resort that made the Catskills look like a hole in the ground. With his person full of beer and his feet out the windy and his old woman frying pork chops over a charcoal furnace and the childher dancing in cotton slips on the sidewalk around the organ-grinder and the rent paid for a week—what does a man want better on a hot night than that? And then comes this ruling of the polis driving people out o' their comfortable homes to sleep in parks—'twas for all the world like a ukase of them Russians—'twill be heard from again at next election time.

"Well, then, Officer Reagan drives the whole lot of us to the park and turns us in by the nearest gate. 'Tis dark under the trees, and all the children sets up to howling that they want to go home.

" 'Ye'll pass the night in this stretch of woods and scenery,' says Officer Reagan. ''Twill be fine and imprisonment for insoolting the Park Commissioner and the Chief of the Weather Bureau if ye refuse. I'm in charge of thirty acres between here and the Agyptian Monument, and I advise ye to give no trouble. 'Tis sleeping on the grass yez all have been condemned to by the authorities. Yez'll be permitted to leave in the morning, but ye must retoorn be night. Me orders was silent on the subject of bail, but I'll find out if 'tis required and there'll be bondsmen at the gate.'

"There being no lights except along the automobile drives, us 179 tenants of the Beersheba Flats prepared to spend the night as best we could in the raging forest. Them that brought blankets and kindling wood was best off. They got fires started and wrapped the blankets round their heads and laid

down, cursing, in the grass. There was nothing to see, nothing to drink, nothing to do. In the dark we had no way of telling friend or foe except by feeling the noses of 'em. I brought along me last winter overcoat, me tooth-brush, some quinine pills and the red quilt off the bed in me flat. Three times during the night somebody rolled on me quilt and stuck his knees against the Adam's apple of me. And three times I judged his character by running me hand over his face, and three times I rose up and kicked the intruder down the hill to the gravelly walk below. And then some one with a flavour of Kelly's whiskey snuggled up to me, and I found his nose turned up the right way, and I says: 'Is that you, then, Patsey?' and he says, 'It is, Carney. How long do you think it'll last?'

" 'I'm no weather-prophet,' says I, 'but if they bring out a strong anti-Tammany ticket next fall it ought to get us home in time to sleep on a bed once or twice before they line us up at the polls.'

" 'A-playing of my flute into the airshaft, says Patsey Rourke, 'and a-perspiring in me own windy to the joyful noise of the passing trains and the smell of liver and onions and a-reading of the latest murder in the smoke of the cooking is well enough for me,' says he. 'What is this herding us in grass for, not to mention the crawling things with legs that walk up the trousers of us, and the Jersey snipes that peck at us, masquerading under the name and denomination of mosquitoes. What is it all for Carney, and the rint going on just the same over at the flats?'

" ''Tis the great annual Municipal Free Night Outing Lawn Party,' says I, 'given by the polis, Hetty Green and the Drug Trust. During the heated season they hold a week of it in the principal parks. 'Tis a scheme to reach that portion of the people that's not worth taking up to North Beach for a fish fry.'

" 'I can't sleep on the ground,' says Patsey, 'wid any benefit. I have the hay fever and the rheumatism, and me ear is full of ants.'

"Well, the night goes on, and the ex-tenants of the Flats groans and stumbles around in the dark, trying to find rest and recreation in the forest. The children is screaming with the coldness, and the janitor makes hot tea for 'em and keeps the fires going with the signboards that point to the Tavern and the Casino. The tenants try to lay down on the grass by families in the dark, but you're lucky if you can sleep next to a man from the same floor or believing in the same religion. Now and then a Murpby, accidental, rolls over on the grass of a Rosenstein, or a Cohen tries to crawl under the O'Grady bush, and then there's a feeling of noses and somebody is rolled down the hill to the driveway and stays there. There is some hair-pulling among the women folks, and everybody spanks the nearest howling kid to him by the sense of feeling only, regardless of its parentage and ownership. 'Tis hard to keep up the social

distinctions in the dark that flourish by daylight in the Beersheba Flats. Mrs. Rafferty, that despises the asphalt that a Dago treads on, wakes up in the morning with her feet in the bosom of Antonio Spizzinelli. And Mike O'Dowd, that always threw peddlers downstairs as fast as he came upon 'em, has to unwind old Isaacstein's whiskers from around his neck, and wake up the whole gang at daylight. But here and there some few got acquainted and overlooked the discomforts of the elements. There was five engagements to be married announced at the flats the next morning.

"About midnight I gets up and wrings the dew out of my hair, and goes to the side of the driveway and sits down. At one side of the park I could see the lights in the streets and houses; and I was thinking how happy them folks was who could chase the duck and smoke their pipes at their windows, and keep cool and pleasant like nature intended for 'em to.

"Just then an automobile stops by me, and a fine-looking, well-dressed man steps out.

" 'Me man,' says he, 'can you tell me why all these people are lying around on the grass in the park? I thought it was against the rules.'

" ''Twas an ordinance,' says I, 'just passed by the Polis Department and ratified by the Turf Cutters' Association, providing that all persons not carrying a license number on their rear axles shall keep in the public parks until further notice. Fortunately, the orders comes this year during a spell of fine weather, and the mortality, except on the borders of the lake and along the automobile drives, will not be any greater than usual.'

" 'Who are these people on the side of the hill?' asks the man.

" 'Sure,' says I, 'none others than the tenants of the Beersheba Flats—a fine home for any man, especially on hot nights. May daylight come soon!'

" 'They come here be night,' says he, 'and breathe in the pure air and the fragrance of the flowers and trees. They do that,' says he, 'coming every night from the burning heat of dwellings of brick and stone.'

" 'And wood,' says I. 'And marble and plaster and iron.'

" 'The matter will be attended to at once,' says the man, putting up his book.

" 'Are ye the Park Commissioner?' I asks.

" 'I own the Beersheba Flats,' says he. 'God bless the grass and the trees that give extra benefits to a man's tenants. The rents shall be raised fifteen per cent. to-morrow. Good-night,' says he."

14: Obsession

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Sydney Mail 28 Dec 1932

'WHEN this man Carson comes, show him right in; and see that we are left alone,' said Hooke, twisting a chair into a position before his desk and measuring how the light rays would fall from the window upon anyone sitting there. A grim smile of satisfaction puckered on his lips; he would be able from his seat at the desk to watch every quiver of Carson's face. He became aware that Maud Carruthers, instead of going, was standing, with a queer look on her face, looking at him.

'He seems to be very desperate,' she said.

'You needn't have any fear for me,' he said.

'I haven't.' She approached the desk and leaned over it towards him, earnestness in her manner. 'It is for him. The poor man is nearly broken. When he came yesterday and pleaded with me to get you to see him he nearly went on his knees. He nearly cried. He almost raved. He has a wife and children—'

Hooke was surprised, and showed it in his stare. 'Whatever happens to Carson, he deserves it,' he snapped.

'His wife and children don't,' said his secretary quickly.

'His wife does.'

'Then his children don't.'

He stared at her again, angrily; her face flooded with red, but she stared back unflinchingly.

'Miss Carruthers, kindly mind your own business. Whatever Carson told you, you know nothing about this case.'

'It's not like you, Mr. Hooke,' she said, a struggle with tears in her voice, as she continued to stand up to him. 'You are kind to people usually, in spite of pretending not to be inclined that way. But with this Mr. Carson—'

'You can go, Miss Carruthers,' he snapped. 'I won't need you again after Carson arrives; so you can go whenever you like.'

Rebuffed, tears in her eyes because of it, she suddenly abandoned her intention of pleading further with him and moved to the door. There was a grace in her movement which caused his eye to follow her.

'Miss Carruthers,' he said, holding her as she reached the door, 'to-morrow, when this matter is settled, I'll get you to have lunch with me, and I'll explain the business.'

'When this matter is settled I don't want to have lunch with you!' The words snapped out vehemently, and in an instant the door was closed behind her.

HOOKE smiled grimly. It was amusing to think that after he had looked and planned for this moment for years, a slip of a girl who happened to be his secretary should try to turn him aside from the enjoyment of his revenge.

He had sworn to himself that Carson should pay— Lena, too. Surely they deserved to pay! Hooke's mind flashed back to the time the news had come to him in France, and the madness that came upon him. It was a despicable thing; he and Lena might not have got on too well together, for she hated poverty; it had been almost a relief to get away from her, even to the war, which, after all, was not such a bad. war to those who took it easily. He had made sacrifices for her, going on the fractional pay the married soldier drew. It was revolting, to think that she should do what she had done; that, with her husband away fighting, she should have turned to this liaison with a man who stayed at home— a cold-footer.... On leave, in a freakish moment he had flung back to Lena sufficient evidence to enable her to get a divorce. Why should he have done that— making matters easy for them?

AFTER the war he had lingered until the last of the troops returned. The necessity of providing for Lena having ceased with her divorce, he had money to spend, and could find hectic enjoyments in the metropolis of the world. But the dawdling had given no satisfaction; the mad anger at her betrayal haunted him until—

The train of his thought was interrupted, in the middle of a gust of anger at the recollection of the torture he had suffered, by the opening of the door.

Miss Carruthers stood there for only a moment; then she was gone, and Carson came into the room, cringingly. Hooke noted, with satisfaction, the palsy of his hands.

'Look, Hooke,' he said, 'you're a business man, and I want to talk sensibly to you about that bill of mine. If you enforce it now you'll get probably nothing. It'll only bring a crash, and I'm so deep in it that everything will go. Give me six months and you'll have the money in full.'

'You know I don't want that,' said Hooke, an icy significance in his tone. It tore from Carson the mask he had tried to assume.

'For God's sake, Hooke, can't you have any mercy? I admit what I did to you, but heaven knows I've suffered for it. You surely don't mean to carry revenge to the limit, now that all these years have passed?'

'I've suffered a bit myself,' said Hooke grimly.

'Yes, but— look at you! Look at me! You're prosperous; you don't look as if you are unhappy. Why should you want to break me?'

'Sit down and I'll tell you,' said Hooke calmly. 'For three years I went mad when I learnt what you and Lena had done to me. I dreaded even to return to

Australia, to find that the reception that was waiting for other men was not there for me. Then, quite suddenly, all the anger I felt settled into a purpose— a determination to make you and Lena pay. I concentrated on that. I came back, and didn't find any difficulty in getting a footing. I built up steadily with the idea of smashing you. And now I've done it!'

'I didn't know that it was you all the time; I have been hit right and left,' said Carson miserably.

'It was me!' said Hooke, with satisfaction. 'I've been undermining you for years. I've given premiums upon occasion to acquire your liabilities and harass you for settlement. And now you— the man who took another man's wife when he was away at the war— you came to me crawling.'

'When I gave Goldsmith that bill—'

'I was Goldsmith,' said Hooke. 'If you hadn't been so frantic for money you'd have wondered how a moneylender like Goldsmith would advance such a sum on such terms.'

'What good will it do you?' mumbled Carson helplessly. 'It will smash me, of course— everything will go and you'll get nothing.'

'It will do more than that,' said Hooke. 'What about Carter's endorsement on the renewal?'

Carson leapt from the chair shaking, but sat down again with an attempt to assume calmness. 'What about it?' he said.

'You know,' challenged Hooke. 'We— Goldsmith and I— only gave you the chance of that renewal to land you properly. Of course, we knew that Carter wouldn't put on his signature again after the Glengarry Company exposure; you told Goldsmith so yourself when you tried to get him to take another endorsement. But you were desperate. You got Carter's signature— or something that looks like it. And you know the penalty for forgery.'

CARSON'S jaw sagged directly he saw what was coming; before the end his head was sunk into his hands... Hooke, staring at him, tried to gloat upon his complete humiliation, but somehow failed.

'I can understand your feeling for Lena and myself, perhaps,' said Carson between his hands, 'but the children haven't done you any harm.'

'I'm sorry for the children,' said Hooke coldly. 'If Lena lets them go I'm prepared to pay for them at a school.'

'If Lena lets them go?' asked Carson blankly, uncovering his face. 'It's for me to say.'

'Carson, within a week or so you'll either be in gaol— or out of the world. I'm not going to take any action about that bill until to-morrow; that'll give you time to take what most men would regard as the best way.'

He had risen with an air of finality, and Carson rose, too, staring at him fascinated. 'Lena will be the one to decide. If she likes to give up the children I'll see about the school. But she'll have to give them up and fend for herself. She deserves punishment, too.'

'You— you want me to commit suicide? You— you want to murder me?'

'In olden days it used to be done with a sword,' said Hooke. 'They don't permit that nowadays.'

He led the way towards the door with a gesture of dismissal, but a sharp laugh caused him to turn. It was to see a different Carson, upright and defiant.

'All right, Hooke! You've shown me the way. I'll do it; and much good may it do you. I wonder I didn't do it before— long ago! It was only the kids held me. Let me tell you, Hooke, that when I am dead it is I who will have the revenge— when you think of how you ruined a man and killed him! You'll think of yourself as a murderer; and you'll think, then, of how ungrateful you were to me!'

'Ungrateful to you?'

'That's what I said. You know what living with Lena was— you went away to the war to escape from it. And *I* know what it is, too. Good God! If I did wrong to you in what we did when you were at the war I've paid for it; it is only the children that have held me. And you might have had all that instead of me, but for me.'

HOOKE stared at him, realising suddenly a strange new point of view.

'And think of all I've done for you! I've made you!' Carson laughed crazily. 'You were just a clerk before you went to the war; and where do you suppose you would have got to, living with Lena? It was easy for you with your war distinctions and the rank you had won to get on when you returned. It gave you a standing.' He laughed deliriously again. 'And here you are, the chap who used to be a clerk, rich, prosperous, and happy, with a fine girl like that secretary of yours in love with you!'

'What?' cried Hooke. It was as if his obsession had been a cloud about him, and the crazy mouthings of the half-demented Carson were showing him things to which he had been blind.

'And I'm the man to whom you owe all this— to me, whom you've ruined! Well, have your rotten triumph, if you want it. I'm going, and—'

'Hold hard a moment, Carson,' called Hooke, and he could see Maud Carruthers, who had apparently not gone home as instructed, through the now opened door, as Carson paused.

'I'm not serious about that bill; in fact, I'm going to cancel the liability. Miss Carruthers, write a letter to-morrow to Mr. Goldsmith instructing him to return Mr. Carson's bill to him.'

'I KNEW you would do something like that,' said Maud when the overwhelmed Carson, weeping in his relief, had gone.

Her eyes were glowing, and Hooke felt grateful to Carson for showing him something to which he had been blind.

'I said we'd have lunch together when the business was settled,' said Hooke. 'As you have stayed, supposing we make it dinner to-night instead?'

15: H.M.S. *Calamity*

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

The Bulletin, 19 Mar 1941

NICODEMUS PHAROAH, the Gunner, disrespectfully alluded to in H.M.S. *Sorceress* as 'Aboukir Nick,' delivered himself of his opinion with characteristic pomposity as he regarded the approaching French 50-gun, two-decked ship *Lenoir* through the open aftermost starboard gun port.

'She may have heavier metal than we've got, but what I say's this. Some 'as guns an' can use 'em— some 'as more guns an' can't make use of 'em proper. We'll win. But, mark my words, the Witch is a ship wi' a curse. Somethink 'orrid'll 'appen to us afore yon frog-eater strikes 'is flag. You can take it from me. Our ship ain't called Calamity throughout the Fleet for nothink. Now, then, you swabs,' he roared to the guns' crews lining each side of the frigate's main deck, 'see that the matches are alight!'

