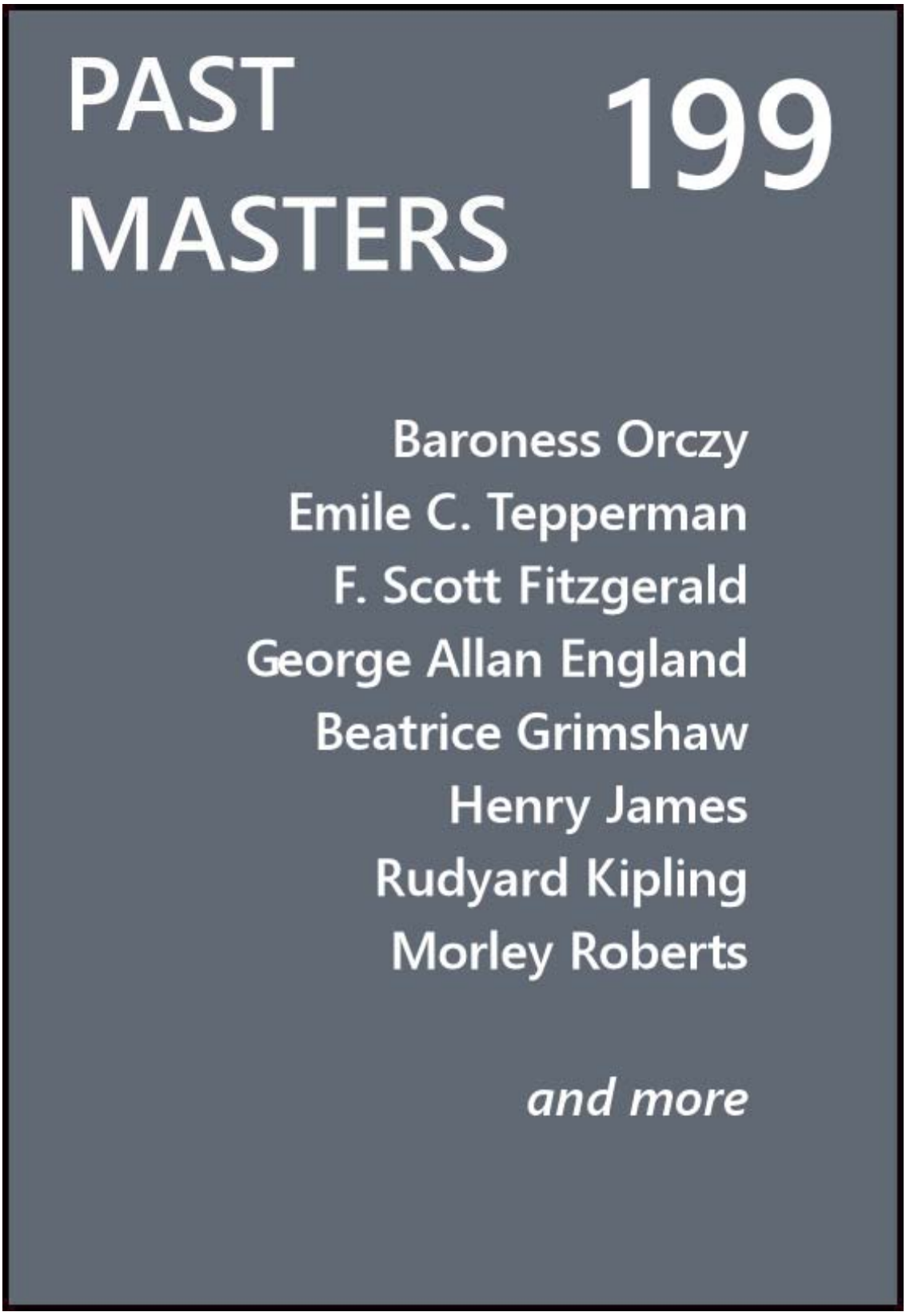
PAST
MASTERS
199
Baroness Orczy
Emile C. Tepperman
F. Scott Fitzgerald
George Allan England
Beatrice Grimshaw
Henry James
Rudyard Kipling
Morley Roberts
and more

PAST MASTERS 199

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

12 Jan 2025

Contents

_____

1: Women Aboard

Anonymous

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express (NSW) 14 Jan 1938

Diligent research could not produce an author for this story; it may be one written anonymously for a distribution syndicate. Even a title seach failed. I found lots of stories entitled "Woman Aboard", but no "Women Aboard".

WE WERE six hours out from Copenhagen and heading for Riga— some two days' steaming for an old cargo boat like the *Curlew*— when the second mate told me about Joan Raeburn. He and I were on the bridge at the time; one of us on duty, the other as a privileged passenger (though officially in the ship's articles as purser), and we had been talking about the colored cloud of butterflies that had, apparently, been blown towards us from the Swedish shore.

'Butterflies at sea!' he remarked, watching them. 'Dashed odd, but they mind me of a voyagle I had in the *John Deane*. Her last, it was. We'd a passenger with us who was a butterfly. It was the Old Man who called her that, but the name fitted. Only she had never been a grub. No, sir! not her. I'll bet she was born with a wink in her eye and took to her father right away, being fonder of men than of women. Know what I, mean? I haven't spoken about her for a long time, and then it was to the wife. A mistake that, mebbe. Y'see, though in a way I was wise to Joan's sort, there 's no doubt I had an idea— it was only for a day or two— that I'd fallen for her hard myself.'

To my regret he broke off there; flailed a hand about; gave a curt 'Port 'a couple of points' to the man in the wheel-deckhouse, and cursed the swarm of midges which had blundered wickedly into the midst of the butterflies. Later, however, when we were almost out of sight of the Swedish coast and a breeze had freed us from our winged ship-mates, and he and I were in my cabin enjoying duty-free tobacco and whisky, he went on:

THAT HUMAN BUTTERFLY? She was a cracker jack! Niece of a friend of the owner's. Joan Raeburn her name was. We were tied up at Bristol waiting for orders, when word came along that on a trip to the Mediterranean ports we were to have two passengers and both of 'em women. I supposed they were to be signed on as stewardesses. Mebbe you can guess how we felt! Passengers are bad enough, anyway— that's not meant personally, for you're different— but women! Holy Pelican!

Women passengers in the *John Deane*! All right! We had to bow our heads. But when Joan came aboard— gosh, I've often wished I could write! I know what she was like, but I can't describe her.

All I can say is she was the sort of girl you could look at without ever getting tired. About twenty-three, with fair, wavy hair, and blue eyes that made you feel there was such a thing as romance after all, and a smile and a voice— oh, she was certainly a great girl, was Joan.... Personality, the skipper called it. I don't know! All I know is this— before she'd been at sea with us thirty-six hours the whole flaming ship's company was mentally upside down. Bewitched, you might call it.

Mind you, it was rough stuff, too, at the start. I remember how the first mate came to see me and said: 'The Old Man's worried about how this Raeburn girl will shape, going round Land's End. It's blowing up like hades, and he forgot to tell her to stow away her small gear.... Doesn 't like to disturb her now.'

And I said: 'It'll teach her she should have stayed ashore. If a young woman of her breed wants to go to sea she should go in a liner, or try the Channel-swimming stunt for whatever that's worth.'

I suppose I was having a shot at being funny. Anyway, when we were clear of the land, Joan came to me on the bridge and said, as honey sweet as you please:—

'A lovely morning, isn't it, Mr. Harvey?'

The cheek of her! But I had been sick, and she hadn't.

Well, we were due to collect her aunt at Gibraltar, but something happened, and what it was didn't come out till later on. Joan fixed that. I can tell you now, though. The aunt got to Gib. on time, but fell ill there and wanted her niece to go ashore; wait a while, and then slip back to England. The way our Joan saw it there was nothing doing. She'd made up her mind to stay on in the *John Deane* till the whole trip was over, and she must have put up aome rod-hot yarn to the old Man

Anyhow, she wangled things so that she went on with us to our next port, which was Naples. Long before we got there she'd started making trouble. I suppose we'd all gone a bit nutty over her, though she was dodging about from one to the other on those silk wings of hers, but it was the first mate who got most of her time.

'He was a fellow called McGee, and a great bird. Good-looking, well-born, and all that, and he had what the Irish call a way with him. Best company in the world— except now and then when he got tight, and hinted there was some kind of bogey in his life. We couldn't make out what it was, but when I'd got over my craziness about Joan, I felt sorry for McGee. You needn't ask me why. I just did feel that way. But I should tell you about one night when we were dodging through the Gulf of Lyons in a beast of a sea. I was going aft, hanging on to anything handy. I met Joan and I could tell she was scared.

'What's the matter, Miss Raeburn?' I asked. 'What d'you want to come on deck for in weather like this?'

She told me she wanted to get to the bridge. That was reasonable enough, for the bridge was about the steadiest place when our packet was playing circus tricks. But I'd a notion that what she really wanted was to be with McGee. She'd as much pluck as any woman I'd ever met, but the way I saw it the weather had got her beat for once, and she was afraid the *John Deane* would go over and under, so she'd a fancy to be with the man she liked best.

'All right,' I told her. 'Grab hold of me and I'll get you along, though you'd be much better in your cabin.'

'I wouldn't, ' she said. 'It's horrible in the cabin. Things keep swinging about and make me feel almost sick. Besides, I get kind of choky. I'll be all right presently.'

I went with her, and remember thinking it queer she should stop trembling as soon as she stood beside McGee in the starboard wing of the bridge. He didn't seem too pleased to see her, and told her what I'd told her— that she'd be better in her cabin. She laughed at him.

'I'm staying here till we sink, or till we get out of this storm,' she said. 'It's the only place where I feel sort of half safe.'

Nearly four hours later, when one of the deck-hands had knocked me, I heard her in the saloon saying a good night to the mate. I knew from the way she spoke she wasn't afraid any longer. I knew, too, that we'd slipped out of the worst of the weather.

After that we'd a sea like a slab of blue marble, but within an hour of the time we docked at Naples things began to happen.

'The mail came aboard and I was near to McGee when he got his one letter. Some of us had half-a-dozen and newspapers from home as well. Joan was near to him, too, and when in her laughing, joking way she pretended to snatch the letter from him, he almost pushed her off. He was one of those fellows who take on tan from the sun and wind for keeps, so that the brown of the skin doesn't alter even in times when there's no sun or wind. But blood showed in his face then.

'A little later when he came to me I understood why he had reddened up. As I've told you, he was one of the best, but he'd always been a bit reserved. I'm damn glad to think he trusted me so well that he could tell me his secrets. That's what he did do. As well as I can mind his words, he said:—

'Look here, Harvey, because I like you and know you can keep your mouth shut, I'm going to let you in on something big about myself. I've got to speak to someone who'll be willing to help.'

I couldn't make out what lie was driving at, but I said— and meant it — 'That's all right, McGee. What's the trouble?'

He told me— and it certainly was a razzle-dazzler. It seemed that he was married; had been for nearly ten years. It happened when he was about twenty-two, and the girl was an Italian he'd met in Naples in a cafe in the Via Roma. He wouldn't say anything definite against her, but it was plain enough she 'd proved to be a mighty bad speculation as a wife. He'd wanted her to go and live in England, but she wouldn't leave Naples, and he'd sent her regular money all these years, though after the honeymoon burst was over they scarcely ever met. A darned nice position, I'd be saying.

He was doing all he could not to give her a bad character, but I could guess she was a no-good. She was a gambler, a self-seeker, and ready to let any man with money fool around with her. Well, she 'd sent a letter to him now to say she was desperately hard up and very ill, though fit enough to travel, and she'd been told that the one thing which might save her was a sea voyage. So she'd written to London while the *John Deane* was at sea, and the result was that the owners— knowing nothing of the innards of the case, of course— had agreed that, in what they called the exceptional circumstances, she should travel in the *John Deane* from Naples and till we got back there. Word about that had been sent to our captain, and he had agreed. He couldn't very well have done anything else, seeing the owners had authorised the thing.

McGee was in an awful state, and for about the first time in my life I felt as if I were watching a man's soul in torture.

'There you have it, Harvey,' he said. 'I'm going ashore at the first chance to see my wife. Despite what she is, I don't see how I can try to persuade her to put this trip off. It would be like asking her to pour into the sink medicine the doctor had said she must have. Y'see I haven't cash at present to send her on any other voyage.'

I could see his point right enough, but I got a bit of a jolt when he said:— Harvey, the Old Man knows my wife is to be sailing with us when we leave here in four or five days, but no one else will be told till just before she comes aboard. Now, listen! I don't want Rosina and Joan Raeburn to meet. You understand?'

I did understand, though I wasn't used to that sort of thing.

'Anything I can do?' I asked. I can see him now as he nodded. His eyes were like the eyes of a man who's just heard some news that has knocked most of the heart out of him.

'Yes, there's something you can do,' he told me. 'Joan and you are pally— nothing sentimental between you, but you're good friends. Do everything you can to get her to leave this ship and go back to London right away. She mustn't

know the truth, of course. Say her people want her. Tell her her aunt is dying. Lie all along the route if you have to, but get her away. I think I'd go mad if she and Rosina were both aboard here. There's been no love-making between Joan and me, but I'd give my life a dozen times over for her. I don't know whether she cares or not. And I need hardly tell you the captain doesn't know anything of this.'

I promised to do what I could, but though every man in the ship would soon know the first mate was married, and that his wife was to sail with us, I couldn't influence Joan to care tuppence about the supposed wishes of her aunt and uncle in London. She was going to complete not merely the outward voyage, but the homeward one as well. She told me so flatly, and laughed at all my lies.

On our third night at Naples I was leaving a cafe in the Via Atmorna when I noticed McGee pass. That surprised me, but ten seconds later I was surprised still more, for I saw Joan Raeburn. She was following him. I hadn't a doubt about that, and I was glad she hadn't seen me.

She wasn't hurrying as she would have been if she'd been trying to overtake him. She was just keeping him in sight; shadowing him, as they say in those detective stories. It occurred to me I'd better do a bit of shadowing too. I'd thought of crossing the street, getting ahead, and then meeting her and giving McGee time to disappear. But that might have meant meeting him first and spoiling whatever his game was.

After two or three minutes he turned down one of those creepy little side streets, and into a house. I slackened my pace, but Joan didn't. I'd a fancy she was going to follow him into the house— it was something rather like the tenement in the east end of London— but she pulled up out side a window and stood watching,

The room was lighted, and the window curtain was thin so that you could see through it in a shadowy kind of way. Nothing happened for a while, then I saw what I suppose you'd call the silhouette of the mate bending over a couch where a woman was half sitting, half lying. He didn't touch her, but I saw him nod his head once or twice, and I saw the woman nod too, and then put her hands to her eyes.

I thought it was time to do some thing, and that the first thing to do was to get Joan away from her 'I spy' business. So I did a bit of smart tack ing, and then came alongside her with a great show of being surprised. But by that time she'd left off watching the window and was heading back for the Via Roma.

'Hullo, Miss Raeburn,' I said. 'Fancy you being up here! I thought you were on .board. You shouldn 't be in this part alone. Naples has changed a lot for the

better since I saw it first, but some bits of it aren't too safe now— especially for a young lady. Lost your way?'

If I hadn't known she was game, I'd have known it then; after a second or two she hoisted a laugh and said: 'That's the idea, Mr. Harvey. I'm glad I've met you. But what were you doing here?'

Honestly, I think I was inspired then. However that may be, I said: 'Well, as a matter of fact, I'd an idea to call and collect Mr. McGee. I know he came along here to see his wife. But I forgot the number of the house.'

I watched her sideways, wondering what in Hades she'd do or say. But I needn't have worried. Just how her mind had been churning I don't know, but I do know she said, and almost calmly:—

'His wife? Oh! I didn't know he was married. But then there was no reason why he should tell me.'

'He didn't mention it to anyone till the other day,' I told her. 'It's not for me to give his story away, but it seems he hasn't been too lucky in the matrimonial draw. But there it is! I'll probably be seeing him before you do and I'll mention I've told you what's a secret yet to everyone else in the *John Deane* except the master, and you and me. Mrs. McGee has been ill and she'll be with us when we sail on Thursday for Sicily.'

That was a real hard knock; but she took it as though she'd an armor plated heart.

'How romantic,' she said, though slowly. 'I'll look forward to meeting Mrs. McGee. Have you met her, Mr. Harvey?'

I said I hadn't and that I didn't particularly want to, though I couldn't just say why. I explained a bit about McGee's wife and how she'd wangled a trip in the *John Deane*, but though all the time I was hoping to hear Joan say she'd decided, after all, to leave us and go back to England overland, she didn't respond. Not a bit of it! The girl was all upsy-downsy between pluck and pride.

It was pride made her pretend she didn't give a couple of hoots for McGee; it was pride made her start flirting all over again with everyone, and go to the opera with a slimy little squid from the agent's office. It was pride made her one of the first to welcome M'Gee's wife when that poor creature had been carried aboard half an hour before we started on the next leg of our trip.

The best bit of comfort I could give McGee was to follow up Joan's unsaid lies and tell him she wasn't worrying.

'You may be daft about her,' I said, 'but, thanks be, she's just what the Old Man called her from the start— a butterfly.'

'Best it should be that way,' he said. 'It means only one of us has to suffer.... I can't remember ever having done anything very wrong, Harvey, but I'm in hell all right.... Why?'

I couldn't tell him. All I knew was that hell is different for each of us, and seems to come and go. I'm told it's just the state of mind, but it can make a man miserable sure enough.

Things went along quietly, and though the mate's wife seemed a bit upset to find a prettier woman than herself in the ship, she was really too ill to care much— or that's the way I'd have thought she felt. Some people think the Mediterranean is always a smooth sea, but we were held up at Capri, for a day and a half between the weather and something dickey with

the engines. Then we started off for Syracuse, and by that time Joan and Mrs. McGee were by way of being great friends, if you please, and I reckon McGee was about the most amazed and worried man alive.

There was big stuff ahead, though— and not far ahead at that. I was on the bridge when the first signs of it showed up— but I didn't think it'ud develop so quick. I sent word along to the mate, and he passed it on to the captain. It. wasn't the weather so much as trouble with the steering gear. But there was fog— and you don't often get fog in those waters.

I was talking to Joan, who'd begun to look a bit uneasy, when the Old Man came along to relieve me. He was a cheery sort as a rule, and always as polite as pie to Joan, but worry had grabbed him then. He told her he wanted her to go aft, and when she asked if that was an order, he said:—

'Well, you don't need to be ordered, Miss Raeburn, but we're going to be very busy up here for a while, and, anyway, you'll be better in the saloon. Take her there, will you, Mr. Harvey? The lights aren't much good in this fog. And ask Mr. McGee to come to me....'

Even before he started to use the siren I knew there were the same sort of ideas in his head that were in mind, but naturally he'd had more experience of fog than I had.

When Joan and I got to the saloon we found the mate's wife there, and I must say she looked pretty bad. She'd huddled herself up in a corner and was fiddling about with some gramophone records but not trying to use any of them, and when she saw the girl and me she shoved the lot away. She must have been a good-looker when she was young, but the good looks had gone. She was thin, and so pale her eyes seemed darker than they really were. You might have thought her almost an. old woman by the lines on her face, but she wasn't more than thirty-three or thirty-four. I've seen men wrecks often enough but never a woman exactly that way— though, of course, I was a damn sight more sorry for her husband.

Looking back now, one of the things I liked best about Joan was the sporting way she treated the other woman. There must have been a terrible disappointment in the girl, but she certainly didn't show it. Up to this point

she'd kept clear away from what's called wearing the heart on the sleeve. I suppose she must have been suffering the same way McGee was, but she had that pride of hers to help, and a heart as big as the earth.

I left her with the woman who'd caught the mate young and made him almost old, if you get my meaning, but before I went she managed to whisper to me. She said she thought the skipper was strange in his manner, and she wanted to tell me if we were in any danger. Of course I jollied her along. I said there was always danger every where if you were expecting it, but that being at sea in a fog was a whale of a sight safer than being in a fog in a London street. I told her, too, there was a breeze coming up, and that the fog would be lifting soon. My own invention, that.

It was then she said, quiet-like, so as Rosina McGee couldn't hear:— 'You've been awfully good to me, Mr. Harvey, and I'll never forget it. But I'm going to tell you something— I wish I had taken your advice and left the ship at Naples. We've had nothing but bad weather and luck ever since we left there. You don't think I'm what's called a Jonah, do you?'

'Bless you heart, no,' I said. 'There isn't a man aboard who wouldn't say you were our lucky mascot.'

That wasn't so bad for me, con sidering I'd never learned to turn out slick speeches.

When I left her I went to McGee's cabin— I needn't be telling you his wife had one to herself— and gave him the Old Man's message. He went forrard at once, and the next time I came on him— Suffering Hades! I can almost see him now as he was then. There are somejpnds of lightning-like flashes that cut themselves into your mind to stay there. He was like a man gone clean crazy, and I expect he was that way for the time being. That would be about one minute after the collision. Our siren had been going all the, time, but we'd heard another. siren. The master was jumpy, and no wonder, for the helm, wasn't answering to the wheel properly, and the blasted fog was worse rather than better.

Golly! I can remember that thunder of a crash nowl I'm telling you what, of course, l didn't know at the time, but we'd been rammed by an Italian passenger ship and, naturally we got the worst of it. Our fault— or our misfortune. Talk about a hullabaloo! There was one aboard the *John Deane* that night. Not that the men didn't play up well. They did. There was nothing of a panic, but all the same there was no chance of getting the boats out, and it was a case of everyone for himself.

But when we were sinking — and going hard-slap at it, too— I almost bumped into McGee and Joan. They didn't see me, but though the fog hadn't moved much I could see them. I could hear them too— couldn't help it. Joan

was saying how she knew there might be death at hand for the whole boiling of us, and that she wanted him to know she loved him; and he was swearing he must live for her sake— must save her and himself. And then. I heard her say, clear as a bugle-call:—

'No— not that! I'm young, and well— and I can swim. You must look after her. You must! She needs you. I'll be all right. I 'm not afraid. Honestly I 'm not. For God 's sake go to her before it's too late.'

He tried to argue, and I 'm not blaming him. Think of the fury of a position he was in, and the temptation he was up against! He looked like having a chance to save one of the two women, and only one, and it was natural he should want to look after the girl he loved— especially when he knew she loved him— and not the woman who'd mucked up his life. But he couldn't make Joan budge, and when I heard her mention my name I thought it was time to take a hand. I was scared, of course. I guess we all were, but I wasn't seeing any of us browning. We'd life-belts; the sea was almost smooth, and I knew that the Italian—as I've told you I didn't know then what she was— would be standing by, and getting her boats out unless she'd been as badly damaged as we were. All the same, it was a toss up, and we had to move quick. So I butted in and shouted at McGee that his wife would likely be in the saloon still, and that I'd look after Miss Raeburn. I remember how he came up and gripped my shoulders, and looked at me as, I'll swear, he never looked at a man before.

'Right!' he said, in a way you might have thought he'd a had fit of asthma. 'Save her, old man, God help you with that.'

He was away then, and a second later I'd an arm about Joan. She'd gone limp on a sudden, and I thought she'd fainted, but she bucked up in a moment or two, though when her face happened to touch mine I knew she 'd been crying, for her cheek was wet.

'Do you think he'll be saved?' she asked, and I said I was sure of it. I said he was a fine swimmer, and that there was plenty of help at hand. That cheered her, but at the same time we were in danger — it was well over half an hour— she kept worrying about McGee, not once about herself. Before we jumped for the water I hailed the Old Man. He wanted to know what had happened to the two women. I told him they were both being looked after, and he called:— 'All right... See you later, maybe.'

It was the first time I'd given a real test-out to a life-belt, and the first few seconds in the sea weren't too good. For one thing, I knew that, whatever happened, I must keep hold of Joan. It was a job I'd taken on for the mate. Not that I'd have left here to herself anyway, but I expect you'll know how I felt. He'd trusted me to do what he'd a million times rather have done himself.

We could hear men shouting, and women on the passenger steamer screaming, and once we bumped into a fellow swimming: it was our second steward. I managed to him a bit of good, for he had been heading back towards what was left of the *John Deane*, and he'd probably have been sucked under. That was our main fear, but we got clear all right. I don't know what I didn't think about then, but I certainly thought about McGee. I'd an easy task compared with his, and it came over me once— 'What will happen, if he and his wife are drowned, or he doesn't manage to save her?'

Somehow I couldn't picture him coming back without her; couldn't see him facing Joan Raeburn and saying— 'I did what I could, but she was drowned, so now I'm free.'

I worried over all manner of points as quickly as though I'd been dreaming them, and all the time Joan was fighting along beside me. Thinking about McGee, you can bet.

The breeze I'd promised came along at last, and soon, with the fog lifting, we could see the Italian's searchlights and then the other lights. We heard the sound of boats being lowered. I realised then we were as good as saved, and we were hauled into the first boat that put off. I could tell you how we collected about a dozen of our crowd, but what counts is that not a soul was lost from the *John Deane*.'

'Even the captain was picked up, and when I say 'even,' I mean I don't think he cared very much then whether he went under or not. He knew there would be a bad time coming for him back in England, though, as a matter of fact, he wasn't to blame in any way. '

The steamer that had driven into us was 'The Ravello,' bound for Naples, and by some miracle she'd hardly been damaged. There were quite a few folk on board who could speak English— also there was a very decent doctor. He took a squint at each man who was brought aboard, but though they were looked after right away I'm dashed if he could do anything with Joan. She wasn't hysterical, but though she must have been nearly worn out, she wouldn't go below. Y'see, the McGees hadn 't been found then. I explained to the doctor how Joan had a woman friend still missing, and that she was determined to stay on deck till the other search boats returned.

I don't doubt that seemed folly to him, because Joan couldn't possibly help to rescue her friend by standing around in dripping clothes. However, he let her have her way, and an English woman passenger who'd sense in her head came along with brandy and biscuits and warm cloaks. And after that there was nothing to do but wait— a cruel business when you don't know whether there will be any reward for the waiting.

