PAST MASTERS 197

Bess Streeter Aldrich
H. Bedford-Jones
Don Marquis
Erle Cox
Stella Benson
Ruby Doyle
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Wilkie Collins
Dorothy F. Perry

and more

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

18 Jan 2025

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1: Tol'able David

Joseph Hergesheimer

1880-1954

The Saturday Evening Post, 14 July 1917

Made into a hit silent movie in 1921 starring Richard Barthelmess, and again as a talkie in 1930. Trials and tribulations of a family of share farmers in West Virigina in the 19th century.

HE WAS the younger of two brothers, in his sixteenth year; and he had his father's eyes— a tender and idyllic blue. There, however, the obvious resemblance ended. The elder's azure gaze was set in a face scarred and riven by hardship, debauch and disease; he had been— before he had inevitably returned to the mountains where he was born— a brakeman in the lowest stratum of the corruption of small cities on big railroads; and his thin stooped body, his gaunt head and uncertain hands, all bore the stamp of ruinous years. But in the midst of this his eyes, like David's, retained their singularly tranquil color of sweetness and innocence.

David was the youngest, the freshest thing imaginable; he was overtall and gawky, his cheeks were as delicately rosy as apple blossoms, and his smile was an epitome of ingenuous interest and frank wonder. It was as if some quality of especial fineness, lingering unspotted in Hunter Kinemon, had found complete expression in his son David. A great deal of this certainly was due to his mother, a thick solid woman, who retained more than a trace of girlish beauty when she stood back, flushed from the heat of cooking, or, her bright eyes snapping, tramped with heavy pails from the milking shed on a winter morning.

Both the Kinemon boys were engaging. Allen, almost twenty-one, was, of course, the more conspicuous; he was called the strongest youth in Greenstream County. He had his mother's brown eyes; a deep bony box of a chest; rippling shoulders; and a broad peaceful countenance. He drove the Crabapple stage, between Crabapple, the village just over the back mountain, and Beaulings, in West Virginia. It was twenty-six miles from point to point, a way that crossed a towering range, hung above a far veil of unbroken spruce, forded swift glittering streams, and followed a road that passed rare isolated dwellings, dominating rocky and precarious patches and hills of cultivation. One night Allen slept in Beaulings; the next he was home, rising at four o'clock in order to take his stage out of Crabapple at seven sharp.

It was a splendid job, and brought them thirty-five dollars a month; not in mere trade at the store, but actual money. This, together with Hunter Kinemon's position, tending the rich bottom farm of State Senator Gait, gave them a position of ease and comfort in Greenstream. They were a very highly esteemed family.

Gait's farm was in grazing; it extended in deep green pastures and sparkling water between two high mountainous walls drawn across east and west. In the morning the rising sun cast long delicate shadows on one side; at evening the shadow troops lengthened across the emerald valley from the other. The farmhouse occupied a fenced clearing on the eastern rise, with a gray huddle of barn and sheds below, a garden patch of innumerable bean poles, and an incessant stir of snowy chickens. Beyond, the cattle moved in sleek chestnut-brown and orange herds; and farther out flocks of sheep shifted like gray-white clouds on a green-blue sky.

It was, Mrs. Kinemon occasionally complained, powerful lonely, with the store two miles up the road, Crabapple over a heft of a rise, and no personable neighbors; and she kept a loaded rifle in an angle of the kitchen when the men were all out in a distant pasturage. But David liked it extremely well; he liked riding an old horse after the steers, the all-night sap boilings in spring groves, the rough path across a rib of the mountain to school.

Nevertheless, he was glad when studying was over for the year. It finished early in May, on account of upland planting, and left David with a great many weeks filled only with work that seem to him unadulterated play. Even that didn't last all the time; there were hours when he could fish for trout, plentiful in cool rocky pools; or shoot gray squirrels in the towering maples. Then, of evenings, he could listen to Allen's thrilling tales of the road, of the gambling and fighting among the lumbermen in Beaulings, or of strange people that had taken passage in the Crabapple stage— drummers, for the most part, with impressive diamond rings and the doggonedest lies imaginable. But they couldn't fool Allen, however believing he might seem…. The Kinemons were listening to such a recital by their eldest son now.

They were gathered in a room of very general purpose. It had a rough board floor and crumbling plaster walls, and held a large scarred cherry bed with high posts and a gayly quilted cover; a long couch, covered with yellow untanned sheepskins; a primitive telephone; some painted wooden chairs; a wardrobe, lurching insecurely forward; and an empty iron stove with a pipe let into an original open hearth with a wide rugged stone. Beyond, a door opened into the kitchen, and back of the bed a raw unguarded flight of steps led up to the peaked space where Allen and David slept.

Hunter Kinemon was extended on the couch, his home-knitted socks comfortably free of shoes, smoking a sandstone pipe with a reed stem. Mrs. Kinemon was seated in a rocking-chair with a stained and torn red plush cushion, that moved with a thin complaint on a fixed base. Allen was over against the stove, his corduroy trousers thrust into greased laced boots, and a black cotton shirt open on a chest and throat like pink marble. And David supported his lanky length, in a careless and dust-colored garb, with a capacious hand on the oak beam of the mantel.

It was May, school had stopped, and a door was open on a warm still dusk. Allen's tale had come to an end; he was pinching the ear of a diminutive dog— like a fat white sausage with wire-thin legs and a rat tail— that never left him. The smoke from the elder Kinemon's pipe rose in a tranquil cloud. Mrs. Kinemon rocked vigorously, with a prolonged wail of the chair springs. "I got to put some tallow to that chair," Kinemon proclaimed.

"The house on Elbow Barren's took," Allen told him suddenly— "the one just off the road. I saw smoke in the chimney this evening."

A revival of interest, a speculation, followed this announcement.

"Any women'll get to the church," Mr. Kinemon asserted. "I wonder? Did a person say who were they?"

"I asked; but they're strange to Crabapple. I heard this though: there weren't any women to them— just men— father and sons like. I drew up right slow going by; but nobody passed out a word. It's a middling bad farm place— rocks and berry bushes. I wouldn't reckon much would be content there."

David walked out through the open doorway and stood on the small covered portico, that with a bench on each side, hung to the face of the dwelling. The stars were brightening in the sky above the confining mountain walls; there was a tremendous shrilling of frogs; the faint clamor of a sheep bell. He was absolutely, irresponsibly happy. He wished the time would hurry when he'd be big and strong like Allen, and get out into the absorbing stir of the world.

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HE WAS dimly roused by Allen's departure in the beginning brightness of the following morning. The road over which the stage ran drew by the rim of the farm; and later David saw the rigid three-seated surrey, the leather mail bags strapped in the rear, trotted by under the swinging whip of his brother. He heard the faint sharp bark of Rocket, Allen's dog, braced at his side.

David spent the day with his father, repairing the fencing of the middle field, swinging a mall and digging post holes; and at evening his arms ached.

But he assured himself he was not tired; any brother of Allen's couldn't give in before such insignificant effort. When Hunter Kinemon turned back toward house and supper David made a wide circle, ostensibly to see whether there was rock salt enough out for the cattle, but in reality to express his superabundant youth, staying qualities and unquenchable vivid interest in every foot of the valley.

He saw the meanest kind of old fox, and marked what he thought might be its hole; his flashing gaze caught the obscure distant retreat of ground hogs; he threw a contemptuous clod at the woolly-brained sheep; and with a bent willow shoot neatly looped a trout out upon the grassy bank. As a consequence of all this he was late for supper, and sat at the table with his mother, who never took her place until the men— yes, and boys of her family— had satisfied their appetites. The dark came on and she lighted a lamp swinging under a tin reflector from the ceiling. The kitchen was an addition, and had a sloping shed roof, board sides, a polished stove, and a long table with a red cloth.

His father, David learned, attacking a plateful of brown chicken swimming with greens and gravy, was having another bad spell. He had the familiar sharp pain through his back and his arms hurt him.

"He can't be drove to a doctor," the woman told David, speaking, in her concern, as if to an equal in age and comprehension.

David had grown accustomed to the elder's periods of suffering; they came, twisted his father's face into deep lines, departed, and things were exactly as before— or very nearly the same. The boy saw that Hunter Kinemon couldn't support labor that only two or three years before he would have finished without conscious effort. David resolutely ignored this; he felt that it must be a cause of shame, unhappiness, to his father; and he never mentioned it to Allen. Kinemon lay very still on the couch; his pipe, beside him on the floor, had spilled its live core, burning into a length of rag carpet. His face, hung with shadows like the marks of a sooty finger, was glistening with fine sweat. Not a whisper of complaint passed his dry lips. When his wife approached he attempted to smooth out his corrugated countenance. His eyes, as tenderly blue as flowers, gazed at her with a faint masking of humor.

"This is worse'n usual," she said sharply. "And I ain't going to have you fill yourself with any more of that patent trash. You don't spare me by not letting on. I can tell as soon as you're miserable. David can fetch the doctor from Crabapple to-night if you don't look better."

"But I am," he assured her. "It's just a comeback of an old ache. There was a power of heavy work to that fence."

"You'll have to get more to help you," she continued. "That Galt'll let you kill yourself and not turn a hand. He can afford a dozen. I don't mind housing and cooking for them. David's only tol'able for lifting, too, while he's growing."

"Why," David protested, "it ain't just nothing what I do. I could do twice as much. I don't believe Allen could helt more'n me when he was sixteen. It ain't just nothing at all."

He was disturbed by this assault upon his manhood; if his muscles were still a little stringy it was surprising what he could accomplish with them. He would show her to-morrow.

"And," he added impetuously, "I can shoot better than Allen right now. You ask him if I can't. You ask him what I did with that cranky twenty- two last Sunday up on the mountain."

His clear gaze sought her, his lean face quivered with anxiety to impress, convince her of his virility, skill. His jaw was as sharp as the blade of a hatchet. She studied him with a new surprised concern.

"David!" she exclaimed. "For a minute you had the look of a man. A real steady look, like your father. Don't you grow up too fast, David," she directed him, in an irrepressible maternal solicitude. "I want a boy— something young— round a while yet."

Hunter Kinemon sat erect and reached for his pipe. The visible strain of his countenance had been largely relaxed. When his wife had left the room for a moment he admitted to David:

"That was a hard one. I thought she had me that time."

The elder's voice was light, steady. The boy gazed at him with intense admiration. He felt instinctively that nothing mortal could shake the other's courage. And, on top of his mother's complimentary surprise, his father had confided in him, made an admission that, David realized, must be kept from fretting women. He couldn't have revealed more to Allen himself.

He pictured the latter swinging magnificently into Beaulings, cracking the whip over the horses' ears, putting on the grinding brake before the post-office. No one, even in that town of reckless drinking, ever tried to down Allen; he was as ready as he was strong. He had charge of Government mail and of passengers; he carried a burnished revolver in a holster under the seat at his hand. Allen would kill anybody who interfered with him. So would he— David— if a man edged up on him or on his family; if any one hurt even a dog of his, his own dog, he'd shoot him.

An inextinguishable hot pride, a deep sullen intolerance, rose in him at the thought of an assault on his personal liberty, his rights, or on his connections and belongings. A deeper red burned in his fresh young cheeks; his smiling lips were steady; his candid blue eyes, ineffably gentle, gazed widely against the

candlelit gloom where he was making his simple preparations for bed. The last feeling of which he was conscious was a wave of sharp admiration, of love, for everything and everybody that constituted his home.

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ALLEN, on his return the following evening, immediately opened an excited account of the new family, with no women, on the place by Elbow Barren.

"I heard they were from down hellwards on the Clinch," he repeated; "and then that they'd come from Kentucky. Anyway, they're bad. Ed Arbogast just stepped on their place for a pleasant howdy, and some one on the stoop hollered for him to move. Ed, he saw the shine on a rifle barrel, and went right along up to the store. Then they hired Simmons— the one that ain't good in his head— to cut out bush; and Simmons trailed home after a while with the side of his face all tore, where he'd been hit with a piece of board. Simmons' brother went and asked them what was it about; and one of the Hatburns— that's their name— said he'd busted the loony just because!"

"What did Simmons answer back?" Hunter Kinemon demanded, his coffee cup suspended.

"Nothing much; he'd law them, or something like that. The Simmonses are right spindling; they don't belong in Greenstream either." David commented: "I wouldn't have et a thing till I'd got them!" In the ruddy reflection of the lamp his pink-and-blue charm, his shy lips, resembled a pastoral divinity of boyhood. Allen laughed.

"That family, the Hatburns— — " He paused. "Why, they'd just mow you down with the field daisies."

David flushed with annoyance. He saw his mother studying him with the attentive concern she had first shown the day before yesterday.

"You have no call to mix in with them," Kinemon told his elder son. "Drive stage and mind your business. I'd even step aside a little from folks like that."

A sense of surprised disappointment invaded David at his father's statement. It seemed to him out of keeping with the elder's courage and determination. It, too, appeared almost spindling. Perhaps he had said it because his wife, a mere woman, was there. He was certain that Allen would not agree with such mildness. The latter, lounging back from the table, narrowed his eyes; his fingers played with the ears of his dog, Rocket. Allen gave his father a cigar and lit one himself, a present from a passenger on the stage. David could see a third in Allen's shirt pocket, and he longed passionately for the day when he would be old enough to have a cigar offered him. He longed for the time when he, like Allen, would be swinging a whip over

the horses of a stage, rambling down a steep mountain, or walking up at the team's head to take off some weight.

Where the stage line stopped in Beaulings the railroad began. Allen, he knew, intended in the fall to give up the stage for the infinitely wider world of freight cars; and David wondered whether Priest, the storekeeper in Crabapple who had charge of the awarding of the position, could be brought to see that he was as able a driver, almost, as Allen.

It was probable Priest would call him too young for the charge of the Government mail. But he wasn't; Allen had to admit that he, David, was the straighter shot. He wouldn't step aside for any Hatburn alive. And, he decided, he would smoke nothing but cigars. He considered whether he might light his small clay pipe, concealed under the stoop, before the family; but reluctantly concluded that that day had not yet arrived.

Allen passed driving the next morning as usual, leaving a gray wreath of dust to settle back into the tranquil yellow sunshine; the sun moved from the east barrier to the west; a cool purple dusk filled the valley, and the shrilling of the frogs rose to meet the night. The following day was almost identical— the shadows swept out, shortened under the groves of trees and drew out again over the sheep on the western slope. Before Allen reached home he had to feed and bed his horses, and walk back the two miles over the mountain from Crabapple; and a full hour before the time for his brother's arrival, David was surprised to see the stage itself making its way over the precarious turf road that led up to the Kinemons' dwelling. He was standing by the portico, and immediately his mother moved out to his side, as if subconsciously disturbed by the unusual occurrence. David saw, while the stage was still diminutive against the rolling pasture, that Allen was not driving; and there was an odd confusion of figures in a rear seat. Mrs. Kinemon said at once, in a shrill strange voice:

"Something has happened to Allen!" She pressed her hands against her laboring breast; David ran forward and met the surrey as it came through the fence opening by the stable shed. Ed Arbogast was driving; and a stranger— a drummer evidently— in a white-and-black check suit, was holding Allen, crumpled in a dreadful bloody faint.

"Where's Hunter?" Arbogast asked the boy.

"There he comes now," David replied, his heart pounding wildly and dread constricting his throat.

Hunter Kinemon and his wife reached the stage at the same moment. Both were plaster-white; but the woman was shaking with frightened concern, while her husband was deliberate and still.

"Help me carry him in to our bed," he addressed Ed Arbogast.

They lifted Allen out and bore him toward the house, his limp fingers, David saw, trailing through the grass. At first the latter involuntarily turned away; but, objurgating such cowardice, he forced himself to gaze at Allen. He recognized at once that his brother had not been shot; his hip was too smeared and muddy for that. It was, he decided, an accident, as Arbogast and the drummer lead Hunter Kinemon aside. David Kinemon walked resolutely up to the little group. His father gestured for him to go away, but he ignored the elder's command. He must know what had happened to Allen. The stranger in the checked suit was speaking excitedly, waving trembling hands— a sharp contrast to the grim immobility of the Greenstream men:

"He'd been talking about that family, driving out of Beaulings and saying how they had done this and that; and when we came to where they lived he pointed out the house. A couple of dark-favored men were working in a patch by the road, and he waved his whip at them, in a way of speaking; but they never made a sign. The horses were going slow then; and, for some reason or other, his little dog jumped to the road and ran in on the patch. Sirs, one of those men spit, stepped up to the dog, and kicked it into Kingdom Come."

David's hands clenched; and he drew in a sharp sobbing breath.

"This Allen," the other continued, "pulled in the team and drawed a gun from under the seat before I could move a hand. You can hear me— I wouldn't have kicked any dog of his for all the gold there is! He got down from the stage and started forward, and his face was black; then he stopped, undecided. He stood studying, with the two men watching him, one leaning careless on a grub hoe. Then, by heaven, he turned and rested the gun on the seat, and walked up to where laid the last of his dog. He picked it up, and says he:

"'Hatburn, I got Government mail on that stage to get in under contract, and there's a passenger too— paid to Crabapple; but when I get them two things done I'm coming back to kill you two dead to hear the last trumpet.'

"The one on the hoe laughed; but the other picked up a stone like my two fists and let Allen have it in the back. It surprised him like; he stumbled forward, and the other stepped out and laid the hoe over his head. It missed him mostly, but enough landed to knock Allen over. He rolled into the ditch, like, by the road; and then Hatburn jumped down on him, deliberate, with lumbermen's irons in his shoes."

David was conscious of an icy flood pouring through him; a revulsion of grief and fury that blinded him. Tears welled over his fresh cheeks in an audible crying. But he was silenced by the aspect of his father. Hunter Kinemon's tender blue eyes had changed apparently into bits of polished steel; his mouth was pinched until it was only a line among the other lines and seaming of his worn face.

"I'd thank you to drive the stage into Crabapple, Ed," he said; "and if you see the doctor coming over the mountain— he's been rung up for— ask him, please sir, will he hurry." He turned and walked abruptly away, followed by David.

Allen lay under the gay quilt in the Kinemons' big bed. His stained clothes drooped from a chair where Mrs. Kinemon had flung them. Allen's face was like white paper; suddenly it had grown as thin and sharp as an old man's. Only a slight quiver of his eyelids showed that he was not dead.

Hunter Kinemon sat on the couch, obviously waiting for the doctor. He, too, looked queer, David thought. He wished his father would break the dreadful silence gathering over them; but the only sound was the stirring of the woman in the kitchen, boiling a pot of water. Allen moved and cried out in a knifelike agony, and a flicker of suffering passed over his father's face.

An intolerable hour dragged out before the doctor arrived; and then David was driven from the room. He sat outside on the portico, listening to the passage of feet about Allen in a high shuddering protest. David's hands and feet were still cold, but he was conscious of an increasing stillness within, an attitude not unlike his father's. He held out an arm and saw that it was as steady as a beam of the stoop roof. He was without definite plan or knowledge of what must occur; but he told himself that any decision of Hunter Kinemon's must not exclude him.

There were four Hatburns; but two Kinemons were better; and he meant his father and himself, for he knew instinctively that Allen was badly hurt. Soon there would be no Hatburns at all. And then the law could do as it pleased. It seemed to David a long way from the valley, from Allen broken in bed, to the next term of court— September— in Crabapple. The Kinemons could protect, revenge, their own.

The doctor passed out, and David entered where his mother was bent above her elder son. Hunter Kinemon, with a blackened rag, was wiping the lock of an old but efficient repeating rifle. His motions were unhurried, careful. Mrs. Kinemon gazed at him with blanching lips, but she interposed no word. There was another rifle, David knew, in the long cupboard by the hearth; and he was moving to secure it when his father's voice halted him in the middle of the floor. "You David," he said, "I want you to stop along here with your mother. It ain't fit for her to be left alone with Allen, and there's a mess of little things for doing. I want those cows milked dry, and catch in those little Dominicker chickens before that old gander eats them up."

David was about to protest, to sob out a passionate refusal, when a glimpse of his father's expression silenced him. He realized that the slightest argument would be worse than futile. There wasn't a particle of familiar feeling

in the elder's voice; suddenly David was afraid of him. Hunter Kinemon slipped a number of heavily greased cartridges into the rifle's magazine. Then he rose and said:

"Well, Mattie?"

His wife laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Hunter," she told him, "you've been a mighty sweet and good husband." He drew his hand slowly and lovingly across her cheek.

"I'm sorry about this, Mattie," he replied; "I've been powerful happy along with you and all of us. David, be a likely boy." He walked out of the room, across the grass to the stable shed.

"He's going to drive to Elbow Barren," David muttered; "and he hadn't ought to have left me to tend the cows and chickens. That's for a woman to do. I ought to be right along with him facing down those Hatburns. I can shoot, and my hand is steady as his."

He stood in the doorway, waiting for the reappearance of his father with the roan horse to hitch to their old buggy. It didn't occur to David to wonder at the fact that the other was going alone to confront four men. The Kinemons had a mort of friends who would have gladly accompanied, assisted Hunter; but this, the boy told himself, was their own affair— their own pride.

From within came the sound of his mother, crying softly, and of Allen murmuring in his pain. David was appalled by the swift change that had fallen over them— the breaking up of his entire world, the shifting of every hope and plan. He was appalled and confused; the thoughtless unquestioning security of his boyhood had been utterly destroyed. He looked about dazed at the surrounding scene, callous in its total carelessness of Allen's injury, his haggard father with the rifle. The valley was serenely beautiful; doves were calling from the eaves of the barn; a hen clucked excitedly. The western sky was a single expanse of primrose on which the mountains were jagged and blue.

He had never known the elder to be so long getting the bridle on the roan; the buggy was drawn up outside. An uneasy tension increased within him— a pressing necessity to see his father leading out their horse. He didn't come, and finally David was forced to walk over to the shed.

The roan had been untied, and turned as the boy entered; but David, at first, failed to find Hunter Kinemon; then he almost stepped on his hand. His father lay across a corner of the earthen floor, with the bridle tangled in stiff fingers, and his blue eyes staring blankly up.

David stifled an exclamation of dread, and forced himself to bend forward and touch the gray face. Only then he realized that he was looking at death. The pain in his father's back had got him at last! The rifle had been carefully

placed against the wall; and, without realizing the significance of his act, David picked it up and laid the cold barrel against his rigid young body.

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ON THE EVENING after Hunter Kinemon's burial in the rocky steep graveyard above Crabapple, David and his mother sat, one on the couch, the other in her creaking rocking-chair, lost in heavy silence. Allen moved in a perpetual uneasy pain on the bed, his face drawn and fretful, and shadowed by a soft young beard. The wardrobe doors stood open, revealing a stripped interior; wooden chairs were tied back to back; and two trunks— one of mottled paper, the other of ancient leather— stood by the side of a willow basket filled with a miscellany of housekeeping objects.

What were left of the Kinemons were moving into a small house on the edge of Crabapple; Senator Galt had already secured another tenant for the care of his bottom acres and fat herds. The night swept into the room, fragrant and blue, powdered with stars; the sheep bells sounded in a faintly distant clashing; a whippoorwill beat its throat out against the piny dark.

An overpowering melancholy surged through David; though his youth responded to the dramatic, the tragic change that had enveloped them, at the same time he was reluctant to leave the farm, the valley with its trout and ground hogs, its fox holes and sap boilings. These feelings mingled in the back of his consciousness; his active thoughts were all directed toward the time when, with the rifle, the obligation that he had picked up practically from his dead father's hand, he would walk up to the Hatburn place and take full payment for Allen's injury and their paternal loss.

He felt uneasily that he should have gone before this— at once; but there had been a multitude of small duties connected with the funeral, intimate things that could not be turned over to the kindest neighbors; and the ceremony itself, it seemed to him, should be attended by dignity and repose.

Now, however, it was over; and only his great duty remained, filling the entire threshold of his existence. He had no plan; only a necessity to perform. It was possible that he would fail— there were four Hatburns; and that chance depressed him. If he were killed there was no one else, for Allen could never take another step. That had been disclosed by the most casual examination of his injury. Only himself, David, remained to uphold the pride of the Kinemons.

He gazed covertly at his mother; she must not, certainly, be warned of his course; she was a woman, to be spared the responsibility borne by men. A feeling of her being under his protection, even advice, had grown within him since he had discovered the death in the stable shed. This had not changed his

aspect of blossoming youth, the intense blue candor of his gaze; he sat with his knees bent boyishly, his immature hands locked behind his head.

An open wagon, piled with blankets, carried Allen to Crabapple, and Mrs. Kinemon and David followed in the buggy, a great bundle, folded in the bright quilt, roped behind. They soon crossed the range and dropped into a broader valley. Crabapple lay on a road leading from mountain wall to wall, the houses quickly thinning out into meadow at each end.

A cross-roads was occupied by three stores and the courthouse, a square red-brick edifice with a classic white portico and high lantern; and it was out from that, where the highway had degenerated into a sod-cut trail, that the future home of the Kinemons lay. It was a small somber frame dwelling, immediately on the road, with a rain-washed patch rising abruptly at the back. A dilapidated shed on the left provided a meager shelter for the roan; and there was an aged and twisted apple tree over the broken pump.

"You'll have to get at that shed, David," his mother told him; "the first rain would drown anything inside."

She was settling Allen on the couch with the ragged sheepskin. So he would; but there was something else to attend to first. He would walk over to Elbow Barren, to-morrow. He involuntarily laid his hand on the barrel of the rifle, temporarily leaned against a table, when his mother spoke sharply from an inner doorway.

"You David," she said; "come right out into the kitchen."

There he stood before her, with his gaze stubbornly fixed on the bare floor, his mouth tight shut.

"David," she continued, her voice now lowered, fluctuating with anxiety, "you weren't reckoning on paying off them Hatburns? You never?" She halted, gazing at him intently. "Why, they'd shoot you up in no time! You are nothing but a— "

"You can call me a boy if you've a mind to," he interrupted; "and maybe the Hatburns'll kill me— and maybe they won't. But there's no one can hurt Allen like that and go plumb, sniggering free; not while I can move and hold a gun."

"I saw a look to you that was right manlike a week or two back," she replied; "and I said to myself: 'There's David growing up overnight.' I favored it, too, though I didn't want to lose you that way so soon. And only last night I said again: 'Thank God, David's a man in his heart, for all his pretty cheeks!' I thought I could build on you, with me getting old and Allen never taking a mortal step. Priest would give you a place, and glad, in the store— the Kinemons are mighty good people. I had it all fixed up like that, how we'd live here and pay regular.

"Oh, I didn't say nothing to your father when he started out— he was too old to change; but I hoped you would be different. I hoped you would forget your own feeling, and see Allen there on his back, and me … getting along. You're all we got, David. It's no use, I reckon; you'll go like Allen and Hunter, full up with your own pride and never — — " She broke off, gazing bitterly at her hands folded in her calico lap.

A new trouble filled David's heart. Through the open doorway he could see Allen, twisting on the couch; his mother was older, more worn, than he had realized. She had failed a great deal in the past few days. She was suddenly stripped of her aspect of authority, force; suddenly she appeared negative, dependent. A sharp pity for her arose through his other contending emotions.

"I don't know how you figure you will be helping Allen by stepping off to be shot instead of putting food in his mouth," she spoke again. "He's got nobody at all but you, David."

That was so; and yet—

"How can I let those skunks set their hell on us?" he demanded passionately. "Why, all Greenstream will think I'm afraid, that I let the Hatburns bust Allen and kill my father. I couldn't stand up in Priest's store; I couldn't bear to look at anybody. Don't you understand how men are about those things?"

She nodded.

"I can see, right enough— with Hunter in the graveyard and Allen with both hips broke. What I can't see is what we'll do next winter; how we'll keep Allen warm and fed. I suppose we can go to the County Home."

But that, David knew, was as disgraceful as the other— his own mother, Allen, objects of public charity! His face was clouded, his hands clenched. It was only a chance that he would be killed; there were four Hatburns though. His heart, he thought, would burst with misery; every instinct fought for the expression, the upholding of the family prestige, honor. A hatred for the Hatburns was like a strangling hand at his throat.

"I got to!" he said; but his voice was wavering; the dull conviction seized him that his mother was right.

All the mountains would think of him as a coward— that Kinemon who wouldn't stand up to the men who had destroyed Allen and his father!

A sob heaved in his chest; rebellious tears streamed over his thin cheeks. He was crying like a baby. He threw an arm up across his eyes and stumbled from the room.

HOWEVER, he had no intention of clerking back of a counter, of getting down rolls of muslin, papers of buttons, for women, if it could be avoided. Priest's store was a long wooden structure with a painted façade and a high platform before it where the mountain wagons unloaded their various merchandise teamed from the railroad, fifty miles distant. The owner had a small glass-enclosed office on the left as you entered the store; and there David found him. He turned, gazing over his glasses, as the other entered.

"How's Allen?" he asked pleasantly. "I heard he was bad; but we certainly look to have him back driving stage."

"I came to see you about that," David replied. "Allen can't never drive again; but, Mr. Priest, sir, I can. Will you give me a try?"

The elder ignored the question in the concern he exhibited for Allen's injury.

"It is a cursed outrage!" he declared. "Those Hatburns will be got up, or my name's not Priest! We'd have them now, but the jail wouldn't keep them overnight, and court three months off."

David preserved a stony silence— the only attitude possible, he had decided, in the face of his patent dereliction.

"Will you try me on the Beaulings stage?" he repeated. "I've been round horses all my life; and I can hold a gun straighter than Allen."

Priest shook his head negatively.

"You are too light— too young," he explained; "you have to be above a certain age for the responsibility of the mail. There are some rough customers to handle. If you only had five years more now— We are having a hard time finding a suitable man. A damned shame about Allen! Splendid man!"

"Can't you give it to me for a week," David persisted, "and see how I do?"

They would have awarded him the position immediately, he felt, if he had properly attended to the Hatburns. He wanted desperately to explain his failure to Priest, but a dogged pride prevented. The storekeeper was tapping on an open ledger with a pen, gazing doubtfully at David.

"You couldn't be worse than the drunken object we have now," he admitted. "You couldn't hold the job permanent yet, but I might let you drive extra— a day or so— till we find a man. I'd like to do what I could for Mrs. Kinemon. Your father was a good man, a good customer…. Come and see me again— say, day after to-morrow."

This half promise partly rehabilitated his fallen pride. There was no sign in the men he passed that they held him in contempt for neglecting to kill the Hatburns; and his mother wisely avoided the subject. She wondered a little at Priest's considering him, even temporarily, for the stage; but confined her wonder to a species of compliment. David sat beside Allen, while the latter,

between silent spaces of suffering, advised him of the individual characters and attributes of the horses that might come under his guiding reins.

It seemed incredible that he should actually be seated in the driver's place on the stage, swinging the heavy whip out over a team trotting briskly into the early morning; but there he was. There were no passengers, and the stage rode roughly over a small bridge of loose boards beyond the village. He pulled the horses into a walk on the mountain beyond, and was soon skirting the Gait farm, with its broad fields, where he had lived as a mere boy.

David slipped his hand under the leather seat and felt the smooth handle of the revolver. Then, on an even reach, he wrapped the reins about the whipstock and publicly filled and lighted his clay pipe. The smoke drifted back in a fragrant cloud; the stage moved forward steadily and easily; folded in momentary forgetfulness, lifted by a feeling of mature responsibility, he was almost happy. But he swung down the mountain beyond his familiar valley, crossed a smaller ridge, and turned into a stony sweep rising on the left.

It was Elbow Barren. In an instant a tide of bitterness, of passionate regret, swept over him. He saw the Hatburns' house, a rectangular bleak structure crowning a gray prominence, with the tender green of young pole beans on one hand and a disorderly barn on the other, and a blue plume of smoke rising from an unsteady stone chimney against an end of the dwelling. No one was visible.

Hot tears filled his eyes as the stage rolled along past the moldy ditch into which Allen had fallen. The mangy curs! His grip tightened on the reins and the team broke into a clattering trot, speedily leaving the Barren behind. But the day had been robbed of its sparkle, his position of its pleasurable pride. He saw again his father's body on the earthen floor of the stable, the bridle in his stiff fingers; Allen carried into the house. And he, David Kinemon, had had to step back, like a coward or a woman, and let the Hatburns triumph.

The stage drew up before the Beaulings post-office in the middle of the afternoon. David delivered the mail bags, and then led the team back to a stable on the grassy verge of the houses clustered at the end of tracks laid precariously over a green plain to a boxlike station. Beaulings had a short row of unpainted two-story structures, the single street cut into deep muddy scars; stores with small dusty windows; eating houses elevated on piles; an insignificant mission chapel with a tar-papered roof; and a number of obviously masked depots for the illicit sale of liquor.

A hotel, neatly painted white and green, stood detached from the main activity. There, washing his face in a tin basin on a back porch, David had his fried supper, sat for a while outside in the gathering dusk, gazing at the crude-oil flares, the passing dark figures beyond, the still obscured immensity of

mountain and forest. And then he went up to a pine sealed room, like the heated interior of a packing box, where he partly undressed for bed.

vi

THE NEXT mid-morning, descending the sharp grade toward Elbow Barren, there was no lessening of David's bitterness against the Hatburns. The flavor of tobacco died in his mouth, he grew unconscious of the lurching heavy stage, the responsibility of the mail, all committed to his care. A man was standing by the ditch on the reach of scrubby grass that fell to the road; and David pulled his team into the slowest walk possible. It was his first actual sight of a Hatburn. He saw a man middling tall, with narrow high shoulders, and a clay-yellow countenance, extraordinarily pinched through the temples, with minute restless black eyes. The latter were the only mobile feature of his slouching indolent pose, his sullen regard. He might have been a scarecrow, David thought, but for that glittering gaze.

The latter leaned forward, the stage barely moving, and looked unwaveringly at the Hatburn beyond. He wondered whether the man knew him— David Kinemon? But of course he did; all the small details of mountain living circulated with the utmost rapidity from clearing to clearing. He was now directly opposite the other; he could take out the revolver and kill that Hatburn, where he stood, with one precise shot. His hand instinctively reached under the seat. Then he remembered Allen, forever dependent on the couch; his mother, who had lately seemed so old. The stage was passing the motionless figure. David drew a deep painful breath, and swung out his whip with a vicious sweep.

His pride, however, returned when he drove into Crabapple, down the familiar street, past the familiar men and women turning to watch him, with a new automatic measure of attention, in his elevated position. He walked back to his dwelling with a slight swagger of hips and shoulders, and, with something of a flourish, laid down the two dollars he had been paid for the trip to Beaulings.

"I'm to drive again to-morrow," he stated to his mother and Allen; "after that Priest has a regular man. I suppose, then, I'll have to go into the store."

The last seemed doubly difficult now, since he had driven stage. As he disposed of supper, eating half a pie with his cracklings and greens, his mother moved from the stove to the table, refilled his plate, waved the paper streamers of the fly brush above his head, exactly as she had for his father. Already, he assured himself, he had become a man.

The journey to Beaulings the following day was an unremarkable replica of the one before. He saw no Hatburns; the sun wheeled from east to west at apparently the same speed as the stage; and Beaulings held its inevitable surge of turbulent lumbermen, the oil flares made their lurid note on the vast unbroken starry canopy of night.

The morning of his return was heavy with a wet low vapor. The mail bags, as he strapped them to the rear rack, were slippery; the dawn was a slow monotonous widening of dull light. There were no passengers for Crabapple, and David, with his coat collar turned up about his throat, urged the horses to a faster gait through the watery cold.

The brake set up a shrill grinding, and then the stage passed Elbow Barren in a smart rattle and bumping.

After that David slowed down to light his pipe. The horses willingly lingered, almost stopping; and, the memory of the slippery bags at the back of his head, David dismounted, walked to the rear of the stage.

A chilling dread swept through him as he saw, realized, that one of the Government sacks was missing. The straps were loose about the remaining two; in a minute or more they would have gone. Panic seized him, utter misery, at the thought of what Priest, Crabapple, would say. He would be disgraced, contemptuously dismissed— a failure in the trust laid on him.

He collected his faculties by a violent effort; the bags, he was sure, had been safe coming down the last mountain; he had walked part of the way, and he was certain that he would have noticed anything wrong. The road was powerful bad through the Barren….

He got up into the stage, backed the team abruptly on its haunches, and slowly retraced his way to the foot of the descent. There was no mail lying on the empty road. David turned again, his heart pounding against his ribs, tears of mortification, of apprehension, blurring his vision. The bag must have fallen here in Elbow Barren. Subconsciously he stopped the stage. On the right the dwelling of the Hatburns showed vaguely through the mist. No one else could have been on the road. A troubled expression settled on his glowing countenance, a pondering doubt; then his mouth drew into a determined line.

"I'll have to go right up and ask," he said aloud.

He jumped down to the road, led the horses to a convenient sapling, where he hitched them. Then he drew his belt tighter about his slender waist and took a step forward. A swift frown scarred his brow, and he turned and transferred the revolver to a pocket in his trousers.

The approach to the house was rough with stones and muddy clumps of grass. A track, he saw, circled the dwelling to the back; but he walked steadily and directly up to the shallow portico between windows with hanging, partly

slatted shutters. The house had been painted dark brown a long while before; the paint had weathered and blistered into a depressing harmony with the broken and mossy shingles of the roof, the rust-eaten and sagging gutters festooning the ragged eaves.

David proceeded up the steps, hesitated, and then, his mouth firm and hand steady, knocked. He waited for an apparently interminable space, and then knocked again, more sharply. Now he heard voices within. He waited rigidly for steps to approach, the door to open; but in vain. They had heard, but chose to ignore his summons; and a swift cold anger mounted in him. He could follow the path round to the back; but, he told himself, he— David Kinemon— wouldn't walk to the Hatburns' kitchen door. They should meet him at the front. He beat again on the scarred wood, waited; and then, in an irrepressible flare of temper, kicked the door open.

He was conscious of a slight gasping surprise at the dark moldy- smelling hall open before him. A narrow bare stairway mounted above, with a passage at one side, and on each hand entrances were shut on farther interiors. The scraping of a chair, talking came from the left; the door, he saw, was not latched. He pushed it open and entered. There was a movement in the room still beyond, and he walked evenly into what evidently was a kitchen.

The first thing he saw was the mail bag, lying intact on a table. Then he was meeting the concerted stare of four men. One of two, so similar that he could not have distinguished between them, he had seen before, at the edge of the road. Another was very much older, taller, more sallow. The fourth was strangely fat, with a great red hanging mouth. The latter laughed uproariously, a jangling mirthless sound followed by a mumble of words without connective sense. David moved toward the mail bag:

"I'm driving stage and lost those letters. I'll take them right along."

The oldest Hatburn, with a pail in his hand, was standing by an opening, obviously at the point of departure on a small errand. He looked toward the two similar men, nearer David.

"Boy," he demanded, "did you kick in my front door?"

"I'm the Government's agent," David replied. "I've got to have the mail. I'm David Kinemon too; and I wouldn't step round to your back door, Hatburn— not if there was a boiling of you!"

"You'll learn you this," one of the others broke in: "it will be the sweetest breath you ever draw'd when you get out that back door!"

The elder moved on to the pounded earth beyond. Here, in their presence, David felt the loathing for the Hatburns a snake inspires— dusty brown rattlers and silent cottonmouths. His hatred obliterated every other feeling but a dim consciousness of the necessity to recover the mail bag. He was filled with

an overpowering longing to revenge Allen; to mark them with the payment of his father, dead in the stable shed.

His objective senses were abnormally clear, cold: he saw every detail of the Hatburns' garb— the soiled shirts with buttoned pockets on their left breasts; the stained baggy breeches in heavy boots— such boots as had stamped Allen into nothingness; dull yellow faces and beady eyes; the long black hair about their dark ears.

The idiot thrust his fingers into his loose mouth, his shirt open on a hairy pendulous chest. The Hatburn who had not yet spoken showed a row of tobacco-brown broken teeth.

"He mightn't get a heave on that breath," he asserted.

The latter lounged over against a set of open shelves where, David saw, lay a heavy rusted revolver. Hatburn picked up the weapon and turned it slowly in his thin grasp.

"I'm carrying the mail," David repeated, his hand on the bag. "You've got no call on this or on me."

He added the last with tremendous effort. It seemed unspeakable that he should be there, the Hatburns before him, and merely depart.

"What do you think of putting the stage under a soft little strawberry like that?" the other inquired.

For answer there was a stunning report, a stinging odor of saltpeter; and David felt a sharp burning on his shoulder, followed by a slow warmish wet, spreading.

"I didn't go to do just that there!" the Hatburn who had fired explained. "I wanted to clip his ear, but he twitched like."

David picked up the mail bag and took a step backward in the direction he had come. The other moved between him and the door.

"If you get out," he said, "it'll be through the hog-wash."

David placed the bag on the floor, stirred by a sudden realization— he had charge of the stage, official responsibility for the mail. He was no longer a private individual; what his mother had commanded, entreated, had no force here and now. The Hatburns were unlawfully detaining him.

As this swept over him, a smile lighted his fresh young cheeks, his frank mouth, his eyes like innocent flowers. Hatburn shot again; this time the bullet flicked at David's old felt hat. With his smile lingering he smoothly leveled the revolver from his pocket and shot the mocking figure in the exact center of the pocket patched on his left breast.

David wheeled instantly, before the other Hatburn running for him, and stopped him with a bullet as remorselessly placed as the first. The two men on the floor stiffened grotesquely and the idiot crouched in a corner, whimpering.

David passed his hand across his brow; then he bent and grasped the mail bag. He was still pausing when the remaining Hatburn strode into the kitchen. The latter whispered a sharp oath. David shifted the bag; but the elder had him before he could bring the revolver up. A battering blow fell, knocked the pistol clattering over the floor, and David instinctively clutched the other's wrist.

The blows multiplied, beating David into a daze, through which a single realization persisted— he must not lose his grip upon the arm that was swinging him about the room, knocking over chairs, crashing against the table, even drawing him across the hot iron of the stove. He must hold on!

He saw the face above him dimly through the deepening mist; it seemed demoniacal, inhuman, reaching up to the ceiling— a yellow giant bent on his destruction….

His mother, years ago, lives away, had read to them— to his father and Allen and himself— about a giant, a giant and David; and in the end— —

He lost all sense of the entity of the man striving to break him against the wooden angles of the room; he had been caught, was twisting, in a great storm; a storm with thunder and cruel flashes of lightning; a storm hammering and hammering at him…. Must not lose his hold on— on life! He must stay fast against everything! It wasn't his hand gripping the destructive force towering above him, but a strange quality within him, at once within him and aside, burning in his heart and directing him from without.

The storm subsided; out of it emerged the livid face of Hatburn; and then, quite easily, he pitched David back across the floor. He lay there a moment and then stirred, partly rose, beside the mail bag. His pistol was lying before him; he picked it up.

The other was deliberately moving the dull barrel of a revolver up over his body. A sharp sense of victory possessed David, and he whispered his brother's name. Hatburn fired— uselessly. The other's battered lips smiled.

Goliath, that was the giant's name. He shot easily, securely— once.

Outside, the mail bag seemed weighted with lead. He swayed and staggered over the rough declivity to the road. It required a superhuman effort to heave the pack into the stage. The strap with which he had hitched the horses had turned into iron. At last it was untied. He clambered up to the enormous height of the driver's seat, unwrapped the reins from the whipstock, and the team started forward.

He swung to the lurching of the stage like an inverted pendulum; darkness continually thickened before his vision; waves of sickness swept up to his head. He must keep the horses on the road, forward the Government mail!

A grim struggle began between his beaten flesh, a terrible weariness, and that spirit which seemed to be at once a part of him and a voice. He wiped the

blood from his young brow; from his eyes miraculously blue like an ineffable May sky.

"Just a tol'able David," he muttered weakly— "only just tol'able!"

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2: The Man With The Red Tie

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

The Story-teller, March 1928

KITTY SAUMAREZ had been ill.

A London flat in Vandyke Place may be all very well when there is a tinge of blue in the sky and the plane trees are in leaf; but in November, with the rain coming down in a grey sheet, or fog stagnant like a solution of dirty cotton-wool outside your window, the situation is less encouraging. Kitty lay and looked at the wet chimney-pots and the swaying and groping plane branches, and listened to the wind. She felt that getting up was not worth while.

Her mother understood more of these things.

"My dear, you will feel better for getting up. You must make an effort."

"I feel so weak still."

"Of course, you will feel weak. You will continue to feel weak until you make an effort."

Mrs. Saumarez was a little, dried-up slip of a woman with a pale mouth and alert blue eyes. She wore rimless pince-nez. She had the kind of hand that is apt to resemble a claw: thin and sinewy, with the fingers curved inwards.

Kitty shed tears. They were perfectly absurd tears, such as are wept on dreary occasions when people feel weak and hopeless, and some little tragedy lies at the back of the mind.

"My dear, don't be ridiculous. You are old enough—"

The tears still trickled.

"You must really pull yourself together. It isn't as if you hadn't everything—all the comforts—"

"Mother, please, I'm too tired to talk."

Mrs. Saumarez went out of the room with the air of leaving a moody child to the persuasions of loneliness. It had sometimes occurred to Mrs. Saumarez that Kitty was unfortunately like her father, that husband whom Mrs. Saumarez had divorced twenty years ago, and never heard of since.

It was always supposed that Roger Saumarez had gone to Samoa or Hawaii or Borneo, anywhere that was queer and impossible and a little adventurous. Also, it was presumed that Roger Saumarez was dead.

It is possible to have everything and nothing, and Kitty was in that unhappy state. She had a home, a highly moral mother, no possible financial worries, an allowance of a hundred a year. Moreover, a little illness and the subsequent convalescence may be full of pleasant snugglings and spoilings if the people about you are comfortable and sympathetic. No one had ever called Mrs.

Saumarez a sympathetic woman, and Kitty had had a rather disastrous little love affair.

The man had behaved very badly.

"But then, my dear Kitty, you must not expect too much from men."

Mrs. Saumarez had helped to cure her daughter of a perfectly absurd romanticism. Her father had been romantic. It was impossible to do anything with romantic people. Romance was just male beastliness dressed up in Tennysonian verse. Mrs. Saumarez did not understand that her daughter had suffered humiliation; she should have understood it, because Roger Saumarez was supposed to have behaved very badly, but Blanche Saumarez had not felt humiliation. She had that sort of cold complacency that may be offended but is never ashamed.

Kitty's doctor was more sympathetic.

"You want a little sunshine. What about a change?"

"I don't feel that I can bother."

"Oh, yes you can. I'll speak to your mother—"

He had paused at the door, and looking back at her he gathered the impression that Kitty was trying to say something to him.

"Well—?"

"If— I— could go away alone."

"Or with friends— the right kind of people?"

"Yes."

He understood that Kitty did not want to go away with her mother.

Dr. Beal put it to Mrs. Saumarez that her daughter needed a change, and Mrs. Saumarez— being a changeless woman— suggested a fortnight at Eastbourne. Mrs. Saumarez liked Eastbourne, therefore it was quite the sort of place for her daughter to convalesce in.

Dr. Beal tactfully applauded the charms of Eastbourne, and then went on to explain that he would prefer to prescribe a month abroad, somewhere in the sunshine. Eastbourne was all very well in the summer, but those bleak, grey downs seemed to make England seem even greyer than it was.

"But I don't go abroad," said Mrs. Saumarez; "I don't like going abroad."

"Perhaps you have friends whom your daughter could join?"

"By herself?"

"Well, why not?"

"But— the expense?"

"Believe me— you may find it less expensive in the end than doctor's bills."

Dr. Beal was a humourist, but you had to be very careful how your humour comported itself in Mrs. Saumarez's presence. You could not allow it to Charleston. It had to be correct and straight in the leg.

"I'll think about it."

But it so happened that Clare Jobson brought the necessary chance and powers of persuasion to tea at the Saumarez flat. Mrs. Jobson was all that Mrs. Saumarez was not; but Mrs. Saumarez allowed her a social relationship because the Jobsons were impeccably nice people. The Jobsons were going to Beaulieu for three months; they were renting a villa there.

"Do let Kitty come out for a month. It would be so nice for Jean."

Kitty's eyes were grateful and imploring.

"Oh— I'd love to go."

Her mother looked all round and through the proposition. She did not quite approve of the Riviera. Never having been there she thought it decadent and nouveau riche. But then—the Jobsons were nice people, and if this was an invitation to stay, there would be no hotel bills.

"It is very kind of you—"

"Do let her come— But of course— you will."

And Mrs. Saumarez was persuaded.

Just what Beaulieu meant to Kitty Saumarez, would not be easily explained. She could not quite explain it to herself; she did not know what she wanted and what she did not want. Her attitude towards life was a shrinking from it rather than a going out to meet it, for she had gone out to meet it as it had appeared to her in the person of a very modern young cub who had not found the sex in her sufficiently accommodating. In these days it was necessary to be accommodating, to be able to look a man straight in the eyes with the boldness of the professional, and Kitty was most unbold.

But here were sunlight and blue sea. The Jobsons' villa was on the way to Cap Ferrat. It had a garden. The Jobsons were kind people, and Kitty's window had been kindly chosen, for it caught the morning sunlight, and showed her a blueness of sea and sky and all that mountainous coast stretching towards Italy. The Jobsons did not fuss her. Jean was a tall, fair-haired, serene young person who patronized the male, and was rather inclined to despise the youthful variety.

"Just let her sit in the sun. Let her get her breath back. She's been frightened."

So said Clara Jobson.

"I'd like to have a word with young Darcy."

So said the daughter.

"The young Darcys are not worth while. When a girl is old-fashioned and romantic—"

"Romantic! Romantic about the modern lad! Great snakes—! And then—of course— the old woman—"

“Jean, my dear, I appreciate the modern touch, but isn’t it a little unsubtle, a frenzy of feet— like your new dance?”

Jean smiled.

“Oh, we are not— all of us—quite so crude as that. But Mrs. Saumarez—! I’m not surprised old Saumarez ran away— Jolly sensible of him— I should say.”

But they allowed Kitty to sit in the sun, and to wander along the path to St. Jean, and to go as far as the cape where the Virgin holds the Child beside the old grey tower. Kitty liked to sit by the sea. The sea was impersonal. It did not ask her for anything, or clutch at her, or expect her to behave like a young animal. There was nothing of the male in it. She shrank from the young male; she was not accommodating. She felt drawn towards older people. Beaulieu might be full of artifice, but also it was full of older people. Young men were scarce. And just at present young men made her shudder.

Jean played tennis at the Bristol club. Kitty preferred to sit in the gardens of the Aux des Fourmis and listen to the Bristol orchestra playing on the terrace. She had a favourite seat there; sheltered, yet in the sun, with the perfume of the wallflowers and the stocks floating to her. There was no need to shrink from music and from flowers.

Also, it appeared to be the favourite seat of a picturesque old man who wore a white flannel suit, and a red tie and a panama hat with a biggish brim to it.

Kitty had observed him in and about Beaulieu. He was observable. He had white hair, and a high colour, and an aquiline nose, and jocund eyes that seemed to see everything without staring. In spite of his white hair he had an air of youthfulness. He looked at life with a large and mischievous tolerance, and with an enjoyment that enjoyed things all the more because it had ceased to be greedy.

Kitty sat at one end of the seat— he at the other. Sometimes there was someone between them, sometimes nothing separated them but three feet of green painted timber. Kitty was not conscious of being noticed by him. He read a book, or watched the people and the sea.

She allowed herself to wonder about his red tie. Was he a socialist—or did he like that particular colour? She had heard that Bernard Shaw wore a red tie, and she discovered resemblances between her picturesque person and the photographs of Bernard Shaw. Supposing it should be the great G. B. S.?

She was caught scrutinizing his red tie, and she had to retreat in confusion. She dropped her vanity-bag. The old fellow picked it up for her.

“Allow me.”

He stood hat in hand. He was very tall, and as slim as a young man.

“Oh, thank you so much.”

She was thinking that he had fine manners, and that his blue eyes had a humorous and ironical kindness.

“So stupid of me—”

He was smiling.

“Supposing we blame my tie?”

She was shocked. She must have been staring at him so very rudely, and he had noticed it.

“Your tie! Oh— please, no— I’m sure—”

“Supposing we sit down again?”

She sat down. She felt absurdly confused, and yet the feeling was not unpleasant. He interested her.

“I’m not a socialist. It’s a piece of symbolism.”

“Oh, a piece of symbolism.”

Was he laughing at her? And even if he was laughing at her she thought that she did not mind his laughter. There was something about him that made her want to laugh back.

“I’m afraid I was very rude.”

“You were looking rather hard at my tie.”

She nodded.

“I was wondering— You see, you are rather like the pictures of— a celebrity.”

“Good heavens!”

“Please don’t think me awfully rude, but are you Mr. Bernard Shaw?”

He looked at her, and then quietly exploded.

“No; I wish you were right! Really, my dear young lady, I must take off my hat to you. You will see— that I have not the Shavian forehead.”

She shared his amusement.

“And your nose—”

“Too hooky— I think. Though, my hair once did boast a ruddiness—”

He glanced at her shingled head.

“You have a touch of it. It’s becoming— very.”

This most irregular of introductions in which neither knew the name of the other, was the beginning of a friendship that was both informal and delightful. His red tie had introduced them. They met each morning on the same seat, and listened to the music and to each others voices.

She had found a name of her own for him— “Mr. White Man,” and to him she was youth— youth as he desired to see it. Her gentleness was refreshing; woman ceases to be woman when she grows hard.

There was a curious and quick sympathy between them. Kitty, who had not known a father, saw in him the father of a wonderful month spent by the southern sea. It was as though they both enjoyed the impersonal atmosphere, the air of mystery, their namelessness to each other. They met like an old man and a child on the shore of time, and talked as an old man and a child can talk.

Sometimes she asked him questions.

"Do you live in England?"

No; he did not live in England. He had not visited England for more than twenty-five years. His life had been spent in the East, but in the end he had grown weary of the East, and the green island had called to him. He was going to England in April.

"Have you friends?"

"Not a soul."

"No one?"

He looked out over the sea.

"I have been a wanderer. That means loneliness— I think I was just beginning to realize how lonely an old man can be."

"Haven't you any people?"

"I had; but something happened in my life, my dear, very long ago, when I was fierce and impatient. That— was the beginning of Ishmael."

Kitty could not help being reminded of her own father; that almost mythical figure relegated to the underworld to which good women consign bad men. Her father was never mentioned; there was no photograph of him in the flat. But on one formal occasion— the day after Kitty had been confirmed— Mrs. Saumarez had enlightened her daughter as to her father's history.

"I thought it best that you should know. Now, if you please, we will never refer to the subject again. I was determined that I would forget. I— have— forgotten."

Kitty could remember the way her mother had crimped up her mouth, and as she had grown older the daughter had cherished a secret and unconfessed sympathy for that father who had disappeared in search of an adventurous freedom.

The Jobsons teased her about her friend with the red tie. Who was he? Where was he staying? She had to confess that she did not know his name.

"But— that's absurd."

"But why should it be? We just meet in the gardens, and talk."

"Highly irregular," said Clara's husband. "Why don't you ask him in to tea, a villa tea with real bread and butter."

"Perhaps I will. I think he's rather lonely."

Which was true, though how lonely he was she did not know. He appeared to keep to himself, much as she did, though he struck her as a man whom people would take to. Those shrewd, merry eyes of his enjoyed life.

"Do you ever walk to the cape?"

They had met in the gardens as usual, but he appeared to be in a restless mood.

"Yes; nearly every day. Not many people go there."

"Is that why you go?"

"Yes."

"Supposing we go there now?"

"I'd love to."

As they were wandering along above the rocks and the sea, and under the occasional shadows of the pines she felt this restlessness in him, a reaching out towards something that he lacked and desired.

"It's a queer business growing old."

"Is it?"

He smiled down at her.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

He was silent a moment, as though reflecting.

"Never mind how old I am. The strange thing is that you don't feel any older. It shows in other ways. You begin to look back instead of looking forward."

"I think I can understand," she said.

They paused to watch a yacht putting out from the harbour of St. Jean.

"Yes," said he; "you put out just like that yacht, but there comes a time when you begin to yearn for the harbour, somewhere to anchor."

They strolled on.

"So— you are going to England to anchor?"

"That's the pity of it. I have no harbour."

And suddenly she was sorry for him, sorry in a most strange way, sorry as she had never been for anyone else in her life before. There was something in his eyes— and his voice.

"But how sad—"

"My own fault," he said.

They came suddenly to that little cape where a wood of pines raises a blackness against the blue of the sky and the sea. It was very still here; no wind moved; as they followed the path she became conscious of another kind of stillness linking them together.

"I suppose you wouldn't tell me—?"

He did not answer her for a moment.

"I might. But, my dear, would youth understand? Yes, perhaps it would understand."

"Perhaps I should."

"Let's sit in the sun," said he; "the sun's so clean."

They went down close to the sea and sat down on two rocks.

"Ever heard of boys running away to sea?"

"Did you?"

He smiled queerly.

"I was a grown boy— a man, a selfish, restless sort of beggar. In fact— I was— what the world calls a bad lot."

She watched his face.

"What is bad—?"

"Ah, that's the question. I wanted my own way; I was unhappy; I wanted my own way so much—that I did not care what happened. I was very much in love with someone else. She's dead now. Oh, years ago. And then— slowly— I began to realize that I was old. I was beginning to look back. I wanted to look—"

She felt a kind of breathlessness.

"At those others—?"

She had startled him.

"What others—?"

"The people— those you had left."

His eyes were on her face.

"How do you know, child?"

"I guessed."