He stood on a gun and stared out over the foam-capped waters at the approaching *Lenoir*, flying the tricolor from her main topmast, and, as a quickly dissolving cloud of white smoke appeared ahead of the Frenchman, called up to the captain on the poop:

'She's opened fire, sir!'

Captain Mayfield nodded down at Mr. Pharoah, and spoke to his first lieutenant, standing beside him at the rail above the quarter-deck. 'We'll hold our fire, Martin. The first broadside's too precious to waste. We'll wait till we're sure of every shot going home in her timbers.'

Another woolly puff of smoke from the Frenchman's starboard bow, and presently a roundshot howled overhead between the masts.

'Better!' cried Number One.

Captain Mayfield took a glance aloft at the shivering topsails.

'Stand by, Mr. Golightly!' he shouted suddenly through his trumpet to the second lieutenant, in charge of the starboard guns. 'Give it to her as your guns bear!' Then, to the two men at the big wheel below his feet at the break of the poop:

'Helm over— hard! Hold her! Steady, now— stead-ee—'

The *Sorceress* came round with flapping canvas, paused a little, and then rushed down by the starboard side of the Frenchman, whilst Mr. Golightly's guns exploded successively, though almost together, in a rending crash that shook the ship from truck to keel. A stifling volume of smoke enshrouded the

decks momentarily, ere the gale tore it to shreds. Every shot had found lodgment in the upper works of the *Lenoir*.

'Splendid!' yelled the first lieutenant, waving his cocked hat as he cheered, and then disappeared as a ball from the Frenchman struck the deck at his feet.

The wind-swept fight went on, and as the sun sank to the horizon line the *Lenoir* had become a burning inferno. When dusk came, the British frigate, scuppers running blood and bulwarks torn and shattered, swung off from the other, close-hauled, beating her way to windward of the blazing wreck. Roaring flames were spouting from the latter's broken bows, turning the darkening, heaving waters blood-red. Then suddenly the flames went out, and nothing remained in the picture but darkness and the faint phosphorescence of the curling crests of the waves.

'Gone !' cried the captain of the *Sorceress*. 'But, dear God, what a calamity! Good Jack Martin— as fine a seaman and as fine a man as ever breathed! Calamity, indeed!'

BUT when he went below to his cabin Captain Mayfield realised that the death of his first lieutenant was not the only misfortune that had overtaken H.M.S. *Sorceress*. Right aft in the Great Cabin, in the curve of the paned windows looking out upon the ship's creaming wake, stood athwartship the great walnut desk his wife had given him, and in each end of it, above the level of the writing surface, was a neat round hole, of the size that would be made by a 24 lb. cannon ball fired at a distance of not more than a dozen yards or so away. When he opened with some difficulty the jammed doors of the desk it was to find not nearly so much chaos as he had expected, but that his most particular and sacred line of pigeon-holes at the back had been completely removed. In the middle of the row had been a compartment a foot square in which were kept his most important personal papers, under an additional door and lock, and, most tremendously important of all, the secret orders from My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, which he was not to open until they were in the latitude of Table Bay, upon a cruise for which the ship was provisioned and equipped for two years.

Here was calamity indeed, and Robert Mayfield groaned aloud as he sank into a chair and contemplated dismally and dejectedly the neatly-wrecked desk. Calamity with a vengeance! He turned in his chair, and sent a hail along the cabin's length.

'Sentry! '

The marine outside the door stepped into the cabin.

'Pass on word for Mr. Golightly,' the captain ordered, and presently the second lieutenant, now acting Number One, came in from the quarter-deck,

his uniform scorched and powder-blackened, and a bloody bandage about his forehead which accentuated the paleness of his face. He paused inside the door and saluted, then leaned against the bulkhead in sheer uncontrollable weariness.

'You sent for me, sir?'

'Yes, Golightly. You are, of course, in poor Martin's place now. Look here— here's trouble, indeed.' He waved a hand at the wrecked desk. 'The ship's earned her nickname once again. My secret orders— all gone. We must bear up for the Cape of Good Hope, and see what the Admiral has to say. Nothing else for it, I suppose? I meant to open them tonight— since we're just about in the position where my general instructions indicated that such was to be done. Did ever you hear of such a thing? We've lost our prize-money, the first lieutenant and all knowledge of the nature of our job.'

'Well, the ship's all right, sir. She's making a little water, but not more than the pumps can rid us of in an hour or two. Bad luck about Martin and losing our prize— but the orders gone, that's bad, indeed. Nothing but the Cape for it, I suppose, sir, as you say.'

After a little further conversation, Mr. Golightly presently took his leave, and went out on to the quarter-deck. Here he bade the midshipman of the watch to summon the crew on duty aft. For one decided course the new first lieutenant had made up his mind. There was to be no more lamentation of calamity.

'Look ye, men,' he said to them, crowded between the breeches of the quarter-deck guns facing him— 'the captain has appointed me to fill Mr. Martin's shoes, and I'm determined upon one thing of which I now give you all warning. There is a foolish tale that his Majesty's ship Sorceress is dogged by ill-luck. That isn't true. We have been in action with an enemy ship almost a third again more heavily armed than ourselves— and sent her to the bottom. Tis true we've lost the best first lieutenant a King's ship ever had— but, on the other hand, you've got me in his place'—he paused for the cheers and laughter he knew his fellow-seamen well enough to expect. 'Well, isn't that something? But this is what I want to tell ye. The first person I hear make use of the word 'calamity' goes to the masthead through each dog-watch for a week. That's all. Ship's company— off the quarter-deck!'

LIEUT. ROBERT GOLIGHTLY, R.N., told the finish of the story to his friend Major Charles Lake, second-in-command of the infantry regiment in garrison, in the latter's sitting-room at his quarters in the Military Barracks at Sydney. They had dined in the Mess, and the Major was listening to his friend's account of the voyage of H.M.S. *Sorceress* to Sydney.

'So that was the first thing I did as first lieutenant— made it plain to all hands that the *Witch* wasn't to be defamed in the future. All this silly talk about her being haunted by calamity and bad luck must cease. But I assure you that for the best part of a fortnight the mastheads were seldom unoccupied. Sailors love to grumble.'

'And did you succeed in giving them a better idea of the ship's good fortune?' asked the Major, smiling.

'No, I'm pretty sure I didn't—but I stifled discussion of her bad fortune. I managed to shut 'em up— at least, aboard the ship. Yet all the while I knew damned well the ship was unlucky, and if ever bad luck was proved it was in our case at the Cape of Good Hope. We shipped a cargo of it there.

'The captain reported himself to the admiral in command of the station as soon as we arrived in Table Bay, and 'twas the beginning of our misfortune that he and the admiral were not good friends. Some old feud about a girl they'd both wanted to marry, I believe. Whatever it was, Admiral Pomfrey undoubtedly scored a very considerable point against our captain when he came to solve our difficulties for us.'

'And how was that?'

'He'd had no word about us from the Admiralty, though word was overdue, so didn't know any more than we did what the mission of the *Sorceress* was. That didn't matter much, and only meant waiting for a few weeks until the ship arrived in Table Bay. We might have enjoyed ourselves for a month or so in Capetown, if it hadn't been for the ill feeling betwixt Mayfield and the admiral. Pomfrey saw his chance, and promptly took it. Mayfield would do nothing but obey orders. And the orders were that we should proceed to Port Jackson and visit New Zealand, returning to the Cape in six months' time. "I cannot have your ship's company idling about here, Captain Mayfield," he said. "Such a cruise as this will very well fill in your time and keep your people employed, and when you return your orders will have doubtless arrived from Whitehall."

'The skipper didn't mind that so much— he had never been to New Holland, nor had I— but two days after his interview with Rear-Admiral Pomfrey we found the fly that was in the ointment. We were to carry out a couple of passengers, and the captain received a request to call again upon the admiral, when he'd be introduced to 'em. Well, that didn't matter much, either. Poor Jack Martin's cabin was available for one of the two, and the carpenter could easily knock together another apartment in a corner of the Great Cabin. So Captain Mayfield went along, quite pleased with everything, and only hoping that his passengers would prove agreeable company. In fact, he was rather glad to have them, before he made their acquaintance that morning. He was even more glad for a while after that, too, but the day his

eyes were opened he wasn't glad at all, only damned miserable. And mortally afraid.

ONE of our passengers was a member of the nobility— Lord Tenacres— and the other was his wife, who was as ignoble as they make em. I mean that. Good-looking as you'd like to see, but vulgar, common and utterly immoral. Never came across'a female like her. Gad, how her handsome face lit up as she stepped on to the quarter-deck when she came aboard! I was standing by the gangway, and it was positively awful the way her eyes gloated and her face flushed as she took in the vision of all those men in the ship, and realised she was the only woman amongst four hundred of us. Indecent, it was— there's no other word!'

'Ha!' laughed the Major. 'Something of a tigress, what!'

'A tigress! By gad, yes— a veritable beast of prey. But, of course, you've met her and her mountain of a husband? Twenty stone, Tenacres must weigh, if a pound. The queerest assorted couple I've ever met. Well, we pulled up our mudhook and sailed out of Table Bay, and the smoke of our salute to Admiral Pomfrey's flag had hardly drifted to looard before she began her little games. And the first she chose was Captain Mayfield.

'Now if ever there was what might be described as a 'good husband,' 'tis Bob Mayfield.

Faithfulness personified, our captain is. No wife in every port for that sailor. You can understand the shock I got when, in the middle watch, two nights out from Table Bay, he suddenly looms up alongside me on the poop, where I was keeping the watch.

' "Good God, Golightly," he whispers to me brokenly. "That infernal woman's in my sleeping cabin and won't go away. In the name of heaven, what's to be done? For God's sake, go and get her out!"

'Well, though I didn't relish the task, orders are orders, so down I went. There she was, seductively beautiful, in poor old Mayfield's berth— actually in his cot. I couldn't speak for a moment or two. But presently I managed to get out: "The captain's compliments, Lady Tenacres, but he's unfortunately detained on deck. Will you be so good as to come with me, if you please?" She looks at me a moment or two and smiles. "Oh, very well, Mr Golightly," she says, "you'll do as well!" Fact, I give you my word, Major!'

'Proceed, my dear Golightly!'

'My God, what a situation! She followed me from the berth, doubtless intending to come to my own cabin, when, by the blessing of a merciful Providence, we encountered his lordship her husband in the Great Cabin, come out in his dressing-gown to forage for some whisky.

'I escaped and went on deck, and reported to the captain. "My God!" he groaned. "That hound Pomfrey! I'll be even with him for this. But, by gad, Golightly, we must protect one another at least. But what of the ship's company? Pomfrey's a devil out of hell to put me into such a position as this. Oh, my God!" he groaned. He would not leave the deck till daylight. Most nights he spent as far as possible on deck, and ordered the marine sentry to be posted within the Great Cabin, instead of in his usual place outside.'

'Well, well,' laughed the Major, 'and the rest of 'em— the ship's company— how did they fare?'

'Major,' said Mr. Golightly dismally, though smiling a little, 'I'd blush to go into particulars. I had to shut my eyes to a very great deal. A truly terrible woman!'

'But how about her husband?'

'Oh, him. He ate enormous dinners each day, and drank bottles and bottles of the Cape of Good Hope wine he'd brought abroad. If he was aware of the lady's activities, he didn't seem to care. Tenacres's troubles! She might do as she liked, so long as she didn't interfere with his boozing and gormandising and sleeping. They were very well suited to each other. But what's amusing you in particular, Major?'

'I was just recalling an encounter I had with Mrs. Macquarie this afternoon, when I went for a ride round the Domain. I found the dear little lady seated at her favorite viewpoint at the end of Anson's Point— you know the stone seat that has been carved in the rock there? She was quite alone, and I dismounted to pay my respects. You know, of course, that Lord and Lady Tenacres have been staying at Government House, at his Excellency's express invitation so soon as he knew they were aboard the *Sorceress* when you arrived?'

'Yes— yes— I hope General Macquarie's safe!'

'He is— now,' laughed Major Lake. 'After extolling the view of the harbor from Anson's Point, Mrs. Macquarie told me that through her exertions the noble lord had obtained a lease for the time being of young Pilkington's house on the Rocks, while Mr. Pilkington's over in Van Diemen's Land on business of the Commissariat Department.

'She will find the view entrancing from Pilkington's verandah,' I ventured.

'Mrs. Macquarie smiled a little stiffly as she agreed with me. "And with Lady Tenacres over on the Rocks," she said, 'I shall be able to admire the view from Government House.' So there you are, Golightly. I think the Governor's safe, at any rate.'

'And so now, perhaps, is his Majesty's ship *Calamity*,' said Mr. Golightly slyly, 'for the Officers' Mess of the 46th is closer to the Rocks than our

anchorage in the Cove. But I think we really do justify our name, Major, after that voyage from the Cape. Don't you?'

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16: The Big Feller

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Argosy All-Story Weekly 29 Jan 1923

AS the night wore on toward its climax the Runt grew more fearful that his own blood might darken the floor of Pete Lamere's barber shop. It was always like that. Whenever he and the Big Feller pulled off anything his nerve got stringy just before the moment of success, of blows, of panting action. He was used to it, and he made himself stick. For of all possible things between heaven and hell, he most desired to be like the Big Feller.

If more than two aces showed up out of the deck when the Big Feller pulled his simple stunt, there would be trouble. It was time for him to do it now— a very fat jackpot. They were using matches for chips, and the pile in the center of the table looked like a double handful of jackstraws. Pete Lamere, the banker, had a shoe box full of dirty money— mostly fives and tens— at his elbow. His shop, headquarters for the sports of Twin Ponds, had been closed since eleven o'clock the night before, and for five hours he had been sitting in the curtained, airtight room with the bank growing.

There was Joe Tyler, the burly liveryman, with a face now as red as the plaid of his waistcoat, looming through the tobacco smoke. The Runt, whose complete name was Calvin Todd, figured that Tyler would be a bad man in a fight. He knew that the other two Twin Ponders, Murphy and Pierce, would be bad men— they were river drivers, and they had on their spiked boots. Lamere might or might not carry a knife. Anyhow, Todd had seen him bounce an objectionable rummy from the shop, and knew that he could handle himself.

Four of the enemy, if it came to a showdown. But Jake Anderson, the Big Feller, sat there as cool as a cucumber; roaring his bets from under a cascading mustache such as the Runt could never hope to raise. Jake, nevertheless, had one eye on the door and the other on the bank as the pot got to the point of slushing over. His mighty fist plowed across the table and spilled a handful of matches.

"Call!" he rumbled.

Everybody had stayed in, and there were some good hands, but nothing like the hand held by the Big Feller. He fanned out four aces and a deuce upon the table, pushing his chair back a little as he did so. The only trouble with his cards was that there was an odd ace in the hand of the liveryman. Just for an instant nobody said anything. Pete Lamere grew rigid, and his black eyes fastened themselves upon the face of Anderson. The river drivers leaned forward with that little hint of a movement which is preliminary to action. Joe

Tyler, with popping eyes, sat comparing the two hands. The Big Feller seized that moment and made it his own.

"They's something crooked here!" he thundered, leaping up with an apparently accidental kick which sent his chair out of the way. "Who dealt them cards?"