But in less than twenty minutes after we 'd been brought to the *Ravello* everyone from the *John Deane* had been accounted for, and I was able to go to Joan and tell her so. '

'Everyone?' she asked as though she couldn't believe. 'Then—'

'She didn't go on, and I said: 'You needn't worry any more. You can go below and have a hot bath and a change. I 've seen Mr. McGee and his wife. I told him you were on board.' '

'Thank Heaven,' she said. 'He— they're all right then?'

'Right as possible,' I told her, which was true in one way. 'Now you go with that lady over yonder who gave us the brandy, and I'll come to see, you in half an hour, if you'll be ready then.'

'I'll be 'ready,' she said. 'And thank you for having saved me, Mr. Harvey.'

'I didn't save, you,' I answered. 'You could have got here by yourself even without the life-belt. '

She shook her head.

'No,' she said. 'Even with the life-belt I'd have gone panicky. I know I would. You see— I can't swim.'

'That blew me right off my bearings. 'Can't swim?' I repeated: 'But about an hour ago I heard, you say to Mr. McGee—'

'Oh, you heard that?' she interrupted. 'Then you must have heard other things. Very well! It makes it all the easier to talk to you. I'll expect you in half an hour.'

When the half hour was over and *The Ravello* was under steam, I saw Joan again in the cabin that had been loaned to her. She wasn't the butterfly any longer, though she'd been rigged in a frock that had been chosen in Paris. She was just an unhappy girl— but braving things out as usual.

'They tell me we'll be in Naples in the morning,' she started. 'I'll be saying good-bye to you then. I'm going back to London overland. You know about Mr. McGee and me?'

I said I did, and told her how I'd followed her in Naples the night she was tracking the mate. She laughed at that, though it wasn't a laugh really. Then she went on like this:—

'I don't suppose we'll be seeing each other after to-night, so I can be frank. I've grown up since I left England. I was a silly ass of a girl then. I'm a woman now. I'm telling you this because you deserve to be told, and because you can help me again! Before I leave this ship I want to have a word with Mrs. McGee— but I don't want to see— him. Can you fix it?'

'I'll try,' I promised. 'But you must know that McGee married when he was a hot-headed youngster, and—'

She smiled at me in a sad sort of way.

'I know all that,' she told me. 'His wife has been quite open. And she knows I love her husband. I didn't tell her, but I know she knows. She may have been a rotter, but honestly, Mr. Harvey, she's been changing these last few days. So— anyway, you'll understand why I don't want to see him again. If I'd let him try to save me to-night instead of saving her I'd have felt like a vulture or something— I won't even think of it. How do you suppose we can arrange for me to have a word with her, and yet keep him out of things?'

I grabbed out the truth then, and explained that though Mrs. McGee had been brought aboard suffering only from shock, she has to be kept in her cabin and allowed to speak to no one. I explained, too, that McGee had been hurt— he must have been struck on the head by something. He was raving about her— Joan, I mean. It would be days, probably, before he got normal.

The end of the thing was that by the time McGee did get normal, his wife was dead of her illness, and Joan was back in England.

But I'll tell you this— she married McGee before he came into his money, for there had been a packet coming to him from some old relative or other. Money didn't matter to that girl. She was one right out of the box.

And that's that! I'm afraid I've been talking a deuce of a lot... Here! Help yourself— and have one of those cigarettes...

———————

2: Blue Jim Takes a Hand

Beatrice Gimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book, July 1928

THE whole side of the open veranda was a sheet of stars. Out on the beach, not twenty yards away, small waves were breaking in Roman candles of sparkling green; there was sea-fire that night. Without a moon, you could yet see clearly enough to mark the cool emptiness of the coral strand that stretched out invitingly below the '"quarters;" you could trace the line of the gray path leading away among the palms.....

One could not be expected to stand what was going on in the house. No. Not with that quiet strand, that peaceful path, and the stars, to call one out of it. I had not had a minute's sleep since the wretched Roy came in. I could not bear it any more. We were alone in the quarters, and I had heard him crying right along since twelve o'clock— it was now, by my luminous-dial watch, a quarter to three.

If we had been women, I suppose one would have gone to his room, and patted him on the shoulder, and said: "There, there!" or something equivalent. And it might have done somebody some good. I don't know— I've never been very much of a woman's man.

But one doesn't go and look at another fellow crying, blubbering like a child, if one can help it. He wouldn't like it, and you wouldn't like yourself. So there was nothing for me but the empty coral strand with the sea-fires breaking on it, and the reef, miles out, talking as reefs do talk, late in the night.

The reef sounded, and the palms made papery noises, and the loose coral clinked like china underneath my feet. It was not so very silent out there, after all, and that was well, for if everything had been still, as it is on some of the scorching northwest season nights, I should have fancied that I heard, yet, the sounds that seemed branded into my ears, the sounds of Arthur Roy, almost twenty-one, strong and handsome, about to be married, crying through the night before his wedding day. No, I know that the classical situation— in stories— is otherwise. It is the young beautiful girl who weeps the night through, before the day that is to see the last of her single life. But— I have seen the world; I know that the tragic bridegroom is not very much less common than the tragic bride. He doesn't feature so well in a film; he is perhaps the least bit ridiculous; he is bitterly ashamed of his woes, while the tragic bride— sometimes— gets consolation and capital out of parading hers. But, take it from me, his position is rather the worse of the two.

Knowing this; with those terrible, harsh male sobs still in my ears; with the thought in my mind of the boy lying there, his life spoiled, his future

mortgaged, his children cursed before their birth— I went along the quiet strand as if the devil himself had driven me. I found myself talking before long, alone with the night and the sea. "It ought to be stopped," I said; and then: "I— I— for twopence I'd—"

Crazy thoughts entered my mind of fighting Roy, knocking him out, putting him in a hospital for a week or so. The worst of it all was that I knew a week might save him. Just to see the monthly steamer in; just to get communication by means of her radio with the outer was years older, and inches shorter. I might think of knocking out the young giant; thought was as far as such a scheme was likely to go.

"Hell!" I said, and kicked out at a sack of rubbish left by some of the native prison gang in a hollow of the beach. It was duskish there, under the shade of the seaward-growing palms. I was as much astonished as a man may be, when the bag rolled over, sat up, and threw my own ejaculation back in my face, adding indistinctly: 'What d'ye mean by it?"

"Is that you, Blue Jim?" was my answer. "Too bad— I thought it was a sack."

"Granted," came his reply, lofty but confused. Then, gravely: "Are you drunk, too "No. Came out for a walk."

"What about?"

I remembered that Jim, drunk or sober, had always had the knack of shooting uncommonly straight. This was surely a sample. I temporized. There was no use giving away Roy's troubles to this insouciant gold-miner, known all over Papua as Blue Jim, on account of an early accident that had stained one cheek of his good-looking dare-devil face the color of the sea. I had known Jim was "in;" the island generally knew all about that. About two o'clock he had hailed me from the steps of the hotel, where he was sitting with a boot in his hand. The other boot was in its natural place. "Look at the holes in me sock," he had complained. "Been walking up and down the town since eleven o'clock, trying to put on other boot. Can't stan' on one leg. Not a st—a stork. Eve'y time, tummle over. Never get that boot on." He looked at me angrily, and I withdrew, lest he should make a personal matter of it. When Blue Jim "came in with a shammy" (of gold), he seldom Jeft the island town without a fight.

And here he was, apparently sobered off, sitting on the beach at three o'clock in the morning, probing, with the very first of his recovered senses, for my secret. That was jim. .... I had often wondered why a man of such sharp intellect should choose to bury himself among the all but inaccessible gold-fields of the mainland; but I had never discovered any reason.

"I— just came," was my lame reply, now.

BLUE JIM stretched out his legs, regarded, with some dismay, the still unshod left foot, and asked me irrelevantly:

"See a wild boot running about anywhere? Lasso it for me if you do..... Spit it out, mate,"

"What, the boot?" Jim and I had been "mates" once, on the occasion of my sole, disastrous venture to the gold-fields. Since then he had kept the sort of liking for me that a competent man (Blue Jim was most competent, at his chosen job) keeps for a pleasant bungler. That I didn't bungle my new work of Government hospital assistant, was nothing to Jim. I think he mixed that up, inevitably, with ideas of caps and aprons. Whereas gold-mining, as the world knows, is above all a man-sized job.

"You know I don't mean the boot," he said pleasantly, but in the moonlight, I could see a wicked twinkle in his eye. Jim was as mischievous as a goat, on occasion. I feared he would simply add to Roy's troubles by laughing at them, but I supposed he was bound to know in any case. So, briefly, I told the story—more than I have told here.

The effect astonished me as much as I have ever been astonished in my life. Jim, regardless of his unbooted foot, sprang erect on the coral gravel, and cursed the wedding, the bride, her relations, the island, the minister, and everything else connected with the ceremony that was to take place next day, as if it had been his own.

"Hold hard," I said, amazedly. '"What's it to you?"

"Nothing. Only that I— I can't stand— You say he got left a couple of days alone with her when the launch broke down, at the plantation— and her brothers got at him, and threatened to have. him thrown out of his job; and the girl said she'd tell the manager herself?"

"Yes. I think he'd have better lost a dozen jobs than marry such a catamaran."

"What did they mean to do if he refused?"

"Bring the usual action— down South. Jim, it's a put-up job if ever there was one. She's ages older; she's knocked about the island bars for donkey's years; what she doesn't know isn't worth— Anyhow, he treated her as he'd have treated his own sister, all along. And they talked about innocence, and lost character and betraying. Betraying! It's the lad that has been betrayed, and is paying for it. Why, the very peacock voice of her—"

Under the light of a warped, late-rising moon, Jim looked extraordinarily sober.

"Island bars," he said, musingly, and then: "Voice like a peacock— How long's she been here? Never saw her."

"Some months. Came up from Australia shortly after the last time you were in. Do you know her? Jones is her name."

"Common as dirt. Common as my own name— near as many Joneses as Smiths knocking about. Doesn't tell me much— but— Has she reddish kinky hair, fat figure, big red mouth half round her head?"

"That's she. Do you—"

Blue Jim slapped his leg, suddenly and violently; and the empty beach rang with his wild, not-quite-sobered laughter.

"If you're up to any of your games," I told him, suspiciously, "call it off. Call it off before you begin. This lad is a mate of mine. We've shared the quarters for six weeks, and a nicer fellow never stepped —if that red-haired Satanella had left him alone. I wont stand any funny business where he's concerned."

Not without reason did I speak; Blue Jim was known all over Eastern Papua as the most incorrigible practical joker in the Territory.

The warning seemed to sober him. He looked at me curiously. 'Yes, it is damned funny," he said. "It must be funny to hear him yelping in there like a pup. And you without the ghost of a notion what he's yelping about. That's the funniest thing of all."

I felt the prick of Jim's renowned tilting-lance. ''What—" I began indignantly. But he was going on.

"Funny— funny! Funny the way he rolls over on his bed and curses her and himself, and looks to see if the dawn's in the sky, and thanks his God when he finds it isn't— yet. Funniest thing of all is to hear him say about a hundred thousand times: 'My wedding day— it wasn't to be like this.' And then he says the girl's name another hundred thousand times—"

"Whose— Judy Jones'?"

"No, owl! I don't know whose. How should I know? I know there is one. Seen her? No. Have I seen the toes inside your boots? I haven't. But I know you have toes, because people do have them invariably, whether you can see them or not. Think that out, turn round three times, and curtsey to the new moon for luck and wisdom."

"She's an old moon," I corrected.

He was not listening. "Have you got, or can you get, a *bagi-bagi*?" he demanded.

"What on earth do you want with one?"

"Never mind. Have you?"

"One of those red shell-money belts the natives wear— the sort they're so dead keen on getting? Well, *dagi-bagis* are growing very scarce, since the boys stopped making them. I don't know that I could—"

"You are the blazing limit. Isn't the window of your quarters next the Government Museum, where they have lots, and doesn't the roof run right up? Well, then, let me have your room for half an hour, and we'll see about the *bagi-bagi*."

"Are you asking me to become an accessory before the fact to a robbery of Government property?" I demanded severely. One is not Civil Service for nothing.

Blue Jim simply winked. "Come off it," he said. "You're going to be accessory to murder tonight, if I tell you."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because young Roy is your friend, and you want to help him."

"Nobody can help him," I answered with some sharpness. "I told you that already. That's the particular hell of it— that, and the fact that it would be all right if the thing could only be put off till the steamer's in."

"Do you mean to say the tigress would let go her prey just because a B. P. boat came whistling round the corner?"

"Yes. The truth is he made a false declaration when he said he was twenty-one— wanted to be sure of basic wage from the Company—and if anyone could get his father on the wireless, the old man could stop it like a shot. He's not twenty-one by two months. But the brothers say his signed declaration of age, made six months ago, is good enough, and they'd like to see him trying to lie out of it, now. They have him all right. The parson don't dare to go back of that."

"What, parson! Has she the cheek—"

"You bet. Parson, Anglican church, bridesmaids, orange-blossoms, veil, and the whole bag of tricks. Honeymoon on Wheeler's plantation; the happy pair depart by launch! It's a crime."

"Couldn't he break the marriage, after?"

"No. Lots of similar cases. The courts don't break 'em. Against public morality, they say."

Blue Jim made several blistering comments on public morality and suddenly sat down on the coral strand.

"Head bad again?" I asked him. I was almost sure of it; the whole of his conversation, during the last few minutes, had seemed to me either crazy or half-intoxicated. But he astonished me by replying gravely: "No. Never clearer. I'm going to put on that boot."

He had found it, and with some difficulty, rejecting all help, got his foot inside. "It's swelled,' he remarked briefly. "Tf ever you get drunk and go without your boots—"

"Pardon me; I shouldn't be likely to— as a civil servant."

"No. Not enough of you for the whisky to stick to anyhow. But if ever you did, I hope you'd remember to put them on before they got too small for you. It's a bad thing to be too big for your boots."

HE was cocking one eye at me now, like a humorous parrot; and once more I had to remember that Jim was famed for seeming-innocent satire. Hurriedly I changed the conversation.

"You didn't tell me yet what you wanted the *bagi-bagi* for."

"Nor won't. What you don't know'll do you no harm. The *bagi-bagi* can wait a little. I'm going to find Bwalé-uta."

"Who?"

"Oh, you know the name, do you?"

"I— can't say. I've only heard of one Bwalé-uta— the chap who was had up before the magistrate for sorcery. He did time for it, and now he's loafing about, getting into mischief, I suppose. I suppose it wouldn't be him you're looking for."

"I shouldn't be likely to— as a civil servant." Jim was walking away down the crashing gravel— quite steady now, so far as I could see.

"But you're not a civil servant," I could not help adding.

"That's just the point," was his last remark, as he went. I thought it over, and concluded that Jim might really be looking for the native criminal.

"They'll raise a scandal among them, somehow," I said despairingly. 'I only hope to heaven I'm not in it."

It seemed to me indecent to return to that house. I found a bed on the veranda of the hotel— you can always slip in and take a bed there, without hindrance, provided there's no one in it before you. And after the disturbed first half of the night, I was glad to sleep.

Morning came, and I woke, conscious of a tangled dream wherein Blue Jim, criminals, bagi-bagis, and museums, were absurdly mingled. And then I recollected that it was Roy's wedding morning, and that nothing could save him now.

THEY were decorating the church— a mockery of mockeries. Miss Jones' energetic family had cut down innumerable palm-leaves, and were making them into arches and sprays. Through the tall windows one could see the matchless blue of the island straits. A canoe like a big brown dragonfly floated lazily past. I don't know what there was of peacefulness, of careless warm content, about the scene, that made me, by contrast, angry. How could the whole world look like that, when a lad's heart was breaking?

Only island folk know how bitter island sorrows are; how the certainty that every trouble has to be lived through in public, adds keenness to its smart; how love troubles, money troubles, health troubles, all alike are worsened by the impossibility of looking for help outside the one tiny community of souls. But worst of all it is, to know that help could certainly be had, in a few, only a few more days— when by nothing short of a miracle can those few days be given. What the steamer means to the islands, only the people of the islands know. On her they depend as nestlings depend on their mother; just so long can they live without her, and no longer. For her black wing of smoke in the distance, they watch from dawn to sunset; when they see her, the heaven rings with their happy cries. In the long interval of her flight, a bird or two may have come to grief for want of her— fallen over the edge of the nest into nothingness; starved; been snatched by some marauding hawk that she could have driven away. Safety comes with her— often leaves the port and island when she goes.

The hawk had snatched my friend; and there was nothing to be done about it. I could see the bird at that moment. Judy Jones— no one ever remembered that she had been christened Julia— was visible on the veranda of her brothers' house, prematurely attired in white. I took a good look at her as I went past. If she was not thirty, I decided, I was doing her grave injustice. She was grossly fat, red in face and hair, with a certain coarsé comeliness about her, and a black eye that called. I had heard her talking; she dropped an "h" now and then, said "Go on!" at every second sentence, and when crossed, could swear like any of her brothers. As for them, when I say that they were the typical Jukes family of the colony, students of heredity will understand— and pity.....

I went on to the quarters. If I had shirked last night, it was no time for shirking now. I could picture Roy, just as clearly as if I had already seen him. The boy had pluck. He would be dressing, making the best of himself, shaving with an uncertain hand, tying a white tie. He'd try to bluff it out, pretend that he was doing this thing of his own free will. Handsome Roy, Roy with his life all before him, and only this one piece of ill-luck behind— to be paid for so much too heavily! If all had been known that was merely guessed at, there were probably half a dozen men who ought to have been in his place today. I cpuld picture their relief; could understand, only too well, why Roy, who had good connections, and might have money coming to him, had been chosen out for victim. I had no belief in the "accidental" breakdown of that launch. I recalled how he had spoken the day before, when sunlight kept his spirits up, and the sacrifice was not quite so near:

"No, old chap, I reckon I'll have to go through with it. She says her name's disgraced, says everyone believes the worst, and her family will turn her out to starve. I— I can't leave her like that. Who said I was being forced into it? Rot. I'm doing the only decent thing."

He had laughed then— laughed as soldiers used to do in the war, with a cigarette half falling from white lips, and pain tearing their bodies. .... He did not know how thin the walls of his room were, how much they had told— last night.

Remembering that, I felt half crazy when I went through early sun between the flowering hedges of frangipanni and hibiscus, back to the quarters where Roy was breaking his heart.

I can recall the strange shadowy look of it all as I came in— the blinds of green cane still down on the veranda, making a dim light like the light of forests; Roy's door wide open, one shaft of sun striking through; the mosquito-netted bed within, tall and ghostly. Why! The lad hadn't got up!

Making as much noise as I could, I tramped across the floor, and pulled the net from under the mattress of the bed. He wasn't even awake. "Roy!" I called, and again "Roy! You'll be late." After all, I was best man, and had my duties.

THE bar of sunlight struck across the pillow, right on his face. For an instant a wild thought had possession of me, "He's dead," and with it came almost a wilder: 'Better that way." I saw, then, that I was wrong. He was merely sleeping— but what a sleep!

There was almost no color in his face. His eyes were not quite closed; one could see the shine of the unmoving balls between the thick black lashes. His lips were parted, but I could not be sure that breath was coming through, until I had felt his chest. That seemed to be heaving steadily.

Ill? Yes, he seemed to be ill. But what kind of illness was it?

The cooky-boy, who had crept up shivering with fright, seemed to think himself better informed. "This one bad sick my masser have," he whispered, staring at the motionless head. "Me savvy him too much."

Of course, as a member of the Chief Medical Officer's Department, I could not tolerate that. I told the boy not to talk nonsense, and to go for the doctor.

"Dokita no good belong this sick,' he demurred.

"Get out and do what you're told," I ordered. He slipped away, muttering to himself some rubbish or other concerning *bagi-bagis*. That was nothing— the natives are always talking about such gear— but it reminded me of something I had forgotten: Blue Jim. I had not seen him since the previous night, but I felt it in my bones that he was up to mischief somewhere. "Lord send he wont drag me into it," I thought, the while I felt Roy's forehead, took

his pulse, and as a last resort, slipped my clinical thermometer under his arm. . "Temperature tells," I thought. "If fever's in it, and fever mostly is in everything, he'll be a degree or two above normal. Anyhow, thank the gods of luck, it's beginning to seem as if that damned wedding might have to be put off after all."

I took the thermometer out— and it was nearly two degrees below normal!

While I was looking, some one came to the doorway, and peeped in: a tall, naked native man, splendidly made and muscled. He had the woolliest head I ever remember seeing on any Papuan— a veritable fleece. He had dog-tooth necklaces, mother-ofpearl lockets, bead chains, armlets of white clamshell, anklets and bracelets of trembling scented grasses. He had at least a dozen scarlet hibiscus flowers from the garden of the quarters, disposed about his head and body. His face was painted in stripes of white, black and annatto red. A more magnificent-looking personage I had never seen among Papuans; and there was, with it all, a certain deliberate importance that showed him to be a man of standing.

I am bound to say that he did not display any respect for myself or for my position as a Government officer. He merely walked over to the bed, looked down at the unconscious Roy, remarked as if to himself "*Ja namu*!" (''That's well"), and left.

"Here, you, stop!" I called after him. "What do you mean? Who are you?"

He paused on the veranda. "I Bwaléuta," he answered proudly. And I knew that I was looking on the famous, or infamous, sorcerer who had terrorized a whole district, committed the devil knew how many murders, and, just come out of jail, yet as full of pride and cheek as if he had been presented with the D.S.O. Nothing could down Bwalé-uta.

"If this was a damn theater show, they'd say there was no unity about it," I muttered, mopping my brow. Bwalé-uta had disappeared; the doctor hadn't come; Blue Jim's madness was still unexplained; the cook-boy had seemed crazy; nothing seemed connected with anything, and everything nevertheless mixed up with everything else. "It's enough to drive any sober respectable body out of his mind," I thought; and while the words were forming, the whole Jones family came in.

There were two brothers, tall, rangy brutes, like wolfhounds, but for the expression; no decent dog ever had such a look on his face. There was a grandmother, near as broad as they were tall, with a wreathing smile on her unholy old lips, and an eye that looked too many ways in too few minutes. There was some sort of a kid sister; I only remember her hair, a burning bush, and her legs, long.and stalky, like grasshoppers' legs. And right in the middle of

the bunch, with her veil half off her head, and her Number Eight white satin shoes soiled with island mud, came the bride.

JULIA was set for battle. Breathing hard through her nostrils, and standing in the midst of the room, she faced me and demanded: 'Where's me husband?"

"Have him ou' o' that," advised Granny, nudging one of the wolfhounds. "He's shammin'. Ou' o' that with him."

"I beg your pardon," I intervened, as the bigger brother made a hostile move towards the legs of Roy. "Mr. Roy is ill: I've taken his pulse and temperature, and there's something seriously wrong."

"He's dronk!" bellowed Granny. The whole scene was revolting to me: I could have wished the entire Jones family dead with pleasure, if wishes ever had a chance of being fulfilled.

"I'm a Government official," I said.. "I forbid you to touch this sick person. The Chief Medical Officer will—"

"The Chief Medical oyster be damned," interrupted the elder Jones. 'Here's at him." He was actually starting to pull the unconscious Roy out of bed— Julia, meantime, weeping noisily and artificially in a corner— when the entrance of Dr. Griffin, with orderlies and a litter, altered affairs.

"Where's my case?" demanded the big doctor, in a thunderous voice. "What the devil are you doing with that man's leg? Since when've you undertaken to treat my patients for me? Clear the room, there, till I see if this disease is infectious, or you'll find yourselves on the quarantine island for three weeks, every man jack of you."

Griffin had chosen his words well. "Disease"— "infection"— promptly emptied the room; and the halo of mystery and power that hangs about a doctor's verdict, kept the Jones family from pressing further inquiry, though they still remained hanging about the road. Being, as one may say, an augur myself, I was not so deeply impressed. I thought I had seen the shadow of a wink.....

But when Griffin had made his examination, there was not the ghost of a wink left. "Queer," he muttered, tapping his long chin abstractedly. "Queer. I've seen something like this— in West Africa. Curious sort of coma— very." He touched the half-seen eyeballs with the corner of a handkerchief. They never moved.

"Take him to the hospital," said Griffin. The orderlies lifted their burden, laid it, covered, in the waiting ambulance; and so began that melancholy journey from the beach, up and up, among the palms and the custard-and-crimson croton trees, that has been taken by so many men of the islands.

Always, in my hospital work, when I saw the ambulance winding up to the red roof on the hill, I used to wonder: "Which way will he come down?" For there were only two ways— feet planted on the shining coral gravel, or feet lying in the ambulance once more, on the way to the funeral launch.

"Collect his things and follow," the Doctor told me. I turned down the bed, and began looking for money and such like. I found what I was seeking—Roy's poor little pocketbook, with a thin wad of notes in it, ready for the sacrifice that had seemed likely to merge itself in a greater' sacrifice yet. I also found something I had not been looking for, but was in no degree surprised to find, one of those fine leather cases with a glassine panel in the front of it, covering a photograph.

I took a good look at the picture. It was signed simply with the sweetest of all women's names, "Mary." The face caught one by the heart, so young, so gallant and gay it was, with all the courage and fun of the dear "flapper" of these days, shining out of its big straightforward eyes. "Mary" expected the best from life; didn't mean to have any worst of it; but if worst came, would face it like a gallant little gentleThat was what I read.

Then I remembered Jim: "Funniest thing of all to hear him say: '*My wedding day— it wasn't meant to be like this*,'

"Why, my God!" I said, "Jim must have been right; he must have known. How on this blessed earth did he—"

IT WAS very quiet in that dusk room, with the green blinds hanging motionless against the sun outside, and the ghostly mosquito-net draperies trailing, dead and white as snow, upon the polished floor. Nothing moved, nothing sounded, except one hurried, droning fly. Somehow, in the stillness, understanding came to me of the history of Blue Jim, more than he had ever vouchsafed to any. man.

"It was the same with himself," I thought, amazedly. "He spent a night like that one— and maybe he didn't get off. No wonder."

I saw the squat form of Mother Jones roll past the doorway.

"Hey," I called, gathering things rapidly into a suitcase, and preparing to leave, "do you know where Blue Jim is?"

"He's dronk," she said. "He was dronk last night, and he's dronk again this morning."

She cursed him with curious particularity. I think she had somehow guessed at Jim's opposition to the marriage, and was resenting it, after her own fashion.