"It's true. Two women; one may be dead; I don't think she would have cared. But—the other—"

"Your daughter—"

Again there was silence. He turned away and looked at the sea. It seemed to her that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, just that. I want to see the child I left behind. I don't suppose I shall ever speak to her. I don't suppose she would want to meet the sort of blackguard her father must have seemed to her. She would have been told—"

"Yes—"

"The mother's story. It's probable that she's her mother's child—not my child. She wouldn't understand—"

"She might."

"Oh, hardly. You see— we were incompatibles. It was my fault and it wasn't my fault. But now— I want to go back and look at her."

“Your daughter?”

“Yes.”

“Is she alive?”

“I don’t know.”

“How strange!”

“It’s more than strange; it’s wicked.”

She felt the sunlight on her hands and face; it had a warmth, a stillness.

“Would you tell me— her name?”

“Why not? Saumarez— Kitty Saumarez.”

Almost she had divined it. Somehow she had felt it coming to her, spreading like a light over the sea, and yet though its very strangeness was ceasing to be strange, she was amazed at the chance that had brought them together.

Her father, sitting there and not knowing himself as her father, the father whom she must have looked upon with baby eyes! She was conscious of a sudden and impulsive tenderness towards him. She trembled. Should she tell him now— or wait?

And he seemed lost in thought. He was gazing over the sea, and his eyes had a sadness. And her impulse was to touch him and to say:

“Look, here is your child. I— too— have suffered, and I understand.”

She felt that she could laugh, and that her laughter would brim with tears.

“You have never asked me my name?”

He seemed to come back from a world of recollection.

“No; I rather liked the anonymous charm—”

“And so did I. But won’t you ask me my name?”

“What is your name?”

“Kitty Saumarez.”

His face had the stillness of astonishment. He had not suspected, or leapt to the revelation as she had done.

“My dear!” he said; “my dear!” and was silent.

His eyes had a kind of appealing, questioning doubt. The inspiration was to be hers. He was a man chained to the past as to a rock in an empty sea.

“Father—”

She knelt down with her hands on his knees. She put up her face to be kissed.

“Isn’t it strange! I have never been able to use that word; but now— I can. I want to.”

“Kitty,” he said; “my Kitty”— and kissed her.

They walked back with linked arms. There was a kind of sacred silence between them, but when they came to the place where the lane ran up to the Villa Violetta, she looked up with a kind of radiant shyness into his face.

"My friends—they are such dears— I want to tell them. Won't you come with me?"

He touched her cheek.

"Dear child— to-morrow— To-day— is too sacred. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I understand."

She went in between the white gate pillars and up the path under the orange trees, and turning once to wave to him, was lost to sight behind a hedge of Banksia rose. He stood for a moment with his hat in his hand, like a man giving thanks. He turned away, and went slowly back down the steep lane towards the sea. He was half-way down the lane when he heard her voice behind him.

"Father—"

He faced about. She seemed to come to him with a kind of stifled swiftness; she had a piece of paper in her hands.

"Father— This— It came an hour ago—"

She gave him the telegram to read. It was from her doctor.

"Return at once. Your mother very ill."

His eyes met her eyes.

"My dear, when do you start?"

"To-night."

"I'm coming with you," was all that he said.

So Roger Saumarez returned to his wife— but to a wife who was dying. Blanche Saumarez was in that state between waking and sleeping when the eyes see nothing or everything. When Kitty brought her father into the room, Blanche Saumarez looked at him, and continued to look as though behind the dim, blue coldness of those eyes, memory was searching. She did not speak; for she was beyond speech. Saumarez had taken a chair beside the bed. He laid a hand on the quilt. And presently Blanche Saumarez's right hand made a little groping movement towards it.

His hand went to meet hers, and closed on it— and thus they remained, silently looking at each other.

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3: Sally

Ruby Doyle

1887-1943

Dungog Chronicle (NSW) 4 Nov 1930

There is not a lot of biographical information about this author. It seems she spent her younger years (probably on a farm) near Dungog New South Wales; began writing items for the local newspaper c, 1920, and went to England in c. 1925, living in London. Austlit, a University database and bibliography of Australian writers, places her death as in London during World War 2, c. 1943.

IT WAS SALLY'S IDEA to let the spare room. She needed pocket money, and as it was a bad year in the country, pocket money from Dad seemed out of the question. The spare room overlooked the barn, and was furnished in unpolished pine. Sally purchased some walnut slain and set to work. At the end of a week the spare room was transformed. She put an advertisement in the local paper, and one in a Sydney daily, then, like a spider that has spun itself a wondrous web, waited patiently.

The first applicant was Mrs. Woodburn, of Dingo Creek, who wrote to say she'd seen Sally's advertisement in the local paper. Could Sally give her her meals? Sally could. Mrs. Woodburn came, and stayed a fortnight, and left, promising to send the money by postal note. As time went by, and no postal note came to hand, Sally concluded that Mrs. Woodburn was a wash-out. She did not say anything, for Dad would jeer, and Mother be unnecessarily upset.

Hopefully she put another advertisement in the Sydney daily, but withdrew the one from the local paper. She did not want another Mrs. Woodburn. Her advertisement caught the eye of Professor Kneeshaw— just arrived in Sydney from California.

The Professor was a snake-hunter and general bug-collector. He had hunted snakes in every part of the world, studied them, photographed them, collected them. He had caught rattlesnakes in north America, ten feet boas and salamanders in Ecuador, asps similar to that which killed Cleopatra in Northern Africa, and all manner of venomous varieties in Central America, East Indies, and Galapagos Islands. His academy, which was conducted by a corporation, and in no way controlled by the State, contained 76,000 specimens of turtles, snakes, lizards and fossils, and still sought more. Its largest specimen was a 25 foot python from the East Indies, and its smallest a three-inch worm from the Philippines.

"The most poisonous snake in the world" — wrote the Professor in an article that appeared in the same paper as Sally's advertisement— "is the 2 foot fer-de-lance, which is found in Trinidad. A bite means certain death.

Another bad customer is the South American rattlesnake, the venom from which sends its victim blind some hours before death."

Sally read the article, and thought of Stripes, the carpet snake which lived in the barn, and cleared it of rats and mice. Often, as she shelled corn, Stripes would rustle about in the loft overhead, and occasionally peep over the side to see what progress she was making. Once she almost sat on him, as, coiled in a sunny corner, he slept beside the corn sacks. She had not disturbed him, and the great carpet snake presently glided away in noiseless, sinuous beauty.

Why people killed snakes, Sally could not imagine. She rather liked them. When the rest of the family pursued a snake with relentless fury she sat apart and wondered. Tree iguanas, and the tiny grey lizards which deposit their funny little eggs under violets and pansies were also beloved by her. In fact, it seemed as though Providence intended that she should advertise the spare room in the same paper that had published the Professor's article.

"A large airy room in a nice country home; good food, riding, shooting, fishing and swimming."

So read the advertisement.

"Where'll the folks swim?" Dad enquired. "The river's dry, and I can't let em spoil the dam.

"Rain," said Sally, hopefully.

"If you think people are going to use my gun and fishing rod, old girl, you're jolly well mistaken," said Bill, younger than Sally by two years.

"Be careful about putting new chums on horseback," Mother advised. "We don't want any deaths at our door."

Sally mentioned the Bug, an ancient nag purchased by Dad fourteen years.

In no time she had an enquiry from the Professor. With difficulty she deciphered his writing and answered the letter, and, when he wrote to say he was coming, went to meet him at the train in the old Ford.

The Professor was a tall, spare man, with bright blue eyes which peered through horn-rimmed spectacles. Humor lurked about his earnest lips and his booming voice attracted general attention. He said his voice helped him catch snakes. One good yell, and they would not move as they did not like noise.

He greeted Sally a warm handshake, a smile, and a booming "How d'you do?"

She liked him at once.

In here simple, homemade dress, and soft pull-on straw hat, which shadowed her freckled but neat little nose, Sally made an equally good impression on the Professor. She stowed him and his baggage in the Ford, and followed by the gaze of the curious, drove back to the homestead.

The Professor was charmed with the spare room, and at once enquired if there were many snakes about. Sally assured him there were not, and was such a large man should be afraid of snakes. Discovering his disappointment at her statement, she at once amended it and spoke of Stripes.

The Professor had come all the way from California to study the Australian snake— and particularly its carpet snake. He looked out the window at the barn, and was more than satisfied that he had seen and answered Sally's advertisement. He spoke of his collection in California. Sally was delighted and told Mother as soon as she got back to the kitchen.

"A crank," thought Dad when he heard the news. "Anyway he won't want to swim in the dam if he's after snakes."

"By the way, Sal," he suddenly remembered Stripes. "Don't let him bag Stripes or the rats'll eat us outa corn in no time."

Sally promised.

The Professor made himself at home at once, and with his big booming voice quite won Dad's heart.

"How d'you ketch 'em?" asked Dad as they sat on the verandah and smoked.

"The job's remarkably simple," said the Professor. "All one has to do is to drop a loop of string over the reptiles head, lift him up and place him alive in the bag, if you want to keep him alive, or in the alcohol tank if you want to preserve him."

Dad puffed hard at his pipe and reflected on the number of times he had swung a snake by Its tail and successfully annihilated it.

"There's really no danger," said the Professor, "but care and a good knowledge of their habits is essential."

Dad agreed. The Professor's first bag was a tree iguana, which unadvisedly entered the house. Mother saw it first and tried to persuade it to retire. Before she could succeed the Professor glimpsed it and, with a shout, gave chase. His ardour inspired Dad and Bill, and soon the unfortunate creature was bagged and helpless in the alcohol tank. It was a splendid specimen; the Professor gloated and, for the rest of the day, talked learnedly about iguanas, until Dad, bored stiff, fled to the barn.

But there was no escape, for the Professor followed him. To add Stripes to his collection was the Professor's expressed and earnest desire. But Dad put his foot down, and Sally was tearful, so the Professor sought another barn, and another Stripes.

He discovered both on the Woodburn's farm and made many trips there and back on the Bug. Occasionally Sally accompanied him on a more spirited mount, and had many a laugh at the antics of the Professor on the Bug. He

never reproached her, for he had fallen in love with her, and wanted her to return with him to California. Sally could not make up her mind. She wanted the Professor, but she did not want to go to California.

"We'll miss her," said Mother, as she sat with Dad on the verandah, and watched Sally ride off with the Professor on one of his snake hunts.

"He hasn't got her yet, nor his carpet snake neither," said Dad. "What he oughta do is to buy a farm out here and run a museum as a side line. Look at the butterfly man near Coff's Harbor. Poor as a church mouse once— worth thousands now— and all outa butterflies and beetles."

Sally's wooing hung fire through no fault of the Professor's, who at last became so perturbed that he began seriously to wonder if it were possible, actually possible, for him to bring his vast collection from California to Australia. The idea staggered him, but Sally, with her charms and her tantalising ways, had flung mere than a loop of string around his heart. He could not see her wed another man. Never before had he met and talked with anything feminine who appreciated snakes. Sally had been born for him. The difficulty was to make her realise it as forcibly as he did. Quite unconsciously Bill solved the question.

For years there had lived in and around the district an old man who, like the Professor, had a passion for snakes. He had collected hundreds, and had patented a snake bite cure, which he hawked from house to house and gained a precarious living thereby. He had been bitten 30 times, and had recovered as many. Now he lay dying in his tent by the roadside.

Riding past one day, Bill had made the sad discovery, and daily took over provisions and medicine from the homestead. They were of no avail, and a week after Bill found him, the old chap died.

Before he died he and the Professor had many an interesting conversation, and the latter bought his collection. The old chap was delighted, for now he could have the tombstone his heart yearned after— a tombstone that should tell the world and a cold-hearted Government which had refused to buy his snake bite cure, how many snakes he had captured during his 76 years; how many times he had been bitten and recovered; how many bottles, of his precious cure he had sold.

Faithfully the Professor promised to carry out his instructions, and, with real regret, watched him die. It was so seldom that he came upon anyone possessed of such wisdom and knowledge of the snake world.

Again the Professor began to think of home, but Sally remained obdurate. California had no charms for her— she loved Australia. The Professor was in despair, and even Mother was concerned, for the Professor appealed to her as a son-in-law.

Deciding at last that it was absolutely impossible to move his vast collection to Australia, the Professor prepared to beat a sad retreat, when Bill settled the question. He harnessed the Bug to the cart, and drove over to the wayside tent to collect the Professor's new and valued collection of Australian snakes.

The Professor could not see him go alone, and Sally could not see the Professor go without her. They drove away together, seated precariously— the Professor's arm about Sally's waist— on the single board which spanned the cart and formed a seat.

The Professor helped Bill lift the precious box of snakes into the cart, and then helped Sally up over the wheel. Though not averse to reptiles, she had never before been in such close proximity to so many, and kept very near the Professor.

Half-way home Bill slashed impatiently with his whip at the sluggish Bug. Resenting such treatment, the Bug retaliated by breaking into a sudden jerky canter. The box of snakes slithered across the floor of the cart, and bumped against the back, which gave way. Out slid the box, and after it tumbled Sally and the Professor.

Bill looked back over his shoulder, and saw a sight that makes him roar to this day.

The Professor, Sally, and the snakes in the middle of the dusty road. Shrieks from Sally, and curses from the Professor, who, without his loop of string, was powerless among his escaping treasures. The Professor can't speak of it yet without getting into a tearing rage. Nevertheless, in this terrible moment he definitely made up his mind on the question which had been tormenting him. Nothing on earth must come between him and Sally. The collection in California must be sold to the State, and he must buy a farm and settle down in Australia. What were snakes, dead or alive, to Sally, with her adorable ways and neat little freckled nose! Resident in some snake infested district, he would form another collection as interesting as that in California.

Grabbing Sally by the arm, he drew her to safety, and from the top of a log sprawled beside the road, watched snakes disappearing in all directions. Some lodged under the log, but that did not disturb the Professor, who only hoped they would stay there until he had time to catch them.

Almost breathless with laughter— from Sally and the Professor's point of view, decidedly ill-timed laughter— Bill drew the cart alongside the log.

"Sorry," he said, mendaciously. "Had no idea the box was so rotten. Hard luck for you, Professor."

He fixed the plank in its place, and Sally stepped over the wheel. The Professor stepped after her, wrathful, and still profane.

He did not tell Sally of his heroic resolve until a week later when, seated with her at the barn door in the soft dusk of a summer's evening, he felt the moment appropriate.

Overjoyed at his decision, Sally almost promised to let him capture Stripes; but just as she was about to speak, Stripes put his head over the edge of the loft and hissed gently. The Professor jumped to his feet, and through his horn-rimmed spectacles peered excitedly up at the enormous reptile. What a specimen! A rat scurried across the loft, and Stripes disappeared.

Remembering Dad's ultimatum, the Professor sighed profoundly. How to circumvent Dad!

"Sally, darling," he whispered, with Californian cunning, "If we could buy this place 'there'd be no need for you to leave home at all— your father's always talking of selling out!"

With innocent affection he blinked through his spectacles at Sally, who for three seconds considered the matter, looking up at her Professor with sparkling, understanding eyes. Stripes would be sold with the farm. Could she let any Professor, however dear, put Stripes in an alcohol tank? Stripes, with his beautiful sinuous body, bead-like eyes and gentle hiss!

She drew the Professor away from temptation.

"Darling," she whispered, ready in her turn to make a tremendous sacrifice. "Let's go to California!"

Two months later they went, and though Sally did not know, Stripes went with them, for the Professor— a wicked man— went to the barn one dark night, armed with a loop of string and his alcohol tank! He told Sally he caught the Woodburn's carpet snake, and Sally— dear girl— believed him!

———————

Be careful what you wish for. You may get it...

4: The Two Vows of Lady Anne

Erle Cox

1873-1950

Australasian (Melbourne) 26 December 1936

"AND so," said the Lord of Wrotham, "it is Hertford who has added to the charter that Wrotham descends through the female line."

"And therefore the walking wine-sack would be my husband." The glint in Lady Anne's eyes suggested that such a marriage would not mean unalloyed happiness for the Earl of Hertford.

In an age when heiresses were State pawns, the suggested alliance was more normal than exceptional. It was the revolt of clean and splendid youth against the threat of debauched middle age that lit the fires of battle in her eyes. Besides, there was Sir Hugh Daventry to be considered, and Hugh— well, he was Hugh, and that meant her universe to Lady Anne.

Her father watched the flushed, angry face, understanding. "It's a sorry affair, Anne. Though he did not put it in words, Hertford means to have you and Wrotham or the King will not sign the charter."

"But what brings the dog here in such haste? What's afoot?" Anne tapped a small foot impatiently among the rushes on the floor.

"He rode in with the Bishop of Bury but an hour since, with a score of men—"

"Those cutthroats I saw in the yard?" Anne interrupted.

Wrotham nodded. "He said he rode ahead of Henry to warn me that the King would lie at Wrotham till Monday. They ride west— to school the Welsh chiefs."

"And our good bishop? Why does he herd in such company?" Anne asked.

Her father shook his head. "I had no chance for speech with him. Mayhap Stephen scented trouble and came as watchdog."

Ann took a step forward and laid a white hand on her father's shoulder gently. "What must be, must be. I will obey if you command."

With his hand grasping his grizzled beard Wrotham stared before him a moment. Then the old warrior suddenly stood erect and brought his hand smashing to the trestle beside him. "No!" he almost shouted. "Must I peddle my daughter for my land at the bidding of Hertford?

Anne shook her head sadly. "Cross Hertford, dear old wolf, and you go landless. He holds us in a cleft stick."

For a minute Wrotham strode to and fro across the narrow chamber. Then stopped and said resolutely. "Better that than live beneath his hand. There is

always France. Phillip would give me Vaux for my allegiance. Listen, Anne! The choice is yours. I am old and little matters for me. Choose as you please!"

"You mean—?"

"Aye! Mean it and will stand by you." Anne stood irresolute, but Wrotham urged her on. "Go, Anne! He is in the lower tower chamber, where he roosts, talking some King's business with Stephen."

BUT Lady Anne did not go directly to Hertford. First she made her way to her own stone-walled, tapestry-hung room, and dismissed the women she found there. Then she flung herself on her couch. For nearly half an hour she lay pondering over the disaster that threatened her life.

Slowly a thought took shape. With closed eyes she lay, testing its every desperate turn, so still that she appeared to be asleep. That morning Lady Anne had arisen from her couch a happy girl, without a care in the world. She rose from it the second time that day a woman— a woman, steel-nerved by an inflexible purpose. With head erect, imperious and splendid, she passed to the lower tower room. By its low arched doorway one of Hertford's cutthroats stood on guard. Leering at her as she paused, the man dropped his pike across her path. The Lady Anne of an hour ago would have shrunk back. The Lady Anne of the moment turned blazing eyes on the guard and hissed— "Would you hang? You dog!"

The pike jerked erect. At a peremptory motion of her hand the man drew aside the leather curtain, and Anne swept past him into the room.

Two torches on the walls and a thick candle on a heavy table lit the small, circular chamber. On one side of the table lounged Hertford. Opposite him, with parchments spread before him, sat Stephen, Bishop of Bury. To him Anne bowed reverently. The two men had been taken by surprise at Anne's unceremonious entrance. Hertford sat twirling, by the stem, a dull and dented silver wine cup. His dark green, velvet robe was marked in front by stains of food and wine. Against the wall beside him lay the mail he had put off.

Stephen had greeted her with a smile. Hertford glowered up at her without moving, and Anne recognised the intentional insolence that he assumed to overawe her. It was Hertford who broke the silence. "Your pardon, Lady Anne, but we are deep in the King's business." There was a curt dismissal in his tone.

"Then the King's business can wait on mine." Hertford gaped, but there was a smile mingled with the astonishment on the Bishop's face as he surveyed a new and surprising Lady Anne.

Hertford scrabbled in his thick, unkempt beard with stubby fingers. "Oh!" he sneered, "since my Lady Anne Wrotham's affairs are greater than King's let us hear them."

Anne smiled over sweetly at the Bishop, and, nodding in Hertford's direction, murmured, "A truly gallant lover, my Lord Bishop."

Hertford sat erect. "Our affairs may rest till another time," he snapped.

"They will not." Her voice was decisive, and she continued, "My father tells me that the Earl of Hertford has offered me the insult of marriage. Better one of our swineherds!"

Anne caught a warning glance from the Bishop as a dark flush spread over Hertford's face. He half arose from the settle, but recovered himself before his almost involuntary outburst of anger. When he spoke again his voice was cool and even.

"Still, I think you will accept my insult, Lady Anne."

"Never!"

Stretching his arm across the table Hertford tapped one of the parchments that lay before the Bishop. "It is the King's will, as well as my own—"

"So," interrupted the Bishop, and his voice was icy, "that is the real reason for withholding the charter."

Hertford nodded, "A State matter, my Lord. There are wings to be clipped. Wrotham, with his nest of knights about him, such as Daventry, carries himself a little high. Henry would have Wrotham in safe hands."

"Safe hands!" Anne's voice cut like a knife. "The safe hands of the man who urged four knights to a foul deed at Canterbury, before its altar." The two men sat frozen. Spoken by a man, the words Anne had uttered would have been a death warrant. For it was common talk that Hertford's hand had been behind the murder of Becket.

When at last Hertford found his voice, though he controlled it, he was trembling with rage. "Still will you marry me," he said hoarsely.

"And, if I still refuse?"

"Then your father goes landless!"

Anne tossed her head defiantly. "A small price for such an escape!"

Hertford bent forward, and as Anne looked at his eyes they reminded her of those of a wicked wild boar. "Listen, you pink and white fool," he growled. "You forget— I am Earl Marshal of England and answer for the safety of the King's Grace. Do I not know of the lands in France your father claims, at Vaux? Do I wait like a dolt while a discontented and dispossessed Baron crosses over to France— a traitor?"

Anne drew a deep breath. "You mean?"

"I mean the loss of Wrotham is but part of the price you will pay; and your father will pay."

Suddenly Anne felt very cold. "I must have time to think." she muttered.

Hertford banged his hand on the table. "No," he thundered. "You demanded your business comes before the King's and so it shall. Your answer?"

LADY ANNE gazed blankly at the narrow arrow slot before her, and her heart missed a beat as she glimpsed a knight in mail ride by. It was Sir Hugh Daventry. For all their sakes she must carry out her desperate plan. Inwardly, she prayed for strength.

She bowed with a humility she was far from feeling. "I agree!" she said quietly.

"Then the marriage takes place tomorrow, when the King is here," said Hertford.

Anne held up a slender white hand.

"One moment, my lord. I agree, but on my own terms. You will accept those, or I choose, and choose cheerfully, the worst you can do." There was no mistaking her inflexible determination.

"And your precious terms?" Hertford grunted.

"First, the charter of Wrotham is sealed by the King. Second, that the marriage does not take place until the week after Holy Week."

Hertford spluttered a vicious oath. "Do you think you deal with a page or a ninny? What safeguard have I that you will keep your word, with Holy Week nigh on six months away."

"This," replied Anne calmly. "On Sunday, at High Mass, before the King and his lords, I will swear on the Holy Elements to give you my hand during the week after Holy Week, if the charter is sealed, and if not to you I will give it to none other."

Hertford thought deeply and then turned to the bishop. "What think you, my lord?"

The bishop, who had watched the scene with increasing anxiety, answered with an edge on his voice. "I think much, but this I say, that vow will bind our Lady Anne faster than steel could bind her."

"Have your way," he snorted at Anne.

Without another glance at Hertford, Anne bowed low before the bishop, asking his blessing, and then, head high, she left the chamber.

BUT Anne swept down the passage until she came on a page dicing with Simon, the captain of her father's horse. It was a forbidden pastime for the page, and at another time would have won swift retribution.

"Boy," she ordered hastily. "Go, find Sir Hugh Daventry and bid him come to me at—" she paused to think, "at the stillroom, and let none hear the message."

Then to Simon: "I need help, Simon. Let Sir Hugh pass through, and then wait near the stillroom lest any of Hertford's cut-throats trouble us."

Simon clanked after her, and a few moments later, as Sir Hugh hurried by, nodded him cheerfully towards the still-room door.

Between Hugh and the Lady Anne, their greetings were likely to be prolonged, because they had been separated for nearly 24 hours. But with a lover's sensitiveness, Hugh recognised the anxiety in her face. The speedily told story sent Hugh's hand to the hilt of his great sword, and his wrath blazed up in a pious desire to hew Hertford into pieces.

But Lady Anne's arms clung about his neck. "Oh, Hugh. I love you for it, but it is madness," she cried. "Would you play Hertford's game for him? Suppose you killed him, what of the King?"

Hugh paused in his struggle to free himself. "But, dear heart," he said, "if you take that oath we are parted."

Anne stepped back, shaking her head, and smiling a little sadly. "Force is useless. You and my father are a pair— dear fighting blunderers alike. Cannot you see we can only meet guile with guile and cunning with cunning? It will take a woman's wit to beat Hertford."

"But—" he began, bewildered.

Anne's hand sought a fine gold chain about her neck. By it she drew from her bosom a small gold crucifix, rudely formed in the art of the day. "Listen, my dear love," she said gently; then, holding the crucifix before her she went on, "I swear by the body of our dear Lord that in the week following Holy Week I will wed you and none other," and she sealed the vow by raising the cross to her lips.

"But," he protested, "the oath you make before the altar!"

Lady Anne put her arms about him and laughed softly. "Hugh, my lover, there is but small joy in hugging a man in mail—" then, after a moment, "the oath before the altar I will take also." Then, seeing his bewilderment, she said, "Hugh, will you trust me and help me?"

"Both trust and help you with life itself, if need be," he answered fervently.

"Promise."

Hugh nodded emphatically.

"Well, all you have to do is to do all I ask without question or hesitation."

"But, Anne! two such oaths!"

They lived in a day when faith was a more simple and religion more a vital force than it is to-day. Hugh was even more anxious than perplexed.

"I will keep both vows," smiled Anne, and stifling further protest with her soft, pink fingers she said, "Remember, you promised to trust me, but I dare not trust you or anyone else."

Hugh surrendered with a lover's grace. "Your orders, my lady?" he asked.

"Only this— guard jealously your peace with Hertford, and when the King comes tomorrow beg permission from him to ride with him into Wales. With you near him, Hertford's suspicions, if he has any, will be lulled."

"And you, dearest?" he ventured.

"What's a lover's promise worth?" she laughed. "You were to ask no questions. But this I will tell you. Until the Monday after Holy Week I take refuge with the Abbess of St. Albans. And now, dear heart, you must go."

NEXT day Henry came to Wrotham, and in the castle for three days there was high revel. On the Saturday Henry sealed the charter of Wrotham, and on the Sunday, before the King and his lords, Anne made her vow in the chapel, where the Bishop of Bury held the Holy Elements.

It was with nothing short of consternation that Bishop Stephen heard the story of Anne's conflicting oaths. His admonishment, stern and uncompromising, was listened to with more levity than reverence.

"But Anne, my dear child," he expostulated, "you have done a terrible wrong."

"If I keep both vows?" Anne smiled.

"That were beyond the wit of man," countered the Bishop between anger and pity.

The Lady Anne held up her hand, on which gleamed a great ruby, set there by Hertford in the chapel. "But not beyond the wit of woman, an' it please my lord." Then she added after a pause "That is, if a certain gruff, cross, but rather dear Bishop will help me."

"Help you to keep both vows and fool Hertford," he demanded.

"That is what I thought you would be clever enough to understand," murmured Ann.

"To foil Hertford I would—" he broke off his restless pacing and faced her. "Mind you, Anne! I'll take no part in evil of the sacrilege of broken oaths."

Impudently Anne kissed his cheek— "You old dear, all I ask is a parchment giving protection of the Church to all who help, so their help does no hurt to canon law or the law of the King."

He stared at her irresolute for a moment. "Faith! you baggage," he said at last, "Much would I like to know what's in your mind."

"Best not, my Lord," she laughed, "then you can declare so to Hertford and the King with a clear conscience."

Without another word to Anne the Bishop turned to Brother Martin and dictated the protection Anne demanded. When he had signed it and sealed it with his own signet he passed it to Anne, who again kissed him and, with a hearty word of gratitude, fled.

As his Lordship watched the swaying curtain through which Lady Anne had passed, he said: "Brother Martin, we who serve our Lord through His Church have many blessings. But of those blessings, my son, the greatest, I think, is celibacy."

ON the Monday a peace fell on Wrotham. Henry departed, and in his train took Hertford, whereat my Lady Anne was much pleased, and also Sir Hugh Daventry, at which she was by no means pleased, though she had so ordered it.

On the day following Lady Anne entered her horse litter, and, accompanied by two of her women and an escort led by Simon, made her journey to the nunnery of St. Albans. By the way she paused for a long space at the home, half-hut and half-cave, of the hermit, Bernard. For the hermit Bernard was a very wise and a very holy man, who had great repute in those parts also as a leech, for he had studied in France and Rome, and cured the wounds and the ills of all for miles around Wrotham, and what Lady Anne said to the hermit only he knows, but it was clear to those who watched that Bernard did not like what he heard.

It was only after Lady Anne had shown him the Bishop's parchment that she left well contented. But long after she had passed on her way Bernard, the hermit, knelt before his simple altar in profound prayer.

IT was on the Thursday of Holy Week that Henry and his court descended on Wrotham and there kept the fast of Good Friday. That year Easter fell late and spring came early. The whole countryside round Wrotham was ablaze with new life.

None the less there were still three anxious and worried men in the castle. Both Sir Hugh and Stephen of Bury sought news from Wrotham, but beyond that she was well he could tell them no more than they themselves knew.

On the Sunday after evensong, as the Bishop paced the castle wall, there fell into step beside him Sir Hugh Daventry, limping slightly from a wound from a Welsh arrow. Question and answer told that neither knew more than the other.

"Hugh, my son," sighed the Bishop, "my mind is vexed, for I fear some madcap trick that may bring sorrow to her— and mayhap shame."

"Never shame, my Lord," defended Hugh stoutly. "But I, too, am heavy at heart. What may hap to me is nothing, but if Hertford does her harm—" here his hand crept across to the heavy hilt of his sword.

"None of that, my son," said the Bishop sternly. "Anne is right, only guile can defeat the guile of Hertford." Then pausing he looked along the wall and exclaimed "But what ails Simon," for the grim old captain was hovering uncertainly 20 feet away.

Seeing he was noticed, Simon approached. "What news, Simon?" demanded Sir Hugh.

The captain hesitated, staring from one to the other. "For me?" asked Hugh, and Simon nodded.

"Then I had best get beyond earshot," said the Bishop, turning, after exchanging glances with Hugh.

"Well, Simon?"

"From my Lady Anne, Sir Hugh. She bids you wait her at the cot of Bernard the hermit at noon tomorrow, and not to forget your promise." Simon recited a well-learned lesson and took himself off without waiting for an answer.

The Bishop rejoined Hugh. "A message from—?"

Hugh nodded gravely. "I cannot understand."

"I ask nothing, Hugh," replied the Bishop, "but whatever she may desire, obey without question."

Hugh laughed grimly. "You and she have minds alike, my Lord, for she has wrenched a promise from me that I obey her blindly. The devil's in it all."

NEXT day at noon, Hugh, an hour before his time, greeted Anne with a glad heart as her escort of a dozen men, headed by Simon and her litter, came to a halt before the hermit's hut.

Anne waved the escort away, and turned with Hugh into the hermit's hut, bidding her women wait outside. Under her arm she bore a small carved cedar casket, which she placed upon the altar. Then for a few precious moments she lay quiet in his arms, before she drew herself gently free.

"Hugh, there is no moment to waste! For this one hour you must promise blind obedience." Then she smiled up at him gravely. "After that, for all my life, dear one, will I obey you."

"As you please, Anne, and what next?"

"Bernard, we are ready," called Anne to the hermit, who stood aside with his head bowed.

"Your women, my Lady," said the hermit, and Anne called them into the hut.

Then while the castle of Wrotham rang with the roar and bustle of preparation for the marriage of Lady Anne and Hertford, at the hermit's hut was that same Lady Anne wed to Sir Hugh — a bewildered and enraptured Sir Hugh— as fast as the Church could bind them.

When the groom walked into the open air Anne turned to him. "Now is your moment of trial, Hugh."

"I have promised, Lady Anne— Daventry," he added with a happy laugh.

"Then for two hours we part," commanded the bride, "for I must keep my vow to that black dog Hertford."

"But—"

"No buts, my husband— nothing but obedience," said Anne gaily. "You ride alone to Daventry manor. Leave me Simon and the escort, and in two hours I will be with you. Go now, my dear, my dear, or I can never let you go!"

For a second Hugh hesitated, then he stooped and kissed her, and flung himself across his horse.

"Ride, and ride fast," she cried as he turned his horse, and as Hugh spurred across the meadow to the woodland she stood watching him until he was out of sight, her hand pressed to her breast.

Then slowly she turned to Simon and said; "Simon, my friend, there is a grave mission for you. Remember, I trust you."

"Have I ever failed my Lady Anne?" he grinned under his bushy beard.

"Never, Simon, but least of all can you fail me now. I have business with the hermit. When that is done I will pass to my litter, not speaking to you. With me go to Daventry the escort and my women. You will remain here, and take your orders from Bernard, as from me. You understand?"

"Trust me, my lady," growled the old war dog, and Anne turned away content.

At the door of his hut the hermit awaited her. "My lady," he said gently, "and is your will the same? Your heart still set?"

"Now more than ever," said Anne decisively. "Do swiftly and without fear what is to be done."

She passed into the hut with Bernard, calling her women in with her, and its frail door was closed.

FOR nearly an hour, while the men of the escort diced on, a cloak thrown on the grass, Simon stood in the warm sunlight. No sound came from the hut. He heard nothing but the buzzing of bees in the clover at his feet. Then as the door shook he barked the escort to their saddles as Lady Anne came from the hut, and with her face half-veiled by her cloak took her place in the litter.

As she had said, she neither spoke to Simon nor looked towards him. He watched the little troop and the litter, with the two women pacing beside it, follow the path taken by Hugh, until it too disappeared. Again Simon stood, waiting.

Then suddenly Bernard appeared, and Simon swung himself heavily into his saddle. The hermit bore under his arm the casket that Lady Anne had brought with her, and in his hand a small roll of parchment. "Take these with care, Simon," he ordered, "and place them yourself in the hands of his Lordship the Earl of Hertford at Wrotham. Giving him greetings from our Lady Anne."

Without a word Simon took the casket, and horse and man lumbered creaking and clanking toward Wrotham.

IN the great hall of the castle, at the high table, sat Henry. With him sat Hertford, Wrotham, and the Bishop of Bury, and about them stood a dozen nobles of the Court.

All looked up as Simon clanked his way to the dais and halted before Hertford.

"My Lord Earl Marshal," boomed Simon. "Greeting from our Lady Anne, who bade me place these before your lordship with my own hands." And Simon deposited casket and parchment on the trestle. Then he saluted abruptly and departed, his duty done.

"Ho!" laughed Henry, "a gift from the bride, Hertford!"

His Majesty was in high good humour, and called for a health to the Lady Anne.

Hertford took up the parchment and snapped the silken thread about it testily. "Does she take me for a monk, to read her writing? Here, my lord bishop, please you to be my clerk for the moment."

Stephen, more curious than the rest, opened the scroll eagerly as Hertford fumbled with the lid of the cedar casket.

And this is what Stephen of Bury read aloud to the listening group:—

To my Lord the Erle of Hertforde:—

Greeting from Anne Daventry. My Lord will have in minde how on the bodie and bloode of our Dere Lord did I take oathe that on the weeke next after Holie Week would I give him my hand, and so mine oathe I kyp, and purge me of my vowe before our Lord. — Anne Daventry.

As he was reading Hertford had opened the casket, from which he had taken a small white silken bundle. As Stephen finished reading the last fold of the silk fell away from what it held.

As their eyes fell on what lay before them every man gasped and remained for a little space as though frozen. Only Stephen moved, as he crossed himself with eyes involuntarily closed. Then he broke the silence, his voice hard and relentless.

"My Lord Hertford. I bear witness before God and man that Lady Anne has kept her vow. Remember, my Lord, the cloak of the Church is about her and hers; harm her at your peril." And slowly the Bishop of Bury went from the hall with bowed head.

But as he moved Hertford burst out with a terrible oath. "Fooled, by God!" he shouted, dashing his cup to the table. "Am I to be cheated by—"

In a second Wrotham was on his feet, with his sword drawn gleaming in the torchlight. "Silence, you—"

But Hertford's sword, too, was out.

What Wrotham might have said was cut short by a burst of that terrible Plantagenet rage, against which no man among them dared stand.

"Up swords! Up swords, I say!" thundered Henry, "Is Wrotham Castle a tavern, that you dare to brawl before your King?"

In the silence as he paused the blades could be heard grating into the scabbards. Then he turned to Hertford.

"Your work, my Lord, and foul work!" he hissed, pointing towards the table. "Hear me, Hertford. My cloak also is about Lady Anne and her people. One move against them and your head answers for it. You have what you bargained for— take it." There was bitter scorn in the King's voice.

But my Lord Hertford did not take what was his. He shrunk backwards— for there on the table, whiter than the silk on which it lay, waxen and exquisite, was the severed left hand of Lady Anne. On its third finger gleamed evilly the great ruby which Hertford had set upon it.

That night the Earl of Hertford got drunker than usual, and those who knew the Earl Marshal best regarded that as a notable achievement.

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5: Vindicated

Dorothy F. Perry

Dorothy Frances Perry, 1879-1937
Australasian (Melbourne) 10 May 1930

TIMOTHY LUCAS and his wife slowly traversed the stately tree bordered street until they reached the grey stone building where Dr. Fortescue had his rooms. It was a fine establishment, with glittering brass plates, a lift, soft green curtains, and bright window boxes. Green and white awnings shaded the windows from the sun, and a couple of magnificent pale pink azaleas in green tubs made a glory of the hall. In the waiting-room, where several patients already sat, the old couple nervously subsided, she to twist her rings, he to turn over the magazines and furtively examine his fellow-patients. A warm wind, redolent of petrol, flower scent, and newly watered pavements swelled the muslin curtains and cheerful sounds of traffic rose from the street below.

"A school teacher," decided old Lucas, focussing a spare female with a shut-up face, bent over a volume of Christina Rossetti— "careless over her food, threatened with ulceration." He was so pleased with his perspicuity that he communicated his views in a loud whisper to his wife, who hushed him in agony.

"That is Archdeacon Croft's wife, Tim; they have eight children; she suffers from heart trouble."

Timothy Chuckled. "You'll be telling me yonder fellow is a drill instructor next."

"Yonder fellow," who was prodigiously red and corpulent, regarded the whispering couple with a glare of suspicion. It was a relief when the pretty attendant in her pink uniform announced "Mr. Smith," and departed.

There were only three people left in the waiting-room, excepting Mrs. Croft and Tim and his wife, a red-haired youth in a loud suit, who surveyed him self anxiously in a pocket mirror, a fat woman who powdered her nose and combed her hair with languid indifference, to Tim's delight and his wife's disdain, and a pale priest, quietly reading his office.

Timothy gave the youth adenoids, the fat lady an internal thyroid, and the priest galloping consumption, barely waiting for his departure before he pronounced his diagnosis. At last, to Mr. Timothy's relief, his own turn came. Timothy was a hypochondriac, and his antics were assumed to conceal acute nervousness. Mrs. Croft's heart beat fast with sympathy, as she followed him into the surgery. There were more pink azaleas on the mantelpiece, and straight pink curtains. They formed a good back ground for the doctor's fine silvery head and shrewd, florid face. He did not wear spectacles, and looked as if he had just had a bath— the type of man Mrs. Timothy liked. He was

sensible, she was sure, and would not unduly alarm Timothy. Poor Timothy had such a horror of symptoms, sickness, and death, though how he had not killed himself long ago with patent medicines she could not imagine.

The doctor gave Timothy an exhaustive examination. He took his blood pressure, rolled back his eyelids, tested his heart, and scrutinised his teeth. He made him cross his leg, and struck him sharply below the knee, betraying surprise when the limb did not respond. Timothy sat rigid, keeping a firm grip on his leg, positively perspiring when a sudden knock sent the member aloft. His hysterical laughter when he found this was the correct procedure, revealed his nervous tension. Otherwise he was the benevolent husband submitting to an indignity for the sake of his wife.

"How do you sleep? What sort of nights do you get?"

"Fair, only two disturbances last night. At twelve when you dropped your hot bottle, and a again at two."

"Three, I think, Alice."

"No, two, dear. You said you would like a pill, and I looked at my watch when you went to get water."

The doctor and his attendant exchanged glances. Diverting old couple, this.

"And your appetite?"

"Well— capricious."

"My husband likes grills, little dishes, sauces; cold meat and root vegetables give him palpitation."

"You have a maid?"

Timothy settled his tie and slipped on his coat.

"My wife is an excellent cook," he said proudly. "We don't keep a maid. She likes to do things herself. Nothing radically wrong, I hope, doctor?"

His tone was jaunty, but his small bright eyes were apprehensive.

"In a blue funk," decided the doctor, "so much the better. Now let him have it."

Aloud he said suavely, "I have found nothing organically wrong, Mr. Lucas, but there are certain symptoms which indicate that it would be wise to go slowly and cautiously. I should cut out all little dishes and sauces. Grills, too, in this hot weather. Far better eat cold meat than twice cooked food, and you will get no harm from any vegetables in season. I suppose you take a reasonable amount of exercise?"

"It depends upon what you call reasonable,' snapped Timothy, looking very hot and testy. "I can't play golf or polo like some people, but I go for a stroll every day when it's fine. When it's bleak or windy I look out for a sunny spot and watch my wife gardening."

The nurse coughed, opened a window, and handed Mrs. Lucas a fan. The old lady thanked her, waved it twice, and let it drop on her lap. Her cheeks were a vivid pink, and she breathed fast in agitated pants. The doctor was a horrid man. He was baiting Timothy, enraging him, which was every bit as bad an being alarming. It would take hours to calm Timothy down. She must interrupt the idiot— must stop him.

But the even voice went on, "I think we need something more than a mere stroll, Mr. Lucas. Suppose you give a hand with the gardening next time, instead of just watching. It would benefit your health, I am sure, to help with the housework. Take it from me that if you were to rise early, lay the fire, and do some odd jobs it would be the making of you physically. I would advise all retired men to do the same as a guard against brooding and introspection."'

A furious retort froze on Timothy's lips. Alice was ill, making curious rattling noises in her throat from which the nurse was freeing its swathe of black tulle. They took off her hat, and her tumbled, silvery head fell back against the dark green velvet of her chair. Her big eyes were literally starting from her head.

"More air," she kept gasping, and paid no heed to Timothy s anxious cries and caresses. "More air" was the last thing he heard as they bundled him from the room, throwing a sop by saying they did not want two patients on their hands .

"A bad attack," said the doctor, as he watched the colour return slowly to Mrs. Timothy's drawn little face. "Overwork and anxiety. The sort that goes till she drops, and there's nothing on earth the matter with that selfish old brute."

Mrs. Timothy's eyes opened suddenly, and she gazed in silent reproach at the doctor.

"Better dear?" asked the nurse quietly. "Now you rest here while I go and relieve your husband's mind. You gave the poor soul a terrible fright. Sit back and don't talk, there's a dear."

Mrs. Timothy lay back and closed her eyes like an obedient child. She felt curiously tired or she would soon put the doctor right about her Timothy. She listened indifferently to his soothing commonplaces, not even bothering to reply when he asked her if she would care for a slip of his pink azalea, of which it seemed he was inordinately proud.

She was so exhausted that she did not look up when she heard the nurse re-enter a moment later. Had she done so, she would have been startled by the girl's expression. Nor did she re-open her eyes when, with a muttered apology, the doctor hurried from the room hard on the heels of the flying pink gowned figure. She just sat on feeling pleasantly tired. The prolonged ringing of an electric bell roused her from her torpor at last, and moving un certainly to the door, she tottered slowly towards the waiting-room.

No one was there but the doctor and the nurse, who with their backs to the door were kneeling beside something or some one stretched on the floor by the couch. A fit or a seizure, she supposed. She must find Timothy. Timothy had such a horror of epilepsy or violence. Then as the nurse shifted her position and looked up, Mrs. Timothy shrieked like a trapped hare, for her short-sighted eyes recognised who it was that lay in silent majesty at their feet. Embolism they called it, and pride triumphed over Mrs. Timothy's passionate grief when she heard their verdict. Timothy had cried wolf for the last time, and this thought restrained her as she sank in the lift to the ground floor an hour later wedged securely between Timothy's tall sons.

And pride kept her heart from breaking as the young men guided her through the still entrance hall between azaleas that glowed like flames, to the taxi-cab that waited below.

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6: Dead Man's Diamonds

Edwin Lester Arnold

1857-1935

Queenslander (Brisbane) 18 March 1922

Author of Phra the Phoenician*,* The Story of Ulla*,* Gullivar Jones*, etc*

THIS IS THE STORY of the young man who sat in the opposite corner of our luxurious smoking compartment as we journeyed down the railway from a mid-African town to the seaport where we picked up a steamer for England.

With the exception of a certain pallor and some lines of suffering in his face there was nothing suggestive of death or hardship about my fellow traveller, yet it was a grim narrative he had to tell, and its details still cling to my memory.

"I was beaten," he said, between the puffs of his cigar smoke, "hopelessly beaten! I had been out alone in the wilderness six months, prospecting for diamonds, and had found nothing. I will not vex you with details of an old story; suffice it to say that, ragged, threadbare, burnt dry by African suns, hungry in heart and stomach, ill-equipped, friendless, and footsore, I at last turned from the quest, setting my face eastward for that dreariest of all earthly adventures, the homeward march of the broken man. I shudder even now to think of the journey, for, it was by the merest chance I escaped alive, and am not, at this moment, a heap of bones and rags, propped up against some tree in the outer wilderness, my fate and resting place alike unknown to friends and enemies."

For a moment the pleasant, boyish face opposite to me clouded over; its lines deepened, the mouth hardened, and palpable fear gleamed in the grey eyes of the speaker, as though his words conjured up a terrible vision; then he mastered himself and went on again.

YOU KNOW what a big place Africa is, how easy to miss one's way in its immensities? I have done a good deal of tramping in my time, but now I was sick, sorry, and careless— careless above everything, and, to make this part of the story short, the terrible days slipped by one after another. I came into an unknown, uninhabited region, and with boots falling to pieces, provisions gone, I presently found I was lost beyond hope, the cruel solitudes of Africa hemmed me in on every side.

When the fact in its naked reality became obvious I sat down and wept; it was physical weakness more than anything else, and when that passed I ate the last crumbs of biscuit in my wallet, pulled myself together, and set out to tramp anew, not with any hope or expectation, but just a dull, savage tramp,

where or whither mattered nothing. All through the fiery days that came afterwards, and most of the star-spangled nights, noting, seeing nothing, I went on and on, I have no knowledge for how long, without thinking, or, indeed, feeling much. My strength dropped from me every hour, and as it went weakness and a blazing sun filled my head with the wildest fancies. I dreamed hard as I walked, dreamed of lovely ladies dancing before me over the scorched ground, dreamed of songs and laughter, of streams and green meadows all around. I was going mad. I sang huskily to myself of feasts and wine, as I starved to death on my feet, staggering ever forward through a glittering pantomime of unrealities to the grim reality of the fate close ahead.

So at last I came unexpectedly one evening into a pleasanter country, with clumps of trees islanded amongst growing grass, and low, blue hills in the near distance. Beside one of these thickets was a shallow pool of water, and as I saw it I knew my tongue was a thong of leather, my veins empty save for the thick, fiery blood that ebbed and flowed so slowly in them. Round and round went the giddy world, the very hills danced before my swollen eyes, the great shuttle of the African sun leapt horribly to and fro in the crimson and golden tapestry of the twilight sky above, but there was water ahead, water! I would have crawled to it through hell, and I did crawl to it on all fours that last quarter of a mile, and lapped, and drank, and wallowed in it like a beast. Then a craving for rest, even if it was for ever, came on me. The nearest clump of trees was not a hundred yards away. It looked home-like and inviting. I staggered painfully over the intervening distance, reeled into the shade, and dropped helpless at the foot of a tree, too weak almost to move the hands that fell listlessly at my side. Here it flashed on me was the end of everything; the appointed place; I feared and suffered no more; my chin dropped on my chest; my eyes glazed; I was dying!

In an hour, for some unknown reason, my numbed faculties suddenly bounded to life again, and with a thrill I awoke. The sun had set, the whole place was full of silence and ghostly twilight, the crowded tree stems, red and ebony under the funeral canopy of their foliage overhead; where was I? Was I dead indeed? I tried to think but could recall nothing. I stared about me in the gloom and then— oh think how my heart jumped, how my pulses beat, for there, opposite, propped against a tree exactly as I was, sat the lonely figure of a man!

He was limp and mute; ragged beyond all description; the soles of his boots towards me ; his broad felt hat pulled down over his face; one hand resting on a rusty rifle lying at his side, his knapsack at the other, and a weather-worn cartridge belt across his chest. All the solitude of the place seemed to concentrate in him. He was the quintessence of silence, yet I was not afraid.

"Hullo, over there!" I called softly, but there was no answer. Again, I spoke, without success, so, on hands and knees, I crawled over to that melancholy huddle of clothes and lifted the hat on its head. Underneath was the face of a man long dead; the high protruding cheek-bones covered with a skin like brown parchment, the teeth bare and white by comparison, the eye-sockets hollow, and the thin lips drawn with an expression of suffering no lapse of time could alter. He was dead as ever any man had been; the sun had dried him as he sat, and his clothes alone held his bones together.

A melancholy object indeed, but I felt too near akin to be alarmed. A prospector like myself my fate also promised to be his. I sat opposite him for a long while, hunched up with weakness, and dreamily wondering where he had come from, what his story was. Meanwhile the day ended, the lurid splendours of a tropical sunset passed from the sky, and with the twilight strange living things unseen through the hot hours, began to move about the veldt. A little owl overhead hooted to another and went off a-hunting; bats flitted through the darkening branches; night insects moved in the shadows, and small deer came down to drink at the pool outside. The very last rays of daylight ran down the barrel of the rifle the man was holding, emphasizing it strongly against the dark ground. My eyes rested on it without muck attention until a deer barked at the water not a hundred yards away. Then eyes and ears together flashed a thought into my mind. Meat, food, was possibly within reach! The physical hunger I had thought dead for ever within me leapt into reality. Would the rifle act, had he an unspent cartridge? With hands that trembled like a leaf I reached over and undid his bony fingers from the stock— they broke under my touch like dry twigs— and lifted the weapon. It was rusty beyond imagination; it would have shocked a Bond-street gunsmith, but the action worked; it could be used. The chamber was empty. Had the dead man any ammunition still left? The answer was life or death to me. I opened his jacket and there slung about him was the cartridge belt. I ran my fingers down, another deer barking loudly at the water hole, and the belt was empty, empty from end to end! I felt in the outer pocket of his jacket, and with a thrill that went through me, amid the crumbs of a biscuit, bits of string, and the stump of a pencil, my fingers found what I looked for. It was a good cartridge, unspent, but the last, the only one, the sole chance between myself and starvation that else must certainly come with the morrow.

I loaded the gun and crept on hands and knees into the open. Never had a man gone a-hunting in more desperate case, but fortunately game was close at hand. A scanty 50 yards crawling through the grass brought me within easy shot of the water, and there, eagerly drinking round its margin, stood half a dozen small deer. In that past, which now seemed so long ago. it would have

been the easiest possible thing to bring down one of them, but now I lay and trembled from head to foot, shook in every fibre of me, as though the world itself was rocking. For full five minutes the fit lasted, but at last, desperately pulling myself together, I rested the muzzle on a clod of earth and took a long aim at the nearest beast. It meant life or death, and when at last the trigger was pulled there came a harmless click, but no report— the cartridge had failed. Then the bitterness of despair came on me again, and hiding my face in the hot earth I felt all was over. But just a chance remained, one in a thousand, that the cartridge might fire at a second try, and the deer were still drinking. Very quietly aim was taken anew, the trigger pressed, a flash of crimson light jumped from the muzzle, and, to my inconceivable delight, the deer sprang into the air and rolled over dead.

What exactly followed is lost in a haze of emotions. I have a remembrance of cutting out with my hunting knife the best portions of that beast; of staggering back to the trees, making a cooking fire, for I had matches and was still civilised man, and then eating. Afterwards came real forgetfulness, a subsidence into oblivion, the gleam of the flames on the leaves overhead, and that gaunt figure sitting propped against the tree-trunk opposite.

Twice was I disturbed before dawn, both awakenings being weird enough to scare one less numbed by privation than myself. The first came about midnight. I was very sound asleep when a gentle pull came at my jacket. In a minute the tug came again, and a hot breath fell on my face. It roused me to quick consciousness, and, starting up, I rubbed my eyes and stared about. The moon was rising outside, ruddy and low, the fire out, and inky blackness under the trees. In the darkness, half a dozen paces away, shone two living eyes with a green, sepulchral radiance. I could see the colour change in them. They were absolutely, completely disembodied, and while I stared they began without a sound to change their position, to that I had to alter mine to face them. As I did so the remembrance of the dead man rushed upon me, and for a moment my hair fairly bristled on my head, then a wave of shame at such cowardice followed, for it was nothing but a fox, or prowling little beast of some sort, and a stone thrown into the darkness, where those green stars had been shining, successfully eclipsed them for the night.

The blaze was made up afresh from the remains of the embers, and setting myself to rest facing the lost pioneer, plainly visible against his tree, I was soon asleep again. but this time troubled dreams disturbed my slumbers. Tossing and turning, I spent an uneasy hour or two until dawn was near at hand; and, with the moon at its zenith, began to fill the shadows with grey light. Then a second time consciousness came suddenly, and opening my eyes, I stared sleepily over to where my grim companion had been sitting. Think how my hair

rose and my heart stood still when I saw he was no longer there! The tree, one of a hundred, was exactly as it had been, but the traveller had vanished from its roots. Not daring to move I lay absolutely motionless for some moment's racking my brains to think what it meant. No wild animal would have thought him worth a moment's notice, and he was dead, as certainly dead as a poor framework of bones wrapped in bleached rags could be. Who could have taken him, where had he gone, had he walked away? With the thoughts flying thus through my mind, my eyes chanced to seek the remains of the camp fire— and they, too, were gone! A moment's fearful hesitation, then, glancing over my shoulder, there lay the embers and the skeleton beyond them, I had simply turned over in my sleep, and lost my bearings.

Fool and coward to be scared by a coyette and frightened by an empty shadow! Indignantly rising, I shook the night dew from my rags and hobbled out on to the veldt. Day was coming, splendid and lovely as it does under the equator, the pearly sky, hung with great planets, beginning to flush with gold and crimson, and the cool breath of heaven drifting in from the nearer hills. I was better, but horribly hungry again. The fox had taken the last of my supper scraps, so, knife in hand, I went down to the pool to get more deer for breakfast. Not a trace of the animal remained, the things of the night-time had made completely away with it. One cannot leave fresh meat in the African wilderness and expect to find it again untouched. As a hunter I knew that, but had been too ill to think of it overnight. So here was I staving and unarmed once more, only the better by one meal, than my friend in the wood. There was nothing for it but to set out again on that weary tramp into the immensity. I went back and stood by him, very sick at heart. As he was, so I should probably be in a day or two. Yet somehow I drew a strange inspiration from his companionship, and determined to do all I could to escape while strength remained.

His boots were better than mine. I sat down in the ripening light, pulled them from the fleshless limbs and put them on. Desperately hunting for one more cartridge, I came upon a second belt about his waist. It was a familiar article to a prospector like myself, and opening the pockets I found they were filled with rough diamonds, a prince's ransom at least. He had obviously been splendidly successful where I had failed, and had died with the wealth he had dreamed of all his life bound valueless about him. How worthless those gems were to me, as they had been to him! I would so gladly have exchanged the whole glittering store for a mouldy biscuit or two. Throwing them away in disgust I presently gathered the stones together again, putting them in my pocket, for cupidity dies hard. The rifle was useless without ammunition, but his jacket seemed better than mine, so an exchange was made. Finally, the

poor remains of that nameless traveller were laid in a shallow hollow, roughly dug in the ground with a pointed piece of wood, and nothing more being possible, I glanced round the strange little woodland chamber, and went into the open.

My idea was to go northward; had that plan been followed this story would never have been told. But, indeed, no way offered much hope; foot-sore and ill I soon began to realise progress in any direction was impossible. The fact at last became so manifest I sat down on a bare rock, hiding my face in my hands in sheer despair. Why had I not died overnight instead of dragging on a miserable existence for a few more hours? Why not have shared to the last that chamber in the wood with the friendly old pioneer? Lifting my hands in impotent distress to heaven I smote them on my breast— and under one, in an overlooked inner pocket of the exchanged coat, lay something hard. Taking it out it proved to be a faded and time-worn pocket book. Every leaf contained entries in pencil, the writing growing feebler and more straggling with each sentence. But it was the final page which fascinated me. Here, in a scrawl scarcely decipherable, the dead man had told of the last hours before sleep overcome him. Roughly, the lines ran like this:

"I can go no further. It is the hot weather; no water, as I hoped, in the pool.— No game; only one cartridge left. I am dying of hunger and thirst:.. I know it. And only a few miles away, through the hills to the south, the road... I saw it yesterday... and men on it. Without food or help I cannot reach it.... It is so close... I have come so far; I have crawled on hands and knees towards it all to-day. No water, I die....the road— "

There the ragged scrawl ran suddenly out in a pencilled line straggling aimlessly down the pages as the man's fingers fell from his control.