"I guess, me, dat you know more as anybody what's crooked!" replied Lamere.

Jake Anderson wasted no time. With a single movement of his big right paw he lifted the hanging lamp out of its frame and sent it smashing through a window, sash, glass, and curtain. In the half-second during which the lamp was a flaring arc in mid air, Cal Todd saw the left hand of his partner reach toward Pete Lamere.

While the Runt jumped for the corner that he had picked out beforehand, he knew exactly what was happening in the darkness. Lamere's hands had grasped the box of money. They would involuntarily lift to defend his eyes against the clutching fingers of Jake's left hand. Then Jake would snatch the shoe-box of bills. This much the Runt would have bet his life on; and he felt reasonably certain of the final result,

He crouched in his corner, with his hands ready in case the battle came his way; but the grunting, cursing heart of the struggle surged away from him and in the direction of the door. Out of the medley came a sudden rending of wood and a choked cry that meant serious harm to somebody. The uproar died as quickly as it had begun. The Runt shuddered, but he kept a catlike gaze upon the blackness in front of him, and at the first flare of a match he leaped forward with clenched fists and labored breath to play his part of innocence. Lamere was lighting a bracket lamp that had not been in use.

Murphy lay upon the wreck of a chair, with his head gashed from eyebrow to crown. The mouth of the barber was a smear. Joe Tyler was just laboring up to his hands and knees, with groans, when Pierce pushed back the door, that now hung upon one hinge, and stepped into the room. He stooped and picked up something from the floor.

"Got away— but he dropped a ten-spot, anyway, the son of a—!" he growled. Then he saw Murphy, and knelt beside him.

"Is he hurt bad?" whispered Todd.

"Nope!" The riverman shrugged. "But it's a mighty good thing his head is thick or it 'd be under the daisies for him! That was a whale of a wallop he got!"

"You, Todd! You know where dat big Jake Anderson come from?" asked Lamere, as he brought a basin of water and a towel for Murphy. "You was the one asked for him to play poker wit' us."

"Sure I do!" exploded the Runt, with an oath. And then he lied emphatically. "He lives over the lake in Vermont. I seen him in Vergennes— the crook!"

"Me, I go dere some time, maybe," said Lamere.

"You ain't the only one!" gasped Tyler, with hands still caressing his stomach. "If anybody can locate him I'll get the boys together and furnish horses to drive to hell and back after him!"

"Me too!" Todd shook his fist at the gray morning into which the Big Feller had vanished. "I didn't lose as much as some of you fellers, but I'm a dam' sight madder for it was me that got him into the game!"

"Ye-ah," agreed Lamere, speculatively. "You got him into dis game."

At which point in the conversation the Runt became very busy helping to bring Murphy back to the world of jackpots and fights, for he did not want the thought of that gathering to turn upon him. He did not want them to remember that he himself had been in Twin Ponds but six weeks, and only for half of that time a member of the select gathering that played for high stakes in the barber shop. He was glad when Joe Tyler said he was going home and to bed to forget that somebody had kicked him in the stomach— he was still more pleased when Murphy came to and he himself felt free to breathe the fresh air, alone.

Again the Runt had come through with a whole skin— but he believed it was the Big Feller's luck and not his own that turned the trick. He flagged the sleeper that went through Twin Ponds at daylight, rode south four stations, and took the next train north. That afternoon he landed in Amesville, a hundred miles north of Twin Ponds. He shook hands around and asked if anybody knew where he could get a job, just as he always did when he got home. He knew they knew that he didn't mean it.

The next day the Big Feller appeared, with a black eye and a lilt of the shoulders that defied anybody to speak about it. He found the Runt just as Todd had settled himself on the grass back of the Methodist church horse shed with a can of corn and a bag of crackers. In silence Anderson took the can and rimmed the top out with the blade of an enormous jack-knife. Half the crackers and most of the corn disappeared before it was his pleasure to talk. He thrust his knife into the sod to clean it, and then cut a chew from his plug.

"Well, Runt," he said, "they was four hundred and seventy-eight dollars in that box. Leastways they was that much when I got time to count it."

The Runt would have given a decade from the other end of his life, precious as that life in its entirety was to him, if he could have played the Big Feller's part, and in the way that the Big Feller played it.

"I told 'em you lived in Vergennes," said Todd. "That Lamere, he acted like he might want to get even."

"Ye-ah," agreed Anderson. "They's plenty of folks would like to get even with me."

He made the statement carelessly, as a god might speak of the curses of mortals. That was the way Calvin Todd wanted to feel; but he was always remembering that he weighed only a hundred and thirty pounds, that he could not bull through a crowd of huskies on his size, in short that he was not the Big Feller.

Jake now drew from a waistcoat pocket some folded bills. They made a little packet of moderate size, very moderate size. He handed it to Todd.

"A hundred," he said. " Your share."

The Runt gulped in astonishment. His expectations had been modest— but he was out six weeks' expenses as well as what he had lost on the night of the big pot.

"Ain't that pretty low, Big Feller?" he asked. "You see—"

"Low?" Anderson turned his broad face and inundated him with a flood of scorn. "Did you take any chances? What the hell did you do, anyway? Hey?"

"I hung around Twin Ponds and found out where they was real money, and got you into the game, and—"

"Rats!" The Big Feller annihilated a grasshopper with an accurate stream of tobacco juice. " All you done was help. I could of pulled it alone."

There was no answer to that. It was the Big Feller who had introduced the extra aces into the game: it was he who had fought the way, out with the money when discovery came. He was the one on whom the Twin Ponders would take revenge, if they could. Todd pocketed the bills.

"All right, Jake."

"Now!" Anderson gave a hitch that lifted the vast expanse of cloth stretched over his shoulders. "I got a hen on!"

"So quick? Ain't you going to lay off and take it easy for a while?"

"This is something big, Runt!" Jake stroked his sweeping mustache and stared off at the blue mountain tops. " Biggest thing I ever pulled. I'm going to be fixed fer life!"

"Going it alone, Big Feller?" To lean up against the horse shed beside the giant made Todd more than ever conscious that he was a small figure of a man.

"Can't. Soon as I get rid of this shiner on my eye I'm going to go to Pineboro. Ever hear of Pineboro?"

"It's a little one-horse crossroads up in Clinton County. Why, it ain't much better 'n this town here!"

"Worse, Runt. Well, they's an old cuss named Hemmingway up there that don't believe in banks. He keeps store, and they say his money lays around in an old safe they had on Noah's Ark."

"That burg—"

"Shut up, you prune! All I say is there's going to be a connection between me and that money— I know how. I'm going to need you. You get to Pineboro a week after I do, and don't let on we know each other. Remember that. Were teetotal strangers. I'll let you know what to do later."

" What 'll I do while Pm waiting?"

"Don't care. Play poker, if them rubes up there know how."

The Runt sighed. He saw a distinct ethical difference between holding up a poker game and robbing a safe. He didn't like it— but the Big Feller would go in anyhow.

"I'm on," he said.

"All right." Anderson rose to his six feet three and stretched. "Now I'll get me some sleep and fix my eye. Don't forget that we don't know each other, and never did."

He was gone, shouldering his way through the quiet summer afternoon as though he scorned it. The Runt sighed. He finished the crackers and corn and lighted his pipe. The thought of this new affair depressed him a little, but to compensate was the lure of mystery, the self confidence of Jake, and promise of a good reward. But he didn't like it— not anything about it. The only excitement in Pineboro, as he remembered the place, was furnished by the town drunkard and the annual camp meeting.

For a dragging week Todd waited in Amesville. He took a few dollars away from those who wanted to court the thrilis of draw or stud, but his soul was not in his work. He wanted, at least once, to give the universe a push by his own efforts, just as the Big Feller pushed and shoved it habitually. But the universe looked over his five feet seven, and saw him not. All that he did was to add impetus to another man's efforts. That was all, and. he had resigned himself to it as better than nothing— he had even resigned himself to robbing a safe in order to be in on something big. Thus he went to Pineboro.

Todd arrived there at a week-end and found the place just like any other crossroads village. It had a store and post-office combined, a blacksmith shop, a church, and, as a variation, a smail sawmill. The Runt did not visit the store, which was thronged with Saturday night traders, but sought what information he wanted among a few quiet souls who smoked in front of the blacksmith shop. From them he learned of a house that "took boarders," and, after. he had announced that he was looking for work as a necessary excuse for his presence in town, he made himself at home at the boarding-house.

When Cal Todd came forth after Sunday breakfast and considered Pineboro in the full light of day and without the Saturday stimulus, he doubted, for the first time in their acquaintance, the sanity of the Big Feller. It did not seem possible that there was any money in that town which could be pried loose. A few white houses with green blinds, and picket fences in front of them. Not even a barber shop or a poolroom. The only sign of recent activity was the trampled pasture back of the school-house, where the camp meeting had just been held.

The Runt sat down upon a nail keg in front of the blacksmith shop and groaned as he lighted his pipe. Either the Big Feller was crazy, or he wasn't. If he wasn't then how did he think he could get away with some old curmudgeon's money in a town like this where everybody was known to everybody else? It would take more brains than either one of them had shown in previous escapades.

And yet, deep in his mind, Todd did not doubt that Anderson could do it. He would get away with it just as he had got away with the Twin Ponds stunt. Big stuff— that was where Jake lived. Todd had lived without honest work for two years now and he had to admit that his good fortune had all been due to the power of Jake's personality. As he thought his faith became gradually restored and he had grown almost hopeful— when the impact of the greatest shock he had ever received in his life struck all the functions of his mind with a kind of paralysis.

The shock was the Big Feller himself. Of course he had expected to see Jake sooner or later— but not like this. For Anderson had on a "boiled" shirt and a white collar, and he was walking with a man who was unmistakably the minister, on one side of him, and a pretty girl on the other. His face was set in a Sunday grin, and he went primly stiff-legged in the direction of the church. The Runt's pipe fell from his hand.

"My Gawd!" he whispered. "The Big Feller has gone bughouse— he's a going to get married!"

In a moment Todd realized that it was not as bad as he had thought. Other people were going in the direction of the church, and the bell was ringing for the second time that morning— it was the hour for the service. He breathed deep relief. Nevertheless the facts were serious enough. He did not know what to think, which way to turn mentally, and while his mind groped a voice spoke at his side.

"Fine looking fellow, ain't he?"

Todd moved his head feebly and saw a stoop-shouldered, well weathered man of middle age. The eye, although alittle reddened, held a kindly gleam, and the Runt clutched eagerly at him for a word of comfort.

"You mean the Big—that big man?" he asked. "Does he—does he live round here?"

"Ye-ah." The stranger meditatively plucked a spear of grass and chewed it. "Leastways, it looks like he would. He come into town a week ago while the camp meeting was going on, and I'm durned if he didn't get religion!"

"Religion? Are you— sure?" 'Todd stumbled over his words; and he realized that his hand had reached out and seized the arm of the other man.

"Sure?" With indignation, and a touch of suspicion, the older man backed away from his grasp. "Sure? Didn't him and me renounce all the works of the devil the same identical night right over there back of the schoolhouse? I been to camp meetings man and boy for forty year, and I never seen a more genuine case than his'n!"

"My Gawd!" said the Runt, for the second time that morning. The words of his new acquaintance continued to beat upon his ears.

"I'm Jeff Hawkins. If you don't come from too fur off maybe you've heard tell of me. I'm all right after camp meeting until I get a whiff of hard cider or Jamaica ginger. But this here Mr. Jacob Anderson has got a genuine and lasting case. If he ain't I'll eat them number twelve shoes of his'n!"'

The bell stopped tolling. The last of the stragglers hurried into church and Jeff Hawkins started on the run to join them. Calvin Todd remained on his nail keg, elbows on knees and head supported by wellnigh nerveless arms. He saw his pipe in the dirt at his feet. 'He saw the neat white houses and the blue sky and the gently waving oaks and maples. But he felt that the savor had gone out of his pipe and the joy of being alive out of the world. If whatJeff Hawkins had said was true, then the world was not the same. If it was true—

The Runt was still clinging with all his strength to that "if " when the sedate Sunday stream began to flow out of the church door. He had sat there on the keg through a couple of hours of sermon and singing. He picked up his pipe. He would have bolted if he had not thought that he would attract less attention by remaining where he was. And so he might if the Big Feller, again with the girl and the minister, had not headed that way. While Todd was still thinking that of course Jake would go by without speaking, the three of them stopped dead in front of him. Anderson held out a big and compelling hand.

"Hello, Cal!" the Big Feller said, as his form swayed before the vision of Todd. I've told the parson about you, and he says there's hopes for you. Miss Cynthia Holmes and Rev. Griggs, this here is Calvin Todd, that comes from the same town I do."

The minister took hold of the Runt's hand and moved it up and down with pleasant words which were only so much sound to him. He swallowed a large lump.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Then he felt his hand taken by a gentler, warmer clasp, and he looked into blue eyes that held a glint of fun and friendliness, but no mockery. They had to look up to him. He squared his shoulders. He did not know what she was saying.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied.

"You needn't bother about that business we was talking about," rumbled the Big Feller. "I've changed all my plans, Cal. Just let it go and don't think no more about it at all."

They were gone. Todd followed the startled glances of other passers-by, and saw that his hand remained extended into the empty air. It required a conscious effort on his part to let it drop back to his side. To that extent was he numb, physically and mentally. He staggered a little as he walked back to the boarding-house, and once there, he hid himself in his room. He lay down upon the bed. It was very good not to be obliged to stand up on his hind legs.

It was blackly true. If the Big Feller had been playing a game he would have ignored the Runt, according to program, until an opportunity came to meet by stealth. But he had openly called the whole thing off. His words there in front of .the blacksmith shop had driven the last nails in the coffin of Cal Todd's hopes. No use. No go. The Big Feller had changed. Dammit.

The Runt forgot his dinner. For long hours that day he visioned a future of piker crap shooting, five-cent ante poker, and a minimum of food and tobacco. He would have to go it alone now. The prospect held no joys for him. The future was a desert— and at length-he forced himself to turn from his own misery to a consideration of the new state of being into which Jake Anderson had come.

What had moved the Big Feller? One who did not know him so well might have said that the motive was obviously love— Jake Anderson promenading in a boiled shirt with a minister and a girl. Cal Todd knew better. Jake had always had girls, more or less, but if he had fallen so hard for a skirt that he would pass up a bundle of money, then he was no longer Jake Anderson, and white blackbirds could be shot out of any tree.

No; there was but one conclusion to be drawn. Religion or no religion, the Big Feller had gone straight. He had decided to hitch up with the folks who worked hard and paid their debts and didn't try to trim the world out of a living. In other words, he Had gambled a period of years out of the joyous heartsof his life for the ease and security of a later day. It was a very safe bet. Cal Todd knew that it was safe enough— if a man wanted to wager regular hours and sore muscles against a roof over his head and a barrel of flour in the pantry. Suddenly the bigness of the bet struck him with the force of a blow.

"Hells bells!" he cried to the empty room. "It's the biggest thing the Big Feller ever done!"

His feet had swung to the floor as the realization came upon him. His admiration for the Big Feller, which had been tottering, was re-established in the twinkling of an eye. The Big Feller had run true to form— he had dumped the big stunt he had been going to pull for something bigger still. This was no weakening. It was Jake's final and overpowering proof of his bigness. Todd got up and began to walk the floor.