Gathering Roy's gear together, and handing it to the cook-boy, I started for the hospital. I had been sorry to hear Jim was "off" again. Vaguely, I had been

hoping more from him than I cared to acknowledge. If this swoon of Roy's broke up— and there was no reason to suppose it would not— within the next three days, the case would be no better than before.

It was growing very hot. I toiled, panting, up the long height, down which men come sometimes so easily, on a longer journey still. Halfway I stopped to breathe. I could see the palm tops glittering in the sun, and the beach outspread below, a belt of blinding white.

"Jim," I said to myself, "oughtn't to have gone off like that again. How am I to know if he meant to do anything, or what he meant? And what did that discreditable nigger pal of his mean, bumping in? And what—"

Consecutive thought, for a moment, deserted me. I had seen on the beach below, a tall, brown figure stalking: a figure unclad, but hung all over with as many gauds as a Christmas tree— Bwalé-uta! And proudly disposed across the wide chest of Bwalé-uta, worn like a bandolier, was the largest, brightest bagi-bagi I had ever seen.

I remembered, then, that I had found the looking-glass in my bedroom at the quarters overthrown, when I came in that morning. The glass stood in the window—the window that gave on the roof joining that of the Government Museum.

"Well, whoever did it," I thought desperately, "it wont be found out for a bit— nobody ever goes in there. And perhaps Jim will sober up first. If he doesn't, they'll say I took it. I'm damned if they wont—my room and all. And a bagi-bagi like that is worth every penny of ten pounds!" And I went on up the hill.

WHEN I got there, Roy was lying in the deadest coma I ever saw in a man, temperature down another point or two, pulse slow. The doctor was beginning to call him an "interesting case," which, as all hospital workers know, bodes ill for a patient.

"Four days to steamer day, isn't it?" I said, looking at the bridegroom who was to have been. You could see better than ever what a handsome fellow he was, with his thick hair brushed high off his dead white forehead, and black fine bars of eyebrows and eyelashes showing up against closed lids.

"If Mary could see him now," I thought, "she'd love him more than ever." For I was convinced— without much evidence to go on— that the gallant little flapper of the photograph loved Roy as heartily as he deserved to be loved.

Thinking of Mary, I was moved to speak; and I told the Doctor everything. Most of it was old news to him; but he caught like a bird at the idea of Roy senior forbidding the banns.

"I see, I see," he exclaimed. "Most fortunate incident, from one point of view; but I tell you frankly I don't like some of the symptoms. If he stays four days in that state, it'll go hard with him to come out."

My heart gave a jump. I had not expected— that. You may think a man is better dead, even say it; but when some one in authority begins to suggest the idea may have a solid foundation, things look different. To die, at twenty—

I don't know how I got through my work that morning; if I did not dress wounds with beef-tea, and coax bad cases to eat with cups of corrosive sublimate, it was more owing to good luck and set habit than anything else. Lunch-time came, and I went off into the windy hot sunlight again, glad to get the smell of disinfectants out of my nostrils for a while. Descending the hill, I met that Bwalé-uta again.

He was loafing about in the palm clump halfway down; a quiet place, hid alike from hospital above and town below. He had his betel-nut gourd and spatula at work, and was munching steadily in a sort of ecstatic peace, just like a cow chewing her cud. As I made to pass him, he barred my way.

"How is the *ibitoe* (marriageable at young man)?" he asked.

"Do you mean Mr. Roy?" I queried coldly. It seemed to me that Bwalé-uta,. like other sorcerers, really did not know his place.

Bwalé-uta nodded, licking his spatula.

"He is very ill."

The sorcerer looked at me inscrutably.

"How is Jim Smith?" he asked. As usual, he spoke excellent English, in contradistinction to the common native jargon. I must say I thought it cheek. I like a native to be a native.

"He is— ill."

"That's a pity," commented Bwalé-uta. "I should have like to talk to him. No matter."

He was barring my way—insolently, I thought. I am a small man, but I hope I am dignified. I motioned the Papuan aside.

Instead of moving, he burst out into sudden sinister laughter, hooked one leg inside of mine, and threw me to the ground. I hadn't time to shout. Bwalé-uta's hand was over my mouth, and in a minute he had forced a gag of rolled grass into it, nearly suffocating me. He tied this on with my own handkerchief. Then he knotted a piece of cord round my ankles, lashed my hands together, and swung me into—what?

The Government ambulance.

THERE it was, brought down from the hospital by one of my own orderlies, at the bidding of this unspeakable villain, kept, no doubt, in waiting, till the

proper minute. They pulled down the hood, started off, and in a moment, gagged, helpless, trussed like a fowl, and, I was on my way—whither? I could not even guess. Bwalé-uta was the terror of his village, the lord (it seemed) of every native he encountered, not excluding my own Government orderlies. He had a bitter grudge against the Government and its works, due to his late imprisonment. Probably he would not dare to kill me, but that he planned some form of revenge seemed almost certain.

"Disrespectful in the last degree," I muttered to myself, half choked by the gag. And then I saw something that had escaped my notice at first—something that made me angrier than ever. Disrespectful! Why, Bwalé-uta had dared to abduct me, not even in the decent ambulance used for white people, but in one of the rickety, rackety old vehicles kept for and used exclusively by natives! If I had been near choking before, I all but swallowed the gag, when, by and by, I heard a white man's voice, close to the ambulance.

"Hallo, where you go alonga that one?"

The Government ambulance. It was one of the storekeepers, a friend of my own. If I could have spoken! I moaned through my nose, and Bwale-uta, hearing, instantly covered the noise with a careless burst of native song. He didn't stop, either; he went on humming and wailing, as they do, not preventing my friend from speaking with the orderly, but quite covering any little noise I was able to make.

"This one New Guinea boy he go finish," explained the orderly glibly.

"Dead nigger, eh? Who's the other?"

I could not catch the orderly's reply. "Other?" I wondered. "Then I did really hear two ambulances." For it had seemed to me, going down the hill, that once or twice I caught the sound of wheels behind me.

The storekeeper made no further inquiry; clearly, he was not interested. No one troubles over dead natives. I heard my friend's slow footsteps dying away, and then indeed I knew that I was deserted.

We were on the level now, wheeling across a narrow stretch of sand. I cannot describe the horror that took possession of me, when I realized that the ambulance was being lifted across a gunwale, into a boat. For the cemetery was on another island, distant some two or three miles across the straits, and no ambulance was ever taken over there save for the purpose of burying the corpse that it contained.

WHEN I felt the motion of the boat, heard the strokes of the oars, and realized that I was in all probability on my way to be buried alive, I made so much noise, moaning and choking through my gag, that Bwalé-uta raised the hood of the ambulance, and put his handsome, wicked face inside.

"Wassa matter?" he demanded. "Nobody going to hurt you."

It was almost dark now, but I could see the glassy stare of his eyes, and realized that he was half drunk with the potent betel-nut.

I did not quite believe him, but somehow I felt better. After all, I reflected, I had the British Government, the Empire, the Crown itself protecting me; why should I be afraid?

It was nearly half an hour before the gunwale slid up on to soft sand, and the boat stopped. They lifted the hood now, and I saw, dimly outlined beneath a moonless sky, the long pale beach and leaning palms of the cemetery island. Bwalé-uta pulled my gag out as one uncorks a bottle, and the rage and abuse that had been choking me throughout the journey burst forth.

It was "moonlight unto sunlight, and water unto wine," however, compared to the explosion that took place a yard or two away. I leaped in my seat when I heard. "Hold still, can't you?" complained the sorcerer. "What way I cut you loose?"

With difficulty I restrained myself until he had loosened my feet and hands, and then I jumped out of the ambulance, and forthwith tumbled very nearly into the arms of— Judy Jones!

SHE was still in her bridal dress. She was, at the moment when I caught sight of her, engaged in tearing the veil from her head, rending it in pieces, and trampling on the remains. And the torrent of bad language that flowed from her lips made me realize once for all what Roy was— possibly— escaping.

There was not much time for thought. Judy turned on me like an angry dog. I was Roy's friend, was I? I had done this, she supposed— had her kidnaped when she was taking a sleep in her granny's own garden. Well, she would have me to learn that she, and her family, were not to be put off by such tricks. Who did I think I was speaking to? (A mere figure of speech— I had not dared to open my mouth, any more than I would have opened it beneath the downdrop of Niagara.) What did I think I was? She would tell me (she did, with embroideries, footnotes, and addenda). For two pins she would assault me. (The exact phrase, I think, was that she would "smack my chops."')

They say that I ran into the sea and tried to drown myself. That is entirely inaccurate. I merely retired waist-deep, and awaited a lulling of the storm. Judy, I knew, was no lover of cold water.

When she had got to the stage of sitting down on the sand, and crying, I came out— partly. I stood fairly near, and told her that she was laboring under a misapprehension, that I was, in fact, as much a sufferer as herself. She seemed to grasp this fact after a while, wept rather more, and asked me if I had "anything to keep the cold out, on me." As it happened, I had— overproof

alcohol, meant for other uses than internal; but I was glad to produce it, and offer it to her, laying it on the sand at some distance from her person, and instantly retiring. She drank all there was, and went to sleep.

DURING the course of our dispute, Bwalé-uta had taken away the boat, so we were abandoned on the cemetery island, and, in fact, were exactly in that position so often celebrated in the short story of today— a man and a woman alone on a desert isle. I have never, since then, been able to understand why such a situation is pictured as agreeable.

I spent the greater part of the night walking up and down to dry my clothes, cursing my bad luck, and wondering what on earth the whole silly business might be supposed to mean. In between times, I found leisure to reflect on Roy, and to feel exceedingly uneasy about him. I could not suppose that the mysterious coma would persist until the arrival of the steamer, four days ahead, without death ensuing. And if it did not persist, we were all exactly where we had been. And why Blue Jim, at such a time, could not have. managed to keep sober— at least, to keep sober a little more, or a little longer— was hard to understand. I was convinced that Jim was the key, the hope of the whole situation.

I had plenty of time to muse upon these, and other matters, during the passing of the longest night I ever remember. It seemed at least a week before the eastern sky, over the township island, began to turn from gray to dusky orange, from orange to sunrise red; before the houses of the town, across a plain of brightening rose, showed out like beads strung along the white thread of the shore; before the groves of frangipanni flowers, death-pale and deadly sweet, began to shine like trees covered in newly fallen snow among the long grasses of the neglected cemetery. But day did come; and with it came a surprise that made me, for the moment, forget even Judy Jones, just waking out of her chilled uneasy sleep upon the shore, and beginning anew her angry complaints.

For I saw, with eyes almost unbelieving, a steamer anchored alongside the town.

It was nothing to Judy. She did not know, as I did, what a steamer, fitted with wireless, and able to send messages to the magic land of "South," meant to Roy and his forced marriage. Nevertheless, she handled the situation with a certain ability. "You'd better start signaling straight off," she said, handing me the torn remnants of her veil. "Tie it on to a stick, climb up on that high rock, and keep shakin' it about till somebody sees you. If it's true what you say, that they been havin' the loan of you too, I reckon you want to get back and get even with them, same as me."

"I can't imagine," I said, "what induced Bwalé-uta to behave in such an extraordinary manner."

"Too right," she agreed. "He's a fair cow. Now you get up and shake that rag."

"There's no need," I told her; "something's coming."

Something was coming— a small but fast launch, and in it— as the speed of the boat soon allowed me to see— Blue Jim.

Blue Jim entirely sober, and rather sorry. Blue Jim driving the launch hard, and anxious— apparently— to get in as soon as possible. Nevertheless he stopped his engine in several feet of water, and letting the boat drift slowly with the tide, hailed me cautiously, before attempting to land.

"What sort of a night have you had?" he demanded; and I was not in any way placated by the twinkle that I fancied I caught in his eye.

"You can imagine for yourself," I replied, with some dignity.

Julia began to weep. "I don't know what crool vile man set that nigger on to leave me here among the dead corpses on me weddin' night that should have been," she complained. "But if it hadn't been for this kind gentleman he left too" (I could scarcely believe my ears, remembering the names she had called me,), "I'd 'a' had me death of cold. And now you can bring us both back again as quick as you like."

"How's Roy?" I asked anxiously.

"All right and walking round. He got better," said Jim, choosing his words carefully, "about half an hour after the boat came in. Soon after Bwalé-uta got back with the Government whaleboat and ambulances."

"What about the wedding?" I cried.

"Yes, what about it?" languishingly demanded Julia.

Somehow she tertified me, when she began to languish. I could understand how she had terrified— almost fascinated— the wretched, captured Roy. I could— What was Jim saying?

"Somebody," he cocked a wicked eye as he said it, "somebody sent a radio last night, after the steamer got in, to old Roy in Sydney. And he radioed back that his son was under age, and he refused consent. So that's that."

I expected hysterics from Julia. I got nothing of the kind. She was not made of such poor clay as to waste a fit where it could be of no conceivable use.

"Come ashore and tell me about it. It's true I was 'ropable' yesterday," she said, still with that languishing tone in her voice. "But I can forgive the boy; I know he's been misled."

Blue Jim ran the launch in, dropped anchor, and sprang ashore off the bow. He swaggered up the beach with his hands in his pockets. He had both boots on today, and looked reasonably tidy. He was shaved, even, and in spite of the

blastingpowder mark that had given him his name, one saw that he had been a personable, even an attractive man at a time not very long past.

"I owe you an apology," he said to me with a side glance, which I found hard to translate, toward Julia. "Bwalé-uta's a good lad, and knows his friends, but when he gets chewing too much betel-nut, as he did yesterday, he's apt to mix up names. Nothing more. Somebody— I wonder who it could have been?— advised him to kidnap Roy in an ambulance, and drop him in the cemetery for the night. And the same bad lot was wicked enough to suggest he should 'puri-puri' "(enchant) "this lady here, so that she'd stop quiet at home for the first time in her life, until the steamer came in—"

"How—" I interrupted. Jim flowed on.

"Seems Bwalé-uta had had news by 'native wireless' that an extra boat was to call; all the natives knew. Well, he got a nice present given him, and went to work hard to earn it, being an honest gentleman on the whole. But he couldn't find his— his boss, let's say— to tell him who was what, when he got a bit confused. So he had Julia here kidnaped instead of Roy, and put Roy to sleep instead of the lady. And he rounded it off by kidnaping Roy's chum, you, to make everything all even. Good lad— only a bit apt to mix things up. I know what it is myself, sometimes."

Jim stopped, and began to feel in his pockets for his pipe. He looked entirely satisfied.

Not so, Julia Jones.

"I'll have my rights!" she began. "If this gentleman has taken away my good name before the township, by staying all night on the island with me, I'm sure e'll act as a gentleman, and make amends." She gave me one of her terrible, languishing glances. I shuddered, as a man may shudder who sees a snake strike at him, safely separated from him by barriers of a strong plate glass.

"My wife's coming up next mail," I said quickly. "She was only waiting till I got a good job with the Government."

Julia turned her eyes, her large, dusky, wicked eyes, on Jim.

"You can spare that," he commented coolly, lighting his pipe, "because your mother isn't dead; and anyhow, a man can't marry his stepdaughter."

"It was you who dusurted my mum?" cried Julia. 'You left her the day after you married her, when I was just a baby?"

"A baby of fourteen— yes," agreed Jim. "Old enough to remember me, I reckon, only in those days I hadn't been fooling about with blasting-powder." He took a long, satisfactory draw at his pipe. "And your old granny never met me," he went on. "Else I don't suppose I'd have had the chance to—"

"What?" demanded Judy, dangerously quiet. 'What, if you please?"

"Fetch you back in my launch," ended Jim, with one of his wicked winks. 'Are you coming quietly, or would you rather stop here among the dead men?"

Judy said no word, but she gathered herself together and went.

I SAW Blue Jim depart again for the gold-fields, which are according to his own somewhat fanciful description, "at the back of nowhere, and the end of Godspeed," I saw him leave with his money all spent, his health just a little further broken than the last time, his future a little deeper mortgaged. He laughed as he went. There was a tall, dignified, clever-looking native in his boat; and the native, Bwalé-uta, wore a splendid *bagi-bagi*, very like one that the Government still is looking for.

Roy went "South," got another job— and is married, I hear.

When I was looking over one of my Kiplings the other night, I came upon a passage opposite which certain initials had been lightly written since last I saw the book— it had been extensively lent about the town, and I had only just recovered it.

The passage was Mulvaney's:

"Can him that helps others help himself, sorr? Answer me that."

And the initials were "J. S." Almost the commonest initials anyone can have, but somehow I could not help fancying they stood for Jim Smith—Blue Jim.

———————————

3: The Flaming Sword

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book May 1933

ROBERT NIVEN, hard and thin and thirty, watched his fellow tourists start to pile into the seven cars in which they were covering the island of Bali. He had had plenty of time to look at them already during this world voyage, but somehow he had not really seen them until now.

They had just finished lunch at this rest-house on a Bali mountain-top. After having collectively paid their organized tips, and collectively looked at the view, they were ready to be off.

"I'm not going," Niven said suddenly. The forty-six companions of his journey cackled. The cars honked. The procession swept away, and silence fell.

Niven brought a chair out from the rest-house, and sat down to smoke and think. Far below him were forests, blue and green as a peacock's breast; ricefields of aquamarine and silver; the huge sinister cone of the volcano, smoking a little today; misty clouds drifting by.

Bullock carts went by. A Bali man or two passed, leading little cows beautiful as deer. The men were handsome; they wore richly colored sarongs and bright turbans. He had heard that they did no work save the cultivation of the ricefields; hard enough, but by no means constant. They danced every night, listened ecstatically to the strange complicated music of the gamelan gong bands. They had fighting cocks, and bet furiously on the matches. They had horses, rode them, petted them, built showerbaths for them along the road. They smoked, indulged agreeably in the agreeable drug of betel nut; and they and the beautiful girls always seemed to be eating; Niven wondered how they kept their statuesque figures.

As for love, no wonder the men went proudly and held high their handsome heads, knowing themselves so precious to the lovely, innumerable girls. Every man could have a beautiful wife or two; and so amiable were these Bali folk that even the rival wives did not quarrel.

Robert Niven could not help thinking that it was somehow wrong that these people should be so happy. They didn't work enough. They hadn't earned it. Here was he, a successful Ulsterman, taking this world tour not because he was extravagant (Lord forbid!), but because he had become thin and run-down from overwork as manager of the Dalriada Weaving Mills. Here was he almost a third through life, and he didn't expect for another ten years to be as far on as every one of these Bali men was now.

There was something wrong. What?

Two people came out of the rest-house behind him and walked across the gravel. Niven was annoyed. He had wanted the place to himself.

Then he saw the face of the girl, and decided she wouldn't be in the way. She was almost as graceful as a Bali girl. Not quite. No clothed white woman could be. But she had beauty of an unusual and distinguished kind. Bronze-gold hair and blue-green eyes, white satin skin and a red, delicate faun-like mouth. And with all these, something else. She had the almost regal bearing of one used to homage.

Where had he seen her before? The elderly man with her was her father, Niven decided. They walked on; and the young man, baffled by his half-recognition, went in and looked in the register. Under his own bold signature, he found the new ones. Nationality, British. Address, London. Names, J. J. Laverty and Miss G. Laverty. A common enough name in the North of Ireland.

"Perhaps they're traveling incognito," he thought. Well, he wouldn't bother them. But one wouldn't be in a hurry to leave this quiet lovely rest-house.

He returned to his chair and his view. Again peace possessed him. Was it possible, Niven mused, to find a way through the invisible wall separating these calm and beautiful and happy people of Bali from the restless, dissatisfied race to which he belonged? He had money enough to give up business now, live almost anywhere in a modest way, with maybe just a little house, sun and flowers and good food, and sport (they shot tigers in Bali), and a horse to ride, a fine little Timor stallion costing no more than a pound. With— with— why not? They were lovely; and you could, if you wanted, marry one— or two, or more.

There the magic glass of his dream shivered. Since he had seen the girl with the bronze hair and blue-green eyes, he hadn't wanted any one of these Bali sweethearts who walked with golden basins on their heads and carried so beautifully their bare lovely figures, supple as flowers. Perhaps it was the beauty, the golden climate, the magic and mystery of Bali; but he almost thought he was in love—after one glimpse—with this unknown girl.

Then he lifted his eyes, saw her coming back from her walk, and knew immediately who she was. Genevieve Lavelle, the singer!

Lavelle! Here in the farthest East at the height of the musical season! What could have happened? Lavelle, who had taken the musical world by storm with her marvelous voice; a daring, amazing girl who rode wild horses, flew her own plane, continually astonished her public. Not for publicity but for the sheer enjoyment of it.

He remembered now that she had changed her name from Laverty to Lavelle for stage purposes. So the older man was her father!

She seemed a spirit of flame. In her the hidden romance of the North had fully flowered. Luck, incredible luck, to be alone with her, or almost alone, on this mountain-top of Bali, with the bond of a common nationality to draw them together!

Before night came down with wind and misty stars, the distant glow of the Batoer volcano lending a false warmth to the cold sky, Genevieve Lavelle and Niven had made acquaintance. After dark, sitting wrapped in steamer-rugs, they found themselves becoming friends.

But first of all, he had to find out why she was in Bali in the midst of the musical season. She told him quite simply. She had had diphtheria, lost her voice— it was thought, irrevocably. Yes, she felt frightfully about it, but one could get over anything if one only made up one's mind. And Bali was the place to do it. Why ? Oh, because it was such a wonderful end of the world, where nothing seemed to matter. Yet there was always a new thrill or two....

As if the word had been the chime of an alarm-clock, Laverty, dozing in a corner of the lounge, raised his head.

"What's that you say, Jinny?" he demanded.

"I was saying," she answered smoothly, "that Bali is the end of the world."

"I heard ye. I heard more than ye think. And I can tell ye that ye're not going to go makin' a silly show of yourself before the natives."

"What is it she wants to do?" Niven asked.

Genevieve, lying draped in her rug like a Tanagra figurine in a classic shawl, turned toward him with a swift impatient movement. The rug caught and held her; she flung it off.

Niven had a curious vision of the spirit of the girl, held by circumstance even as her limbs were held by the heavy wrap. Talk of thrills! Had she not lost the finest thrill of all, the singer's great moment, sweeping Valkyrie-like above the world on the winged steed of her voice? In that nightly apotheosis, passion, feeling, had found release that was now denied. No wonder she struggled, sought for excitement, wherever she could find it.

Her father answered Niven curtly: "She wants to go and spend the night in one of those native temples."

"But I don't understand—"

The girl broke in. "Surely you've heard about the native women who defied the law, and went and passed a night in an unconsecrated new temple, down at the little port beyond Boeleleng? They won't let a woman do that, or anyone, if they can help it, but a woman most of all. And, of course, she wanted to find out why."

"Did she?"

"Maybe she did. She never said. She was found dead in the morning."

"You want to try it? Why?" Niven asked.

"I want to find out." She was lying on the floor again, swathed in her tawny wrap, long and supple as a young pantheress. Her eyes, as she looked up at Niven, seemed to shoot sparks of gold.

"If I could make her look at me, for me, like that," he wished, knowing that in truth she was not looking at him, but through him, at some strange picture in her mind.

"I shall go," she said. "I shall go and stay the night in the inner court of this new temple they're putting up halfway to Singharadja. There are two almost together. People say you see wonderful and awful things—"

"Ye were simply taken in," put in Laverty.

"If you don't believe there's anything, you can't mind my trying. And if you cross me too much, and keep forbidding— well, you know what might happen."

The old man turned dark red. "Has he had the impudence to come after ye?"

"As to that, I don't know. I heard they were in Java, sometime ago, he and she, and that they were getting on as badly as ever."

Niven felt slightly embarrassed; the conversation was becoming intimate. He could guess what remained unsaid— a married admirer, a girl, restless, desperate... What a fool her father was to keep her from seeking sensations in her own way!

THERE was a momentary silence. The wind, cold as an English wind, battered about the bungalow; in the chilly lounge, pictures swung on walls, papers rattled, and "the long carpets rose upon the gusty floor." Tonight, at this very moment, black heat brooded on the pains below, among the palms and the anana groves, where Bali maidens walked, laughing and fanning, and *legong* dancers sweated, in their jeweled silks, posturing to the silver clang of the *gamelan* band. A climate within a climate; one more count in favor of marvelous Bali. These people had all— even to heat or cold at will. Country of a fairytale, if ever there was one.

Well, he would be mad. He would capitalize what he possessed. He would buy a little land, have a little bungalow, somewhere among the banyan forests and the rice. Leave civilization behind him. Ride and swim, and shoot Bali tigers, keep fighting cocks, race spirited Timor stallions. Live on palm-wine and Malay *hors d'oeuvres*, like the Bali people. Sleep the hot days, travel and dance the moonlight nights through. Share it all with a blue-green-eyed girl who wanted excitement and who, by Jove, if she joined her life with his, should have it.

As for the married suitor, he'd crush him under his heel like a cockroach. So far had Bali brought him in a day and half a night— Bali, where all life ran slowly and softly, except the life of love.

All this he thought in a moment. The next, he said: "But, Mr. Laverty, there can hardly be any objection— if your daughter takes precautions."

"Ay so? And what pree-cautions would ye suggest ?"

"Well, you know how these temples are built— no roof, just open courts with carved walls and shrines. She wouldn't be shut up. She could make her experiment if she liked, with you and myself staying outside the walls, ready to come in if called upon."

"And me with chronic lumbago ? No, thenk ye."

"Well, then, myself, if you trust me."

"I trust Jinny," Laverty dryly answered. "But I tell the both of ye, I don't like it."

Followed a week or two of uncertain weather, heavy rain at night, and high winds during the day. Genevieve's project was postponed for the time being. Some travel was done by the three, some quiet sight-seeing, away from the larger parties. The rain passed over; weather of gold set in. Temples and altars stood out in the pure light, lovely beyond telling, for the most part quiet, with now and then a Bali maiden coming to kneel before a shrine, hold up high her offering of fruit and flowers; with, once in a way, a brief eruption of tourists shouting, snap-shotting, storming about the place and trampling underfoot its loveliness; then, in a few minutes, storming on again, with laughter and loud honking of many cars.