"The road, the road!" Had he save me after all? There were the southward hills I had but now turned my back upon, close at hand, and behind them, unless he lied, civilization, meat, drink, shelter, kindly faces, everything that makes life worth living. With a cry in my burning throat that scared the vultures in the cotton-trees, a fierce energy returning to my shrunken limbs, I plunged southward, seeing, noting nothing; bursting through tangles and thickets like a madman; scaring the game from my path, reckless of sun, dust, or pain, until, after some miles, I did indeed breast the rise of the low hill and looked down on the further side.

"AND was the road there?" I asked of my fellow traveller on that African railway?

He laughed lightly as he lit another cigar.

"Yes," he answered, "only a mile away and people on it. Still closer to me was an English picnic party camped by a pretty spring in the green turf; women in white muslin dresses, men; cold chickens and tongues from England laid out on the spread cloth; gooseberry tarts, and cakes, claret cup and iced coffee. Lord! how I frightened them as I leapt out of hell into that paradise! But, luckily, perhaps for me, all my senses went as I touched the hem of their tablecloth, and the next thing I knew I was in bed in hospital, being tenderly nursed back to strength again. The old note book that saved my life is up there in the attaché-case in the rack, you can see it if you like."

"And the diamonds?"

"I have tried honestly to find any one who has a better right to them than myself, but none with the shadow of a claim has come forward. They are only the lesser half of what I owe to that poor chap back there in the thicket by the pool! And now here's the place where we stop an hour for luncheon. I telegraphed for a good one to be ready for us. I believe it will take me six months to get over my fasting in the wilderness. Hurry up!"

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7: Tuan Franks' Holiday

H. Bedford-Jones

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TUAN FRANKS came to Zamboanga for his annual fortnight's holiday, to buy violin-strings and mingle with white people.

Franks lived down among the islands, had an ache in his heart for Virginia, and was a dry, sun-withered man whose eyes were clear and sparkling as gray rock crystal. It was not for nothing that he was adviser to a native sultan. Franks knew a lot—a lot more than most people suspected;-and he had that rare faculty of winning sheer guesses-on which hang life and death.

Thus, before he had been two days in Zamboanga, he guessed that young Summers had been hooked in a raw game. No one knew about it, but Tuan Franks needed no diagrams; he heard some talk of Sabine d'Aiglon, and guessed the rest. There was no earthly reason for him to draw cards in that game, except that young Summers hailed from Virginia. That, for Tuan Franks, was reason enough.

One must, even reluctantly, glance at the whole affair from the viewpoint of Sing & Morcum. There was no such firm name in existence. Sing was a fat, oily Cantonese pawnbroker who dealt in money and other things. Morcum was a mustached, impeccable shipping man who maintained an office in the Calle Madrid. For many reasons, his private business with Sing was kept strictly *sub rosa*.

Morcum, who knew that Summers was about sucked dry, carried his new information to his silent partner.

"This man Franks—Tuan Franks, they call him—is at the club. Comes from Sibuko; no end of a *tuan* down that way, and money to burn. Looks to me like an easy mark."

Sing Toy blinked his fat and sleepy eyes like a tawny cat.

"No fool," he said dryly, "but a simpleton. There is a distinction."

Morcum nodded; a smile curling beneath his mustache.

"I expect so. From what I pick up, a sentimental lot— plays the fiddle. A remittance man of some kind, yet he seems to stand pretty well around here. What do you say to getting rid of Summers and taking a whirl at this chap?"

"Tuan Franks keeps away from women," said Sing Toy. "I know of him. I doubt if he would fall for Sabine at all."

"Sabine isn't a woman," said Morcum. "She's a devil."

Sing Toy nodded. "Well, let us feel out the matter," he responded cautiously.

THE matter might have ended there, except that Morcum was at the country club this same night. A group of tourists on the veranda were discussing the Straits by moonlight; there was much loud talk and music. Morcum, drinking, was handing out the usual plaint about oil to a group of shipping men in the library.

"Coconut is the rottenest cargo in existence," he declaimed. "You. have to figure on at least thirty per cent leakage— can't be shipped without leaking. The *John Fargo* is one of the best boats in water, and she lost forty per cent on her last San Francisco lading. The oil is bound to melt, and the barrels to leak."

"Perhaps the stowage is at fault," said a mild voice. Morcum glanced up to find Tuan Franks at his elbow. Some one introduced them. Morcum's predatory eyes devoured Franks and belied his smiling answer.

"Not at all," he said positively. "I'll gamble five thousand gold that no cargo of oil can be laid down without such leakage! Why, look at the—"

"Just a minute," said Franks. "I'll take the wager."

Morcum's jaw fell. Only for an instant, however. He was no fool, and knew his subject.

"Agreed," he returned. "Memorandum?"

"No." Franks smiled dryly and produced a check-book. "Post the money with the secretary here. I'll tell you how to stow the next cargo. If over ten per cent leaks, I lose."

"Done!" Morcum chuckled. A little crowd gathered around, shipping men most of them. The checks were written and posted. Then some one asked Franks if it were a secret.

"Not at all!" he said, a flash in his brilliant gray eyes. "How is the congealed oil stowed? Anywhere and everywhere, but always above the water-line. Naturally, it melts. If it is laid down in three tiers below the water-line, it wont melt. There's something for you shipping chaps to chew. Never thought of it, did you?"

"But it'll rot the bottom out of wooden ships!" protested some one. Franks chuckled. "If it melts, certainly! But stowed right, it wont melt."

There was a thoughtful silence. Every shipping man present realized that something revolutionary had been discovered. But Tuan Franks, slipping off unobtrusively, left the club a step behind Summers, passed his arm under that of the younger man, and spoke cheerfully.

"Leaving so early, Summers? Come, walk over to the wireless station with me. I've a bit of good news for your ear."

"No good news can get that far," said the younger man morosely. Franks chuckled in his dry fashion.

"Excuse me for intruding on your private affairs, young man; but you're from Virginia, and I hate like the devil to see a Virginian get trimmed by a rotten crowd."

Summers flushed in the moonlight.

"I haven't hollered, have I?" he demanded heatedly and in some amazement.

"That's why," responded Franks. "I've been in the islands twenty years or so, old chap. Just reflect on that for a minute! If you hollered about your trimming, you'd have a libel suit and be wrecked. There are other ways. I had a little talk with Morcum tonight, and. he gave me a check for five thousand to be returned to you; it's to be kept quiet. Ill leave the cash with you in the morning. You're stopping at the Mindanao?"

"Good Lord!" breathed Summers huskily. "Why, how—"

"Not a word!" Franks airily waved his stick. "Still, you could do me a big favor in return, if you would. I need a little information— confidential. Looks to me like storms ahead, and I like to have a rubber coat when it rains. Will you spill a few things?"

Summers, pretty well gone to pieces, talked for an hour as he might have talked to his own father. Franks advised him to catch the Manila boat on the following day, and Summers took the advice.

As for Morcum, he was very glad that Summers vanished so opportunely. It removed any possible embarrassment.

TUAN FRANKS had not, of course, collected Morcum's five thousand; but Morcum felt uneasily that it would be collected in due course. So did Sing Toy, who took steps to sell the coconut-oil information in other quarters and recoup. The affair, however, settled the fate of Franks. "We'll trim him brown!" asserted Sing, an unholy gleam in his muddy eyes. "He's smart, but he's a simpleton. I have full reports on him."

You will no doubt recall having heard Sabine d'Aiglon spoken of in the islands. She did not move in official circles, but you must not hastily set her down as an undesirable citizen. Her misfortune was that she came of half-caste breed; yet she capitalized this misfortune to a magnificent extent.

She was probably the most beautiful creature who has ever been seen in the islands— not merely a physical beauty, although her deep gold hair, her marvelous golden skin with that peculiar dusky richness that is the heritage of half-caste blood, and her slender golden body made a perfect unit of beauty. In Saigon, in Madrid, in Paris, she had created sensations. She was a musician of superb finish. Her mental attributes were astounding.

In Zamboanga, for example, she occupied a beautiful old Spanish villa near Ayala Beach, kept an expensive motor, and spent money freely. Cynics and puritans to the contrary, nothing is so gracious in the world's eye as the spending of money, unless it be the spending of brains. Sabine dispensed both. Her weekly salon was a revelation of taste and art, and to it came all those who dared, and many who should not have dared. Music, beauty and culture graced her board. Her position was secure, for there was nothing to be told against her.

She was not at all a harpy, a vampire, a crude laborer in the field of sex— not at all! True, there were men like Summers— but rarely. It was Morcum's greed and Summers' folly which had brought about any coarse work in this instance. Sabine d'Aiglon served Sing Toy in other ways, and had served him from Manila to Sydney; points of trade, items of shipping, even politics. It was Sabine who enabled Sing & Morcum to clean up a hundred thousand, for example, on the spectacular copra and oil famine during the war.

Tuan Franks found himself invited to the weekly salon, and attended. He came in a spirit of cynicism; he remained in one of awed incredulity, taken back to the days when he was a gentleman and revered women with a fine, high courtesy. When he made his *adieux*, the deep sapphire eyes of Sabine struck into him with a smiling camaraderie.

"I like you, Tuan Franks," she said. "Will you come again, in a day or two? It is pleasant to talk with one who is a gentleman— with one who can bow gracefully!"

An odd definition of gentility, no doubt; but Franks promised to call.

WHEN he came again, Sabine received him in the music-room— a dim, softly silent place where many hearts had broken. Upon the piano lay a violin in an open case. After a little Franks came to it—

Sabine was bringing a Bach fugue out of the piano as assuredly no one had ever before brought it out of that instrument. Franks looked at the violin, and an astounded cry broke from him.

"My Lord! Why, you have a Guarnerius here!"

She turned her head to smile slightly at him. "A violin, yes. It belonged to my brother— he was killed at Verdun. Do you play? If so, then play with me!"

She struck into a light waltz. Franks picked up the violin and examined it with awe in his eyes. How was he to know that it had come from the pawnshop of Sing Toy, who had bought it from a drunken sailor for three dollars?

Tuan Franks was not a pretty man. His white silks clung baggily about his withered frame. His face was golden brown, deeply tanned; his nose was red, with purpled veins. Above it his unspeakably brilliant gray eyes— as though all

the energy and vitality of the body had flowed into those eyes! They changed color at times, but seldom. He looked what he was— adviser to a native ruler, a man who could not go back, and yet a man respected for what lay within himself.

"Not that much." He shook his head at the waltz. "Not for such a marvel as this, a violin of the master! It demands dignity."

"But me, I do not like dignity!" Sabine pouted, laughed a golden ripple, and struck a deep chord. "Did not Wagner invent ragtime, when he ragged the *Preislied* in his *Vorspiel*?"

"That is true," admitted Franks, cuddling the fiddle beneath his chin. "Come, then— the Prize-song!"

So they played together, and Franks loved the violin, and the heart in him ached to own it. The woman offered it to him as a gift— craftily enough; for Tuan Franks refused. But a day or two afterward she accepted a check and said she would turn over the money to a charity in Saigon. Sing Toy, later, tucked away the check for two thousand pesos and grunted with satisfaction.

Thus it came about that Franks greatly prolonged his holiday in Zamboanga, and was a caller almost daily at the villa near Ayala Beach. Also he left the violin there, using it only when he came, fiercely enjoying the music that greeted him; for in duets Sabine was superb, and as accompanist she was a marvel, One afternoon Franks met Morcum on the street. Unfortunately for himself, Morcum had been at the liquor, and his brain centers were a bit confused. He had the bad luck to invite Franks to invest in some copra deal. Franks let his gray eyes bore into Morcum for a moment.

"Invest?" said his dry voice. "Thanks, Morcum, but not with you. Summers invested with you, I believe."

Other people heard the remark, saw Franks turn on his heel. Morcum went livid with shame and fury, hailed a *jinrikisha*, and went straight to Sing's office. Almost incoherent with rage, he told Sing Toy what had passed.

"I want that chuckling devil done for!" he cried. "He knows too damned much!"

Sing Toy blinked his puffy eyes. "I agree with you, my friend."

"I want him— attended to!"

The Cantonese made a quiet gesture of assent. "Very well. Come back tomorrow morning, sober, and we will give Sabine the orders."

"You think she'll go the limit?" queried Morcum, a vicious passion at his lips. "I mean to finish Franks, I tell you!"

Sing Toy smiled meditatively. He took from his desk drawer a packet of letters, bound about with a cord of crimson silk.

"You remember the assassination of the governor general of Indo-China a couple of years ago? Well, that is all. If Sabine is not a good girl, the French will be glad to send her to Noumea. So she will be a good girl, and do what I say. The only question is whether Tuan Franks can be caught by her."

"Caught?" Morcum laughed harshly. "He's caught already!"

Sing Toy made no response. He was a very cautious man.

TUAN FRANKS really did enjoy finding himself *en famille* with Sabine d'Aiglon.

This is a rather delicate subject, and you must not misunderstand the friendship. On the part of Franks, it was purely intellectual. He called every evening at the villa, and attained a degree of intimacy for which many men would have bartered their souls; yet his perfect courtesy never unbent an iota.

This puzzled Sabine, interested her, set her to studying the man. Always there was music, music; Tuan Franks saturated himself with it after long deprivation. He made the Guarnerius sing to her, but the song was of broken days and lost hopes, never of throbbing love and passion.

To her the man seemed cold, and this Sabine d'Aiglon could not comprehend fully.

Gradually it dawned upon her that the man held a terrifically tight rein upon himself. He had returned to the days when he was a gentleman, and this spirit ruled him absolutely, guarded him; his sense of idealism, of chivalric courtesy, was instinctive. He was blind to nothing in the world; he might be tempted to sin— certainly! At close quarters with himself, however, the temptation lost force. His attitude, queerly, was not unlike that of a convent-bred girl.

Now, for Sabine d'Aiglon to encounter— in the line of duty— such a man as this, was something more than a novelty: it was a calamity. Tuan Franks was no beauty, no ardent young spark; yet she chose to break and win him. With the perversity of her kind she desired to conquer him. This, simply, was because she appreciates the fine things in him.

Her interest grew with each meeting, with each impact of her own personality against that blank wall of charming courtesy. That he enjoyed her society, gave freely of himself, was evident; but the unfathomable quality in him took an ever stronger hold upon the woman. She was not vicious, you comprehend; she had great qualities— misdirected.

Then, one evening, she undertook in a mad moment to warn him against Morcum. She did it subtly, cleverly. For an instant she thought he had not understood. Then he smiled.

"Dear madame, I appreciate your words," he answered. "But, please comprehend, I am not at all hoodwinked— not at all. Mr. Summers was my very good friend, you see? So now, *au revoir*, charming one! May I say *à lendemain*?"

He bowed over her fingers and was gone.

IT was a long moment before she recovered from the electric shock of his words. The revelation of Franks' depth astounded her, swept her from her feet. She sank into a chair, staring at nothing. Summers— his friend! Oh, fool that she had been, fools that they all were, to tamper with such a man as this! Could he know how Summers had been betrayed and rooked? Could he know her share in that business?

"*Mon Dieu*, what a man!" she breathed through lovely parted lips. "What a man! Shall I warn Morcum and Sing?"

Morcum! At the name, her lip curled. She caught sight of herself in a pier-glass, and rose. She saw what an unutterably lovely thing she was, what an exquisite thing, beyond words!

"Very well,' she said, a flame in her eyes. "Such a man can fight Sing Toy— and beat him! Then we go to Sibuko together, and forget the world."

Upon the morrow she was commanded to the shop of Sing Toy. She went.

In the cluttered little shop where the Cantonese squatted among his affairs like a fat yellow spider, she stood and received her orders. Morcum was there. Among the three no words were wasted; it was plain speaking.

"Tomorrow night— finish it," concluded Sing Toy. "The main thing is to get the check for twenty thousand dollars. He can give that much, at least."

"Bah!" Sabine uttered a scornful word. "The man is no fool! And—"

"Wait!" Sing Toy smiled. "It is to be a loan— you know the old story. Offer to sign papers, anything. Then come from your villa to the city, by boat, with him. I have arranged for a fine mahogany launch. You will have a nice ride. We will take care of Tuan Franks and the papers you sign. The check will be cashed in the morning. Franks will vanish. That is all. You understand?"

She listened, with a nod. Here she perceived that it was not a question of money only, but of life. That was Morcum's work, of course. Sing Toy was too wise to afford vengeances.

"I will be waiting in the launch," added Morcum, smiling thinly. "Will you get the check? Can you do it?"

Sabine nodded and departed. She knew that Sing Toy held the whip-hand over her, while he held those papers. She had no ambition to go to the French penal colony on Noumea. So, her only hope was to find the man who could conquer Sing Toy—and she had found him.

WHEN Tuan Franks called at the villa on the following evening, he encountered for the first time a seductive hint in the d'Aiglon. It was only a hint, a touch of personal warmth in the greeting. He was in evening dress, as always It was typical of the man— and significant— that he so played at being a gentleman.

Sabine had never been so lovely; and perhaps it warned him. Also there was no music laid out upon the piano. She told him that she must leave early, that she would take him back to town by boat. And he assented to this.

Something in his manner affected her strangely, made her wonder if he could know more than appeared. But in his presence all her fright of Sing Toy lessened and waned to nothing. That memory fled out of her, and all the veneer cracked, so that the woman below came suddenly to the surface.

She turned to Franks, and tears were brimming at her eyes.

"Tell me!" she said abruptly. "Am I— do you think I am not— a good woman?"

Franks was profoundly startled. He had not expected this evident sincerity.

"Dear madame, you are the most beautiful woman I ever saw! And I think you are good."

Her eyes devoured him mistily, ignoring his frankness. "If you will take me to Sibuko, I will go. But first you must help me. I— there is trouble here."

Tuan Franks put out one hand and thoughtfully closed the case of the Guarnerius. It was a pregnant and symbolic action, could she have guessed it— as though more than the violin case were being closed. Yet she did not observe it.

Had Franks betrayed the least sign of yielding, she meant to tell him everything, expose the plot to take his life that night, and clinch passion with gratitude. But Franks did not give the sign. His courtesy had never been so exquisite, so perfectly balanced. Slowly the fact was driven home to her brain that this man rejected her absolutely. Tuan Franks was very gentle about it, but he was undeniably firm.

"You have hinted that you are in trouble," he concluded. "I will do anything in my power for you, dear madame. Please believe that!"

The tears came. They were real tears, and shame took hold upon her, so that she fled from the room. Anger and shame gripped her, mastered her. Presently she came back, and there was a sad, shadowy smile upon her lips. Franks had let her down hard, as she saw it; now she would play the game.

SHE told him about needing the money, and there was much truth in her story— about the letters that Sing Toy held, for instance. She had scarcely

expected Franks to believe her, and yet she read belief in his eyes. There was about her nothing of the tigress, the woman scorned. She knew the cards perfectly, and a better man than Tuan Franks would have lost that game.

Franks heard her out, listening gravely. He produced his check-book and wrote out a check for twenty thousand pesos, gold. He handed her the check, and silently accepted the acknowledgment she insisted upon writing. Then, the matter of the loan ended, he made the prosaic observation that they had better start for town. He took up the Guarnerius as he spoke, and she knew that he would come no more. He assented to this gravely.

"My holiday is ended, dear madame," he said. "In a day or so I must go to Sibuko."

At the door Sabine made one last effort, but Tuan Franks seemed not to understand her veiled allusion. She drew the gorgeous yellow cloak about her shoulders and led the way through the gardens to the boathouse and landing. Franks followed, and uttered some polite comment upon the beauty of the moonlight.

At this, she could have struck him down herself. Her heart hardened beyond recall.

They came down to the landing, where a long and glistening launch rocked to the swell. Sabine d'Aiglon looked for Morcum, in vain. Half of the boat was in bright moonlight, half in the black shadow of the after-awning. Trim white-clad figures held the lines.

Tuan Franks handed her aboard, and she took a chair forward of the awning. She pictured Morcum falling suddenly upon Franks, the black shadows vomiting yellow men to overwhelm him.

"Hello, here are drinks! Thoughtful crowd," said Franks.

A boy appeared before them, bearing a tray. So, they meant to drug Franks first! That was like Morcum, to take' no chances. Sabine d'Aiglon smiled as she took the cup presented to her, and she smiled again, cruelly, as Tuan Franks tossed off the drink. She sipped more slowly at hers, the pungent odor of limes in her nostrils. Then she drank, and leaned back. The boat's engine purred; the boat slipped away from the landing. Away from them dropped the coral beach where the phosphorescent waves came tumbling up from the Sulu Sea; out in the channel the islands were black dots; up above, on the mesa, the country club and wireless station glistened with lights. The launch slithered through the glittering waters. Presently Sabine attempted to speak, but her voice would not come. The crystal cup fell from her hand and tinkled on the deck.

Tuan Franks, watching her, smiled slightly.

SOMETIME later the launch swept past the end of the government wharf and headed for the Chinese pier. Juan Franks said a word in Malay to the boatmen, who pulled from the shadows of the awning a shapeless bulk which they opened up— to disclose the figure of a man. It was Morcum, bound hand and foot, wrapped in matting.

"Well," said Franks pleasantly, "you and your Chink friends overlooked a bet or two, Morcum. I know a lot more than you gave me credit for. And I have some good Malay friends, as you have learned tonight."

Morcum did not answer. He was gagged. Franks turned to his Malays.

"Place the lady beneath the awning, and put this man there also. Await my return."

Franks put down the violin carefully, and then left the boat.

First he telephoned the shop of Sing Toy, and found that Sing was there and would receive him. Ten minutes later Tuan Franks stood before the fat, oily Cantonese— who blinked at him. Franks smiled as he had smiled at Morcum.

"Never mind explanations, Sing," he said quietly. "The point is, I win the game. Now, I will balance all our accounts and call them square, if you will turn over to me the letters which you hold regarding Madame d'Aiglon. Otherwise—"

He cocked his head to one side, and his bright, glittering eyes dwelt upon Sing Toy with a speculative air.

As for Sing, that astute Cantonese knew the futility of fighting for what is not worth the fight. He wisely concluded that Sabine d'Aiglon was of no further use to him. From his desk he took a packet of letters bound with a cord of crimson silk.

"I am glad our accounts will be closed," he said blandly.

"Thank you— for the compliment!" Franks bowed, and departed.

When he returned to the launch, Franks stood on the deserted landing and directed, a few words to his Malays who awaited him. A moment later Morcum came up the steps, rubbing at his wrists. Franks, very pleasantly, took his arm and invited him to a walk.

The two walked off together, Morcum speechless, frightened, sullen. They paced in silence to the corner of the Calle Madrid. There, in front of a letter-box, Tuan Franks halted his companion and held up the packet of letters Sing Toy had given him.

"I just obtained these from Sing Toy," he said. He put them in his pocket, and then showed Morcum a single letter, stamped. He tapped this on the letterbox.

"Now," he said crisply, "your game is up, Morcum— done with for good! I got a full confession out of the lady; that's how I was able to forestall you. Sing Toy verified it. I intend to have just as much mercy on you as you had on Summers and the other poor devils you rooked. Understand? Here is the complete story of this affair. When it is made public, your goose is cooked in the islands; the story will follow you everywhere— and I intend to make it public."

"Wait!" croaked Morcum. Under the street lights his face was ghastly. "If it's money—"

"I'm no blackmailer. Thanks."

As he spoke, Tuan Franks slipped the letter into the box. "There it goes. You'll read the full account in the *Herald* tomorrow. Now run along home and reflect on your sins."

Morcum staggered slightly, then walked away. Tuan Franks looked after him, a queer smile upon his lips, and turned back toward the Chinese pier.

"He's just fool enough to think," murmured Franks, "that I'd be fool enough to give the affair to the newspapers! Well, so much the worse— for him."

Sabine D'Aiglon wakened to surroundings which were at once unfamiliar— yet vaguely familiar. The pulsating throb of engines pierced her brain. The round port, the neat stateroom, the whirring fan— one of the Straits steamers, beyond a doubt!

Fright entered into her and became panic. She sat up, to realize that she was alone, sleep-drugged, still clad in her gorgeous attire, the yellow cloak about her shoulders. Her eyes widened as a chatter of talk reached her from the deck outside— it was sunset of another day! How long had she slept? Who had drugged her? What had happened?

The answer came in a crinkle of paper as her hands moved. She looked down to her lap, and opened the folded sheet— read:

Dear Madam: I would advise that you continue aboard ship to Singapore, at least. You will find your money and personal belongings in the suitcases placed in your stateroom. Your other effects will follow by the next boat. I owe you great thanks for many charming evenings, and for a beautiful Guarnerius, which I shall always cherish in your memory. Accept my high esteem and compliments. Also the enclosed package, in remembrance of Tuan Franks.

She found herself staring down at letters bound with a cord of crimson silk.....

AT NEARLY the same hour, but far back in Zamboanga, the oily Sing Toy was reading in the paper an account of the mysterious suicide of Morcum, for

reasons unknown. Sing Toy read the account with interest. He did not know the reasons either, but he could guess. Presently he laid the paper down and reached for his long bamboo pipe.

"I am glad that Tuan Franks has departed for Sibuko," he reflected. "And I am also glad that the accounts between us are not to remain open. I was never quite certain about that man— but I am certain now. I think that I came out lucky."

And complacently he lighted his bamboo pipe.

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8: The Question

Brand Whitlock

1869-1934

Munsey's Magazine July 1899

Dungog Chronicle (NSW) 23 Jan 1903

THEY HAD NOT seen each other for years, and when Reynolds's telegram came that Saturday morning Weston's heart had leaped in a glad way, uncommon to him during the twenty years he had been practising law in Greenfield. All day he had gone about his work as nervous and happy as a child that counts the weeks and days and hours to Christmas. He had found it difficult to concentrate his mind and to co-ordinate his faculties. The writing of a letter had been a burden, and after reading a whole page of the digest he was unable to comprehend the syllabi and had forgotten the point upon which he sought sustaining authority.

He had gone home that morning earlier than was his wont, to tell his wife that a luncheon would suffice for the noon meal, and that, out of deference to Reynolds's city habit, she would better 'reserve' dinner for the evening hour. The children had complained in hungry bitterness at this, but Edith Weston had understood the importance of it all. She had lived through too many years of retrospection and anecdote concerning Reynolds not to do so.

And then, there were other blushing reasons. Harking back to maidenhood, she recalled a time when John Reynolds, had been among the possibilities of her life. But after all, she had loved Bob Weston, and given her hand to him because she loved him, and since those days of light hearts they had together followed Reynolds's career as he had gone on and on, and up and up.

Bob was still a country lawyer, and she was still his wife, and trimmed the frayed edges of his cuffs, and Jack was a corporation lawyer and a Senator, lost in the clouds far above them. And Bob had been considered, in youth, so much the brighter of the two!

Weston made many trips out of the office that afternoon. He bought a number of cigars— imported cigars, the dealer called them, though they were merely Key West— but at any rate the best Greenfield afforded, and better than he ever permitted himself. It occurred to him to get a bottle of wine for the dinner, but he knew Edith would not approve of that, and so compromised by buying cigarettes, in case Reynolds should smoke them. He was determined that nothing should be lacking in the comfort of his guest, especially In that moment after dinner when Edith should bring the coffee in.

He vaguely understood that Reynolds was an epicure. The life at Washington was probably responsible for that. He had suggested to Edith the hiring of Hits. Hampton, the old negress who swept for her on Fridays and

washed on Mondays, but Edith had said that she was not ashamed of doing her own work. When all his errands were done he bought some roses to take home to her; it had been a long time— and, then, any way, they would look well on the table at dinner.

Between the times when he rushed out of the office on these little errands he sat at his window, looking down upon the littered courthouse square, at the lines of muddy waggons at the hitching racks, and the farmers with whips in their hands, trading, gossiping, tippling; and waiting for their women to come from the stores. He mused, but not on these unsightly scenes. He mused on the happy evening that was before him.

Once in his reverie he felt that perhaps he would be abashed by a certain awe of Reynolds's success and fame. Would it be possible to call him 'Jack' again? Would be find the same boyish sympathy and familiarity? Pshaw! They would pick up the threads of their lives where they had parted, and it would all be the same again.

'Let's see, how long's it been, anyway?' said Weston that night as they sat after dinner in the little room, which, because it had a glass book-case in it, he called the library. Weston knew exactly how long it had been, for he recalled each detail of his parting with Reynolds ten years before. He was testing a friend's memory. He had tried to make the inquiry in a careless way, but he felt a pang at Reynolds's reply:

'Well, I'm sure I don't know. A good many years, though, hasn't it?'

Edith had left them to put the children to bed, and Weston and his chum had been having the first of those long talks Weston had so fondly anticipated that afternoon. Somehow they had not picked up the broken threads of their lives. Ever since he had seen Reynolds's tall form, that had taken on the corpulence of prosperity, emerging from the vestibule of the Pullman coach that afternoon, Weston had more than once fallen under the spell of Reynolds's greatness. He had felt his welcome marred by a certain gawkishness that suddenly overwhelmed him, and on the way home had found himself apologising for little old Greenfield. During the dinner hour their conversation was desultory and banal. Reynolds, indeed, had given most of his attention to Edith, who was cumbered, like Martha of old, about much serving. But Weston had refused, to recognise any change. He had rebuked the suggestions of his own heart, and looked forward resolutely to a time when they should be alone. And now the time had come in the children's bed hour. They could hear Edith upstairs, singing little Mildred to sleep. Her voice came down to them.

Sleep, baby, sleep,
Thy father tends the sheep.'

Weston made one or two remarks, but Reynolds did not hear. He was sitting with his head inclined toward the wide door that led into the hall. His hand, in raising his cigar to his lips, had paused midway:

'Thy mother shakes the dreamland tree,
'Down falls a little dream on thee.'

Weston noticed patches of white hair at Reynolds's temples, and remarked them. Reynolds tilted his cigar between his teeth, lay back in his chair, and sighed. In perfunctory reply he said something about Weston's advancing baldness.

'You're almost an old man' he said, 'at forty-five, is it?'

'No, seven— forty-seven,' replied Weston. You know, Ja—' He was about to say 'Jack,' but said 'Senator' instead. 'You know you were just thirteen months older than I.'

'Oh, yes, so I was, to be sure.' Weston had thought of a thousand little incidents to talk over with Reynolds. A score of times the words 'do you remember' were on his lips, but seldom had he been able to proceed. Reynolds had listened sympathetically enough, and seemed to enter into the spirit of reminiscence, and felt, somehow, his guest's memory was not accurate on all those trivialities of their youth. Sometimes it was plain that Reynolds did not at all remember what was to Weston as clear as the events of that very morning. Weston came to realise that while these memories meant much in his narrow, circumscribed existence, in Reynolds's larger life, they no longer had any place.

The realisation gave Weston sadness. He felt a strange dissatisfaction with himself, a restiveness under his environment and the deadly monotony of his days. He scarcely analysed the feeling; and chose not to regard it as in any sense of spirit envy, and yet there sat Reynolds, with his fine clothes and his cosmopolitan manner, trifling in his elegant way with a silver cigarette case, and listening to a lullaby. How characteristic!

He was one of those natural children of fortune whom the world delights in helping along. He seemed to ride like a god upon a sparkling wave of prosperousness and success that never broke; upon the rocks of opposition or died upon the sands of failure. They had begun life with the same equipment, the same education, the same prospects, the same possibilities. In those days he had been serenely confident that the noontide of life would find him rich and famous. He had dramatised himself, indeed, as patronising Reynolds. And now the day was far spent, the evening was at hand. Forty-seven, and a country lawyer, and, worst of all, disillusioned, palsied by the recognition of his own limitations and impossibilities! And there sat Reynolds trifling with a sliver cigarette case, a railroad lawyer and a Senator! He heard in the chamber

overhead, above the crooning of the lullaby, the tiny voice of his youngest child, persisting in some monotonous question. An 'added weight, Imposed by the sense of another responsibility, oppressed him.-' He felt tears. And he had toiled and toiled and tolled! The lullaby grew soft and low, as if it were falling asleep with the baby. Then Reynolds spoke. He spoke in a voice that likewise was low, as if he tea red to disturb the slumber song.

'Bob,' he said, looking at Weston uncertainly, and it warmed Weston's ' heart to hear Reynolds call him 'Bob' again, 'Bob, tell me something, will! you?'

'What?'

'Why— this. If you had it all to do over, if you had your life to live again, would you— well— have it the same as it has been?'

Weston knew that Reynolds had not said just what he meant, so he asked:

'In what particular?'

'Well, if it were possible for things that are to be exactly as if they had never been, would you, for instance, be married?'

Weston was silent.

'Pardon my impertinence,' said Reynolds hastily. 'I use the privilege of an old chum to satisfy the curiosity of an old bachelor.'

Weston, reclining at length in his deep chair, puffed smoke profusely. Reynolds's question after all had not greatly startled him. Rather, it had imparted a gentle impetus to his thoughts, sweeping them into deeper channels. Had Reynolds's question suggested the true reason for his failure? What if he had not married? Would he have buried himself in Greenfield?

As a young man he had dreamed dreams. The dreams had not been unusual or unreasonable. They had come true for Reynolds. After graduation— in, those dreams— they had made that tour of Europe. And when they returned, having had their fling, they had settled down in New York to practise law. There, indeed, they had lived much in the same style they had maintained in the dear old rooms at Cambridge. Weston had continued to Inhale the atmosphere of culture. He had cultivated in hours of repose his artistic purposes and instincts. His lodgings were furnished with the taste of a dilettante; there were rich tapestries and Oriental rugs, luxurious divans and Inviting couches piled with bright pillows. There were etchings and drawings, paintings and sketches and studies, little bits with the signatures of artist friends. There were great library tables littered with magazines, there were deep chairs, a shaded student's lamp, many books, the odour of a Turkish cigarette. There were trophies of the field, and countless things that bespoke athletics. Then, his offices, with private rooms more richly furnished than any parlour, with many clerks, and all the bustle and important and mystery of a big law firm in the city.

There was an air charged as it were with corporate wealth and plenty, with syndicated security. Outside all this the life of the theatres, of the cafes, of the drawing-rooms, dinners and balls, golf links in the afternoons, carriages and horses and yachts, summers by the seashore, and voyages to Europe, that meant less to him, so much as a matter of course were they esteemed, than the single journey to Columbus to argue the Colvin case in the Supreme Court He was so well-dressed, so airily familiar with all new things, whether social fads or artistic triumphs, books, plays, operas, fashions. He would have smiled in such a superior way as he toyed with his silver cigarette case.

Then there was his characteristic interviews in the newspapers, essays in the reviews, his stories, now and then, in the magazines. There were the cartoons of him, the verbatim reports of his scathing cross-examinations of witnesses in the celebrated cases of the day. He saw again the reporters going down the bay in tugs to meet him on his return from Europe, to obtain his opinions on the nominations, the courtroom hushed and still when he delivered those profound arguments, the banquet boards rattling with gentlemanly applause when he made those humorous after-dinner speeches, the crowds gathering at the railway stations 'When he stumped the State, the galleries of the Senate Chambers ringing with patriotic enthusiasm when he delivered those brilliant perorations, and the diplomacy of the nation impressed by his suavity and power, the policies of State feeling again and again, through a long and rounded career, the ennobling impulse of his hand. But above and beyond all, for himself the perfect freedom.

Weston sighed and turned to Reynolds. He opened his lips to speak, but there came to him, floating down the stairway and through the hall the flow voice, of Edith, for the baby had resumed her insistent and petulant little query:

'Sleep, baby, sleep,
Thy father tends the sheep.'

Reynolds was listening to the lullaby, rapt and intent, and Weston did not speak.

He sighed again. He had buried himself in Greenfield. And why? Because—

He fell back in his chair again to trace all the elements of his fate back to their primal cause— because one night by the merest chance In that Idle vacation after he was done with the college, he had gone to see some girls. It was June, and the night was soft, odorous, and mysterious. The great oaks stood darkly about the big house on the outskirts of Greenfield. The moon was shining, its mellow light trickling in liquid gold down through the purple

shadows of the trees. Edith walked beside him beneath those trees. She was a slender girl, and she was dressed in white.

The moonlight bathed her in its radiance, and glorified her simple muslin gown. It glimmered in pearls and drops of dew In her brown hair— and oh, the tendrils of that hair that curled about her brow. It made her slender arms dazzling in their fairness, and when she raised her eyes to his they gleamed tenderly. Her lips were parted; she almost laid her little hand upon his arm. He heard frogs, and their croaking was sweet The shrill pipings of a million Insects suddenly became music. He caught for an instant the scent of some strange sweet flower, and then he breathed again the heavy odour of the lilac blooms. The tinkling of a banjo on the veranda sounded far away, like the dripping of distant rain at twilight. And suddenly that night of chance was transformed into the night of fate. He held her gently in his arms, her glorious head was upon his shoulder.

There was another night, when the moon once more shone softly down, and Edith once more clad in white, walked beside him. There were crowds about, and many lights and the breath again of flowers, and the roll of a mighty organ, and solemn words. She raised her eyes to his again, with the soft flame of a new life in them, and she called him by a new name.

Then the little cottage and the furnishing of it, and Edith in an apron more beautiful to him than a bridal robe, waiting at noontime and at evening by the little gate. And when the baby came, and once it had a Christmas and once a birthday: then they hovered together through long nights in a darkened room above a little cradle, and then they stood with hands clasped over a little grave, and their tears fell hot and fast upon the naked clods of a little mound.

The years rolled, by, and the children came. What a big boy John was grown to be! How well he was doing at school, and what a man he would make! He would be a great man. He had a destiny. And Susie, with the blue eyes, and Mildred— he heard the voice upstairs singing still softly:

'Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber.
Holy angels guard thy bed.'

The voice ceased. Silence fell upon the little home that was entertaining the Senator.

Reynolds, after a long while, listening for the voices that did not resume its singing, said:

'Well?'

Weston looked at him, and blinked and smiled. He opened his lips to speak, but, hearing a foot upon the stairs, and the rustle of a skirt in the hall, he

turned his eyes to behold Edith, who parted the curtains, and shading her brow with her hand, came in smiling through the door.

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9: Man of Importance

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Argus (Melbourne) 21 Oct 1937

A NUMBER of years ago— around 1905 let us say— a man named Butch Moore owned a saloon in New York. He had two sons and two daughters and all them were introduced to the saloon business at a tender age.

Bartender age if you understand me.

Butch conducted his saloon in the most approved fashion of the day. Both his sons were trained to take over the business at some future date. And his two daughters, both huge specimens of the feminine gender, would think nothing of busily lifting three or four drunks a night and tossing them into the alley

In 1915 the old man died. His eldest as ascended to the throne. He now came known as Butch Moore. The Butch is dead; long live the Butch! and the business went on just the same as it was before the old man served his latest beer.

The advent of the dry era (pardon me while I laugh offstage) young Butch went into consultation with his brother.

"This is the only racket we know," he said, "and the best thing we can do is stick in it. It may be against the law, but we'll have to chance it."

Thus Butch became the owner of a place that as time passed on was known as a speakeasy. Essentially the saloon business was as it had always been.

But with one difference— competition was keener...

In the winter or 1924 Butch left his speakeasy for a short stroll. His brother was behind the bar. In walked a burly gentleman named Cassidy.

Cassidy was a detective in this precinct and was indeed one of the toughest boys in the district.

Cassidy didn't waste time

"I'm Cassidy from the inspector's staff," he announced belligerently, and this places is under investigation. What's your name, bartender?"

Butch brother decided to play for time. Butch would be back at any moment. He hesitated so long that Cassidy clenched his fists.

"Listen you silly looking monkey," he growled, "you'll give me your name or I'll punch your nose."

Still the bartender hesitated. Cassidy threw down his pencil and paper and ran behind the bar. He was just about to implant a solid punch when Butch stepped into the place.

"Hey," howled Butch, what's goin' on here? What are you to tryin' to do there, Billy? I'm Butch Moore and I own this place."

Cassidy looked at Butch

"I'm gonna teach this bartender a lesson," he said, "and then I'll take care of you, Mr Owner."

Butch thought fast. He had to. If he didn't his brother was in for a terrific punching. He shifted his cigar with no display of emotion

"Listen Cassidy," he murmured calmly, "if there's any punches to be done around here I'm the feller that does it. Now I want you to take little tip. If you start any trouble around here I'll have you transferred to another post tomorrow. Not only you but you can back and tell your inspector that I'll get him transferred too. You get me?"

It was Butch's purpose to get Cassidy's mind away from the idea of hitting his brother And he succeeded admirably. Cassidy released the man and broke into a loud and hearty laugh. The idea of a lowly speakeasy owner having an inspector transferred tickled him immensely.

HAVING made a bluff— silly is it was— Butch felt that he might as well stick to his guns

"Remember what I said," continued Butch, "If there is any kind of a complaint lodged against this very respectable place, you and your Inspector will go. You mark my words."

Cassidy was still laughing.

"Man," he laughed, "I certainly wish you luck. And I'll tell you something else. You better get busy right away on havin' the inspector and me transferred because I am turnin' in a complaint report just as soon as I get back to the station house. So long old timer."

Cassidy went back to the station house. As he entered the door he was still chuckling merrily. This joke was too good to keep. So he told every man in the house.

Most of them enjoyed it almost as much as Cassidy. Practically all of them knew Butch Moore had no more power with the police commissioner than I have with the King of England.

The following morning a notice arrived It was short comprehensive and I very much to the point. Inspector M—— had been transferred to another precinct for the time being. Ordered to go with him were Detective Cassidy and several others.

It was nothing more than one of those coincidences that can happen only in real life. Yet Cassidy's story was still fresh in the minds of all who had heard It. Could it be possible that Butch Moore was responsible? Well who else? Hadn't he said he'd do it? It must be true. There could be no other answer.

What the boys had no way of knowing of course was that the order had been signed by the police commissioner more than a week before

That night about 10 o'clock three policemen showed up at the "release of Mr Butch Moore. Moore looked glumly at them

Mr Moore said one of them politely, "We wonder if we might trouble you for a few moments? We would like to speak with you alone."

Marvelling at this unexpected display of geniality Butch nodded his head and led them to the rear room.

"There's no use beating around the bush, Mr Moore," the first one stated. "We are all aware of the transfer and of the part you played in it."

Butch almost give himself away

"Transfer?" he repeated vaguely. The men all smiled

"Oh come now, Mr Moore," said the speaker, "you know even better than we that Inspector M——and Detective Cassidy have been shifted."

BUTCH MOORE almost fell from his chair. It suddenly dawned on him that something very amazing had happened. The policeman placed a hand on his arm.

"Mr Moore," he said cordially, "We've always liked you around here We simply dropped around to apologise for Detective Cassidy's action the other night. And we just want to be your friends. Is it agreed?"

"It's okay with me boys," cried Butch his eyes popping. "I wouldn't harm you boys for the world."

They sat for 10 more minutes. As they arose to leave another policeman took Butch to one side.

"I hate to bother you, Mr Moore," he whispered, "but I wonder if we could trouble you just for one more little favour? One of the sergeants in our station is a pain in the neck to us. Will you see if you can have him transferred too?"

Butch sank into a chair

"I'll do what I can," he responded weakly, "but I make no promises."

Since that episode long years have gone by. There have been raids and raids and still more raids in Butch Moore's district.

But for reasons best known to themselves the police always pass up the wide open speakeasy of Mr Butch Moore.

The entire neighbourhood treats him with the utmost respect. If he wants a favour in his district he has but to call the station house. He is what is known as a big shot....

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10: The Wooden Buddha

Capel Boake

Doris Boake Kerr, 1889-1944

Herald (Melbourne), 20 June 1925

IT stood on a shelf just above his desk, a small wooden Buddha, the figure seated on a pedestal decorated in gold with a representation of the moon and stars. Since his marriage he had kept it in his office. Any reminder of his wanderings over the face of the earth seemed incongruous in the smug domesticity of his home; also, his wife was unaccountably jealous of those vagabond years of his. She seemed to think that, given any encouragement, he would be off again.

At seventeen, Jim Allison had run away from the stool waiting for him in his father's office, to sign aboard a small schooner, making for Japan. It was not until ten years later that he returned to take up life again where he had left it. He settled down contentedly enough, and if at times a sick nostalgia for those careless, happy days shook him, he managed to hide it from his wife. Such places he had known; queer, remote corners of the world... buried temples in the forests... staring faces of heathen gods... strange seas... Every town In tho East had echoed to his restless footsteps. They rang in his memory like a song— Bangkok, Rangoon, Mandalay, Pekin....

It was at Pekln the wooden Buddha came his way. His thoughts went racing back. He had left his ship and wandered inland. From the great road sweeping to Pekln, and guarded by strange monsters carved in stone, he could see the blue and yellow roofs of the city gleaming in the sun, the masses of purple lilac above the courtyard walls, and the tender green of the willow trees.

It was a warm day in early spring, and he paused to rest in the shadow of a high wall, conscious as he did so that he was very thirsty. He looked about thoughtfully. If he could manage to climb the wall he might find fruit, or possibly water. It was risky, but he decided to chance it. Swinging himself up by the aid of the branches of a tree which hung above the wall, he clambered over, and, glancing round to see no one was about, dropped lightly to the ground.

He found himself in an orchard; against the grey stone walls, in piled up masses of colour, the cherry and peach trees were in bloom. Stealing forward he came to a small, stone temple in front of which a girl was kneeling. He saw the tiny shrine of the Buddha, the thin blue curl of the incense smoke, and knew by the richness of her dress and the jewels in her hair, that she must be the daughter of a wealthy mandarin.

Startled, he drew back into the shelter of the trees, but the movement disturbed her. She turned her head and saw him. At that moment he knew he was in terrible danger, and glanced back quickly to see if the way was clear. She had but to clap her hands and half a dozen servants would be at his heels. He turned to fly, but she stopped him with a gesture, and, amazingly, greeted him in English. Dangerous though he knew his position to be, he stood rooted to the spot.

Never, he thought, had he seen such a rare and exquisite creature, Her skin was like a magnolia flower, and her eyes as soft and dark as the pansies his mother used to grow in the little garden at home.

As he listened to her quaint and mellifluous phrases so strange to his ear, he had a confused sense that he was living in a dream. She told him she had had an English teacher whom she had loved, and for that reason all the English were her friends. Then, hearing his hesitating explanation of his intrusion, she brought out pale amber tea in covered cups of blue and green, strange sweets and lychee nuts, and spread them before him, beckoning him to eat and drink.

He was glad to do so, though in spite of her assurances, he felt uneasy. There was an old woman hovering in the background who looked at him malevolently, and he kept a speculative eye on her as he drank his tea. She would, he realised, be quite pleased to see him put through some particularly unpleasant form of Chinese torture if she could have her way.

When she came running up to her mistress and spoke to her in a rapid undertone, it was all he could do not to betray his agitation. The girl listened gravely, then dismissed her with a wave of the hand.

"The old woman tells me my father is approaching," she said. "So you must go, for I could not save you if he found you here. But before you go, take this, from me."

She tore the Buddha from its shrine, and thrust it into his astonished hands.

"It is mine, and will bring— what you call— luck. Now go, quickly, quickly."

In the distance he beard the murmur of voices, and realised he had barely time to get away. Light-footed as a cat, he threaded his way through the trees and climbed the wall. Turning back, he caught a momentary glimpse of her as she raised her hand in a gesture of farewell.

THAT night his ship sailed for Australia, and he brought the Buddha home with him. It sometimes crossed his mind to wonder, looking up at it from his office desk, if the gift of the Chinese girl had brought him luck. True, he had a pleasant home, a wife whom he loved, two children— what more could a man want? Then he would shrug his shoulders, and fall to his work again.

It was his cousin George, just home from five years in China and Japan, who showed him what it was the Chinese girl had meant. The Buddha was the first thing to catch his roving eye as he strolled Into the office.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What's this?"

He took it down and examined it curiously. "A household shrine, I should say. The moon and stars have probably some esoteric significance, though I'm hanged if I know what it is. Sometimes they use these things as a hiding place for treasure. Let's have a look. There's probably a secret spring somewhere. Yes, I thought so."

He twisted it in his hand, and the figure moved.

"You see, the pedestal is hollow. Why, what's this?"

His voice changed, then he flung something down on the desk; "A necklace of uncut rubies, if you please, and beauties at that. I suppose you'll give them to Alice? Pity she's so fair; to my mind rubies should only be worn by a dark woman."

The other did not reply. Through his mind flashed a swift vision of a girl with a skin like a magnolia flower and eyes like pansies. No, he could not give her jewels to his wife; perhaps, later on to his daughter.

Slowly he dropped the rubies back into their hiding place, and snapped the spring.

"I don't think we'll tell Alice yet awhile," he said.

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11: Poisoned Pen

Leonard D. Hollister

Courtney Ryley Cooper, 1886-1940

The Blue Book Magazine Feb 1921

One of a series of "Post Office Stories"

PERHAPS you've never noticed it; in all probability you never knew that it existed. Yet in every post office of anything approaching metropolitan size is a little secret passageway which protects you without your knowledge, that serves as the buffer between temptation and the carrying out of the evil promises which dishonesty holds forth— a little gallery where the post office inspectors take their turns at the tiresome job of espionage, to protect the mails.

The windows of that little gallery are hidden; they cannot be seen from the big mailing-rooms below. But their vista is wide, their range of vision long— from them one can view the whole interior workings of a post office; and the clerk who stops to feel a letter for the softness of currency enclosed can be spotted as easily as though the observer were within three feet of him. It is a requirement of the post office inspection department— that that great, plodding, unostentatious ferret organization: which safeguards the mails, both from within and without, for inspections to be made from the "gallery" at regular intervals, simply as a routine procedure. No one is suspected; the post office inspector who stands guard behind the disguised, concealed window hopes that there will be no one who will deserve suspicion; for the men who are working below are his fellows, his co-employees, his partners in the tremendous task of seeing that Uncle Sam's burden of mail reaches its destination without delay and without damage. Yet it is a necessary thing, and it is done.

Ralph Harris had been on watch for three hours now, sitting behind the little window which looked out upon the tremendous chutes, the racks and long tables of the mail-room below. Fifteen minutes remained of his watch, until another inspector was to take his place— fifteen minutes of routine, cursory examination without result, merely the procedure which must be gone through in keeping with the regulations.

All at once Harris' serenity departed; he leaned close to the window and watched with the intensity that only a man who is on the scent of criminality can know.

BELOW Harris, a clerk had taken a letter from the mass which he was running through the canceling machine and held it to the light, then studied it

a moment before he returned it-to the pile of the missives which lay on the table. Harris had seen such actions before; they usually were the preliminary to petty pilfering from the mails, the stealing of envelopes containing money sent without the protection of money orders or registry. The post-office inspector turned away from his post of duty with a feeling of downheartedness. It always hurt him to discover some one tampering with the mails. But when he reached his office, his expression changed. For the same clerk whom he had seen examining the letter was awaiting him.

"The inspector in charge isn't here, is he?"

"No—went home several hours ago."

"Can you take his place?"

Harris looked rather sharply at the clerk. "Certainly."

"Then,"— and the mail canceler smiled, —"I guess I've got a case for you."

"So?"

"I don't know— it's just guess work on my part. But are you investigating any sort of a black-mail matter in regard to the Kenneth Clawsons?"

"No, Why?"

THE mail-clerk hesitated.

"Well," he said at last, "I can't say. It's just a hunch on my part. A couple of weeks ago I happened to be running the mail through the canceling machine, and a letter stuck. I took it out of the regular bunch, and by accident I got it between me and the light. It was just a cheap envelope, and thin. There wasn't any return address on it, and it was in typewriting. As I say, I got it between me and the light, and something made me take a second look. I happened to see the words 'I'll expose you.'

"Naturally, I didn't think anything of it. I hand-canceled the letter and shoved it back in the regular bunch. A couple of nights later another one came through, addressed in the same way and in the same envelope. I guess curiosity got the better of me, and I looked again. But this time the letter inside was folded in such a way that I couldn't see anything. Two nights more, and another one came. I looked at that too, but the writing was concealed. And they've been coming every day or so. The fact that they were always the same, always typewritten without a return, always in the same batch of mail— well, my first experience led me on, and I've looked at all of them. I know it's against regulations, but I believed I was doing the right thing. And tonight the letter happened to be folded in the same way as the first one. For a minute I put it back in the regular mail. Then the more I thought of it, the more I felt I ought to bring the thing to you. Look!"

HE brought forth a flimsy cheap envelope from his pocket and handed it to the post-office inspector. Harris took it, looked at the typewritten address, then snapping on a powerful light over his desk, held the envelope against it. For a moment the typewritten words within were indistinct; finally they resolved themselves into one line which protruded above the fold of the missive and which could be discerned through the covering of the envelope:

I warn you I am a desperate man and unless I get the money—

Harris nodded,

"Thanks for breaking the rules," he said at last. "This looks like blackmail. Take the letter back and run it through in the regular way. Posted at Station A, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but that doesn't seem to mean much. I've watched that. They seem to be mailed from various parts of the city— but always about the same time, after six at night. I always got them in the first or second run."

"All right. Let me know if any more come through. I'll start an investigation and see what I can learn from the Clawsons."

The clerk went out, and Harris sank back in his chair, relieved. At least he did not have to face the disagreeable duty of sending some mail-clerk to the penitentiary for yielding to the temptation held before him by the careless senders of money. As for the clue which had been brought to him—

Harris reached for his hat and left the office. A half-hour later he rang the bell of the big, rambling, old-fashioned Clawson home, far out in the residence district of the city.

"Mr. Clawson, please," he announced when the maid answered his summons. Then a moment later, in the old-fashioned parlor, he faced a tall, rather hard-featured man who looked at him with suspicious eyes and who inquired sharply as to his mission. Harris rose.

"I'm from the Post Office Department," he announced, pulling forth his case and showing his card-commission. "If I'm not mistaken, you've been receiving some rather mysterious letters?"

"Nothing of the kind!" Kenneth Clawson snapped out the words, a denial, which to Ralph Harris was a strict affirmation of his statement. The inspector smiled.

"Perhaps I didn't make myself clear. It's your wife who has been receiving them."

"You're entirely mistaken!"

"May I see Mrs. Clawson?"

"Its impossible. She's ill."

"As a result of these letters?"

Clawson glared. "I don't know what you're talking about; we've been receiving no letters, and if we had, it wouldn't be any of your business!"

"I beg your pardon— it would be very much of my business if those letters happened to contain anything in violation of the postal laws. It's a penitentiary offense to send Black Hand or poison-pen matter through the mails, and while I do not want to appear insistent, Mr. Clawson, haven't you or your wife received within the last few weeks a number of letters making demands for money?"

Again came the glare from the eyes of the hard-featured old man.

"There hasn't been a speck of mail come to this house that hasn't been right and proper. As I remarked before, you're presuming."

"For which I apologize."

"It must all be a mistake."

Harris rose.

BOWING, he left the house, to hurry once more for the post office and the mail-room.

"That letter," he ordered as he approached the clerk. "Find it and bring it up to me with a receipt. I want to hold it for the inspector in charge."

"Yes sir."

Fifteen minutes later the clerk reported at the inspector's office to turn over the thin, cheap envelope to Harris, to accept his receipt for it and to depart to his work of the night. The inspector held the missive again to the light; then, carefully depositing it in the safe, he went home. Next morning he faced the inspector in charge.

"Chief," he announced, "I'd like an order to open some mail. Looks like Black Hand."

"Sure?"

"Yep. Know Kenneth Clawson?"

"Do I?" The Chief laughed with reminiscence. "He's a miser. That man's made more nickels squeal for mercy than any other ten men in the United States. Married a choir-singer about five years ago. Very proud of himself and hates a newspaper as a rat hates poison."

"Thanks. I thought so. I've got a letter here that looks very much like a demand for money— but he's trying to keep it quiet. A postal clerk brought it up to me last night. It's addressed to Mrs. Clawson, and according to the clerk, the same kind of letters have been coming through for the last two weeks. Take a look." He held the letter to the light, and the Chief squinted. Then the inspector in charge made out the formal order for the opening of the

envelope. Together they carefully steamed it and unfolded the typewritten paper which lay within. Then they grunted. For suspicion had been correct:

This is the fifth letter I've written you, Mrs. Lucy Clawson. I'm going to write five more. I want you to get in the proper atmosphere for receiving my demand. I want you to fully realize just what kind of a woman you are, and how your downfall is going to drag you and your husband down into the mire.

I want money. I'm not going to tell you how much now. But I warn you I am a desperate man, and unless I get the money, you'll suffer for it. And that sniveling, pious, sanctimonious husband will suffer with you.

I know you to be a far different kind of woman from that which you pretend to be. Your husband knows your record, and yet he poses as a pious pillar of the church and sneers at ordinary sinners. Will he still sneer when I get through with him? And will you sneer?

The Chief smiled grimly: "Writes like an educated man," he commented. "Let's see what the rest says:"

They read on:

I know all about how you married and robbed young Lawrence Hannerton. Nice little mess, wasn't it? I know all about the scrape you got into over that stolen necklace. How would you like to see that in the papers? And what about the fact that you are now a fugitive from justice on a charge that you have a habit of marrying without going through the formality of a divorce from a prior husband?

Don't think I'm afraid to write you all this. I'm not taking the slightest risk in the world. You wont go to the authorities with it. You're afraid, and your husband's afraid. If you go to the authorities, the papers will get hold of it. The minute they do that, I'll send them carbon copies— anonymously, of course— of all these letters. And they'll print them. What's more, they'll look up the facts and print them too.

And don't think either that I'm simply going to walk into a newspaper office and ask them to print my story if you don't do as I wish. There's another method which is much easier and which absolutely insures publication. It only costs two or three dollars to file an alienation suit, you know, and I have plenty of grounds. My wife never would have lost her love for me if it had not been for companions she met through you. So just let that sink in. You wont forget— I'll take care of that!

Your Nemesis.

The inspector in charge looked curiously toward Harris, then flipped the letter thoughtfully for a moment.