Into his mind seeped a gray glimmer, as light comes into a room when a door is opened very 'slowly. The light spread. The darkness was not—and Calvin Todd stood full in a flood of revelation.

"I'll stick to, the Big Feller!" he said. "If he can do it, then, by Tophet, I'll do it, too!"

He sat down, exhausted, and let his head fall back against the tidied cushion of his chair. By luck and pure cussedness, as he called it, he had followed Jake through more than one escapade, and he could follow him now. That was the stuff! He'd get a job in the morning, if the sawmill was running; and next Sunday he, Calvin Todd, would go to church in a boiled shirt and a white collar. Beyond that his future did not unfold, for the supper bell told him that his stomach had gone flat against his backbone. He went down-stairs with his head up, and he shouldered the atmosphere just a little as he walked into the diningroom,

In a general way the immediate future was as Todd had conceived it. He got a job in the sawmill, he knew the torment of a lame back, and he had the considerable satisfaction of knowing that he was traveling the same road as Mr. Jacob Anderson. Jake, however, had got a week the start of him, in addition to the start which nature seemed to have given the Big Feller, and he was plucking much fruit from the tree + of prosperity.

Jacob Anderson clerked in the store, and it was said he was talking of buying out old man Hemmingway. That was a long way from robbing the safe. Jake passed the plate in church already, and he had been asked to run for constable at the next election. Pineboro had swallowed the recent convert. Moreover, he had taken the lead of the half-dozen young men who were trying to marry Cynthia Holmes, acknowledged to be the prettiest girl in the village. Todd was willing to admit that she was the prettiest girl in the world. Every evening he had seen her go to the store to get the mail, and every time he had seen her he had been more certain that the Big Feller was getting full measure, pressed down and running over, for his virtue.

It was more to look at her than to eat strawberries that the Runt went to the lawn party and festival which the Ladies' Aid Society held on the church lawn a short time after his advent in Pineboro. He could not any more help getting into her vicinity than a fly can keep away from a molasses barrel. He did not reason about it— he just let his legs take him, and when at last she saw hin, and spoke, he felt satisfied with the price he had paid in respectability for this moment.

"Why, good evening!" she smiled. "You're Mr. Anderson's friend!"

"Yes, ma'am." The Runt sat down at her invitation and then edged toward the end of the bench away from her. Not for him was sentiment permissible with such a girl. Moreover, although Anderson had spoken to him with great coolness when he had gone into the store, his loyalty was not dimmed.

"Yes, ma'am. Jake certainly is a fine feller."

"You've known each other quite a while, she says."

"Well, I guess so! Come from the same town, and we've been partners for a couple of years. He's a reg'lar feller, Jake is, and he ain't afraid of anything that walks, creeps, or crawls!"

She was looking at him with sober interest. This was his chance to give the Big Feller a boost, and he had drawn breath to start in again when she spoke.

"It's funny he happened to come to Pineboro— and you, too."

"Funny?" echoed Todd. He supposed Anderson had straightened all that out— hadn't he practically said so that Sunday in front of the blacksmith shop. "Didn't Jake tell you?"

"Tell me what, Mr. Todd?"

"Why—" Calvin began to see that he had put his foot in it. "Why, he got religion, didn't he?"

"Well?"

She had him, pinned up like a butterfly against the wall. He flapped. Dammit! Why had Jake been so stand-offish? They ought to get together.

"Well, you see, after he got religion, what he come for"— the Runt swallowed, and finished with a gasp— "it wasn't what he come for, then!"

"You sound to me," said Miss Cynthia Holmes, "a good deal like a fish out of water."

"Yes, ma'am," admitted the Runt, with a vigorous nod, " I am."

"All right, then," she agreed, soothingly. "Now tell me what you two came to Pineboro for in the first place."

"I was going to help, in the first place." Todd paused to get out his blue and white polka dot handkerchief and wipe his forehead. "But Jake got religion. Then I made up my mind Id go straight for good— and I'm beginning to like it— and then it was all off."

"What was off?"

"Why, what we was talking about, Miss Holmes!" He had floundered around badly, and he knew it, but now he was too far gone to hope that he could untangle his own words.

"What was that, Mr. Todd?"

"What was what?"

"What we talked about just now— what was it?"

"I— I— I don't know!"

After a moment Cynthia Holmes smiled. It was far from being an unfriendly smile, and yet there was a hint of a storm somewhere back of her eyes.

"Did you get religion, too, Mr. Todd?"

"No, ma'am."

"I thought you didn't," she said, as she rose from their bench, "because you're the worst liar I ever listened to!"

The first coherent thought to come up out of the Runt's welter of misery was that he had gummed things up for the Big Feller. Now he began to understand how hard it was to go straight. He had been a fool to think Jake would tell people about his past before he had had a chance to make good. Todd took a solemn resolution to square things with Miss Holmes in some way.

Without waiting for that opportunity, however, he went over to the store and waited until the last loafer had left, despite frequent frowns from Anderson. When they were alone he went up to the counter.

"Jake," he began, in a low voice, " PI say you're pulling off a big stunt, and Pm for you. But put me wise what you told and what you didn't. I don't want to make any breaks and queer you. Get me?" `

"What's that?" roared Anderson, in sudden fury. Then he leaned over the counter and hissed: "What're you hanging around here for, anyway? Didn't I tell you it was all off that Sunday in front of the blacksmith shop? That safe is safe! You hear me? I ain't going to pinch a nickel!"

"Sure, Jake!" The Runt was more hurt in feelings than scared, somewhat to his own surprise. "I know you're on the level, and I'm trying to root for you! Just put me wise—"

"Beat it!" The Big Feller laid one hand on the counter as Todd had seen many a barkeep do. "Go back to Amesville and match pennies with the kids!"

Todd backed out of the store in silence. There was no use trying to argue with the Big Feller when he was in that mood. Todd did not blame him, for it was clearly a case of misunderstanding. Anderson probably thought he was hanging around to make trouble, for how could he know that the Runt had really gone straight?

Why, indeed, should Cal Todd stay in Pineboro? He could play this new game just as well in any other place. Of course desire to watch the Big Feller's shining example held him. And perhaps there was a desire to catch glimpses of Cynthia Holmes. She could not be anything but a glimpse to him. He would not let himself think of her in any other way. It was impossible to conceive of any woman rejecting the Big Feller, just as it was impossible to conceive of any man not wanting to marry Cynthia Holmes.

"He thinks I'm trying to put over something," muttered the Runt to himself as he slowly undressed that night, "That's what. I guess I better beat it back to Amesville, or somewheres, like he said."

But the obstacles within himself did not permit his resolution to go into effect immediately. Here in this little village where he had first taken hold upon his soul and began to direct it in the way it should go, he had formed some attachments of a kind he had not known before. Since his hand was no longer against every man, he found that every man's hand was no longer against him. From the old lady who ran the boarding-house to the sawyer boss at the mill, people manifested more or less friendliness.

This continued. Old Hemmingway offered him credit at the store. Parson Griggs hunted him up one night, and before the end of the interview Cal Todd found himself thinking that there might be some good in ministers after all. The world was changing. He hesitated to tear up and transplant his slender roots. He kept away from the store as much as possible, but he stayed on day after day.

He ate abbreviated suppers in order to see Cynthia Holmes walk to the post-office in the cool of the evening. With the consciousness that he was doing the best he could, he lost any fear he might have had of Anderson, and sometimes he contrived to walk as far as the store with Cynthia. Finally he got the chance for which he worked— the opportunity to explain to her why they had come to Pineboro and to testify to the Big Feller's present state.

"I hope you believe he's give up planning to take a nickel, Miss Holmes," he said. "After the way I messed things up for him I'll feel better if I know you believe it."

"I believe it," she said. He knew that she spoke the truth, and he was satisfied.

What with waiting for this opportunity to undo the harm he had done to the cause of the Big Feller, and his reluctance to leave his new world, Calvin Todd was still in Pineboro on the evening when a part of the sins of Jake Anderson sought him out, and found him drugged with good fortune.

It was one of those calm, sweet twilights when the earth is tinted with rose and dusky purple for a long and restful time before darkness comes fully. The

Runt, coming out from supper, breathed gratefully. He saw Cynthia Holmes cross the street ahead of him. She turned and smiled and bowed, while he fumbled at his hat dejectedly. He was too late to-night: quite frequently she stayed there to talk to Anderson. :

She went into the store. Todd saw a knot of men following after her— strangers, Strangers were too uncommon in Pineboro to pass without remark? And something about these men seemed familiar. He took a few rapid steps and caught a fair view of the face of one of them before he disappeared within the store. Pete Lamere, the barber of Twin Ponds! That big bulk beside him had been Joe Tyler, or his double. The other two must be Murphy and Pierce, of that memorable poker game.

Todd thought. The Big Feller was trapped. Old Hemmingway would not be back from supper yet. Nobody in sight except Zach Tompkins, eighty years old and rheumatic. They sure would do up Jake this time, for he couldn't run if he had a chance, and leave Cynthia, It would take too much explaining afterwards.

The Runt's nerve did not get stringy, to his own momentary surprise as he leaped up the steps of the store porch. -He got to the doorway just as the actors inside arranged themselves in the instant before the climax. Cynthia was pressed back against some corded up bolts of cloth— frightened but not, panicky. The Big Feller was at bay behind the counter on the opposite side of the store. Murphy crouched at one end of the counter, ready to head him off, and Pierce at the other. Lamere and Joe Tyler were advancing against him in a cautious frontal attack.

"Where's that four hundred dollars you stole?" roared Tyler.

"I guess we take four hundred dollars wort' out of your hide, Jake!" grinned Lamere. There was no mercy in that grin. it was time for the Runt to act.

"Come on, Big Feller!" he yelled; and with a whoop and a right swing he landed on Joe Tyler. The liveryman's cheek split to the knuckles of Todd, and he reeled until a cracker box brought him to the floor.

Pete Lamere turned. Todd's glance swept in the certainty of a bad five minutes for himself. Murphy and Pierce had charged upon Anderson, attacking from two sides. That left the Runt to face Lamere alone. His hope was that he might live until the Big Feller could rescue him. Better than that he did not count possible.

They met with a thud— the barber and the Runt. Todd struck home thrice upon a crimsoning nose as he went into the clinch; then the corded arms of Lamere locked across the small of his back and he knew that the Frenchman's

reputation was not founded upon empty boastings. In vain he pounded at Lamere's ribs, while he was bent back and still farther back until swords of pain stabbed from hips to neck and swords of light leaped and flashed before his eyes. He saw bending over him the great face of Tyler, bleeding and rage distorted.

Where was the Big Feller? Surely he had had time to dispose of the others!

The Runt felt himself going down—the feet of the conquerors battered at his head— and the world vanished in black agony.

Calvin Todd found his body no pleasant dwelling place when he came back to it. It was a house of suffering. More pains, indeed, were there than he had ever known before. He was in no haste to see— hear think. For a time all of his forces were given over to a battle with feeling— feeling that now resolved itself into a hundred different hurts and now merged in one mighty ache.

At length he became conscious that a damp and pleasant coolness came and went upon his head. He tried to open his eyes, but only one of them responded. The other remained an ache. There was light. In a one-sided fashion he saw shelves of canned goods, and knew that he was lying upon a counter in Hemmingway's store. Then the face of the minister blinked at him, and he leaped to the belief that he was going to die. This became a conviction when Cynthia Holmes brushed Parson Griggs aside and put a fresh cloth upon his head. She was the kind of a girl who would fuss over a strange dog, if she thought it was going to die.

"Where— where's the Big Feller?" he asked, through lips that felt strangely cumbersome.

"There was a streak of dust went down the road while you was saving his life," replied Miss Holmes. "He was somewhere ahead of it."

There must be a big mistake. Calvin Todd felt that if he were about to die he must right that mistake. He pulled himself out of his misery, for it was up to him.

"Jake turned over a new leaf, honest to goodness!" he labored with his ideas. "I told you—"

"He told me all about robbing Mr. Hemmingway long before you did!" she interrupted; and her eyes crinkled with amusement. "Only he said you was the desperate character that was going to do it, and he was a government detective sent to catch you at it! He told me that, and got religion the same day he found out I had three hundred acres of the best land in the township! Course he turned over a new leaf! He's been trying to marry my farm!"

The Runt forgot that he had thought he was dying. From other lips he would have believed no ill of Jake Anderson— but from her lips he must believe.

"My Gawd!" he whispered. "I reformed because I thought the Big Feller had gone straight!"

"Tommyrot!" snapped Cynthia Holmes. "It was your own self you was trying to catch up to all the time! You're the Big Feller!"

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17: The Passing Partner

Elliott Flower

1863-1920

Blue Book, Oct 1917

WHEN Matthew Breck, of the firm of Glynn, Breck & McKey, picture-frame manufacturers, returned to the office after his long illness, he found that the shop had readjusted itself during his absence and that he seemed to be no longer necessary. Another sat at his desk in-his private office and dictated to his stenographer. This other was Arthur Glynn, son of Peter Glynn, the senior partner.

"You were away so long," explained Arthur uneasily, "that Dad thought somebody ought to step in and take charge of things."

"Unnecessary," asserted Breck irritably, for he was still weak and nervous, and it annoyed him to find some one else in his chair. "Miss Hammond could have done everything needful. Miss Hammond knows as much about this business as I do."

"Very likely," agreed Arthur dryly. "Miss Hammond has been very helpful to me in routine matters, but the larger questions arising could not be left to the judgment of a stenographer, and neither Dad nor McKey has any time to give to the business."

"Well, no matter,' rejoined Breck. "No harm done, I guess, and I'll be coming back in a few days— just as quick as the doctor will let me. He says I'm not strong enough to take hold yet."

"Better see Dad first," advised Arthur significantly.

Breck did not like either the words or the tone, but he said nothing more then. He was in no condition for a controversy, and he felt that there was no need of one, anyway. He would resume his old position in a few days, and that would settle everything.

On his way out, he paused a moment at Miss Grace Hammond's desk. Miss Hammond had been his personal stenographer, and her desk had been in a corner of his private office, where he could consult with her freely, but now she was in the main office with the other clerks and stenographers. He did not like that. Miss Hammond was a wonderfully capable and efficient young woman, with an intimate knowledge of the firm's affairs that would make her invaluable to a new manager, and the fact that she was thus apparently banished troubled him.

"How's the business, Miss Hammond?" he asked with a smile.

She looked up at him and shook her head, but what she said was: "Oh, we've been getting along nicely."

He realized that the shake of the head was for him, and the verbal reply for the others in the office, and it confused him.

"Well, I'll be taking hold again in a few days," he said.

Again she shook her head, this time turning her eyes with quick significance toward the door to the private office; but what she said was: "We'll be glad to see you back, Mr. Breck."

He hesitated a moment, as if uncertain what to say or do, and then, with the help of his cane, ambled out to the automobile that was awaiting him. But he was worried and perplexed— worried about himself rather than about the business, although it was the fact that he found the business situation so perplexing that worried him about himself.

"I can't concentrate," he complained to himself querulously as he was being driven home. "It must be the result of my illness, and no doubt the trouble will pass away, but I can't concentrate, and my memory is worse than before— just when I need a clear head, too."