In between, often for days together, there would be such silence as Niven had never dreamed of; silence that did not merely exist, but was kept by something unnamed and unknown. Then the temples, with their flowering trees standing stately within grass courts, their strange and terrifying faces grinning down from walls and columns among stone bird wings that seemed about to rise and flutter; the temples, with their dreaming stillness, their gray beauty, and their rare, amazing outburst of pure sensuality, springing up here and there among the lovely carvings like flames among flowers— all this seemed to symbolize, as nothing else could have done, the very spirit of Bali.

IN these days, it seemed to Niven, Genevieve was feeling the spirit of the place as he felt it. Love, he knew, if it came to her here, would come swiftly. And there were little things that encouraged him. Her voice, that lovely speaking voice (how, he wondered, could she speak so like a singer if her voice was gone forever?) softened exquisitely when she used his name; her thoughts

seemed to lean toward him. It was as if she caught and read what he was thinking, without need of speech.

"To have a home here," she said one day. "To live among these people who are so happy— it would be like heaven. And I'd study their music. You don't know how much there is in it—"

"I know they simply live for it."

"I could find things in these *gamelan* orchestras that no one else has found. They shake you so. They are wicked sometimes. But they're— great."

They were standing alone in one of the innumerable temples; a frangipani tree shed falling stars upon her bead; the wind went ruffling under dark-arched gateways; a long way down, below the temple courts, from among the fields of rice that shone like emerald and gold, came faintly the tingle-tangle of a native band.

"It's as if the whole country sang," she said. "And the people— they sing even when they are silent. Let's never, never go back!"

She had come to it herself. He took one quick step nearer; he was about to say the words that should bind them both to Bali forever, when they were struck from his lips.

A TALL stranger had come into the temple court, was advancing with a smile toward Genevieve. Niven instantly guessed who it was, summed up, in a quick second glance, the appearance of his rival. The man was about forty; he wore whites and a solar topee, like most of the tourists; he was massively made and had a penetrating, commanding black eye. Sallow he seemed, like one who spends much time indoors, and there was something of the scholar's stoop about his wide shoulders; but he had good looks of a certain stony kind.

One could not tell how much, or how little, Genevieve was pleased by the interruption. With the perfect self-possession of the actress, she turned to the newcomer and met him smilingly.

"This is quite a pleasant surprise," she said. "I thought that you and Mrs. Messervy were still in Java."

The man said, looking hard at her: "Mrs. Messervy is still in Java." Then he added: "We buried her in the cemetery at Batavia, six weeks ago. Java fever."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

"You understood the unfortunate circumstances, I believe. In such cases—"

"Yes, exactly. May I introduce Mr. Niven ? Professor Messervy, of Camelot University. The Professor is frightfully clever; they actually pay him to run round studying colored people and so on. I'm not clever; I don't understand his work, but you must listen reverently to everything he says."

Niven saw that she was chattering to hide her embarrassment. Somehow, that pleased him.

The Professor threw a coolly estimating glance in Niven's direction. He saw a sandy fellow with a very blue pair of eyes, and a toothbrush mustache; a tall, tough, ordinary young man who didn't look as if he owned any sort of degree.... Niven had taken his B. A. at Trinity College, Dublin, but that would not have saved him in Messervy's eyes.

Ignoring Niven, he spoke to the girl.

"You mustn't undervalue yourself," he said. "You understand, I'm sure, that marriage customs are my specialty— primitive marriage customs, as compared with those of later origin, in especial. I believe there will be great scope for observation here in Bali, where they have so happily solved the serious problems of unsatisfactory marital relationship which continue to embarrass nations supposed to be higher in the scale of civilization. —Have you got a match?"

The last sentence was addressed to Niven, and for the moment it made him jump. Then he realized what was wanted and produced his box.

Messervy gave it back, started a large cigar, and continued his talk with Genevieve.

"This," thought Niven, "is a new sort of professor— not much like the kind in books, in spite of his long-winded chat." Messervy, he thought indignantly, had taken the girl away from him as coolly as he would have taken the last piece of bread in a shipwreck, and for the same reason— because he thought himself more worthy to have her, and it, than anyone else.

"But we'll see," Niven told himself. "We'll see."

NEVERTHELESS, things changed from that time on.

Professor Messervy attached himself to the party, and it seemed that Laverty, at least, was inclined to like his company. Niven thought he understood. If Genevieve was not going to make money by singing, it might be well for her, from Laverty's point of view, to marry a man who evidently had resources above and beyond any furnished by the university. Messervy was a free spender when his work or his pleasure seemed to require it. His clothes were impeccable ; he hired the best of cars, and his purchases of Bali gold and silverwork, so Niven enviously noted, must have made a big hole in a hundred pounds.

He didn't give away any of the stuff, but he recommended himself to Genevieve by taking up the question of the proposed night visit to an unconsecrated temple. All the facts about the end of the lovely native girl who had been found dead in the temple beyond Boeleleng, he industriously

collated, and compared with similar incidents elsewhere, letting loose so deep a flood of comparative anthropology upon the heads of the two men and the girl, that in the end nobody quite knew what he was talking about. They did gather, however, that he took the question seriously, and that he was by no means opposed to Genevieve's experiment.

"He's told us nothing we didn't know before," Niven somewhat bitterly commented to old Laverty.

"I d'knaw," the other said. "The fella did say that thur's a tradition that Bali doesn't like the white people—"

"Exactly. Some of them, anyhow. They call the tourists wild beasts."

"Ay, but before thur were towrists. There's been a gey wheen of fellas took the notion they'd like to stay here, but nawn of them has, except maybe a two-three, and they're naw lucky.... It's not the natives themselves, though. Maybe I could find ye a reason or two again it, though I'm naw professor."

"What do you make of it?" Niven inquired.

"I make this," the other answered. "The like of us were cowped intil the wilderness, owa the Garden of Eden, long ago. Maybe we were the better for it. But anyhow, ye can't be goin' back, once ye're out— the angels with the flamin' swords keeps the gate."

"Do you believe all that?"

"Spur'tully, ay; acshully, I d'knaw. No matter. The swords are thur. And thur's no luck for annyone tries to lep over them."

"It sounds like nonsense to me," Niven commented. "But I dare say it isn't. Anyhow, it won't affect you— by the look of things."

GENEVIEVE and Messervy were walking up and down the shady avenue of waringin trees that ran outside the hotel. They had been constantly together during the past few days, and Niven had seen almost nothing of the girl. He was beginning to feel unhappy about his chances. Genevieve had been somewhat attracted by this man, even before the death of his wife. Was the fascination returning? Niven could not tell. He did not believe that Genevieve would choose Messervy before himself, simply as man to man— the fellow must be as unscrupulous as they make them, to have made love to her when he wasn't free; and anyhow his talk, disguised as it was in the garments of science, showed him to have not as much decent sense of morality as would lie heaped up on a thruppenny piece— so the Ulsterman indignantly put it to himself.

But Messervy had personality, fascination beyond common; one could not mistake that. Genevieve— had she been caught in the net?

FULL MOON came and passed, and dry weather came with it. Genevieve's experiment was fixed for a night when moonrise was due about twelve o'clock. That would give time to reach the unconsecrated temples in the dark, secretly, so that neither the Dutch Government nor the natives should know what was afoot, and it would make sure of light later on, when perhaps light might be wanted.

Messervy, who as a matter of course took everything into his hands, had declared his intention of spending the night in the temple adjacent to that chosen by Genevieve. There was not a stone's throw between the two; and he would, he said, be quite near in case she wanted him. Niven, wishing uselessly that he had thought of this idea himself, was left to make his own plans. "It won't be necessary for you to bother at all," Messervy told him, addressing him much as if he were a tiresome undergraduate. Niven made no reply— there was no use talking.

When Messervy and Genevieve, about eleven o'clock, started afoot for the temples, Niven silently followed them. Hidden, he watched the girl run lightly up the steps of the nearer court, flashing her electric torch to see the way. She carried a wrap over her arm; she was whispering and laughing with Messervy. The professor, encumbered with rug, pillow, sandwich-case and flask, as well as a torch and a revolver, had clearly taken no chances where he himself was concerned.

They had a long whispered talk at the top of the stairs. Niven noted, with relief, that Messervy was not pleased by the substance of it. He seemed to remonstrate with Genevieve; once he came so close to her, snatched her hand so eagerly, that Niven was on the point of coming forward.

But Genevieve smilingly withdrew from him; she seemed to bid him an amiable good-night, and went up the steps, under the great carved archway, into the temple courtyard. Messervy went down the road to the gateway of the second temple and, ascending the steps, disappeared.

Niven, during the daytime, had found a hiding-place for himself— a clump of young bamboo, just outside the wall of the nearer temple. There he settled down to wait. He didn't know just what he feared. The Bali people were kind; even if Genevieve should be discovered in the very act of desecrating their holy places, violence was not to be apprehended. And the Professor, whatever his ideas of morality might be, would surely not annoy a young girl whom he confidently hoped to marry.

No. There was something else. Of course, one did not believe in such things; but Genevieve had been drinking in stories about Bali ghosts and devils: About the evil spirits that haunted every native temple until the sacred ceremonies had driven them away, and set the carved stone guardians at the

gates upon the watch for wicked things. About the special risk run by women, who were more obnoxious to evil spirits than men. Genevieve was sensitive, like all artists; if she saw a shadow, she might be frightened. He must be near. As for Messervy, Niven placed no confidence in him. He would be making anthropological notes by the light of a torch; maybe he'd even be sleeping...

It was very quiet there in the little grove. Only the stars looked down upon the new pale loveliness of the temples; only the coco-palms, outside, whispered; and the scent of lotus from the sacred ponds lay on the air. In the temples not a sound was heard. Messervy must be sleeping. As for Genevieve—

WHAT was that? Niven sat suddenly upright. He had been conscious, ashamedly, for some little time, of a curious sensation of fear, a mounting dread that seemed to come in waves, as though something unnamed, not to be understood, now and then sent forth a cautious tentacle toward himself, and then drew back into dark. Yet there had been no sound; only the faint gossiping of coco-palms, and the drip-drip of water from the temple ponds. There had been nothing to see, although the moon was up at last, and everything clear as on an English winter's day.

Now, from the temple where Messervy watched, came a strange noise— a choking sound, the sound of a scramble and of a fall.

NIVEN was instantly on his feet, listening hard. Was there no noise from the court where Genevieve sought her perilous thrill? Yes. There was a sound,— impossible, yet not to be denied,— a sound as of low sweet singing.

"God!" said Niven. He vaulted the temple wall.

He did not know what he expected to see, but he had a loaded revolver in his pocket; he took it out before he looked about him after landing violently on the grass. Then he saw Genevieve standing in the middle of the court, under the pouring moon, just as she might have stood in days that were past beneath the limelight that falls on and follows the prima donna of opera. And she was singing!

Her voice had come back; there she stood, head raised and eyes half closed, singing just as a bird sings, exquisitely, clearly, some light operatic air.

Niven ran forward and caught her hand. "Are you all right?" he cried.

She did not answer him, did not seem to see him. She went on singing.

He tried to lead her away. She followed where he led her, stopped when he stopped, never looked at him or seemed to be conscious of his presence. And still she sang. The beauty, the horror of it, shook his heart. It seemed as if the

very spirit of her had fled in the night, leaving instead this mechanical singing bird caged in the body of a beautiful and soulless woman.

"She's had some fright," he thought. "Saw something that shook up her nervous system, brought back the voice, but left her— left her—"

No, he could not say it.

Staring about him in the vivid moonlight to see whether any trace of that which had alarmed her was left, he saw Professor Messervy. The man was lying across the low wall that divided the two temples, his head and arms trailing down on the grass of the court.

"What the devil does he think he's doing there?" Niven wondered. He went over and lifted the body. Messervy was dead, and his face was not good to see. The man had died in terror.

Hand on lip, Niven stood looking— looking. What had Messervy been doing on that wall, in the midst of the lonely night? Why had he started to come over to Genevieve, who (Niven was almost sure) had but just refused to marry him? It might have been that he was fleeing from something frightful, unbearable, that had pounced on and torn his scientific beliefs to shreds, there in the unconsecrated temple. It might have been— otherwise. In any case death, and an ugly death, had caught him.

Leaving him there till morning, when the Dutch officials should look after the matter, Niven took Genevieve by the hand and very gently led her home. She sang a little now and then along the way. She did not speak.

There was an inquest and an inquiry. Messervy, they said, had died of heart failure brought on by the effort of climbing the wall. His spirit-flask was found beside his rug and pillow— empty.

No more was to be known.

AFTER some months Genevieve Lavelle took up her singing again for a short time— on concert platforms only. But it was whispered that she had lost her mind; that she seldom if ever spoke, but could not keep from appearing in public and singing with all the former beauty of her voice.

Laverty was despondent, but Niven, going in day by day to the flourishing factory of which he was now part owner, never gave up his hope, his conviction that Genevieve would recover.

"She ran frightful dangers," he said to Laverty, "but the thing— whatever it was— did not get her. It couldn't."

"Why for no?" Laverty asked, and Niven explained:

"The Bali people tell you that evil spirits have little power, comparatively, over any pure young girl. The native woman who died had no such shield."

"Havers and nawnsence," was Laverty's acid comment....

But Niven's faith had its reward, apparently. For gradually a change came over Genevieve. And while public appearances grew distasteful to her, she became in speech and thought, seemingly, much like any normal woman. Never once, however, has she referred to that night in the Bali temple; it may be that those hours are mercifully gone from her memory.

And if Paradise has been denied to Niven and to her, even as it has been denied to you and me, their marriage has been, to all seeming, at least as happy as most marriages. One learns not to ask too much of this world.

_____

4: Blood Will Tell

Don Marquis

Donald Robert Perry Marquis, 1878-1937
The American Magazine Nov 1915
The Lone Hand, 1 Jan 1916

I AM a middle-sized dog, with spots on me here and there, and several different colors of hair mixed in even where there aren't any spots, and my ears are frazzled a little on the ends where they have been chewed in fights.

At first glance you might not pick me for an aristocrat. But I am one. I was considerably surprised when I discovered it, as nothing in my inmost feelings up to that time, nor in the treatment which I had received from dogs, humans or boys, had led me to suspect it.

I can well remember the afternoon on which the discovery was made. A lot of us dogs were lying in the grass, up by the swimming hole, just lazying around, and the boys were doing the same. All the boys were naked and comfortable, and no humans were about, the only thing near being a cow or two and some horses; and although large they are scarcely more human than boys. Everybody had got tired of swimming, and it was too hot to drown out gophers, or fight bumblebees, and the boys were smoking grapevine cigarettes and talking.

Us dogs was listening to the boys talk. A Stray Boy, by which I mean one not claimed or looked out for or owned by any dog, says to Freckles Watson, who is my boy:

"What breed would you call that dog of yours, Freck?"

I pricked up my ears at that. I cannot say that I had ever set great store by breeds up to the time that I found out I was an aristocrat myself, believing, as Bill Patterson, a human and the town drunkard, used to say when intoxicated, "that often an honest heart beats beneath the outcast's ragged coat."

"Spot ain't any *one* particular breed," says Freckles. "He's considerably mixed."

"He's a mongrel," says Squint Thompson, who is Jack Thompson's boy.

"He ain't," says Freckles, so huffy that I saw a mongrel must be some sort of a disgrace. "You're a link, link liar, and so's your Aunt Mariar," says Freckles.

I thought there might be a fight then, but it was too hot for any enjoyment in a fight, I guess, for Squint let it pass, only saying, "I ain't got any Aunt Mariar, and you're another."

"A dog," chips in the Stray Boy, "has either got to be a thoroughbred or a mongrel. He's either an aristocrat or else he's a common dog."

"Spot ain't any common dog," says Freckles, sticking up for me. "He can lick any dog in town within five pounds of his weight."

"He's got some spaniel in him," says the Stray Boy.

"His nose is pointed like a hound's nose," says Squint Thompson.

"Well," says Freckles, "neither one of them kind of dogs is a common dog."

"Spot has got some bulldog blood in him, too," says Tom Mulligan, an Irish boy owned by a dog by the name of Mutt Mulligan. "Did you ever notice how Spot will hang on so you can't pry him loose, when he gets into a fight?"

"That proves he is an aristocratic kind of dog," says Freckles.

"There's some bird dog blood in Spot," says the Stray Boy, sizing me up careful.

"He's got some collie in him, too," says Squint Thompson. "His voice sounds just like a collie's when he barks."

"But his tail is more like a coach dog's tail," says Tom Mulligan.

"His hair ain't, though," says the Stray Boy. "Some of his hair is like a setter's."

"His teeth are like a mastiff's," says Mutt Mulligan's boy, Tom. And they went on like that; I never knew before there were so many different kinds of thoroughbred dog. Finally Freckles says:—

"Yes, he's got all them different kinds of thoroughbred blood in him, and he's got other kinds you ain't mentioned and that you ain't slick enough to see. You may think you're running him down, but what you say just proves he ain't a common dog."

I was glad to hear that. It was beginning to look to me that they had a pretty good case for me being a mongrel.

"How does it prove it?" asked the Stray Boy.

"Well," says Freckles, "you know who the King of Germany is, don't you?"

They said they'd heard of him from time to time.

"Well," says Freckles, "if you were a relation of the King of Germany you'd be a member of the German royal family. You fellows may not know that, but you would. You'd be a swell, a regular high-mucky-muck."

They said they all guessed they would.

"Now, then," says Freckles, "if you were a relation to the King of Switzerland, too, you'd be just twice as swell, wouldn't you, as if you were only related to one royal family? Plenty of people are related to just one royal family."

Tom Mulligan butts in and says that way back, in the early days, his folks was the Kings of Ireland; but no one pays any attention.

"Suppose, then, you're a cousin of the Queen of England into the bargain and your grand-dad was King of Scotland, and the Prince of Wales and the Emperor of France and the Sultan of Russia and the rest of those royalties were relations of yours, wouldn't all that royal blood make you twenty times as

much of a high-mucky-muck as if you had just one measly little old king for a relation?"

The boys had to admit that it would.

"You wouldn't call a fellow with all that royal blood in him a mongrel, would you?" says Freckles. "You bet your sweet life you wouldn't! A fellow like that is darned near on the level with a congressman or a vice-president. Whenever he travels around in the old country they turn out the brass band; and the firemen and the Knights of Pythias and the Modern Woodmen parade, and the mayor makes a speech, and there's a picnic and firecrackers, and he gets blamed near anything he wants. People kow-tow to him, just like they do to a swell left-handed pitcher or a champion prize-fighter. If you went over to the old country and called a fellow like that a mongrel, and it got out on you, you would be sent to jail for it."

Tom Mulligan says yes, that is so; his grand-dad came to this country through getting into some kind of trouble about the King of England, and the King of England ain't anywhere near as swell as the fellow Freckles described, nor near so royal, neither.

"Well then," says Freckles, "it's the same way with my dog, Spot, here. Any dog can be full of just one kind of thoroughbred blood. That's nothing! But Spot here has got more different kinds of thoroughbred blood in him than any dog you ever saw. By your own say-so he has. He's got all kinds of thoroughbred blood in him. If there's any kind he ain't got, you just name it, will you?"

"He ain't got any Great Dane in him," yells the Stray Boy, hating to knuckle under.

"You're a liar, he has, too," says Freckles.

The Stray Boy backed it, and there was a fight. All us dogs and boys gathered around in a ring to watch it, and I was more anxious than anybody else. For the way that fight went, it was easy to see, would decide what I was.

Well, Freckles licked that Stray Boy, and rubbed his nose in the mud, and that's how I come to be an aristocrat.

Being an aristocrat may sound easy. And it may look easy to outsiders. And it may really be easy for them that are used to it. But it wasn't easy for me. It came on me suddenly, the knowledge that I was one, and without warning. I didn't have any time to practice up being one. One minute I wasn't one, and the next minute I was; and while, of course, I felt important over it, there were spells when I would get kind of discouraged, too, and wish I could go back to being a common dog again. I kept expecting my tastes and habits to change. I watched and waited for them to. But they didn't. No change at all set in on me. But I had to pretend I was changed. Then I would get tired of pretending, and

be down-hearted about the whole thing, and say to myself: "There has been a mistake. I am not an aristocrat after all."

I might have gone along like that for a long time, partly in joy over my noble birth, and partly in doubt, without ever being certain, if it had not been for a happening which showed, as Freckles said, that blood will tell.

It happened the day Wilson's World's Greatest One Ring Circus and Menagerie came to our town. Freckles and me, and all the other dogs and boys, and a good many humans, too, followed the street parade around through town and back to the circus lot. Many went in, and the ones that didn't have any money hung around outside a while and explained to each other they were going at night, because a circus is more fun at night anyhow. Freckles didn't have any money, but his dad was going to take him that night, so when the parade was over him and me went back to his dad's drug store on Main Street, and I crawled under the soda water counter to take a nap.

Freckles's dad, that everyone calls Doc Watson, is a pretty good fellow for a human, and he doesn't mind you hanging around the store if you don't drag bones in or scratch too many fleas off. So I'm there considerable in right hot weather. Under the soda water counter is the coolest place for a dog in the whole town. There's a zinc tub under there always full of water, where Doc washes the soda water glasses, and there's always considerable water slopped on to the floor. It's damp and dark there always.

Outdoors it may be so hot in the sun that your tongue hangs out of you so far that you tangle your feet in it; but in under there you can lie comfortable and snooze, and when you wake up and want a drink there's the tub with the glasses in it. And flies don't bother you because they stay on top of the counter where soda water has been spilled.

Circus day was a hot one, and I must have drowsed off pretty quick after lying down. I don't know how long I slept, but when I waked up it was with a start, for something important was going on outside in Main Street. I could hear people screaming and swearing and running along the wooden sidewalk, and horses whinnying, and dogs barking, and old Tom Cramp, the city marshal, was yelling out that he was an officer of the law, and the steam whistle on the flour mill was blowing. And it all seemed to be right in front of our store. I was thinking I'd better go out and see about it, when the screen doors crashed like a runaway horse had come through them, and the next minute a big yellow dog was back of the counter, trying to scrouch down and scrooge under it like he was scared and was hiding. He backed me into the corner without seeing me or knowing I was there, and like to have squashed me.

No dog— and it never struck me that maybe this wasn't a dog— no dog can just calmly sit down on me like that when I'm waking up from a nap, and get

away with it, no matter how big he is, and in spite of the darkness under there I could see and feel that this was the biggest dog in the world. I had been dreaming I was in a fight, anyhow, when he crowded in there with his hindquarters on top of me, and I bit him on the hind leg.

When I bit him he let out a noise like a thrashing machine starting up. It wasn't a bark. Nothing but the end of the world coming could bark like that. It was a noise more like I heard one time when the boys dared Freckles to lie down between the cattle guards on the railroad track and let a train run over him about a foot above his head, and I laid down there with him and it nearly deafened both of us. When he let out that noise I says to myself, "Great guns! What kind of a dog have I bit?"

And as he made that noise he jumped, and over went the counter, marble top and all, with a smash, and jam into the show window he went, with his tail swinging and me right after him, practically on top of him. It wasn't that I exactly intended to chase him, you understand, but I was rattled on account of that awful noise he had let out, and I wanted to get away from there, and I went the same way he did. So when he bulged through the window glass on to the street I bulged right after him, and as he hit the sidewalk I bit him again. The first time I bit him because I was sore, but the second time I bit him because I was so nervous I didn't know what I was doing, hardly. And at the second bite, without even looking behind him, he jumped clean over the hitch rack and a team of horses in front of the store and landed right in the middle of the road with his tail between his legs.

And then I realised for the first time he wasn't a dog at all. He was the circus lion. Mind you, I'm not saying that I would have bit him at all if I'd a-known at the start he was a lion.

And I ain't saying I wouldn't 'a' bit him, either.

But actions speak louder than words, and records are records, and you can't go back on them, and the fact is I did bite him. I bit him twice.

And that second bite, when we came bulging through the window together, the whole town saw. It was getting up telephone poles, and looking out of second-story windows, and crawling under side-walks and into cellars, and trying to hide behind the town pump; but no matter where it was trying to get to, it had one eye on that lion, and it saw me chasing him out of that store. I don't say I would have chased him if he hadn't been just ahead of me, anyhow, and I don't say I wouldn't have chased him, but the facts are I did chase him.

The lion was just as scared as the town— and the town was so scared it didn't know the lion was scared at all— and when his trainer got hold of him in the road he was tickled to death to be led back to his cage, and he lay down in

the far corner of it, away from the people, and trembled till he shook the wagon it was on.

But if there was any further doubts in any quarter about me being an aristocrat, the way I bit and chased that lion settled 'em for ever. That night Freckles and Doc went to the circus, and I marched in along with them. And every kid in town, as they saw Freckles and me marching in, says:—

"There goes the dog that licked the lion!"

And Freckles, every time anyone congratulated him on being the boy that belonged to that kind of a dog, would say:—

"Blood will tell! Spot's an aristocrat, he is."

And him and me and Doc Watson, his dad, stopped in front of the lion's cage that night and took a good, long look at him. He was a kind of an old moth-eaten lion, but he was a lion all right, and he looked mighty big in there. He looked so big that all my doubts come back on me, and I says to mtself "Honest, now, if I'd a-known he was a lion, and that big a lion, when I bit him, would I have bit him, or would I not?"

But just then Freckles reached down and patted me on the head and said: "You wasn't afraid of him, was you, old Spot! Yes, sir, blood will tell!"

———————

5: Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

The New-England Magazine, Dec 1834

A YOUNG FELLOW, a tobacco-pedler by trade, was on his way from Morristown, where he had dealt largely with the Deacon of the Shaker settlement, to the village of Parker's Falls, on Salmon River. He had a neat little cart, painted green, with a box of cigars depicted on each side-panel, and an Indian chief, holding a pipe and a golden tobacco-stalk, on the rear. The pedler drove a smart little mare, and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees; who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one. Especially was he beloved by the pretty girls along the Connecticut, whose favor he used to court by presents of the best smoking tobacco in his stock; knowing well that the country lasses of New England are generally great performers on pipes. Moreover, as will be seen in the course of my story, the pedler was inquisitive, and something of a tattler, always itching to hear the news, and anxious to tell it again.