"A nice little combination of poisoned pen and Black Hand," he announced at last. "Here, take it and seal it again. Then chase downstairs with it and see that the carrier gets it for delivery on the morning round. As you go out, send Grueblin in to me."

HARRIS nodded and obeyed, stopping for a moment at the outer office to inform a fat-faced, grinning, likable-appearing young inspector that the Chief desired an interview in the inner office. When he returned from his mission, the interview was over and the Chief was leaning back in his chair, thoughtfully studying the ceiling. He turned his head at the entrance of Harris.

"Never mind doing anything more on that Clawson case today," came his order. "Better spend your time looking up some of those old land-frauds. They're piling up on us pretty heavy. Don't get into anything that will take you out of town, though. Ill want you around here if Grueblin has any luck."

"Is Grueblin on the case too?"

"I hope so, by this time. If things work out all right, a new grocer boy's going to begin delivering the daily food at the Clawson home this afternoon; and furthermore, I think that before another day is over, he'll be taking the cook to a motion picture show and have the low-down on any other servants that happen to be around the house. Grueblin's got as fine a little system of jazz for that sort of thing as I ever struck. It's what we need right now, Harris, There's no use in trying to get anything out of old man Clawson. He'd suborn the worst kind of a felony before he'd let his name get into the papers. His wife's evidently suffering from hysteria, and we can't reach her. It'd probably only gum up the cards if we did. So our big chance lies in what Grueblin can find out, and what the rest of these letters show. You got that tender little missive into the postman's hands, didn't you?"

"Yes— caught him just as he was starting on his route."

"Good! We'll work better in the future. Those things have been coming through on the first or second run after six o'clock, haven't they? Very well; you and I will stick around here each night until those runs are over. Then if any of the letters show up, we can read 'em, copy 'em and have 'em back in the mail in a half-hour. Meanwhile we'll see what Grueblin turns up." Harris turned to his land-fraud cases. That night he met the inspector in charge in the office after hours and waited. But no letter came, and no word from Grueblin. Another night, and the postal-clerk brought up a second missive, in the same kind of envelope as the first. They read it and returned it to the mails, carefully re-sealed. It had contained nothing more than the first, a streaming epistle of invectives, of threats, of venomous hatred. Two days more, and another appeared. It was little different, except that it explained in stronger language the various escapades of which the young wife of the miserly Clawson was accused.

ON the afternoon following it was Grueblin who stood at the inner office door when Harris answered the knock— Grueblin, with a young woman by his side. They entered, and the three drew chairs to the Chief's desk.

"This is Sadie," announced Grueblin with the air of a man who had told enough. "Sadie's turned out to be a darned good friend of mine. She's the maid for the Clawsons. Haven't many servants there— only Sadie and a cook."

"I'll say they aint!" announced Sadie with feeling. "And they wouldn't have us if we wasn't a couple of darned fools. I've said to myself more times than once that I was workin' my life away there for about half of what I could get anywhere else— but you know how us girls is; once you get a place, you just hate to go out and look for another one."

"Sure!" Grueblin was doing the talking. "Isn't that just what I told you last night at the picture-show? Clawson don't let go of much money for anything, does he?"

"I'll say he don't."

"Weren't you telling me that he tried to palm off a bum half-dollar when he paid you last week?"

"I'll say he did!" Sadie said it with her nose in the air.

"Well, listen, Sadie: Just as I told you— these gents are friends of mine, and they're looking up Clawson a little. So you just go ahead and spiel them all that dope you were telling me."

The Chief and Harris said nothing. There was no need. One person and one alone owned Sadie—the genial, fat-faced Mr. Grueblin. The maid forgot the others, to turn and talk directly to him.

"Well, just like I was telling you, I was going upstairs a week or so ago— now, lemme see what night it was—"

"Never mind that. Just wade in. You were going upstairs—"

"Yeh, and I had on my slippers, so I wasn't making any noise. All of a sudden I stopped right on the landing, because there sure was goings on in the Missis' room."

"Talking things over, were they?"

"I'll say they were. I couldn't catch much of what it had all started about, but I kept hearing something about a letter. You know, old man Clawson opens every bit of mail that comes to the house, whether it's for him or not. Always acts to me like he was afraid somebody'd try to vamp that wife of his. She's about thirty years younger than him, you know."

"Sure. And you said they were scrapping?"

"I'll say they were. He was sorer'n a goat about something, and was asking her a lot of questions about a man— I couldn't catch his name. For a long while she denied everything. And then she just busted loose and admitted she'd

been just a plain crook and thief and bigamist and everything else and that if the old man wanted to, he could go and get a divorce.

"Well, that kind of squelched him for a minute."

"Hear anything more, Sadie, besides Mrs. Clawson's confession that these letters, whatever they were, were true, and that the old man was going to hush up the writer?"

"That's about all— except that there was a lot of interesting talk while the information was bubbling forth. I'll say I got an earful."

"I'll say you did," paraphrased the genial Mr. Grueblin. Then he looked at his watch. "We've just about got time to take in a picture-show before your time's up. Are you on?"

"I'll say I am," said Sadie, and she vanished out the door with her grinning companion. The Chief looked toward the inspector.

"Same old story," he announced. "Old husband, young wife. Marries her simply because she's got a pretty face—never thinks of her character. Somebody spills the beans, and the husband gets the dope. Only, in this case, if I know Clawson, he's going to spend his last cent to keep it quiet. He's gone too far now to do anything else."

Harris strode to the window and stood for a moment looking out.

"I've got a funny idea about this case," he said at last.

"Which is?"

"Too darned funny to tell. You'd laugh at me. Guess I'll take a turn around town."

THAT night they met, again to read a letter filled with invectives, teeming with ridicule— a letter filled with poisoned thoughts, of a type to eat into the resistance of a person, to weaken it to the breaking-point.

One of them arrived three nights later. Two nights after that Harris and the Chief bent low over the fifth of the missives. Then Harris went to the desk.

"Ready," he announced. "Read it slow, so I'll get it all."

"All right; here goes:

'This is the end, Mrs. Lucy Clawson, either the end for me or the end for you. There is no need to go into much detail. You know why I am writing this letter. I want a hundred thousand dollars. Does it sound like a lot of money? Very well; just let that husband of yours figure how much this will cost him if he doesn't pay it. Let him take the law of averages, and he'll see that my price is cheap.

"You know why I want the money, and you know what I'll do if I don't get it. So it's up to you. And you'll pay it— at least your husband will. If he doesn't both of you will get all that's coming to you.

"I will be expecting one of you to turn the corner of Eighth and J streets Monday night at ten o'clock. You will walk fifty feet past the Barnes junk-yard to a spot in front of a little

grocery store, where a bread-box stands unlocked. I want you to drop the money in there, and I'll do the rest.

"And don't try any fakes. Don't try to have me arrested. Drop that money in hat bread-box in a package containing a hundred one-thousand-dollar bills. Otherwise I'll squeal, and I'll tell everything I know, which is a lot. As ever, Your Nemesis.' "

The copying concluded, the Chief folded the letter and returned it to its envelope.

"Ready yet to tell what your hunch is?"

"Not by a jugful." Harris smiled in a deprecatory manner as he said it. "The darned thing's too liable to turn out wrong. Is that all?"

"Yep— until you've made the clean-up, whatever it is."

HARRIS didn't answer. Instead, he turned for the door and left the office, not to return until the next afternoon. Then it was only for a moment, to check up with the Chief, to assure himself that the necessary aid would meet him an hour before the time appointed by the letter, and to learn from Grueblin that the quarrels had continued in the Clawson house without any hint of a turn in the decision to pay the unknown blackmailer rather than submit to the tortures of publicity. Harris moved on, to stroll about town for awhile, eat a leisurely dinner, and then— It was nine-thirty when he took the trail of the hard-faced Kenneth Clawson as the miser came forth from his big. house and started hurriedly down the street toward a car. It was nine-fifty-five when he alighted at Eighth and J streets, just a few feet behind the man' whose right arm, pressed tight against his coat, gave evidence of a package concealed there. Slowly Clawson looked about him as he reached the sidewalk, eying Harris carefully as the inspector sought the shadows and walked leisurely up the street, keeping continuously in the darkness, so that the old man might not recognize him as the man who once had asked very pointed questions about blackmailing letters. A cigar-store was open. Harris stepped inside and bought a package of cigarettes. When he stepped forth again, Clawson had disappeared down the darkness of J street toward the junk-yard and the bread-box. Nor did Harris follow.

Five minutes passed; and then—

The shrill warning of a police whistle, the patter of feet coming from the darkness of J Street, and Harris leaped into action. A second later a hurrying man turned the corner, stuffing a package into his shirt as he ran. Harris doubled, then plunged— like a football player in a tackle. His arms caught tight about the knees of the man, and the fugitive hurtled over him, to scramble vainly, to beat against the inspector's head and shoulders with his fists, to curse— then to lie panting and silent. Other forms had come around the

corner. One of them had a flash-lamp— which displayed the further fact that both carried revolvers in readiness for action. Harris clambered to his feet.

"Take him to Headquarters," he ordered, "and hold him there. Do you know what luck Brady had?"

"With that other party?" asked one of the detectives. "No. He was just starting up there when we left him. Don't think he ought to have any trouble, though."

"Hope not," said Harris of the Post Office Department. "Better frisk this bird before you call the wagon. He's liable to be carrying a gat." Then he ran for a street-car headed toward the Federal Building.

SHORTLY after midnight Harris stepped onto the veranda of the Kenneth Clawson house. A moment later the door opened, and Kenneth Clawson glared at him.

"I haven't got time to talk to you!" he said excitedly. "My wife's—"

"Disappeared," answered the post-office inspector casually. The other man stared.

"How do you know?"

"Also the two servants. You came home to find everyone gone."

"Yes, Where are they? What's—"

"Rather poor home-coming, wasn't it— after parting with a hundred thousand dollars to keep those little escapades quiet?"

"You— you—"

"You mean to ask me if I know? Sure I do. And I'd suggest to you, Mr. Clawson, that if you're really eager to see your wife, you'd better come with me."

The man obeyed breathlessly. When they reached the office of the inspector in charge, the aged millionaire stared about him tensely, excitedly.

"I thought you said—"

"That if you wanted to see your wife, you'd come along. Exactly. Please have a chair. First of all, Mr. Clawson, kindly remember that in spite of your efforts to keep this little affair quiet, you didn't do it. You're now in danger of going to the penitentiary for suborning a felony, unless you walk the straight and narrow path The inspector in charge desires that I ask you a few questions."

White-faced, Kenneth Clawson sat and stared at the post-office inspector. Harris smiled, then drew his chair closer.

"First of all, Mr. Clawson, when and where were you married?"

"But—"

"You heard what I asked you. Answer that question, please."

"I was married," came the dull answer, "five years ago, to Miss Lucy Winthrop, a choir-singer."

"How long had you known her?"

"Six months— ever since she had been at the church."

"Where did she come from?"

"Boston, I think."

"Ever check up on that?"

"Of course not."

"Naturally. You're a millionaire who looks after every little item of money, and will chase a man ragged to get his Dun and Bradstreet rating. But with a little thing like a wife— of course that never entered your head. Now, since you've been married, how much money have you given her?"

"That's an impertinent question."

"I'll admit it sounds so. But on the contrary, it's very pertinent. But if you wont answer it yourself, I'll answer it for you. The amount was very small. And you simply refused to die. And there wasn't a chance to get a divorce. And— well, what else could you expect, not a choir-singer, but a very neat, nifty little burlesque chorus-girl, who'd married for money, to do?"

WHILE the old man stared, Harris reached toward the Chief's desk and juggled a package in one hand.

"I'd really like to return this to you, Mr. Clawson," he said, "but I can't do it until after the trial. It's your hundred thousand dollars that you dropped into a bread-box tonight. I had a little hunch from the start— but I couldn't be sure. -I was better satisfied after I'd looked up your wife's record and found that— well, that most of her choir-singing had been done in a burlesque chorus. And so, while you were gone tonight, and while the dicks from headquarters were busily engaged in capturing her confederate, I just had her and the servants brought down here for questioning— the servants to tell what we already knew, and your wife to tell the fact that she'd tried every legitimate way in the world to get money out of you, and failing, had worked the only racket that would make you loosen up."

Harris looked at the gaping, gasping individual before him. Then he continued.

"I've got a little good news for you. All those little escapades were entered into before your wife married you. That's why she confessed them so easily. There'll be publicity— much of it. But it's of a little different sort from what you've been expecting. In this case you'll simply appear as the prosecuting witness, to testify that your wife, with a confederate named Haynes, whom she knew in the good old days, hatched up a nice little proposition to get a

hundred thousand dollars out of you by the poison-pen racket, worked, not against you, but against that wife herself. The minute Haynes had his hands safely glued on the money, your choir-singing mate and he were to make the grand getaway to parts unknown. And of course, you were to stay behind. Now, to be that prosecuting witness, you, of course, will have to sign the information charging the crime, as prepared by the district attorney. And naturally, I don't want you to take my word. Your wife's out in the anteroom. She's had her turn on the griddle, and she'll talk. She's already signed one confession made to us— and another one wont hurt. Would you like to interview the lady?"

Wordlessly, Kenneth Clawson signified his desires. A half-hour later, perspiring, dull-faced, he re-entered the office of the inspector in charge.

"Where— where do I go to sign the warrant?" he asked.

"To the district attorney's office, at ten o'clock in the morning," answered Harris. "Meanwhile, your time's your own. Shall I call a taxicab for you, or would you prefer the cheaper system of a street-car?"

A long moment passed. Then Kenneth Clawson reached into a pocket and dragged forth his wallet. He tore the old strap from it and threw it on the floor. He raked the bills from the various little partitions and stuffed them loosely into a trousers pocket. Then he straightened his shoulders, and with the air of a man facing the whole wide world, willing to go the limit, even if it should cost as much as three dollars, he waved a hand toward the telephone.

"Call me a taxi!" he ordered.

———————————

12: The Way to Freedom

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

(as by Gordon Keyne)

Blue Book, Sep 1938

THE trusty guiding Cotterel— who required no guide— looked at him with unfeigned envy.

"How does it feel to be back in stir, but a free man?"

Cotterel laughed. "Not so good, if you want to know. I had to come back, to see Manning. The Warden says he's not so good."

The trusty shook his head. "Nope. They took old Finger Tricks to the hospital yesterday. He went to pieces after you left. I guess he just don't want to live. There's the doc now. He can take you along."

The prison doctor shook hands with Cotterel. They all knew him here, knew he had been here for months, knew he had been found guiltless and pardoned out. They all had warm looks for him.

"Come along." The doctor nodded. "You have permission, of course—oh, as long as you like! Good. You'll cheer the old fellow up. Can you talk with him?"

"I was his cell-mate for months," said Cotterel simply.

Finger Tricks— a good name for the old forger, a doubly good nickname. He was in for life, and it would not be long now. In a bad way, said the doctor. What his lungs needed was Arizona air, high and dry. He was in hospital merely for tests, not because of disability ; not yet.

Smith took the letter. "I'll read it when my parole is up," he said.

Cotterel shivered a little. Then his shoulders squared, and he smiled once more, gayly, hopefully, cheerfully; old Manning must be cheered up....

They were alone together in the big ward; no other patients here, as it chanced. Prepared as he was, Cotterel was shocked by the change in his old friend. Manning's gray features were lined and drawn and tired; his sunken eyes were less bright than of old. His long, slender fingers, the fingers of a born artist, the fingers of a forger, were nimble as ever, however.

The joy in his face, his eyes, his hands, was a thing electric.

"Heard a few days ago you were not so well off," said Cotterel, sitting down. Smoking was allowed here. He produced cigarettes.

"I'm done," said Manning. "It's the finish, boy."

His fingers spoke for him. During many years Manning had been dumb, due to throat trouble, and Cotterel, his cell-mate, had learned the finger-talk; it had come in handy many times when no talking was allowed. He did not need to use it now, however.

"Manning, you did a lot for me when I was in here," he said abruptly. "You did every possible thing one man can do for another."

"Steered you right," said the deft fingers.

"More than that. You showed me the real man inside of you; we got pretty close, in those days. There's only one way I can repay all you've done for me— that's by getting you out of here."

Manning opened his mouth and emitted a hoarse, almost soundless cackle.

"Escape? Me?" he said on his fingers. "Don't talk foolishness."

"And," said Cotterel, "while I was here and half out of my head, and thinking day and night of escape, you held me back with your wisdom. Your stories of other escapes. Did you ever hear of Sir Sydney Smith?"

Manning frowned. Well-educated, talented, versatile, Manning had been unable to escape his one weakness, the one great gift so terribly misused. He was a gentle, kindly man; his real affection had kept Cotterel from going mad in this same prison.

Now he said slowly:

"I vaguely recall the name; a British admiral, I think. Wasn't he the man who beat Napoleon at Acre and changed the whole destiny of the Corsican?"

Cotterel nodded, with a sudden flashing smile.

"So there's something I can teach you, is there?" he observed. "Yes, you've got the right man in mind. Sir Sydney was a brusque, forcible and forthright seaman; also, he was a gentleman, willing to endanger his whole career to avoid dishonor. Well, he learned something when he was a young captain, the most dashing and popular captain in the fleet. He learned something that you should learn, that you must learn."

Manning smiled. "My friend," said his flying fingers, "I see that you're giving me a dose of my own medicine. Yes, I'm willing to learn. But nothing will do me any good now— nothing."

This evidence of a despondent, hopeless heart touched Cotterel deeply.

"That's what Sir Sydney felt too. Back in 1796, when the French Revolution had passed its bloodiest height, when the Directory was in power, when Bonaparte's star was rising brilliantly, Sir Sydney didn't know the lesson of the simplest way; but he learned it."

"The simplest way?" Manning's head came up. His sunken eyes searched Cotterel with sudden swift alertness. "You mean, of escape?"

"Precisely. And God helping me. I mean to teach you that lesson if I can," said Cotterel solemnly. "The simplest way! But let me tell you about Sir Sydney. He had led a boat raid far up the Seine River, into the very heart of France, when he was captured; with him was a French nobleman, the Marquis de Talfort, exiled and sentenced to death by the revolutionary government.

Luckily, Talfort was not recognized by their captors; he adopted the position of Sir Sydney's servant and the fantastic dress of a jockey. As the jockey and valet, John, who pretended to speak little or no French, he remained with Sir Sydney. The ignorance of the French regarding English customs and manners was extreme; the people in power at that time, remember, were not people of education and knowledge.

"The Directory were overjoyed at Smith's capture. They declared him to be a spy and had him sent to Paris. There, for two years, he was most rigorously confined in the Temple, the former prison of the royal family. Every effort of the British Government to effect his release or exchange was flatly refused. But you must see those two men in their prison, in this historic and terrible Temple. It was a tiny place, able to hold only a very few prisoners—"

A TINY place indeed, a tower with a wall about it, six hundred years old; a tower and wall and garden, and outside it the city encroaching closely—noisome tenements, huddled old structures that housed workmen and loose women. A little tower, a hundred and fifty feet high, the last relic of the once glorious stronghold of the Templars. Here, then, was Sir Sydney, in the second year of his captivity; a handsome, fluent, vivacious man of thirty, a man filled with the ardent flame of reckless adventure, and quartered in the very rooms from which Louis XVI had gone to death four years previously. With him was Talfort, his supposed valet, now passing by the name of John; a merry soul, gay and clever, a fascinating man liked by everyone, always wearing his extravagant costume of jockey's buckskin breeches and boots— facing immediate death if that disguise were penetrated.

Such men are not to be contained by iron bars.

DURING the weary months they had planned escape with tortuous care. Three other men confined in the Temple, dangerous royalists, had joined in the attempt. But one of them had turned traitor at the last moment. Now, in the high room whose barred window overlooked the street and the tenements opposite, Sir Sydney sat in the utmost dejection.

"No use," he said despondently. "Now they watch us more closely than ever; our every movement is noted; our very food is inspected. What was difficult before, has now become impossible."

The valet John, who had been sitting for a long time at the window, turned to him.

"Bah! spirit, Don't let them break your my friend. Look at me. They take me for a servant. They give me liberties. I can drink with the guards, eat in the

kitchen, make love to the jailer's daughter! And she's not so bad, [give you my word. Something may yet come of it."

Sir Sydney's lips twitched.

"A good thing your wife's in England, you rascal!"

"Madame la Marquise," said John under his breath, "is sitting at a window opposite, looking at me."

Smith's head jerked up. Luckily, he was too astounded to speak, for at the moment steps sounded at the door. A guard had come to look in through the wicket at the two prisoners; they were watched at all times. When the steps retreated, Smith ventured a word.

"Is this a joke?"

"Come and see."

Smith sauntered to the window. It was midsummer, beastly hot, and flies were everywhere. Looking out and down at the houses opposite, his gaze came to rest upon a broken window at which sat a woman, knitting.. She looked up, and made a gesture. Her face, despite the frowsy shawl which framed it, was intelligent, handsome, lovely. Smith made a gesture, and she replied.

"Here, what are you doing?" The door was flung open, and a guard clumped in. "Whom are you looking at, there?"

Smith turned, with a smile, and pointed to the street where children were playing. The surly guard looked down, and grunted.

"None of that. Trying to attract their attention, are you? Stop it."

Alone again, Smith looked at his companion. His dejection was gone. Hope had flared up anew; schemes, stratagems, possibilities, surged within him.

"Go and enjoy yourself down below," he murmured. "I'll think up some way to communicate with her. Ah! I have it! Call in the guard."

THE guard appeared promptly. Smith pointed to the two windows, and begged for some old newspapers with which to kill the flies that were abundant. "Kill them with your hands like other people, aristocrat," guffawed the soldier.

"A spy needn't be afraid to soil his hands!"

"Very well," said Sir Sydney, and going to the window, fell to work at the flies. "Ha! John, I've discovered a new amusement. Thanks, my good soldier, thanks!"

The guard laughed; John departed to the kitchen, and Sir Sydney went on with his amusement. Inside of an hour, he had reached an understanding with the woman at the window across the way.

Within three or four days, the two of them had formulated a code of signals which permitted exchange of messages.

So closely had houses encroached upon the Temple, that at one point outside the little garden where the prisoners took daily exercise, a narrow little street barely ten feet wide separated the old tenements from the nine-foot-thick wall. It was at this point the project of escape was aimed.

One afternoon as the prisoners, a scant half-dozen in all, were walking about the little garden, Smith stopped to converse with one of the others. Immediately a guard charged down upon them roughly, seized them, and shoved them apart.

"No talking allowed, you rascals!" he roared. "Keep apart, or back to your rooms you'll go!"

Smith, as he was shoved violently away from the other, felt the folded paper thrust into his hand by the guard, and slipped it out of sight.

Later he got a moment to look at the writing before chewing up the paper:

That particular guard was bribed, and might perhaps be trusted. A tunnel was being dug beneath the street at the narrow point designated. It would be slow work; patience!

He told John, that night; the two men rejoiced together.

A VERY singular relation existed between Sir Sydney and the chief jailer, Lasne, who was a ferocious republican and an implacable prison chief, but who was accustomed to deal with the nobility. For the Englishman he had conceived a high respect, frequently inviting him to dinner— for which Smith paid well— and treating him with courtesy. One hot, sweltering evening, Lasne astonished his prisoner. "It is insufferable here, monsieur. If might have your word of honor not to o much as think of escape, I'll conduct you past the guards and give you an hour on the boulevards."

Smith's jaw fell, till he perceived that the offer was serious.

"Upon my word of honor!" he said. "I'll not even think of escape."

Fifteen minutes later he was wandering the streets of Paris, free.

Incredible as it may seem, this offer was repeated more than once. Orders came every now and then to redouble the severity of the prison regulations, and Lasne obeyed them harshly. None the less, he allowed Sir Sydney an hour or two of absolute freedom, always upon the same promise.

One evening as Smith strolled at liberty, a man came up to him, addressed him by name, stating he was from the Marquise de Talfort and wished to speak with him.

"That is impossible," said Sir Sydney. "I can communicate only from within the Temple— I have given my word."

"Then take this letter, read it, give me an answer."

Smith took the letter and pocketed it. "I'll read it when my parole is up, and give a reply in the usual way," he said, and turned back.

A man capable of such quixotic honor would be capable of anything. Lasne knew this very well, and made up for his periods of indulgence by redoubled severity when Smith was not on parole.

WEEKS passed. By means of the bribed guard and the window-signals, Smith was kept in touch with the progress of the work across the way, proceeding slowly but surely. The Marquise was in touch with several royalist agents, who had flung themselves into the task of freeing the prisoners of the Temple.

A charming young woman with a child, who had numerous gentleman callers, leased the entire building opposite the garden wall. Her callers came frequently and remained long, which would certainly have attracted unfavorable attention anywhere else in the world; revolutionary Paris, however, had discarded all moral and other inhibitions.

These callers were or had been gentlemen, which was a very bad thing for the enterprise in hand. However ardent or patriotic a gentleman may be, when it comes to digging a tunnel from a cellar beneath a street and under a wall on the other side, he is extremely liable to error, as any ditch-digger knows. There are occasional advantages in not being a gentleman, in the world of practical affairs.

The tunnel lengthened,' and there was no suspicion. Sir Sydney, over on the other side of the wall, was filled with hope and eagerness. His valet John, however, was rather skeptical.

"If you can get word to them," he advised, "tell them to put a mason on the job, even at the risk of raising suspicion."

Smith managed the message, and the Marquise, at her broken window opposite, signaled that it would be done; also that the tunnel was nearly finished, and would be broken through the next evening. Be ready to escape at once!

Here, then, came in sight the end of these long weeks of suspense. One more day! Then escape into the seething turmoil of Paris, disguise, evasion to the frontier, and rescue! Two years of imprisonment, of harsh treatment lightened only by occasional favors, were at an end. The volatile Smith could hardly contain himself.

NEXT morning, in the cellar of the house across the way, a mason was brought into the affair, properly blinded by gold. He consulted with the

gentleman laborers, and gave his opinion that while their tunnel was the proper length, he thought it ran too low in the ground. He was promptly engaged to work all day on the job and bring it to a proper finish—but not, of course, to pierce through the other side. That must be reserved for the hours of darkness.

So the mason fell to work. Hours later, he came upon stone, as he worked at the end of the tunnel, and began to remove the stone. It did not occur to anyone concerned that the tunnel, instead of being too low, might be too high.

Smith, that afternoon, was taking his exercise in the garden with the other prisoners, under the eye of watchful guards. One of these guards was stationed beside the high wall that closed off the street. The burly fellow, leaning on his musket, was drawing comfortably at his clay pipe, when something scratched on the wall beside him. He glanced at the wall, and his jaw actually dropped; his eyes bulged out, and he let fall his pipe with one low oath of dismayed stupefaction.

For, untouched by human hands, moved by some invisible power, that nine-foot stone wall seemed all a-crawl!

A bit of rock was dislodged and fell at his feet. Then another. *The tap-tap-tap* of a hammer was heard. Then a whole chunk of rubble fell away.

At the wild, startled yell of the guard, Sir Sydney perceived the frightful truth. The mason, whether by design or accident, had pierced through the wall!

The alarm was sounded; drums rolled; guards came running; the prisoners were bundled away to quarters. Sir Sydney, from his room, caught sight of the watcher opposite and made frantic signals. They were understood. By the time the head jailer and the officers he summoned had traced the matter to the right house, and discovered the tunnel— no one was there.

"I feared as much," muttered the valet John, when the two friends could exchange a word later. "They got away all right, but they failed. They'll always fail."

"What? You, of all persons, have lost heart?" exclaimed Smith. The other nodded despondently, glanced at his fantastic garments, and spat out a curse.

"Yes; I give up. If all the efforts made to free the royal family from these very rooms could not succeed, how can we succeed? I'm about ready to give up, tell them my name, and let them kill me."

"Don't be a fool! I'll tell you how we can succeed!" exclaimed Smith with a burst of passionate energy. Then he caught sight of a flicker at the door wicket. His tone changed instantly. "You lazy, disgraceful rascal, look at these boots of mine! You were supposed to have cleaned them. You've nothing else to do, and yet you neglect your work like a damned surly dog!"

He buffeted the Marquis in furious anger. There was a low laugh outside the door; the guard, satisfied, withdrew. Talfort rubbed his cheek and grinned,

"Well done; they nearly caught us. Well, how to succeed, then?"

"The simplest way, of course—always the simplest way!" exclaimed Sir Sydney. "I never thought of it before; of course, of course! All this slow, laborious effort is sheer waste of time."

"I agree with you. What, then, is your way of simplicity?"

Sir Sydney made a gesture of caution. "Tell you later—when I think it out."

This attempted rescue of the prisoners kicked up a fearful row. That Smith was the objective, could be guessed; he was the most important prisoner in French hands, and the most closely guarded.

His little promenades were brought to light. The Directory, who ruled France, did not know whether to be lost in admiration of his quixotic sense of honor, or in fury at the chief jailer's trust in him. Lasne was removed at once, and another took his place.

John's wife did not reappear. The bribed guard, no doubt in fear lest his bribery become known, refused with vicious oaths even to speak with Sir Sydney. All communication with the outside was cut off—but not before Smith had smuggled out a note directed to his friends in England.

The result of this became apparent one morning, when the valet John was summoned to pack his effects and clear out. As a prisoner of war, he had been exchanged.

Hearing this, he gazed at Sir Sydney with actual dismay.

"But I can't leave you alone here! How this was managed, I don't know—"

"I do," said Smith, laughing. "I arranged it, my friend. You're in more danger than I am. I simply directed England to effect your exchange at once —the simplest way, you understand? It should have been done months ago, a year ago! Unfortunately, I had not learned my lesson then. Now I have. You shall go, and become the means of rescuing me."

"I?" demanded the other. "How?"

Smith, who appeared to be in excellent spirits, whispered in his ear, and drew back, laughing at the astonishment of the other.

"The simplest way— you see?" he observed. "You can get word to agents here in Paris; the whole thing is a matter of half an hour."

"You're out of your head!" ejaculated the valet John, staring at him. "But I'll tell them. Good-by, my dear kind master," he added, as guards appeared. "It grieves me to part with you—"

"It doesn't grieve me," broke in Smith. "You're an idle, lazy rogue, and I'm glad to be rid of you!"

Thus the Marquis de Talfort, ridiculous jockey rig and all, departed from the scene, safely reaching England with a batch of exchanged prisoners.

THE rigor of Sir Sydney Smith's confinement was redoubled by the new jailer. He received no favors, no liberty; new and more severe orders were received from the Directory, and were obeyed harshly.

"If the accursed English hope to get you out of here," said the jailer, after changing him from the moderately comfortable rooms to close solitary confinement, "they'll have to conquer all Paris!"

"Ultimately," said Sir Sydney, with his gay smile, "they'll probably do just that, my friend!"

Upon a late Saturday afternoon, word was brought to the prison governor of a carriage at the gates, containing Adjutant L'Oger and Colonel Lafarge, on official business. He ordered the carriage admitted, and received the two officers with ceremony.

"Citizen," said the adjutant, throwing down a document, "the Directory desires to transfer one of your guests to less comfortable but perhaps safer quarters. Here's the order. If you'll be so good as to hand him over to us, we'll be on our way."

"Eh? The Englishman?" The jailer seized the document, examined the signatures of Barras and other directors, the seal, the stamp of the minister. "A moment, citizens, till the registrar assures me that all is correct."

He bustled away to the *greffier* or registrar, who presently returned with him and sent for the prisoner. Sir Sydney was brought in between two guards and informed that he was to change prisons.

"So!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I'm to receive still further persecutions? As though I were not bad enough off here—"

"Citizen," broke in the adjutant stiffly, "the Government does not wish to aggravate your misfortunes. You'll be very comfortable in the place to which I'm taking you." And as he spoke, Adjutant L'Oger winked significantly at the prison governor, who grinned in delight at the jest, and then motioned the guards.

"Take him away, help pack his effects, and be smart about it."

As the officials waited, the governor and chief jailer beckoned the registrar.

"Give the Citizen Adjutant the book; the discharge must be signed."

The big book was produced; the discharge was written in; and Adjutant L Oger signed it with a flourish.

"You have no guards?" asked the registrar anxiously.

"I," said Colonel Lafarge promptly, "am in charge of the prisoner."

At this moment Sir Sydney was brought back, with his personal belongings. The registrar nodded.

"Yes, Citizen Colonel, but you must take at least six of our men properly to guard this man. He is most important."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lafarge, and turned to Smith. "I am an officer; you're an officer. Your parole will be sufficient to do away with an escort. Your honor is well known."

Smith bowed. "Thank you. I swear on the faith of an officer to accompany you wherever you may take me."

"Enough! To the carriage," said Adjutant L'Oger, and out they went.

The carriage rolled away. The gates clanged shut. On the strength of a forged order, Sir Sydney Smith was out of prison and on his way to freedom—a matter of half an hour's work in all.

"SO," concluded Cotterel, smiling, "you see the lesson, my friend? Circumstances alter cases, in other words. When all else is useless, the simplest way may succeed."

Old Manning wakened from his absorbed attention, came back to the present, and with a sigh glanced around the infirmary.

"That may be true," he said, on his nimble fingers: "but I don't see why it should apply to my case. Unless,"— and he suddenly transfixed Cotterel with a startled, intent look,— "unless you have some crazy scheme!"

The younger man, indeed, was suddenly in obvious suspense. He glanced at his watch, frowned, and wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"Yes," he admitted. "Yes, I— I had a scheme— but I don't know—"

"Good Lord, man!" The other stared at him, aghast. "What have you done? You haven't forged anything—"

Cotterel made an urgent signal of caution, as the door opened and the prison doctor came in. He went to Manning seized his hand, and pumped it, beaming at him.

"Upon my word, Manning, I'm delighted! I understand there's some good news for you. Anyway, you're wanted in the Warden's office. You can walk, all right; shall I have an orderly help you dress?"

"No, no, I'll do it," broke in Cotterel anxiously. "We'll be ready in five minutes, Doc."

"I'll be waiting." And the other departed.

Alone, Manning caught Cotterel by the arms, stared into his face, then freed his hands to talk.

"Answer me! Don't you know that forged papers will only make more trouble later? What in the devil's name have you done ?"

"Taken Sir Sydney's advice," said Cotterel with a shaky laugh. "I went about it the simplest way, that's all. You know, the Governor was much interested in my case, on account of my proven innocence. It wasn't hard to see him. I got him interested in you. He almost agreed to parole you in my care, to Arizona. Said he'd get in touch with the Warden this afternoon, by telephone. This means that he's decided. He's done it. You're going with me— away, free— understand ?"

Manning turned away, to hide the tears on his cheeks,

"But why," he asked, when he was dressed and ready, "why didn't you tell me before?"

"I wasn't sure," said Cotterel in wild delight. "Don't you see? I didn't dare give you hope that would only be dashed. I tried to break it to you with that story while I sparred for time, and waited for the word to come through. Old man, you're walking out now— thank Heaven, we're done with all this forever!"

And they were.

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13: Movie Blackmail

Charles Kingston

Charles Kingston O'Mahony 1884-1944
Detective Fiction Weekly 13 April 1929

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I HAVE a contempt for the person who is wise only after the event and, therefore, I will not pretend that had my advice been taken I should have vetoed the proposed inclusion of our hotel in a film to be entitled "New York's Fashionable and Famous Hotels."

The motion picture is all embracing and universal nowadays, and everybody knows the saying that sweet are the uses of advertisement, but I think I should have made a few inquiries before granting permission. I was away for the week-end when the representative of the film company called, which may not have been merely a coincidence. However, permission was given, the film was taken so unobtrusively that many persons who appeared in it never knew it, and some weeks later a wealthy French boot manufacturer was shot dead in a hotel at Nice by a jealous husband.

That sentence contains an abrupt transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from comedy to tragedy, but it does not exaggerate, as there would have been no murder had not our hotel been included in the series which I have named. And now I will link up both by relating in sequence the events which culminated in a ghastly crime.

The movie operator had first urged that Sunday afternoon should be the chosen time for making the film, but at the request of the manager he agreed to Monday night, usually our worst from the point of view of patronage, but on this occasion rendered important by a dinner concert by artists of renown who were certain to attract a large and fashionable crowd. It was arranged that three episodes in the story of the hotel should be told— lunch time, afternoon tea time, and dinner time; there were to be films made of the exterior, depicting our patrons arriving, and a few interior scenes which would have to be touched up at the studio because the management could permit nothing likely to interfere with the comfort of our guests.

An Odd Defect

THAT WAS the simple arrangement, and when I returned to the hotel on Monday morning to resume my duties I heard all about it from the manager, who was feeling nervous less such a method of publicity damage our prestige by making us seem cheap. I did not quite agree with him, reminding him that if

all the other leading hotels were in the scheme we could not afford to be left out. That cheered him up, and he was quite keen on it when at half past twelve the operator and his assistant arrived. They were both youngish men of unimportant appearance and void of personality, but they evidently knew their work, and I congratulated them sincerely on their smoothness and efficiency.

When the third episode was "shot," they prepared for departure. It shows how little they interested me when I say that I never troubled to inquire their names, and I should have forgotten them completely had I not been keen to see the copy of the film which they had promised to send the manager.

It duly came to hand in less than a week and at first sight I thought it excellent, but a closer scrutiny enabled me to spot at least one defect—in almost every scene the same man and woman appeared. 'They were a striking couple and could not be mistaken, the tall, clean-shaved man with the large, dark eyes and rather prominent lips standing or sitting beside the petite little lady with the wonderful teeth revealed by an even more wonderful smile.

Under False Names

"THEY MIGHT be actors posing professionally and they make it look unreal," said the manager, with a growl. "The funny thing is I can't recall seeing either of them in the hotel. Can you?"

I could not, but then there was nothing surprising about that. I never profess to keep a mental register of our patrons— it was as much as I could do to keep an eye on those who interest me professionally— but at the same time I was surprised at the manager's failure to recall the most prominent persons in the film, for I am certain that once seen they could not have been forgotten easily. However, there was nothing more to be said on the subject; the film was apparently complete, and in a short time our hotel would be shown on the screen in some hundreds of theaters.

A month or so later the whole affair had degenerated into the commonplace, one of those exciting events which grow stale before they are a day old and we had far more important things to think about long before a headquarters detective brought to the manager a letter from the chief of police at Nice, France, inquiring if a Frenchman of the name of Decalon and a Mme. Yibert had stayed at our hotel on Monday, June 206.

It was the work of a few minutes to run through our books and ascertain that no one bearing either name had been among our guests on the night in question, and the manager was telling the detective so when the latter drew from his pocket a couple of photographs.

"They may have used false names," he said. '' The probability is that they did, but you may be able to recall their appearance. Look at these photographs."

A Murder in France

I UTTERED an exclamation of surprise the instant I saw them.

"Why, they're the couple who figured so prominently in the film that was taken of the hotel that very day!" I cried, and all three of us stared hard at the photographs for quite a minute.

The detective was the first to break the silence.

"I'd like to hear about that film," he said, settling himself in the armchair facing the manager, "but before you start I'd better tell you that the French police are interested because the day before yesterday Decalon, the original of that photograph, was shot dead at Nice by the husband of the original of the other photograph."

It did not take me long to satisfy his curiosity concerning the film, but when I had finished he had to confess that he knew little more than he had already related about the tragedy at Nice. It was apparently another instance of the eternal triangle, in this case the actors being a young married couple in poor circumstances and a middle-aged bachelor of considerable wealth. Apparently, the latter had been the tempter, and the jealous husband, unable to convince his wife that all that glitters is not gold, had followed his treacherous rival to Nice and had shot him dead in a corridor of one of the principal hotels there.

"It is the sort of thing that's always happening in Europe," said the detective, preparing to leave us.

"Except in one particular," I remarked, picking up the photographs from the table and gazing at them. "According to your story Decalon and the lady eloped to New York and stayed at this hotel under assumed names, but if they were so desirous of secrecy why did they make themselves so conspicuous during the taking of the film? I don't refer to the exterior scenes in which they appear, for then they might have been filmed without knowing it, but that scene where they are almost sitting in the game chair in the lounge could not have been photographed without their being fully aware of the fact."

"By Jove, you're right, it does seem odd," said the headquarters man. He rose and stretched himself. "It's no business of mine anyhow. 'The man's dead and it's the job of the Nice police to deal with his murderer, who's in jail. But I'll mention what you say to the chief in the event of further inquiries being considered desirable."

A Vain Couple

THE little problem I had propounded kept my interest alive, and the next time I was down town I looked in at headquarters and found the detective who had brought us the photograph. He had half a dozen French papers in his desk and in each one of them the photographs of Decalon and Mme. Yibert were reproduced, and once again I scrutinized faces which were by now almost as familiar to me as my own.

There was no doubt that they had been at our hotel on June 26, whatever the manager or the reception clerk might say to the contrary. But how could they have been there and yet pass unobserved in spite of the man's remarkable appearance and the woman's amazing beauty? I marveled at the vanity of the couple in boldly posing for the movie operator when they both must have known that there was a wronged husband capable of avenging himself by committing murder.

"The husband is in prison now awaiting trial," said the detective, as I handed the papers back to him; "he'll be acquitted, of course, for they never convict in crimes of passion in France."

He yawned, lit a cigarette, and having chatted on general topics for a few minutes we parted.

An Amazing Meeting

IT WAS a lovely afternoon and I made for City Hall Park where there was quite a crowd enjoying weather perfect for New York. I was strolling along Broadway when I was startled by seeing in front of me the originals of the two persons in the film of the hotel. I had less than ten seconds in which to identify them as they passed me, but in that brief time I discovered all the proof I needed, including a tiny scar to the extreme left of the upper lip of the man, and although they as suddenly disappeared I felt as though I had suddenly discovered that the age of miracles had not yet passed.

It was clearly a case for action, however, and I acted promptly. A taxi was at hand and I was soon at the address in Forty-Second Street from which the copy of the film sent to the manager had been addressed. But all that rewarded me was the information, given grudgingly by a surly housekeeper, that the film company I was inquiring about had rented the single room office for only a month, and then had merely used it as an accommodation address.

By now I had come to the conclusion that the affair was beginning to look serious if not sinister, and I drove back to headquarters, but I was not prepared for the good humored chaff of the detective when I related what I had seen.

"No," he said, in laughing protest, "you must be mistaken. Why, Decalon is dead and Mme. Yibert is at Nice under the supervision of the police who are determined that she shan't avoid giving evidence at the trial. You can't expect me, therefore, to believe that not only is Mme. Yibert in New York, but that Decalon, the murdered man, is actually alive and walking about New York."

"I don't care what you say," I retorted. "I saw the originals of these two photographs little more than half an hour ago, and it's my opinion that if you'll find the man who took the film of the hotel you'll also find the real story behind the murder at Nice. Isn't it odd that the so-called film company should have had what amounts to a fake office in Forty-Second Street? Isn't it odder still that what I may call the principal and most prominent actors in the film of the hotel should be a man and a woman who to all intents and purposes had the very best of reasons for avoiding the very prominence the film gives them?"

Inside the Plot

HE PLAYED nervously with the pens on his desk and was silent.

"I'll have inquiries made about the film company," he said at last. "Perhaps, you'll send along the copy of the film and any communications you have had from the company?"

"They'll be in your possession tonight," I said, and I was as good as my word, for a special messenger delivered them at headquarters within an hour, and then the manager, in whom I had confided, and I waited for the developments which we both knew would be sensational.

But we had to wait some weeks, and the reason was that the man and the woman I had seen in Broadway had recognized me and had promptly sailed for Europe. They were actually arrested in Pontorsin, a village in Brittany, a month after my visit to headquarters and the charge against them was blackmail and conspiracy.

For the film of the hotel had been part of a blackmail plot by a gang of four, including one woman. They had rented the room in Forty-Second Street, given themselves a high-sounding name, and had selected our hotel as the scene of the film which was to be used to extort money.

The real Decalon, the man who was murdered at Nice, was a friend of the Yiberts, who were, as I have said, poor in comparison with the wealthy manufacturer. Decalon entertained them frequently and on occasions was seen alone in Mme. Yibert's society, but there never was any question of intrigue until a mutual acquaintance by the name of Lendra concocted the scheme which he intended should compel Decalon to pay hush money.

Owing to his intimacy with both parties Lendra heard regularly of their few engagements, and when one evening Decalon casually mentioned that he was going to New York on business on a certain date and the next morning Lendra ran into Mme. Yibert, who informed him that she was going to spend three weeks with an aunt at Marseilles, he began to make his plans there and then. 5

He assembled a little company, including an out-of-work actress who in figure and face resembled Mme, Yibert and who could "make up" to look like madame to the life. There was also a big, burly ruffian to impersonate Decalon, and the fourth member was an expert movie operator who may be described as unemployable because of his record and character.

I need not describe in full how the film was taken which apparently depicted Mme. Yibert and M. Decalon entering our hotel and chatting intimately in the lounge and later dining together. It was very well done and when the picture was complete, Lendra called on Decalon to inform him that he had been asked by a certain person to offer him for sale all the rights in a film which Decalon would find it to his advantage to suppress. The wealthy manufacturer, who had returned to France and was on eve of leaving for a holiday at Nice, had first thought that Lendra was attempting a silly and meaningless joke, and when at last it dawned on him that the blackguard was serious he threw him out of the room and kicked him out of the front door. Had the Yiberts been at home he would have telephoned to tell them of the attempt to blackmail him, for he and Mme. Yibest had nothing whatever to hide, but the latter was still with her aunt and Yibert himself was staying with a bachelor friend in the country. And it was to this unfortunate absence from home of the Yiberts that the tragedy was due entirely, for if Decalon could have had a few minutes on the phone with either of them he would have saved his life.

As it was he went off to Nice, and Lendra, crazy for revenge, sent the copy of the film in his possession to Yibert, accompanying it with specially enlarged photographs of the scenes in which the bogus Decalon and the bogus Mme. Yibert figured prominently.

To Yibert the evidence must have appeared decisive— he believed that whereas the camera cannot lie an aunt can and will to help a niece engaged in an intrigue— and being naturally of a very jealous disposition he had thought of nothing else but revenge. How he took it has been told, and all that remains of the story can soon be related. Lendra was arrested shortly after the impersonators of Decalon and Mme. Yibert were under lock and key, but the fourth member of the gang escaped to South America. The trio were put on trial a week after Yibert had been acquitted as the result of an emotional appeal by one of the most celebrated French lawyers. But there was no

emotion when the three blackmailers stood in the dock and in contrast to the acquitted murderer got ten years' imprisonment each. It is a way they have in France!

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14: archy interviews a pharaoh

Don Marquis

Donald Robert Perry Marquis, 1878-1937
Archy and Mehitabel, Doubleday, 1927

Archie, the cockroach who was a vers libre *poet in a former life, before his soul transmigrated in a cockroach, valiantly types his stories in* vers libre *form by diving headfirst onto the keys of a typewriter. (This was, after all, in the 1920s). On this occasion the brave little roach manages to travel from Don Marquis's newspaper office to the Metropolitan Museum to interview a mummified pharaoah.*

boss i went
and interviewed the mummy
of the egyptian pharaoh
in the metropolitan museum
as you bade me to do

what ho
my regal leatherface
says i

greetings
little scatter footed
scarab
says he

kingly has been
says i
what was your ambition
when you had any

insignificant
and journalistic insect
says the royal crackling
in my tender prime
i was too dignified
to have anything as vulgar
as ambition
the ra ra boys
in the seti set
were too haughty

to be ambitious
we used to spend our time
feeding the ibises
and ordering
pyramids sent home to try on
but if i had my life
to live over again
i would give dignity
the regal razz
and hire myself out
to work in a brewery

old tan and tarry
says i
i detect in your speech
the overtones
of melancholy

yes i am sad
says the majestic mackerel
i am as sad
as the song
of a soudanese jackal
who is wailing for the blood red
moon he cannot reach and rip

on what are you brooding
with such a wistful
wishfulness
there in the silences
confide in me
my perial pretzel
says i

i brood on beer
my scampering whiffle snoot
on beer says he

my sympathies
are with your royal

dryness says i

my little pest
says he
you must be respectful
in the presence
of a mighty desolation
little archy
forty centuries of thirst
look down upon you

oh by isis
and by osiris
says the princely raisin
and by pish and phthush and phthah
by the sacred book perembru
and all the gods
that rule from the upper
cataract of the nile
to the delta of the duodenum
i am dry
i am as dry
as the next morning mouth
of a dissipated desert
as dry as the hoofs
of the camels of timbuctoo
little fussy face
i am as dry as the heart
of a sand storm
at high noon in hell
i have been lying here
and there
for four thousand years
with silicon in my esophagus
as gravel in my gizzard
thinking
thinking
thinking
of beer

divine drouth
says i
imperial fritter
continue to think
there is no law against
that in this country
old salt codfish
if you keep quiet about it
not yet

what country is this
asks the poor prune

my reverend juicelessness
this is a beerless country
says i

well well said the royal
desiccation
my political opponents back home
always maintained
that i would wind up in hell
and it seems they had the right dope

and with these hopeless words
the unfortunate residuum
gave a great cough of despair
and turned to dust and debris
right in my face
it being the only time
i ever actually saw anybody
put the cough
into sarcophagus

dear boss as i scurry about
i hear of a great many
tragedies in our midsts
personally i yearn
for some dear friend to pass over
and leave to me

a boot legacy
yours for the second coming
of gambrinus

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15: Pourquoipas

Richard Marsh

Richard Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915
The Pocket Magazine, April 1900

1: The Talking Horse

"BUT, MADAME, I do not understand you!"

"It is a mystery!"

"A mystery!" Mr. Fletcher felt that the word inadequately described the situation. "Do you mean to say I hardly know whether to take you seriously that you have been having a conversation with a horse?"

"That is to say, with my husband— with Ernest."

"I thought you said that he was dead?"

"It is certain. Did I not see him die? I will show you the bed upon which we laid him out. Did I not shed upon his corpse my tears? What would you have?"

"Then how about the conversation?"

"It is metempsychosis."

Mr. Fletcher began to be amused.

"Metempsychosis?"

"It is a theory of which I know but little. Is it an article of faith with which monsieur is acquainted?"

"Not much personally."

"I? I am a Catholic. Ernest? He was I know not what! These men! Never shall I forget my feelings when— when I suggested sending for a priest; he said that it was not worth while to trouble the good man, for when he died his soul would pass into a horse."

"A horse?"

"A horse! He even named the horse! It is incredible!"

Mr. Fletcher thought it was— almost.

"Monsieur must know that my husband— he is dead, what does it matter?— was not to me a good husband. I did my best to bring him to a sense of what was right, of what was proper; but, after all, it is little that a wife can do, is it not so? He had his little fortune, I had mine. Puff! before I knew it, his was gone. Do not ask me how. He would have sent mine with it; I said no. He was a great horseman. He used to keep horses to run at races, and to sell— that was his business; the hotel was mine— and among them was the famous Pourquoipas— all the world has heard of Pourquoipas."

All the world might have done. Mr. Fletcher had not. He said so.

"Monsieur has not heard of Pourquoipas! It is extraordinary! He is the greatest trotting horse in the world. It is little I know of these things, but I do

know that Pourquoipas is indeed a marvel. He was my horse, as indeed, when you have the truth, were all the others. Judge, then, of my surprise when, as I told monsieur, I said to Ernest, 'Shall I send for a priest?' he replied, 'Of what use? When I die my soul will pass into Pourquoipas.' 'What nonsense are you talking?' I demanded. 'Agnes,' he said, 'you have often accused me of having no religion. I have a religion. I believe in the doctrine of metempsychosis.' 'What horror is that?' I cried. 'It is the doctrine of transmigration of souls. I am now about to die. I believe that when I am dead my soul will pass into the body of Pourquoipas. It is as I say. Those who live longest will see most.' He looked at me with his glassy eyes. He turned over on his side. Before I knew it he was dead. Those were nice last words for a wife to hear from a husband as he was entering the grave.

"I said nothing to anyone. I was too much ashamed. The day before yesterday he was buried. Yesterday morning I entered the stable to see that all was well. I was looking at Pourquoipas. I was wondering what I should do with him. He is entered for half a dozen races and what do I know of racing? and suddenly Pourquoipas turned and looked at me. 'Agnes,' he said, 'good-day.' Monsieur, it was my husband's voice. I fell to the ground. They found me in a fit. They carried me to the house. Oh, mon Dieu!"

The lady applied her handkerchief to her eyes. Apparently she wept.

"Don't you think it possible," suggested Mr. Fletcher mildly, "that you were the victim of a delusion?"

"Possible. When I returned to consciousness I said to myself, 'It is sure! I am no fool— I!' The more I thought of it, the more I said to myself it was a trick my fancy played me. Last night when I went to bed this idea was clearly presented to my mind."

Madame Peltier paused. She glanced round the room with what was very like a glance of apprehension.

"Monsieur, last night I had no doubt upon the matter. This morning I found, pinned to my pillow, a piece of paper, on which was written the words, 'Come to the stable.' They were in my husband's handwriting. I have the piece of paper in my pocket."

She rummaged in a pocket, which seemed as remarkable for the variety of its contents as any schoolboy's could possibly have been. Finally she produced a scrap of paper; this she placed upon the table with a flourish which was essentially dramatic.

"There it is; monsieur may see it for himself."

It was a quarter-sheet of dirty notepaper, on which was written, in a cramped French handwriting, the words, "Come to the stable."

"It is my husband's handwriting; there are a hundred persons who can swear to it. I said, 'It is another trick.' But, in spite of myself, I went to the stable. Scarcely had I put my foot inside the door than Pourquoipas looked round to me with this remark, 'You see, my wife, it is as I said.'"

"Did you have another fit?"

"Would that I had! It was not all he said, not by a great deal. He advised me to commit suicide."

"In order to join him in the bosom of Pourquoipas?"

"Not actually, but in effect. He desired, the vagabond! that I should ruin myself. He said that I was to send all the horses and a sum of money— ah! what a sum!— to an address at Morlaix. I was to ask no questions as to their destination; I was to dismiss them from my mind as though they had never been."

Mr. Fletcher rose from his seat.

"You don't mean that he said all that?"

"It is the truth. All the horses and ten thousand francs— all to be sent to a man at Morlaix, of whom I had never heard. It would be my ruin; as well commit suicide at once."

"This gets interesting."

"He said that if I did not do it he would haunt me by day and by night; he would make my life a burden; he would make me wish that I was never born."

"Seriously, madame, are you quite sure that you were not again the victim of your own imagination?"

"I have no imagination; I know not what it is. When I hear a thing, I hear a thing; and when I hear my husband's voice I know it, monsieur may rest assured of that. Besides, there is the paper."

There was the paper, but Mr. Fletcher did not see that there was much in that. Oddly enough, he had been routing out materials for an article on Breton superstitions, when he stumbled on this find at Plestin. He had not been in the place half a dozen hours when the landlady of his hotel, "La Boule d'Or," thrust on him her confidence. She said— he had never had such an accusation hurled at him before— that "monsieur looked so sympathetic."

On the shore he found the stables. They were built within a stone's-throw of the sea. Outwardly, they had not the appearance of a typical training stable— of a training stable, that is, as it is known in England. A lank, knock-kneed individual was lounging in front of the door, who was the typical English jockey as he is found in fifth-rate racing establishments in "foreign parts." Him Mr. Fletcher accosted.

"Got some decent horses, I hear."

The "jockey" looked him up and down.

"They've got four legs— most on 'em."

Mr. Fletcher knew that the speaker had already read his inmost soul, and was aware that his equine knowledge extended no further than the capability of being able to draw a distinction between a horse and an ass.

"Four good legs, some of them, I understand."

"About as good as yours and mine." Mr. Fletcher felt that this language, in one in the position of the speaker, was out of place.

"Can I have a peep at them?"

"There's no law again' it, as I knows on."

The stable door was open; Mr. Fletcher entered. The jockey slouched in after him. The arrangements were primitive, but the building was of considerable size, and some eight or nine animals were in the boxes.

"Which is Pourquoipas?"

"That is Pourquoipas." On Mr. Fletcher moving towards the animal indicated the jockey was moved to further eloquence. "He is a 'orse, he is." Pause. "He is a 'orse." Another pause. "There ain't no trotter like him, not in Europe, there ain't. I ought to know." Pause. "And I says so." Pause. "That 'orse can do his mile inside of two-eleven." The speaker glanced at Mr. Fletcher, as if challenging contradiction; but as that gentleman was unaware of there being anything remarkable in a horse "doing his mile inside of two-eleven" his countenance was blank. "Yes, and inside of two-ten, if he's fairly on the job."

Again a look in the nature of a challenge; still no reply. In possible disgust the jockey did what Mr. Fletcher was hoping he would do— he turned on his heels and left the stable. He seemed to see nothing surprising in leaving a perfect stranger to examine the stud at his leisure.

Mr. Fletcher was content, however, to confine his attention to one member of the stud— to Pourquoipas.

"So you're Pourquoipas, are you? I don't know much about the genus trotting horse, but if you're a fair example of the rest of your tribe you're not a handsome family. Big, gawky, leggy brute! You look to me more like a cart-horse gone wrong than any other kind of quadruped I've seen!" Pourquoipas looked round with sullen eyes, as though he resented these observations of a too-candid critic.

"A nice sort of man the late Peltier must have been to have wished to transfer his soul to such a thing of beauty as yourself."

The creature made a movement with his hind legs, which caused Mr. Fletcher to nimbly step aside.

"Now then, whose toes are you trying to step upon? A pretty mean sort of scamp your master must have been."

There ensued an interval of silence. Mr. Fletcher stared at the horse, and the horse at him. It was a stare, perhaps, of mutual admiration.

"Fat English pig!"