BRECK had reason to be worried by the situation disclosed at the office, and he also had reason to resent it. He had not been told that Arthur Glynn was in charge. As the managing partner and the man upon whose ideas and work the partnership and business were based, he should have been advised of any important change in the office. He could have been consulted at any time during his convalescence, and Peter Glynn should have come to see him, but Peter Glynn had done no more than telephone an occasional perfunctory inquiry as to his condition. Neither had McKey. Both of them had allowed him to come back, unwarned, to find another man sitting at his desk; and the other man, Glynn's son, had had the effrontery to tell him to "see Dad" when he spoke of resuming his place in the office. It was incomprehensible. Something was wrong, but his bewildered brain refused to grapple with the problem.

Except for the money put in by the others, Breck had been the whole firm from the day it was organized. The adjustable picture-frame, upon which the business was based, was his idea, and it was he who had interested Glynn and McKey in it when he found that he lacked sufficient money to handle it alone. The proposition looked good to them, and they had idle money to put into it, but no time to give to it; so it was finally arranged that the idea was to count for one-sixth of the capital, that Breck was to put in an additional one sixth in cash, taking a third interest in the firm, and that each of the others was to take a third, paying cash for it. In addition, Breck was to manage the business on a salary, giving his entire time to it.

Glynn, the most aggressive and prominent of the three, insisted upon having precedence in the firm name, and this was reluctantly conceded by

Breck, who thought himself entitled to it but did not deem it wise to urge his claim too strongly. McKey did not care where his name appeared on the letterheads, so long as he got his share of the profits.

A wood-working plant, on the verge of bankruptcy, had been acquired and remodeled to meet the requirements of the new business, and a strong advertising campaign had given the new concern so good a start that it had made money from the beginning. The profit, although small at first, had increased slowly during the five years of the firm's existence, and the outlook for the future was so good that there already was talk of a larger plant.

All this had been done under the personal management of Breck, with the assistance of Grace Hammond. For Miss Hammond, as already mentioned, was very much more than a mere stenographer. If given her due, she would have had the title of Assistant Manager, at least. Breck had organized shop and office so that that they almost ran themselves, but for the most part, Miss Hammond supplied what direction was necessary to keep them running smoothly. She had to, for it had become apparent to her during the last year that Breck was losing his grip. Others in the office suspected something of the sort, but she alone knew. Breck's mind was slipping. His memory was faulty, and little things excited and confused him. Unconsciously he more and more relied upon her, not only to fill the gaps in his memory but also to suggest the solution of any business problem that arose.

She was loyal, was Grace Hammond, and Breck himself did not realize how dependent he was upon her. He knew that she was very helpful to him, and he had no doubt that in an emergency she could run the business alone for a time; but what he did not know was that she actually was running the business; although through him, when illness took him from his desk for three months. The decisions were hers; he merely voiced them.

"SOMETHING'S wrong at the office," Breck told his wife fretfully when he returned home. "I don't know what it is, but something's wrong. Miss Hammond tried to tell me, but I couldn't seem to understand. It just confused me."

"No wonder," soothed Mrs. Breck. "You shouldn't be even thinking of business for at least another month."

"I can't concentrate," complained Breck. "I can't focus my thoughts on anything; they ramble."

Mrs. Breck told him that was the most natural thing in the world after such an illness, and no doubt she believed it. She had noticed earlier that his memory was not good and that trivial things confused and irritated him, but she had attached no importance to this. He had overworked himself, she

reasoned then, and would be all right after a rest; but he had refused to take the rest, and the illness that followed had naturally made matters worse. However, she reasoned now, he would be all right as soon as he regained his strength. Mrs. Breck was not a woman to give more than passing attention to anything outside of her housekeeping problems, and she had no knowledge at all of either business or mental disorders.

"Young Arthur's at my desk," Breck went on, "and he told me to see his father when I spoke of coming back. Then Miss Hammond tried to signal me something, but I couldn't get it—my thoughts scattered. But why should I see Peter about taking my own chair at my own desk in my own office? Why shouldn't he see me? And why should Arthur—"

"That's it!" exclaimed Mrs. Breck indignantly. "Why shouldn't he see you? You're the one that's been sick, and he hasn't been here once in all that time. Don't you go near him, Matthew!"

"I don't mean to!" declared Breck with a rather feeble effort at determination. "He can come to see me. I shall go back to my desk when I'm strong enough, and he can come to me. That's all there is to that!"

Mrs. Breck approved of this determination, but she urged her husband to dismiss the whole subject from his mind until the doctor permitted him to return to his desk. Then, as soon as he had things in satisfactory shape, he must take a vacation to recuperate.

But Breck could not thus dismiss the vexing problem. However advisable,—and the doctor also urged it,—Breck could not do it. He worried about the business situation, fretfully seeking to reason out what was wrong with it, and then worried..about himself because he could reach no satisfactory conclusion. After two days of this, he called a taxi, disregarding the doctor's orders and his wife's protests and went to the office again. He could at least settle one phase of the problem, he reasoned.

HE found Arthur Glynn still in possession of the private office, and Arthur seemed to have no thought of vacating. He was easier and more confident than in the previous interview.

"I'm ready to take hold again," announced Breck. "I'll have to go a bit slow at first, but—"

"Have you seen Dad?" interrupted Arthur.

"Why should I?" replied Breck.

"Well, you'd better see him," advised Arthur. "He has something to say to

"If Peter has anything to say to me," returned Breck, holding tight to the idea that had brought him there, "let him come to me and say it. I don't know why I should go to him."

"Why, that's all right, too," agreed Arthur. "Perhaps this is the best place to say it. I'll telephone him."

He got his father on the wire and informed him of Breck's presence at the office.

"He'll be over as soon as he can get hold of McKey," he reported. "Better take a chair," he added with a grin.

Asked to have a chair in his own office!

There was something ridiculous about that, but it also added to his confusion of ideas, and he was sorry now that he had come. He should have waited until he was stronger, for it was evident from Arthur's tone and manner that he faced some sort of unfriendly encounter with Peter, and he was in no condition for that.

Peter and McKey arrived soon. Peter was a big, brusque, brutal man—that is, he was big always, brusque usually, and brutal whenever occasion required. None but a brutal man could have failed to be touched by the evident helplessness of Breck, and even Peter found it necessary to make some excuse for what he was doing. McKey, a little man, was merely a passive participant, tacitly sanctioning Peter's course by his presence, but aside from that doing no more 'than to offer his hand to Breck much as he might have offered it to the chief mourner at a funeral. Peter's greeting was a curt nod.

"I'm sorry you're forcing this on us at this time, Breck," said Peter, while this son grinned exultingly. "I should have preferred to wait until you were stronger and better able to stand the shock, but you would not have it so."

"Shock?" repeated Breck. "What shock? Why should there be any shock? I've merely come back to my desk—"

"It isn't your desk any more," asserted Peter bluntly.

"Isn't my desk!"

BRECK looked at Peter in bewilderment. So this was the trouble he couldn't understand! No wonder! Even now that it was put in plain words, it was incomprehensible. How could the manager's desk belong to anyone else? "You're in no condition to handle the business," Peter continued, "and you haven't been in shape to do it for some time; so McKey and I have put Arthur in as manager."

Breck seemed to shrivel up in his chair. This was verification of what he himself had feared—that his mind was slipping. A blow in the face would have disturbed him less.'

"We had to do it," Peter went on. "Trouble developed, and the concern simply had to have a head."

"There was no trouble when I left!" flared Breck, tortured into a show of spirit.

"Labor trouble," explained Peter.

"My men were contented," returned Breck.

"No doubt," rejoined Peter dryly. "You made the trouble by encouraging their rapacity, and Arthur had to check it. He found a very bad state of affairs here. The trouble is not over yet."

Breck subsided, more bewildered than ever. "I can't understand it," he muttered. "Everything was all right when I left!"

"You can't understand anything," asserted Peter. "That's how things got in such shape."

Breck, his confidence in himself utterly gone, wondered if this could be true.

"We're paying Arthur twenty thousand a year to put the business on a proper basis,' explained Peter, thus adding another blow, "and then we mean to spread out."

"Twenty thousand!" cried Breck. "Why, I only drew five thousand. Twenty thousand will wipe out most of the profit."

"Different men are worth different prices," remarked Peter, "and we expect to eat up all the profit for a time in putting the business on a basis to pay more later. Of course, if this policy does not appeal to you," he added significantly, "there's nothing to prevent you from selling your interest."

"To whom?" asked Breck.

"Why, if you want to get out," responded Peter indifferently, "I might take it for Arthur—at a reasonable price."

AND Peter got it, of course, at something less than half its value on the basis of the profit the firm was then making. He argued, however, that the firm, under its new policy, would derive no profit at all from the business for some time to come, and of course there was a possibility that the new policy would not work out satisfactorily. Breck did not think it would, especially with an inexperienced youth and a twenty thousand-dollar salary saddled on it, and labor trouble in the background. As for the price, it seemed the best he could get, for Peter thoughtfully explained that he would have to advise any prospective purchaser of the new policy and its immediate effect. So Breck sold his third interest. The deeper he went into the matter, the more confused he became, and there really seemed nothing else to do.

He paused at Miss Hammond's desk as he was leaving.

"I'm out," he told her wearily.

She nodded understandingly. "But perhaps it's just as well," she encouraged.

"No," he said, "it isn't. You don't know what it means to me. I made this business, and now I'm out."

"Still, it may be better so," she insisted.

He shook his head, shuffled weakly out to his taxi, went home, fainted on the doorstep, was put to bed, and a hurry-call was sent in for the doctor.

Also, but through different channels and for a different purpose, a hurry-call went to his son. Miss Hammond sent that. Miss Hammond did not know of Breck's relapse, but she did know more of what happened in the private office than he did, and the meaning of it was very much clearer to her. Her desk was nearest to the door of the private office, and a door ajar may disclose much to one with an intimate knowledge of office affairs, especially when it is supplemented by the letters she takes from dictation. Miss Hammond had known in a general way what was going to happen before it happened, but she had not expected action to be so quick or so drastic. The brutality of the method added to the indignation aroused by the injustice of the purpose and, to her mind, relieved her of any obligation of office loyalty. Her feeling of loyalty, now strengthened by sympathy, was to her former chief, anyway, and it was only through his son that she could help him.

HOWARD BRECK was holding a salaried position in Toledo— a position that paid little except in promise for the future. She had met him two years before, when he was paying his parents a vacation visit, and she had liked him. He was not a brilliant man, but there was a sturdiness about him that inspired one with confidence.

In this case, Howard Breck, securing a leave of absence, responded promptly to the suggestion that his presence was needed to straighten out his father's business affairs. He had known of his father's illness, of course, but while severe and protracted, the doctor had not considered it serious enough to call him from his work, and he had known nothing of the mental trouble. So the summons was a surprise; and even more surprising and disquieting was Miss Hammond's very urgent request that he see her before seeing anyone else.

However, she made the situation quickly clear to him when he called upon her at her home, and he was deeply impressed by her loyalty to his father. Also he was deeply impressed by her clear-headed business reasoning.

His father was, and had been, failing mentally, she told him frankly, and his removal as manager was justified. The way it was done was so inexcusably brutal that it stirred her to wrath, and it was not unlikely that the shock of it

would still further unsettle his mind; but as a business matter, the act itself was defensible. ;

"But the business prospered under his management," argued Howard.

She acknowledged that it had. "But," she explained with modest reluctance, "he didn't manage as much as he thought he did."

Howard gave her a sharp glance, and immediately dismissed the suspicion that had flashed to his mind. He could not doubt her sincerity. "I see," he mused. "Well, what else?"

"They were justified in deposing him as manager," she repeated, "but they were not justified in cheating him out of his interest in the firm."

"What!" cried Howard. "I hadn't heard of that!"

"They gave him, I believe, about forty per cent of the value of his third interest," she said, "and young Glynn has been gloating over it ever since. I happen to know, because he dictates his letters to me, and he simply had to tell some of his friends how successful he had been in his clash with a back-number."

"But how did they do it?" demanded Howard.

SHE explained at some length the arguments used.

"And all that," she added, "was so low and mean and dishonest that it simply enraged me. I knew beforehand that they meant to get your father out, and I tried to warn him ; but they'd have got him another time if they hadn't this time, and later I decided that we could do better with him out than we could with him in. That's what I meant when I told him that perhaps it was just as well that he had sold."

"I don't see why," objected Howard.

"That's because you don't know anything about the inside of this business," she replied; "and neither does Arthur Glynn."

"Oh!" murmured Howard. "Now I begin to get you."

"Arthur," she went on, "is even more helpless than your father, because he knows less and thinks he knows more, and I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help him very much."

"Now I do get you!" cried Howard.

"Not yet," returned Miss Hammond. "There are other points to be considered, and you can't stand behind me, as you will have to do, until you fully grasp the situation. First, there never was any intention of giving Arthur a twenty thousand-dollar salary. That was merely to discourage your father. If it had failed in that, Arthur might have been allowed to draw it, to reduce the profit, but fifteen thousand of it would have gone to his father and McKey.

That would have given them fifteen thousand clear before there was anything for your father. Do you get the idea?"

"A barefaced swindle!" exclaimed Howard.

"If you could prove it!" she reminded him. "With your father in, they simply use this salary to cover the profit; with your father out, they simply change their mind about the salary, as they have a right to do, and the fifteen thousand goes openly into the profit-account. Either way, they get the money."

"How about the business-expansion plans?" asked Howard. "Is that the same story?"

"Very much the same," she replied. "It was intended to discourage your father, as it did; but with him out, they can drop the idea and continue along more conservative lines."

"I presume the labor-trouble is a bluff too," he remarked gloomily.

"No, that's real," she told him, "but it wouldn't be real under your father's management."

"That is," he suggested, "under your management."

She shook her head. "So far as the men were concerned," she explained, "I simply continued his policy. He was fair with the men, and they liked him. Put him back at his old desk, and there will be no trouble; but Arthur Glynn, if left to himself, will have a strike on his hands mighty soon."

"And he's being left to himself?" smiled Howard.

"Well, he hasn't asked for any advice, and I haven't volunteered any," she responded, returning his smile. "Possibly I might be able to tell him some things about the labor situation that he doesn't know, but he has such abiding confidence in himself that one hesitates. I suspect, however, that Arthur is going to be such a costly experiment that they will be crazy to reduce the cost."

Howard nodded soberly. "I think

"I see what you're driving at," he said, "but it's a pretty big job under the complicated conditions, and I'm not sure it can be put through. For my part, I'll go the limit—"

"Then that's all right!" she broke in cheerfully. "Now—"

"I'll go the limit," he repeated, "but I don't see why you should become involved in something that may be hurtful to you in a business way. I'm thankful for the information—"

"Then that's all right!" she said again, ignoring the interruption. 'With you behind me—"

"But I tell you," he insisted, "I must do this myself."

"You!" she bantered, the raillery softened by a smile. "Why, you don't even know where to begin, and there are some points yet to be worked out. Besides, I want to do this for my own satisfaction."

Her impulsiveness was too much for his slower wit, and he surrendered. After all, she was the only one with any sort of comprehensive grasp of the situation.

"But you'll be needed," she assured him, "badly needed. You may have to raise quite a bit of money in a hurry. How much do you suppose you can borrow on your father's third?"

"But Father hasn't any third," he objected.

"I know," she returned, "but his peeve gives him a credit that he lacks without it, and you must arrange with him for the use of that credit."