After an early breakfast at Morristown, the tobacco-pedler, whose name was Dominicus Pike, had traveled seven miles through a solitary piece of woods, without speaking a word to anybody but himself and his little gray mare. It being nearly seven o'clock, he was as eager to hold a morning gossip as a city shopkeeper to read the morning paper. An opportunity seemed at hand, when, after lighting a cigar with a sun-glass, he looked up and perceived a man coming over the brow of the hill, at the foot of which the pedler had stopped his green cart. Dominicus watched him as he descended, and noticed that he carried a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick, and traveled with a weary, yet determined pace. He did not look as if he had started in the freshness of the morning, but had footed it all night, and meant to do the same all day.

"Good-morning, mister," said Dominicus, when within speaking distance. "You go a pretty good jog. What's the latest news at Parker's Falls?"

The man pulled the broad brim of a gray hat over his eyes, and answered, rather sullenly, that he did not come from Parker's Falls, which, as being the limit of his own day's journey, the pedler had naturally mentioned in his inquiry.

"Well, then," rejoined Dominicus Pike, "let's have the latest news where you did come from. I'm not particular about Parker's Falls. Any place will answer."

Being thus importuned, the traveler— who was as ill-looking a fellow as one would desire to meet, in a solitary piece of woods— appeared to hesitate a little, as if he was either searching his memory for news or weighing the expediency of telling it. At last, mounting on the step of the cart, he whispered in the ear of Dominicus, though he might have shouted aloud and no other mortal would have heard him.

"I do remember one little trifle of news," said he. "Old Mr. Higginbotham, of Kimballton, was murdered in his orchard, at eight o'clock last night, by an Irishman and a nigger. They strung him up to the branch of a St. Michael's pear-tree, where nobody would find him till the morning."

As soon as this horrible intelligence was communicated the stranger betook himself to his journey again, with more speed than ever, not even turning his head when Dominicus invited him to smoke a Spanish cigar and relate all the particulars. The pedler whistled to his mare and went up the hill, pondering on the doleful fate of Mr. Higginbotham, whom he had known in the way of trade, having sold him many a bunch of long nines, and a great deal of pigtail, lady's twist, and fig tobacco. He was rather astonished at the rapidity with which the news had spread. Kimballton was nearly sixty miles distant in a straight line; the murder had been perpetrated only at eight o'clock the preceding night; yet Dominicus had heard of it at seven in the morning, when, in all probability, poor Mr. Higginbotham'a own family had but just discovered his corpse, hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. The stranger on foot must have worn seven-league boots, to travel at such a rate.

"Ill news flies fast, they say," thought Dominicus Pike; "but this beats railroads. The fellow ought to be hired to go express with the President's Message."

The difficulty was solved by supposing that the narrator had made a mistake of one day in the date of the occurrence; so that our friend did not hesitate to introduce the story at every tavern and country store along the road, expending a whole bunch of Spanish wrappers among at least twenty horrified audiences. He found himself invariably the first bearer of the intelligence, and was so pestered with questions that he could not avoid filling up the outline, till it became quite a respectable narrative. He met with one piece of corroborative evidence. Mr. Higginbotham was a trader; and a former clerk of his, to whom Dominicus related the facts, testified that the old gentleman was accustomed to return home through the orchard, about nightfall, with the money and valuable papers of the store in his pocket. The clerk manifested but little grief at Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe, hinting, what the pedler had discovered in his own dealings with him, that he was a

crusty old fellow, as close as a vise. His property would descend to a pretty niece who was now keeping school in Kimballton.

What with telling the news for the public good, and driving bargains for his own, Dominicus was so much delayed on the road that he chose to put up at a tavern, about five miles short of Parker's Falls. After supper, lighting one of his prime cigars, he seated himself in the barroom, and went through the story of the murder, which had grown so fast that it took him a half hour to tell. There were as many as twenty people in the room, nineteen of whom received it all for gospel. But the twentieth was an elderly farmer, who had arrived on horseback a short time before, and was now seated in a corner smoking his pipe. When the story was concluded, he rose up very deliberately, brought his chair right in front of Dominicus, and stared him full in the face, puffing out the vilest tobacco smoke the pedler had ever smelled.

"Will you make affidavit," demanded he in the tone of a country justice taking an examination, "that old Squire Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered in his orchard the night before last, and found hanging on his great pear-tree yesterday morning?"

"I tell the story as I heard it, mister," answered Dominicus, dropping his half-burned cigar; "I don't say that I saw the thing done. So I can't take my oath that he was murdered exactly in that way."

"But I can take mine," said the farmer, "that if Squire Higginbotham was murdered night before last, I drank a glass of bitters with his ghost this morning. Being a neighbor of mine, he called me into his store, as I was riding by, and treated me, and then asked me to do a little business for him on the road. He didn't seem to know any more about his own murder than I did."

"Why, then, it can't be a fact!" exclaimed Dominicus Pike.

"I guess he'd have mentioned it, if it was," said the old farmer; and he removed his chair back to the corner, leaving Dominicus quite down in the mouth.

Here was a sad resurrection of old Mr. Higginbotham! The pedler had no heart to mingle in the conversation any more, but comforted himself with a glass of gin and water, and went to bed, where, all night long, he dreamed of hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. To avoid the old farmer (whom he so detested that his suspension would have pleased him better than Mr. Higginbotham's), Dominicus rose in the gray of the morning, put the little mare into the green cart, and trotted swiftly away toward Parker's Falls. The fresh breeze, the dewy road, and the pleasant summer dawn revived his spirits, and might have encouraged him to repeat the old story had there been anybody awake to hear it. But he met neither ox-team, light wagon, chaise, horseman,

nor foot-traveler, till, just as he crossed Salmon River, a man came trudging down to the bridge with a bundle over his shoulder, on the end of a stick.

"Good morning, mister," said the pedler, reining in his mare. "If you come from Kimballton or that neighborhood maybe you can tell me the real fact about this affair of old Mr. Higginbotham. Was the old fellow actually murdered, two or three nights ago, by an Irishman and a nigger?"

Dominicus had spoken in too great a hurry to observe, at first, that the stranger himself had a deep tinge of negro blood. On hearing this sudden question, the Ethiopian appeared to change his skin, its yellow hue becoming a ghastly white, while, shaking and stammering, he thus replied:

"No! no! There was no colored man! It was an Irishman that hanged him last night, at eight o'clock. I came away at seven! His folks can't have looked for him in the orchard yet."

Scarcely had the yellow man spoken, when he interrupted himself, and, though he seemed weary enough before, continued his journey at a pace which would have kept the pedler's mare on a smart trot. Dominicus stared after him in great perplexity. If the murder had not been committed till Tuesday night, who was the prophet that had foretold it, in all its circumstances, on Tuesday morning? If Mr. Higginbotham's corpse were not yet discovered by his own family, how came the mulatto, at above thirty miles' distance, to know that he was hanging in the orchard, especially as he had left Kimballton before the unfortunate man was hanged at all? These ambiguous circumstances, with the stranger's surprise and terror, made Dominicus think of raising a hue and cry after him, as an accomplice in the murder; since a murder, it seemed, had really been perpetrated.

"But let the poor devil go," thought the pedler. "I don't want his black blood on my head; and hanging the nigger wouldn't unhang Mr. Higginbotham. Unhang the old gentleman! It's a sin, I know; but I should hate to have him come to life a second time, and give me the lie!"

With these meditations, Dominicus Pike drove into the street of Parker's Falls, which, as everybody knows, is as thriving a village as three cotton factories and a slitting mill can make it. The machinery was not in motion, and but a few of the shop doors unbarred, when he alighted in the stable-yard of the tavern, and made it his first business to order the mare four quarts of oats. His second duty, of course, was to impart Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe to the hostler. He deemed it advisable, however, not to be too positive as to the date of the direful fact, and also to be uncertain whether it were perpetrated by an Irishman and a mulatto, or by the son of Erin alone. Neither did he profess to relate it on his own authority, nor that of any one person; but mentioned it as a report generally diffused.

The story ran through the town like fire among girdled trees, and became so much the universal talk that nobody could tell whence it had originated. Mr. Higginbotham was as well known at Parker's Falls as any citizen of the place, being part owner of the slitting mill, and a considerable stockholder in the cotton factories. The inhabitants felt their own prosperity interested in his fate. Such was the excitement that the "Parker's Falls Gazette" anticipated its regular day of publication, and came out with half a form of blank paper and a column of double pica emphasized with capitals, and headed "HORRID MURDER OF MR. HIGGINBOTHAM!" Among other dreadful details, the printed account described the mark of the cord round the dead man's neck, and stated the number of thousand dollars of which he had been robbed; there was much pathos also about the affliction of his niece, who had gone from one fainting fit to another, ever since her uncle was found hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree with his pockets inside out. The village poet likewise commemorated the young lady's grief in seventeen stanzas of a ballad. The selectmen held a meeting, and, in consideration of Mr. Higginbotham's claims on the town, determined to issue handbills, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of his murderers, and the recovery of the stolen property.

Meanwhile, the whole population of Parker's Falls, consisting of shopkeepers, mistresses of boarding-houses, factory girls, mill men, and schoolboys, rushed into the street, and kept up such a terrible loquacity as more than compensated for the silence of the cotton-machines which refrained from their usual din, out of respect to the deceased. Had Mr. Higginbotham cared about posthumous renown, his untimely ghost would have exulted in this tumult. Our friend Dominicus, in his vanity of heart, forgot his intended precautions, and, mounting on the town pump, announced himself as the bearer of the authentic intelligence which had caused so wonderful a sensation. He immediately became the great man of the moment, and had just begun a new edition of the narrative, with a voice like a field preacher, when the mail stage drove into the village street. It had traveled all night, and must have shifted horses at Kimballton at three in the morning.

"Now we shall hear all the particulars," shouted the crowd.

The coach rumbled up to the piazza of the tavern, followed by a thousand people; for if any man had been minding his own business till then, he now left it at sixes and sevens, to hear the news. The pedler, foremost in the race, discovered two passengers, both of whom had been startled from a comfortable nap to find themselves in the centre of a mob. Every man assailing them with separate questions, all propounded at once, the couple were struck speechless, though one was a lawyer and the other a young lady.

"Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham! Tell us the particulars about old Mr. Higginbotham!" bawled the mob. "What is the coroner's verdict? Are the murderers apprehended? Is Mr. Higginbotham's niece come out of her fainting fits? Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham!!"

The coachman said not a word, except to swear awfully at the hostler for not bringing him a fresh team of horses. The lawyer inside had generally his wits about him, even when asleep; the first thing he did, after learning the cause of the excitement, was to produce a large red pocketbook. Meantime, Dominicus Pike, being an extremely polite young man, and also suspecting that a female tongue would tell the story as glibly as a lawyer's, had handed the lady out of the coach. She was a fine, smart girl, now wide-awake and bright as a button, and had such a sweet, pretty mouth that Dominicus would almost as lief have heard a love tale from it as a tale of murder.

"Gentlemen and ladies," said the lawyer, to the shopkeepers, the mill men, and the factory girls, "I can assure you that some unaccountable mistake, or, more probably, a wilful falsehood, maliciously contrived to injure Mr. Higginbotham's credit, has excited this singular uproar. We passed through Kimballton at three o'clock this morning, and most certainly should have been informed of the murder had any been perpetrated. But I have proof, nearly as strong as Mr. Higginbotham's own oral testimony, in the negative. Here is a note, relating to a suit of his in the Connecticut courts, which was delivered me from that gentleman himself. I find it dated at ten o'clock last evening."

So saying, the lawyer exhibited the date and signature of the note, which irrefragably proved, either that this perverse Mr. Higginbotham was alive when he wrote it, or— as some deemed the more probable case of two doubtful ones— that he was so absorbed in worldly business as to continue to transact it, even after his death. But unexpected evidence was forthcoming. The young lady, after listening to the pedler's explanation, merely seized a moment to smooth her gown and put her curls in order, and then appeared at the tavern-door, making a modest signal to be heard.

"Good people," said she, "I am Mr. Higginbotham's niece."

A wondering murmur passed through the crowd, on beholding her so rosy and bright; that same unhappy niece whom they had supposed, on the authority of the *Parker's Falls Gazette*, to be lying at death's door in a fainting fit. But some shrewd fellows had doubted, all along, whether a young lady would be quite so desperate at the hanging of a rich old uncle.

"You see," continued Miss Higginbotham, with a smile, "that this strange story is quite unfounded, as to myself; and I believe I may affirm it to be equally so in regard to my dear uncle Higginbotham. He has the kindness to give me a home in his house, though I contribute to my own support by

teaching a school. I left Kimballton this morning to spend the vacation of commencement week with a friend, about five miles from Parker's Falls. My generous uncle, when he heard me on the stairs, called me to his bedside, and gave me two dollars and fifty cents, to pay my stage fare, and another dollar for my extra expenses. He then laid his pocketbook under his pillow, shook hands with me, and advised me to take some biscuit in my bag, instead of breakfasting on the road. I feel confident, therefore, that I left my beloved relative alive, and trust that I shall find him so on my return."

The young lady courtesied at the close of her speech, which was so sensible and well-worded, and delivered with such grace and propriety, that everybody thought her fit to be Preceptress of the best Academy in the State. But a stranger would have supposed that Mr. Higginbotham was an object of abhorrence at Parker's Falls, and that a thanksgiving had been proclaimed for his murder, so excessive was the wrath of the inhabitants on learning their mistake. The mill men resolved to bestow public honors on Dominicus Pike, only hesitating whether to tar and feather him, ride him on a rail, or refresh him with an ablution at the town-pump on the top of which he had declared himself the bearer of the news. The selectmen, by advice of the lawyer, spoke of prosecuting him for a misdemeanor, in circulating unfounded reports, to the great disturbance of the peace of the commonwealth. Nothing saved Dominicus, either from mob law or a court of justice, but an eloquent appeal made by the young lady in his behalf. Addressing a few words of heartfelt gratitude to his benefactress, he mounted the green cart and rode out of town, under a discharge of artillery from the schoolboys, who found plenty of ammunition in the neighboring clay-pits and mud-holes. As he turned his head, to exchange a farewell glance with Mr. Higginbotham's niece, a ball, of the consistence of hasty-pudding, hit him slap in the mouth, giving him a most grim aspect. His whole person was so bespattered with the like filthy missiles, that he had almost a mind to ride back and supplicate for the threatened ablution at the town-pump; for, though not meant in kindness, it would now have been a deed of charity.

However, the sun shone bright on poor Dominicus, and the mud, an emblem of all stains of undeserved opprobrium, was easily brushed off when dry. Being a funny rogue, his heart soon cheered up; nor could he refrain from a hearty laugh at the uproar which his story had excited. The hand-bills of the selectmen would cause the commitment of all the vagabonds in the State; the paragraph in the *Parker's Falls Gazette* would be reprinted from Maine to Florida, and perhaps form an item in the London newspapers; and many a miser would tremble for his money-bags and life, on learning the catastrophe of Mr. Higginbotham. The pedler meditated with much fervor on the charms of

the young schoolmistress, and swore that Daniel Webster never spoke nor looked so like an angel as Miss Higginbotham, while defending him from the wrathful populace at Parker's Falls.

Dominicus was now on the Kimballton Turnpike, having all along determined to visit that place, though business had drawn him out of the most direct road from Morristown. As he approached the scene of the supposed murder, he continued to revolve the circumstances in his mind, and was astonished at the aspect which the whole case assumed. Had nothing occurred to corroborate the story of the first traveler, it might now have been considered as a hoax; but the yellow man was evidently acquainted either with the report or the fact; and there was a mystery in his dismayed and guilty look on being abruptly questioned. When, to this singular combination of incidents, it was added that the rumor tallied exactly with Mr. Higginbotham's character and habits of life; and that he had an orchard, and a St. Michael's pear-tree, near which he always passed at nightfall; the circumstantial evidence appeared so strong that Dominicus doubted whether the autograph produced by the lawyer, or even the niece's direct testimony, ought to be equivalent. Making cautious inquiries along the road, the pedler further learned that Mr. Higginbotham had in his service an Irishman of doubtful character, whom he had hired without a recommendation, on the score of economy.

"May I be hanged myself," exclaimed Dominicus Pike aloud, on reaching the top of a lonely hill, "if I'll believe old Higginbotham is unhanged till I see him with my own eyes and hear it from his own mouth? And as he's a real shaver, I'll have the minister or some other responsible man for an endorser."

It was growing dusk when he reached the toll-house on Kimballton Turnpike, about a quarter of a mile from the village of this name. His little mare was fast bringing him up with a man on horseback, who trotted through the gate a few rods in advance of him, nodded to the toll-gatherer, and kept on toward the village. Dominicus was acquainted with the toll-man, and while making change the usual remarks on the weather passed between them.

"I suppose," said the pedler, throwing back his whip-lash, to bring it down like a feather on the mare's flank, "you have not seen anything of old Mr. Higginbotham within a day or two?"

"Yes," answered the toll-gatherer. "He passed the gate just before you drove up, and yonder he rides now, if you can see him through the dusk. He's been to Woodfield this afternoon, attending a sheriff's sale there. The old man generally shakes hands and has a little chat with me; but to-night he nodded— as if to say, 'Charge my toll'— and jogged on; for wherever he goes, he must always be home at eight o'clock."

"So they tell me," said Dominicus.

"I never saw a man look so yellow and thin as the squire does," continued the toll-gatherer. "Says I to myself, to-night, 'He's more like a ghost or an old mummy than good flesh and blood.'"

The pedler strained his eyes through the twilight, and could just discern the horseman, now far ahead on the village road. He seemed to recognize the rear of Mr. Higginbotham; but through the evening shadows, and amid the dust from the horse's feet, the figure appeared dim and unsubstantial; as if the shape of the mysterious old man were faintly molded of darkness and gray light. Dominicus shivered.

"Mr. Higginbotham has come back from the other world, by way of the Kimballton Turnpike," thought he.

He shook the reins and rode forward, keeping about the same distance in the rear of the gray old shadow, till the latter was concealed by a bend of the road. On reaching this point, the pedler no longer saw the man on horseback, but found himself at the head of the village street, not far from a number of stores and two taverns, clustered round the meeting-house steeple. On his left was a stone wall and a gate, the boundary of a wood-lot, beyond which lay an orchard, further still a mowing field, and last of all a house. These were the premises of Mr. Higginbotham, whose dwelling stood beside the old highway, but had been left in the background by the Kimballton Turnpike. Dominicus knew the place; and the little mare stopped short by instinct; for he was not conscious of tightening the reins.

"For the soul of me, I can not get by this gate!" said he, trembling. "I never shall be my own again, till I see whether Mr. Higginbotham is hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree!"

He leaped from the cart, gave the rein a turn around the gate-post, and ran along the green path of the wood-lot, as if Old Nick were chasing behind. Just then the village clock tolled eight, and as each deep stroke fell, Dominicus gave a fresh bound and flew faster than before, till, dim in the solitary centre of the orchard, he saw the fated pear-tree. One great branch stretched from the old contorted trunk across the path, and threw the darkest shadow on that one spot. But something seemed to struggle beneath the branch!

The pedler had never pretended to more courage than befits a man of peaceable occupation, nor could he account for his valor on this awful emergency. Certain it is, however, that he rushed forward, prostrated a sturdy Irishman with the butt-end of his whip, and found— not indeed hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree, but trembling beneath it, with a halter round his neck— the old identical Mr. Higginbotham!

"Mr. Higginbotham," said Dominicus, tremulously, "you're an honest man, and I'll take your word for it. Have you been hanged or not?"

If the riddle be not already guessed, a few words will explain the simple machinery by which this "coming event" was made to "cast its shadow before." Three men had plotted the robbery and murder of Mr. Higginbotham; two of them, successively, lost courage and fled, each delaying the crime one night by their disappearance; the third was in the act of perpetration, when a champion, blindly obeying the call of fate, like the heroes of old romance, appeared in the person of Dominicus Pike.

It only remains to say that Mr. Higginbotham took the pedler into high favor, sanctioned his addresses to the pretty schoolmistress, and settled his whole property on their children, allowing themselves the interest. In due time, the old gentleman capped the climax of his favors by dying a Christian death, in bed, since which melancholy event Dominicus Pike has removed from Kimballton, and established a large tobacco manufactory in my native village.

6: The Peace of Ephraim

Morley Roberts

1857-1942

Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), 6 April 1901

The "last spike" on the Canadian Pacific Railroad was driven on 7 November 1885

OLD EPHRAIM came shuffling down the hillside, and slid through the thick, dewy brush till he saw the lake water close at hand. He stood on the flat for a long minute, swinging his head from side to side, and with his fiery little eyes he took in the landscape.

"Gr-r-r-umph," said Ephraim, as he rubbed against a pine. "Gr-r-r-umph."

And, saying so, he slouched to the lake beach and drank. A bald-headed eagle on a dead branch high over head took no notice, for he was considering the question of fish for dinner. A striped chipmunk sat on a log and chirped. Far across the wide water was a blue column of faint smoke, but the lake was utterly calm. Not an Indian's canoe dotted the mirror in which were reflected the great hills. Ancient peace brooded over the forest.

"Gr-r-r-umph," said Ephraim, and by it meant to remark that it just suited him. He had no complaints to make so long as nobody interfered to crowd him. For, as you may guess. Ephraim was a bear, and in all his life he had never seen a man. He did not know that man was good to eat; he had yet to discover that man makes railroads, and is a mighty disturber of peace.

The very next day there landed on this far off quiet lake beach in British Columbia two animals who. walked upon their hind legs. One of them was a silent man, with a blt of the bear In him, for he sometimes said, "Gr-r-r-umph," but the other laughed, and was as cheery as a chipmunk in a newly-deserted camp.

"This is the spot, the only possible," said the cheerful Disturber,

"Gr-r-r-umph," answered the gruff Disturber. "Why, certainly, Harris; it's actually flat, and with a dozen or two of men here with axes we'll knock thunder out of this brush, and have these infernal trees down; and, sirree, we'll build our town right here."

"It'll hev to do," said Harris, with discontent.

"You're as bad as the old Scotch grumbler who said that the engine-bed laid down by his son was 'level, but nae mair,' " cried Sisson, laughing. "Why, sirree, we'll have a lovely time building. Gimme a railroad."

He smacked ruddy lips, and gleamed red in the westering sun.

"Back to the Narrows, old man."

Next morning more invaders came in many boats and old Indian dug-outs, and there was the sound of axes laid to the roots of ancient pines. Ephraim of

the woods heard nothing, for he was far off among the silent hills on a blueberry picnic.

"Look out now! Stand from under, you!"

"How's she falling?"

The chief axeman stood with his palm against the bole of the biggest monarch there.

"One more clip."

The tree whimpered and wavered, and cracked loudly.

"This way, my beauty," said the axeman; as he moved aside, still with his palm to the bark. The tree bowed; and with an ever-increasing speed swept to the ground, landing with an-awful crash.

So fell many that hour.

They built a road.

They marked out a place for the C.P. Store. And Sisson stood with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat."

"She moves," said Sisson.

What moved he did not say. But a town was in the very act of arising. The tree took centuries. The town was born in a day.

"At Sisson's Landing" they said down the Shushwap Lake. And yet Sisson's Landing had only existed twenty-four hours.

"We're off up to Sisson's," said half the crowd on the wharf at Kamloops. There were Americans from East Canada and from the United States just yonder. There were Englishmen, and real or imported British Columbians. With them stood Scandinavians, and sons of Lapland, and Chinamen and Indians. A Mexican swapped cigarettes with a Spaniard from Castille.

"Clahya tilicum, how goes it, partner? Why, I thot as you was bound for Victoria?"

"So I was, but now I ain't. Sisson's in business. That's what."

So Sisson's hummed still more.

"Where are you off to, Johnny, old Fan Sing?"

"Me washee Sisson's."

"Wash her well, you old galoot."

"*Mein Gott*, I miss de boat," said a German.

"Miss thunder," said the incredulous crowd: "we never observed you miss anything. It's we do that. What's in your baggage?"

The libelled German passed that disorderly Customs gang, puffing. Then the steamer squealed; an echo answered from the big bluff opposite.

"Hoot-too-oot!"

"Goodbye— good luck— send word— eh, what— I ain't got none— can't catch a derned word— oh, yea— by Gosh— now you're off— here's how, you railroad-building scum, you!"

"Hoot-too-oot-too-oot!"

And the Spallumcheen stern wheeler swept at twelve knots for Sisson's.

Everybody was bound for Sisson's. They came from the First Columbia Crossing and from Golden City. They dropped in from Sandy Point. They dropped down from Spallumcheen in the ricketty rotten tub called the *Pearl.* They paddled from the Salmon Arm. They came up from Ashford in the Black Canon, from Cache Creek, from Yale, from Hope, from Victoria. Good men came, and bad. There were men who sold and men who bought; men who loafed, who worked, who gambled, who stole. Sisson's was once a bear-haunt, now it was a hive of bees who made money instead of honey. A corduroyed road led into Eagle Pass; four-horsed waggons squished in mud, and teamsters howled or sang or were silent according to their progress and the progress of the long day.

The authorities further west woke up.

"There's a town at Sisson's, send Todd up!"

And Todd, the magistrate, got into the boat. He tried to look after liquor licences. But then every other man had a keg.

Said Sisson: "This is my town, by gosh! "

He beamed on the saturnine Harris who was the silent partner.

"Now she scoots, she hums," said Sisson.

The long, street which was Sisson's was house: made of canvas, of matched flooring, of clapboards of logs, of bark shacks.

"Come in and eat," said one house in red letters, "We are the Shushwap House."

"Pie," said another house.

Another one had red blinds.

Another was where the gamblers led the wary and unwary to "buck and tiger." They spake the language of Faro, of Keno, and they had a Wheel of Fortune, which was a fortune to them. But the greatest fortune was the secret keg. Only when Todd landed there was more sobriety. He had the law behind him, and north of the forty-ninth parallel of latitude, which divides the United States from Canada, the Law grows rather well than otherwise. South of that parallel, the Law is rather a poor weed. You certainly won't get 60 bushels of it to the acre out of the soil in Idaho and Montana.

"Law be— yep, that's what!" they say there.

But in British Columbia a warrant runs at times.