It was these words, spoken in French, which broke that interval of silence. Mr. Fletcher started back in so much haste as to come into sudden and unexpected contact with the stable wall. It seemed that this flattering address proceeded from Pourquoipas! For some seconds he gazed at the animal with an astonishment which was altogether unequivocal.

"I'm not surprised that it frightened the woman! The thing was uncommonly well done. Now, my ventriloquial friend, where are you?"

Echo answered where. Mr. Fletcher treated Pourquoipas with very little ceremony. He drove him from side to side of his box, so that no corner of it was hidden. He peered into his manger; he routed among the straw; he looked up at the ceiling; he examined the other boxes— there was nothing there but horses. He returned to stare at Pourquoipas; and the more he stared the more the wonder grew.

"Blockhead."

The same voice; and again it seemed to proceed from Pourquoipas.

"So there was something in it after all. I thought the woman was romancing. Well, this is something new in travellers' tales. I wonder, my friend, just where you are?"

While he wondered the voice went on—

"You think, you English, that you are wise. Bah! You are a nation of fools! Go back to your land of fogs; there you will be more at home than here."

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Fletcher, when the voice was still.

It seemed that it was. All efforts on his part to provoke a continuation of the conversation proved futile. His language was not exactly choice, his allusions were not entirely civil; but nothing he could say had any effect upon the quadruped, or upon the gentleman behind the scenes who had endowed the quadruped, *pro tem*., with the faculty of speech.

"If the seance is concluded I suppose I'd better go."

As he left the stable he told himself

"Unless I am mistaken, our friend the jockey has a finger in this pie."

When he got into the open air the first thing he saw was the jockey, walking beside a horse which a lad was exercising on the sands a good three-quarters of a mile away.

Later on Mr. Fletcher, having returned to the hotel for dinner, noticed above the mantelpiece of the *salle-a-manger* the picture of a man. The portrait was in oils, and life-size. The man was leaning over a table, staring the spectator in the face. It was in the modern style of French sensation— the man

seemed actually alive! But, in its way, it was distinctly a work of art. Mr. Fletcher asked the Breton maid, who brought in his soup, who the original was.

"It is the patron— the husband of madame. It is a good likeness. But, for me, I do not like it. Whenever I look at it I think that he is going to leap at me across the table."

The idea was not inapt; he did look as though he were about to spring.

"Wasn't he a little man?"

"But a dwarf. That is how he was so good a rider."

The face in the picture was not an evil face. It seemed to Mr. Fletcher that it was rather the face of a fool than a knave. But about the whole portrait there was a curious appearance of life one momentarily expected the man to spring.

That night Mr. Fletcher was aroused from his first sleep by a tapping at his bedroom door. At first— as we are apt to do— he wondered what it was that had disturbed his slumber. Tap, tap, tap! As he listened there came a further tapping at the panel of the door. He started up in bed.

"Who's there?"

"Open, monsieur, for the love of heaven."

It was a woman's voice.

"Is that you, madame?"

"Open, monsieur. I pray you, open."

"What's the matter?"

Slipping into a pair of trousers, Mr. Fletcher went to see. Outside the door was Madame Peltier in a costume of the most amazing scantiness.

She had a lighted candle in her hand. Without waiting for an invitation, pushing past the gentleman, she entered his room. Putting her candle on the table, herself she placed upon a chair. Mr. Fletcher felt that this behaviour of his landlady's required an explanation, even in the wilds of Côtes du Nord!

"May I ask, madame, what is wrong?"

Now that she had gained admittance, the lady appeared to be in a state of speechless agitation; it was plain that there was something wrong.

"Ernest!" she gasped. "Ernest! I have seen him."

"Ernest?" For a moment the name conveyed no significance to Mr. Fletcher's bewildered brain. "You mean your husband?"

"My husband! I have seen his ghost!"

"His ghost?"

Mr. Fletcher was becoming conscious that there might be more excitement in the country than in the town.

"I have seen his ghost; oh, mon Dieu! I was asleep. Suddenly I awoke. Someone was leaning over me, having a tight hold of my arm. It was Ernest. Oh, *mon Dieu*!"

"You were dreaming."

"Dreaming! I wish I had been dreaming. Is that a dream?" The lady pulled up the sleeve of her single garment. An ugly bruise showed on the skin of her plump, white arm. "Ernest was a little man, but he had a wrist like steel. That is where he gripped me. Is that a dream?"

"How do you know it was your husband?"

"Do I not know my husband? He whispered in my ear— oh, the horror! 'You see, my wife, it is as I said.' I was too frightened to speak. 'I will haunt you by day and night until you do my bidding.' Then he began again about the horses and the ten thousand francs which I am to send to a Monsieur Quelquechose at Morlaix— just as I heard it, every word, from Pourquoipas. It will be my ruin!"

While the lady sobbed, Mr. Fletcher, in his unstockinged feet, paced to and fro.

"It strikes me that there is some plot on foot to deprive you of your property. Do you know anything about that jockey of yours?"

"Sam Tucker? He is a fool, and a knave. What then?"

"Do you think him capable of originating an elaborate scheme of robbery?"

"He is capable of anything; he is always robbing me. What has that to do with my husband?"

"That, at present, is more than I can tell you. Of course, the ghostly visitation was a trick."

"Is that a trick?"

The lady pointed to the bruise upon her arm.

"That is part of the trick. But I will talk the matter over with you in the morning, and we will see what can be done. You had better return to your room. You are hardly likely to receive another visit from that very versatile husband of yours to-night."

"I would not return to my room not for ten thousand horses and a million francs."

"Then you had better go to your maid. I suppose that you hardly propose remaining here?"

The lady went to her maid. Immediately on her departure the gentleman turned into bed. But he could not sleep; he turned, and tossed, and tumbled; the lady's visit had banished slumber. Pourquoipas, the words which had fallen— or which had seemed to fall— from the creature's lips, the lady's story— half a dozen things were jumbled together in his mind.

Perhaps some twenty minutes or half an hour had elapsed since the lady had gone. He was lying on his left side, with his face turned towards the wall. His eyes were closed, in the forlorn hope that sleep would come upon them unawares. But as he lay, and no sleep came, and, instead, phantoms of thought persisted in chasing each other across his brain, in weariness of spirit he opened them to look out upon the world. As he did so he was surprised to see that a light— a faint light— was shining on the wall. His first impression was that it was later than he had imagined, and that the first glimmerings of daylight were finding their way into the room. Something, however, in the colour of the light suggested that it certainly was not daylight. And, as he lay in a sort of drowsy stupor, his eyes still fixed on the dimly illuminated wall, he began to fear that that absurd woman had returned, to outrage the proprieties, and to seek shelter from her fears.

"Confound her! If this isn't something like an hotel, I never knew one yet! Talk about travellers being taken in and done for!"

This he muttered beneath his breath. Then he turned lazily in bed, intending, with as much politeness as circumstances would permit, to call down execrations on his hostess. But he did not call down execrations on his hostess, because his hostess was not there.

When he turned in bed he perceived that the room was lighted, but from what source there was no evidence to show. The light was, so to speak, just enough to cast the room in shadow; just enough to make things visible, and yet not plain. It was a dim and a ghostly light.

While Mr. Fletcher was wondering to what unseen friend he was indebted for this genteel illumination, all at once his eyes fell upon a man, who was standing on the other side of the table, leaning over the board. He could have sworn that he was not there when he first had turned, a second ago, for his glance had travelled all round the room, in search of his landlady, and he had seen that it was empty. Yet it was equally certain that now the man was there, unless, that is, he was the victim of an hallucination. When one is awake, and in one's right mind, one does not, as a general rule, see things which are non-existent; and now he saw that man.

He was a very little man, if that was any consolation, and he was a curious-looking little man. As he leaned across the table his attitude conveyed an odd and slightly uncanny impression of his being about to spring. There was silence. The visitor made no remark. Mr. Fletcher, on his part, made none. The man was a stranger to him, and yet where had he seen him before? Suddenly he remembered in the picture over the mantelpiece in the *salle-a-manger*. He was the patron— the husband of madame! Either the artist had caught, in a marvellous and prophetic manner, his sitter's pose, or the sitter had caught the

artist's inspiration. Mr. Fletcher saw the picture reproduced before his eyes, as in the portrait— the little man looked as though he were going to leap at him across the table!

"Monsieur, a little of your attention."

The visitor opened the ball of conversation— the voice was the voice which had seemed to proceed from Pourquoipas.

"You are an Englishman? Very good. Confine yourself to your own affairs. Return to your own country."

The visitor's manner was distinctly acid. As he listened, Mr. Fletcher became very certain that the man in front of him was neither a spectre of his own imagination, nor a visitant from shadowland.

"You hear? I say, return to your own country."

Mr. Fletcher heard, and, as he heard, he sat up in bed and contemplated the speaker at his leisure.

"You're a nice young man, upon my word!"

This form of reply seemed to take the visitor aback. He seemed to think that he had not created a sufficient impression.

"You do not know who I am?"

"Oh, yes I do, thanks."

"You think I am alive?"

"I don't think you are."

"Very good. Try and see." The speaker raised his hand, with a little mocking gesture. "But I warn you to take care. Above all, I warn you not to meddle in affairs which are no concern of yours. Go away from here, or— you will regret it."

"I assure you, honestly, that I shall not regret it if remaining here will afford me an opportunity of having frequent interviews with you. You are the sort of man, I should say, who improves upon acquaintance."

"You laugh at me? Well, you will not laugh long. I warn you to go away from here before to-morrow night, or you will be sorry."

"Sorry? Not at all! You little brute!"

As Mr. Fletcher uttered this last exclamation, springing out of bed, he bounded towards the little man behind the table. He moved with great agility, but if he expected to take the other by surprise, he failed. No sooner did his feet touch the floor than the mysterious light vanished, and, despite his haste, all that he succeeded in doing was to come in violent contact with the table.

Some strongish language escaped his lips as, in the pitchy darkness, he went rushing round the table. He succeeded in reaching the other side of it; he also succeeded, when he reached it, in finding nothing there.

"Where are you, you hound?"

No voice replied. He stood a moment, listening. There was not a sound.

"I know you're somewhere in the room. Only wait until I lay my hands on you!"

Even as he spoke someone laid a hand on him, lightly, on his arm; and a voice— a well-known voice— observed

"Good-night, dear friend— until tomorrow!"

Mr, Fletcher sprang round with an agility which was really marvellous, grasping wildly at the speaker. He grasped, however, nothing but the air. When he realised that there was nothing there to grasp, Mr. Fletcher's language was quite unprintable. At last he lit the candle. By its glimmer he examined the room— there was nothing but the room to examine. All traces of his visitor had disappeared. Nor could he find anything which went to show the means by which that disappearance had been effected. The door was locked, so was the window.

"Where has the little beggar gone? It strikes me that this is quite a model thing in hotels. It dates from before the flood; and I'll stake a pound it's honeycombed with sliding doors and secret passages, like the hotels used to be in the good old-fashioned tales of my boyhood."

As he came to this conclusion he returned to the table behind which the little man had stood. His eyes fell upon a piece of paper which was lying in its centre.

"What is that? I didn't notice anything there when I lit the candle."

It was a quarter-sheet of dirty notepaper— own brother to the scrap which Madame had shown him. It contained two words, written in the same cramped handwriting as the words upon her piece—

"Until to-morrow."

"That's odd. How came that there? There can be no doubt that the thing's well done."

He thought so when, having put out the candle and returned into bed, on laying his head on the pillow, his cheek came into contact with another scrap of paper.

"What the—!"

He sprang out of bed as though a serpent had stung him. With hands which actually trembled he once more caused light to shine upon the scene. He bore the candle to the bed sure enough there was a piece of paper on the pillow.

"How in thunder did that get there?"

As gingerly as though it were some precious— or, perhaps, some deadly— thing, he picked it up between his finger and his thumb. It was the third of the series another dirty quarter-sheet; and on it, in the old, familiar hand, was this excellent advice: "Do not meddle with the affairs of others." The advice was

excellent; there could be no doubt of that. But still Mr. Fletcher felt that its excellence did not sufficiently account for its presence on his pillow. This time, when he returned into bed, he did not put the candle out. He left it burning.

Sleep has been compared to a woman "uncertain, coy, and hard to please." When we seek for slumber it eludes us; when we least expect it, behold, it comes! It came to Mr. Fletcher then. Hardly was he once more between the sheets before he was sleeping softly as a child.

2: The Living Picture

WHEN Mr. Fletcher awoke— there was no mistake about it this time— it was broad day. He lay for some moments revelling in the first joy of waking. When he thought of the events of the night he laughed aloud; they were so utterly absurd. Remembering the scraps of paper he sat up in bed to look for them. In rising his glance fell upon his pillow; there, on the snowy linen, within half an inch of where his cheek had just been resting, branded, as it seemed, in blood, was the impress of a horse's hoof.

Mr. Fletcher managed, during the early portion of that day, to avoid his hostess. He went out into the village. There appeared to be only one shop in the place; at the door of that establishment stood a man. He was a big, burly fellow in blouse and sabots; he looked a companionable soul. Mr. Fletcher found him what he looked— a gossip. Mr. Fletcher began by alluding to the natural beauties of the neighbourhood; he then remarked that he was staying at "La Boule d'Or," the landlord of which, he understood, had lately died.

"It was time he did."

"Such a scamp, was he?"

"As honest a man as ever lived."

Mr. Fletcher pricked up his ears at this.

"Rather wild, wasn't he?"

"There never was a quieter soul."

"But wasn't he extravagant?"

"Extravagant! For example, he had never a sou to spend."

"That, I suppose, was after he had spent all he had to spend?"

Monsieur Bonchard— the name was painted on the little window over his door— cast at Mr. Fletcher a contemplative glance; he placed his hands on the upper portion of his capacious stomach.

"I see."

"What do you see?"

"You have been listening to Madame Peltier."

"Madame Peltier certainly gave me to understand that he was not all a husband should have been."

"Marie!" Monsieur Bonchard called into the shop. A feminine reproduction of himself came towards the front. "What sort of a husband was Peltier up at the Hotel de la Boule d'Or?"

"A model husband— a true model."

"As for his wife—"

The lady interposed.

"It is not for us to say anything."

"I was his friend; it is for me to say the truth. She murdered him!"

"Murdered him!"

Mr. Fletcher felt that the authorities were too conflicting.

"Not with a pistol and a knife, but with her cruelty. She led him the life of a dog! She did not let him have enough to eat; she would not let him have a sou to call his own; she would not let him have his liberty; she used to lock him up in a room for days; she beat him."

"Beat him!"

"Never shall I forget one night he came to me; he was crying— ah! like my little baby. 'Bonchard,' he said, 'it is finished. She has beaten me! '"

"With her shoe," explained the lady, "as though he were a little child."

"He was a very little man; she was a big woman; he was as nothing in her hands. She used to say she would show him as a dwarf. Ah, what he suffered! He had a spirit which was too large for his body. After that beating— monsieur, he was black and blue, with my own eyes I saw the bruises!— within a week he was no more— he was dead. That is why I say she murdered him."

"One tale is good," reflected Mr. Fletcher, "until another is told. The fault does not appear to have been all upon one side. If she beat him with her shoe— degradation not to be surpassed— I don't wonder that he preferred the bosom of Pourquoipas."

Corroboration of Monsieur Bonchard's story was obtained from another quarter— from the Breton maid who waited upon him at his midday meal.

"What sort of man was the late Monsieur Peltier?"

"An angel."

Mr. Fletcher felt that this was strong. The maid did not look as though she was an enthusiastic damsel. On the other hand, still less did Monsieur Peltier— in his portrait— look as though he were an angel.

"What was there angelic about him?"

"He was so good; that was his fault— he was too good. He was a little man— such a little man— one could have nursed him like a baby."

Mr. Fletcher was conscious that there might be drawbacks in being nursed like a baby.

"I suppose, then, that he and his wife lived happily together?"

"Happily! Ah, for example!" The damsel was standing by his chair. Stooping, she whispered in his ear: "Madame has a tongue!" Standing up, she looked about her, possibly to see if the coast was clear: "And madame has an arm! You see that?" She pointed to a red mark upon her cheek. "She has just done it. She may be big, but I will let her know that next time she slaps me it shall not be for nothing."

It was possible that the damsel's evidence was prejudiced. When one has just been slapped, one does not necessarily have a high opinion of the slapper. Still, straws show which way the wind is blowing. It was evident that public opinion was not unanimous in reprobating Monsieur Peltier.

Mr. Fletcher did not see his hostess until after supper. He was quitting the *salle-a-manger* when he heard the sound of sobbing. The sound proceeded from a little room at the foot of the stairs. The door of the room was open. In it was Madame Peltier.

"Monsieur, I entreat you, enter."

Mr. Fletcher entered.

"It is all over. It is done. It is finished."

Mr. Fletcher inquired what was finished.

"I am ruined. It is of no consequence to anyone— that I know very well— but it is all the world to me."

Mr. Fletcher asked— being driven upon the paths of cross-examination— in what way she was ruined.

"I have just given orders that all my horses— Pourquoipas alone is worth five-and-twenty thousand francs— and all the money I have in the world are to be sent to a man in Morlaix, of whom I have not even heard the name."

"You are not serious?"

"Do I look as though I were not serious, monsieur? What would you have? Ask Sam Tucker. He is going to take both the money and the horses."

"If you really have given such an order I would earnestly advise you to countermand it. You don't mean to say, now you have had an opportunity for quiet thought, that you are not yourself persuaded that you have been the victim of a trick?"

"What do you call a trick? Was that a trick last night? Do not tell me I do not know my own husband, if you please. All this morning I say to myself, 'I will go into the stable. No, no, no!' This afternoon I find upon my table a piece of paper— 'Come!' Who put it there? It is in my husband's writing. I went to the stable, although I said to myself I would not go. I have heard there from

Pourquoipas— ah! what I have heard! Never was I spoken to in such a way before; and by a horse! *Ciel*! It is a wonder I am not dead! It is enough that I promised to send the horses and the money, by Sam Tucker, to a man at Morlaix, whose name even I do not know."

"I would strongly advise you to put off the fulfilment of your promise at any rate, until the morning."

"It is impossible! I am not a woman without courage, but I do not dare."

She did dare. Mr. Fletcher persuaded her. The sacrifice was postponed.

"Now," the gentleman told himself, "unless I am greatly mistaken, to-night I shall have another visitor as the consequence of meddling with the affairs of others!"

His forebodings were realised he had a visitor! He put off retiring to the latest possible moment. When he did seek the privacy of his own apartment, he still postponed the act of going to bed.

"I think I remember seeing somewhere a little play called *Diamond Cut Diamond*. If I am to receive a visit I think I'll receive him sitting up. I shall be able to offer him more courtesy than I should if I were in bed."

He put out the candle, taking care to have it within easy reach. He put a box of matches in his pocket, only regretting that there was no lantern handy. Taking off his boots, he sat down in a chair and waited. He waited hours. Nothing broke the silence of the night; no church clock told of the flight of time.

"One might almost think that someone had told my friend that I had a six-shooter in my pocket, the better to do him honour. If something doesn't happen soon I shall either have to walk about or else go to sleep in my chair; and if it comes to that, I'd better go to bed."

The night stole on. Still nothing to break the monotony of waiting in the dark. More than once Mr. Fletcher had caught his chin in the act of falling forward on to his chest— his yawns became prodigious!

"It begins to occur to me that, at my time of life, nothing and no one is worth sitting up for all night. I'm off to bed."

He was about to go to bed, and, for that purpose, had already risen from his seat, when— he heard a sound!

"What's that?"

It might have been the creaking of a board; it might have been the movement of a mouse; it might have been any of the trifling noises of which we are conscious in the silence of the night. Of one thing only he was certain— he had heard a sound! He listened, his sense of hearing almost unnaturally alert. A sound again!

"Perhaps, after all, it's nothing but a mouse."

If it was a mouse, it was a curious one. The sound became plainer. It seemed to Mr. Fletcher that it was coming nearer.

"It's someone moving. I hope to goodness it isn't that old idiot, madame."

But it did not seem as if it proceeded from the stairs. Surely, if she came at all, she would come that way.

"It strikes me that it is someone in the other room. For all I know there may be someone sleeping there. Halloa! what's that?"

It was a ray of light the merest pencil; it gleamed, like a streak of molten metal, across the floor.

"As I'm a Dutchman it's shining through the wall!"

It was, there could be no doubt of it; it came through a crevice in the wainscot.

"I have it! I spot it all! Now for the next card in the game— it'll be a call for trumps. I rather fancy, too, that I shall be able to trump this little trick."

The pencil of light grew wider.

"They're slipping a panel in the wainscot— just behind the head of my bed! This thing gets beautifully plain."

With a cat-like step Mr. Fletcher moved towards the bed. The pencil of light was ceasing to be a pencil— it began to illuminate the room.

"Steady, my friend, that panel distinctly creaked; you must oil it next time before you play this game. In delicate operations of this kind 'trifles light as air' are apt to spoil the full effect."

The room was in that state of semi-radiance which had puzzled Mr. Fletcher on the previous night.

"Now, my friend, is it now? It is! He's coming. Trumped! Good-evening, dear friend, good-evening."

With one hand he had someone by the collar of his coat, with the other he pointed a revolver into someone's face.

"Good-evening, dear friend, good-evening."

There ensued an interval for reflection. The captive seemed momentarily paralysed; the captor was taking stock. The prisoner was a little man a very little man, scarcely reaching above Mr. Fletcher's waist.

"After all!"

The words proceeded from the little man in something between a moan and a gasp.

"As you say, my friend, 'after all'— after all we meet again. Perhaps you will permit me to strike a light— my light? Your light we will examine later on."

The little man offered no resistance when his captor drew him towards the table. He stood in silence while the candle was being lit, nor did he flinch when

Mr. Fletcher held it in front of his face, the better to see what manner of man he was.

"From the look of you I should say you were the late Peltier's Corsican brother."

"You have a revolver; shoot me, it is better so."

"It may be better so— a little later in the evening; at the present it seems to me that it would be a pity. Let me place you on the table."

Lifting him in his arms Mr. Fletcher seated him on the edge of the table, the little man remaining as docile as a child. When, however, he had gained that post of vantage, "What it is to have been born a little man!" he groaned.

"The situation is not without its compensations. Women, mistaking your age, may bestow on you their caresses as generously as though you were a little boy. Now, may I ask— I trust you will not deem the question an impertinence— who you are and what's your little game?"

"Do you not know me?"

"Unless you are the ghost of the late lamented Peltier, I am afraid I don't."

"I am Peltier himself."

"Peltier! Ernest! Whew!" Mr. Fletcher whistled. "But I thought that you were dead."

"In the morning I shall be dead."

The little man spoke with an air of tragic gloom.

"But so far as I understand the right of the matter you are, or you ought to be, stone dead now. You are buried."

"My coffin is buried."

The little man was still. Looking at him, marking his air of extreme depression, Mr. Fletcher began, faintly, to realise the situation.

"You do not understand?"

"Not yet— exactly."

"Although you do not understand, you have ruined me. It seems to me that that is well. Is it because you love my wife?"

"Your wife! Well, not precisely."

"What is it, then? You think, no doubt, you have done a brave and clever thing— you, a stranger, who came into this country for the first time yesterday. You are mistaken. You see, I am a small man. My wife, she is as big as a house. Ever since the day I married her she made my life no life at all. I could do nothing against her; she did with me as she pleased. Once I ran away. I did not go far; I had only three francs in my pocket. Those I had to steal. Sometimes— two, three times a day— she would look to see if there was any money in my pockets. She found me, she brought me back; she locked me up for three whole weeks in this very room. She took away my clothes. She left

me but my drawers, my slippers, and my shirt. That was very funny, was it not? For you, but not for me. Oh, mon Dieu! After all, I am a man."

In the uncertain light Mr. Fletcher saw that the tears were rolling down the speaker's cheeks.

"I was ashamed to complain to people of the treatment I received, though I do not doubt it was plain enough to all the world. I thought once or twice of killing her, but it seemed to me that it would be better that I should kill myself rather than her. This reflection put into my head the beginning of a scheme. At last things came to a crisis. She— she beat me. She beat me as though I were a child— me, a man of honour— with a slipper upon her knee! It is incredible, but it is none the less the truth, she beat me until I cried with pain! That was enough. I arranged my scheme. I pretended to be ill. I knew that she was very superstitious. I told her that, when I was dead, my soul would pass into the body of a horse."

"Pourquoipas?"

"Into the body of Pourquoipas. No sooner had I said it than I seemed to die."

"How did you manage that?"

"I swallowed a draught which made it seem— to her— that I was dead."

"But how about the doctor? Aren't such things as certificates of death known in this part of the world?"

"Sam Tucker saw to that."

"I thought our friend the jockey had a finger in the pie."

"He has been a good friend to me, Sam Tucker. She lost no time in putting me into a coffin. Dead, she feared me more than living. Sam Tucker fastened down the lid."

"Having first, I suppose, taken care to see that you were out of it?"

"That is so. When the coffin had been buried we got her down to the stable. I spoke to her, as she thought, out of the mouth of Pourquoipas."

"And, pray, how was that edifying performance arranged? You spoke to me, you must remember, out of the mouth of Pourquoipas."

"It was very simple. There is a cellar underneath the stable. A small grating opens into the box of Pourquoipas. I spoke through the grating. You were easily deceived."

"You think so, do you? It seems to me, my friend, that you're a past master in deception."

"My idea was to frighten my wife into sending the horses— which, after all, are my own property— and a sum of money to an address in Morlaix. Then I should be able to start the world afresh, freed from the chains of slavery. There can be no doubt she would have sent them. You came upon the scene.

By meddling in the affairs of others you have ruined all. It seems that I must starve, and, after all—"

"Hist! What's that?" Mr. Fletcher caught Monsieur Peltier by the arm. "There's someone coming up the stairs, and I'll bet a dollar it's your wife. Hide behind the curtains of the bed."

There came a tapping at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Open, monsieur, open!" When the door was opened Madame Peltier stood without, in the airy costume of the night before. "Monsieur, I cannot sleep; it is no good. All the night I think that I hear voices—"

A figure advanced into the centre of the room, the figure of a very little man.

"Agnes!"

The lady fainted. Sixteen solid stone fell with a thud upon the ground. Mr. Fletcher brought her round in course of time.

"It was Ernest!"

"Upon my word," said Mr. Fletcher, "I believe it was."

"It is enough. Better to be ruined than to die. I will send the money and the horses in the morning."

And she sent them!

16: Tchotl

Stella Benson

1892-1933

In: *Collected Short Stories*, Macmillan & Co., 1936

NIELSEN, when he first caught sight of the white topee gliding along the lower limit of his range of vision, thought, here was a fellow-foreigner coming to see him. This would have been very surprising, for, as far as he knew, the Chinese city of Lao-pao was exclusively filled with Chinese; he was himself the only exception. He knew this to his cost, for whenever he moved he was followed about by incredulous crowds, as though time were turned round, and he were a kind of dinosaurus of to-morrow, surviving into yesterday. As soon as the visitor reached the steps, however, Nielsen saw that the cleanness of the topee had deceived him; this was simply the kind of visitor that one might expect in Lao-pao— a young Chinese of the business class. Nielsen, who came from Minnesota, was a person of callow friendliness, and he immediately rolled his fat legs from the long chair on which he lay, to greet the guest, a light of alacrity shining in his large hungry protruding eyes.

The face of the newcomer belied the complacency of the perfect topee; it was a melancholy face; its bones seemed to be set at melancholy angles, although— since the face was Chinese— there were no wrinkles to plough furrows of superficial disillusionment.

"You must think me very unconventional," said the visitor humbly, "but I hope when I acquaint the circumstances, you will excuse me for paying call on you without introduction. My name is Chin Yu-ting; my profession is a bank clerk." He looked at Nielsen as though he expected to be thrown down the steps at once. But Nielsen was unaffectedly delighted to see any one anywhere, in any circumstances. Nielsen always had a great deal to say, and usually no one to say it to. Repressive years of solitude mellowed this bottled-up fermented wine of words within him, and the result, when the cork was finally drawn, was a generous outpouring of nectar, to which any one was welcome, simply for the asking. No slip was allowed to intervene betwixt this cup and any proffered lip; sometimes he even splashed a few drops of brimming superfluous idealism on to his patient Chinese servants, or into letters on Moral or Social Problems which he wrote to the Shanghai papers. He did not much repine if his generosity was only acknowledged by half-wits, scoffers and buffoons. An arid desert, he knew, absorbs a few priceless drops of water without apparent advantage; yet fundamentally, ideals were good for every one— were never really wasted. Nielsen believed that he was a person who Thought in Wide Terms and was Interested in Nation-wide Problems. The pressure of his widening horizon, he felt, had burst the limits of the moral

panorama seen from Jenkinsville, Minnesota, where he was born and raised. Even the city of Minneapolis, he often thought, would seem provincial to him now that he had seen Manila and Shanghai, and had learned to take for granted such quaint facts as that every one round him spoke Chinese and rode in rickshaws instead of Fords. Nielsen now prided himself on being no Middle Western hick; he despised men who had no Ideals— who talked of nothing but money, drink, women and food. He himself was of course no expert on any of these matters.

"I am very happy indeed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Chin," said Nielsen. "I don't know why you should apologize for calling, I'm sure. I'm an American, you know, and Americans despise forms and ceremonies." For the inorganic principles injected by his Jenkinsville education were still embedded in encysted cells in Nielsen's mind, just as the bullets from old wars remain lodged in the body. Schooling in Jenkinsville was not a matter of teaching-to-think— it was simply teaching. There were about twenty-six persons in Jenkinsville— all those of his classmates, in fact, who enjoyed the full use of their wits— who had exactly the same mind as Nielsen to this day— even though the school-mistress who had modelled their common mind had been mercifully lost to them all for fifteen years. Democratic education is an incurable affliction; it informs once and for all.

"I will now tell you," said Chin Yu-ting, "why I have taken this liberty. Oh, Mr. Nielsen, there has been very great joy in my heart to hear that you— an English-speaking gentleman— has come to live at Lao-pao. For three years I live in this place with a lonely heart. I am from Peking, a student of Y—— Mission College; I cannot freely talk the Cantonese language which is here the custom. All the time I long earnestly that some one shall come to Lao-pao speaking either the language of England or of Peking freely, with whom I can discuss the modern developments in comparative theologies— my favourite study. French priests come to Lao-pao— I am speaking no French. German mining engineers also come— but I am not understanding any German. An Italian explorer going to Tibet— a Russian ex-nobleman fleeing from Bolsheviks— I am not able to speak with them one word. My heart is always alone, as though my lips have been dumb— my ears deaf. Then I hear that an American is coming here to open an agency of the Standard Oils, and so my heart is very happy, for though I do not know America and cannot discuss American matters—"

Here, Nielsen saw at once, was a thirsty soul for some of his Ideals. "Why, Mr. Chin," he said, "you've got us Americans quite wrong. You don't have to discuss American matters with Americans. I don't know how it is with folks snared in the cloying traditions of the Old World, but Americans are always

Citizens of the World. Americans think Internationally, in terms of Uplift— Humanity— Idealism.... Wherever you see an American, you may be sure he's got Ideals somewhere back of those horn-rimmed goggles of his. I can tell you right now, if you and me are going to get together it won't be to discuss trivial little home-town gossip about material facts— it'll be to compare notes about the Great Things of Life. Americans feel the urge to get to Soul-grips with the Universe. Comparative Theology, I'll admit, is not much in my line— theology, and all other ologies and osophies, I leave to your half-baked narrow-minded professors who can't see outside their own classrooms. I've worked out a religion and a philosophy of my own, Mr. Chin, a very simple one, and its slogan is Be Your Best Self and Help the Next Guy to be His. Humanity's my theology— it's Soul that counts, and the Purpose behind the Soul. Man is the master of— do you know those beautiful lines by one of our American poets?—"

"Yes," said Mr. Chin, hastily but without irony. "I know them, of course. They are written by the late William Ernest Henley, a noted English author, I believe."

"I am the Master of my Fate," chanted Nielsen, who was not to be baulked of his quotation— and Chin Yu-ting joined in the chorus— "I am the Captain of My Soul." They both looked very masterful and captain-like for a minute.

"Strictly speaking," said Chin Yu-ting, "such beliefs, though very noble, are not to be labelled Theologies. I am myself interested in—"

"Ah, but Americans don't deal in labels," said the infatuated Nielsen. "Americans think for themselves, regardless of the labels the effete so-called thinkers of the Old World have tied on to—"

"How interesting it is, discussing the matters of the mind in this animated manner," said Mr. Chin, with a self-conscious laugh. "I feel refreshed already, like a camel that has trodden a long distance across a desert before meeting with an oasis. For indeed, Mr. Nielsen, to see interesting men— perhaps men who could improve my acquaintanceship with the comparative theologies— passing through Lao-pao, and yet, having no mutual language, being not able to exchange any word— has often reminded me of the beautiful words of another English poet— namely, S. T. Coleridge— 'Water, water, everywhere— and not a spot to drink.' I have often thought—"

"There you touch on one of my pet Ideals," shouted Nielsen. "I believe I can help you there. I believe our meeting is going to have Results— is going to strike a spark, as human meetings ought to do. We have met with a Purpose, Mr. Chin, I sensed it from the start. Now listen— didn't you ever hear about Universal Languages? Universal Language is a study of mine, as it ought to be

the study of every thinking man who cares about Human Brotherhood. Now listen—"

"I learned English," said Mr. Chin, "due to being told that it was itself the univ—"

"You've heard of Tchotl, I guess," said Nielsen.

The torrent of Chin Yu-ting's protest evaporated suddenly, leaving one distilled monosyllable. "No," he said weakly.

"I wonder you never heard of Tchotl," said Nielsen, slightly checked in his turn. "I was going to say— I may be a very undistinguished sort of guy in many ways, Mr. Chin, but I have this distinction— and I'm proud of it— that I was raised in that great little city, Jenkinsville, in Minnesota— where Tchotl originated— that I was in on the start of that Superlatively World-Wide Movement, and that its famous founders— Trent C. Howells and Oscar T. Lambie— are personal friends of mine. Furthermore—"

"I have warned you in the beginning that I am ignorant of American matters, Mr. Nielsen," said Mr. Chin. "Most certainly I am unfortunate in having no knowledge of—"

"Tchotl is emphatically not an American matter. The very essence of Tchotl is its flaming universality. Tchotl is the Real World Language. Its name, you will notice, is an ingenious combination of the initials of its inventors, Trent Carlos Howells and Oscar Tetworth Lambie— and it is my firm belief that the day will come when the names of those two men will be written in letters of gold side by side with the names of Moses, Thomas à Becket, Emerson, Confucius, George Washington, Homer, Mary Baker Eddy, Shakespeare and other World Regenerators. Tchotl is a—"

"But do many persons really—"

"Tchotl is a superlative brotherhood of World Thinkers; it has an agent— or exponent— or apostle— (call it what you will)— in every country in the world. Would you believe it, Mr. Chin, when I last heard from old Tet (that's O. T. Lambie), he told me that Tchotl has even secured a footing in the quaint little European state of Montenegro, as a result of a most fruitful tour of Europe by a young Jenkinsville matron called Mrs. Zinnia Putney Wicketts, whose eloquence is inspiring an animated interest in Tchotl wherever she goes—"

"But could a Tchotl-speaker, for instance, in Lao-pao be sure of—"

"The reason why Tchotl has such an instant universal appeal is because the underlying idea is so superlatively simple; a child can grasp it as easily as can the hoary-headed professor. There are no words longer than one syllable in Tchotl, and no consonant or vowel sounds are used that are not common to all world languages. Furthermore— and here is the genuine stunning originality of Tchotl, Mr. Chin— not only the lips are used in speaking, but also the fingers.

For instance— Ta, one of the key syllables, meaning anything alive.... Ta, if I hold up one finger, means man— two fingers, a non-human mammal— three, a bird of some kind— and so forth. Now if—"

"But if you also erected the thumb?" asked Chin Yu-ting, his eyes almost leaning out of his head.

"Ah, well, there you come to the lesser saurians, as far as I can recall without the textbook," said Mr. Nielsen in slight confusion. "I don't pretend to be word-perfect in the language, though of course I'm studying it in my spare time. I have a spare textbook in my bureau upstairs and I'd be tickled pink, Mr. Chin, to enrol you as a member and pupil. I could give you your first few lessons, and then sell you the primer— it only costs five dollars gold and the proceeds all go to the disseminating of the superlative Gospel of World Understanding— and you'd have the satisfaction of being the dean of Tchotl-speakers in Lao-pao— this sleepy little burg's first member of the vastest World Movement of our day."

"It is indeed an extremely impressing thought," said Chin Yu-ting, "to soar over all the barriers of language at one jumping. To be so conveniently in touch with the universe— this would be well worth five dollars gold— (thirteen dollars twenty cents of Lao-pao money). How long time do you think will be needful to make a perfect Tchotl-speaker of me— able (for instance) to discuss (for instance) comparative theologies with a Tchotl professor from (for instance) Montenegro?"

"Three months' intensive study should be ample. I remember old Tet telling me that his best student— a Christian Science practitioner in Jenkinsville— mastered the elements in three lessons, and by the end of the second week could chatter Tchotl like a native— I mean like a World Citizen— but of course that is exceptional. My dear friend, I'm proud to see you so enthused— I'm proud to think I have the honour to be your teacher of Tchotl— as a friend, mind you, Mr. Chin— purely as a friend,— there's to be no question of a teacher's fee, of course, between friends like you and I. Five dollars gold for the textbook— that's all Tchotl's going to cost you— and cheap it is at the price— a small price for the right of entry into a Universal Brotherhood— an insurance, as Trent Howells always says, against the soul-wastage involved in petty nationalism and—"

Chin Yu-ting could hardly contain his enthusiasm. "Let me see this book at earliest convenience, Mr. Nielsen. Let me now repeat my first lesson."

"I'll bring the book right down," said Nielsen.

As he passed through the hall on his way upstairs, he noticed that the mail had come, and, forgetting for a moment his ardent pupil, he hung over the tempting-looking heap of letters and papers— the exile's bread of life. He

opened one of the home newspapers— the *Jenkinsville Morning Examiner*— and skimmed the headlines with a hungry eye as he walked slowly upstairs.

"Howells Bonnet Houses New Bee," murmured a chatty minor headline, in the "Home-folks at Home" column. "Trent C. Howells and his co-dreamer Oscar Tetworth Lambie admitted to-day that their World Language has proved a flop. Trent, interviewed this morning, faced the death of his World-dream with a laugh like the good sport he is. 'No doubt about it,' he confessed frankly. 'Our roll of members shrank alarmingly— especially after Mrs. Zinnia P. Wicketts, our former silver-tongued booster, lost interest in it and took up with the study of Byzantine architecture instead. Three thousand nine hundred and twelve language professors, social reformers, and elocution wizards failed to reply to our questionnaire that we mailed all over the world six months ago in order to boost Tchotl— and only nine textbooks have been sold— not counting eight hundred and sixty that we distributed free— a daring ad. which provoked no response whatever. Tet— (Oscar T. Lambie) and myself still claim we were on to a whale of a notion in inventing Tchotl— but the world's not educated up to a Big Thing like that is, and the dead weight of effete Europe has been thrown into the scales against us— we have proof of that. It's all part of the conspiracy of a sinister aristocratic tradition against free enlightened democracy. No good flogging a dead horse, however, and Tet and I know when we're whipped. We've just got to quit. But we should worry; we've got a new scheme that just can't fail to usher in a new economic era. I don't want to talk a whole lot about it right now, but I'll ask you this much— did you ever think why it is that we hand out huge sums all round for foodstuffs— importing fish here— exporting wheat there— canning asparagus here— wearing out our fists pulling milk out of cows there— while all the time right here under our shoe-soles all of us has got—' But right there Trent caught my eager optic and stopped short. 'No, sir,' he laughed. 'You aren't going to pry the secret out of me till the time comes. The world will know all about it soon enough when the details are perfected. It's a swell scheme, though, you can take it from me and, economically speaking, it's the biggest thing ever. Tet and me are working night and day to give it a running start. Tchotl, after all, was words— this new scheme is deeds....' "

Nielsen only ceased reading long enough to allow him to take the Tchotl textbook from a drawer in his desk; the impetus of his errand carried him so far, before he paused to consider the effect of what he had read upon his triumphant act of salesmanship. Still considering the newspaper he walked slowly downstairs. He stood for a moment at the door of the sitting-room. For a second his dim imagination showed, as though on a badly lighted stage, an impossible scene, the cue for which was, "See here, Mr. Chin, I want you to

read this newspaper par. I take back all I said...." Take back? To recall spoken ideals from the flattered air— to roll up and put dustily away rosy festoons of words— to turn tamely and retrace his steps to the beginning of that resilient path of words— above all, to unsell something successfully sold— every instinct revolted against such inconceivable tasks. Words were Nielsen's mark upon the air— nothing must erase the fine bright signature of his words from the air. Words were seeds sown in the soft tilled minds of listeners— was it not treachery to the soil to uproot the springing crops— treachery to the soil— betrayal of the sower— aye, and blasphemy against the Lord of the Manor Himself? Was not the whole duty of man to Put Things Across? Nielsen lifted up his face to the Salesman's God and knew that his duty was loyalty to the Successful Deal. He entered the room. Mr. Chin, his appetite for immediate universal brotherhood whetted by the delay, came to meet him, with a hand outstretched for the book.

"By opening this book," said Chin Yu-ting solemnly, "I think I open simultaneously a doorway into the world society. Behind this metaphorical door I think many thousands of world brothers stand ready to cry— in the Tchotl tongue— Welcome, brother Chin. Formerly I have been made deaf and dumb by the disease of national language, but now for ever through the future years I shall be freed from this affliction, and to every newcomer at Lao-pao I can stretch out the hand of freedom and exclaim in Tchotl— Welcome, brother— open to me your thoughts and I shall open mine..."

Nielsen hesitated only long enough to drop the newspaper into the waste-paper basket. "I'll tell the world you're right, brother," he said.

———————————

17: McSwash's Bitter Experience

Ward Edson

Edward Dyson (1865-1931)

Punch (Melbourne) 10 April 1902

I CALL HIM McSwash because that is a not his name, a very excellent reason, as all editors who have been called upon to deal with men who insist that a they are the unpleasant heroes of printed stories know well. McSwash was not an unpleasant person.

He was a large, bland, blonde man with glasses, not common 'specs,' but those artistic affairs that grip a man's nose, and give him a very superior air and an intellectual expression. Leonard John McSwash was a traveller for a city house, and a certain evening of a certain day (dates not necessary) he was driving a lame horse drawing a shattered trap along an awful road in a Victorian bush district, feeling about as awful as a man could feel and yet desire to live.

McSwash was uncommonly hungry, he was devilishly thirsty, he was thundering tired, and as dusty as the ash pits in Gehenna. Add to all this the fact that L. J. McSwash was lost, and the circumstance that his brakes had refused to work on the top of Pegger's Hill a mile back, with the result that the horse bolted to the bottom, banged into a log, lamed himself, litho-fractured the wagon, and humped the driver out on his forehead, and you arrive at some vague idea of Mr McSwash's frame of mind, provided you are a sympathetic person, and can enter into the feelings of another.

But do not forget that the day had been like a picnic amongst the friers in Hades, 140 in the shade, and all Tophet in the sun, with a hair-curling north wind blowing all the loam in this lost district through the whiskers of McSwash.

'Ger-up, you blankety, bloomin' flyblown crowbait!' growled Leonard, heaping abuse on his unfortunate horse which limped along slowly, drawing the creaking, lop-sided vehicle behind it.

'Oh, for a drink!' growled the commercial, in an agonised soliloquy. 'Oh for a cold, frothing length of good colonial beer!'

This petition may have a certain humorous atmosphere about it to the reader, but McSwash never put up a more earnest prayer in his life. He spoke from the bottom of a sun-baked dust-covered soul, and as he opened his eyes behold there stood by a twist in the road a small pub, built mainly of palings, and over the door dangled a sign:

STEVE HEELEY,
LICENSED VICTUALLER.
GOOD ACCOMMODATION
FOR MAN AND BEAST.

Exactly three seconds later McSwash was pounding on Heeley's bar counter.

Mr Heeley appeared, after having been aroused out of the stable by a shrill female voice, and asked: 'What'll ye be afther havin', sor?'

'I'll have a beer to begin with,' said McSwash.

The traveller had the beer. It was not so long or cold as it might have been, but the weary wayfarer swore it was nectar.

'Now I'll have the best dinner you can spread out in five minutes by a fast clock.'

The dinner was provided, and McSwash, refreshed and rested, and feeling better pleased with the world, and more kindly disposed towards the Fates, smoked luxuriously, and ordered a bath.

'What is it, sor?' said Heeley.

'I'll have a bath. I feel like Dusty Rhodes, and I want to establish my identity as a white man,'

'A wash is it?' said Heeley, when McSwash had bellowed directions and orders in his ear.

Heeley was a small, pluckered, skinny Irishman, with little green eyes, and the round, red tip of a small, shiny nose peeping curiously out of a great mass of whiskers. He was deaf, too, but otherwise an obliging man within his limitations, but the limitations of Heeley's Inn were very narrow.

After an absence of five minutes Heeley announced that the bath was ready in there, and, investigating. Heeley found two pints of water in a tin dish.

McSwash blustered: 'Look at me, man,' he cried. 'I weigh fourteen stone without all this real estate that I gathered along the road; do you expect me to take a swim in a pie dish?'

Heeley explained that the district afforded no facilities for bathing; there was not a bath tub within nine miles, and the creek was running so shallow that a bullfrog could not keep himself wet by rolling in it.

Of course, McSwash, finding he couldn't have a bath, wanted it more than anything else on earth, burned for it, was sure he would pass a miserable night without it. But Heeley couldn't help him, and there wasn't another house of accommodation anywhere within reach.

'I'll tell ye what, sor,' said Heeley, coming to McSwash half an hour later, 'there's the big rain bar'l, it's three parts full o' warther, an' if ye don't moind

waitin' till the weemin folks have gone to bed ye might shlip in in the dark, an' have a shwim. The warther ain't used for dhrinkin', an' you're welkim.'

McSwash accepted the offer gratefully, and settled down to wait with what patience he possessed. Meanwhile his horse was being doctored in Heeley's stable, and after tea Heeley himself set off with the broken trap to the nearest blacksmith's seven miles away.

Beside Mrs Heeley there was a plump, red-headed servant girl at the hotel. Mrs Heeley herself was a not uncomely and well-kept woman of forty. McSwash had not seen a sign of any other person so far as eye could reach.

Leonard the wayfarer got weary of waiting for Mrs Heeley to go to bed, and fell asleep himself at about ten o'clock. He woke at midnight, and, stealing out in his pyjamas, he found the house buried in sleep. A faint, far-off, melancholy snore indicated the direction of the Heeley bedroom. McSwash crept out noiselessly, closing the door after him, and made his way to the rain barrel.

The barrel was erected on a square wooden stand, and was on the shady side of the house, between two chimneys. Tossing his pyjamas under the wooden structure, Leonard climbed to the top of the barrel with the aid of a box, and gently let himself down into the water. It was delicious.

The night was close and oppressive, and the water was delightfully cool, but the bulky commercial found the barrel rather a tight fit. The addition of his substance brought the water almost to the top of a the barrel, and McSwash stood there, soaking and quite enjoying himself. It would have been better had he been able to move about, but one has to be content with something short of perfection at bush pubs. Mack was feeling quite delightful, and stood indulging in the delights of the bath, and a gentle reverie, when suddenly the sound of soft voices was borne to his ear. He listened tremulously.

'Se'p me bob, Jim, I do love yer!'

It was a woman's voice. McSwash now heard stealthy footsteps approaching. His first thought was of flight, but he was a modest man, and it occurred to him that if he must be discovered a barrel was a fairly effective costume. He waited in great anxiety, and presently a young man and woman came round from the back of the house and stood close to the commercial's bath tub.

'If the missus knew I got up to go a-courtin' with you she'd gimme the run.'

It was the attractive red-haired servant, and a tall, bearded bushman was holding her round the waist as if he owned her.

'Let's sit down 'ere,' he said, indicating the bench on which stood the barrel containing the rain-water and a fat and bashful man of forty.

'Right oh,' said the girl, 'but I must not stay long, you know.'

'Thank heaven!' thought McSwash. But they did stay long. They sat n there hugging each other, and exchanging the soggy conversation customary between country lovers, while the comfortable coolness at first experienced by McSwash turned to a decided chill, and till harsh, shooting pains began to travel up his legs and attack his interior, and the man in the barrel prayed fervently that something might happen to Jim and Jane— something that would cause them to leave the immediate vicinity in a great hurry, with such damage as would serve to teach them to keep better hours in the future.

The moon rolled slowly over the dark surrounding bush, and an occasional monkey bear grunted, or a possum squeaked, and McSwash hung to the edge of the barrel and suffered, and still the lovers lingered below. It had come to the point when Leonard felt he must disclose himself or perish of cramp, when Jane smartly disengaged herself from a lingering kiss, and fled into the house. Jim arose from his seat, yawned, cursed, and then strode a off into the bush.

Now was Mack's chance. He'd had all the bath he wanted, and he made an effort to climb out.

Horror! he could not do it. He struggled heroically, but in vain. Do what he would, he failed to hoist himself more than breast high above the barrel rim, and to add to his a terrors a great, gaunt brute of a dog, disturbed by his struggles, darted suddenly around the corner and commenced to bark furiously. McSwash shook his fist at the dog, and ordered it off, but it promptly went at him with a flying rush and a jump, and snapped a bit off his finger.

Mack promptly retired as far as possible into his barrel again, once in a way raising his head to expostulate with the dog, an action which only served to increase the beast's fury, and set it jumping for succulent mouthfuls.

The unhappy drummer raised one cry for help, but remembered the same instant that Heeley had not returned, and there were only women in the house. The cry increased the dog's indignation to a point of madness, and it jumped and snapped, barking frantically the while, until McSwash was glad to seize the wooden cover, back down low into the water, and hold the cover partly over the top of the barrel to protect himself.

He had been in this position about ten minutes when he heard Mrs Heeley calling to the dog: 'Down, Dingo, down! Whatever's of the matter with the dog?'

McSwash remained in the water, quaking.

'Jane! Jane! called Mrs Heeley, 'come here; I do believe there's someone hangin' round the house. Bring the gun.'

There was a pause during which the dog renewed his attack on the barrel, and then Jane arrived with the gun.

'I'm sure I heard some one call as if Dingo had nipped him. Give me the gun, I'm a better shot than you. Now, if anyone shows up I'll put a pint of shot into him before he can say Jack Robinson.'

'Oh, lor!' groaned McSwash inwardly; 'if I speak now I'm a dead man.'

'He's somewhere about here,' said Mrs Heeley. 'Down Dingo! Be quiet, blast you!'

At that moment the unhappy wretch in the barrel felt himself grabbed by the hair.

'I've got him, mum! I've got him!' cried Jane's voice. 'He's here in the barrel.'

Further disguise was useless. McSwash's head and shoulders bobbed out of the barrel, the women yelled, the gun exploded in the confusion, while Dingo literally whirled in a fit of ungovernable ferocity.

'Stick to him, Jane!' cried Mrs Heeley. 'Gimme a hold too!'

She took two handfuls of McSwash's hair, and the two women pulled with in all their power, while McSwash yelled and protested.

The miserable man felt his barrel of refuge toppling; for an instant it poised on its edge, then over went man, a women, barrel, and all. Substantial Mrs Heeley struck the dog in falling, and knocked it flat. Jane got the benefit of the flood that jerked from the barrel, and McSwash was jerked about half out of his refuge by the force of the fall and the burst of water, but here his greatest circumference jammed in the narrow part of the barrel, and he lay helpless, half a man and half a keg.

Dingo was the first to recover. He le took a business-like grip on McSwash's shoulder blade and began to haul at McSwash. Mrs Heeley, who recognised the traveller at last, seized on the tail of the dog, and pulled with all her might. They shifted the barrel, but they did not relieve McSwash, and even when the dog was pulled off and locked up, it was impossible for various reasons to get McSwash out of his barrel, and McSwash could not help himself.

'Lie still, sir,' said Mrs Heeley, as an' we'll roll ye into the barn, where ye can stay till me good man comes home. Maybe he'll find a way out.'

They rolled McSwash into the barn, and there he stayed in his barrel— a much suffering, greatly swollen, and sorely tried man— till Heeley returned chopped him out with an axe.

McSwash says he'll never bathe in a rain barrel again if he has to go unwashed to the end of his days."

18: His Honour

Roy Bridges

1885-1952

Argus (Melbourne) 5 Nov 1938

SPADE died at midnight in His Majesty's gaol at Hobart Town. The Rev. Robert Knopwood was summoned by the keeper of the gaol from his prayers with Millon in the condemned cell too late for more than the broken, gasping confession of Spade's guilt of the crime for which Millon was to hang in the morning.

Too late to write down the confession, to guide the fingers to the man's mark against the name, with the keeper and the assistant keeper for witnesses. Not too late to know— as the chaplain prayed the Lieutenant-Governor might believe— that the lad John Millon, shipped by the *Kangaroo* to Sydney for trial, convicted, condemned, and shipped back to the Derwent to hang on Hunter's Island, was not guilty of the murder of the colonist Hartley, as he vowed to his mother. His Honour must believe— must grant the reprieve of the chaplain's instant and earnest petition.

Going cautiously through the darkness from the gaol to the lantern at the gate of Government House, Mr. Knopwood yielded to doubt of his reception by Colonel Davey at that time of night, and to fear lest his Honour should prove too deep in drink, in too foolish or evil a mood, or fuddled state, to accept and act on Spade's confession, grant the reprieve, and save poor young Millon from hideous injustice.

This fear was justified, when he passed the sentry, had been admitted to the house, and in the hall faced his Honour's man-servant, Varney, heavy with sleep and rum. No, His Honour would not see Mr. Knopwood. His Honour had given his orders, and it was as much as a man's life was worth to disobey them!

"It is!" the chaplain took him up. "It is a matter of life and death! I insist on your taking my message to the Governor! I insist on seeing him at once!"

"But his Honour said—"

"You heard me, my man. Don't dare to disobey me!"

"I'm obeying his Honour!"

"Where is his Honour? Abed? In the house?..." Mr. Knopwood's fear grew acute. The Lieutenant-Governor might be out in the hills, on a mad debauch with his boon companions, officials and convicts! Then he could not reach him that night and win the reprieve!

"I've told you" Mr. Knopwood, his Honour's not to be disturbed. And I've told you I take his Honour's orders!"

"But, by gad, you'll take mine!" the chaplain cried, with a thud of his cane on the floor. "I've borne with you too long !"

"But his Honour's orders—" Varney was repeating.

Mr. Knopwood interrupted, "My man, you're his Honour's servant while you're in his favour, and no longer. And it's before me as magistrate you're like yet to come— with his Honour's complaint against you for insolence. And I'll not forget this night, I promise you!"

VARNEY was quailing; Mr. Knopwood was persisting, advancing as the man receded down the narrow hall, swerving to his left before the chaplain's ire, his pointing cane, and his voice uplifted. "Take my message to the Governor, at once! And be damned to you for an impudent rascal!"

A door to the chaplain's right opened. Mrs. Davey stood in the doorway, pale and protesting: "Varney! What does this mean? Why, Mr. Knopwood ! At this hour of the night! What brings you here, sir?"

He knew from her haggard look, her weary eyes, and her sadly drooping lips that she had sat late, awaiting her husband's return, and seeking by her presence to prevent new scandal and new protest of the respectable to the Governor-in-Chief, or had been sitting with the Governor in drink. Her fingers twined distressfully in the shawl draped about her black gown and held at her bosom.

He said swiftly, "Forgive me, ma'am, but my business with his Honour is a matter of life and death... The lad Millon, who's to hang in the morning! And this rascal refuses to announce me !"

She signed to Varney to go. She faltered, "The lad Millon, sir! The Governor will do nothing for him. The poor mother was waiting at the gate all yesterday. I induced him to see her, but he would no nothing... He can do nothing !"

"His Honour is here ?"

She said tremulously, "Yes, but he'll not listen to you, sir. He—"

"Ma'am, the lad's not guilty !"

She said distressfully,. "Oh, sir, his mother declared this to my husband with such sincerity and grief as nigh broke my heart."

He said earnestly, "That does you honour, ma'am. She's a good woman, and she's suffered cruelly. Following her son out here, of her own free will, and trying to reclaim him."

She uttered a choking cry: "Oh, Mr. Knopwood, when he dies to-morrow she will die of a broken heart!"

"Ma'am, he'll not die! Calm yourself!" he implored her. "And take me to the Governor !"

She whispered, drawing back, "He is here... lying down, but you'll not make him understand you to-night."

"But by day— when he's slept—"

"Sir, I fear not, even with the day."

She signed him to step into the room, a parlour, furnished with taste and for comfort, and faintly lit by candles which had burned low in their brass sticks. A door to the left opened on a bedroom. She closed and locked the door on the hall, after the chaplain had entered the room. She led him to the open door and pointed to the bed. The curtains had been ripped from the canopy and lay in a huddle on the floor. A table was overturned, and the flickering candle light was reflected from broken bottles and shivered glasses. His Honour Colonel Thomas Davey, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, in his shirt and trousers, lay tumbled on the bed in a drunken stupor; his face red and congested, his mouth open, snorting, snoring, choking.

She had wound a wet towel about his brows. She had loosened his shirt collar and cravat. She had been sitting watching him in an armchair by the dying fire. The chaplain's years of experience and observation compelled the certainty— the terror— the Governor would not be in his sober senses before morning, and with the morning John Millon must hang.

He drew back from the rum-reeking room with a sense of sick despair. She followed him and closed the door. She walked slowly to the open writing desk by the window, and half-turned the chair, so that, on sitting down, she might face the chaplain, standing by the hearth. She said, "Pray sit down, sir."