Howard spoke rather impatiently then. "I'll go as far as you like at my own risk," he said, "but I'll not involve my father in anything I do not fully understand."

"Of course not," she agreed. "You will simply arrange so that you can act promptly when you do understand. It will be all up to you, Mr. Breck, when the time comes, but you'll have to let me choose the time."

With a gesture of resignation, he again surrendered. He would go with her up to the point of involving his father, and then decide.

She was really an amazing young woman— just about his own age, but mentally and physically nimbler, and he admired that. On the other hand, he, while slow, had the persistence to go through with anything he started, and she admired that. For what she was undertaking now, his steadying influence was what she needed; for what lay ahead of him, her quickening influence was what he needed.

"No doubt you know best," he conceded, "but I'd rather face the Glynns, father and son, and have it out with them."

"Rather stupid, don't you think, to face them without weapons?" she returned. "I mean to arm you first."

That not only satisfied him, but the idea pleased him, and he made the preparations that she had suggested.

HE had no trouble in arranging matters with his father. The elder Breck was again confined to his bed, worrying more than ever, and he agreed to his son's proposition before it was fairly made.

"I'm no good any more," he said wearily. "You talk it over with your mother, and I'll do anything you say."

"But I want to explain the purpose," insisted Howard. "We mean to go after Glynn and McKey—"

"Who's 'we'?" asked Matthew Breck.

"Why— er— Miss Hammond and I," replied Howard.

"Oh!" murmured Matthew. "You've been talking to her, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Matthew, after pondering this a moment, "before my brain gets to drifting again, I'd like to tell you something."

"Yes ?"— inquiringly.

"You tie up to Miss Hammond, and you won't make any very bad mistake. She knows what she's doing all the time."

"She's a very capable young woman," agreed Howard.

"If that's all you see in her," grumbled Matthew, "I'll match my brain against yours any time, and beat you out on eyesight, too. However, that isn't business, and we— What were we talking about, Howard?" The young man told him, and he nodded. 'Go ahead!" he instructed; "and I'll help you any way I can— you and Miss Hammond. I've a lot of confidence in Miss Hammond."

Howard reported back to Miss Hammond the following day at luncheon, that being his first opportunity to see her again outside the office. But he did not report all that his father had said. He was afraid that the suggestion that he "tie up" to her might be misconstrued, to the confusion of a purely business proposition. He did tell her, however, that his father had great confidence in her, and she seemed to find that quite satisfying.

"It comes down to this," he explained : "Mather knows and cares nothing about the business, and leaves everything to me, while Father knows and cares a great deal about the business, and leaves everything to you. Between us, we can do about as we please, and I find that several of Father's friends still think well enough of the business to let us have what money we may need on the third interest in it that we haven't got, any time we get it. I hope that's clear to you?"

"Perfectly," she assured him with a smile.

"Well, it isn't very clear to me," he confessed, 'and if you've been putting problems like that up to Father, I don't blame him for getting confused. Anyhow, that's as far as I can go blindfold."

"That's as far as you'll have to go blindfold," she returned. "We have only to await the opportune moment now."

"I can't wait long," he objected. "There's my job in Toledo."

"Why not give it up?" she suggested.

"THE meaning of that was clear, and it startled him. "Are you planning to put me in Father's former place?"

"The men are very restless," she remarked. "I suspect a new manager is going to be needed."

"But not me!" he cried. "That's preposterous !"

"I thought you might feel that way about it, if you knew too much too soon," she commented, '"but—well, Arthur has been tactless and arrogant, and your father's son stands well with the men, because he is your father's son."

"That's your work," he charged.

"They have somehow got the idea," she pursued, "that you would continue your father's policies, and I suspect that somebody who will do that will be needed."

"That would be you," he asserted.

"Me!" she scoffed. 'Why, I'm only a stenographer."

"And the rest of us are puppets!" he retorted; and then another point claimed his attention. "Why all the extra money?" he asked. "It must be almost time to explain that."

"Almost," she agreed. "It's a precaution that may not be needed, but we can't be sure of that until we see what the men do." -

"You're treating me like a child," he complained.

"Wait," she cautioned, "and you'll see that I'm simply fashioning weapons for your use."

He waited, with growing impatience, a week—two weeks—and then he resigned his Toledo job. He had to do that or return. But he insisted, before he resigned, that she disclose the nature of the weapons she was fashioning for him, and she had progressed so far with them then that she was willing. After that, she was the impatient and he the cautious one.

"Fact is," she confessed, "I'd have gone ahead regardless, if I hadn't found in you a sort of subconscious restraint; and now that the responsibility is yours, I'm in a hurry."

"Now that the responsibility is mine," he returned, "I'm not."

AGAIN two weeks passed— irksome weeks, in one way, and yet pleasurable in another. Waiting for an uncertain something to happen was decidedly irksome, but it gave young Breck excuse and opportunity to see Miss Hammond daily, and there was at least nothing irksome about that. Also it gave him much time to spend with his father, who was improving physically, if not mentally, and who derived much comfort from his presence and the feeling that his affairs were in competent hands.

Until the last one, Miss Hammond's reports during this time were all alike: the exasperation of the men over irritating shop-rules and a changing wage

system was steadily increasing. The last one, however, told him that the time for action had arrived: the men had reached the limit of their patience, and a committee had been appointed to wait upon Peter Glynn the following day. They had refused to treat with Arthur Glynn. Peter, scenting trouble when he heard of this, had offered to meet them in the shop at ten o'clock the next morning, and he would undoubtedly bring McKey with him.

"It wont be a long session," she predicted, "but it will be fairly startling, I think. If you drop in about an hour later, you'll be pretty sure to find Glynn and McKey in Arthur's office talking it over, and then you can do the rest."

"I'll be there," he promised.

It was not a long session, and it was fairly startling. Peter brought McKey with him; and Arthur, of course, was also present when they met the men in the shop. McKey, as usual, remained in the background, saying nothing. He was never a loquacious man, but it was a wise thing to listen when he did speak. Arthur found the situation too amazing for words, and Peter himself was seriously perturbed.

The men boldly demanded a new manager; and men do not make that sort of demand lightly: they must win when they do make it, or conditions will be more intolerable than before. In this case, they recited their grievances, but made it clear that the mere redress of these would not satisfy them: the man responsible must go. They had complained to him before, and it had merely made matters worse.

Peter did not bluster now; it was no time to bluster. He gave his son a disgusted look and then asked for time to consider the matter.

The men agreed to this, but they insisted that they must have his decision by five o'clock that afternoon, so that they could know before going home whether they would be coming back the next morning, and Peter had to agree to that. Then he and his son and McKey retired to Arthur's office for a conference.

PETER made no effort to conceal his disgust. "Been nagging the men, have you?" he snarled.

"Things were too lax under Breck," complained Arthur sullenly. "I had to establish and maintain discipline, and the new wage-system would have saved quite a bit of money, too."

"I am afraid," put in McKey, speaking for the first time, "that Arthur will have to go."

But Peter was not ready to concede that. However disappointed and disgusted he might be, he did not want his son forced out.

He was expressing his views on this point when an office-boy brought word that Mr. Howard Breck wished to see them.

"Tell him we're busy," instructed Arthur, glad to find some way that he could exercise his authority without getting into trouble.

Peter impatiently backed Arthur's decision; they had no time to bother with a Breck just then; but McKey demurred. McKey thought it might be well for them to know what Matthew Breck's son wanted, and Peter's impatience did not blind him to the wisdom of that. So Howard was admitted.

Arthur, feeling that he should take the lead in his own office, opened with a curt demand to know what Howard wanted, to which Howard retorted, with equal curtness, that he had come to reclaim his father's interest in the firm.

The Glynns, father and son, laughed then, but McKey was as impassive as usual. Miss Hammond, her desk close to the door that Howard had purposely left ajar, listened while she pretended to correct some typewritten sheets. Eavesdropping was not a habit with Miss Hammond, but in this matter she would have put her ear to a keyhole, if necessary.

"On what terms and on what grounds?" asked Peter.

"On the same terms that you gave when you took the interest from him," replied Howard, "and on the ground that you deliberately tricked him in that transaction."

"Better be careful what you say!" cautioned Peter menacingly.

"I'm saying nothing that I can't back up," rejoined Howard. Then he recounted briefly the arguments used to induce his father to sell. "Arthur never has drawn that salary," he concluded, "and you never have and never will spread out in a way to jeopardize or even lessen the immediate profit. The whole transaction was based on lies told a sick man.'

"We simply changed our minds and plans, as we had a right to do," argued Arthur. "There's no justification for any such inference as you draw, and we'll make you mighty sick—"

"Shut up, Arthur!" ordered Peter, for he saw deeper into the matter than his son.

"It looks bad, very bad," pursued Howard, "in dealing with a man in Father's condition."

"I haven't heard of any conservator being appointed," remarked Peter dryly.

"Not yet," returned Howard.

McKEY gave Howard a quick, searching glance, but made no comment. "Knowing his physical and mental condition," pursued Howard, "you deliberately took advantage of it."

"That," declared Peter, "is a lie!"

Howard shrugged his shoulders indifferently at this charge. "Ask your son," he advised. "In letters to three different people he not only admitted it but gloated over it. I happen to have the names and addresses of the three."

"I am afraid," remarked McKey for the second time, "that Arthur will have to go." And now Peter raised no objection. "That disposes of the strike," added McKey. "What next?"

"The cancellation of my father's sale of his interest in the business," replied Howard.

"Nothing doing!" blustered Peter, his disgust with his son and the humiliation of one defeat making him the more determined to concede nothing else. "We don't mean to be blackmailed on the fool letters of a boy."

"You'd have a lovely time explaining them in court," suggested Howard. "But let that pass, for the moment. You may have forgotten that you deposed my father as manager on the ground that he was mentally incompetent the very day that you got him to sell you his interest in the business for less than half its value. It took a little time to get satisfactory legal proof of your reason for deposing him, but we got it, and aside from the many corroborating and unsavory details mentioned—"

"I am afraid," put in McKey in his quiet way, "that Arthur will have to give up his interest in the firm. It seems rather necessary."

"And while we're buying," added Howard, "we'd like to buy enough more to give us control—"

"No!" thundered Peter.

"Think it over," advised Howard. "We're willing to pay a fair price for what we need, but experience has taught us that we really must have control. I don't think anybody would blame us for insisting— if the facts were disclosed as a result of any squabble over the question. Do you?"

"You haven't the money to buy it!" asserted Peter.

"We have what you paid Father for his interest to redeem that interest," explained Howard pleasantly, "and that will give us what else we need."

"By what authority are you acting?" demanded Peter. "Matthew Breck can't be sane for you and crazy for us."

"If our authority is questioned," replied Howard, "we'll have a conservator appointed, and as matters stand, a conscientious conservator could stir up an awful rumpus—with the facts we've uncovered. Think it over!"

PETER did think it over, to such purpose that he had no immediate response to make. It was McKey who spoke first.

"Meanwhile," suggested McKey, "we are in control and can name the new manager."

Both Peter and Howard were instantly alert. Each saw some purpose in this, but neither could quite grasp its significance. Howard frowned, and Peter smiled.

"I would suggest to my associate in this little affair," pursued McKey, "that we give the position to Miss Grace Hammond."

Peter, puzzled, nevertheless nodded his acquiescence, taking it for granted that McKey had some good reason for the suggestion. Howard, however, was completely dumfounded. Never a quick man at readjusting himself to new conditions, he found the situation eluding him for a moment. The whole plan was upset. The purpose had been to put him in as the representative of his father, but this blocked it. It was confusing in its unexpectedness—a _ possibility so far unconsidered; and as a matter of sheer gratitude he could not oppose her appointment.

"Dropped a brick in the works, didn't I?" remarked McKey with a smile.

"Why, yes," confessed Howard, "you did rather mess things up. What's the idea?"

"I was just wondering," replied McKey, "and I'm beginning to find out."

"Well," reflected Howard, who had now managed to pull himself together, "the idea is good, anyhow. I favor it, and I am sure it will meet Father's approval. She's been running the business for a year anyway, and she knows more about it—"

"I thought so," murmured McKey.

"Thought what?" demanded Peter. "Where's all this taking us?"

Howard and McKey ignored him. "If you're in earnest," said Howard, his bewilderment giving place to enthusiasm, "we'll arrange the matter right now. There couldn't be a better manager for the business."

"I thought so," repeated McKey, nodding his head.

Miss Hammond, excited and indignant, flashed into the room before he could say more.

"I wont be manager!" cried Miss Hammond. "I don't want to be manager! Do you think I'm going to be a business woman all my life? Well, I guess not. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Howard Breck, to spoil everything at the last moment! Can't you see he's tricking you into letting control remain where it is? I wont have it!"

"I thought so," murmured McKey again.

"Thought what?" demanded Peter.

"With the dangerously false start we made, this combination is too strong for us," explained McKey. "I was just wondering whether it was all brain or part

heart." Miss Hammond became confused and troubled then, especially when she encountered Howard's eyes. "No one to be bought off here," concluded McKey. "We'll have to give them what they want, Glynn."

"I wont!" declared Peter angrily.

"In that case," returned McKey, "it seems to me the part of wisdom to drop out entirely. I have no stomach for trouble as matters stand. I don't like to be convicted on my own evidence. The game never appealed to me, anyhow. I can see that it looked to you like a good chance to do something nice for Arthur, with a neat little profit for yourself, at somebody else's expense, and I went along with you; but I was never keen for it, and this looks like the time to duck... Breck, you can have my interest, all or none, for just what I put into the business."

"I'll take it all," responded Howard promptly.

"And mine," offered Peter in haste as he realized the hopelessness of his position.

Howard shook his head. 'Your interest isn't a necessity to us now," he explained, "and I couldn't pay so much for it—not nearly so much."

MATTHEW BRECK was still confined to the house, but not to his bed, and Howard insisted that Miss Hammond accompany him when he went to make his report.

"It isn't very clear to me," complained Matthew, after listening to his son's explanation, "but somehow or other you've got the whole business. Is that it?"

"Grace got it," replied Howard, "but it seems to be yours and mine— if I can swing the rest of the deal. We're getting more than we planned, you know, and it takes more ready cash."

"One thing at a time," warned Matthew, "or you'll be getting me mixed up. Did I hear you calling her 'Grace' ?"

"Why— er— yes."

"Well," mused Matthew, "I guess Grace and the business is a combination that's good for all you need with the men I can send you to.' We can fix that up; and then— There goes my mind— wool-gathering again. I had something else to tell you, too." He rapped his head with his knuckles impatiently, and it seemed to bring results. "Oh, yes!" he exclaimed. "Yes, of course! You ought to be awfully sure of Grace."

Howard turned to her with a whimsical smile, and their eyes met in an exchange of something deeper and more momentous than smiles. It was a long moment before he turned again to his father.

"Awfully sure of Grace," repeated Matthew.

Howard was whimsical again now. "Everybody seems to feel that way about it," he remarked, finding verification of what her eyes had told him in the fact that they now avoided his eyes, "but marriage—"

"Why, yes," interrupted Matthew; "yes, that will do very nicely."

And then— But why intrude? Even Matthew had the sense to amble away to another room.

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18: Red Hair

W. L. Alden

1837-1908

In: *Shooting Stars*, 1878

THE NAME of the lady who a few weeks since dropped her back hair on the sidewalk of a street in Clinton, Illinois, has never been ascertained. The hair in question was of a bright red color, and few persons imagined that it was dangerous when unconnected with its owner. Nevertheless, that seemingly innocent back hair led to a tragedy that nearly ruined the peace of two happy and respectable families.