Yet when Todd cleared, and especially when he lighted out for home on a Saturday, Sisson's burned and blazed and yelled and bulged, and went on tearing Jamboree and painted itself as red as some did their cheeks in the Houses with Red Blinds. Law might grow, but order went rip like a rotten top-sail in a squall. Sisson's howled and rioted, and the long-booted and redshirted danced till dancing entered their brains and consciousness waltzed out, turning head-over-heels, catherine wheel-wise, into the darkness.

They lay in piles. They stacked themselves in fine disorder like the truck shoot of a capsized waggon on the rough toat road. They lay like spillicans, and no one could disentangle Bill from Jack, or Hans from Mike, or Peter from Paul. There was a universal federation on the beach of the silver lake. The stars looked down on international quietness at last.

And now the railroad crawled nearer. It came down from the east, and it crawled up from the west. Hard men built it where drink was not. Only in the middle of the yet rail-less space was such a spot as Sisson's. Sisson's knew now that the last spike must be driven not so far away from its fiery speck in the wilderness. The notion intoxicated all; even Harris, the bear, smacked Sisson on the shoulder as the news came in.

"The end of track is at the summit!"

The soberest danced. For Achievement was tasselling like maize. The Federation's labor was nearly over. Finance was to commence fruition.

"It's the biggest railroad on earth!"

That depressed men from the United States. They drooped and dranked, and bucked up, and declared that south of the border it could have been built in about forty-seven seconds and three fifths, by the third best chronometer, in Washington. They were given the laugh and the lie, and some joined battle.

"You ain't got the mountings as we hev," said a Missourian, who had never seen a mountain til he came to British Columbia.

"These yer mountains is to the full twenty thousand feet, I swear," said one of the men of British; Columbia.

"Say thirty!"

"And so I will!"

He did. And believed it.

But it was a big road anyhow. You'll allow that partner! Come, fill up; what's your poison, give it lip, fill them up again, Mr. Smith, and take one yourself. Here's to the last spike of the Canadian Pacific!"

"Who will drive it home? Oh, happy man, no less happy than he who laid the last true stone on the Great Pyramid, or he who one day shall sit in Latitude Nothing on the chair of the Assembled Longitudes.

They did things, these people, and they sweated joy. What time the tall pagodas of the spruces fell, and odorous hemlocks trembled, and the ruddy barked fir declined on meaner brush, their hearts beat full and happy. The surveyed line became real, and broadened; pick and shovel, bar and drill labored; rock-cuts opened, their contents whirled into fills; and dynamite spoke sharply to gunpowder. The cliffs threw themselves Into the river, and gave way to the road.

It was the road to Sisson's.

And below, the forest slipped aside like a split crowd when, police enter; and the track-layers fought with the weight of Iron and steel. The makers of ties toiled aside in little camps where sudden canvas, seen through opposing enticing brush, showed white like a cataract or a snowdrift. For the rails stepped eastward on the ties. Eastward to Sisson's, to a last hand-shaking, to a lock-fast grip of east and west.

The papers talked, adding to the universal noise which roared along the rails from Montreal east away to Winnipeg, east and away to Medicine Hat, and east to Calgary and the stone steps of mountains to one summit. Each community yelled in print; what the crowd said in subscriptions (cash, hash, or promises) the editor poured forth in a flood of Ink.

"The most notable event of the century," for what the thunder is the rest of the world? We are we, the Unanimous, the Surprising, Uprising. Enterprise East and West— we have pretty nigh corralled the Universe! So!

And all this merged into two chutes verging on Sisson's, the dumping ground of Hope, Work, and Achievement. What wonder that Sisson almost paled, poor man, and then trembled (he being optimistic), and turned to the Advocatus Diaboli Harris, invoker of Disaster and the Dark Side of Things.

"By gosh, it's great!"

He said so to the stars and the lake In front of him.

"The way you chaps howl," said Harris gloomily, "would or should make the earth open; why the blue blazes don't you do things quietly?"

For they were roaring a new song in a hundred saloon bars at Sisson's about the Last Spike.

"The last nail in their coffin, the galoots," said that bear Harris, "the drink sellers have their money, and we have their labor and the financiers have us, and when the spike is driven they are out of a job!"

But the crowd said that one job was monotonous, and a railroader couldn't sit down by a built road and admire his own work even for seventy-five dollars a month. They hankered now in the back of their minds for new roads. Every man Jack of them was a pick and shovel Alexander.

"We ain't lookin' for no soft seat!"

Good to hear that in these days, when the soft-seated howl softly on cushions, and do not know their complaint is suppressed energy. Rise up, rise up, and come to the meeting of the rails! Even now one end of track can almost catch the clink of hammer on spike at the other end of track. The Atlantic and St. Lawrence say at the rail telephone

"Are you there?"

"We're here," say the Pacific and the Columbia River and the Fraser! "we're here, you bet."

Those, who have not lived in such mountain air or listened to the music of the stormy river, and the cymbals of the crash of snow slides, hear the echo of it now and catch the smell of the men's kitchens mingled with the odor of stripped bark and pine chips and sawdust! The sawmill on the creek hums; the axe talks through the distance, when the tree gives depth to its voice, like a lone bull-frog in a far-off marsh. Overhead the snow glitters and the feathery pines are princely plumes. And yonder, yonder (the other western side of Sisson's) there are horrors; sand, alkali, hot sun, the Dry Belt, in fact, betwixt Kamloops and the Canon of the pent-in Fraser. With so big a thing as this road, in so great a scale of lives and labor, we can afford to give away everything. We present you with life and death and many changes of panorama; Heaven opens and hell smokes.

How it smoked at Sisson's!

For, as I have been endeavoring to show you blind mice, Sisson's was peculiar. It had qualities that no other place of achievement had. It was the place of white-hot welding— Sisson's sizzled, the temperature of men's minds climbed out of the poor thin realm of the normal and got up notch by notch in fine frenzy heat till enthusiastic lava rolled in waves like a storm in Kilauea's basin. Tom Sisson sank and was melted— black Harris floated red hot slag in molten metal; the very stars were to come down out of the sky. Fused ambitions looked on Heaven above as Little Jack Horner looked on his historic cake.

"He put in his thumb
And pulled out a plum-"

Sisson's with its whole corporate hand reached for constellations. Immortal magic Sisson's! Born yesterday, it was becoming immemorial. Yesterday was ancient reckoning; to-day was culmination. To-morrow the new pole (made of gold in the shape of a spike) was to be driven in by gods.

Day by day drifted past in huge labor. Barrows ran with giants behind them; emulous hills slid obediently into hollows, and the grade grew along the

ground, nearer, nearer the event. And as the interest concentrated itself, some outside fell-off. They had to go; the crowd betwixt end of track and end of track was too great; men stood in each other's way; hammers, bars, and shovels lay in piles, their work done. Displaced sons of labor stood by in imminent sadness; their minds wavered betwixt this conquered territory and some railroad breaking out in Oregon or thereabouts. Some went with set minds; some stayed, anchored for the final triumph.

The full days tumbled from the calendar of time and the day itself arrived. Round yonder bluff could be heard the shriek of one locomotive— across the lake could be seen the white steam of another. One was east and the other, west. They were to meet by glorious Sisson's. Stand back, clear the track for this one dictator of a day doubly triumphing in the gods' capitol of mountains!

Strangers shook hands; strangers there were, with lights and men's eyes, and stars, and, metaphorically, with a thousand headlights of engines.

Sisson's rose early, having never been to bed. All night long that street of Sisson's was aflare none; a Chinaman was a fellow creature; Sisson himself gave a hand to any thrust-out fist of congratulation. And Sisson was somebody then and always. Sisson and Sisson's sibulated on every tongue.

They said

"Sisson's is a town—"

"And will be—"

An interjected "nothing" produced uproar till the interjector humbly explained that his "nothing" by no means referred to Sisson's.

"What is she now?"

"And what will she be?"

They walked along the Christmas tree, forest of imagination, and cracked nuts with twenty dollar gold pieces in them. A leaf was at least a dollar bill.

"Here's to the city, of Sisson's— the mountain capital!"

They drank, to that. The Shack-owner passed a box of cigars about, and actually forgot and gave the best.

And yet they knew that Sisson's was a coruscating symbol only; east was hammer, west was anvil, and Sisson's flew out in sparks. Harris, the devil's advocate of black truth, said so, being melancholy drunk, and was ejected by the virtuous illusionists.

"To-morrow— no— to-day!"

The sun climbed over the hills— and it was the day. Sisson's turned out with blacked or greased boots and many clean shirts, and some rasped chins looking like headed stubble, and poured hither and thither. The Bosses came. The big boss and the lesser boss and the little boss and (so to speak) the boss-lets. The white-headed surveyor came with many sons— he had opened the

pass; the engineers came— they were dynamite and powder and law and order combined. The police came, B. C. police and Dominion police, madly jealous of each other, or jealous and despising; and Todd, magistrate, suppressor or mitigator of illicit liquor. Victoria sent men and women; they came from Montreal, visible embodied congratulations. Two locomotives stood almost pilot to pilot. Even now the track-layers sweated with the last six-hundred pound rails. Their strong man carried one alone, and was madly cheered by crowd and echo from the hills.

"Now, then— that's it— so—"

"Now a spike—"

The hammer fell.

"Another— so!"

"Another!"

"No; that's the last— the last. Leave it for the big man!"

How they cheered, stumbling among brush and piles of ties. They looked round half aghast to think it so near done. The autumn of accomplishment suddenly saddened them.

"Where shall we be to-morrow?"

Sisson's quivered, and almost knew itself a name.

"I'm going to-morrow or next day-but you-" You will stay, of course, for the greater, solider glory of Sisson's?"

Now you virtuous and you temperate must understand how It was that Sisson's proceeded to raise Cain and got full, far too full, of various imported adulterations! They stood in illusion, on illusion, clad with illusion, and when the work was over began to feel cold. For some it was their last work. For some their first. Some faced idleness, some faced seeking. An ended job is a cold day always. Who shall provide?

Sisson's couldn't say, and therewith proceeded to get very much over the border of strict sobriety.

Be it remembered, without infinite regret, that "the Grest, the Lesser, and the Little, and all their Satellites were just about as full as the Shushway Lake. Little and great were alike men, and this day swept down dignity and pride of place and all barriers. Didn't the biggest shake hands with Sisson's meanest? And it wasn't a fluke either. Humanity was fuzed.

They drove that golden spike, and as the roar of golden applause loosened snow, the wires carried echoes to the east and west, to Montreal, to New York, to London, to the world.

"We have been and gone and done it! the biggest railroad on this earth is done. That is— it is begun!"

'"Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Gentlemen, the Queen!"

The great dinner marquee strained at its supports, and wonder wondered that it didn't rise like a balloon.

"To the President of the United States!"

Why not, why not? Yell, yell, ye inside and outside devils.

"To the President of this road!"

Ay, to the President of this road, this through road, this only road under one management from the Atlantic to the Pacific! Suck in your breath, and send the balanced snow slides down!

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The locomotives hooted. The crowd fired off its guns. The steamers on the lake whooped deliriously, and echo answered from a thousand precipices— "It's done! It's done! It's done!"

Sisson's flamed with lights, and was a constellation till another day dimmed its sparkling crown.

OLD EPHRAIM, just before holing up time, come out of the hills and went crashing through the brush towards the lake. For the lake side was quiet again, and a spirit of curiosity, led by some enticing and curious odors, took him down. He scrambled over a prone pine and came into the open, and into Silent Sisson's, where chipmunks once more played, and where every shack and shanty was eyeless, with its windows and sashes gone.

He went through the dead city with his suspicious red eyes glaring, and every now and again he stopped and swung his head from side to side. And when he came to the water he saw, as he drank, the white steam of a locomotive just across the Narrows. The locomotive said— "Hoot-too-oot." .

And Ephraim sniffed contemptuously.

What he thought of dead Sisson's no man is smart enough to tell, but what he said was "G-rrr-umph!"

———————————

7: Cleverly Caught

John Arthur Barry

1851-1911

Launceston Examiner (Tasmania) 29 April, 3 and 4 May, 1898

AMONG the saloon passengers of the *Illimani*, ere she was a fortnight out, little Miss Agnew had become quite a pet.

"She was such a dear— so natural, so really chic!' said the ladies; while the men enjoyed to the full her utter or assumed lack of conventionality.

She was a fresh-colored girl of about 15, handsome enough after a robust, dairy-maid fashion, with full red lips, white teeth, and black eyes, under a shock of curly hair, that shrank from no man's gaze. Miss Agnew had come on board at the very last moment, with an uncle and aunt to see her off; also a note from the owners, commending her to the captain's care.

Popularly it was known that she was a rich squatter's daughter, returning home after a long visit to England. Her sole occupation of one of the best berths in the ship, as well as the possession of plenty of spare cash, gave some reason to the rumor of wealth. It was also whispered that she had been expelled from more than one fashionable school. But nobody seemed to think much the worse of her for that.

This trip the *Illimani* happened lo have a rather aristocratic passenger list for Australia. There were an incoming governor and his countess; another couple of stray peers and peeresses; a rich baronet and his wife; and several gentlemen, middle-aged and elderly, making the round voyage for their health's sake— that is, the sake of a long and uninterrupted steady drinking. And with these, at times, nothing loth, "Dolly," as she was called, would smoke the cigarette and toss a glass of champagne, being looked upon with a lenient eye by her female friends, not only on the plea of her being an "Australian tomboy," but for the sake of the little scandalous tit-bits site was able to retail to them afterwards in the privacy of their cabins.

At Naples, among others, there came on board for the second saloon a young Frenchman, apparently pretty ill with asthma; so much so, indeed, that he seemed able to do nothing else but lie in his deck chair all day long, covered up with rugs. Quite a curiosity, too, was this deck chair, massive but light, folding up into a compact compass, curiously carved, and made of neither cane nor canvas, but of stout olive wood, with big, bulging arms and a thick, curved back. And Monsieur Deschamps seemed to set great store by it, for always, when the day was over, and he walked feebly to his berth, the quartermaster carefully folded up the chair and carried it lo its owner.

At first people laughed. But cranks and eccentrics are so plentiful on such ships as the *lllimani* that far more *outré* things ceased to attract attention, and

Deschamps and his chair soon became part and parcel of the daily and weekly monotony.

Curiously enough, among all the passengers, there was no one with a sufficient knowledge of French to interpret between the sick passenger and the *Illimani*'s doctor, or the stewards, or anybody. And this was awkward, for Monsieur Deschamps was unable to speak a word of any language but his own. This matter presently coming to Dolly's ears, she volunteered to "have a go."

"I was," she said, "a couple of years at school at Rouen, aud if I can't patter their lingo, I reckon I'm due for the leatheriest medal on board this canoe." So, tripping across the bridge that separated the two classes, Dolly went up to the invalid and began— much to everybody's admiration— to discourse with eloquent volubility and gesture.

Listening a minute, the Frenchman appearing to recognise the real thing at last, sat up and waved his hands and shrugged his shoulders, and with a delight aud gratification beautiful to witness. And after this, nearly every day, Dolly went along and cheered the poor fellow up, interpreting his symptoms to the doctor and his wants to the stewards.

In most ocean liners there is posted up somewhere a notice advising passengers to deposit their valuables with the purser for safety during the voyage a small percentage being charged for the accommodation. Many people object to paying this; others are too lazy to go to any trouble; others too careless. So that, very often until something is missing, the caution is a dead letter.

It was so on the *lllimani*. But one morning Dolly, returning from her usual visit to her French friend, found the saloon a scene of the utmost confusion— ladies running about with empty jewel cases, stewards protesting, purser threatening, and the cliief stewardess in hysterics. The Countess of Trebibond had lost a diamond necklace and a set of priceless pearls; Lady Trotter de Globe was minus her family jewels, sapphires, opals, and diamonds valued at £3,000; the Honorable Mrs Monopole's diamond earrings (they were fashionable then) tiara, and necklet, were gone.

In fact, it appears that nearly everything worth having was gone. There were a lot of paste and Palais Royal imitations— beautifully done— but all such had been rejected with the nice appreciation of an expert, or at least an intimate. And, to complete matters, nothing was forced— every lock intact and the keys in their owners' pockets.

The excitement and commotion were intense. The captain alone kept calm; and when the male relatives of the victims talked about suing the company, he suavely drew their attention to the notice afore-mentioned. Dolly was demurely sad, and condoled, even wept, with her aristocratic friends. Her own

things, a set of pearls and a few diamond ornaments, she explained, had been in the purser's big safe from the commencement of the voyage. Her uncle had insisted on it.

But who was the thief? Public opinion pointed to some one among the stewards. And the first thing done was to ransack the "glory-hole," as their quarters were called. Nothing was found. Then "search law" was proclaimed throughout the ship, much to the indignation of the second and third classes.

It took some considerable time to overhaul the effects of nearly 400 people. Nor was it a pleasant matter, as the purser, the chief steward, and their assistants discovered. Not a trace of the lost jewellery was to be found.

But the captain grew anxious. He had been quite certain that the things would be found. Although he was not liable, the ship's reputation would be ruined so far as carrying passengers was concerned. And this was a serious consideration. Still, what more could he do?

Then suddenly he remembered that Watson was waiting at Colombo to go on with him to Melbourne. If anybody could help it was Watson! Wherefore those who troubled about the daily runs, noticed that the *Illimani* was being driven al almost top speed across the Arabian sea. In these days she was a decidedly uncomfortable ship within— suspicion writ large on every face of all her great company, each one doubtful of his neighbor, and all secretly watching, and so it seemed, thinking about the reward offered by the victims and the executive of the *Illimani*— £500 — contributed to by captain and ship's boy alike, and very willingly. Dolly Agnew gave £30 to the fund; and her friend, Monsieur Deschamps, when made aware of what was goltig on, insisted on putting down his name for £5. But nothing came of it.

At Colombo— reached after a record run— there was indignation when it was found that the captain had stopped all shore-going, and also barred the usual crowd of dealers, jugglers, etc., from coming near the ship. Only one passenger came on board at Colombo— an old, gray-haired, gray-bearded man who walked with a stoop, and peered dimly at people through tinted spectacles. He was accepted as a tea-planter, an old friend of the captain's going to Australia on business.

Speaking little himself, Mr Johnson was, nevertheless, a perfect godsend to the ship at large; and into his ears was dinned by the passengers again and again the story of their losses and wrongs.

"Well," asked the skipper, a few days later as Mr Johnson strolled into the former's state-room, "any news yet?"

"Not much," was the reply; "only that you've got at least one artist on board-one of the most skilful cracksmen in London— which is saying a good deal."

"Which is he?" asked the captain. "Some fellow in the steerage, I suppose?"

"Not much," replied the other, laughing. "The only wonder is that he is not in the saloon here. It's the fellow in the second who gammons sick, and sits in the big chair all day."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the captain, "you're out of it this time, old man. That poor chap's a Frenchman— can't speak a word of anything else!"

"Is that so?" replied the other calmly. "Well, in any case, he's the man who can tell you where the stolen stuff is."

"Nonsense," said the captain. " He's never been for'ard the whole passage. Why, If it hadn't been for Miss Agnew talking to him, he'd have had to stay dumb altogether."

"Fine-looking, fresh-complexioned, rather Jewessy, curly-haired girl, lots of side and sauce— No. 27, port side?"

"Right," replied the skipper. " Australian native. She's in my charge. Knows her way about, though, too well to want any looking after."

"H'm!" grunted his companion, lighting a fresh cigar. "You told me, I think, that you had searched the ship?"

"Every corner and every soul on board," replied the captain, proudly.

"Tchk, tchk," said the other, between tongue and teetli. "What a pity! Tony Jenkins is a genius, though! A commoner would have chucked the things overboard. Not Tony; he's too much of an artist to stand any waste of that sort Yes, I should say there was a chance. When you first broached the matter I thought it was only a bit of amateur aristocratic kleptomania. I see now that it's thorough business— business sweet and hot; a well-considered, long-thought-of, cleverly put-up job. Thank your stars, my boy, that I happened to be where I was, or you'd have lost your billet to a certainty!"

"Well, Watson— yes, of course, Johnson," said the captain, changing color as he thought of the fix he was in, and saw no way out of, "there's the reward, you know. And—"

"Don't want a penny," replied the detective. "This is purely a little private affair between ourselves. I'm on official business, and shouldn't have meddled but for old acquaintance's sake. You did me a good turn once. I'll return it now— if I can."

Next morning Mr Johnson managed, casually, to have a talk with Dolly, who came up to where he sat in the sun, looking very old and feeble, to ask bis opinion on the quality of the saloon tea, which, she averred, "wasn't fit for pigs to drink." Later, she confided to her friends that he wasn't a bad old josser, and that she rather thought he'd been a gay sort of a chappie in his day; while, on his part, Mr Johnson, removing the powerful magnifying glasses he had worn

throughout the interview, smiled in his beard, and muttered, "The scar's there all right, but fainter than when I saw it last. Clever! Clever's no name for it! No use looking through their berths, I suppose. However, I may as well have a try. I'll bet the stuff's neither there nor on their persons. If not, where then? A sum in induction, *à la* Sherlock Holmes!"

And "Mr Johnson," generally supposed to be the cleverest and keenest of all Scotland Yard, puckered his brows over the problem. During dinner he managed to slip into, and with practised hands ransack, Dolly's berth. But he found nothing at all incriminating in the single-cabin trunk, unless a bottle of hair depilatory and another of dye could be deemed so. The clothing was all of good make and quality, and as the intruder noted the carefully-worked initials, "D.A.," on everything, he shook his head doubtfully. Under the circumstances a mistake was a very serious matter. And the *Illimani* was rapidly ncaring tlie Australian coast. If he was to make a coup, he had no time to lose.

Monsieur Deschamps occupied a deck chair aft: and while its occupant was at luncheon in the second saloon on the following day Sir Johnson made as free with his belongings as he had done with Dolly's. And with a. little more success. In the pockets of a pair of old trousers he found a tiny key, with only one ward, at the sight of which his eyes glistened.

"M-m," he muttered, as he slopped out on to the empty deck, "the rest of the bunch are overboard. I suppose. Overlooked this one, evidently. Didn't think Tony was so careless. But what's he done with the stuff? Sent it after the keys? No, I can't believe that, after going to so much trouble."

One morning, listlessly observing the little procession emerging from the invalid Frenchman's cabin, as usual-first, Monsieur Deschamps, walking very slowly, and holding on tight to things in his path; then the quartermaster. laden with chair and rugs, mounting up to the second promenade deck— an idea flashed across the watching detective's brain, and ere night he managed to have a chat with the quartermaster.

"Yes, sir," said the latter, in answer to a question, "poor chap, 'e thinks a lot o' that chair. I've got to put it in his berth every night, so keerful as if it was made o' glass. You see, it ain't no common chair, that one."

"Well, I'm ready," said Johnson to the captain shortly after this. "You've been very good, and haven't bothered me much. Now, I want your help. You must get the doctor to send for the Frenchman to the dispensary on some pretence or other. Then Miss Agnew must be called to interpret. Presently we two will drop in, and then— well, if I'm right, you'll see some fun. If I'm not, there'll be wigs on the green. But I can't put it off any longer, although not as sure as I'd like to be. Once we get to Albany, the fat's in the fire; for I cannot

wait to shadow people, nor can you very well prevent the Westraliau passengers from landing."

As the captain and Mr Johnson strolled into the dispensary that evening, Monsieur Deschamps was speaking.

"*Mais oui, Monsieur le docteur*." said he, "*je crois bieu que, depuis que j'ai pris voire derniere mixture, je me fals plus de saute*."

"He says," translated Dolly, " that since he took that last medicine he feels much better."

"Hello, Tony, old man," suddenly exclaimed the detective, who had been standing in one corner of the rather dim room. "I'm sorry to hear of your— your being so ill. How do you like the sea?"

"Mr Watson!" shouted the sham Frenchman, as he stared from the clean-shaved, hawk-eyed, massive-jawed man before him, to the grey wig, beard and spectacles on the deck.

"And how's my little friend, the Kid?" continued Watson, stepping to the door and noting, with a breath of relief, the color fade out of Dolly's cheeks and the familiar, hunted look he knew so well steal over both their faces.

"No, you don't!" he continued, suddenly whipping out a revolver and presenting it at Tony, whose hand was quietly stealing around to his hip pocket. The other laughed carelessly, and, taking a cigar out of his case, lit it: while Watson, turning to the astonished skipper and doctor, said: "Allow me, gentlemen, to present to you Mr Anthony Green, alias Jenkins, alias Deschamps, and a dozen others; and Master William Dawson, better known as the Kid, the Dinah, Young Dutch, &c., the former gentleman the leading artist of his profession, the latter the best female impersonator of the day.

"Now, Tony, where's the swag?"

"Curse you, Watson!" replied the elder of the pair calmly,. but with au ugly look in his shifty gray eyes. "Find it, if you can! I won't help you!"

"Same here!" exclaimed the *ci-devant* Dolly, with a laugh. "And if any of those old cats in the saloon make a row, Tony, I'll tell some funny little stories I've picked up among 'em that will make 'em glad to leave Australia by the next mail boat.

"Good boy," said Tony approvingly. "Kept eyes and ears open, eh?"

"You bet!" replied the lad, defiantly sitting hack, crossing his legs, and puffing away at a cigarette; regarded by the poor captain with a fascinated stare of amazement.

"Well, Jenkins, come now— the swag!" exclaimed Watson impatiently. "Find it," replied the othei; laconically. "All right," said Watson, playing his doubtful trump.

"Captain, will you kindly have Monsieur Deschamps' s chair brought in here?"

"The devil!" shouted Jenkins. "Never mind troubling. How did you find it out? All right; I pass. Watson, you've spoiled one of the best things of the century. Well, I suppose we can go now. I don't fancy anybody will bother either of us, from what the Kid's told me off and on," and he chuckled. "I suppose," he went on, "that we may as well keep up the fiction till we get to Albany, eh, Watson? But think of all my time and trouble and ingenuity wasted. Think of that lovely chair and its secret hiding places. Hang it! I could almost cry over the thing, Watson."

"Or shoot me," replied the latter, laughing grimly, as he replaced his disguise.