He cried out with agitation and resentment, "No, ma'am, no ! Forgive me— my fear— my horror—of the shameful wrong that will be done, while the Governor lies there—!"

"You can delay this... you can prevent this."

"Ah, God, I shall, if they will heed me— believe me— believe Spade's confession. He killed Hartley. Millon is innocent !"

She turned to the desk. She took pen and paper. She said slowly, "Sir, do sit down. And wait ! I shall write, as my husband would have written—"

He gasped, "You, ma'am ! But a reprieve... from you... is worthless. It must be from the Governor !"

She said steadily, "It will come from the Governor. I have written so much for him. I have signed his name so often. He has thanked me— later. No one but you, sir, knows— has guessed this. He will honour this. He will thank me— when he is himself. Pray tell me what he would have written, Mr. Knopwood!"

———————————

19: Mrs. Zant and the Ghost

Wilkie Collins

1824-1889

In: *My Lady's Money,* Tauchnitz, 1879, as "The Ghost's Touch"

A novelette

THE COURSE of this narrative describes the return of a disembodied spirit to earth, and leads the reader on new and strange ground.

Not in the obscurity of midnight, but in the searching light of day, did the supernatural influence assert itself. Neither revealed by a vision, nor announced by a voice, it reached mortal knowledge through the sense which is least easily self-deceived: the sense that feels.

The record of this event will of necessity produce conflicting impressions. It will raise, in some minds, the doubt which reason asserts; it will invigorate, in other minds, the hope which faith justifies; and it will leave the terrible question of the destinies of man, where centuries of vain investigation have left it— in the dark.

Having only undertaken in the present narrative to lead the way along a succession of events, the writer declines to follow modern examples by thrusting himself and his opinions on the public view. He returns to the shadow from which he has emerged, and leaves the opposing forces of incredulity and belief to fight the old battle over again, on the old ground.

ii

THE events happened soon after the first thirty years of the present century had come to an end.

On a fine morning, early in the month of April, a gentleman of middle age (named Rayburn) took his little daughter Lucy out for a walk in the woodland pleasure-ground of Western London, called Kensington Gardens.

The few friends whom he possessed reported of Mr. Rayburn (not unkindly) that he was a reserved and solitary man. He might have been more accurately described as a widower devoted to his only surviving child. Although he was not more than forty years of age, the one pleasure which made life enjoyable to Lucy's father was offered by Lucy herself.

Playing with her ball, the child ran on to the southern limit of the Gardens, at that part of it which still remains nearest to the old Palace of Kensington. Observing close at hand one of those spacious covered seats, called in England "alcoves," Mr. Rayburn was reminded that he had the morning's newspaper in

his pocket, and that he might do well to rest and read. At that early hour the place was a solitude.

"Go on playing, my dear," he said; "but take care to keep where I can see you."

Lucy tossed up her ball; and Lucy's father opened his newspaper. He had not been reading for more than ten minutes, when he felt a familiar little hand laid on his knee.

"Tired of playing?" he inquired— with his eyes still on the newspaper.

"I'm frightened, papa."

He looked up directly. The child's pale face startled him. He took her on his knee and kissed her.

"You oughtn't to be frightened, Lucy, when I am with you," he said, gently. "What is it?" He looked out of the alcove as he spoke, and saw a little dog among the trees. "Is it the dog?" he asked.

Lucy answered:

"It's not the dog— it's the lady."

The lady was not visible from the alcove.

"Has she said anything to you?" Mr. Rayburn inquired.

"No."

"What has she done to frighten you?"

The child put her arms round her father's neck.

"Whisper, papa," she said; "I'm afraid of her hearing us. I think she's mad."

"Why do you think so, Lucy?"

"She came near to me. I thought she was going to say something. She seemed to be ill."

"Well? And what then?"

"She looked at me."

There, Lucy found herself at a loss how to express what she had to say next— and took refuge in silence.

"Nothing very wonderful, so far," her father suggested.

"Yes, papa— but she didn't seem to see me when she looked."

"Well, and what happened then?"

"The lady was frightened— and that frightened me. I think," the child repeated positively, "she's mad."

It occurred to Mr. Rayburn that the lady might be blind. He rose at once to set the doubt at rest.

"Wait here," he said, "and I'll come back to you."

But Lucy clung to him with both hands; Lucy declared that she was afraid to be by herself. They left the alcove together.

The new point of view at once revealed the stranger, leaning against the trunk of a tree. She was dressed in the deep mourning of a widow. The pallor of her face, the glassy stare in her eyes, more than accounted for the child's terror— it excused the alarming conclusion at which she had arrived.

"Go nearer to her," Lucy whispered.

They advanced a few steps. It was now easy to see that the lady was young, and wasted by illness— but (arriving at a doubtful conclusion perhaps under the present circumstances) apparently possessed of rare personal attractions in happier days. As the father and daughter advanced a little, she discovered them. After some hesitation, she left the tree; approached with an evident intention of speaking; and suddenly paused. A change to astonishment and fear animated her vacant eyes. If it had not been plain before, it was now beyond all doubt that she was not a poor blind creature, deserted and helpless. At the same time, the expression of her face was not easy to understand. She could hardly have looked more amazed and bewildered, if the two strangers who were observing her had suddenly vanished from the place in which they stood.

Mr. Rayburn spoke to her with the utmost kindness of voice and manner.

"I am afraid you are not well," he said. "Is there anything that I can do— "

The next words were suspended on his lips. It was impossible to realize such a state of things; but the strange impression that she had already produced on him was now confirmed. If he could believe his senses, her face did certainly tell him that he was invisible and inaudible to the woman whom he had just addressed! She moved slowly away with a heavy sigh, like a person disappointed and distressed. Following her with his eyes, he saw the dog once more— a little smooth-coated terrier of the ordinary English breed. The dog showed none of the restless activity of his race. With his head down and his tail depressed, he crouched like a creature paralyzed by fear. His mistress roused him by a call. He followed her listlessly as she turned away.

After walking a few paces only, she suddenly stood still.

Mr. Rayburn heard her talking to herself.

"Did I feel it again?" she said, as if perplexed by some doubt that awed or grieved her. After a while her arms rose slowly, and opened with a gentle caressing action— an embrace strangely offered to the empty air! "No," she said to herself, sadly, after waiting a moment. "More perhaps when to-morrow comes— no more to-day." She looked up at the clear blue sky. "The beautiful sunlight! the merciful sunlight!" she murmured. "I should have died if it had happened in the dark."

Once more she called to the dog; and once more she walked slowly away.

"Is she going home, papa?' the child asked.

"We will try and find out," the father answered.

He was by this time convinced that the poor creature was in no condition to be permitted to go out without some one to take care of her. From motives of humanity, he was resolved on making the attempt to communicate with her friends.

iii

THE lady left the Gardens by the nearest gate; stopping to lower her veil before she turned into the busy thoroughfare which leads to Kensington. Advancing a little way along the High Street, she entered a house of respectable appearance, with a card in one of the windows which announced that apartments were to let.

Mr. Rayburn waited a minute— then knocked at the door, and asked if he could see the mistress of the house. The servant showed him into a room on the ground floor, neatly but scantily furnished. One little white object varied the grim brown monotony of the empty table. It was a visiting-card.

With a child's unceremonious curiosity Lucy pounced on the card, and spelled the name, letter by letter: "Z, A, N, T," she repeated. "What does that mean?"

Her father looked at the card, as he took it away from her, and put it back on the table. The name was printed, and the address was added in pencil: "Mr. John Zant, Purley's Hotel."

The mistress made her appearance. Mr. Rayburn heartily wished himself out of the house again, the moment he saw her. The ways in which it is possible to cultivate the social virtues are more numerous and more varied than is generally supposed. This lady's way had apparently accustomed her to meet her fellow-creatures on the hard ground of justice without mercy. Something in her eyes, when she looked at Lucy, said: "I wonder whether that child gets punished when she deserves it?"

"Do you wish to see the rooms which I have to let?" she began.

Mr. Rayburn at once stated the object of his visit— as clearly, as civilly, and as concisely as a man could do it. He was conscious (he added) that he had been guilty perhaps of an act of intrusion.

The manner of the mistress of the house showed that she entirely agreed with him. He suggested, however, that his motive might excuse him. The mistress's manner changed, and asserted a difference of opinion.

"I only know the lady whom you mention," she said, "as a person of the highest respectability, in delicate health. She has taken my first-floor apartments, with excellent references; and she gives remarkably little trouble.

I have no claim to interfere with her proceedings, and no reason to doubt that she is capable of taking care of herself."

Mr. Rayburn unwisely attempted to say a word in his own defense.

"Allow me to remind you—" he began.

"Of what, sir?"

"Of what I observed, when I happened to see the lady in Kensington Gardens."

"I am not responsible for what you observed in Kensington Gardens. If your time is of any value, pray don't let me detain you."

Dismissed in those terms, Mr. Rayburn took Lucy's hand and withdrew. He had just reached the door, when it was opened from the outer side. The Lady of Kensington Gardens stood before him. In the position which he and his daughter now occupied, their backs were toward the window. Would she remember having seen them for a moment in the Gardens?

"Excuse me for intruding on you," she said to the landlady. "Your servant tells me my brother-in-law called while I was out. He sometimes leaves a message on his card."

She looked for the message, and appeared to be disappointed: there was no writing on the card.

Mr. Rayburn lingered a little in the doorway on the chance of hearing something more. The landlady's vigilant eyes discovered him.

"Do you know this gentleman?" she said maliciously to her lodger.

"Not that I remember."

Replying in those words, the lady looked at Mr. Rayburn for the first time; and suddenly drew back from him.

"Yes," she said, correcting herself; "I think we met—"

Her embarrassment overpowered her; she could say no more.

Mr. Rayburn compassionately finished the sentence for her.

"We met accidentally in Kensington Gardens," he said.

She seemed to be incapable of appreciating the kindness of his motive. After hesitating a little she addressed a proposal to him, which seemed to show distrust of the landlady.

"Will you let me speak to you upstairs in my own rooms?" she asked.

Without waiting for a reply, she led the way to the stairs. Mr. Rayburn and Lucy followed. They were just beginning the ascent to the first floor, when the spiteful landlady left the lower room, and called to her lodger over their heads: "Take care what you say to this man, Mrs. Zant! He thinks you're mad."

Mrs. Zant turned round on the landing, and looked at him. Not a word fell from her lips. She suffered, she feared, in silence. Something in the sad

submission of her face touched the springs of innocent pity in Lucy's heart. The child burst out crying.

That artless expression of sympathy drew Mrs. Zant down the few stairs which separated her from Lucy.

"May I kiss your dear little girl?" she said to Mr. Rayburn. The landlady, standing on the mat below, expressed her opinion of the value of caresses, as compared with a sounder method of treating young persons in tears: "If that child was mine," she remarked, "I would give her something to cry for."

In the meantime, Mrs. Zant led the way to her rooms.

The first words she spoke showed that the landlady had succeeded but too well in prejudicing her against Mr. Rayburn.

"Will you let me ask your child," she said to him, "why you think me mad?"

He met this strange request with a firm answer.

"You don't know yet what I really do think. Will you give me a minute's attention?"

"No," she said positively. "The child pities me, I want to speak to the child. What did you see me do in the Gardens, my dear, that surprised you?" Lucy turned uneasily to her father; Mrs. Zant persisted. "I first saw you by yourself, and then I saw you with your father," she went on. "When I came nearer to you, did I look very oddly— as if I didn't see you at all?"

Lucy hesitated again; and Mr. Rayburn interfered.

"You are confusing my little girl," he said. "Allow me to answer your questions— or excuse me if I leave you."

There was something in his look, or in his tone, that mastered her. She put her hand to her head.

"I don't think I'm fit for it," she answered vacantly. "My courage has been sorely tried already. If I can get a little rest and sleep, you may find me a different person. I am left a great deal by myself; and I have reasons for trying to compose my mind. Can I see you tomorrow? Or write to you? Where do you live?"

Mr. Rayburn laid his card on the table in silence. She had strongly excited his interest. He honestly desired to be of some service to this forlorn creature— abandoned so cruelly, as it seemed, to her own guidance. But he had no authority to exercise, no sort of claim to direct her actions, even if she consented to accept his advice. As a last resource he ventured on an allusion to the relative of whom she had spoken downstairs.

"When do you expect to see your brother-in-law again?" he said.

"I don't know," she answered. "I should like to see him— he is so kind to me."

She turned aside to take leave of Lucy.

"Good-by, my little friend. If you live to grow up, I hope you will never be such a miserable woman as I am." She suddenly looked round at Mr. Rayburn. "Have you got a wife at home?" she asked.

"My wife is dead."

"And you have a child to comfort you! Please leave me; you harden my heart. Oh, sir, don't you understand? You make me envy you!"

Mr. Rayburn was silent when he and his daughter were out in the street again. Lucy, as became a dutiful child, was silent, too. But there are limits to human endurance— and Lucy's capacity for self-control gave way at last.

"Are you thinking of the lady, papa?" she said.

He only answered by nodding his head. His daughter had interrupted him at that critical moment in a man's reflections, when he is on the point of making up his mind. Before they were at home again Mr. Rayburn had arrived at a decision. Mrs. Zant's brother-in-law was evidently ignorant of any serious necessity for his interference— or he would have made arrangements for immediately repeating his visit. In this state of things, if any evil happened to Mrs. Zant, silence on Mr. Rayburn's part might be indirectly to blame for a serious misfortune. Arriving at that conclusion, he decided upon running the risk of being rudely received, for the second time, by another stranger.

Leaving Lucy under the care of her governess, he went at once to the address that had been written on the visiting-card left at the lodging-house, and sent in his name. A courteous message was returned. Mr. John Zant was at home, and would be happy to see him.

iv

MR. RAYBURN was shown into one of the private sitting-rooms of the hotel.

He observed that the customary position of the furniture in a room had been, in some respects, altered. An armchair, a side-table, and a footstool had all been removed to one of the windows, and had been placed as close as possible to the light. On the table lay a large open roll of morocco leather, containing rows of elegant little instruments in steel and ivory. Waiting by the table, stood Mr. John Zant. He said "Good-morning" in a bass voice, so profound and so melodious that those two commonplace words assumed a new importance, coming from his lips. His personal appearance was in harmony with his magnificent voice— he was a tall, finely-made man of dark complexion; with big brilliant black eyes, and a noble curling beard, which hid the whole lower part of his face. Having bowed with a happy mingling of dignity and politeness, the conventional side of this gentleman's character

suddenly vanished; and a crazy side, to all appearance, took its place. He dropped on his knees in front of the footstool. Had he forgotten to say his prayers that morning, and was he in such a hurry to remedy the fault that he had no time to spare for consulting appearances? The doubt had hardly suggested itself, before it was set at rest in a most unexpected manner. Mr. Zant looked at his visitor with a bland smile, and said:

"Please let me see your feet."

For the moment, Mr. Rayburn lost his presence of mind. He looked at the instruments on the side-table.

"Are you a corn-cutter?" was all he could say.

"Excuse me, sir," returned the polite operator, "the term you use is quite obsolete in our profession." He rose from his knees, and added modestly: "I am a Chiropodist."

"I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it! You are not, I imagine, in want of my professional services. To what motive may I attribute the honor of your visit?"

By this time Mr. Rayburn had recovered himself.

"I have come here," he answered, "under circumstances which require apology as well as explanation."

Mr. Zant's highly polished manner betrayed signs of alarm; his suspicions pointed to a formidable conclusion— a conclusion that shook him to the innermost recesses of the pocket in which he kept his money.

"The numerous demands on me—" he began.

Mr. Rayburn smiled.

"Make your mind easy," he replied. "I don't want money. My object is to speak with you on the subject of a lady who is a relation of yours."

"My sister-in-law!" Mr. Zant exclaimed. "Pray take a seat."

Doubting if he had chosen a convenient time for his visit, Mr. Rayburn hesitated.

"Am I likely to be in the way of persons who wish to consult you?" he asked.

"Certainly not. My morning hours of attendance on my clients are from eleven to one." The clock on the mantelpiece struck the quarter-past one as he spoke. "I hope you don't bring me bad news?" he said, very earnestly. "When I called on Mrs. Zant this morning, I heard that she had gone out for a walk. Is it indiscreet to ask how you became acquainted with her?"

Mr. Rayburn at once mentioned what he had seen and heard in Kensington Gardens; not forgetting to add a few words, which described his interview afterward with Mrs. Zant.

The lady's brother-in-law listened with an interest and sympathy, which offered the strongest possible contrast to the unprovoked rudeness of the mistress of the lodging-house. He declared that he could only do justice to his sense of obligation by following Mr. Rayburn's example, and expressing himself as frankly as if he had been speaking to an old friend.

"The sad story of my sister-in-law's life," he said, "will, I think, explain certain things which must have naturally perplexed you. My brother was introduced to her at the house of an Australian gentleman, on a visit to England. She was then employed as governess to his daughters. So sincere was the regard felt for her by the family that the parents had, at the entreaty of their children, asked her to accompany them when they returned to the Colony. The governess thankfully accepted the proposal."

"Had she no relations in England?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"She was literally alone in the world, sir. When I tell you that she had been brought up in the Foundling Hospital, you will understand what I mean. Oh, there is no romance in my sister-in-law's story! She never has known, or will know, who her parents were or why they deserted her. The happiest moment in her life was the moment when she and my brother first met. It was an instance, on both sides, of love at first sight. Though not a rich man, my brother had earned a sufficient income in mercantile pursuits. His character spoke for itself. In a word, he altered all the poor girl's prospects, as we then hoped and believed, for the better. Her employers deferred their return to Australia, so that she might be married from their house. After a happy life of a few weeks only—"

His voice failed him; he paused, and turned his face from the light.

"Pardon me," he said; "I am not able, even yet, to speak composedly of my brother's death. Let me only say that the poor young wife was a widow, before the happy days of the honeymoon were over. That dreadful calamity struck her down. Before my brother had been committed to the grave, her life was in danger from brain-fever."

Those words placed in a new light Mr. Rayburn's first fear that her intellect might be deranged. Looking at him attentively, Mr. Zant seemed to understand what was passing in the mind of his guest.

"No!" he said. "If the opinions of the medical men are to be trusted, the result of the illness is injury to her physical strength— not injury to her mind. I have observed in her, no doubt, a certain waywardness of temper since her illness; but that is a trifle. As an example of what I mean, I may tell you that I invited her, on her recovery, to pay me a visit. My house is not in London— the air doesn't agree with me— my place of residence is at St. Sallins-on-Sea. I am not myself a married man; but my excellent housekeeper would have received

Mrs. Zant with the utmost kindness. She was resolved— obstinately resolved, poor thing— to remain in London. It is needless to say that, in her melancholy position, I am attentive to her slightest wishes. I took a lodging for her; and, at her special request, I chose a house which was near Kensington Gardens.

"Is there any association with the Gardens which led Mrs. Zant to make that request?"

"Some association, I believe, with the memory of her husband. By the way, I wish to be sure of finding her at home, when I call to-morrow. Did you say (in the course of your interesting statement) that she intended— as you supposed— to return to Kensington Gardens to-morrow? Or has my memory deceived me?"

"Your memory is perfectly accurate."

"Thank you. I confess I am not only distressed by what you have told me of Mrs. Zant— I am at a loss to know how to act for the best. My only idea, at present, is to try change of air and scene. What do you think yourself?"

"I think you are right."

Mr. Zant still hesitated.

"It would not be easy for me, just now," he said, "to leave my patients and take her abroad."

The obvious reply to this occurred to Mr. Rayburn. A man of larger worldly experience might have felt certain suspicions, and might have remained silent. Mr. Rayburn spoke.

"Why not renew your invitation and take her to your house at the seaside?" he said.

In the perplexed state of Mr. Zant's mind, this plain course of action had apparently failed to present itself. His gloomy face brightened directly.

"The very thing!" he said. "I will certainly take your advice. If the air of St. Sallins does nothing else, it will improve her health and help her to recover her good looks. Did she strike you as having been (in happier days) a pretty woman?"

This was a strangely familiar question to ask— almost an indelicate question, under the circumstances A certain furtive expression in Mr. Zant's fine dark eyes seemed to imply that it had been put with a purpose. Was it possible that he suspected Mr. Rayburn's interest in his sister-in-law to be inspired by any motive which was not perfectly unselfish and perfectly pure? To arrive at such a conclusion as this might be to judge hastily and cruelly of a man who was perhaps only guilty of a want of delicacy of feeling. Mr. Rayburn honestly did his best to assume the charitable point of view. At the same time, it is not to be denied that his words, when he answered, were carefully guarded, and that he rose to take his leave.

Mr. John Zant hospitably protested.

"Why are you in such a hurry? Must you really go? I shall have the honor of returning your visit to-morrow, when I have made arrangements to profit by that excellent suggestion of yours. Good-by. God bless you."

He held out his hand: a hand with a smooth surface and a tawny color, that fervently squeezed the fingers of a departing friend. "Is that man a scoundrel?" was Mr. Rayburn's first thought, after he had left the hotel. His moral sense set all hesitation at rest— and answered: "You're a fool if you doubt it."

v

DISTURBED by presentiments, Mr. Rayburn returned to his house on foot, by way of trying what exercise would do toward composing his mind.

The experiment failed. He went upstairs and played with Lucy; he drank an extra glass of wine at dinner; he took the child and her governess to a circus in the evening; he ate a little supper, fortified by another glass of wine, before he went to bed— and still those vague forebodings of evil persisted in torturing him. Looking back through his past life, he asked himself if any woman (his late wife of course excepted!) had ever taken the predominant place in his thoughts which Mrs. Zant had assumed— without any discernible reason to account for it? If he had ventured to answer his own question, the reply would have been: Never!

All the next day he waited at home, in expectation of Mr. John Zant's promised visit, and waited in vain.

Toward evening the parlor-maid appeared at the family tea-table, and presented to her master an unusually large envelope sealed with black wax, and addressed in a strange handwriting. The absence of stamp and postmark showed that it had been left at the house by a messenger.

"Who brought this?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"A lady, sir— in deep mourning."

"Did she leave any message?"

"No, sir."

Having drawn the inevitable conclusion, Mr. Rayburn shut himself up in his library. He was afraid of Lucy's curiosity and Lucy's questions, if he read Mrs. Zant's letter in his daughter's presence.

Looking at the open envelope after he had taken out the leaves of writing which it contained, he noticed these lines traced inside the cover:

"My one excuse for troubling you, when I might have consulted my brother-in-law, will be found in the pages which I inclose. To speak plainly, you have been led to fear that I am not in my right senses. For this very reason, I

now appeal to you. Your dreadful doubt of me, sir, is my doubt too. Read what I have written about myself— and then tell me, I entreat you, which I am: A person who has been the object of a supernatural revelation? or an unfortunate creature who is only fit for imprisonment in a mad-house?"

Mr. Rayburn opened the manuscript. With steady attention, which soon quickened to breathless interest, he read what follows:

vi

THE LADY'S MANUSCRIPT

YESTERDAY morning the sun shone in a clear blue sky— after a succession of cloudy days, counting from the first of the month.

The radiant light had its animating effect on my poor spirits. I had passed the night more peacefully than usual; undisturbed by the dream, so cruelly familiar to me, that my lost husband is still living— the dream from which I always wake in tears. Never, since the dark days of my sorrow, have I been so little troubled by the self-tormenting fancies and fears which beset miserable women, as when I left the house, and turned my steps toward Kensington Gardens— for the first time since my husband's death.

Attended by my only companion, the little dog who had been his favorite as well as mine, I went to the quiet corner of the Gardens which is nearest to Kensington.

On that soft grass, under the shade of those grand trees, we had loitered together in the days of our betrothal. It was his favorite walk; and he had taken me to see it in the early days of our acquaintance. There, he had first asked me to be his wife. There, we had felt the rapture of our first kiss. It was surely natural that I should wish to see once more a place sacred to such memories as these? I am only twenty-three years old; I have no child to comfort me, no companion of my own age, nothing to love but the dumb creature who is so faithfully fond of me.

I went to the tree under which we stood, when my dear one's eyes told his love before he could utter it in words. The sun of that vanished day shone on me again; it was the same noontide hour; the same solitude was around me. I had feared the first effect of the dreadful contrast between past and present. No! I was quiet and resigned. My thoughts, rising higher than earth, dwelt on the better life beyond the grave. Some tears came into my eyes. But I was not unhappy. My memory of all that happened may be trusted, even in trifles which relate only to myself— I was not unhappy.

The first object that I saw, when my eyes were clear again, was the dog. He crouched a few paces away from me, trembling pitiably, but uttering no cry. What had caused the fear that overpowered him?

I was soon to know.

I called to the dog; he remained immovable— conscious of some mysterious coming thing that held him spellbound. I tried to go to the poor creature, and fondle and comfort him.

At the first step forward that I took, something stopped me.

It was not to be seen, and not to be heard. It stopped me.

The still figure of the dog disappeared from my view: the lonely scene round me disappeared— excepting the light from heaven, the tree that sheltered me, and the grass in front of me. A sense of unutterable expectation kept my eyes riveted on the grass. Suddenly, I saw its myriad blades rise erect and shivering. The fear came to me of something passing over them with the invisible swiftness of the wind. The shivering advanced. It was all round me. It crept into the leaves of the tree over my head; they shuddered, without a sound to tell of their agitation; their pleasant natural rustling was struck dumb. The song of the birds had ceased. The cries of the water-fowl on the pond were heard no more. There was a dreadful silence.

But the lovely sunshine poured down on me, as brightly as ever.

In that dazzling light, in that fearful silence, I felt an Invisible Presence near me. It touched me gently.

At the touch, my heart throbbed with an overwhelming joy. Exquisite pleasure thrilled through every nerve in my body. I knew him! From the unseen world— himself unseen— he had returned to me. Oh, I knew him!

And yet, my helpless mortality longed for a sign that might give me assurance of the truth. The yearning in me shaped itself into words. I tried to utter the words. I would have said, if I could have spoken: "Oh, my angel, give me a token that it is You!" But I was like a person struck dumb— I could only think it.

The Invisible Presence read my thought. I felt my lips touched, as my husband's lips used to touch them when he kissed me. And that was my answer. A thought came to me again. I would have said, if I could have spoken: "Are you here to take me to the better world?"

I waited. Nothing that I could feel touched me.

I was conscious of thinking once more. I would have said, if I could have spoken: "Are you here to protect me?"

I felt myself held in a gentle embrace, as my husband's arms used to hold me when he pressed me to his breast. And that was my answer.

The touch that was like the touch of his lips, lingered and was lost; the clasp that was like the clasp of his arms, pressed me and fell away. The garden-scene resumed its natural aspect. I saw a human creature near, a lovely little girl looking at me.

At that moment, when I was my own lonely self again, the sight of the child soothed and attracted me. I advanced, intending to speak to her. To my horror I suddenly ceased to see her. She disappeared as if I had been stricken blind.

And yet I could see the landscape round me; I could see the heaven above me. A time passed— only a few minutes, as I thought— and the child became visible to me again; walking hand-in-hand with her father. I approached them; I was close enough to see that they were looking at me with pity and surprise. My impulse was to ask if they saw anything strange in my face or my manner. Before I could speak, the horrible wonder happened again. They vanished from my view.

Was the Invisible Presence still near? Was it passing between me and my fellow-mortals; forbidding communication, in that place and at that time?

It must have been so. When I turned away in my ignorance, with a heavy heart, the dreadful blankness which had twice shut out from me the beings of my own race, was not between me and my dog. The poor little creature filled me with pity; I called him to me. He moved at the sound of my voice, and followed me languidly; not quite awakened yet from the trance of terror that had possessed him.

Before I had retired by more than a few steps, I thought I was conscious of the Presence again. I held out my longing arms to it. I waited in the hope of a touch to tell me that I might return. Perhaps I was answered by indirect means? I only know that a resolution to return to the same place, at the same hour, came to me, and quieted my mind.

The morning of the next day was dull and cloudy; but the rain held off. I set forth again to the Gardens.

My dog ran on before me into the street— and stopped: waiting to see in which direction I might lead the way. When I turned toward the Gardens, he dropped behind me. In a little while I looked back. He was following me no longer; he stood irresolute. I called to him. He advanced a few steps— hesitated— and ran back to the house.

I went on by myself. Shall I confess my superstition? I thought the dog's desertion of me a bad omen.

Arrived at the tree, I placed myself under it. The minutes followed each other uneventfully. The cloudy sky darkened. The dull surface of the grass showed no shuddering consciousness of an unearthly creature passing over it.

I still waited, with an obstinacy which was fast becoming the obstinacy of despair. How long an interval elapsed, while I kept watch on the ground before me, I am not able to say. I only know that a change came.

Under the dull gray light I saw the grass move— but not as it had moved, on the day before. It shriveled as if a flame had scorched it. No flame appeared. The brown underlying earth showed itself winding onward in a thin strip— which might have been a footpath traced in fire. It frightened me. I longed for the protection of the Invisible Presence. I prayed for a warning of it, if danger was near.

A touch answered me. It was as if a hand unseen had taken my hand— had raised it, little by little— had left it, pointing to the thin brown path that wound toward me under the shriveled blades of grass.

I looked to the far end of the path.

The unseen hand closed on my hand with a warning pressure: the revelation of the coming danger was near me— I waited for it. I saw it.

The figure of a man appeared, advancing toward me along the thin brown path. I looked in his face as he came nearer. It showed me dimly the face of my husband's brother— John Zant.

The consciousness of myself as a living creature left me. I knew nothing; I felt nothing. I was dead.

When the torture of revival made me open my eyes, I found myself on the grass. Gentle hands raised my head, at the moment when I recovered my senses. Who had brought me to life again? Who was taking care of me?

I looked upward, and saw— bending over me— John Zant.

vii

THERE, the manuscript ended.

Some lines had been added on the last page; but they had been so carefully erased as to be illegible. These words of explanation appeared below the canceled sentences:

"I had begun to write the little that remains to be told, when it struck me that I might, unintentionally, be exercising an unfair influence on your opinion. Let me only remind you that I believe absolutely in the supernatural revelation which I have endeavored to describe. Remember this— and decide for me what I dare not decide for myself."

There was no serious obstacle in the way of compliance with this request.

Judged from the point of view of the materialist, Mrs. Zant might no doubt be the victim of illusions (produced by a diseased state of the nervous system), which have been known to exist— as in the celebrated case of the book-seller, Nicolai, of Berlin— without being accompanied by derangement of the intellectual powers. But Mr. Rayburn was not asked to solve any such intricate problem as this. He had been merely instructed to read the manuscript, and to say what impression it had left on him of the mental condition of the writer; whose doubt of herself had been, in all probability, first suggested by remembrance of the illness from which she had suffered— brain-fever.

Under these circumstances, there could be little difficulty in forming an opinion. The memory which had recalled, and the judgment which had arranged, the succession of events related in the narrative, revealed a mind in full possession of its resources.

Having satisfied himself so far, Mr. Rayburn abstained from considering the more serious question suggested by what he had read.

At any time his habits of life and his ways of thinking would have rendered him unfit to weigh the arguments, which assert or deny supernatural revelation among the creatures of earth. But his mind was now so disturbed by the startling record of experience which he had just read, that he was only conscious of feeling certain impressions— without possessing the capacity to reflect on them. That his anxiety on Mrs. Zant's account had been increased, and that his doubts of Mr. John Zant had been encouraged, were the only practical results of the confidence placed in him of which he was thus far aware. In the ordinary exigencies of life a man of hesitating disposition, his interest in Mrs. Zant's welfare, and his desire to discover what had passed between her brother-in-law and herself, after their meeting in the Gardens, urged him into instant action. In half an hour more, he had arrived at her lodgings. He was at once admitted.

viii

MRS. ZANT was alone, in an imperfectly lighted room.

"I hope you will excuse the bad light," she said; "my head has been burning as if the fever had come back again. Oh, don't go away! After what I have suffered, you don't know how dreadful it is to be alone."

The tone of her voice told him that she had been crying. He at once tried the best means of setting the poor lady at ease, by telling her of the conclusion at which he had arrived, after reading her manuscript. The happy result showed itself instantly: her face brightened, her manner changed; she was eager to hear more.

"Have I produced any other impression on you?" she asked.

He understood the allusion. Expressing sincere respect for her own convictions, he told her honestly that he was not prepared to enter on the obscure and terrible question of supernatural interposition. Grateful for the tone in which he had answered her, she wisely and delicately changed the subject.

"I must speak to you of my brother-in-law," she said. "He has told me of your visit; and I am anxious to know what you think of him. Do you like Mr. John Zant?"

Mr. Rayburn hesitated.

The careworn look appeared again in her face. "If you had felt as kindly toward him as he feels toward you," she said, "I might have gone to St. Sallins with a lighter heart."

Mr. Rayburn thought of the supernatural appearances, described at the close of her narrative. "You believe in that terrible warning," he remonstrated; "and yet, you go to your brother-in-law's house!"

"I believe," she answered, "in the spirit of the man who loved me in the days of his earthly bondage. I am under his protection. What have I to do but to cast away my fears, and to wait in faith and hope? It might have helped my resolution if a friend had been near to encourage me." She paused and smiled sadly. "I must remember," she resumed, "that your way of understanding my position is not my way. I ought to have told you that Mr. John Zant feels needless anxiety about my health. He declares that he will not lose sight of me until his mind is at ease. It is useless to attempt to alter his opinion. He says my nerves are shattered— and who that sees me can doubt it? He tells me that my only chance of getting better is to try change of air and perfect repose— how can I contradict him? He reminds me that I have no relation but himself, and no house open to me but his own— and God knows he is right!"

She said those last words in accents of melancholy resignation, which grieved the good man whose one merciful purpose was to serve and console her. He spoke impulsively with the freedom of an old friend,

"I want to know more of you and Mr. John Zant than I know now," he said. "My motive is a better one than mere curiosity. Do you believe that I feel a sincere interest in you?"

"With my whole heart."

That reply encouraged him to proceed with what he had to say. "When you recovered from your fainting-fit," he began, "Mr. John Zant asked questions, of course?"

"He asked what could possibly have happened, in such a quiet place as Kensington Gardens, to make me faint."

"And how did you answer?"

"Answer? I couldn't even look at him!"

"You said nothing?"

"Nothing. I don't know what he thought of me; he might have been surprised, or he might have been offended."

"Is he easily offended?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"Not in my experience of him."

"Do you mean your experience of him before your illness?"

"Yes. Since my recovery, his engagements with country patients have kept him away from London. I have not seen him since he took these lodgings for me. But he is always considerate. He has written more than once to beg that I will not think him neglectful, and to tell me (what I knew already through my poor husband) that he has no money of his own, and must live by his profession."

"In your husband's lifetime, were the two brothers on good terms?"

"Always. The one complaint I ever heard my husband make of John Zant was that he didn't come to see us often enough, after our marriage. Is there some wickedness in him which we have never suspected? It may be— but how can it be? I have every reason to be grateful to the man against whom I have been supernaturally warned! His conduct to me has been always perfect. I can't tell you what I owe to his influence in quieting my mind, when a dreadful doubt arose about my husband's death."

"Do you mean doubt if he died a natural death?"

"Oh, no! no! He was dying of rapid consumption— but his sudden death took the doctors by surprise. One of them thought that he might have taken an overdose of his sleeping drops, by mistake. The other disputed this conclusion, or there might have been an inquest in the house. Oh, don't speak of it any more! Let us talk of something else. Tell me when I shall see you again."

"I hardly know. When do you and your brother-in-law leave London?"

"To-morrow." She looked at Mr. Rayburn with a piteous entreaty in her eyes; she said, timidly: "Do you ever go to the seaside, and take your dear little girl with you?"

The request, at which she had only dared to hint, touched on the idea which was at that moment in Mr. Rayburn's mind.

Interpreted by his strong prejudice against John Zant, what she had said of her brother-in-law filled him with forebodings of peril to herself; all the more powerful in their influence, for this reason— that he shrank from distinctly realizing them. If another person had been present at the interview, and had said to him afterward: "That man's reluctance to visit his sister-in-law, while her husband was living, is associated with a secret sense of guilt which her

innocence cannot even imagine: he, and he alone, knows the cause of her husband's sudden death: his feigned anxiety about her health is adopted as the safest means of enticing her into his house,"— if those formidable conclusions had been urged on Mr. Rayburn, he would have felt it his duty to reject them, as unjustifiable aspersions on an absent man. And yet, when he took leave that evening of Mrs. Zant, he had pledged himself to give Lucy a holiday at the seaside: and he had said, without blushing, that the child really deserved it, as a reward for general good conduct and attention to her lessons!

ix

THREE days later, the father and daughter arrived toward evening at St. Sallins-on-Sea. They found Mrs. Zant at the station.

The poor woman's joy, on seeing them, expressed itself like the joy of a child. "Oh, I am so glad! so glad!" was all she could say when they met. Lucy was half-smothered with kisses, and was made supremely happy by a present of the finest doll she had ever possessed. Mrs. Zant accompanied her friends to the rooms which had been secured at the hotel. She was able to speak confidentially to Mr. Rayburn, while Lucy was in the balcony hugging her doll, and looking at the sea.

The one event that had happened during Mrs. Zant's short residence at St. Sallins was the departure of her brother-in-law that morning, for London. He had been called away to operate on the feet of a wealthy patient who knew the value of his time: his housekeeper expected that he would return to dinner.

As to his conduct toward Mrs. Zant, he was not only as attentive as ever— he was almost oppressively affectionate in his language and manner. There was no service that a man could render which he had not eagerly offered to her. He declared that he already perceived an improvement in her health; he congratulated her on having decided to stay in his house; and (as a proof, perhaps, of his sincerity) he had repeatedly pressed her hand. "Have you any idea what all this means?" she said, simply.

Mr. Rayburn kept his idea to himself. He professed ignorance; and asked next what sort of person the housekeeper was.

Mrs. Zant shook her head ominously.

"Such a strange creature," she said, "and in the habit of taking such liberties that I begin to be afraid she is a little crazy."

"Is she an old woman?"

"No— only middle-aged." This morning, after her master had left the house, she actually asked me what I thought of my brother-in-law! I told her,

as coldly as possible, that I thought he was very kind. She was quite insensible to the tone in which I had spoken; she went on from bad to worse. "Do you call him the sort of man who would take the fancy of a young woman?" was her next question. She actually looked at me (I might have been wrong; and I hope I was) as if the "young woman" she had in her mind was myself! I said: "I don't think of such things, and I don't talk about them." Still, she was not in the least discouraged; she made a personal remark next: "Excuse me— but you do look wretchedly pale." I thought she seemed to enjoy the defect in my complexion; I really believe it raised me in her estimation. "We shall get on better in time," she said; "I am beginning to like you." She walked out humming a tune. Don't you agree with me? Don't you think she's crazy?"

"I can hardly give an opinion until I have seen her. Does she look as if she might have been a pretty woman at one time of her life?"

"Not the sort of pretty woman whom I admire!"

Mr. Rayburn smiled. "I was thinking," he resumed, "that this person's odd conduct may perhaps be accounted for. She is probably jealous of any young lady who is invited to her master's house— and (till she noticed your complexion) she began by being jealous of you."

Innocently at a loss to understand how she could become an object of the housekeeper's jealousy, Mrs. Zant looked at Mr. Rayburn in astonishment. Before she could give expression to her feeling of surprise, there was an interruption— a welcome interruption. A waiter entered the room, and announced a visitor; described as "a gentleman."

Mrs. Zant at once rose to retire.

"Who is the gentleman?" Mr. Rayburn asked— detaining Mrs. Zant as he spoke.

A voice which they both recognized answered gayly, from the outer side of the door:

"A friend from London."

x

"WELCOME to St. Sallins!" cried Mr. John Zant. "I knew that you were expected, my dear sir, and I took my chance at finding you at the hotel." He turned to his sister-in-law, and kissed her hand with an elaborate gallantry worthy of Sir Charles Grandison himself. "When I reached home, my dear, and heard that you had gone out, I guessed that your object was to receive our excellent friend. You have not felt lonely while I have been away? That's right! that's right!" he looked toward the balcony, and discovered Lucy at the open

window, staring at the magnificent stranger. "Your little daughter, Mr. Rayburn? Dear child! Come and kiss me."

Lucy answered in one positive word: "No."

Mr. John Zant was not easily discouraged.

"Show me your doll, darling," he said. "Sit on my knee."

Lucy answered in two positive words— "I won't."

Her father approached the window to administer the necessary reproof. Mr. John Zant interfered in the cause of mercy with his best grace. He held up his hands in cordial entreaty. "Dear Mr. Rayburn! The fairies are sometimes shy; and this little fairy doesn't take to strangers at first sight. Dear child! All in good time. And what stay do you make at St. Sallins? May we hope that our poor attractions will tempt you to prolong your visit?"

He put his flattering little question with an ease of manner which was rather too plainly assumed; and he looked at Mr. Rayburn with a watchfulness which appeared to attach undue importance to the reply. When he said: "What stay do you make at St. Sallins?" did he really mean: "How soon do you leave us?" Inclining to adopt this conclusion, Mr. Rayburn answered cautiously that his stay at the seaside would depend on circumstances. Mr. John Zant looked at his sister-in-law, sitting silent in a corner with Lucy on her lap. "Exert your attractions," he said; "make the circumstances agreeable to our good friend. Will you dine with us to-day, my dear sir, and bring your little fairy with you?"

Lucy was far from receiving this complimentary allusion in the spirit in which it had been offered. "I'm not a fairy," she declared. "I'm a child."

"And a naughty child," her father added, with all the severity that he could assume.

"I can't help it, papa; the man with the big beard puts me out."

The man with the big beard was amused— amiably, paternally amused— by Lucy's plain speaking. He repeated his invitation to dinner; and he did his best to look disappointed when Mr. Rayburn made the necessary excuses.

"Another day," he said (without, however, fixing the day). "I think you will find my house comfortable. My housekeeper may perhaps be eccentric— but in all essentials a woman in a thousand. Do you feel the change from London already? Our air at St. Sallins is really worthy of its reputation. Invalids who come here are cured as if by magic. What do you think of Mrs. Zant? How does she look?"

Mr. Rayburn was evidently expected to say that she looked better. He said it. Mr. John Zant seemed to have anticipated a stronger expression of opinion.

"Surprisingly better!" he pronounced. "Infinitely better! We ought both to be grateful. Pray believe that we are grateful."

"If you mean grateful to me," Mr. Rayburn remarked, "I don't quite understand— "

"You don't quite understand? Is it possible that you have forgotten our conversation when I first had the honor of receiving you? Look at Mrs. Zant again."

Mr. Rayburn looked; and Mrs. Zant's brother-in-law explained himself.

"You notice the return of her color, the healthy brightness of her eyes. (No, my dear, I am not paying you idle compliments; I am stating plain facts.) For that happy result, Mr. Rayburn, we are indebted to you."

"Surely not?"

"Surely yes! It was at your valuable suggestion that I thought of inviting my sister-in-law to visit me at St. Sallins. Ah, you remember it now. Forgive me if I look at my watch; the dinner hour is on my mind. Not, as your dear little daughter there seems to think, because I am greedy, but because I am always punctual, in justice to the cook. Shall we see you to-morrow? Call early, and you will find us at home."

He gave Mrs. Zant his arm, and bowed and smiled, and kissed his hand to Lucy, and left the room. Recalling their interview at the hotel in London, Mr. Rayburn now understood John Zant's object (on that occasion) in assuming the character of a helpless man in need of a sensible suggestion. If Mrs. Zant's residence under his roof became associated with evil consequences, he could declare that she would never have entered the house but for Mr. Rayburn's advice.

With the next day came the hateful necessity of returning this man's visit.

Mr. Rayburn was placed between two alternatives. In Mrs. Zant's interests he must remain, no matter at what sacrifice of his own inclinations, on good terms with her brother-in-law— or he must return to London, and leave the poor woman to her fate. His choice, it is needless to say, was never a matter of doubt. He called at the house, and did his innocent best— without in the least deceiving Mr. John Zant— to make himself agreeable during the short duration of his visit. Descending the stairs on his way out, accompanied by Mrs. Zant, he was surprised to see a middle-aged woman in the hall, who looked as if she was waiting there expressly to attract notice.

"The housekeeper," Mrs. Zant whispered. "She is impudent enough to try to make acquaintance with you."

This was exactly what the housekeeper was waiting in the hall to do.

"I hope you like our watering-place, sir," she began. "If I can be of service to you, pray command me. Any friend of this lady's has a claim on me— and you are an old friend, no doubt. I am only the housekeeper; but I presume to take a sincere interest in Mrs. Zant; and I am indeed glad to see you here. We

none of us know— do we?— how soon we may want a friend. No offense, I hope? Thank you, sir. Good-morning."

There was nothing in the woman's eyes which indicated an unsettled mind; nothing in the appearance of her lips which suggested habits of intoxication. That her strange outburst of familiarity proceeded from some strong motive seemed to be more than probable. Putting together what Mrs. Zant had already told him, and what he had himself observed, Mr. Rayburn suspected that the motive might be found in the housekeeper's jealousy of her master.

xi

REFLECTING in the solitude of his own room, Mr. Rayburn felt that the one prudent course to take would be to persuade Mrs. Zant to leave St. Sallins. He tried to prepare her for this strong proceeding, when she came the next day to take Lucy out for a walk.

"If you still regret having forced yourself to accept your brother-in-law's invitation," was all he ventured to say, "don't forget that you are perfect mistress of your own actions. You have only to come to me at the hotel, and I will take you back to London by the next train."

She positively refused to entertain the idea.

"I should be a thankless creature, indeed," she said, "if I accepted your proposal. Do you think I am ungrateful enough to involve you in a personal quarrel with John Zant? No! If I find myself forced to leave the house, I will go away alone."

There was no moving her from this resolution. When she and Lucy had gone out together, Mr. Rayburn remained at the hotel, with a mind ill at ease. A man of readier mental resources might have felt at a loss how to act for the best, in the emergency that now confronted him. While he was still as far as ever from arriving at a decision, some person knocked at the door.

Had Mrs. Zant returned? He looked up as the door was opened, and saw to his astonishment— Mr. John Zant's housekeeper.

"Don't let me alarm you, sir," the woman said. "Mrs. Zant has been taken a little faint, at the door of our house. My master is attending to her."

"Where is the child?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"I was bringing her back to you, sir, when we met a lady and her little girl at the door of the hotel. They were on their way to the beach— and Miss Lucy begged hard to be allowed to go with them. The lady said the two children were playfellows, and she was sure you would not object."

"The lady is quite right. Mrs. Zant's illness is not serious, I hope?"

"I think not, sir. But I should like to say something in her interests. May I? Thank you." She advanced a step nearer to him, and spoke her next words in a whisper. "Take Mrs. Zant away from this place, and lose no time in doing it."

Mr. Rayburn was on his guard. He merely asked: "Why?"

The housekeeper answered in a curiously indirect manner— partly in jest, as it seemed, and partly in earnest.

"When a man has lost his wife," she said, "there's some difference of opinion in Parliament, as I hear, whether he does right or wrong, if he marries his wife's sister. Wait a bit! I'm coming to the point. My master is one who has a long head on his shoulders; he sees consequences which escape the notice of people like me. In his way of thinking, if one man may marry his wife's sister, and no harm done, where's the objection if another man pays a compliment to the family, and marries his brother's widow? My master, if you please, is that other man. Take the widow away before she marries him."

This was beyond endurance.

"You insult Mrs. Zant," Mr. Rayburn answered, "if you suppose that such a thing is possible!"

"Oh! I insult her, do I? Listen to me. One of three things will happen. She will be entrapped into consenting to it— or frightened into consenting to it— or drugged into consenting to it—"

Mr. Rayburn was too indignant to let her go on.

"You are talking nonsense," he said. "There can be no marriage; the law forbids it."

"Are you one of the people who see no further than their noses?" she asked insolently. "Won't the law take his money? Is he obliged to mention that he is related to her by marriage, when he buys the license?" She paused; her humor changed; she stamped furiously on the floor. The true motive that animated her showed itself in her next words, and warned Mr. Rayburn to grant a more favorable hearing than he had accorded to her yet. "If you won't stop it," she burst out, "I will! If he marries anybody, he is bound to marry ME. Will you take her away? I ask you, for the last time— will you take her away?"

The tone in which she made that final appeal to him had its effect.

"I will go back with you to John Zant's house," he said, "and judge for myself."

She laid her hand on his arm:

"I must go first— or you may not be let in. Follow me in five minutes; and don't knock at the street door."

On the point of leaving him, she abruptly returned.

"We have forgotten something," she said. "Suppose my master refuses to see you. His temper might get the better of him; he might make it so unpleasant for you that you would be obliged to go."

"My temper might get the better of me," Mr. Rayburn replied; "and— if I thought it was in Mrs. Zant's interests— I might refuse to leave the house unless she accompanied me."

"That will never do, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I should be the person to suffer."

"In what way?"

"In this way. If you picked a quarrel with my master, I should be blamed for it because I showed you upstairs. Besides, think of the lady. You might frighten her out of her senses, if it came to a struggle between you two men."

The language was exaggerated; but there was a force in this last objection which Mr. Rayburn was obliged to acknowledge.

"And, after all," the housekeeper continued, "he has more right over her than you have. He is related to her, and you are only her friend."

Mr. Rayburn declined to let himself be influenced by this consideration, "Mr. John Zant is only related to her by marriage," he said. "If she prefers trusting in me— come what may of it, I will be worthy of her confidence."

The housekeeper shook her head.

"That only means another quarrel," she answered. "The wise way, with a man like my master, is the peaceable way. We must manage to deceive him."

"I don't like deceit."

"In that case, sir, I'll wish you good-by. We will leave Mrs. Zant to do the best she can for herself."

Mr. Rayburn was unreasonable. He positively refused to adopt this alternative.

"Will you hear what I have got to say?" the housekeeper asked.

"There can be no harm in that," he admitted. "Go on."

She took him at his word.

"When you called at our house," she began, "did you notice the doors in the passage, on the first floor? Very well. One of them is the door of the drawing-room, and the other is the door of the library. Do you remember the drawing-room, sir?"

"I thought it a large well-lighted room," Mr. Rayburn answered. "And I noticed a doorway in the wall, with a handsome curtain hanging over it."

"That's enough for our purpose," the housekeeper resumed. "On the other side of the curtain, if you had looked in, you would have found the library. Suppose my master is as polite as usual, and begs to be excused for not

receiving you, because it is an inconvenient time. And suppose you are polite on your side and take yourself off by the drawing-room door. You will find me waiting downstairs, on the first landing. Do you see it now?"

"I can't say I do."

"You surprise me, sir. What is to prevent us from getting back softly into the library, by the door in the passage? And why shouldn't we use that second way into the library as a means of discovering what may be going on in the drawing-room? Safe behind the curtain, you will see him if he behaves uncivilly to Mrs. Zant, or you will hear her if she calls for help. In either case, you may be as rough and ready with my master as you find needful; it will be he who has frightened her, and not you. And who can blame the poor housekeeper because Mr. Rayburn did his duty, and protected a helpless woman? There is my plan, sir. Is it worth trying?"

He answered, sharply enough: "I don't like it."

The housekeeper opened the door again, and wished him good-by.

If Mr. Rayburn had felt no more than an ordinary interest in Mrs. Zant, he would have let the woman go. As it was, he stopped her; and, after some further protest (which proved to be useless), he ended in giving way.

"You promise to follow my directions?" she stipulated.

He gave the promise. She smiled, nodded, and left him. True to his instructions, Mr. Rayburn reckoned five minutes by his watch, before he followed her.

xii

THE housekeeper was waiting for him, with the street-door ajar.

"They are both in the drawing-room," she whispered, leading the way upstairs. "Step softly, and take him by surprise."

A table of oblong shape stood midway between the drawing-room walls. At the end of it which was nearest to the window, Mrs. Zant was pacing to and fro across the breadth of the room. At the opposite end of the table, John Zant was seated. Taken completely by surprise, he showed himself in his true character. He started to his feet, and protested with an oath against the intrusion which had been committed on him.

Heedless of his action and his language, Mr. Rayburn could look at nothing, could think of nothing, but Mrs. Zant. She was still walking slowly to and fro, unconscious of the words of sympathy which he addressed to her, insensible even as it seemed to the presence of other persons in the room.

John Zant's voice broke the silence. His temper was under control again: he had his reasons for still remaining on friendly terms with Mr. Rayburn.

"I am sorry I forgot myself just now," he said.

Mr. Rayburn's interest was concentrated on Mrs. Zant; he took no notice of the apology.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"About a quarter of an hour ago. I was fortunately at home. Without speaking to me, without noticing me, she walked upstairs like a person in a dream."

Mr. Rayburn suddenly pointed to Mrs. Zant.

"Look at her!" he said. "There's a change!"

All restlessness in her movements had come to an end. She was standing at the further end of the table, which was nearest to the window, in the full flow of sunlight pouring at that moment over her face. Her eyes looked out straight before her— void of all expression. Her lips were a little parted: her head drooped slightly toward her shoulder, in an attitude which suggested listening for something or waiting for something. In the warm brilliant light, she stood before the two men, a living creature self-isolated in a stillness like the stillness of death.

John Zant was ready with the expression of his opinion.

"A nervous seizure," he said. "Something resembling catalepsy, as you see."

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"A doctor is not wanted."

"I beg your pardon. It seems to me that medical help is absolutely necessary."

"Be so good as to remember," Mr. John Zant answered, "that the decision rests with me, as the lady's relative. I am sensible of the honor which your visit confers on me. But the time has been unhappily chosen. Forgive me if I suggest that you will do well to retire."

Mr. Rayburn had not forgotten the housekeeper's advice, or the promise which she had exacted from him. But the expression in John Zant's face was a serious trial to his self-control. He hesitated, and looked back at Mrs. Zant.

If he provoked a quarrel by remaining in the room, the one alternative would be the removal of her by force. Fear of the consequences to herself, if she was suddenly and roughly roused from her trance, was the one consideration which reconciled him to submission. He withdrew.

The housekeeper was waiting for him below, on the first landing. When the door of the drawing-room had been closed again, she signed to him to follow her, and returned up the stairs. After another struggle with himself, he obeyed. They entered the library from the corridor— and placed themselves behind the closed curtain which hung over the doorway. It was easy so to arrange the

edge of the drapery as to observe, without exciting suspicion, whatever was going on in the next room.

Mrs. Zant's brother-in-law was approaching her at the time when Mr. Rayburn saw him again.

In the instant afterward, she moved— before he had completely passed over the space between them. Her still figure began to tremble. She lifted her drooping head. For a moment there was a shrinking in her— as if she had been touched by something. She seemed to recognize the touch: she was still again.

John Zant watched the change. It suggested to him that she was beginning to recover her senses. He tried the experiment of speaking to her.

"My love, my sweet angel, come to the heart that adores you!"

He advanced again; he passed into the flood of sunlight pouring over her.

"Rouse yourself!" he said.

She still remained in the same position; apparently at his mercy, neither hearing him nor seeing him.

"Rouse yourself!" he repeated. "My darling, come to me!"

At the instant when he attempted to embrace her— at the instant when Mr. Rayburn rushed into the room— John Zant's arms, suddenly turning rigid, remained outstretched. With a shriek of horror, he struggled to draw them back— struggled, in the empty brightness of the sunshine, as if some invisible grip had seized him.

"What has got me?" the wretch screamed. "Who is holding my hands? Oh, the cold of it! the cold of it!"

His features became convulsed; his eyes turned upward until only the white eyeballs were visible. He fell prostrate with a crash that shook the room.

The housekeeper ran in. She knelt by her master's body. With one hand she loosened his cravat. With the other she pointed to the end of the table.

Mrs. Zant still kept her place; but there was another change. Little by little, her eyes recovered their natural living expression— then slowly closed. She tottered backward from the table, and lifted her hands wildly, as if to grasp at something which might support her. Mr. Rayburn hurried to her before she fell— lifted her in his arms— and carried her out of the room.

One of the servants met them in the hall. He sent her for a carriage. In a quarter of an hour more, Mrs. Zant was safe under his care at the hotel.

xiii

THAT night a note, written by the housekeeper, was delivered to Mrs. Zant.

"The doctors give little hope. The paralytic stroke is spreading upward to his face. If death spares him, he will live a helpless man. I shall take care of him to the last. As for you— forget him."

Mrs. Zant gave the note to Mr. Rayburn.

"Read it, and destroy it," she said. "It is written in ignorance of the terrible truth."

He obeyed— and looked at her in silence, waiting to hear more. She hid her face. The few words she had addressed to him, after a struggle with herself, fell slowly and reluctantly from her lips.

She said: "No mortal hand held the hands of John Zant. The guardian spirit was with me. The promised protection was with me. I know it. I wish to know no more."

Having spoken, she rose to retire. He opened the door for her, seeing that she needed rest in her own room.

Left by himself, he began to consider the prospect that was before him in the future. How was he to regard the woman who had just left him? As a poor creature weakened by disease, the victim of her own nervous delusion? or as the chosen object of a supernatural revelation— unparalleled by any similar revelation that he had heard of, or had found recorded in books? His first discovery of the place that she really held in his estimation dawned on his mind, when he felt himself recoiling from the conclusion which presented her to his pity, and yielding to the nobler conviction which felt with her faith, and raised her to a place apart among other women.

xiv

THEY left St. Sallins the next day.

Arrived at the end of the journey, Lucy held fast by Mrs. Zant's hand. Tears were rising in the child's eyes.

"Are we to bid her good-by?" she said sadly to her father.

He seemed to be unwilling to trust himself to speak; he only said:

"My dear, ask her yourself."

But the result justified him. Lucy was happy again.