Messrs. Smith and Brown are two leading citizens engaged in the grocery business in Clinton. They are men of great worth of character, and have reached middle age without incurring the breath of slander. One evening Mr. Smith returned from the store and sitting down at the tea table, produced a Chicago paper from his pocket and remarked with much indignation, "That revolting Beech er scandal has been revived, and its loathsome details are again polluting the press and corrupting the minds of the public." Mrs. Smith replied that "it was a shameful outrage that the papers were allowed to publish such disgusting things," and asked her husband "which paper had the fullest account of the matter." That excellent man said that he believed the Gazette contained more about it than any other paper, and that after tea he would send one of the boys to get a copy of it. His wife thanked him, and was in the act of remarking that he was always thoughtful and considerate, when the oldest boy exclaimed, "Pa, you've got a long red hair on your coat collar!"

A prompt investigation made by Mrs. Smith confirmed the boy's accusation. There was an unmistakably female hair on the collar of Mr. Smith's coat, and it was obtrusively red. Mr. Smith said that it was a very extraordinary thing, and Mrs. Smith also remarking "very extraordinary, indeed," in a dry, sarcastic voice, expressed deep disgust at red hair, and a profound contempt for the "nasty creatures" who wore it.

About the same hour Mr. Brown was also seated at his tea table, and was endeavoring to excuse, himself to Mrs. Brown for having forgotten to bring home a paper. That lady, after having expressed the utmost indignation at the revival of the Beecher scandal, had asked for the paper in order to see who was dead and married, and was, of course, indignant because her husband had not brought it home. In the heat of the discussion she noticed a long red hair on Mr. Brown's coat collar, and, holding it up before him, she demanded an explanation. In vain did Mr. Brown allege that he had not the least idea how the hair became attached to his collar. His wife replied that what he said was simply ridiculous. "Red hair don't blow round like thistle down, and at your

time of life, Mr. Brown, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. The less you say the better, but I can tell you that you can't deceive me. I'm not a member of Plymouth Church, and you can't make me believe that black is white."

Now, both Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith were perfectly innocent. Of course, they were annoyed by the remarks of their respective wives, but like sensible men, they avoided any unnecessary discussion of the painful topic. The next day they each brought home all the Chicago papers that contained any reference to the Beecher matter, and, as the papers were received by Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Smith with many protestations of the disgust which they felt at hearing any mention of the scandal, they naturally supposed that they had made peace. But marital suspicion once awakened is not easily put to sleep. While Mr. Brown was handing his wife the bundle of newspapers, she was closely scrutinizing his coat collar, and, after she had laid the papers on her plate and told the children not to touch them, she quietly took two long red hairs from her unfortunate husband's coat, and held them solemnly before his face.

"Mary, I give you my solemn word," began the alarmed Mr. Brown; but he was not permitted to finish his sentence. "Don't say one word," exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "Falsehoods won't help you; I am a faithful and loving wife, and I'll have you exposed and punished if there is any law in Illinois." Thus saying she gathered up her newspapers and rushing to her room, locked herself in. It was not until later in the evening that Mrs. Smith, as she was about to turn down her husband's lamp, which was smoking, perceived that two red hairs were attached to his shoulder. She said nothing, but after laying them on the table before him, burst into tears and refused to be comforted until Mr. Smith solemnly swore that he had not seen a red haired girl for months and years, and offered to buy her a new parlor carpet the very next day.

Of the two ladies, Mrs. Brown was much the stronger and the more determined. The next evening, when Mr. Brown brought back from the store no less than five red hairs on his coat collar, she broke a pie plate over his head, and leaving him weltering in dried apples, put on her bonnet and left the house. Mrs. Smith, on the same evening, found four of the mysterious red hairs on her husband's coat, but she refrained from violence, and merely telling him that she would not believe in his innocence if he was to swear till he was black in the face, called loudly for her sainted mother, and was about to faint when Mrs. Brown burst into the room. Mr. Smith, like a wise man, fled from the scene, and the two ladies soon confided their wrongs to one another.

When Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith met the next day, the former confessed to the latter that he was in a terrible scrape. Confidence begat confidence, and they soon became convinced that they were the victims of a frightful

conspiracy to which some unknown wearer of red back hair was a party. Their distress was increased early in the afternoon by the appearance of their respective wives, who walked up and down the opposite side of the street for hours, each carrying a conspicuous rawhide, and evidently lying in wait for the imaginary red haired woman. Messrs. Smith and Brown felt that they were ruined men, and that a tremendous scandal was about to overwhelm them. They even wished that they were dead.

About 4 o'clock P. M. Mrs. Smith clutched her companion's arm and bade her listen to a small-boy who was relating one of his recent crimes to a youthful companion.

"I just picked up that there hair," remarked the wicked youth, "and put some of it on old Smith's and old Brown's coats; I kep' a-puttin' of it on every day, and you just bet they ketched it from their old women when they went home. Smith, he's as solemn as an owl, and old Brown looks as if he was a goin' to be hung."

The remains of the boy were removed by the constable, and the Smith and Brown families are once more united and happy.

19: The Ray Of Displacement

Harriet Prescott Spofford

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IT WOULD INTEREST none but students should I recite the circumstances of the discovery. Prosecuting my usual researches, I seemed rather to have stumbled on this tremendous thing than to have evolved it from formulæ.

Of course, you already know that all molecules, all atoms, are separated from each other by spaces perhaps as great, when compared relatively, as those which separate the members of the stellar universe. And when by my Y-ray I could so far increase these spaces that I could pass one solid body through another, owing to the differing situation of their atoms, I felt no disembodied spirit had wider, freer range than I. Until my discovery was made public my power over the material universe was practically unlimited.

Le Sage's theory concerning ultra-mundane corpuscles was rejected because corpuscles could not pass through solids. But here were corpuscles passing through solids. As I proceeded, I found that at the displacement of one one-billionth of a centimeter the object capable of passing through another was still visible, owing to the refraction of the air, and had the power of communicating its polarization; and that at two one-billionths the object became invisible, but that at either displacement the subject, if a person, could see into the present plane; and all movement and direction were voluntary. I further found my Y-ray could so polarize a substance that its touch in turn temporarily polarized anything with which it came in contact, a negative current moving atoms to the left, and a positive to the right of the present plane.

My first experience with this new principle would have made a less determined man drop the affair. Brant had been by way of dropping into my office and laboratory when in town. As I afterwards recalled, he showed a signal interest in certain toxicological experiments. "Man alive!" I had said to him once, "let those crystals alone! A single one of them will send you where you never see the sun!" I was uncertain if he brushed one off the slab. He did not return for some months. His wife, as I heard afterwards, had a long and baffling illness in the meantime, divorcing him on her recovery; and he had remained out of sight, at last leaving his native place for the great city. He had come in now, plausibly to ask my opinion of a stone— a diamond of unusual size and water.

I put the stone on a glass shelf in the next room while looking for the slide. You can imagine my sensation when that diamond, with something like a flash of shadow, so intense and swift it was, burst into a hundred rays of blackness

and subsided—a pile of carbon! I had forgotten that the shelf happened to be negatively polarized, consequently everything it touched sharing its polarization, and that in pursuing my experiment I had polarized myself also, but with the opposite current; thus the atoms of my fingers passing through the spaces of the atoms of the stone already polarized, separated them negatively so far that they suffered disintegration and returned to the normal. "Good heavens! What has happened!" I cried before I thought. In a moment he was in the rear room and bending with me over the carbon. "Well," he said, straightening himself directly, "you gave me a pretty fright. I thought for a moment that was my diamond."

"But it is!" I whispered.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed roughly. "What do you take me for? Come, come, I'm not here for tricks. That's enough damned legerdemain. Where's my diamond?"

With less dismay and more presence of mind I should have edged along to my batteries, depolarized myself, placed in vacuum the tiny shelf of glass and applied my Y-ray; and with, I knew not what, of convulsion and flame the atoms might have slipped into place. But, instead, I stood gasping. He turned and surveyed me; the low order of his intelligence could receive but one impression.

"Look here," he said, "you will give me back my stone! Now! Or I will have an officer here!"

My mind was flying like the current through my coils. How could I restore the carbon to its original, as I must, if at all, without touching it, and how could I gain time without betraying my secret? "You are very short," I said. "What would you do with your officer?"

"Give you up! Give you up, appear against you, and let you have a sentence of twenty years behind bars."

"Hard words, Mr. Brant. You could say I had your property. I could deny it. Would your word outweigh mine? But return to the office in five minutes—if it is a possible thing you shall—"

"And leave you to make off with my jewel! Not by a long shot! I'm a bad man to deal with, and I'll have my stone or—"

"Go for your officer," said I.

His eye, sharp as a dagger's point, fell an instant. How could he trust me? I might escape with my booty. Throwing open the window to call, I might pinion him from behind, powerful as he was. But before he could gainsay, I had taken half a dozen steps backward, reaching my batteries.

"Give your alarm," I said. I put out my hand, lifting my lever, turned the current into my coils, and blazed up my Y-ray for half a heart-beat, succeeding

in that brief time in reversing and in receiving the current that so far changed matters that the thing I touched would remain normal, although I was left still so far subjected to the ray of the less displacement that I ought, when the thrill had subsided, to be able to step through the wall as easily as if no wall were there. "Do you see what I have here?" I most unwisely exclaimed. "In one second I could annihilate you—" I had no time for more, or even to make sure I was correct, before, keeping one eye on me, he had called the officer.

"Look here," he said again, turning on me. "I know enough to see you have something new there, some of your damned inventions. Come, give me my diamond, and if it is worth while I'll find the capital, go halves, and drop this matter."

"Not to save your life!" I cried.

"You know me, officer," he said, as the blue coat came running in. "I give this man into custody for theft."

"It is a mistake, officer," I said. "But you will do your duty." "Take him to the central station," said Mr. Brant, "and have him searched. He has a jewel of mine on his person."

"Yer annar's sure it's not on the primmises?" asked the officer. "He has had no time—"

"Sure, if it's quick he do be he's as like to toss it in a corner—"

I stretched out my hand to a knob that silenced the humming among my wires, and at the same time sent up a thread of white fire whose instant rush and subsidence hinted of terrible power behind. The last divisible particle of radium— their eyeballs throbbed for a week.

"Search," I said. "But be careful about shocks. I don't want murder here, too."

Apparently they also were of that mind. For, recovering their sight, they threw my coat over my shoulders and marched me between them to the station, where I was searched, and, as it was already late, locked into a cell for the night.

I could not waste strength on the matter. I was waiting for the dead middle of the night. Then I should put things to proof.

I confess it was a time of intense breathlessness while waiting for silence and slumber to seal the world. Then I called upon my soul, and I stepped boldly forward and walked through that stone wall as if it had been air.

Of course, at my present displacement I was perfectly visible, and I slipped behind this and that projection, and into that alley, till sure of safety. There I made haste to my quarters, took the shelf holding the carbon, and at once subjected it to the necessary treatment. I was unprepared for the result. One

instant the room seemed full of a blinding white flame, an intolerable heat, which shut my eyes and singed my hair and blistered my face.

"It is the atmosphere of a fire-dissolving planet," I thought. And then there was darkness and a strange odor.

I fumbled and stumbled about till I could let in the fresh air; and presently I saw the dim light of the street lamp. Then I turned on my own lights—and there was the quartz slab with a curious fusing of its edges, and in the center, flashing, palpitating, lay the diamond, all fire and whiteness. I wondered if it were not considerably larger; but it was hot as if just fallen from Syra Vega; it contracted slightly after subjection to dephlogistic gases.

It was near morning when, having found Brant's address, I passed into his house and his room, and took my bearings. I found his waistcoat, left the diamond in one of its pockets, and returned. It would not do to remain away, visible or invisible. I must be vindicated, cleared of the charge, set right before the world by Brant's appearing and confessing his mistake on finding the diamond in his pocket.

Judge Brant did nothing of the kind. Having visited me in my cell and in vain renewed his request to share in the invention which the habit of his mind convinced him must be of importance, he appeared against me. And the upshot of the business was that I went to prison for the term of years he had threatened.

I asked for another interview with him; but was refused, unless on the terms already declined. My lawyer, with the prison chaplain, went to him, but to no purpose. At last I went myself, as I had gone before, begging him not to ruin the work of my life. He regarded me as a bad dream, and I could not undeceive him without betraying my secret. I returned to my cell and again waited. For to escape was only to prevent possible vindication. If Mary had lived— but I was alone in the world.

The chaplain arranged with my landlord to take a sum of money I had, and to keep my rooms and apparatus intact till the expiration of my sentence. And then I put on the shameful and degrading prison garb and submitted to my fate.

It was a black fate. On the edge of the greatest triumph over matter that had ever been achieved, on the verge of announcing the actuality of the Fourth Dimension of Space, and of defining and declaring its laws, I was a convict laborer at a prison bench.

One day Judge Brant, visiting a client under sentence of death, in relation to his fee, made pretext to look me up, and stopped at my bench. "And how do you like it as far as you've gone?" he said.

"So that I go no farther," I replied. "And unless you become accessory to my taking off, you will acknowledge you found the stone in your pocket—"

"Not yet, not yet," he said, with an unctuous laugh. "It was a keen jest you played. Regard this as a jest in return. But when you are ready, I am ready."

The thing was hopeless. That night I bade good-bye to the life that had plunged me from the pinnacle of light to the depths of hell.

When again conscious I lay on a cot in the prison hospital. My attempt had been unsuccessful. St. Angel sat beside me. It was here, practically, he came into my life. Alas, that I came into his.

In the long nights of darkness and failing faintness, when horror had me by the throat, he was beside me, and his warm, human touch was all that held me while I hung over the abyss. When I swooned off again his hand, his voice, his bending face recalled me. "Why not let me go, and then an end?" I sighed.

"To save you from a great sin," he replied. And I clung to his hand with the animal instinct of living.

I was well, and in my cell, when he said. "You claim to be an honest man—"

"And yet?"

"You were about taking that which did not belong to you."

"I hardly understand—"

"Can you restore life once taken?"

"Oh, life! That worthless thing!"

"Lent for a purpose."

"For torture!"

"If by yourself you could breathe breath into any pinch of feathers and toss it off your hand a creature— but, as it is, life is a trust. And you, a man of parts, of power, hold it only to return with usury."

"And stripped of the power of gathering usury! Robbed of the work about to revolutionize the world!"

"The world moves on wide waves. Another man will presently have reached your discovery."

As if that were a thing to be glad of! I learned afterwards that St. Angel had given up the sweetness of life for the sake of his enemy. He had gone to prison, and himself worn the stripes, rather than the woman he loved should know her husband was the criminal. Perhaps he did not reconcile this with his love of inviolate truth. But St. Angel had never felt so much regard for his own soul as for the service of others. Self-forgetfulness was the dominant of all his nature.

"Tell me," he said, sitting with me, "about your work."

A whim of trustfulness seized me. I drew an outline, but paused at the look of pity on his face. He felt there was but one conclusion to draw— that I was a madman.

"Very well," I said, "you shall see." And I walked through the wall before his amazed eyes, and walked back again.

For a moment speechless, "You have hypnotic power," then he said. "You made me think I saw it."