"Well, yes, at the moment," admitted the other. "But it's all over now. I never bother about spilt milk. You know that, Watson. All the sparklers shall be back before eight bells tonight, *parole d'honneur*. Doctor, I feel so much better that I don't think I'll require any more medicine. Miss Agnew, I know I can trust you to smooth matters over with our aristocratic friends *la bas*. Have you finished with us, Watson?"

"Provisionally," replied the detective. " I don't suppose the Captain here wants more fuss made over the matter than can be helped. And the doctor will keep silent for the ship's sake. I'm of Miss Agnew's opinion that the ladies for'ard will he only too pleased to get their jewellery back again. Of course, if we had long to wait it would be different. But we shall be at Albany tomorrow; and that young scamp's presence among them won't matter much for one night more."

"Look here, Watson," put in "the Kid," "if you're not civil I'll tell tales before I go yet."

"But," stammered the captain, speaking for the first time. "I say Watson, where's our guarantee? Of course you may trust Mr— um— Jenkins— er— Green, there, and— this er— young man, or girl, or whatever it is, and take their words. But I'd like something—"

"That's all right." interrupted Watson, cheerfully. "I know my mark. I'd trust Tony up to any sum, once he's given his word. Believe me, it will be all serene. And neither of them will blab. They've been fairly beaten for once at least."

"Thank you, Mr Watson, for your good opinion of me," said Tony, pausing at the door and bowing politely. "You will see, I hope, that it is deserved. *Au revoir*!"

And sure enough, some time and somehow, before next morning, each of the despoiled ones found her property returned intact. Explanations, of course, were demanded; but all at once the thirst for them dropped; and

"Dolly" laughed mockingly at the glances of fear and abhorrence darted at her by whilom friends and confidantes. On all sides it was agreed "that for the sake of the ship and the captain" the affair should be hushed up. It was difficult; but Watson, with the aid of a stowaway, who was working his passage as deputy assistant fourteenth steward, and for a consideration acted as scapegrace, managed it.

"Keep the chair, Watson," said Monsieur Deschamps as he went over the side at Albany. "It will remind you of the prettiest bit of work you ever did."

8: Ticket To Hell

Emile C. Tepperman

1899-1951

The Spider, Jan 1935

IF PETER GARTH had turned the corner two minutes sooner or five minutes later, he wouldn't have seen it.

Max's Loan Office, where the girl had said she would wait for him, was about one hundred feet down from the corner, on Madison. It was closed for the night.

The girl's hat was on the sidewalk, trampled and dirty; her handbag lay beside it, opened, its contents spewed around. The tall man with the narrow head and the big ears had a bunch of the girl's black bobbed hair clutched in his left fist, and he was slugging her methodically in the face with the right. His own face was impassive, as if he were doing an everyday job.

Peter Garth started to run toward them, and the man saw him. He stopped punching the girl, dropped her, and darted away across the street. The girl's limp body sagged to the sidewalk as Peter came up close. At the same instant someone stepped out of the dark doorway of Max's, and banged away with an automatic at the unconscious form of the girl. Three shots went into her, and her body jerked with each.

Then the man in the doorway raised his gun at Peter. But Garth already had his own automatic out, and it barked once. The man in the doorway was hurled back against the glass panel of the door; his gun clattered and bounced on the pavement. Peter's shot had got him in the heart.

Peter swung toward the fleeing man, the one who had been punching the girl. He caught sight of him diving into a sedan halfway down the block. Peter leveled his automatic, but didn't fire— for the man was already in the car, and the car leaped away from the curb. The tail-light was out; it was impossible to read the license number in the dark.

Peter let the car go and stooped to the girl. She was stirring, moaning a little.

The private detective knelt beside her, raised her head in his arms. Her face was puffed and discolored from the beating; her lips were bloody, and her left cheek was split below the eye. She was wearing a light-colored blouse and a tan skirt, and the blouse was soaked in blood that came from somewhere in her left breast.

Peter stripped the blouse away from her. The three bullets had got her fairly close together. One had gone into the soft part of her breast, was not a mortal wound; but the other two had struck her high up on the left side and must have pierced the lung.

The officer on the beat pounded up. A crowd gathered miraculously where there hadn't been a soul before.

Two minutes later an ambulance and a radio car raced to the curb.

Peter stood up, bleak-eyed, and left her to the ministrations of the interne.

As yet, no one had noticed the body in the doorway of Max's.

THE patrolman from the radio car came up behind Peter. "She dead, Doc?" he asked the intern.

The latter shook his head. "No. But we better get her out of here quick. We have to probe for the bullets."

The driver of the ambulance got the stretcher out, and they put her on it.

The cop said to the policeman on the beat, "You ride with her, Jack; make out the report at the hospital." Then he asked Peter, "What happened here?"

"I don't know," Peter answered. "I heard the shooting, and came around the corner, and she was lying there."

He stooped and picked up the girl's purse, raked the contents into it. The cop exclaimed, "Hey! Don't touch that. Leave it for the homicide men!"

He snatched the purse out of Peter's hand, but the detective had already palmed a pawn-ticket that had lain in the bottom of the purse.

While they were sliding the stretcher into the ambulance, a headquarters car shrieked to a stop behind it. Detective Sergeant Dave Sayre got out, followed by a photographer, a finger-print man, and Reiner, the assistant D.A., with his stenographer.

Sayre saw the girl stirring. "Who the hell sent for homicide?" he barked. "What is this, April fool?"

His eyes swung to Peter, and he grunted. "Hunh. When you're around, Garth, there's always a stiff some place. What did you have to do with this?"

"I happened to be passing," Peter told him. "I saw the girl on the sidewalk; she'd been shot."

"Yeah," Sayre retorted. "You just happened to be passing. It always happens like that when there's shooting. Who's the dame?"

The ambulance pulled away with the precinct cop riding it. The patrolman from the radio car handed Sayre the purse. "This is hers, Sarge. Maybe it's got her name in it."

Sayre took the purse, dug his hand into it. He pulled out a package of cigarettes, a book of matches, a very thin powder compact of lacquered metal, and a stick of lip-rouge. Then came a little money purse, containing three dollars in bills and twenty-seven cents in change.

"The usual stuff," Sayre said. "Nothing— aha! This'll give us some dope." He brought out a small, leather-bound memo book. He put the rest of the stuff back, stuck the pocket-book under his arm, and opened the memo book.

The first page had a space for the name and address of the owner. "Marie Joyce," he read. "Four-thirty-one Covent Street. I seem to recall that name." He flipped through the pages, stopped at one, scanned it carefully, and looked up at Peter with a sneering sort of grin.

"So you just happened to be passing, hunh? You don't know a teeny little thing about her, hunh?" He shoved the open book under Peter's nose. "So what's your name an' address doing in her book? Answer me that!"

Peter tried to get an expression of astonishment on his face. *"My* name? You don't say so!"

Reiner, the assistant district attorney, pushed forward. Reiner was a sour-looking individual, in his forties. He had been trying for years to get something on the private detective, ever since the time that Peter had made a fool of him in court one day.

"So!" Reiner exclaimed. "His name's in the girl's book, is it? This interests me!" He said crowingly to Peter, "Looks like you made a little slip this time, Garth. Didn't think your victim would name you that way, did you?"

Sayre shoved his bulk between them. "Don't get hot over it, Garth. Reiner's just pullin' his regular stuff. I know you aren't the one that messed that dame up— you ain't that kind of a guy; but you *do* know something about this business that you're holding out. Your name didn't get into her book by accident— and you didn't happen to be coming around the corner by accident, either. Now spill it, boy, and give me a break."

PETER'S frown changed to a grin. "Thanks for the whitewash, Dave." He was about to add something, when the photographer, who had been poking around the scene, raised an excited shout.

"Looka this, Sarge!" he called out from Max's doorway. "A stiff!"

Sayre said, "What the hell!" He unceremoniously elbowed Reiner out of the way, and strode over to the doorway of the store, pulling out his flashlight.

Reiner and Peter followed him over.

Sayre swung the beam of his light down so that it illumined the dead man's face, and the hole just above the heart. "Right through the pump," he commented. Then he glanced up at Peter. "This is different, Garth. It looks like your style of shooting. Let's see your gun."

Peter said, "I shot him, Dave. He's the guy that gave it to the girl. There's his gun. You'll probably find three shots fired."

Reiner cleared his throat. "Well, Garth, so it's murder after all. You better give up your gun." He barked down at the kneeling detective sergeant, "Sayre, I want you should place him under arrest at once. He lied before; now he admits killing a man. How do we know this man shot the girl? Maybe Garth— "

Sayre stopped him abruptly. "Dry up, will you, Reiner? This stiff is Nate Mariano, that we've been holding a murder warrant for! I thought he'd skipped to Chi!"

At the name of Mariano, Peter stiffened. But he quickly relaxed and grinned at the D.A. He took out his gun and handed it to Sayre. "Just so you can check up, Dave. See how many shots've been fired out of that. You'll find only one."

Sayre stood up, took the automatic, removed the clip, and examined it. "Right," he grunted.

"Wait a minute," Reiner insisted. "He could have changed the clip, couldn't he?"

"Swell chance!" Peter scoffed. "The cop on the beat came up right after the shooting. Anyway, you'll find that gun there, alongside Mariano, is the one that fired the shots into her. And you'll find Mariano's prints on it— I notice he's not wearing gloves."

Sayre returned Peter's gun. "You better come downtown anyway, Garth, and tell the inspector all about this."

Peter slid the gun back in its clip, said, "Look, Dave. You won't be done here for an hour— the medical examiner hasn't even shown up yet. Suppose I meet you downtown—" he consulted his wrist watch— "at nine-thirty. That'll give you plenty of time to get through, and it'll give me a chance to finish up some business."

"Nothing doing!" Reiner growled. "Garth stays right here." He glared at Peter. "You think you can go around shooting up the whole goddam town and get away with it? How do we know you'll show up at nine-thirty? I want to question you right now— I think you should be held!"

Peter turned, faced him full, eyes narrowed. He said softly, "You're beginning to get in my teeth, Reiner. You've been riding me for ten years now, and I've been lettin' you get away with it because you wear glasses. But one of these minutes your face is gonna bump into this—" he held his right fist close to the prosecutor's nose— "awful hard, glasses or no glasses!"

Reiner shrank from the cold threat in Peter's face. But Sayre put a mollifying hand on the latter's shoulder.

"Take it easy, Garth; what's the use of the rough stuff?" Then he growled at Reiner, "You know damn well that if Garth says he'll be downtown at nine-thirty, he'll be there. He's been a private dick in this town for more years than

you've been prancing around in the D.A.'s office. Maybe him and I wrangle a bit every once in a while, but the inspector and me, we take his word for plenty. I say he can go. If you want to order him held on your own responsibility, go ahead— it's your privilege."

Reiner fidgeted. He had done that very thing once before, and been compelled, the following day, to listen to a biting tirade from the senior judge of the Court of General Sessions. Peter Garth had not spent the past ten years in the city without making some very powerful friends in high places.

Peter gave him no time to protest further. He turned his back on him, said to Sayre, "You're all right, Dave. See you later." And he walked away, whistling an unidentifiable tune atrociously off key.

HE turned the corner, back the way he had come, went two blocks up, and entered the cigar store on the corner. In the telephone booth, he dialed a number, and when a nervous voice said "Hello," he spoke quickly. "Mr. Sampson? Garth. I got the ticket. The Joyce girl had it."

The other's voice seemed to hesitate a moment, then said, "All right. Can you— er— come up at once?"

"Be right over," Peter told him.

"Er— are you— alone?"

"Sure I'm alone. Think I carry a brass band with me?"

When he hung up, he came out of the booth and consulted the telephone directory, got the number of the Mount Royal Hospital, and called it. He asked for the accident ward, and said, "Mamie? This is your long-lost pal, Peter Garth. How you like the night shift?"

Mamie was the nurse in charge of the accident ward. She sounded pleased. "Where've you been keeping yourself these months? I thought you'd forgotten me. Listen, Peter, I don't get a night off till Sunday. But I moved last week, and I have the sweetest little room you ever saw. Call for me here at seven in the morning, and you can buy me breakfast, and then we'll— "

"Hold everything," Peter broke in. "Don't say any more; you'll take my mind off business— and this is a business call."

"Oh," she said flatly. Then in a sharp tone, "What do you want to know?"

"A girl named Marie Joyce— beat up and shot three times. Brought in about fifteen minutes ago. What's her condition?"

The answer came to him spitefully. "She's dead! Passed out on the way up in the stretcher— internal hemorrhage." She clicked the receiver down, and the connection was broken.

Peter shrugged as he left the cigar store. His eyes were grim. He got a cab and gave an uptown address. On the way up he took out the pawn ticket and

examined it. It had been issued by Max's Loan Office to one Marie Joyce, and certified that a string of graduated diamonds had been pledged by her for a loan of two hundred and fifty dollars. Peter nodded to himself and put the ticket away.

At the large apartment hotel in the eighties, he entered the elevator and told the operator, "Mr. Sampson's apartment."

The operator left him off at the sixth. He rang the bell of the door at the end of the hall.

There was no answer for a moment. Then Sampson's voice called, "Come in."

Sampson was sitting very stiffly at one end of the large sofa. He was close to fifty, rotund, bald. He wore a green dressing-gown over his vest, and he seemed to be very ill at ease.

Peter came up and stood in front of him. "What's the trouble, Mr. Sampson? You were all hot to get that ticket an hour ago, and you rushed me into making a date with that Joyce dame. Now, when I tell you I got it, you sit there like a poker. Don't you want it any more?"

Sampson shifted uncomfortably. He said, "Ugh— ah yes. Sure. Sure I want it. Did you— ah — have much trouble?"

"Yeah. Some. A mean-looking bird beat the girl up. He must be one of the Mariano crowd. Mariano himself was there, and he put three slugs into the girl. So I put one in him— dead center."

"You— ah— mean you killed him?"

"Nothing else. I guess they must have got wise that the Joyce girl was crossing them, and tailed her to give her the works. It so happened I got there ten minutes ahead of time, and came into the thick of it. The guy that was beating her up got away. I'd like to meet him!"

Sampson's eyes were looking up at him in a sort of mute agony. From behind Peter a voice suddenly said, "So you want to meet me?"

He felt a gun barrel poking into his back.

PETER stood perfectly still, and started to swear in a low voice.

The man behind him said, "Turn around— slowly."

Sampson gestured despairingly. "They held me up, Garth— while you were 'phoning. They made me tell you to come up— then they hid in the next room and made me sit here and wait for you."

Peter saw the man with the narrow head and the big ears. A little to one side of him was another man, small, thin, in a peaked cap. They both had guns.

The man with the narrow head reached over and took Peter's gun out of the clip. He said pleasantly, "Don't make any plays, Garth. Pinky and I would both drill you."

Sampson blurted from behind Peter, "For God's sake, Deloya, let's talk business. Let me keep that ticket and I'll pay you the five thousand I was going to give the girl."

Deloya shook his narrow head in a gruff negative, not taking his eyes from Peter. "Chicken-feed," he said, with a curl of the lip. "Twenty-five thousand as a first payment, notes for seventy-five more. You cough up, or we send the ticket to your wife. When she sees that her string of diamonds has been hocked by a dame, you'll wish you'd paid."

Sampson put his head in his hands. He moaned, "Why did I have to play around with a woman like that! Why did I ever give her my wife's diamonds?"

Deloya laughed shortly. "Marie Joyce has made monkeys out of plenty of guys. You got nothing to be ashamed of. All you got to do now is pay up and forget about it."

Peter said, "Forget about a hundred thousand? That's a hell of a lot of dough. You birds do things in a big way."

Sampson groaned. "I can't pay it. My wife would be sure to learn about that, too. I'd have as hard a job explaining the money as the necklace."

"You could say you lost the dough in the market," Deloya said. "It's better than telling her you fell for a dame while she was in the country."

Pinky broke in. "What the hell is all this gabbin' for? This here dick is the one that bumped Mariano. Let's brain him, take the hock ticket an' scram!"

Deloya's mouth twisted into a thin smile. "A very good suggestion, Pinky. Garth probably has that five thousand he was going to pay Marie. We can take that, get the diamonds out of Max's, and go far away. Now that Garth killed Mariano, there's only a two-way split!"

Sampson got to his feet, pleading. "Wait, Deloya, wait! I've got to have that necklace. You don't know my wife!"

Deloya's smile broadened. "But I do. That's why we picked you to work this game on. A guy whose wife has a temper like yours should never fool around with dames— and if he can't keep away from them, the gas-pipe is his best bet!"

"No, no!" Sampson cried. He wilted, sat down in the sofa again. "I'll give you the money."

"*And* the notes," Deloya added. "Make 'em payable to bearer."

Sampson took out his checkbook, reached for a fountain pen. "I'll have to give you a check for twenty thousand. Garth can give you the five he has in cash. Will that be all right?"

"Sure. You won't welsh on the check. I'd show it to your wife and explain how I got it. Make it out to cash."

Peter stopped him. "Just a minute," he said. "It's no good, Sampson. No can do."

"Wh-what do you mean?" Sampson frowned. "You've got no kick. I paid you five hundred dollars to go and make the deal with the girl. You— can keep that five hundred anyway." He filled in the check for twenty thousand, signed it.

Peter shook his head. "It's not that easy. That girl— Marie Joyce— died in the hospital. Mariano shot her; this guy, Deloya, beat her up. It's murder, and these two guys are just as guilty as Mariano. I never make deals with murderers— there's no percentage in it."

SAMPSON waved his pen at Peter, angrily. "What business is it of yours whether the girl died or not? You're paid to help me get that string of diamonds back."

"Right," said Peter. "But I'm not paid to condone murder. And I hate the guts of a guy who will slam a girl in the face the way this one did. Nothing doing. I won't allow it."

Pinky started to laugh. "Listen to him, willya? He's makin' rules now!" He jabbed his gun viciously in Peter's stomach, and snarled. "You won't even have time to make a will— let alone rules!"

Sampson exclaimed, "God, don't do that here! Take him out somewhere. I can't have stiffs around this apartment!"

Peter looked down at the gun in Pinky's hand. "You dassn't shoot that off in here, shrimp. The cops would be swarming all over the place; you'd get caught, and burn."

Deloya grinned. "Hold him that way, Pinky. I got it all figured out."

He took a silencer out of his pocket, and began to screw it on the automatic he had taken away from Peter. "We'll shoot him with his own gun," he told Sampson. "Then you can say he bumped himself off. It won't make any noise, and we'll have time to get away."

"You sure it'll be all right?" Sampson asked. "I hope my wife doesn't suspect anything."

Peter stood still, and bit out at Sampson, "You're a hell of a client— willing to see me given the works, so you won't get bawled out by your wife!"

Sampson shrugged. "You brought it on yourself. Why don't you cooperate? Believe me, I'd commit murder any time rather than face Lena!"

Deloya had the silencer screwed on by this time. He raised the gun, his eyes glittering. "All right, punk, here it comes. Pinky, stand away from him!"

Peter was set for a quick sidestep that would put Pinky between him and Deloya. If he wrenched at Pinky's gun hand he might be able to prevent the bullet from hitting him in a vital spot. The rest would be up to the gods.

But even as he saw the tightening of Deloya's mouth that preceded the pressing of the trigger, there was a sound at the outside door, and they heard feet in the foyer.

Deloya turned slowly to the door. He dropped the gun to his side, where it would be hidden from anybody who might enter. He had put his own gun away.

Pinky kept Peter covered, but tried to see who was coming out of the corner of his eye.

The door of the room opened. A large, imposing woman came in. She was in her forties, and she walked with an air of command. She wore a tailored suit which, though expensive, could not hide the stoutness of her figure.

Her brows were knitted in reproval, and she disregarded the others in the room, saying to Sampson, "John! Didn't I tell you never to leave the hall door unlocked? I can't understand such carelessness! I was sure you'd be doing something improper, so I decided to come back a day earlier. Good thing I did— you'd have had burglars swarming all over the place. Imagine— leaving the door unlocked! I've a good mind—"

It was Peter's move which stopped in mid-sentence the seemingly endless tirade.

Pinky had been listening to her, open-mouthed. Deloya's face bore a faint smile, while Sampson seemed to have been stricken with paralysis.

Peter had taken advantage of the diversion to sweep Pinky's gun hand away from his stomach. Pinky's hand contracted on the gun. It exploded once into the floor! He turned a startled face. Peter swung a neat uppercut to his chin that sent him reeling backward into Deloya.

Peter followed him up, and wrenched the gun out of his hand.

Deloya swung, lifted the silenced gun, and fired.

PETER felt a burning tear along his ribs. He fired into Deloya's body across the stumbling Pinky. Deloya doubled over with a dazed expression on his face, and crashed to the floor. The silenced gun slid from his hand.

Pinky was staggering dizzily about, one hand to his aching chin.

Abruptly an avalanche descended upon Peter— an avalanche in the shape of Mrs. Sampson! Plainly she had no fear of guns. Her eyes were blazing.

"Young man," she shouted, "what do you mean by shooting off revolvers in my house? You've killed that man! How dare you? Why don't you have your battles elsewhere? I declare, John"— she turned to Sampson, whose face had

gone a terrible white— "you certainly need to be watched! Imagine harboring such low characters in our house! Hereafter I won't even be able to go away for a day! It's—"

Peter had been listening to her with admiration. Now he noticed Pinky, on the floor, wrapping his fingers around the silenced gun that Deloya had dropped.

"Keep away from it!" he snapped.

But his voice was all but drowned by Mrs. Sampson's shouting. Pinky either did not hear him, or else paid no attention. He swung the silenced gun upward, lips drawn back from his teeth.

Mrs. Sampson saw him, and for the first time realized that there was some degree of danger in the atmosphere. She stopped her speech and screamed, rushed at Pinky.

Pinky swung the muzzle up toward her. Peter fired once. Pinky flipped back with a hole in his forehead.

Mrs. Sampson went silent, stunned at last.

Peter said to her, "I'm sorry, madam. I'm afraid your rug is spoiled."

A dazed expression had come into her eyes. "Spoiled," she said very low. "Rug?" She looked at the blood, then at Peter. She staggered over to the sofa, sat down beside her husband.

Sampson looked from her to Peter, unable to utter a word. But there was a note of appeal in his glance when his gaze met Peter's.

From out in the street there sounded the siren of a radio car.

Peter said, "The police are certainly quick these days." He stooped to the floor and picked up the checkbook and pen which Sampson had dropped. He capped the pen and returned it to Sampson who took it automatically, and put it in his vest pocket.

Peter looked at Mrs. Sampson. Her head lolled on the back of the sofa; her eyes were closed and her mouth was open.

Sampson followed Peter's glance. "S-she's fainted!" he burst out.

"Sure," Peter said. "She's bluffed you all your life. You've been afraid of her tongue. The minute she sees the real McCoy she weakens. Not that I blame her. These two guys are a nasty sight."

Sampson made no move to revive his wife. He looked up at Peter with haggard eyes. "What are you going to do to me, Garth?" He shuddered. "God! I was going to let them kill you— on account of her!"

Peter opened the checkbook, and pulled out the twenty thousand dollar check, which he folded and pocketed. Then he took out the pawn-ticket, and handed it to Sampson. "You can redeem that tomorrow, and put the necklace back in the vault before she learns about it. I'm taking this check and the five

thousand in cash as my fee. You were going to pay it out anyway. So you'll pay it as a penalty for putting me on the spot."

Sampson snatched the ticket. The relief in his face was almost pitiable. "Keep the check, Garth. You're entitled to it. I'll never forgive myself for the way I acted. She's had me on the run all my life. From now on it's going to be different. I'm a new man now. Wait'll you see how a man comes into his own!"

_____

9: Shocking Bad Luck on the Baron

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

In: *And still I Cheat the Gallows*, 1936

The short story series was a favourite with the prolific author; stand alone short stories, but using the same protagonist and having an overall plan, with the stories first sold to the slick magazines, and then collected into book form and sold all over again. No wonder he could afford a vast yacht and a villa in the south of France.

I HAD realised, from the moment I had received that somewhat cryptic note written on plain paper and without any hint of official origin, that the interview to which I was now committed was likely to be a trifle difficult. I realised it even more fully when I was shown into a small, barely-furnished apartment tucked away at the end of a long passage in a hidden corner of one of the great Whitehall buildings, A tall, grey-haired man with weary eyes and lined face looked up from behind his desk at my entrance. He nodded a more or less courteous greeting and waited until the commissionaire had departed.

"Will you bring up that chair nearer to me, Mr. Armstrong?" he invited.

Armstrong was the name by which I was passing at the moment, a good, non-committal sort of name which went very well with my present appearance. I had grown, during my politic absence in one of my favourite corners of Europe, a slight moustache, and I had allowed my hair to grow a little long at the sides in the old Spanish manner affected a few years ago by gigolos and romantic shop assistants. I brought the chair to the side of his desk as desired and waited.

"I shall be very frank with you, sir," my companion began. "I do not wish to know your real name nor do I wish you to become acquainted with mine. For conversational purposes you can call me Colonel Guy. I wish to assure you first of all that although I may be said to hold an official post, it is not one which has any affiliation to Scotland Yard or the administration of our domestic criminal law. You understand me, I trust?"

"I think so, sir," I assented.

"I represent the last resource used by my employers in any vital emergency. When such is put into my hands it is understood that I may use any means I think well— legal or illegal, moral or immoral. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly."

"The fact that you may be or are a criminal does not interest or affect me," the man who had called himself Colonel Guy continued. "If you accept the enterprise I propose, I shall have no objection to your using criminal means to obtain results, but it will be entirely at your own risk."

"That is reasonable," I admitted.

"Very well, then, here is the position. One of the most prominent of our statesmen, whom it is our duty to protect, was induced by means which I need not for the moment enter into to write an extremely indiscreet letter to a certain European potentate. The letter was written with an honest desire to promote the cause of peace. Since then, there has been a lightning-like change in the situation. That letter, if made dishonourable use of, would almost inevitably result in war."

"The letter is now in whose possession, and where?" I asked.

My friend with the tired eyes leaned forward to a stationery rack and drew from it a slip of perfectly plain paper. He wrote a single line upon it and held it up for my inspection. I nodded, whereupon he destroyed the slip of paper and threw the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

"There only remains to discuss the commercial side of this enterprise," he went on. "For what sum will you undertake the task of obtaining, or attempting to obtain, that letter?"