———————

20: At Mat Aris Light

John Arthur Barry

1850-1911

In: Sea Yarns, 1910

A slightly shorter version was published Launceston Examiner (Tasmania) 14 and 15 Sep 1897), credited to *Chambers Journal*

MY FRIEND HARDING was head-keeper of one of the finest lighthouses in the world, and I was free of it at all hours. But it was o' nights that I loved best to join the old man on his watch, and sit on the balcony and gaze out at the great ocean illumined at minute intervals by the flood of white radiance that seemed to pour forth a greeting to the silent ships as they passed and repassed, or came straight for the harbour-mouth.

Harding was a square-built, gray-haired man with a strong, determined face, all browned and wrinkled by sun and storm, and eyes that burned like live coals under shaggy white brows.

At odd times, athwart the concentrated beams that seemed to hit the far horizon, would sail ships, glorified momentarily as they passed through, with every spar and sail and rope sharply outlined by the sudden brilliance; but more often they slid along between light and water, ill-defined phantasmal blobs of smudge, out of which, when the fancy took them to make their numbers, would spout forth many-coloured fires, all incomprehensible to the untutored eye as the dim fabrics they proceeded from.

But Harding and his assistant signalmen read off ships and numbers as easily, apparently, as if it was broad daylight; and the telegraph would repeat at intervals: 'Large square-rigged ship with painted ports, steering E. by N. Made her number 23,745.' Or, it might be, 'Steamer, black funnel with white band, brig-rigged, deep, bound south, showed no number.' But nothing large or small ever escaped the eagle lookout kept from that eyrie on the great cliff, where the only sounds that broke the long night silences were the wash of the waves on the rugged kelp-grown rocks four hundred sheer feet beneath and the subdued hum of the big dynamo in the basement.

This, you will see, was no isolated light stuck forlornly hundreds of miles from any where. It was an establishment over which Harding presided—quite a little settlement of government offices connected with the important department of harbours, rivers, and trade. His salary was high; so was the efficiency of the service he headed. And he was not averse to a little judicious praise now and again. On one of these occasions I had said something respecting the speedy identification of a foreign cruiser, and the prompt wiring of details to the capital whilst yet the war-ship crept quietly in as if desirous of

escaping attention, and little guessing that, long ere she reached the port, a score of nine-inch guns, to say nothing of submarine mines and Brennan torpedoes, would have blown her to atoms had she disregarded the challenge of the warned guardship at Inner Point. Well, I had complimented him on the ceaseless vigilance maintained, and he chuckled, well pleased, and hemmed, and remarked, 'Now that reminds me!'

Usually a taciturn man, and one engrossed in his business, he was difficult to 'draw.' Often enough he had said as much before with no result; often matters had followed well worth the hearing. In any case I knew silence was best.

It was a wild night, with a 'southerly' blowing great guns, keeping the sea flattened into a vast milky-white expanse of foam, that kept up a long-drawn, continuous roar at the foot of the cliffs in fitting accompaniment to the shrieking blasts that wrestled and tore around the great tower, as if striving to shake it from its foundations deep down in the solid rock.

'Come along to my room,' said Harding at last, after a good look around, 'and we'll have a pipe and a glass of grog whilst I tell you about another lighthouse I ran, and another man o' war that I watched some twenty-five years ago now.'

Descending into his private snuggery beside a bright fire, I took one of the big arm-chairs whilst Harding operated with hot water, case-bottle, lemons, and sugar, and, after fixing matters to his satisfaction, filled his pipe and said:

IT MUST BE about five-and-twenty years now since the day I sat on the steps of the Sailors' Home in Singapore, stone broke. I'd been first mate of a ship called the *Star of Africa*, that the skipper'd managed to run slap on to a rock in the Straits of Sunda. It wasn't my fault, nor did I lose my ticket like the captain. All the same, I found it precious hard to get another ship.

Owners as well as masters have fads and prejudices in this respect— not, perhaps, as regards a first time. But this happened to be my second wreck running. So my luck, you see, was dead out. Actually but for bananas I might have starved. Bananas and water fill up and satisfy right enough, only it takes you all your time to keep the supply going. Presently, as I sat there, digesting my second or third breakfast, out came the Master-intendant, and said he:

'Harding, if you stay here till the moon turns blue you'll never get a ship. But a billet's turned up that, perhaps, is better than nothing. The Dutch,' he went on, 'have built a lighthouse somewhere down yonder on the Bornean coast, and a second keeper is wanted: wages, eighty guilders a month and rations. It's the merest fluke that I happened to hear of it. Will you take it?'

'Would a duck swim?'

'All right, then, come along to Van Veldt and Co.'s office; they'll take you on my recommendation.'

The Dutch agents did so without question. More, they paid me a month's wages in advance, and sent me in one of their steamers round to Batavia, where I was to get fresh orders. Arrived there, I was kept waiting a month. But as I had good quarters, and plenty to eat and drink, I didn't mind spending my 'dead horse' in this way. One day, however, I was told to get my belongings on board a little fore-and-aft schooner which had been loading stores for the newly-built lighthouse.

We were ten days on the passage; and when we brought up at our destination, and I saw what I'd come to, I'd have taken ten days on bananas and water to get away again.

From a thickly-wooded point a reef ran nearly three-quarters of a mile out into the Macassar Straits. At the extreme end of Mat Aris— as the point was called— stood the lighthouse. You'd ha' laughed! Imagine a sort of shed, shaped like one of those oval-topped meat safes, built on a platform resting on piles forty feet high. That was all. From the shed there ran a corduroy bridge, with a hand-rail, some thirty feet back shoreward, to another and a larger platform, where, in a large hut, we were to live. The only way to get down to terra firma was by ladders. At low water all you could see was mud; and dozens of alligators that used to come down a river close to for salt-water bathing. Everywhere, almost down to the sea, stood great trees, 150 feet high, growing close together— elbowing each other, so to speak; and, as if that wasn't enough, creepers, ferns, and undergrowth of all descriptions filled up every vacant chink between them. On this impenetrable face of woodland the efforts of the workmen and builders had merely left a slight scratch— even by this rapidly greening over. Nature heals her scars in that country almost as soon as received.

The light itself was merely a big lantern, carrying eight wicks, kerosene fed, and hung to the roof of the meat safe. That it had been badly wanted, primitive as it was, the remains of several vessels emphatically witnessed.

My boss was there already, a cross-bred, surly-looking customer— father Dutch, mother Malay. She kept house for us— a skinny old hag, with a nose like an eagle's, and a bigger moustache than I could boast of in those days. Her son's name was Peter— Peter Klopp.

Presently the schooner went away and left us. And what a life it was! Nothing to do after trimming the lights of a morning, and sweeping bucketsful of moths out of the round- house, except sit and smoke, and look out across the Straits to Celebes— just a blue line of high mountains in the distance—

sleep, eat, watch the ships coming and going, or pull faces at the monkeys up amongst the tall trees that waved their heads seventy feet above ours.

At times the traffic was pretty thick. It was always peculiar. Junks from Swatow, bound for Amboyna and Ceram for sandalwood, swallows' nests, and *bêche de mer*; "country wallahs" from Penang and Singapore, going round to Banjermassin for coffee and rice; steam tramps from Australian ports, loaded up to their gunwales with coal for Manila; and smart little topsail schooners flying any flag that took their fancy, and ready to pick up anything that wasn't too hot or too heavy for them, from a bushel of nutmegs to a holdful of 'blackbirds.' But, with the exception of a Dutch gunboat, the *Bliksem*, acting as a sort of sea-patrol, which called on us at long intervals, we had no visitors at Mat Aris Point.

Peter and his old mother I soon discovered were confirmed opium smokers, and when they went in for a regular spree, and began to suffer a recovery, they made things hum in 'Monkey Island,' as I called it. Once I was fool enough to interfere and stop Peter from choking the life out of her. For thanks, the pair turned on me; but I managed to dress them down, although Peter nearly got his knife into me.

'AND I CAN TELL YOU,' laughed Harding, pausing in his story, and rising to conjure again with the kettle and other adjuncts, 'that two to one, with precious little room, and a break-neck fall if you're not careful, isn't as funny as it might be.'

Having replenished the glasses and refilled and lit his pipe, Harding proceeded:

WELL, AFTER THIS I could see that the two had taken a down upon me; and as I, on my part, was heartily sick of the whole contract, I told the officer who commanded the *Bliksem*, next time she called, that I wanted to leave; and that the sooner he found a substitute the better I should be pleased. For answer he called me an English *schelm*, which means rascal, and told me that I had agreed for two years-which was a lie-and that there I should stay. Also, that he'd make it his business to see that I didn't get away.

Seeing that escape, for that's what it really came to, by water was not to be thought of, except by swimming— and the sharks pretty well put that out of the question— I determined to see what the land side was like. A muddy-banked river emptied itself just below the lighthouse, and this one day I started to follow up. But I didn't follow long. I don't believe I got a mile before I was mother-naked, and nearly bitten and stung to death. Every bush and shrub— nay, the very flowers seemed to carry a thorn. And what with fire-

ants, mosquitoes, leeches, centipedes, stinging flies, and worse than all, a blamed caterpillar that drops on to you off the leaves and stick hairs into you that break off in your flesh and fester, I can assure you it was the roughest picnic I ever had. Why, I almost thought I could hear the alligators chuckling as I made home again. Certainly Peter laughed, for the first time since we'd been mates on Monkey Island, when he saw the plight I was in.

A day or so after this the gunboat sent her gig ashore again, and from the hammock I had slung in my portion of the big hut, I could hear much laughter amongst the Dutchmen as Peter detailed my adventure. I heard also allusion to some other *'verdomde Engelander;*' and a long talk about the light and bearings, the gist of which, for want of a more intimate knowledge of the language, escaped me. Next morning I saw Peter marching off along the narrow strip of bank that separated bush from sea with a tail-block, over his shoulder; and, though wondering mightily what he could be up to, I wasn't going to show any curiosity. A tail-block, by the way, I ought to tell you, is the common block that you reeve a rope through, only to one end of it is attached a long 'tail' of plaited stuff, usually by which it can be made fast to a spar or bolt, alow or aloft. Very little gave me food for thought in those days, and I puzzled over this till Peter came back; and, rummaging amongst the stores, walked off once more with a coil of new ratline-line, and in the same direction.

He did not appear at dinner, and as I finished my mess of rice, salt fish, and pickled mangoes, I said to the woman, 'What's become of Peter?'

'He's gone to set a trap for an orang-outang whose tracks he saw at the foot of the ladders yesterday,' she replied, grinning and leering. 'And,' added she sarcastically, 'if you don't believe me, go and look; only leave your clothes behind, most misbegotten of English fools.'

Peter came home that evening, and in the interest created by a new visitor in those waters, and whose acquaintance I at once sought some means of making, the incident of the tail-block was completely forgotten.

Dutch soundings, it appeared, having been found so unreliable as to bring a good few British vessels to grief, that Government, characteristically enough, had despatched a vessel to correct them, without giving the Dutch notice, or saying by your leave, or anything else.

And although we, or rather I, was unaware of it, H.M.S. *Badger* had for some time been thus engaged at the upper portion of the Straits. Now she appeared off Mat Aris busy, in sporting parlance, wiping the Bliksem's eye, very much to the disgust of the latter's officers, whose specialty, if they possessed one, was supposed to be surveying.

The *Badger* was a paddle-wheeled, brig-rigged old tub, sure enough. But she was British; and as I stared and stared through the glasses at the white

ensign and the good red cross flying from her peak, I was often tempted to swim off to her as she puffed and churned away, fussing around after her boats like an old hen after her chicks.

But when I looked at the black, three-sided fins sticking up at high water right alongside our piles, I felt my toes tingle, and thought better of it, trusting that same day she'd send a boat to give us a call, when I determined that go I would if all the Dutchies in the East Indies were to try to stop me.

That Peter guessed my thoughts and notions I could see from the mean, yellow-brown, grinning face of him. And I'd try to get his dander up sometimes.

'Look at that, Peter,' I'd say. 'That's my country flag. There's no slaves underneath its folds, sweating and toiling, half-starved, and taxed to death's doors like there is under yours. Hip, hip, hooray! Rule Britannia and God save the Queen! and confusion to all half-breds!'

He didn't understand all of it, of course, but he used to shake his fist at the *Badger*, and look as nasty as a hatful of snakes.

Twice whilst I was on watch— as we used to call the intermittent, sleepy look-out we kept at Mat Aris— the Bliksem boat came ashore, and I could hear the officer and Peter each time having a long confab together. During the night the old wife always used to have coffee ground and hot water on the fire, so that we could make our own if we wished for a drink.

One night, shortly after the Dutch officer's last visit, coming in and rousing Peter to take his watch, I brewed myself a cup before turning in. It tasted very bitter, and I didn't finish it; but almost before I'd time to undress I was dead to the world. I woke in a fright, dripping with sweat, and shaking all over. Now, in the lighthouse was a bottle of lime-juice I'd brewed myself; my throat was as dry as the lubricators of a collier's engines, and the thought of that drink tantalised me till I made shift to crawl out of my hammock and stagger along the, bridge to the little house, where also was a 'chatty' of cold water.

To my utter astonishment, in looking up I saw that the light was out. Opening the door, I entered, and, half-choking, felt for the water-bottle. It was empty. Striking a match, I saw that the floor was soaking wet. Putting up my hand to the wicks, they only frizzed and sputtered at contact with the flame. Also the spare lantern that we always kept ready trimmed had disappeared.

Stepping outside on to the platform, I stared around, headachy and very shaky still. The night was black as pitch— one of those nights you often get out there, that feel almost like black velvet, and as thick. And there wasn't a star to be seen, as sometimes happens at the change of the monsoons. The jungle, too, was still as death; there was no sound on land or on the sea. The whole world seemed fast bound in sleep and darkness. Presently my eye, roving along shore, came to the gleam of a light some half-mile away, about on a level with

where ours should have been, only much further inland-a big light I sane it was, as my eyes got the sleep out of them, and burning steadily.

As I stared, puzzled beyond expression, I all at once heard the sound of muffled snorting and churning faint in I the distance-a noise as if a shoal of grampuses were coming down the Straits.

Listening and staring, there suddenly rose to mind fragments of the first talk I'd heard between Peter and the Dutchman about lights and bearings. Then, somehow, came a connection between that and the tail-block and the coil of ratline stuff. Then— I don't know how it happened, but in a second (perhaps you've experienced something of the kind) my brain seemed cleared of cobwebs, as if a broom inside had been swept across it sharply, and the whole plan lay before me plain as mud in a wine-glass. And I laughed; yes, sir, I assure you I did, for I saw my time had come at last. The puff, puff, and wheezy panting was sounding nearer; and, looking steadily and hard into the distance, I could see, a long way up the Straits, a shower of sparks like a swarm of fireflies, hut which I knew marked the whereabouts of the *Badger*, burning Nagasaki coal.

She was approaching obliquely, over from the Celebes side, heading about west-sou'-west to pick up Mat Aris light; then, according to the sailing directions, she would straighten up west-by-sou', keeping the light four points to her starboard bow to clear the reef. Now, with the light in its present position, she would, if unsuspicious— and it was the merest chance that anybody on board observed the change— crash right on to the outermost edge of the reef, and go down in deep water, as others had done before her. It was a trap conceived with perfectly diabolical cunning and ingenuity, the site of the false light having evidently been determined most carefully and scientifically— not too far to excite the look-out's— distrust, end yet near enough to prove effectual.

Puff-puff, churn-churn, pant-pant.

Another twenty minutes, and it would be all up with. H.M.S. *Badger*. But, knowing exactly what to do— holding two honours and the ace, so to speak— I was as cool as a cucumber, and, except for that trembling about the legs, my own man again. That I had been drugged or poisoned by an insufficient dose, I more than suspected. Just then, however, I didn't bother my head about that. I wanted to renew the light on Mat Aris. Round the caboose in which the lantern used to hang, as I've told you, for all the world like a leg of mutton in a meat safe, ran lockers filled with tins of kerosene, waste, rope, oakum, and such matters. Knocking the heads of a couple of the tins in, I poured the oil over all liberally, saturating everything. After this, a match was all that was needed, and before I was halfway along the bridge the flames were six feet high. Just

looking in her den to see that the old lady wasn't there, I went down the ladders like a lamplighter, and ran along the bank towards where I knew the false beacon must be, swung high aloft in some tree.

Over logs and stumps I stumbled, looking back now and again at the big, tall glare, till, rounding a point, the dense forest shut it from sight. Getting along somehow, I stopped at last, and listened. But I could hear nothing of the *Badger*. Inland, however, high overhead, hung the light. Pulling out my sheath knife, I made for it, headlong through bush and briar. As I guessed, it was hung to a tree, and, feeling all round, I soon found the rope belayed to a root, and before you could say 'Jack Robinson,' I'd slashed It through, and was watching the lantern coming down by the run when a fellow jumped out of the dark, and muzzled me round the throat.

'Hello, Peter,' I said, as I returned the compliment, 'you see the coffee wasn't strong enough.'

I hadn't time to say much, being very busy, for the brute, in spite of the opium, was stronger than I thought, and I weaker. Down we went, rolling over and over, whilst, to make things warmer, the lantern capsized, and, setting fire to the coarse grass, it blazed up all about us. Also the woman, with a big club in her fist, was dancing around screeching blue murder, but frightened to hit, so closely entangled were we. I still grasped my knife. I could see Peter's also gleam as we turned and writhed. Presently I felt a sharp pain In my shoulder, and knew I was stabbed. That made me real mad; and as we rolled away a bit from the fire, the hag made a smack at me, but, missing, caught Peter on the point of the shoulder, causing him to drop the knife. He stretched out to recover it, and I got home on him till I felt the wooden haft jar against his ribs.

He went limp all in a minute, exactly like one of those bladders the children play with if you shove a pin into it. Well, we'd rolled down a bank into a bit of a swamp, and when the hag saw what had happened, she gave one yell, and jumped fairly on top of me, and got her stick to work in great style. As you may imagine, I was by this pretty well knocked out, and I don't know how matters would have gone; only that a boat's crew of *Badgers* just then came on the scene, and dragged the hag off me, swearing, kicking, and striking right and left, until one of the men gave her a poke with a bayonet, when she suddenly calmed down, and started to raise the Malay death-wail.

And she had cause to, for Peter pegged out before we got him on board. Mine turned out to be nothing much worse than a flesh wound, although I'd lost a lot of blood from it.

As you may guess, the skipper of the *Badger* was in a pelter when he'd heard my story. Certainly I had no witness, and the hag kept her mouth as close as a rat-trap. But we got over that. There was a Malay interpreter on

board, and he gave the captain a hint. So, when the woman heard that she was to be taken back to Perak, her native place, and there handed over to the tender mercies of the Sultan— at that time our very good friend— she made a clean breast of everything, Including the attempt to poison me with the juice of the klang-klang berries. Four hundred guilders was the price of Peter's connivance, and promotion to one of the Java lights if the plan succeeded.

This confession of the hag's was a bit of luck for me, and Captain Cardigan complimented me in presence of the ship's company on the way I'd behaved, having undoubtedly saved the *Badger*, whose officer of the watch was, steering by the false light when it suddenly disappeared.

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21: The Man from Coolgardie.

A Bit of Up-to-Date Romance.

John Arthur Barry

The Australasian Pastoralists' Review, 15 March 1894

HE CAME ON BOARD at Albany. He was tall, thin, brown, and dry-looking. The trousers, shirt, and hat he wore might have been worth sixpence— certainly no more. As he explained to the staring stewards, he had been forced to run for it to catch the boat.

"Take my luggage down to my berth, some of you," said he, pointing to a bulky three bushel canvas bag that the steam-winch had just deposited on deck. "It isn't a very swagger sort of portmanteau, certainly, but I daresay I could get a swop for it if I tried."

It took fifteen stewards, the bo'sun, his two mates, and the four quartermasters to lift that common-looking sack and carry it down the staircase into the second saloon and along the alley way into the new passenger's berth. Then they came up in a distressed kind of condition and the Man from Coolgardie marched them off to the "Pimply Bullfinch" and shouted right royally for the crowd, and when he put his hand in his pocket to pay for the drinks he drew it back full of sovereigns and nuggets— lumps of ironstone and gold and gold and ironstone.

"Most of the stuff in the bag yonder is like that," he remarked, handing a rich specimen round for examination, "only a good bit bigger."

He drank no spirits. Bottled ale and porter were his favourite beverages; and as he finished one bottle the bartender, duly instructed, had the cork of another one already drawn. But two dozen or so produced no perceptible effect upon the Man from Coolgardie.

"I've been two years in Hell," said he cheerfully, "and can take a lot of moistening. It's six months since I've had a wash and twelve since I've had a decent feed. If a man was to offer me tinned lobster now I'd kill him. Send the bathroom steward along, one of you, like a good fellow."

A gentleman, evidently, although one sorely grimed and battered with long warfare in the desert.

That night the band played on the promenade-deck of the great steamer, and the passengers danced under the electric lights; and the Man from Coolgardie, clothed out of the slop chest, and clean, and a little moistened, sat watching them with eager eyes, and an unlit cigar between his teeth.

"Good God," said he, at length, straightening himself up, "what a glorious thing it is to get back to civilisation again, if only as represented here on the deck of a mail steamer!"

"Yes, but you've done well, and made your pile, and are homeward bound!" said some one out of the group.

"May be," he replied, turning a handsome sharp-cut, mahogany hued face towards his questioner. "But every grain's been earned twice over with sweat, and blood, and fever, and hunger, and thirst! Even had I not been as successful as I have, nothing should induce me to go back to that awful place again."

There was plenty of room on the R.M.S. *Talcahuano* this trip; so the Man from Coolgardie had a berth all to himself— I occupied the next one ; and presently becoming friendly, he told me his story. We were sitting right aft, one night, with the lights out and the ship very quiet.

"A couple of years ago," he began, " I owned a big cattle station up in North-West Queensland. But times went from bad to worse, until it hardly paid to breed. Of course, most of us around were in the banks up to the neck. One fine day they gave myself and three of my neighbours notice to quit— wanted to realise, they said.

"Certainly they made me an offer to stop on as a sort of stockman-in-charge at a pound a week. But, somehow, I couldn't see it. My father and mother were buried there. It was in fact, home, and not the place to work for wages on under a stranger.

"And the worst of the matter was that I was engaged to be married just when the trouble came.

"However, it was of no use crying; so the three of us— all bachelors— determined to push out for the W.A. diggings, which were then beginning to get talked about.

"That was an awful trip—the last two hundred miles into Champion Bay on foot. Give you an idea of what it was like. I went on ahead one day with our only surviving horse to look for water, leaving the others about done.

"I found no water; and after going ten miles the horse lay down to die. Cutting his throat I filled the two water-bags with blood and tramped back only to find one fellow pegged out, and the other not very far behind him. I was pretty well baked myself, as you may imagine. However, after a good drink, I got Willis round, and as we both stood looking at poor Gordon, stretched dead under a heap of spinifex that we'd rooted up for shade, it came on to rain heavens hard, and in about five minutes the still warm body was almost afloat. That night we went on to the horse and had a feed off him. He was poor as a crow, but we managed to cut off enough to last for a few days.

"We were pretty far gone before we made the coast, that we never ought to have left, and ran it down to Champion Bay. We spelled there for a time. But Willis never got over the trip— died in Perth a month after.

"So I lost both my mates. Poor chaps, there'll be more than them'll lose the number of their mess before it's all over out yonder!" and my companion pointed to where the outlines of the coastal sand-hills showed spectrally under the moonlight.

"Well, I had no luck on the Murchison," continued the Man from Coolgardie, lighting a fresh cigar, " so I tackled Coolgardie— tramped every inch of it. No more luck there than elsewhere— hard matter, in fact, to keep skin and bone together. If it hadn't been for the thought of Ally I half think I'd have jacked on the whole thing and come in and tried for a job of rouseabouting on one of the stations.

"However, my time was coming. Word came in that gold had been struck some 50 miles to the North-East.

"Out of thirty who started, only myself and another fellow reached the spot. All the others gave in and went back. There was a brackish soakage here which kept us going for a while. The second day out I struck a patch. It was so rich on the very surface that, fearing someone might come along whilst I was away, I took off my trousers, tied up the bottoms of the legs and filled them with the finest specimens I could find. Then I tramped the road back to the camp.

"Presently the place was rushed properly, and what with camels and horses, the water soon gave out. But I'd come to the end of my jeweller's shop. It all lay in about thirty feet square. Of course there was gold elsewhere, but nothing like so rich. Come down and I'll show you some of it."

Turning on the electric light, he took a knife, ripped a few stitches along the mouth of the stout canvas bag and pulled out a lump of stone, half quartz, half ironstone, whose upper side was furrowed and cupped by the winds and rains of centuries, and whose under side was a mass of virgin gold; another lump, fully three parts gold; and yet another, as big as a big man's fist, which shone dully all over with that deadly yellowish gleam that men barter their lives so freely for.

"Altogether about £12,000 worth, I reckon, in there," said he as he stitched the bag up again. I sold 2,000 ounces in Perth; and there's as much again as you see here gone on to Melbourne. Yes, I may buy back the old station again. But not to live there. Ally and I— bless her true heart!—'II have a jolly good house at Darling Point, or there about. I feel tired after this two years' bucketing and can do with a rest. I'm a young man yet comparatively. Look at this," and, taking a much-worn locket from around his neck, he passed it across

to where I sat on that golden bag which indeed took up most of the room in the berth. Where had I seen that beautiful laughing face with its glorious black eyes and weak little mouth?

Somewhere, certainly, and quite lately. As I gazed thoughtfully at it, he went on. "I wired from York. Most likely she'll run down and meet me at Adelaide— that'll be to-morrow. I've only had two since I've been away. But that's nothing. There's lots miscarried. They always do out there. But it's nearly over now, thank God ! The long wait was killing us both! " and a happy smile stole over the weather-worn face as he took the locket from me and restored it to its place.

"Her father's one of the big importing firm of Brown, Jones, and Co.," he continued presently. "Ally and I were youngsters together. I fancy the old man was always a bit doubtful about the engagement, although he did give his consent. But when the smash came, of course I offered to release her. And she cried, and kissed me, and said she'd wait twenty years if need be. Then the old man offered me a billet in the office. But I thought it best to come clean away and try my own luck. And I can't say that I regret it now, although it's been hard lines ; and often I've been ready to change places with those other two, gone under without a show. However, to-morrow may make up to me for everything."

God knows it did— after a fashion !

But we are poor animals the best of us, and can rarely see further than our noses. So we went up to the "Pimply Bullfinch" (as the boys called the top bar), and drank her health; and then came down to the "Golden Anchor" (which was the bottom bar), and then went off to bed.

And the great ship snored across the Bight, running steady as a rock, with perhaps only two out of her crowd of passengers who never slept the live-long night— the Man from Coolgardie, in contemplation of the happiness the next day might bring to him ; and myself, trying ever vainly to place a memory.

Next morning, taking a constitutional right away for'ard, I happened to glance in at one of the saloon windows where the passengers were at breakfast.

The first face I saw was hers. There was no mistaking the careless, thoughtless expression of the weak but beautiful features. The eyes alone would have been enough to identify the original of the portrait seen last night. Between the first and second saloons of the big liners, the intercourse is, as a rule, infinitesimal. People may be boxed up in the same ship for weeks together without catching more than a transient glimpse of each other— perhaps not even that.

So it happened that I had only seen her once before, on the occasion of a concert, or something of the kind, to which invitations had been issued from first saloon to second.

"Who is that lady at the small table on the port side?" I asked of one of the stewards who chanced to be passing at the time.

"Lady Shoreham, sir," he replied, after a look in, "she an' 'er usband come on at Colombo. They went out with us for their 'oneymoon from Sydney; an' they liked the place so well that they stopped there till we come back this time. That's 'er 'usband settin' opposite her— the tall gent in black. They're going overland from Adelaide."

Was it possible, then, that this was the end of the digger's dream?

However, I was not so utterly certain of the matter, to, even had I been inclined that way, which I was not, impart my suspicions to the Man from Coolgardie. We should be at Adelaide presently. He was almost sure to see her then.

Standing at the gangway as the big ship let go her anchor in Larg's Bay, and watching the passengers crowding along the deck, I saw the Shorehams come out of the saloon entrance, close behind them was the Man from Coolgardie, his gaze fixed with a puzzled expression in it on the form in front of him. As if impelled by those intent eyes, the lady turned slowly round.

"Alice!" he exclaimed, loudly enough to make people stare, and I could see the bright colour forsake her face even to the very lips, for a moment they stood thus. Then Lord Shoreham, who had been busy with a bundle of rugs and cloaks, threw one of the latter over her shoulders, for the wind blew keenly, saying, "Now, my dear, I think we're quite ready." Then the chief officer and the purser came officiously bustling up with cries of " Clear the gangway, please! " And the pair moved on, her cheeks still the hue of the snowy ermine that bordered her wrap. Down the ladder with officers behind and quartermaster in front the procession went, whilst the Man from Coolgardie, all the bronzed wholesomeness gone out of his face, leaving it livid and shrunken, tottered to the rail and stared down at them in a dazed sort of way.

But she never once looked up from the deck of the tender to the row of faces along the ship's side.

Presently her husband made some remark at which she laughed.

Then the Man from Coolgardie dropped off the rail as if shot, and catching my eye, walked unsteadily aft.

"Thought you were going to leave us at Adelaide?" I remarked that night, as Cape Jervois light fell and twinkled far astern, and the Man from Coolgardie sat and watched it with a set haggard face, and the band played soft waltz music on the half-deserted deck.

"Well, no," said he with a little laugh, "I've altered my plans. There's a boat leaves Melbourne on Thursday for W.A., I'm going with her— back into Hell again. They say you write stories. Put mine into one, if you like."

And he turned his face away towards the lonely light.

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22: The Round-Faced Beauty

A Story of the Chinese Court

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IN THE CITY OF CHANG-AN music filled the palaces, and the festivities of the Emperor were measured by its beat. Night, and the full moon swimming like a gold-fish in the garden lakes, gave the signal for the Feather Jacket and Rainbow Skirt dances. Morning, with the rising sun, summoned the court again to the feast and wine-cup in the floating gardens.

The Emperor Chung Tsu favored this city before all others. The Yen Tower soaring heavenward, the Drum Towers, the Pearl Pagoda, were the only fit surroundings of his magnificence; and in the Pavilion of Tranquil Learning were held those discussions which enlightened the world and spread the fame of the Jade Emperor far and wide. In all respects he adorned the Dragon Throne— in all but one; for Nature, bestowing so much, withheld one gift, and the Imperial heart, as precious as jade, was also as hard, and he eschewed utterly the company of the Hidden Palace Flowers.

Yet the Inner Chambers were filled with ladies chosen from all parts of the Celestial Empire— ladies of the most exquisite and torturing beauty, moons of loveliness, moving coquettishly on little feet, with all the grace of willow branches in a light breeze. They were sprinkled with perfumes, adorned with jewels, robed in silks woven with gold and embroidered with designs of flowers and birds. Their faces were painted and their eyebrows formed into slender and perfect arches whence the soul of man might well slip to perdition, and a breath of sweet odor followed each wherever she moved. Every one might have been the Empress of some lesser kingdom; but though rumours reached the Son of Heaven from time to time of their charms,— especially when some new blossom was added to the Imperial bouquet,— he had dismissed them from his august thoughts, and they languished in a neglect so complete that the Great Cold Palaces of the Moon were not more empty than their hearts. They remained under the supervision of the Princess of Han, August Aunt of the Emperor, knowing that their Lord considered the company of sleeve-dogs and macaws more pleasant than their own. Nor had he as yet chosen an Empress, and it was evident that without some miracle, such as the intervention of the Municipal God, no heir to the throne could be hoped for.

Yet the Emperor one day remembered his imprisoned beauties, and it crossed the Imperial thoughts that even these inferior creatures might afford such interest as may be found in the gambols of trained fleas or other insects of no natural attainments.

Accordingly, he commanded that the subject last discussed in his presence should be transferred to the Inner Chambers, and it was his Order that the ladies should also discuss it, and their opinions be engraved on ivory, bound together with red silk and tassels and thus presented at the Dragon feet. The subject chosen was the following:—

Describe the Qualities of the Ideal Man

Now when this command was laid before the August Aunt, the guardian of the Inner Chambers, she was much perturbed in mind, for such a thing was unheard of in all the annals of the Empire. Recovering herself, she ventured to say that the discussion of such a question might raise very disquieting thoughts in the minds of the ladies, who could not be supposed to have any opinions at all on such a subject. Nor was it desirable that they should have. To every woman her husband and no other is and must be the Ideal Man. So it was always in the past; so it must ever be. There are certain things which it is dangerous to question or discuss, and how can ladies who have never spoken with any other man than a parent or a brother judge such matters?

"How, indeed," asked this lady of exalted merit, "can the bat form an idea of the sunlight, or the carp of the motion of wings? If his Celestial Majesty had commanded a discussion on the Superior Woman and the virtues which should adorn her, some sentiments not wholly unworthy might have been offered. But this is a calamity. They come unexpectedly, springing up like mushrooms, and this one is probably due to the lack of virtue of the inelegant and unintellectual person who is now speaking."

This she uttered in the presence of the principal beauties of the Inner Chambers. They sat or reclined about her in attitudes of perfect loveliness. Two, embroidering silver pheasants, paused with their needles suspended above the stretched silk, to hear the August Aunt. One, threading beads of jewel jade, permitted them to slip from the string and so distended the rose of her mouth in surprise that the small pearl-shells were visible within. The Lady Tortoise, caressing a scarlet and azure macaw, in her agitation so twitched the feathers that the bird, shrieking, bit her finger. The Lady Golden Bells blushed deeply at the thought of what was required of them; and the little Lady Summer Dress, youngest of all the assembled beauties, was so alarmed at the prospect that she began to sob aloud, until she met the eye of the August Aunt and abruptly ceased.

"It is not, however, to be supposed," said the August Aunt, opening her snuff-bottle of painted crystal, "that the minds of our deplorable and unattractive sex are wholly incapable of forming opinions. But speech is a

grave matter for women, naturally slow-witted and feeble-minded as they are. This unenlightened person recalls the Odes as saying:—

'A flaw in a piece of white jade
May be ground away,
But when a woman has spoken foolishly
Nothing can be done—'

a consideration which should make every lady here and throughout the world think anxiously before speech." So anxiously did the assembled beauties think, that all remained mute as fish in a pool, and the August Aunt continued:—

"Let Tsu-ssu be summoned. It is my intention to suggest to the Dragon Emperor that the virtues of women be the subject of our discourse, and I will myself open and conclude the discussion."

Tsu-ssu was not long in kotowing before the August Aunt, who despatched her message with the proper ceremonial due to its Imperial destination; and meanwhile, in much agitation, the beauties could but twitter and whisper in each other's ears, and await the response like condemned prisoners who yet hope for reprieve.

Scarce an hour had dripped away on the water-clock when an Imperial Missive bound with yellow silk arrived, and the August Aunt, rising, kotowed nine times before she received it in her jewelled hand with its delicate and lengthy nails ensheathed in pure gold and set with gems of the first water. She then read it aloud, the ladies prostrating themselves.

To the Princess of Han, the August Aunt, the Lady of the Nine Superior Virtues:—

"Having deeply reflected on the wisdom submitted, We thus reply. Women should not be the judges of their own virtues, since these exist only in relation to men. Let Our Command therefore be executed, and tablets presented before us seven days hence, with the name of each lady appended to her tablet."

It was indeed pitiable to see the anxiety of the ladies! A sacrifice to Kwan-Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, of a jewel from each, with intercession for aid, was proposed by the Lustrous Lady; but the majority shook their heads sadly. The August Aunt, tossing her head, declared that, as the Son of Heaven had made no comment on her proposal of opening and closing the discussion, she should take no part other than safeguarding the interests of propriety. This much increased the alarm, and, kneeling at her feet, the swan-like beauties, Deep-Snow and Winter Moon implored her aid and compassion. But, rising indignantly, the August Aunt sought her own apartments, and for the first time

the inmates of the Pepper Chamber saw with regret the golden dragons embroidered on her back.

It was then that the Round-Faced Beauty ventured a remark. This maiden, having been born in the far-off province of Suchuan, was considered a rustic by the distinguished elegance of the Palace and, therefore, had never spoken unless decorum required. Still, even her detractors were compelled to admit the charms that had gained her her name. Her face had the flawless outline of the pearl, and like the blossom of the plum was the purity of her complexion, upon which the darkness of her eyebrows resembled two silk-moths alighted to flutter above the brilliance of her eyes— eyes which even the August Aunt had commended after a banquet of unsurpassed variety. Her hair had been compared to the crow's plumage; her waist was like a roll of silk, and her discretion in habiting herself was such that even the Lustrous Lady and the Lady Tortoise drew instruction from the splendours of her robes. It created, however, a general astonishment when she spoke.

"Paragons of beauty, what is this dull and opaque-witted person that she should speak?"

"What, indeed!" said the Celestial Sister. "This entirely undistinguished person cannot even imagine."

A distressing pause followed, during which many whispered anxiously. The Lustrous Lady broke it.

"It is true that the highly ornamental Round-Faced Beauty is but lately come, yet even the intelligent Ant may assist the Dragon; and in the presence of alarm, what is decorum? With a tiger behind one, who can recall the Book of Rites and act with befitting elegance?"

"The high-born will at all times remember the Rites!" retorted the Celestial Sister. "Have we not heard the August Aunt observe: 'Those who understand do not speak. Those who speak do not understand'?"

The Round-Faced Beauty collected her courage.

"Doubtless this is wisdom; yet if the wise do not speak, who should instruct us? The August Aunt herself would be silent."

All were confounded by this dilemma, and the little Lady Summer-Dress, still weeping, entreated that the Round-Faced Beauty might be heard. The Heavenly Blossoms then prepared to listen and assumed attitudes of attention, which so disconcerted the Round-Faced Beauty that she blushed like a spring tulip in speaking.

"Beautiful ladies, our Lord, who is unknown to us all, has issued an august command. It cannot be disputed, for the whisper of disobedience is heard as thunder in the Imperial Presence. Should we not aid each other? If any lady has

formed a dream in her soul of the Ideal Man, might not such a picture aid us all? Let us not be 'say-nothing-do-nothing,' but act!"

They hung their heads and smiled, but none would allow that she had formed such an image. The little Lady Tortoise, laughing behind her fan of sandalwood, said roguishly: "The Ideal Man should be handsome, liberal in giving, and assuredly he should appreciate the beauty of his wives. But this we cannot say to the Divine Emperor."

A sigh rustled through the Pepper Chamber. The Celestial Sister looked angrily at the speaker.

"This is the talk of children," she said. "Does no one remember Kung-fu-tse's [Confucius] description of the Superior Man?"

Unfortunately none did— not even the Celestial Sister herself.

"Is it not probable," said the Round-Faced Beauty, "that the Divine Emperor remembers it himself and wishes—"

But the Celestial Sister, yawning audibly, summoned the attendants to bring rose-leaves in honey, and would hear no more.

The Round-Faced Beauty therefore wandered forth among the mossy rocks and drooping willows of the Imperial Garden, deeply considering the matter. She ascended the bow-curved bridge of marble which crossed the Pool of Clear Weather, and from the top idly observed the reflection of her rose-and-gold coat in the water while, with her taper fingers, she crumbled cake for the fortunate gold-fish that dwelt in it. And, so doing, she remarked one fish, four-tailed among the six-tailed, and in no way distinguished by elegance, which secured by far the largest share of the crumbs dropped into the pool. Bending lower, she observed this singular fish and its methods.

The others crowded about the spot where the crumbs fell, all herded together. In their eagerness and stupidity they remained like a cloud of gold in one spot, slowly waving their tails. But this fish, concealing itself behind a miniature rock, waited, looking upward, until the crumbs were falling, and then, rushing forth with the speed of an arrow, scattered the stupid mass of fish, and bore off the crumbs to its shelter, where it instantly devoured them.

"This is notable," said the Round-Faced Beauty. "Observation enlightens the mind. To be apart— to be distinguished— secures notice!" And she plunged into thought again, wandering, herself a flower, among the gorgeous tree peonies.

On the following day the August Aunt commanded that a writer among the palace attendants should, with brush and ink, be summoned to transcribe the wisdom of the ladies. She requested that each would give three days to thought, relating the following anecdote. "There was a man who, taking a piece of ivory, carved it into a mulberry leaf, spending three years on the task.

When finished it could not be told from the original, and was a gift suitable for the Brother of the Sun and Moon. Do likewise!"

"But yet, O Augustness!" said the Celestial Sister, "if the Lord of Heaven took as long with each leaf, there would be few leaves on the trees, and if-"

The August Aunt immediately commanded silence and retired. On the third day she seated herself in her chair of carved ebony, while the attendant placed himself by her feet and prepared to record her words.

"This insignificant person has decided," began her Augustness, looking round and unscrewing the amber top of her snuff-bottle, "to take an unintelligent part in these proceedings. An example should be set. Attendant, write!"

She then dictated as follows: "The Ideal Man is he who now decorates the Imperial Throne, or he who in all humility ventures to resemble the incomparable Emperor. Though he may not hope to attain, his endeavor is his merit. No further description it needed."

With complacence she inhaled the perfumed snuff, as the writer appended the elegant characters of her Imperial name.

If it is permissible to say that the faces of the beauties lengthened visibly, it should now be said. For it had been the intention of every lady to make an illusion to the Celestial Emperor and depict him as the Ideal Man. Nor had they expected that the August Aunt would take any part in the matter.

"Oh, but it was the intention of this commonplace and undignified person to say this very thing!" cried the Lustrous Lady, with tears in the jewels of her eyes. "I thought no other high-minded and distinguished lady would for a moment think of it."

"And it was my intention also!" fluttered the little Lady Tortoise, wringing her hands! "What now shall this most unlucky and unendurable person do? For three nights has sleep forsaken my unattractive eyelids, and, tossing and turning on a couch deprived of all comfort, I could only repeat, 'The Ideal Man is the Divine Dragon Emperor!'"

"May one of entirely contemptible attainments make a suggestion in this assemblage of scintillating wit and beauty?" inquired the Celestial Sister. "My superficial opinion is that it would be well to prepare a single paper to which all names should be appended, stating that His Majesty in his Dragon Divinity comprises all ideals in his sacred Person."

"Let those words be recorded," said the August Aunt. "What else should any lady of discretion and propriety say? In this Palace of Virtuous Peace, where all is consecrated to the Son of Heaven, though he deigns not to enter it, what other thought dare be breathed? Has any lady ventured to step outside such a limit? If so, let her declare herself!"

All shook their heads, and the August Aunt proceeded: "Let the writer record this as the opinion of every lady of the Imperial Household, and let each name be separately appended."

Had any desired to object, none dared to confront the August Aunt; but apparently no beauty so desired, for after three nights' sleepless meditation, no other thought than this had occurred to any.

Accordingly, the writer moved from lady to lady and, under the supervision of the August Aunt, transcribed the following: "The Ideal Man is the earthly likeness of the Divine Emperor. How should it be otherwise?" And under this sentence wrote the name of each lovely one in succession. The papers were then placed in the hanging sleeves of the August Aunt for safety.

By the decree of Fate, the father of the Round-Faced Beauty had, before he became an ancestral spirit, been a scholar of distinction, having graduated at the age of seventy-two with a composition commended by the Grand Examiner. Having no gold and silver to give his daughter, he had formed her mind, and had presented her with the sole jewel of his family-a pearl as large as a bean. Such was her sole dower, but the accomplished Aunt may excel the indolent Prince.

Yet, before the thought in her mind, she hesitated and trembled, recalling the lesson of the gold-fish; and it was with anxiety that paled her roseate lips that, on a certain day, she had sought the Willow Bridge Pavilion. There had awaited her a palace attendant skilled with the brush, and there in secrecy and dire affright, hearing the footsteps of the August Aunt in every rustle of leafage, and her voice in the call of every crow, did the Round-Faced Beauty dictate the following composition:—

"Though the sky rain pearls, it cannot equal the beneficence of the Son of Heaven. Though the sky rain jade it cannot equal his magnificence. He has commanded his slave to describe the qualities of the Ideal Man. How should I, a mere woman, do this? I, who have not seen the Divine Emperor, how should I know what is virtue? I, who have not seen the glory of his countenance, how should I know what is beauty? Report speaks of his excellencies, but I who live in the dark know not. But to the Ideal Woman, the very vices of her husband are virtues. Should he exalt another, this is a mark of his superior taste. Should he dismiss his slave, this is justice. To the Ideal Woman there is but one Ideal Man— and that is her lord. From the day she crosses his threshold, to the day when they clothe her in the garments of Immortality, this is her sole opinion. Yet would that she might receive instruction of what only are beauty and virtue in his adorable presence."

This being written, she presented her one pearl to the attendant and fled, not looking behind her, as quickly as her delicate feet would permit.

On the seventh day the compositions, engraved on ivory and bound with red silk and tassels, were presented to the Emperor, and for seven days more

he forgot their existence. On the eighth the High Chamberlain ventured to recall them to the Imperial memory, and the Emperor glancing slightly at one after another, threw them aside, yawning as he did so. Finally, one arrested his eyes, and reading it more than once he laid it before him and meditated. An hour passed in this way while the forgotten Lord Chamberlain continued to kneel. The Son of Heaven, then raising his head, pronounced these words: "In the society of the Ideal Woman, she to whom jealousy is unknown, tranquillity might possibly be obtained. Let prayer be made before the Ancestors with the customary offerings, for this is a matter deserving attention."

A few days passed, and an Imperial attendant, escorted by two mandarins of the peacock-feather and crystal-button rank, desired an audience of the August Aunt, and, speaking before the curtain, informed her that his Imperial Majesty would pay a visit that evening to the Hall of Tranquil Longevity. Such was her agitation at this honour that she immediately swooned; but, reviving, summoned all the attendants and gave orders for a banquet and musicians.

Lanterns painted with pheasants and exquisite landscapes were hung on all the pavilions. Tapestries of rose, decorated with the Five-Clawed Dragons, adorned the chambers; and upon the High Seat was placed a robe of yellow satin embroidered with pearls. All was hurry and excitement. The Blossoms of the Palace were so exquisitely decked that one grain more of powder would have made them too lily-like, and one touch more of rouge, too rosecheeked. It was indeed perfection, and, like lotuses upon a lake, or Asian birds, gorgeous of plumage, they stood ranged in the outer chamber while the Celestial Emperor took his seat.

The Round-Faced Beauty wore no jewels, having bartered her pearl for her opportunity; but her long coat of jade-green, embroidered with golden willows, and her trousers of palest rose left nothing to be desired. In her hair two golden peonies were fastened with pins of kingfisher work. The Son of Heaven was seated upon the throne as the ladies approached, marshaled by the August Aunt. He was attired in the Yellow Robe with the Flying Dragons, and upon the Imperial Head was the Cap, ornamented with one hundred and forty-four priceless gems. From it hung the twelve pendants of strings of pearls, partly concealing the august eyes of the Jade Emperor. No greater splendour can strike awe into the soul of man.

At his command the August Aunt took her seat upon a lesser chair at the Celestial Feet. Her mien was majestic, and struck awe into the assembled beauties, whose names she spoke aloud as each approached and prostrated herself. She then pronounced these words:

"Beautiful ones, the Emperor, having considered the opinions submitted by you on the subject of the Superior Man, is pleased to express his august

commendation. Dismiss, therefore, anxiety from your minds, and prepare to assist at the humble concert of music we have prepared for his Divine pleasure."

Slightly raising himself in his chair, the Son of Heaven looked down upon that Garden of Beauty, holding in his hand an ivory tablet bound with red silk.

"Lovely ladies," he began, in a voice that assuaged fear, "who among you was it that laid before our feet a composition beginning thus— 'Though the sky rain pearls'?"

The August Aunt immediately rose.

"Imperial Majesty, none! These eyes supervised every composition. No impropriety was permitted."

The Son of Heaven resumed: "Let that lady stand forth."

The words were few, but sufficient. Trembling in every limb, the Round-Faced Beauty separated herself from her companions and prostrated herself, amid the breathless amazement of the Blossoms of the Palace. He looked down upon her as she knelt, pale as a lady carved in ivory, but lovely as the lotus of Chang-Su. He turned to the August Aunt. "Princess of Han, my Imperial Aunt, I would speak with this lady alone."

Decorum itself and the custom of Palaces could not conceal the indignation of the August Aunt as she rose and retired, driving the ladies before her as a shepherd drives his sheep.

The Hall of Tranquil Longevity being now empty, the Jade Emperor extended his hand and beckoned the Round-Faced Beauty to approach. This she did, hanging her head like a flower surcharged with dew and swaying gracefully as a wind-bell, and knelt on the lowest step of the Seat of State.

"Loveliest One," said the Emperor, "I have read your composition. I would know the truth. Did any aid you as you spoke it? Was it the thought of your own heart?"

"None aided, Divine," said she, almost fainting with fear. "It was indeed the thought of this illiterate slave, consumed with an unwarranted but uncontrollable passion."

"And have you in truth desired to see your Lord?"

"As a prisoner in a dungeon desires the light, so was it with this low person."

"And having seen?"

"Augustness, the dull eyes of this slave are blinded with beauty."

She laid her head before his feet.

"Yet you have depicted, not the Ideal Man, but the Ideal Woman. This was not the Celestial command. How was this?"

"Because, O versatile and auspicious Emperor, the blind cannot behold the sunlight, and it is only the Ideal Woman who is worthy to comprehend and worship the Ideal Man. For this alone is she created."

A smile began to illuminate the Imperial Countenance. "And how, O Round-Faced Beauty, did you evade the vigilance of the August Aunt?"

She hung her head lower, speaking almost in a whisper. "With her one pearl did this person buy the secrecy of the writer; and when the August Aunt slept, did I conceal the paper in her sleeve with the rest, and her own Imperial hand gave it to the engraver of ivory."

She veiled her face with two jade-white hands that trembled excessively. On hearing this statement the Celestial Emperor broke at once into a very great laughter, and he laughed loud and long as a tiller of wheat. The Round-Faced Beauty heard it demurely until, catching the Imperial eye, decorum was forgotten and she too laughed uncontrollably. So they continued, and finally the Emperor leaned back, drying the tears in his eyes with his august sleeve, and the lady, resuming her gravity, hid her face in her hands, yet regarded him through her fingers.

When the August Aunt returned at the end of an hour with the ladies, surrounded by the attendants with their instruments of music, the Round-Faced Beauty was seated in the chair that she herself had occupied, and on the whiteness of her brow was hung the chain of pearls, which had formed the frontal of the Cap of the Emperor.

It is recorded that, advancing from honour to honour, the Round-Faced Beauty was eventually chosen Empress and became the mother of the Imperial Prince. The celestial purity of her mind and the absence of all flaws of jealousy and anger warranted this distinction. But it is also recorded that, after her elevation, no other lady was ever exalted in the Imperial favour or received the slightest notice from the Emperor. For the Empress, now well acquainted with the Ideal Man, judged it better that his experiences of the Ideal Woman should be drawn from herself alone. And as she decreed, so it was done. Doubtless Her Majesty did well.

It is known that the Emperor departed to the Ancestral Spirits at an early age, seeking, as the August Aunt observed, that repose which on earth could never more be his. But no one has asserted that this lady's disposition was free from the ordinary blemishes of humanity.

As for the Celestial Empress (who survives in history as one of the most astute rulers who ever adorned the Dragon Throne), she continued to rule her son and the Empire, surrounded by the respectful admiration of all.

23: Last Night When You Kissed Blanche Thompson

Bess Streeter Aldrich

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A Mason family story

JUNIOR MASON was twelve. The statement is significant. There are a few peevish people in the world who believe that all twelve-year-old boys ought to be hung. Others, less irritable, think that gently chloroforming them would seem more humane. A great many good-natured folks contend that incarceration for a couple of years would prove the best way to dispose of them.

Just how Springtown was divided in regard to Junior and his crowd of cronies depended largely upon the amiability of its citizens. But practically everyone looked upon that crowd as he looked upon other pests: rust, sparrows, moth-millers and potato bugs. As the boys came out of school tearing wildly down the street with Apache yells, more than one staid citizen had been seen to cross the road hurriedly, as one would get out of the way of fire engines, or molten lava rolling down from Vesuvius.

There were a dozen or more boys in the crowd, but the ringleaders were Runt Perkins, Shorty Marston and Junior Mason, and the only similarity between charity and Junior was that the greatest of these was Junior.

At home, by the united efforts of the other members of the Mason family, he was kept subdued into something resembling civilized man. Mother ruled him with a firm hand but an understanding heart. It is a fine old combination. The girls made strenuous efforts to assist in his upbringing, but their gratuitous services were not kindly looked upon by the young man, who believed it constituted mere butting-in.

Katherine it was who took upon herself the complete charge of his speech. Not an insignificant "have went" nor an infinitesimal "I seen" ever escaped the keen ears of his elder sister, who immediately corrected him. Mother sometimes thought Katherine a little severe when, in the interest of proper-speaking, she would stop him in the midst of an exciting account of a home-run. There were times, thought Mother, when the spirit of the thing was so much more important than the flesh in which it was clothed.

For arithmetic Junior showed such an aptitude that Father was wont to say encouragingly, "You'll be working in the bank one of these days, Son." At which "Son" would glow with a legitimate pride that quickly faded before the sight of a certain dull red book entitled "Working Lessons in English Grammar." Katherine labored patiently many an evening to assist in bringing Junior and

the contents of this particular volume somewhere within hailing distance of each other. Painstakingly she would go over the ground with him in preparation for his lesson, to be met with a situation something like this:

"Now we're ready. Read the first sentence, Junior."

And Junior would earnestly and enthusiastically sing-song: "'He took his coat down from the nail without a word of warning.'"

"What's the subject, Junior? Now think!"

"Coat," Junior would answer promptly. Then, seeing Katherine's grieved look, he would change quickly to "Nail." And when the look deepened to disgust he would grow wild and begin guessing frantically: "Warning? Took? From?"

Of the three girls Eleanor was his best friend. Rather boyish herself, she was still not so far removed from the glamour of ball games in the back pasture, the trappings of gophers, and circuses in the barn, but that the two held many things in common.

It was Marcia who was his arch enemy. Not that she committed any serious offenses. It was her attitude that exasperated him. She had a trick of perpetrating a lazy little smile on his every act, a smile that was of surpassing superiority. And she had a way of always jumping at the conclusion that he was dirty. "Go wash your hands!" was her sisterly greeting whenever he approached. She used it as consistently toward him as she used "How do you do?" to other people. Junior would jump into a heated argument over his perfect cleanliness, a discussion that consumed more time than an entire bath would have taken.

Junior's other enemy was Isabelle Thompson. The Thompsons were the Mason's nearest neighbors, the two yards being separated by a low hedge. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Tobias Thompson, and two daughters: Blanche, who was a little older than Eleanor Mason, and Isabelle, aged eleven.

Mrs. Thompson was a little thin woman who reveled in her reputation of being the neatest housekeeper in Springtown. Why do those characteristics so often go together? Does the thin, wiry condition of a woman's body beget neatness? Or does she keep herself worn thin by her energetic scrubbing? Is it a physiological or a psychological problem?

However that may be, Mrs. Thompson continued to lay strips of rag carpet over her best rugs to keep them clean, and then a layer of newspapers over the rag carpet to save that, too. Andy Christensen declared that she came clear out to the gate to meet him whenever he brought up the groceries on a muddy day.

Her neatness extended to the other members of her household. Tobias was proprietor of a combined grocery and meat market; and no pig, dizzily hanging

head downward from its peg in the back room, looked more pink or slick or skinned than he.

"It is certainly nice to think our meat comes from such a clean place," Mother often said.

"Yes," the frank Marcia agreed, "if you don't mind a little thing like underweight."

"Believe me!" Eleanor added, "Tobias would pinch a weenie in two if he dared."

Mrs. Thompson's mind was as neat as the rest of her. It, too, was a prim, tidy place with symmetrical shelves on which were stored a few meager but immaculate items, such as cleanliness being next to godliness, dancing a device of the devil, and that the only route to heaven was via the particular church to which she belonged. Yes, everything in her mind and heart was small and neat and necessary. Those organs were not all cluttered up with a lot of unessential rubbish like Mother Mason's. There were no tag-ends of emotion over the moon swinging out from behind a swirl of silver clouds, nor messy scraps of thrills because a thrush was singing in a rain-drenched lilac bush at twilight. Mother's was the soul of a poet. Mrs. Thompson's was the soul of a polyp.

She was one of the few people who riled Mother through and through. She would say, "I won't quarrel with any of my neighbors," as though the others ran around seeking trouble. Or, "I've always said honesty was the best policy." It was as though she felt she had invented honesty. You know the type? And even now, some Mrs. Thompson will read this and say, "Doesn't that for all the world remind you of Aunt Abbie?" After all, it is probably a good thing that some power has never yet decided to give us the gifting mentioned by Mr. Robert Burns.

The Masons, among themselves, always spoke of the elder Thompson daughter as "Blonche," and imitation of the broad and stilted pronunciation her mother used. As for Isabelle, Junior's crowd of boys had a pet name for her also. There is a portion of the human anatomy that is never mentioned in a drawing-room. The said section is bounded on the north by the lungs, on the south by the hip-bone sockets and on the east and west by the ribs. Although it is never spoken aloud in polite society, far be it from anyone to accuse Junior and Runt Perkins and Shorty Marston of constituting polite society. So in the privacy of their own crowd they always spoke of the younger Thompson girl as Is-a-Belly. It was not gallant nor was it kind, but twelve-year-old boys are quite often neither gallant nor kind.