"You did see it. I can go free any day I choose."

"And you do not?"

"I must be vindicated." And I told exactly what had taken place with Brant and his diamond. "Perhaps that vindication will never come," I said at last. "The offended *amour propre*, and the hope of gain, hindered in the beginning. Now he will find it impossible."

"That is too monstrous to believe!" said St. Angel. "But since you can, why not spend an hour or two at night with your work?"

"In these clothes! How long before I should be brought back? The first wayfarer— oh, you see!"

St. Angel thought a while. "You are my size," he said then. "We will exchange clothes. I will remain here. In three hours return, that you may get your sleep. It is fortunate the prison should be in the same town."

Night after night then, I was in my old rooms, the shutters up, lost in my dreams and my researches, arriving at great ends. Night after night I reappeared on the moment, and St. Angel went his way.

I had now found that molecular displacement can be had in various directions. Going further, I saw that gravity acts on bodies whose molecules are on the same plane, and one of the possible results of the application of the Y-ray was the suspension of the laws of gravity. This possibly accounted for an almost inappreciable buoyancy and the power of directing one's course. My last studies showed that a substance thus treated has the degenerative power of attracting the molecules of any norm into its new orbit— a disastrous possibility. A chair might disappear into a table previously treated by a Y-ray. In fact, the outlook was to infinity. The change so slight— the result so astonishing! The subject might go into molecular interstices as far removed, to all essential purpose, as if billions of miles away in interstellar space. Nothing was changed, nothing disrupted; but the thing had stepped aside to let the world go by. The secrets of the world were mine. The criminal was at my mercy. The lover had no reserves from me. And as for my enemy, the Lord had delivered him into my hand. I could leave him only a puzzle for the dissectors. I could make him, although yet alive, a conscious ghost to stand or wander in his altered shape through years of nightmare alone and lost. What wonders of energy would follow this ray of displacement. What withdrawal of malignant growth and deteriorating tissue was to come. "To what heights of succor for

humanity the surgeon can rise with it!" said St. Angel, as, full of my enthusiasm, I dilated on the marvel.

"He can work miracles!" I exclaimed. "He can heal the sick, walk on the deep, perhaps— who knows— raise the dead!"

I was at the height of my endeavor when St. Angel brought me my pardon. He had so stated my case to the Governor, so spoken of my interrupted career, and of my prison conduct, that the pardon had been given. I refused to accept it. "I accept," I said, "nothing but vindication, if I stay here till the day of judgment!"

"But there is no provision for you now," he urged. "Officially you no longer exist."

"Here I am," I said, "and here I stay."

"At any rate," he continued, "come out with me now and see the Governor, and see the world and the daylight outdoors, and be a man among men a while!"

With the stipulation that I should return, I put on a man's clothes again and went out the gates.

It was with a thrill of exultation that, exhibiting the affairs in my room to St. Angel, finally I felt the vibrating impulse that told me I had received the ray of the larger displacement. In a moment I should be viewless as the air.

"Where are you?" said St. Angel, turning this way and that. "What has become of you?"

"Seeing is believing," I said. "Sometimes not seeing is the naked truth."

"Oh, but this is uncanny!" he exclaimed. "A voice out of empty air."

"Not so empty! But place your hand under the second coil. Have no fear. You hear me now," I said. "I am in perhaps the Fourth Dimension. I am invisible to any one not there— to all the world, except, presently, yourself. For now you, you also, pass into the unseen. Tell me what you feel."

"Nothing," he said. "A vibration— a suspicion of one. No, a blow, a sense of coming collapse, so instant it has passed."

"Now," I said, "there is no one on earth with eyes to see you but myself!"

"That seems impossible."

"Did you see me? But now you do. We are on the same plane. Look in that glass. There is the reflection of the room, of the window, the chair. Do you see me? Yourself ?"

"Powers of the earth and air, but this is ghastly!" said St. Angel.

"It is the working of natural law. Now we will see the world, ourselves unseen."

"An unfair advantage."

"Perhaps. But there are things to accomplish to-day." What things I never dreamed; or I had stayed on the threshold.

I wanted St. Angel to know the manner of man this Brant was. We went out, and arrested our steps only inside Brant's office.

"This door is always blowing open!" said the clerk, and he returned to a woman standing in a suppliant attitude. "The Judge has gone to the races," he said, "and he's left word that Tuesday morning your goods'll be put out of the house if you don't pay up!" The woman went her way weeping.

Leaving, we mounted a car; we would go to the races ourselves. I doubt if St. Angel had ever seen anything of the sort. I observed him quietly slip a dime into the conductor's pocket— he felt that even the invisible, like John Gilpin, carried a right. "This opens a way for the right hand undreamed of the left," he said to me later.

It was not long before we found Judge Brant, evidently in an anxious frame, his expanse of countenance white with excitement. He had been plunging heavily, as I learned, and had big money staked, not upon the favorite but upon *Hannan*, the black mare. "That man would hardly put up so much on less than a certainty," I thought. Winding our way unseen among the grooms and horses, I found what I suspected— a plan to pocket the favorite. "But I know a game worth two of that," I said. I took a couple of small smooth pebbles, previously prepared, from the chamois bag into which I had put them with some others and an aluminum wafer treated for the larger displacement, and slipped one securely under the favorite's saddle-girth. When he warmed to his work he should be, for perhaps half an hour, at the one-billionth point, before the virtue expired, and capable of passing through every obstacle as he was directed.

"Hark you, Danny," then I whispered in the jockey's ear.

"Who are you? What— I— I— don't—" looking about with terror.

"It's no ghost," I whispered hurriedly. "Keep your nerve. I am flesh and blood— alive as you. But I have the property which for half an hour I give you— a new discovery. And knowing Bub and Whittler's game, it's up to you to knock 'em out. Now, remember, when they try the pocket ride straight through them!"

Other things kept my attention; and when the crucial moment came I had some excited heart-beats. And so had Judge Brant. It was in the instant when Danny, having held the favorite well in hand for the first stretch, *Hannan* and *Darter* in the lead and the field following, was about calling on her speed, that suddenly Bub and Whittler drew their horses' heads a trifle more closely together, in such wise that it was impossible to pass on either side, and a horse

could no more shoot ahead than if a stone wall stood there. "Remember, Danny!" I shouted, making a trumpet of my hands. "Ride straight through!"

And Danny did. He pulled himself together, and set his teeth as if it were a compact with powers of evil, and rode straight through without turning a hair, or disturbing either horse or rider. Once more the Y-ray was triumphant.

But about Judge Brant the air was blue. It would take a very round sum of money to recoup the losses of those few moments. I disliked to have St. Angel hear him; but it was all in the day's work.

The day had not been to Judge Brant's mind, as at last he bent his steps to the club. As he went it occurred to me to try upon him the larger ray of displacement, and I slipped down the back of his collar the wafer I had ready. He would not at once feel its action, but in the warmth either of walking or dining, its properties should be lively for nearly an hour. I had curiosity to see if the current worked not only through all substances, but through all sorts and conditions.

"I should prefer a better pursuit," said St. Angel, as we reached the street. "Is there not something ignoble in it?"

"In another case. Here it is necessary to hound the criminal, to see the man entirely. A game not to be played too often, for there is work to be done before establishing the counteracting currents that may ensure reserves and privacies to people. To-night let us go to the club with Judge Brant, and then I will back to my cell."

As you may suppose, Brant was a man neither of imagination nor humor. As you have seen, he was hard and cruel, priding himself on being a good hater, which in his contention meant indulgence of a preternaturally vindictive temper when prudence allowed. With more cunning than ability, he had achieved some success in his profession, and he secured admission to a good club, recently crowning his efforts, when most of the influential members were absent, by getting himself made one of its governors.

It would be impossible to find a greater contrast to this wretch than in St. Angel— a man of delicate imagination and pure fancy, tender to the child on the street, the fly on the wall; all his atmosphere that of kindness. Gently born, but too finely bred, his physical resistance was so slight that his immunity lay in not being attacked. His clean, fair skin, his brilliant eyes, spoke of health, but the fragility of frame did not speak of strength. Yet St. Angel's life was the active principle of good; his neighborhood was purification.

I was revolving these things while we followed Judge Brant, when I saw him pause in an agitated manner, like one startled out of sleep. A quick shiver ran over his strong frame; he turned red and pale, then with a shrug went on. The

displacement had occurred. He was now on the plane of invisibility, and we must have a care ourselves.

Wholly unconscious of any change, the man pursued his way. The street was as usual. There was the boy who always waited for him with the extra but to-night was oblivious; and failing to get his attention the Judge walked on. A shower that had been threatening began to fall, the sprinkle becoming a downpour, with umbrellas spread and people hurrying. The Judge hailed a car; but the motorman was as blind as the newsboy. The shower stopped as suddenly as it had begun, but he went on some paces before perceiving that he was perfectly dry, for as he shut and shook his umbrella not a drop fell, and as he took off his hat and looked at it, not an atom of moisture was to be found there. Evidently bewildered, and looking about shamefacedly, I fancied I could hear him saying, with his usual oaths, "I must be deucedly over-wrought, or this is some blue devilment."

As the Judge took his accustomed seat in the warm and brilliantly lighted room, and picking up the evening paper, looked over the columns, the familiar every-day affair quieting his nerves so that he could have persuaded himself he had been half asleep as he walked, he was startled by the voice, not four feet away, of one of the old officers who made the Kings County their resort. Something had ruffled the doughty hero. "By the Lord Harry, sir," he was saying in unmodulated tones, "I should like to know what this club is coming to when you can spring on it the election of such a man as this Brant! Judge? What's he Judge of? Beat his wife, too, didn't he? The governors used to be gentlemen!"

"But you know, General," said his *vis-à-vis*, "I think no more of him than you do; but when a man lives at the Club—"

"Lives here!" burst in the other angrily. "He hasn't anywhere else to live! Is there a decent house in town open to him? Well, thank goodness, I've somewhere else to go before he comes in! The sight of him gives me a fit of the gout!" And the General stumped out stormily.

"Old boy seems upset!" said someone not far away. "But he's right. It was sheer impudence in the fellow to put up his name."

I could see Brant grow white and gray with anger, as surprised and outraged, wondering what it meant— if the General intended insult— if Scarsdale— but no, apparently they had not seen him. The contemptuous words rankled; the sweat stood on his forehead.

Had not the moment been serious, there were a thousand tricks to play. But the potency of the polarization was subsiding and in a short time the normal molecular plane would be re-established. It was there that I made my mistake. I should not have allowed him to depolarize so soon. I should have

kept him bewildered and foodless till famished and weak. Instead, as ion by ion the effect of the ray decreased, his shape grew vague and misty, and then one and another man there rubbed his eyes, for Judge Brant was sitting in his chair and a waiter was hastening towards him.

It had all happened in a few minutes. Plainly the Judge understood nothing of the circumstances. He was dazed, but he must put the best face on it; and he ordered his dinner and a pony of brandy, eating like a hungry animal.

He rose, after a time, refreshed, invigorated, and all himself. Choosing a cigar, he went into another room, seeking a choice lounging place, where for a while he could enjoy his ease and wonder if anything worse than a bad dream had befallen. As for the General's explosion, it did not signify; he was conscious of such opinion; he was overliving it; he would be expelling the old cock yet for conduct unbecoming a gentleman.

Meanwhile, St. Angel, tiring of the affair, and weary, had gone into this room, and in an arm-chair by the hearth was awaiting me— the intrusive quality of my observations not at all to his mind. He had eaten nothing all day, and was somewhat faint. He had closed his eyes, and perhaps fallen into a light doze when he must have been waked by the impact of Brant's powerful frame, as the latter took what seemed to him the empty seat. I expected to see Brant at once flung across the rug by St. Angel's natural effort in rising. Instead, Brant sank into the chair as into down pillows.

I rushed, as quickly as I could, to seize and throw him off, "Through him! Pass through him! Come out! Come to me!" I cried. And people to-day remember that voice out of the air, in the Kings County Club.

It seemed to me that I heard a sound, a sob, a whisper, as if one cried with a struggling sigh, "Impossible!" And with that a strange trembling convulsed Judge Brant's great frame, he lifted his hands, he thrust out his feet, his head fell forward, he groaned gurglingly, shudder after shudder shook him as if every muscle quivered with agony or effort, the big veins started out as if every pulse were a red-hot iron. He was wrestling with something, he knew not what, something as antipathetic to him as white is to black; every nerve was concentrated in rebellion, every fiber struggled to break the spell.

The whole affair was that of a dozen heart-beats— the attempt of the opposing molecules each to draw the other into its own orbit. The stronger physical force, the greater aggregation of atoms was prevailing. Thrust upward for an instant, Brant fell back into his chair exhausted, the purple color fading till his face shone fair as a girl's, sweet and smiling as a child's, white as the face of a risen spirit— Brant's!

Astounded, I seized his shoulder and whirled him about. There was no one else in the chair. I looked in every direction. There was no St. Angel to be seen.

There was but one conclusion to draw— the molecules of Brant's stronger material frame had drawn into their own plane the molecules of St. Angel's.

I rushed from the place, careless if seen or unseen, howling in rage and misery. I sought my laboratory, and in a fiend's fury depolarized myself, and I demolished every instrument, every formula, every vestige of my work. I was singed and scorched and burned, but I welcomed any pain. And I went back to prison, admitted by the officials who hardly knew what else to do. I would stay there, I thought, all my days. God grant they should be few! It would be seen that a life of imprisonment and torture were too little punishment for the ruin I had wrought.

It was after a sleepless night, of which every moment seemed madness, that, the door of my cell opening, I saw St. Angel. St. Angel? God have mercy on me, no, it was Judge Brant I saw!

He came forward, with both hands extended, a grave, imploring look on his face. "I have come," he said, a singular sweet overtone in his voice that I had never heard before, yet which echoed like music in my memory, "to make you all the reparation in my power. I will go with you at once before the Governor, and acknowledge that I have found the diamond. I can never hope to atone for what you have suffered. But as long as I live, all that I have, all that I am, is yours!"

There was a look of absolute sweetness on his face that for a dizzy moment made me half distraught. "We will go together," he said. "I have to stop on the way and tell a woman whose mortgage comes due to-day that I have made a different disposition; and, do you know," he added brightly, after an instant's hesitation, "I think I shall help her pay it!" and he laughed gayly at the jest involved.

"Will you say that you have known my innocence all these years?" I said sternly.

"Is not that," he replied, with a touching and persuasive quality of tone, "a trifle too much? Do you think this determination has been reached without a struggle? If you are set right before the world, is not something due to— Brant?"

"If I did not know who and what you are," I said, "I should think the soul of St. Angel had possession of you!"

The man looked at me dreamily. "Strange!" he murmured. "I seem to have heard something like that before. However," as if he shook off a perplexing train of thought, "all that is of no consequence. It is not who you are, but what you do. Come, my friend, don't deny me, don't let the good minute slip. Surely the undoing of the evil of a lifetime, the turning of that force to righteousness, is work outweighing all a prison chaplain's—"

My God, what had the intrusion of my incapable hands upon forbidden mysteries done!

"Come," he said. "We will go together. We will carry light into dark places— there are many waiting—"

"St. Angel!" I cried, with a loud voice, "are you here?"

And again the smile of infinite sweetness illuminated the face even as the sun shines up from the depths of a stagnant pool.

End