As a consequence of their mother's narrow attitude, the two Thompson girls were self-consciously engrossed in their own attainments. Their mother believed that her daughters, like the king, could do no wrong, a view that was

thoroughly shared by the girls themselves. They were perfect in their manners, immaculate as to their persons, flawless in their conduct. But, lacking a sense of humor which would otherwise have been their redeeming quality, they were excellent specimens of that despicable creature— a prig.

The fun-loving Mason girls spoke always of "Blonche" as "The Perfect One,' and Junior continued to use that nameless, ungallant appellation for Isabelle whenever his boyish disgust of her faultless record grew too deep.

Boys of this age live on the border between childhood and adolescence. It is a sort of No Man's Land in which they seem not to know just where they belong. In this they are not unlike the maiden with reluctant feet. They are such a queer mixture of Youth and Childhood that one hour, with developing mind, they seem to be reaching out into the future to wrestle with man-sized problems, while the next hour, with no conscious understanding of the change, they abandon that mood to drop back into the trifling plays of babyhood.

This was an hour, this particular warm summer evening, when Junior had slipped back into babyhood. With all the inanity of which he was capable, he had pried off a loose slat in the trellis-work under the back porch, and, with much grunting and wiggling, had managed to crawl through. No, the motives of a twelve-year-old boy are not always governed by a rational cause. He just did it.

Scrounging under the porch, he looked around in the semi-darkness. His eye lighted on an old, battered, rusted tin street-car, a relic of younger if not happier days. He succeeded in pulling off one of the tin wheels. There was a hole in the center of the wheel left by the withdrawing of the hub. He held it to his mouth and blew. It gave forth a weird, plaintive sound like the mewing of a cat. Immediately, with that ability to become all things to all men, Junior felt himself taking on the characteristics of a cat. Fur seemed, in some miraculous way, to spring out on his body. With the erstwhile street-car wheel between his teeth and emitting continuous purring sounds, he pad-padded out from under the porch. With the capacity for sinking himself in an imaginary character, he felt in his heart all the sly, treacherous attributes of a car. Nay, more, he was a cat.

Out on the lawn he crawled through the grass of the side yard to the hedge, stopped to rub a pair of invisible whiskers against a weed, nibbled daintily at a stalk of catnip, and, settling back on his haunches, laid the street-car wheel aside to lap a presumably clean tongue over a slightly soiled paw. Then, with half-human, half-feline promptings, he cogitated plans for the rest of the evening.

Across the hedge at the Thompson home, someone was sitting in the hammock behind the vine-covered lattice-work of the porch. Junior could hear

the steady squeak-squeak of the swaying ropes. It would be Isabelle, curled and beribboned, daintily holding her big doll, likewise curled and beribboned. Just what there is in the contemplation of an immaculately clean, piously good, little girl to rouse the ire of a semi-soiled, ungodly little boy is one with mysteries of the Sphinx and the Mona Lisa smile. Junior, at the thought of Isabelle sitting placidly in the hammock, was seized with an uncontrollable desire to startle her out of the state of calmness into one of sudden agitation.

So he crept through an opening in the hedge into the Thompson yard, pausing with an imaginary distended tail, to crouch and spring at a robin in the grass. Failing to capture his prey, he crawled noiselessly toward the porch, placed his forepaw on the lattice-work, and emitting a low whining purr peered through the vines.

It was not Isabelle. It was Blanche. In the hammock with her sat Frank Marston, his arm casually thrown across the back of the hammock, his face in close proximity to hers.

The cat did not purr again. Open-mouthed, he took in the little scene before him, which spectacle included the placing of a hasty, boyish kiss on Blanche's cheek. Then the leading man and lady both giggled rather foolishly. They were very young.

Once again in the annals of history had curiosity killed the cat, for all feline characteristics immediately left the onlooker, and he became a twelve-year-old masculine biped.

He slipped noiselessly away, waiting until he had turned the corner of the Thompson house before he allowed the pent-up laughter within him to trickle forth. It was too rich for words that he had witnessed it. Wouldn't everyone laugh when he told them! He ran down the Thompson's side terrace, walked nonchalantly across the street and around the next block. On the way, he told the joke to three people, Runt Perkins and Hod Beeson, who delivered coal, and Lizzie Beadle, the town dressmaker. The reason he told no one else was the very simple one that those were all the people he met.

Reaching home by this circuitous route, he burst in upon the family with the tale.

"With my own eyes I seem 'em," he finished breathlessly

"Saw them," corrected Katherine, didactically.

"Saw 'em," Junior repeated.

If Katherine was concerned with Junior's manner of speaking, Mother was immediately concerned with the moral aspect of his spying, but Marcia and Eleanor thought only of the news.

"What do you know about that?" It was Marcia.

"Mrs. Thompson would have a fit and fall in it." Katherine, too, was growing interested.

"I wonder if Frankie was all scrubbed and sterilized," Eleanor put in.

"Girls! Girls!" Mother remonstrated.

"Young folks are most of all fools," was Tillie's affable contribution. At which Marcia and Eleanor wrung their hands and pretended to weep.

"Junior!" It was Mother who spoke severely. "You probably meant no harm, but let this be a lesson to you about sneaking up on anyone. Promise me you'll not tell a soul."

"I promise," Junior said glibly. But even as he spoke he cast a guilty thought at the gossip he had left behind him like the long tail of a Chinese kite.

The next night, the Mason family had just finished supper, for in Springtown one eats dinner as the sun crosses the meridian and supper as it sinks down behind the elms that line the distant banks of old Coon Creek.

Chairs were pushed back. Tillie had begun to pick up the dishes. Father was opening the evening paper. The white ruffled curtains swayed in and out. The girls were humming in concert "Somewhere a Voice is Calling." It was as peaceful a scene as the Acadian village of Grand Pré.

Just then The Voice called, but it was neither tender nor true. It came in clicking, indignant tones from Mrs. Thompson at the dining-room door. She came in like a hawk in a chicken yard. In angry tones she told them that Blonche had just heard what Junior had been telling around town about her, that there was not one word of truth in it, and that she wanted something done about it. On and on she went, delivering vindictive verbal uppercuts to Junior, making a self-righteous speech on the excellent quality of her girls' upbringing, and finished with "Neither one of my girls would allow a thing like that."

For one brief, fleeting moment, Mother had an unholy desire to retort, "Oh, of course, I've taught my girls to spoon."

During the onslaught the members of the family had remained rooted to their respective places like the king's family during the curse on the "Sleeping Beauty." When she had finished, the spell broke. Father was the first to stir. He stirred himself so thoroughly that he slipped quietly out of the dining-room into the kitchen. Do not be unduly harsh in your criticism of him. There are so many good American fathers like that. He could have diplomatically refused a loan to the governor. He might even have unflinchingly faced a masked bank robber. But he could not face his little angry neighbor. Mother, in exasperation, sometimes wondered how so successful a business man could be so helpless in domestic crises.

So it was Mother who took the stage. She questioned Junior. The latter, very red and visibly embarrassed, wanted nothing in the world so much as that the painful scene should end, even as that older masculine member of the family. So he did what almost any little boy would have done, what George Washington might have done, had there been twelve feminine eyes gazing at him in grief or anger or concern. He lied.

"I was just—" he mumbled, "just jokin'."

"You mean," Mother asked coldly, "that you made it up?" Junior nodded his head. And his guardian angel in sorrow, probably made a long black mark in The Book.

"Then," said Mother calmly, "you will go to every person you told and try to make right your very poor joke." She assured Mrs. Thompson that they would do all in their power to rectify matters, and that Junior would apologize to Blanche. Mrs. Thompson was mollified. She simpered a little. "You know me, Mrs. Mason. I don't like neighborhood quarrels."

"Neither do I," said Mother dryly.

Mrs. Thompson, in a state of mental satisfaction, wrapped her mantle of self-complacency about her and left.

"The old pole-cat!" Tillie remarked sweetly when the door closed. Although Tillie found plenty of faulty with the Mason children, herself, let some outsider do it and she was immediately on the warpath.

Everyone was perturbed. "Who did you tell?" Katherine demanded, and the fact that she did not say "whom" was proof positive that she was upset.

"I happened to tell Lizzie Beadle," Junior whimpered.

"Good night!" Eleanor threw up her hands. "You might just as well have put it on the front page of the Springtown 'Headlight.'"

They all talked to him at once. Katherine gave a hurried résumé of the poem that concerns shooting arrows and words into the air. It was all very hard on his nerves. So he got his cap and started to the door. Action, even if it were attempting to pick up spent and scattered arrows, seem preferable to the society of the critical women of his household.

Strangely enough it was Marcia who followed him out onto the porch. There were tears in her eyes. Careless, tender-hearted Marcia had impulsively erred so often herself that she felt more sympathy for her little brother than anyone else did.

"Junie!" She threw an arm around his shoulder. "You're like a knight of old— why, Junie, you're Sir Galahad. You're going on your white horse in search of the Holy Grail, only this time the Grail is Truth."

It pleased Junior's fancy. His drooping head lifted a little. He ran down the steps, and by the time he had unhitched an invisible white charger with gold

trappings, mounted him and started down the street, he was quite impressed with the nobility of his journey.

Sustained by the thought of the character he was impersonating, he stopped at the Thompson's and mumbled a hasty apology to the red-eyed Blanche. It was noticeable that neither the maker of the apology nor the recipient looked directly at the other.

He went next to Hod Beeson's. It was rather trying to explain his errand to him, Hod not knowing what Junior was talking about, as he had let the scandal go in one coal-grimed ear and out the other. Eventually, Hod closed the rambling confession with "All right, Sonny. That's all right."

So Junior rode next to the Beadles' little weather-beaten house and told fat, untidy Lizzie his message. Lizzie looked disappointed over the news. Perhaps she was thinking of a few arrows about it she, herself, had shot into the air. But she said, "You're some kid, Junie, to take all that trouble for a smartie like Blanche Thompson. Have a cookie."

Junior, further impressed with his praiseworthy conduct, rode on to the Perkinses, where he made known his errand to Runt and his mother.

"Now, look at that." Mrs. Perkins turned to her own offspring. "What a gentlemanly thing for Junior to do!"

After this Junior hated to give up his holy mission. It seemed uninteresting to turn around and go home after so few visits. So he began telling other people what he was doing. He told several of the boys of his crowd and Mrs. Hayes and the Winters's hired girl. He stopped Grandpa McCabe on the street and explained his self-abasement to that deaf old man. Grandpa couldn't sense it, but gathering that something was wrong at the Thompsons', he stopped in front of their home and leaned a long time on his cane, looking anxiously toward the house.

After that, with sudden inspiration, it struck Junior that no one had mentioned his apologizing to Frank. Surely that was an oversight on his mother's part. Did not one owe an apology to the kisser just as much as to the kissee?

So he rode up to the Marstons' Colonial home, dismounted and went in. The Marstons were eating dinner, as Springtown people do when they have company from the city. There was a rich uncle there and his pretty daughter, to say nothing of a charming friend she had brought with her. Nicky and Frank and Shorty all sat at the table, clothed in their best suits and manners.

Junior, standing humbly just inside the dining-room door, cap in hand, felt that here, before so appreciative an audience, was opportunity for the grand climax of his self-humiliation. So, in the polite tones of a well-bred boy, he respectfully apologized to Frank. It could not have been done with more

deference or Chesterfieldian grace. Junior had a swift desire that his sisters might have witnessed it.

A dull brick-red color surged over Frank's long, lean face. "What you talkin' about, kid?"

Junior dropped the rather formal, stilted tones of his former speech and dropped into his own familiar boyish-ones. He seemed deadly in earnest. Anyone hearing him could not help but be impressed with his sincerity. "You know, Frank, last night when you kissed Blanche Thompson— you thought you heard a cat mew? Well, Frank, it wasn't a cat. It was me. I'm around to all the neighbors apologizin' for sayin' I seen you."

Amid smiles from the guests, an embarrassed laugh from his mother, and unrestrained shouts from his dearly loved brothers, Frank got up. Junior sensed the fact that he was to pass out with Frank also. Not everyone is gifted with as delicate and acute sensibilities.

Out in the hall Frank grabbed his caller's shoulders in a crab-like pinch. Words hissed through his clenched teeth. These were the words: "I'd like to make you into mincemeat. You hike out of here and keep your mouth shut. Ja understand? Now, scoot!"

It was trying to Sir Galahad to have his high mission so misunderstood. He started home a little wearily, trying to forget Frank's baleful attitude and remember only those who had praised him. Of such is the kingdom of optimists.

The entire Mason family was ensconced on the front porch. They greeted him rather effusively. Everyone seemed in a softened mood toward him. The truth was, the brave way in which he faced the results of his ill-advised joke appealed to them all.

He sat down in the hammock by Katherine, who put her arm around him. It made him hot and uncomfortable but he stood it. Marcia threw him a smile and Eleanor gave him a stick of gum. He preferred the latter. Smiles are fleeting, but gum, with proper hoarding, lasts a week. Mother spoke to him cheerfully. Even Tillie neglected to look for dirt on his shoes. Father, his feet on the porch railing, gave a long rambling speech about veracity, a sort of truth-crushed-to-earth-Abraham-Lincoln monologue.

The family went to bed with that light-hearted feeling which comes after a painful domestic crisis has been passed. It was apparent to all, that Junior, in spite of the poor taste of his joke, had vindicated himself.

And the evening and the morning were the third day.

The members of the family straggled into breakfast one by one. Mother sighed as she saw them. She knew that the ideal way was for all the chairs to

be pushed back from the table simultaneously. But she could remember just once when it had happened— the Sunday morning the Bishop had been there.

Junior was the last to arrive. Several drops of water, creeping lingeringly down the side of his face, proclaimed to all who were inclined to be pessimistic that he had washed. He sat down with great gusto.

"Well, I hope old lady Thompson feels better now. Ya, I sure hope she does." He chuckled, spreading eleven cents' worth of butter on a griddle cake. "The old lady was purty excited, she was. 'N' so was Blonchie, till I fixed it all up fine about her 'n' Frankie. Ya, I fixed 'em. But don't you fergit it, no matter what I said last night, just the same, I seen 'em."

There was silence in the Mason dining-room. Everyone looked at Mother. Mother looked across at Father, sitting there in all his financial capableness and his domestic inability. Father looked helplessly back. Mother knew that she was expected, as usual, to take the steering wheel, but she felt like a skipper on an uncharted sea.

A son of hers had spied upon his neighbors, gossiped, and then lied about the truth. Was the falsehood of last evening a double-dyed sin? Or was it the spirit of knighthood— that gallant thing that has been handed down through the ages— the traditional honor with which a gentleman protects a lady's name? Mother gave it up. For the life of her, she did not quite know.

Junior, conscious of the impressive silence, decided that he was making a hit. And as it was not often given to him to create that kind of stir in this particular circle, he waxed visibly in pleases importance and genially reiterated, "Ya, no matter what I said, you can put this in your pipe— I seen 'em."

"Saw them," corrected Katherine mechanically, from pure force of habit.

"Saw 'm," repeated Junior, also from force of habit, and again a pregnant silence descended upon the breakfast table.

It was broken by Father. The assembled Masons looked at him expectantly as he cleared his throat, preliminary to speech. It was a desperate situation that could rouse Father to grip the domestic steering wheel. In Mother's expression, relief struggled with anxiety as to just what he was going to do. If he was going to thrash Junior— She half opened her lips, as Father gave another preliminary cough. Then he spoke.

"Looks a little like rain," he said. "Hope we don't have a wetting before the haying's over."

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24: The Smart Aleck

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

The Saturday Evening Post, 18 July 1914

CAP'N BUCK FLUTER, holding his watch in the approved conductor's grip, glanced back and forth the short length of the four-five accommodation and raised his free hand in warning:

"All aboard!"

From almost above his head it came:

"If you can't get a board get a scantlin'!"

Clustered at the White or shady end of the station, the sovereign Caucasians of Swango rocked up against one another in the unbridled excess of their merriment. Farther away, at the Colored or sunny end of the platform, the assembled representatives of the African population guffawed loudly, though respectfully. To almost anyone having the gift of spontaneous repartee it might have occurred to suggest the advisability of getting a plank provided you could not get a board. It took Gash Tuttle to think up scantling.

The humorist folded his elbows on the ledge of the window and leaned his head and shoulders out of the car, considering his people whimsically, yet benignantly. He wore attire suitable for traveling— a dented-in gray felt hat, adhering perilously to the rearmost slope of his scalp; a mail-order suit of light tan, with slashed seams and rows of buttons extending up the sleeves almost to the elbows; a hard-surfaced tie of pale blue satin; a lavender shirt, agreeably relieved by pink longitudinal stripings.

Except his eyes, which rather protruded, and his front teeth, which undoubtedly projected, all his features were in a state of active retreat— only, his nose retreated one way and his chin the other. The assurance of a popular idol who knows no rival was in his pose and in his poise. Alexander the Great had that look— if we may credit the likenesses of him still extant— and Napoleon Bonaparte had it, and David Garrick, to quote a few conspicuous examples.

Alone, of all those within hearing, Cap'n Buck Fluter did not laugh. Indeed, he did not even grin.

"All right, black boy," he said. "Let's go from here!"

The porter snatched up the wooden box that rested on the earth, flung it on the car platform and projected his person nimbly after it. Cap'n Buck swung himself up the step with one hand on the rail. The engine spat out a mouthful of hot steam and the wheels began to turn.

"Good-by, my honeys, 'cause I'm gone!" called out Mr. Tuttle, and he waved a fawn-colored arm in adieu to his courtiers, black and white. "I'm a-

goin' many and a-many a mile from you. Don't take in no bad money while your popper's away."

The station agent, in black calico sleeve-protectors and celluloid eyeshade, stretched the upper half of his body out the cubby-hole that served him for an office.

"Oh, you Gash!" he called. "Give my love to all the ladies."

The two groups on the platform waited, all expectant for the retort. Instantly it sped back to them, above the clacking voice of the train:

"That's all you ever would give 'em, ain't it?"

Mr. Gip Dismukes, who kept the livery stable, slapped Mr. Gene Brothers, who drove the bus, a resounding slap on the back.

"Ain't he jest ez quick ez a flash?" he demanded of the company generally.

The station agent withdrew himself inside his sanctum, his sides heaving to his mirthful emotions. He had drawn a fire acknowledged to be deadly at any range, but he was satisfied. The laugh was worth the wound.

Through the favored section traversed by the common carrier to whose care genius incarnate had just committed his precious person there are two kinds of towns— bus towns and non-bus towns. A bus town lies at an appreciable distance from the railroad, usually with a hill intervening, and a bus, which is painted yellow, plies between town and station. But a non-bus town is a town that has for its civic equator the tracks themselves. The station forms one angle of the public square; and, within plain sight and easy walking reach, the post office and at least two general stores stand; and handily near by is a one-story bank built of a stucco composition purporting to represent granite, thus signifying solidity and impregnability; and a two-story hotel, white, with green blinds, and porches running all the way across the front; also hitch rails; a livery stable; and a Masonic Hall.

Swango belonged to the former category. It was over the hill, a hot and dusty eighth of a mile away. So, having watched the departing four-five accommodation until it diminished to a smudgy dot where the V of the rails melted together and finally vanished, the assembled Swangoans settled back in postures of ease to wait for the up train due at three-eight, but reported two hours and thirty minutes late. There would still be ample time after it came and went to get home for supper.

The contemptuous traveling man who once said that only three things ever happened in Swango— morning, afternoon and night— perpetrated a libel, for he wilfully omitted mention of three other daily events: the cannon-ball, tearing through without stopping in the early forenoon; the three-eight up; and the four-five down.

So they sat and waited; but a spirit of depression, almost of sadness, affected one and all. It was as though a beaming light had gone out of their lives. Ginger Marable, porter and runner of the Mansard House, voiced the common sentiment of both races as he lolled on a baggage truck in the sunshine, with his cap of authority, crowned by a lettered tin diadem, shoved far back upon his wooly skull.

"Dat Mistah Gashney Tuttle he sho is a quick ketcher," stated Ginger with a soft chuckle. "W'ite an' black— we suttinly will miss Mistah Tuttle twell he gits back home ag'in."

Borne away from his loyal subjects to the pulsing accompaniment of the iron horse's snorted breath, the subject of this commentary extended himself on his red plush seat and considered his fellow travelers with a view to honing his agile fancy on the whetstones of their duller mentalities. On the whole, they promised but poor sport. Immediately in front of him sat a bride and groom, readily recognizable at a glance for what they were— the bride in cream-colored cashmere, with many ribbons; the groom in stiff black diagonals, with braided seams, and a white lawn tie. A red-faced man who looked as though he might be a deputy sheriff from somewhere slept uneasily one seat in the rear. He had his shoes off, revealing gray yarn socks. His mouth was ajar, and down in his throat he snored screechily, like a planing mill. The youngest member of a family group occupying two seats just across the aisle whimpered a desire. Its mother rummaged in a shoebox containing, among other delicacies, hard-boiled eggs, salt and pepper mixed and enveloped in a paper squill, blueberry pie, leaking profusely, and watermelon-rind preserves, and found what she sought— the lower half of a fried chicken leg. Satisfied by this gift the infant ceased from fretful repining, sucking contentedly at the meat end; and between sucks hammered contentedly with the drumstick on the seat back and window ledge, leaving lardy smears there in the dust.

Cap'n Buck— captain by virtue of having a regular passenger run— came through the car, collecting tickets. At no time particularly long on temper, he was decidedly short of it today. He was fifteen minutes behind his schedule— no unusual thing— but the locomotive was misbehaving. Likewise a difference of opinion had arisen over the proper identity of a holder of mileage in the smoker. He halted alongside Gash Tuttle, swaying on his legs to the roll and pitch of the car floor.

"Tickets?" he demanded crisply.

"Wee gates, Cap," answered the new passenger jovially. "How does your copperosity seem to sagashuate this evenin'?"

"Where goin'?" said Fluter, ignoring the pleasantry. "I'm in a hurry. What station?"

"Well," countered the irrepressible one, "what stations have you got?"

Cap'n Buck Fluter's cold eye turned meaningly toward the bell cord, which dipped like a tired clothesline overhead, and he snapped two fingers peevishly.

"Son," he said almost softly, "don't monkey with me. This here ain't my day for foolin'!"

Favored son of the high gods though he was, Gash Tuttle knew instantly now that this was indeed no day for fooling. Cap'n Buck was not a large man, but he had a way of growing to meet and match emergencies. He handled the Sunday excursions, which was the acid test of a trainman's grit. Coltish youths, alcoholically keened up or just naturally high spirited, who got on his train looking for trouble nearly always got off looking for a doctor. As regards persons wishful of stealing a ride, they never tried to travel with Cap'n Buck Fluter oftener than once. Frequently, for a period of time measurable by days or weeks, they were in no fit state to be traveling with anyone except a trained nurse.

Gash Tuttle quit his fooling. Without further ado— whatever an ado is— he surrendered his ticket, receiving in exchange a white slip with punchmarks in it, to wear in his hatband. Next came the train butcher bearing chewing gum, purple plums in paper cornucopias, examples of the light literature of the day, oranges which were overgreen, and bananas which were overripe, as is the way with a train butcher's oranges and bananas the continent over. In contrast with the conductor's dourness the train butcher's mood was congenially inclined to persiflage.

After an exchange of spirited repartee, at which the train butcher by an admiring shake of the head tacitly confessed himself worsted, our hero purchased a paper-backed work entitled, "The Jolly Old Drummer's Private Joke Book." This volume, according to the whispered confidences of the seller, contained tales of so sprightly a character that even in sealed covers it might be sent by mail only at the sender's peril; moreover, the wink which punctuated this disclosure was in itself a promise of the spicy entertainment to be derived from perusal thereof. The price at present was but fifty cents; later it would go up to a dollar a copy; this, then, was a special and extraordinary rate.

The train continued on its course— not hurriedly, but with reasonable steadfastness and singleness of purpose. After much the same fashion the sun went down. The bride repeatedly whisked cindery deposits off her cashmered lap; the large-faced man, being awakened by one of his own snores, put on his shoes and indulged in fine-cut tobacco, internally applied; but the youngest passenger now slept all curled up in a moist little bundle, showing an expanse of plump neck much mottled by heat-rash, and clutching in one greased and

gritted fist the denuded shank-bone of a chicken with a frieze of gnawed tendons adhering to its larger joint.

At intervals the train stopped at small way stations, bus or non-bus in character as the case might be, to let somebody off or somebody on. Cap'n Buck now made his trips carrying his lantern— the ornate nickel-plated one that had been awarded to him in the voting contest for the most popular trainman at the annual fair and bazaar of True Blue Lodge of the Junior Order of American Mechanics. It had his proper initials— J. J. F.— chased on its glass chimney in old English script, very curlicue and ornamental. He carried it in the crook of his left elbow with the handle round his biceps; and when he reached the end of his run he would extinguish its flame, not by blowing it out but by a quick, short, expert jerk of his arm. This is a trick all conductors seek to acquire; some of them succeed.

Twilight, the stage manager of night, had stolen insidiously on the scene, shortening up the backgrounds and blurring the perspectives; and the principal character of this tale, straining his eyes over the fine print, had reached the next to the last page of "The Jolly Old Drummer's Private Joke Book" and was beginning to wonder why the postal authorities should be so finicky in such matters and in a dim way to wish he had his fifty cents back, when with a glad shriek of relief the locomotive, having bumped over a succession of yard switches, drew up under a long open shed alongside a dumpy brick structure. To avoid any possible misunderstanding this building was labeled Union Depot in large letters and at both ends.

Being the terminus of the division, it was the train's destination and the destination of Mr. Tuttle. He possessed himself of an imitation leather handbag and descended on solid earth with the assured manner of a seasoned and experienced traveler. Doubtless because of the flurry created by the train's arrival and the bustling about of other arrivals his advent created no visible stir among the crowd at the terminal. At least he noticed none. Still, these people had no way of knowing who he was.

In order to get the Union Depot closer to the railroad it had been necessary to place it some distance away from the heart of things; even so, metropolitan evidences abounded. A Belt Line trolley car stood stationary, awaiting passengers; a vociferous row of negro hackmen were kept in their proper places by a uniformed policeman; and on the horizon to the westward a yellow radiance glowed above an intervening comb of spires and chimneys, showing where the inhabitants of the third largest second-class city in the state made merry at carnival and street fair, to celebrate the dedication and opening of their new Great White Way— a Great White Way seven blocks long and

spangled at sixty-foot intervals with arc lights disposed in pairs on ornamental iron standards. Hence radiance.

Turning westward, therefore, Mr. Tuttle found himself looking along a circumscribed vista of one-story buildings with two-story fronts— that is to say, each wooden front wall extended up ten or fifteen feet above the peak of the sloping roof behind it, so that, viewed full-on, the building would have the appearance of being a floor taller than it really was. To add to the pleasing illusion certain of these superstructures had windows painted elaborately on their slab surfaces; but to one seeking a profile view the false work betrayed a razor-like thinness, as patently flat and artificial as stage scenery.

Travelers from the Eastern seaboard have been known to gibe at this transparent artifice. Even New York flat dwellers, coming direct from apartment houses which are all marble foyers and gold-leaf elevator grilles below and all dark cubby-holes and toy kitchens above, have been known to gibe; which fact is here set forth merely to prove that a sense of humor depends largely on the point of view.

To our Mr. Tuttle such deceits were but a part of the ordered architectural plan of things, and they moved him not. What did interest him was to note that the nearmost of these bogusly exalted buildings displayed, above swinging twin doors, a cluster of lights and a sign testifying that this was the First Chance Saloon. Without looking he sensed that the reverse of that Janus-faced sign would advertise this same establishment as being the Last Chance. He did not know about Janus, but he did know about saloons that are handily adjacent to union depots. Moreover, an inner consciousness advised him that after a dry sixty-mile trip he thirsted amain. He took up his luggage and crossed the road, and entered through the knee-high swinging doors.

There was a bar and a bar mirror behind it. The bar was decorated at intervals with rectangles of fly paper, on the sticky surfaces of which great numbers of flies were gummed fast in a perished or perishing state; but before they became martyrs to the fad of sanitation these victims had left their footprints thickly on the mirror and on the fringes of colored tissue paper that dangled from the ceiling. In a front corner, against a window, was a lunch counter, flanked on one side by stools and serving as a barricade for an oil stove and shelves of cove oysters in cans, and hams and cheeses for slicing, and vinegar cruets and pepper casters and salt cellars crusted with the saline deposits of the years. A solitary patron was lounging against the bar in earnest conversation with the barkeeper; but the presiding official of the food-purveying department must have been absent on business or pleasure, for of him there was no sign.

Gash Tuttle ordered a beer. The barkeeper filled a tall flagon with brew drawn from the wood, wiped the clinging froth from its brim with a spatulate tool of whittled cedar, and placed the drink before the newcomer, who paid for it out of a silver dollar. Even as Mr. Tuttle scooped in his change and buried the lower part of his face in the circumference of the schooner he became aware that the other customer had drawn nearer and was idly rattling a worn leather cup, within which dice rapped against the sides like little bony ghosts uneasy to escape from their cabinet at a séance.

The manipulator of the dice held a palm cupped over the mouth of the cup to prevent their escape. He addressed the barkeeper:

"Flem," he said, "you're such a wisenheimer, I'll make you a proposition: I'll shake three of these here dice out, and no matter whut they roll I'll betcha I kin tell without lookin' whut the tops and bottoms will come to— whut the spots'll add up to."

The other desisted from rinsing glassware in a pail beneath the bar.

"Which is that?" he inquired skeptically. "You kin tell beforehand whut the top and bottom spots'll add up?"

"Ary time and every time!"

"And let me roll 'em myself?"

"And let you roll 'em yourself— let anybody roll 'em. I don't need to touch 'em, even."

"How much'll you risk that you kin do that, Fox?" Roused greed was in the speaker's tone.

"Oh, make it fur the drinks," said Fox— "jest fur the drinks. I ain't aimin' to take your money away frum you. I got all the money I need." For the first time he seemed to become aware of a third party and he turned and let a friendly hand fall on the stranger's shoulder. "Tell you whut, Flem, we'll make it drinks fur this gent too. Come on, brother," he added; "you're in on this. It's my party if I lose, which I won't, and ole Flem's party if he loses, which he shore will."

It was the warmth of his manner as much as the generosity of his invitation that charmed Mr. Tuttle. The very smile of this man Fox invited friendship; for it was a broad smile, rich in proteids and butterfats. Likewise his personality was as attractively cordial as his attire was striking and opulent.

"'Slide or slip, let 'er rip!'" said Mr. Tuttle, quoting the poetic words of a philosopher of an earlier day.

"That's the talk!" said Fox genially. He pushed the dice box across the bar. "Go to it, bo! Roll them bones! The figure is twenty-one!"

From the five cubes in the cup the barkeeper eliminated two. He agitated the receptacle violently and then flirted out the three survivors on the wood.

They jostled and crocked against one another, rolled over and stopped. Their uppermost faces showed an ace, a six and a five.

"Twelve!" said Flem.

"Twelve it is," echoed Fox.

"A dozen raw," confirmed Gash Tuttle, now thoroughly in the spirit of it.

"All right, then," said Fox, flashing a beam of admiration toward the humorist. "Now turn 'em over, Flem— turn 'em over careful."

Flem obeyed, displaying an ace, a deuce and a six.

"And nine more makes twenty-one in all!" chortled Fox triumphantly.

As though dazed, the barkeeper shook his head.

"Well, Foxey, ole pardner, you shore got me that time," he confessed begrudgingly. "Whut'll it be, gents? Here, I reckin the cigars is on me too, after that." From a glass-topped case at the end of the bar alongside Gash Tuttle he produced a full box and extended it hospitably. "The smokes is on the house— dip in, gents. Dip in. Try an Old Hickory; them's pure Tampas— ten cents straight."

He drew the beers— large ones for the two, a small one for himself— and raised his own glass to them.

"Here's to you and t'ward you!" he said.

"Ef I hadn't a-met you I wouldn't a-knowed you," shot back Gash Tuttle with the lightning spontaneity of one whose wit moves in boltlike brilliancy; and at that they both laughed loudly and, as though dazzled by his flashes, bestowed on him the look that is ever the sweetest tribute to the jester's talents.

The toast to a better acquaintance being quaffed and lights exchanged, the still nonplussed Flem addressed the winners:

"Well, boys, I thought I knowed all there was to know about dice— poker dice and crap dice too; but live and learn, as the feller says. Say, Fox, put me on to that trick— it'll come in handy. I'll ketch Joe on it when he gits back," and he nodded toward the lunch counter.

"You don't need to know no more'n you know about it already," expounded Fox. "It's bound to come out that way."

"How is it bound to come out that way?"

"Why, Flem, it's jest plain arithmetic; mathematics— that's all. Always the tops and bottoms of any three dice come to twenty-one. Here, gimme that cup and I'll prove it."

In rapid succession, three times, he shook the cubes out. It was indeed as the wizard had said. No matter what the sequence, the complete tally was ever the same— twenty-one.

"Now who'd 'a' thought it!" exclaimed Flem delightedly. "Say, a feller could win a pile of dough workin' that trick! I'd 'a' fell fur some real money myself."

"That's why I made it fur the drinks," said the magnanimous Fox. "I wouldn't put it over on a friend— not for no amount; because it's a sure-thing proposition. It jest naturally can't lose! I wouldn't 'a' tried to skin this pardner here with it even if I'd 'a' thought I could." And once more his hand fell in flattering camaraderie on a fawn-colored shoulder. "I know a regular guy that's likewise a wise guy as soon as I see him. But with rank strangers it'd be plumb different. The way I look at it, a stranger's money is anybody's money—"

He broke off abruptly as the door hinges creaked. A tall, thin individual wearing a cap, a squint and a cigarette, all on the same side of his head, had entered. He stopped at the lunch counter as though desirous of purchasing food.

"Sh-h! Listen!" Fox's subdued tones reached only the barkeeper and Mr. Tuttle. "That feller looks like a mark to me. D'ye know him, Flem?"

"Never seen him before," whispered back Flem after a covert scrutiny of the latest arrival.

"Fine!" commented Fox, speaking with rapidity, but still with low-toned caution. "Jest to test it, let's see if that sucker'll fall. Here"— he shoved the dice cup into Gash Turtle's grasp— "you be playin' with the bones, sorter careless. You kin have the first bet, because I've already took a likin' to you. Then, if he's willin' to go a second time, I'll take him on fur a few simoleons." The arch plotter fell into an attitude of elaborate indifference. "Go ahead, Flem; you toll him in."

Given a guarantee of winning, and who among us is not a born gamester?— Gash Tuttle's cheeks flushed with sporting blood as he grabbed for the cup. All his corpuscles turned to red and white chips— red ones mostly. As for the barkeeper, he beyond doubt had the making of a born conspirator in him. He took the cue instantly.

"Sorry, friend," he called out, "but the grub works is closed down temporary. Anything I kin do fur you?"

"Well," said the stranger, edging over, "I did want a fried-aig sandwich, but I might change my mind. Got any cold lager on tap?"

"Join us," invited Fox; "we're jest fixin' to have one. Make it beer all round," he ordered the barkeeper without waiting for the newcomer's answer.

Beer all round it was. Gash Tuttle, too eager for gore to more than sip his, toyed with the dice, rolling them out and scooping them up again.

"Want to shake for the next round, anybody?" innocently inquired the squint-eyed person, observing this byplay.

"The next round's on the house," announced Flem, obeying a wink of almost audible emphasis from Fox.

"This here gent thinks he's some hand with the bones," explained Fox, addressing the stranger and flirting a thumb toward Gash Tuttle. "He was sayin' jest as you come in the door yonder that he could let anybody else roll three dice, and then he could tell, without lookin' even, whut the tops and bottoms would add up to?"

"Huh?" grunted the squinty-eyed man. "Has he got any money in his clothes that says he kin do that? Where I come frum, money talks." He eyed Gash Tuttle truculently, as though daring him to be game.

"My money talks too!" said Mr. Tuttle with nervous alacrity. He felt in an inner vest pocket, producing a modest packet of bills. All eyes were focused on it.

"That's the stuff!" said Fox with mounting enthusiasm. "How much are you two gents goin' to bet one another? Make it fur real money— that is, if you're both game!"

"If he don't touch the dice at all I'll bet him fur his whole roll," said the impetuous newcomer.

"That's fair enough, I reckin," said Fox. "Tell you whut— to make it absolutely fair I'll turn the dice over myself and Flem'll hold the stakes. Then there can't be no kick comin' from nobody whatsoever, kin there?" He faced their prospective prey. "How strong are you?" he demanded, almost sneeringly. "How much are you willin' to put up against my pardner here?"

"Any amount! Any amount!" snapped back the other, squinting past Fox at Gash Tuttle's roll until one eye was a button and the other a buttonhole. "Twenty-five— thirty— thirty-five— as much as forty dollars. That's how game I am."

Avarice gnawed at the taproots of Gash Tuttle's being, but caution raised a warning hand. Fifteen was half of what he had and thirty was all. Besides, why risk all on the first wager, even though there was no real risk? A person so impulsively sportive as this victim would make a second bet doubtlessly. He ignored the stealthy little kick his principal accomplice dealt him on the shin. "I'll make it fur fifteen," he said, licking his lips.

"If that's as fur as you kin go, all right," said the slit-eyed man, promptly posting his money in the outstretched hand of the barkeeper, who in the same motion took over a like amount from the slightly trembling fingers of the challenger.

Squint-eye picked up the dice cup and rattled its occupants.

"Come on now!" he bantered Gash Tuttle. "Whut'll they add up, tops and bottoms?"

"Twenty-one!" said Mr. Tuttle.

"Out they come, then!"

And out they did come, dancing together, tumbling and somersaulting, and finally halting— a deuce, a trey and a four.

"Three and two is five and four is nine," Gash Tuttle read off the pips. "Now turn 'em over!" he bade Fox. "That's your job— turn 'em over!" He was all tremulous and quivery inside.

In silence Fox drew the nearest die toward him and slowly capsized it. "Four," he announced.

He flipped the deuce end for end, revealing its bottom: "Five!"

He reached for the remaining die— the four-spot. Dragging it toward him, his large fingers encompassed it for one fleeting instance, hiding it from view entirely; then he raised his hand: "Six!"

"Makin' twenty-one in all," stuttered Gash Tuttle. He reached for the stakes.

"Nix on that quick stuff!" yelled his opponent, and dashed his hand aside. "The tops come to nine and the bottoms to fifteen— that's twenty-four, the way I figger. You lose!" He pouched the money gleefully.

Stunned, Gash Tuttle contemplated the upturned facets of the three dice. It was true— it was all too true! Consternation, or a fine imitation of that emotion, filled the countenances of Flem and of Fox.

"That's the first time I ever seen that happen," Fox whispered in the loser's ear. "Bet him again— bet high— and git it all back. That's the ticket!"

Mr. Tuttle shook his head miserably, but stubbornly. For this once, in the presence of crushing disaster, the divine powers of retort failed him. He didn't speak— he couldn't!

"Piker money! Piker money!" chanted the winner. "Still, ever' little bit helps— eh, boys?"

And then and there, before Gash Tuttle's bulging and horrified eyes, he split up the winnings in the proportion of five for Flem and five for Fox and five for himself. Of a sudden the loser was shouldered out of the group. He looked not into friendly faces, but at contemptuous backs and heaving shoulders. The need for play acting being over, the play actors took their ease and divided their pay. The mask was off. Treachery stood naked and unashamed.

Reaching blindly for his valise, Gash Tuttle stumbled for the door, a load lying on his daunted spirit as heavy as a stone. Flem hailed him.

"Say, hold on!" He spoke kindly. "Ain't that your quarter yonder?"

He pointed to a coin visible against the flat glass cover of the cigar case.

"Sure it is— it's yourn. I seen you leave it there when I give you the change out of that dollar and purposed to tell you 'bout it at the time, but it slipped my

mind. Go on and pick it up— it's yourn. You're welcome to it if you take it now!"

Automatically Gash Tuttle reached for the quarter— small salvage from a great and overwhelming loss. His nails scraped the glass, touching only glass. The quarter was cunningly glued to its underside. Surely this place was full of pitfalls. A guffawed chorus of derision rudely smote his burning ears.

"On your way, sucker! On your way!" gibed the perfidious Fox, swinging about with his elbows braced against the bar and a five-dollar bill held with a touch of cruel jauntiness between two fingers.

"Whut you got in the gripsack— hay samples or punkins?" jeered the exultant Slit-Eye.

"Yes; whut is the valise fur?" came Flem's parting taunt.

Under their goadings his spirit rallied.

"Cat's fur, to make kittens' britches!" he said. Then, as a final shot: "You fellers needn't think you're so derned smart— I know jest exactly how you done it!"

He left them to chew on that. The parting honors were his, he felt, but the spoils of war— alas!— remained in the camp of the enemy. Scarcely twenty minutes at the outside had elapsed since his advent into city life, and already one-half of the hoarded capital he had meant should sustain him for a whole gala week was irretrievably gone, leaving behind an emptiness, a void as it were, which ached like the socket of a newly drawn tooth.

Vague, formless thoughts of reprisal, of vengeance exacted an hundredfold when opportunity should fitly offer, flitted through his numbed brain. Meantime though adventure beckoned; half a mile away or less a Great White Way and a street fair awaited his coming. That saffron flare against the sky yonder was an invitation and a promise. Sighing, he shifted his valise from one hand to the other.

The Belt Line car, returning stationward, bore him with small loss of time straightway to the very center of excitement; to where bunting waved on store fronts and flag standards swayed from trolley poles, converting the County Square into a Court of Honor, and a myriad lights glowed golden russet through the haze of dust kicked up by the hurrying feet of merrymaking thousands. Barkers barked and brass bands brayed; strange cries of man and beast arose, and crowds eddied to and fro like windblown leaves in a gusty November. And all was gaiety and abandon. From the confusion certain sounds detached themselves, becoming intelligible to the human understanding. As for example:

"Remembah, good people, the cool of the evenin' is the time to view the edgycated ostritch and mark his many peculiarities!"

And this:

"The big red hots! The g-e-r-reat big, juicy, sizzlin' red hots! The eriginal hot-dog sand-wige— fi' cents, halluf a dime, the twentieth part of a dollah! Here y'are! Here y'are! The genuwine Mexican hairless Frankfurter fer fi' cents!"

And this:

"Cornfetti! Cornfetti! All the colors of the rainbow! All the pleasures of the Maudie Graw! A large full sack for a nickel! Buy cornfetti and enjoy yourselves."

And so on and so forth.

The forlorn youth, a half-fledged school-teacher from a back district, who had purchased the county rights of a patent razor sharpener from a polished gentleman who had had to look at the map before he even knew the name of the county, stood on a dry-goods box at the corner of Jefferson and Yazoo, dimly regretful of the good money paid out for license and unsalable stock, striving desperately to remember and enunciate the patter taught him by the gifted promoter. For the twentieth time he lifted his voice, essaying his word-formula in husky and stuttering accents for the benefit of swirling multitudes, who never stopped to listen:

"Friends, I have here the Infallible Patent Razor Sharpener. 'Twill sharpen razors, knives, scissors, scythe blades or any edged tool. If you don't believe it will—" He paused, forgetting the tag line; then cleared his throat and improvised a finish: "If you don't believe it will— why, it will!" It was a lame conclusion and fruitful of no sales.

How different the case with a talented professional stationed half a block down the street, who nonchalantly coiled and whirled and threw a lasso at nothing; then gathered in the rope and coiled and threw it again, always at nothing at all, until an audience collected, being drawn by a desire to know the meaning of a performance seemingly so purposeless. Then, dropping the rope, he burst into a stirring panegyric touching on the miraculous qualifications of the Ajax Matchless Cleaning and Washing Powder, which made bathing a sheer pleasure and household drudgery a joy.

Never for one moment abating the flow of his eloquence, this person produced a tiny vial, held it aloft, uncorked it, shook twenty drops of its colorless fluid contents on the corrugated surface of a seemingly new and virgin sponge; then gently kneaded and massaged the sponge until— lo and behold!— lather formed and grew and mounted and foamed, so that the yellow lump became a mass of creamy white suds the size of a peck measure, and from it dripped huge bubbles that foamed about his feet and expired

prismatically, as the dolphin was once believed to expire, leaving smears upon the boards whereon the operator stood.

Thereat dimes flowed in on him in clinking streams, and bottles of the Matchless flowed from him until, apparently grown weary of commerce, he abandoned his perch, avowedly for refreshment, but really— this being a trade secret— to rub shavings of soft yellow soap into the receptive pores of a fresh sponge and so make it ready against the next demonstration.

Through such scenes Gash Tuttle wandered, a soul apart. He was of the carnival, but not in it— not as yet. With a pained mental jolt he observed that about him men of his own age wore garments of a novel and fascinating cut. By contrast his own wardrobe seemed suddenly grown commonplace and prosaic; also, these city dwellers spoke a tongue that, though lacking, as he inwardly conceded, in the ready pungency of his own speech, nevertheless had a saucy and attractive savor of novelty in its phrasing. Indeed, he felt lonely. So must a troubadour of old have felt when set adrift in an alien and hostile land. So must the shining steel feel when separated from the flint on which it strikes forth its sparks of fire. I take it a steel never really craves for its flint until it parts from it.

As he wormed through a group of roistering youth of both sexes he tripped over his own valise; a wadded handful of confetti struck him full in the cheek and from behind him came a gurgle of laughter. It was borne in on him that he was the object of mirth and not its creator. His neck burned. Certainly the most distressing situation which may beset a humorist follows hard on the suspicion that folks are laughing— not with him, but at him!

He hurried on as rapidly as one might hurry in such crowded ways. He was aware now of a sensation of emptiness which could not be attributed altogether to the depression occasioned by his experience at the First and Last Chance Saloon; and he took steps to stay it. He purchased and partook of hamburger sandwiches rich in chopped onions.

Later it would be time to find suitable lodgings. The more alluring of the pay-as-you-enter attractions were yet to be tested. By way of a beginning he handed over a ten-cent piece to a swarthy person behind a blue pedestal, and mounting eight wooden steps to a platform he passed behind a flapping canvas curtain. There, in company with perhaps a dozen other patrons, he leaned over a wooden rail and gazed downward into a shallow tarpaulin-lined den where a rather drowsy-appearing, half-nude individual, evidently of Ethiopian antecedents, first toyed with some equally drowsy specimens of the reptile kingdom and then partook sparingly and with no particular avidity of the tail of a very small garter snake.

Chance, purely, had led Gash Tuttle to select the establishment of Osay rather than that of the Educated Ostrich, or the Amphibious Man, or Fatima the Pearl of the Harem, for his first plunge into carnival pleasures; but chance is the hinge on which many moving events swing. It was so in this instance.

Osay had finished a light but apparently satisfying meal and the audience was tailing away when Gash Tuttle, who happened to be the rearmost of the departing patrons, felt a detaining touch on his arm. He turned to confront a man in his shirtsleeves— a large man with a pock-marked face, a drooping moustache and a tiger-claw watch charm on his vest. It was the same man who, but a minute before, had delivered a short yet flattering discourse touching the early life and manners and habits of the consumer of serpents— in short, the manager of the show and presumably its owner.

"Say!" began this gentleman.

"Say yourself," flashed Gash, feeling himself on safe ground once more; "your mouth's open."

The man grinned in appreciation of the thrust— a wincing grin, as though owning himself beaten in the very first sally.

"All right, old scout," he said jovially, "I will. Come back here where nobody can't hear me while I say it." He drew the younger man to the inner side of the platform and sank his voice to a confidential rumble. "Soon as I seen you comin' in I says to myself, 'That's the party I'm lookin' for.' You don't live here in this town, do you?"

Gash Tuttle shook his head and started to speak, but the big man was going on. Plainly he was not one to waste time in idle preliminaries:

"That's the way I doped it. You're in the profesh, ain't you? You've been workin' this street-fair game somewhere, ain't you?"

"No," Gash Tuttle confessed, yet somehow at the same time feeling flattered.

"Well, that just goes to show how a guy can be fooled," said the Osay man. "I'd 'a' swore you was on to all the ropes in this biz. Anyway, I know just by the cut of your jib you're the party I'm lookin' for. That's why I braced you. My name's Fornaro; this here is my outfit. I want somebody to throw in with me— and I've made up my mind you're the party I'm lookin' for."

Once bitten, twice shy; and Gash Tuttle's fifteen-dollar bite was still raw and bleeding. He started to pull away.

"I wouldn't choose to invest in anything more until I'd looked it over," he began. The large man grasped him by his two lapels and broke in on him, drowning out the protest before it was well started.

"Who said anything about anybody investin' anything?" he demanded. "Did I? No. Then listen to me a minute— just one minute. I'm in a hurry my own self and I gotta hand you this proposition out fast."

Sincerity was in his tone; was in his manner too. Even as he spoke his gaze roved past Gash Tuttle toward the tarpaulin draperies which contributed to their privacy, and he sweat freely; a suetlike dew spangled his brow. There was a noise outside. He listened intently, then fixed a mesmerizing stare on Gash Tuttle and spoke with great rapidity and greater earnestness:

"You see, I got some other interests here. Besides this pit show, I'm a partner in a store pitch and a mitt-joint; and, what with everything, I'm overworked. That's the God's truth— I'm overworked! What I need is a manager here. And soon as I seen how you handled yourself I says to myself, 'That's the party I want to hire for manager.' What did you say your name was?"

"Tuttle— Gashney P. Tut—"

"That's enough— the Tuttle part will do for me. Now, Tuttle, set down that there keister of yours— that gripsack— and listen. I gotta go down the street for a half hour— maybe an hour— and I want you to take charge. You're manager while I'm gone— the joint is yours till I git back. And tonight, later on, we'll fix up a deal together. If you think you like the job we'll make a reg'lar arrangement; we'll make it permanent instid of temporary. See?"

"But— but—"

"But nothin'! I want to find out if my first judgment about you is correct. See? I want to make a test. See? That's it— a test. You ain't goin' to have much to do, first off. The nigger is all right s'long as he gits his dope." He motioned toward the canvas-lined retreat where Osay now dozed heavily among the coils of his somnolent pets. "And Crummy— that's my outside man— kin handle the front and make the spiel, and take in what money comes in. I'll mention to him as I'm leavin' that you're in charge. Probably I'll be back before time for the next blow-off. All you gotta do is just be manager— that's all; and if anybody comes round askin' for the manager, you're him. See?"

His impetuosity was hypnotizing— it was converting; nay, compelling. It was enough to sweep any audience off its feet, let alone an audience of one. Besides, where lives the male adult between the ages of nine and ninety who in his own mind is not convinced that he has within him the making of a great and successful amusement purveyor? Still, Gash Tuttle hesitated. The prospect was alluring, but it was sudden— so sudden.

As though divining his mental processes, the man Fornaro added a clinching and a convincing argument.

"To prove I'm on the dead level with you, I'm goin' to pay you for your time— pay you now, in advance— to bind the bargain until we git the details all fixed up." He hauled out a fair-sized wad of currency and from the mass detached a frayed green bill. "I'm goin' to slip you a she-note on the spot."

"A which?"

"A she-note— two bones. See?"

He forced the money into the other's palm. As Gash Tuttle automatically pocketed the retainer he became aware that this brisk new associate of his, without waiting for any further token of agreement on his part, already was preparing to surrender the enterprise into his keeping. Fornaro backed away from him and dropped nimbly down off the back of the platform where there was a slit in the canvas wall; then turned and, standing on tiptoe to bring his mouth above the level of the planking, spoke the parting admonition in hasty tones:

"Remember now, you're the boss, the main guy, the whole cheese! If anybody asts you tell 'em you're the manager and stick to it."

The canvas flapped behind him and he was gone. And Gash Tuttle, filled with conflicting emotions in which reawakened pride predominated, stood alone in his new-found kingdom.

Not for long was he alone, however. To be exact, not for more than half a minute at the very most. He heard what he might have heard before had his ears been as keenly attuned as the vanished Fornaro's were. He heard, just outside, voices lifted conflictingly in demand, in expostulation, in profane protest and equally profane denunciation of something or other. A voice which seemed to be that of the swarthy man denominated as Crummy gave utterance to a howl, then instantly dimmed out, as though its owner was moving or being moved from the immediate vicinity with unseemly celerity and despatch. Feet drummed on the wooden steps beyond the draperies. Something heavy overturned or was overthrown with a crash.

And as Mr. Tuttle, startled by these unseemly demonstrations, started toward the front entrance of his domain the curtain was yanked violently aside and a living tidal wave flowed in on him, dashing high and wide. On its crest, propelled by irresistible cosmic forces, rode, as it were, a slouch-hatted man with a nickel-plated badge on his bosom, and at this person's side was a lanky countryman of a most threatening demeanor; and behind them and beyond them came a surging sea of faces— some hostile, some curious, and all excited.

"Who's in charge here?" shouted the be-badged man.

"Me— I am," began Gash Tuttle. "I'm the manager. What's wanted?"

"You are! I 'rest you in the name of the law for runnin' a skin game!" the constable whooped gleefully— "on a warrant swore out less 'en a hour ago."

And with these astounding words he fixed his fingers, grapple-hook fashion, in the collar of the new manager's coat; so that as Gash Tuttle, obeying a primal impulse, tried to back away from him, the back breadth of the coat bunched forward over his head, giving him the appearance of a fawn-colored turtle trying to retreat within its own shell. His arms, hampered by sleeves pulled far down over the hands, winnowed the air like saurian flippers, wagging in vain resistance.

Holding him fast, ignoring his muffled and inarticulate protests, the constable addressed the menacing countryman:

"Is this here the one got your money?"

"No, 'tain't. 'Twas a big ugly feller, with mushtashes; but I reckin this here one must've helped. Lemme search him."

"Hands off the prisoner!" ordered the constable, endeavoring to interpose his bulk between maddened accuser and wriggling captive.

He spoke too late and moved too slowly. The countryman's gouging hands dived into Mr. Tuttle's various pockets and were speedily out again in the open; and one of them held money in it— paper and silver.

"Here 'tis!" barked the countryman, exultant now. "This here two-dollar bill is mine— I know it by this here red-ink mark." He shuffled out the three remaining bills and stared at them a moment in stupefaction, and his yelp of joy turned to a bellow of agonised berserk rage. "I had two hundred and twenty-eight dollars in cash, and here ain't but seventeen dollars and sixty cents! You derned sharper! Where's the rest of my mortgage money that yore gang beat me out of?"

He swung a fearsome flail of an arm and full in Gash Tuttle's chest he landed a blow so well aimed, so vigorous, that by its force the recipient was driven backward out of his coat, leaving the emptied garment in the constable's clutches; was driven still further back until he tottered on the rear edge of the platform and tumbled off into space, his body tearing away a width of canvas wall and taking it along with him as he disappeared.

Perhaps it was because he fell so hard that he bounced up so instantaneously. He fought himself free of the smothering folds of dusty tarpaulin and turned to flee headlong into the darkness. He took three flying steps and tripped over the guy rope of the next tent. As he fell with stunning violence into the protecting shadows he heard pursuit roll over the platform past Osay, thud on the earth, clatter on by him and die away in the distance to the accompaniment of cheers, whoops and the bloodthirsty threats of the despoiled countryman.

IF ONE has never stolen a ride on a freight train the task presents difficulties and dangers. Still, it may be done, provided one is sufficiently hard pressed to dare its risks and risk its discomforts. There is one especially disagreeable feature incident to the experience— sooner or later discovery is practically inevitable.

Discovery in this instance came just before the dawn, as the freight lumbered through the swampy bottoms of Obion Creek. A sleepy and therefore irritable brakeman found, huddled up on the floor of an empty furniture car, a dark heap, which, on being stirred with a heavy boot-toe, moved and moaned and gave forth various other faint signs of life. So, as the locomotive slowed down for the approach to the trestle, he hoisted the unresisting object and with callous unconcern shoved it out of the open car door on to the sloping bank of the built-up right of way— all this occurring at a point just beyond where a white marker post gleamed spectrally in the strengthening light of the young summer day, bearing on its planed face the symbol, S-3— meaning by that, three miles to Swango Junction.

At sunup, forty minutes later, a forlorn and shrunken figure, shirt-sleeved, hatless and carrying no baggage whatsoever, quit the crossties and, turning to the left from the railroad track some rods above the station, entered, with weary gait, a byway leading over the hill to the town beyond. There was a drooping in the shoulders and a dragging of the mud-incrusted legs, and the head, like Old Black Joe's, was bending low.

The lone pedestrian entered the confines of Swango proper, seeking, even at that early hour, such backways as seemed most likely to be empty of human life. But as he lifted his leaden feet past the Philpotts place, which was the most outlying of local domiciles, luck would have it that Mr. Abram Philpotts should be up and stirring; in fact, Mr. Philpotts, being engaged in the milk and butter business, was out in his barn hitching a horse to a wagon. Chancing to pass a window of the barn he glanced out and saw a lolled head bobbing by above the top of his back fence.

"Hey there!" he called out. "Hey, Gash, what air you doin' up so early in the mornin'?"

With a wan suggestion of the old familiar sprightliness the answer came back, comically evasive:

"That's fur me to know and fur you to find out!"

Overcome, Mr. Philpotts fell up against his stable wall, feebly slapping himself on the legs with both hands.

"Same old Gashney!" he gurgled. "They can't nobody ever git ahead of you, kin they boy?"

The words and the intent of the tribute reached beyond the palings. Their effect was magical; for the ruler was in his realm again, back among his loyal, worshipful subjects. The bare head straightened; the wearied legs unkinked; the crushed and bruised spirit revived. And Gashney Tuttle, king of jesters, re-crowned, proceeded jauntily on his homeward way, with the wholesome plaudits of Mr. Philpotts ringing in his gratified ears and the young sun shining, golden, in his face.

End