"If I succeed, a thousand guineas," I told him.

"And if you fail?"

"Nothing."

"The thousand guineas shall be paid to you the day you hand over the letter."

I picked up my hat. For the first time, a gleam of some sort of expression was manifest in my companion's worn features. He appeared a little surprised.

"You don't require any Government permits or visas for your passport?" he asked. I shook my head.

"Thank you," I replied, "those I can arrange for myself. I am perhaps more at home on the continent than in this country."

"You must understand clearly," he concluded, "that if you should get into any sort of trouble, however serious, the British Government knows nothing of you. We could not intervene on your behalf even to save your life."

"My life I can look after myself," I assured him. "The British Government means no more to me than any other client on whose behalf I might be working."

"Excellent," he approved. "Do you require an advance of money for your expenses?"

"I can finance myself," I told him.

"Good morning, then," he wished me.

"Good morning," I echoed, making for the door.

IT CERTAINLY seemed as though my new enterprise had started badly. Four days later I was seated on a plain bench, my back to a white wall in one of the dreariest of prison cells. Through the barred windows, at least ten feet out of my reach, came a glorious vision of deep blue sky, the perfume from innumerable baskets of sun-kissed flowers and herbs from the market across the way, occasionally the cheerful hum of busy voices. To spoil my complete appreciation of this pleasant suggestion of a gay city outside, however, I was, for the first time in my life, subjected to the indignity of handcuffs, and a short distance from me, one on either side, were a couple of picturesquely attired but savage-looking equivalents of the British policeman. The position was all the more uncomfortable because I had not the faintest idea from what direction the misfortune had arisen. I had been seated happily in a café not fifty yards away, enjoying the sunshine and a Vermouth Rossi, when I was suddenly surrounded by what seemed to me to be half the police force of the city. My name was demanded by the sergeant in charge and without the slightest hesitation I had been marched off to my present lodging. I had met with checks before in many of my enterprises; once in Mexico I had been in far worse straits, but nothing like this had ever happened. Notwithstanding my bewilderment, however, I kept calm and maintained a rigid silence. I have always believed that there is something to be gained through professing ignorance of the language of one's captors and I was hoping all the time that from the conversation of my guards I might discover the reason for my present plight. It seemed considerably longer but it was scarcely more than an hour when the tension of the situation was broken. From outside, the key clanked in the lock of my prison apartment. A policeman of apparently superior rank made hasty entrance, followed by a man in dark clothes whom I afterwards gathered to be a high official in the Italian secret service police. They had accepted the supposition that I spoke no Italian and the latter addressed me in German.

"The gentleman will kindly accompany us. The magistrate, Signor Bettini, is holding a court."

The manacles were removed from my wrists. That, at any rate, was a step in the right direction. I was led through several passages into a sombre apartment where an elderly and corpulent Italian, who was sweating profusely at the forehead, was seated before a table. To my surprise, he rose at my entrance and bowed.

"Signor Armstrong," he said in German, handing me a passport and some other papers which had been taken from me at my arrest, "permit me to return these. A mistake has been made. The apologies of the court are due to you. The clerk will return the money and other contents of your pockets."

"I am free?" I asked,

"The signor is perfectly free," the magistrate asserted, and it struck me that he was in deadly fear of something or other. "I trust that the signor will accept this expression of our profuse regrets. A similarity of name. Most unfortunate."

A packet, presumably containing the remainder of my personal belongings was thrust into my hands. I was escorted from the police court as though I had been a prince. The guards in the outside hall all saluted me. The magistrate himself walked by my side.

"I may hope, sir," he said, bending towards me, "that this incident will be forgotten. It is unfortunate that the alias under which the noble Baron is for excellent reasons paying his brief visit to the city resembles very closely the name of an Englishman for whom all our police were watching and who came to our city, without a doubt, with criminal intentions. That particular individual has shot himself at the hotel, on being arrested. He was occupying, by a singular coincidence, the adjoining apartment to you, signor, number 387."

"Do you mean to say that the man in the next room to mine at the Excelsior is dead?"

"It is quite true, signor," the magistrate replied. "The number of your room, I think, is 388. This man was occupying 387. Signor Vasili, of our secret police, came here at once on receipt of my telephone message. Is there anything I can do now to make amends?"

I hesitated, for it was a somewhat embarrassing moment. I was wondering who the mischief had been shot in my place. However, I was always something of an opportunist and I seized my chance.

"You can give me a note signed by yourself," I suggested, "which I can show in case a similar mistake happens again. I am a perfectly harmless person and the touch of those handcuffs was one of the most unpleasant experiences of my life."

"The signor will wait one moment," the magistrate begged. "What he asks is perfectly reasonable."

He stood up at the desk of the outside courthouse and he wrote me a eulogy which took my breath away. I gathered that I was of noble birth, that I was a great friend of Italy's, personally known and vouched for at court and the Papal headquarters, and a person in favour with the great ones of the land. It enjoined all Italian citizens who were good Fascists to render me aid in any disturbance or trouble I might meet. To all this the magistrate set his signature, set the great seal of the court, placed it in a long envelope and inside the rubber band of the passport.

"This, dear sir," he said, holding out his hand, "will save you from any further trouble. Be so kind as to give me your assurance that this little contretemps is forgotten."

I accepted his hand.

"It passes entirely from my mind," I assured him.

"I thank the signor for his courtesy," was the magistrate's grateful acknowledgement.

Then I emerged once more into the thronged streets of Rome, called for a taxicab and sitting stiffly in my place was driven away.

My first direction to the driver had been the large and magnificent Excelsior where I had taken rooms. On the way there, however, I changed my mind. The experience through which I had passed baffled me. I determined that before I reached the hotel I must try and arrive at something approaching a solution. I directed the man to drive to the Galleria Colonna. There I dismissed him and, finding a quiet spot in an absolutely empty corner, I glanced first of all at the passport which had been returned to me and which I had been carrying, believing it to be mine. Enlightenment came like a flash.

The photograph was more like me than any photograph I had ever had taken in my life, but the name was Baron Albrecht von Hertzfeld; my profession, I gathered, was that of private secretary to the Foreign Relations Committee of the German Government, and my address in Berlin! The passport was stamped as of diplomatic issue carrying with it many privileges in various countries. I glanced at the papers. They were all in German and to do with matters of which I knew little, but the importance of which I recognised. I tore open the little packet of my personal belongings and found myself now the proud possessor of a gold and platinum cigarette-case bearing a large coronet on one side and a regimental coat-of-arms on the other; letters of credit for a large amount upon two German banks in Rome and a formidable roll of thousand-lire notes, besides some small change. There was a passionate love letter signed 'Magda', which I refrained from reading at the moment, and a card which informed me that a very great man next to the Dictator, the greatest in Italy, would grant me an interview at seven o'clock that evening. I was begged to come informally and to keep my name and mission secret from any members of the Press who might approach me. There was also a small pocket-book in which I found the key to a short cipher and I also found what gave me some faint inkling as to what had happened— in a secret compartment a few private visiting cards on which appeared solely the name of Johan Armstrong, Importer of Foreign Wines, with an address in Berlin.

I left the gallery without even stopping to glance at one of my favourite pictures, and, walking the distance of several streets, took a taxicab from a

stand near the river. Once again I collected the whole of the baron's possessions and submitted them to careful examination. Then I made my plans. I might have to change them suddenly. I might meet with disaster. But at any rate I felt all the old tingling in my blood which came to me when I was really walking in the land of adventure. The next half-hour, I felt, would probably decide my fate. I had taken great chances in life before, but these were almost the greatest odds I had ever faced. I looked at myself in the mirror of the cab, straightened my hair, gave a little more martial twirl to my moustache, disposed of my belongings in my various pockets and told myself most emphatically that I was the Baron Albrecht von Hertzfeld and that I was in a temper, or soon should be. Then I drove underneath the porte cochère of the Excelsior, paid off my chauffeur and, approaching the broad mahogany counter, asked for key number 388. It was passed over to me at once with a smile and bow from the concièrge and I mounted to the third floor, swinging it in my hand. As I strode along the corridor, I noticed several servants outside the door of my former apartment talking excitedly amongst themselves. I ignored them, however, opened the door of number 388 and closed it behind me. Everything here was as I had anticipated.

There were two large suitcases on luggage stands, each ornamented with a coronet. There was a great vase of roses, the bathroom was filled with luxurious etceteras to a man's toilet. Then, as though noticing the sound of voices outside for the first time, I opened my door and looked out.

"What is it that has happened there?" I asked, pointing to the seal upon the adjoining door.

A waiter stepped forward.

"We are forbidden to say a word, signor," he said. "If you would be so good, Gnädiger Baron, to ask at the office— "

"The office be damned," I answered. "Let them come to me."

I strode to the telephone. I demanded 'Enquiries.'

"It is the Baron von Hertzfeld who speaks," I thundered out. "Send me the manager at once."

I strolled about the room, taking careful note of everything so far as I could. To my relief, I came to the conclusion that the baron was travelling without a manservant. In a minute or two the manager, flurried and anxious, made his appearance.

"What is the meaning of all this commotion?" I demanded.

The manager signalled the waiter to leave.

"Monsieur le Baron," he said, "I appeal to you. Be lenient with us. A tragedy has happened in the room adjoining yours. Its occupant was found this morning— dead— in the corridor. I fear there is no doubt that he was

assassinated for political reasons, although the doctors are willing to look upon it as a case of suicide. What makes the matter more unfortunate," the manager went on, gaining courage, "is that the valet who waited upon the two rooms became so thoroughly confused at the enquiry which took place here after the tragedy had been discovered this morning, he broke down altogether. It seems that there was some likeness between you, Baron, and the Mr. John Armstrong of England who occupied the other room. You, neither of you, it seemed, were travelling with personal servants and in brushing your clothes and replacing them he confesses that he got absolutely confused. The police inspector was perhaps a little severe with him. At any rate, he broke down and was carried away to hospital. He was suffering from shell-shock when we accepted him here but we thought he had every chance of recovery. Now it is impossible to say."

"I have plenty of clothes here," I declared impatiently, "and an odd suit or two makes no difference, in any case. I should like to know a little more about this fellow who was murdered and who also called himself Armstrong."

"So far, Gnädiger Baron, the matter is a complete mystery," the hotel manager declared. "The British Consul has been informed and beyond that we shall do nothing. If you would care to change your suite," he suggested, "to another part of the hotel— "

"Not worth while, thank you," I answered. "I will not detain you any longer, signor. I wish to change my clothes and keep an appointment."

The manager took his leave. I rang for a waiter and ordered a bottle of Scotch whisky and Seltzer water. I made myself a stiff drink. Several possible complications of this affair had already presented themselves to me. The one consoling fact, however, was the nearness of the date when Orlino would receive me. Seven o'clock that evening. I glanced at my watch. It was already past five. I went through all the baron's papers once more, then I selected one of his overcoats, a black Homburg hat, a pair of gloves of very superior quality and a cane. As I passed the enquiry office on my way out the clerk hurried towards me.

"This despatch has just arrived, Monsieur le Baron," he announced.

I tore it open without hesitation. It consisted of one word only— 'Subito'— and I saw that it had been handed in at Berlin. I made my way to one of the writing-tables and from the baron's pocket-book I drew out the small code. It took me less than ten seconds to trace the word.

'SUBITO: Report progress immediately.'

I took out a form and turned to the other side of the code. This was easier still. I found a single word for 'All goes well' and added 'Hope settlement Thursday.' I arranged this in code, addressed it according to the instructions

and handed it over the counter. The clerk who accepted it waved away my money.

"It will be on the bill, Baron," he told me, "I will see that it goes off at once."

I passed out, called a taxicab and in half an hour I was deposited at the great aeroplane works near the boundaries of the city. I asked to speak to one of the principals. It was fortunate, they told me in the office, that the Chevalier Tonelli was still in his office. In reply to a remark of mine about closing, he only smiled.

"We have been open night and day for four years, signor," he told me.

I found myself in a few minutes shaking hands with the virtual manager of the place, a slim, rather gaunt-faced Italian whose name was becoming famous all over the world in connection with his newly designed war planes. I drew from my pocket the note written by the magistrate.

"I will just explain, signor," I said, "that I am here on a mission of great importance and I have an interview which will conclude my business in an hour or so. You have my card there. Perhaps you would care just to look through this letter."

I handed him the few words scrawled by the magistrate, begging all good sons of Italy to render every assistance possible to the distinguished bearer. Signor Tonelli smiled as he folded it up and handed it back.

"It is not necessary, this, Baron," he assured me. "My entire services are at your command. If you wish for anything possible it shall be done. If you wish for anything impossible it shall also be done. Proceed, if you please."

"My interview is at seven o'clock," I said. "I shall be ready to leave Rome at nine o'clock. I wish to purchase from you," I produced my pocket-book, "one of your Silver Lightning passenger planes with twin engines. It must be one that has already been tried and it must be ready to take me to Berlin to-night."

Signor Tonelli smiled.

"And for a moment," he remarked, "I imagined the Baron was going to ask me something difficult. The plane will cost you 12,000 lire. Will you permit me to show you the one I suggest?"

He led the way out into the works. We seated ourselves on a small trolley and in a few minutes found ourselves in a huge arched room. There were a dozen glittering monsters of aluminium and steel, monsters to look at but little chambers of luxury when one had mounted the steps.

"This one on the outside came in yesterday morning from its trials," Signor Tonelli confided. "Guido!"

One of the foremen hurried up and saluted.

"Can you have number seventeen there ready for Berlin by nine o'clock?"

"I can have it ready in half an hour, if you desire, sir."

"You would like to make a close inspection?" the manufacturer asked me. "Here is a pamphlet with all the particulars," he went on, taking one from a stand. "We can guarantee you, I think, one hundred and seventy-five miles an hour. You will, I presume, require a pilot and a mechanic."

"For this flight, of course," I assented. "I have had some experience in flying but I shall need to keep your pilot and mechanic for at least a week and you must explain to them that they are entirely at my disposal during that time."

Signor Tonelli looked at me for a moment shrewdly.

"Well," he reflected, "I suppose that is reasonable. I shall come myself to see you off. You will ring up this number when you are free and come straight to our private enclosure at the Campagna Flying Grounds. It will take you a half-hour by motor from anywhere in the city."

I counted out the money, adding a margin for the services of the pilot and the mechanic and for the fuel required. Signor Tonelli shook hands with a smile

"I think," he confided, "that that is the quickest sale I have ever made. The money in my pocket, the engines already being tuned up, you in the air to-night. One lives. It is great business."

I drove back to Rome. I kept away from the Excelsior, but I went to a small cafe where I ate a hasty meal. Precisely at seven o'clock I descended at the magnificent residence of Signor Orlino. On the production of my card I was led at once to a very beautiful library from which the great statesman was supposed to mould the mind not only of his master but of many other famous men of Europe. He welcomed me cordially.

"Our first meeting, I think, Baron," he remarked. "I am very happy to have this opportunity. Come, we are not going to hurry over this séance, you know. Make yourself quite comfortable in that easy chair and let us be as human as possible. Here on this tray," he added, turning to a solemn-faced butler who had just entered bearing a silver salver, "you will find a flask of our old Orvieto, which we Italians think the greatest wine there is, two glasses and some of our Pampalini sandwiches. If you wish for cigars they can be obtained. These are my favourite cigarettes."

"A most delightful accompaniment to our conversation, signor," I said. "I seldom smoke cigars."

"We will drink the first glass," Signor Orlino proposed, watching them as they were filled, "to our complete understanding."

We drank together, our right hands extended. I decided that my host was the most likeable fellow. I remembered those few lines of instructions which I had read. I was in no hurry to talk.

"Signor," I confided, "I am here with unusual powers, it is true, but in the first place and the last I am a listener. With as much detail as you can afford to give me, I desire, in the secrecy of this apartment, that you reveal the basis of this proposed arrangement."

"It is a joyous task," Orlino assured me. "But first you shall feast your eyes upon this, the wickedest letter ever written by any great statesman. You will understand then the reasons for our proposal and at the same time its justification."

Orlino unlocked a drawer of his desk and produced a small black coffer of some sort of metal. He unlocked this and took from it a sealed packet, broke the seal, drew out a letter written in pen and ink in thin, spidery handwriting, very clear and distinct, and handed it over to me. I read it from beginning to end, carefully affecting not to notice the fact that Orlino's fingers inside the drawer were resting upon a small revolver.

"The letter itself is not for our discussion. It is our justification," he observed.

"It is enough," I said.

Orlino replaced the letter in the envelope, resealed it and returned it to the coffer.

"Now," he went on, leaning a little across the table, "these are the plans of my illustrious master. They are the product of his brain— not mine. I take no credit for them. I am his spokesman."

"That is understood," I agreed.

Orlino cleared his throat and fixed his attention entirely upon me. For an hour he spoke, during which my interruptions were monosyllabic and trivial. I will admit that I was fascinated by the man. What he said has no part in my story and I shall never disclose it, but its subtlety, its logic, its plausibility, lacked nothing in the telling. I watched him with increasing wonder. His expression seemed to change every second. His face, so still and composed at my entrance, seemed to have developed rubber-like qualities. His gesticulations drove home his words. It was a wonderful yet a fruitless effort. I kept myself firmly in hand. I told myself that this must be played out to the end without a backward thought, yet twice, when the telephone rang and his sole gesture was to remove the instrument without a break even in his tone, I was conscious of a faint shiver. I knew so well that although this far-reaching scheme could with great propriety be communicated to the private and trusted envoy of Germany, the Baron von Hertzfeld, the Englishman— myself, a stray unit without a nation at the back of him, sitting there with a false passport in his pocket and nothing to excuse his mad impersonation— was

face to face with eternity with every buzz of the telephone, with every second ticked out by the clock on the mantel.

Orlino was pleased with himself. He was so inspired by his subject that quite unconsciously, I am sure, he finished with the peroration of an orator. He had spent so much of himself that he rose to his feet at the finish and passed a scented silk handkerchief across his glistening forehead. I played up to him, filled with a grim resolution to keep this duologue true to life. I, too, rose to my feet and grasped his hand.

"It is magnificent," was all that I trusted myself to say.

His eyes glittered.

"Your master?" he demanded. "Tell me, as man to man, how will he react to this?"

It was my moment. I threw myself into my part to the utmost of my ability.

"Signor," I said, "have no doubt of one thing. He will be transported— he will be in a frenzy— but remember he is a man without imagination. After his first outburst of approval, I can see the shadow come over his face. He will remember that all this is built up, has been justified, glorified even, by one page of handwriting. He will stretch out his hands as though to grip the air. He will say: 'Show me that letter!'"

"But you," Orlino protested, "you are his other self. You have seen the letter."

I was catching some of his excitement. I gripped his hand once more.

"Signor," I cried, "he would not trust his own mother if she came out of heaven and told him those words had been written by that man! He would demand to see them. Oh, I know that suspicious nature— all that stands between him and real greatness, but it is there. What does it matter? Let him see the letter. In forty-eight hours it shall be back again."

He seemed stricken aghast by my request.

"You demand the impossible!" he exclaimed. "You do not realise what the possession of that letter means. It means the downfall of Great Britain's stiff-necked, hypocritical government. It will be like the writing upon the sky for future generations, the proof that England and England's statesmen are no more to be trusted. No excuse will ever wash out the shame of it. It may have been written in a moment of madness, but that matters little. The written word cannot be denied."

"The letter will be as safe with me for a few hours as though it were in that coffer," I argued. "It will pass straight from my hands into the hands of a man for whom it will be a writing in letters of gold. It will bring about what has long been the ambition of every mid-European statesman. Think of it, signor! Germany, France and Italy united and allied against Great Britain, and Russia

our benevolent friend in the background! You take her colonies when you choose. You will bring her people to the verge of starvation in less than a month. All this is true," I concluded passionately, "and yet, signor, I can only repeat that you do not know my master. He reads that letter once and the affair is concluded. All that you have spoken of will happen. But— he must see with his own eyes."

It was clear that I had made an impression. Orlino drank his wine thoughtfully. He refilled my glass and his own. Twice his hand went out to the telephone, only to be withdrawn. He rose to his feet and paced up and down the few yards behind his chair. It was I who broke the silence.

"I regret, signor," I said, "that I have given you such cause for disturbance. I can, if you wish, return to-night. I can repeat, so far as my poor choice of words will permit me, all that you have said. I can assure him that I have seen the letter, but I can tell you now most surely what the answer will be— either you must come to Berlin or he must come to Rome. He will not act unless he has seen with his own eyes what I have seen."

"And yet you— you," he muttered, "are supposed to be his trusted envoy."

"Signor," I rejoined, "I do not think there exists a man in the world who would trust another's eyesight in this matter."

"You have seen the telegrams to-night?" Orlino demanded. "You realise that if England and France come together over this Spanish business our great opportunity will have passed?"

"The more reason," I told him boldly, "for you to speed me on my mission."

I think that was the moment when Orlino made up his mind. He spoke through his telephone earnestly. Then he rose and took me by the arm.

"I cannot leave even you here alone," he said. "Come with me. I speak with the Chief himself."

We walked into a small soundproof chamber lit only by a single electric light, without windows and only the one door through which we had passed. He left me in a distant corner and for five minutes he conversed in muffled tones with his unseen master. Presently he hung up, led me back to the other room, unlocked the coffer, drew out the letter, placed it in another envelope and sealed that.

"Your plans for leaving here?" he asked.

"Are made," I told him. "I have worked it all out. I ask for no more than forty-eight hours."

"My life is pledged on your safe return," he said.

He touched a bell. My audience was at an end. I left him seated at his desk, his thin features drawn as though with pain. He was a man in anguish. Until the door was safely closed I feared every moment that I should be called back.

Nothing untoward happened, however. I was escorted to the street by bowing servants. The motor-car placed at my disposal by Orlino was waiting in the street. At the flying ground the wonderful engines of my plane were already humming as I drove down the long level way towards the hangar. I held my watch in my hand as I ran up the steps.

"Avanti— subissimo!" I ordered.

I felt the air beneath me. I had a brief panoramic view of the buildings below, the busy streets, the little knot of spectators who had seen us off. There was no sign of any disturbance, but as we reached the clouds I fancied that I heard a gun below. I was busy with the wireless, however. It took me only a few seconds to put it out of action. The pilot's bell rang.

"The route, signor?" he demanded.

"Croydon," I answered.

I saw the pilot lean towards his mechanic. They talked together. I touched the signal bell.

"It is understood," I said, "that I have purchased the machine and that you are acting under my orders?"

"Si, si, signor," was the prompt reply.

"Understand then," I continued, "that I desire to call first at Croydon. I know the route."

There was another brief hesitation, then they both glanced round; they both nodded.

"A hundred pounds extra if we are there before daylight," I promised.

From underneath their visored helmets I seemed to catch their genial acquiescence. We were well above the clouds now and travelling at a great speed. I watched the needle of the compass. Our course was properly set. I tested the wireless. It was inoperative. There could be no sleep for me, however. I sat with folded arms rigidly awake whilst the stars paled, the inky clouds dispersed and the grey lights pierced the darkness behind. The mechanic in front pointed exultingly downwards. We seemed to be approaching a dark chasm with irregular lights. I nodded understandingly. It was the North Sea.

I AM NOT SURE that I did not value more than the notes I was presently to handle, the complete change in Colonel Guy's whole appearance as I sank a little wearily into the chair by his desk. I was wearing grey tweeds, permitting myself the use of a monocle, my linen was from Bond Street and showed no signs of disarray and I had a bunch of violets in my buttonhole. I drew off my chamois-leather gloves and handed him the packet. For a moment he forgot to open it. The tired look seemed to have faded from his face, the little pouches

had disappeared from under his eyes, his mouth was slightly open. He stared at me just as though he were looking at an impossibility.

"Who in God's name are you?" he muttered at last.

"Ah," I reflected, "that requires consideration. If you looked in my pocket you would see my cards are engraved in the name of Reginald Salter. All quite in order, I can assure you. I am a bona fide member of the club you would find in the left-hand corner, and the chambers in John Street are also mine. If you went into particulars you would even find that my linen and underclothes were all properly marked 'R.S.' You see," I continued, "I never entered into this business as an amateur, Colonel. I had to provide for every contingency."

"But I have just heard from the Consul," he protested. "John Armstrong— your description exactly when you left here— an unknown Englishman found dead in a corridor at the Excelsior Hotel."

"That, I am afraid, was another man altogether," I confided, "although he had the misfortune to greatly resemble me. You need have no fear, however, that I have been indulging in promiscuous bloodshed. His assassination was purely a political affair. I had no hand in his killing, although it has put me very much on my guard. You observe that I no longer wear a moustache and that my appearance is greatly changed."

"I'm damned if I should have known you anywhere," the colonel admitted, "but you don't mean to say—"

He seemed suddenly to realise what that envelope before him meant. He literally fell upon it, tore the seal away and drew out the letter with trembling fingers. He read a few lines and I heard a little gulp in his throat. It is my belief that he was as near hysterics as any man I have ever seen. He raised himself with difficulty to his feet, swung open the door of a small safe, deposited the letter there, reset the combination and closed the door again. When he sat down in his chair he was breathing heavily. He gazed at me with fascinated eyes.

"The man who lies dead at the Excelsior," I observed, "carried my passport, it is true, thanks to the blunder of a shell-shocked valet, and was found outside the bedroom allotted to me, but as I daresay they may discover some day, he was a German— Baron von Hertzfeld— who bore, most unfortunately for him, a strong resemblance to me. He was a special envoy from Berlin."

The colonel held up his hands.

"No more, I beg of you," he said, unlocking a drawer by his side and bringing out a pile of notes.

"I am afraid," I told him, conveniently forgetting that little packet of lire notes, "that I shall require a few extras. I had to buy a very expensive plane and I had to promise the mechanic and pilot a considerable sum— a hundred

pounds— to reach here by dawn. The price of the machine was 12,000 lire. That I paid for. Considering the gentleman whom I interviewed on behalf of the government explained that this letter was worth several hundreds of millions of pounds— "

The colonel was recovering himself. He was jotting figures down hastily. He pushed a bundle of notes across to me.

"Five thousand pounds, Mr.— er— "

"Salter," I reminded him.

"Thank you," he said. "Will you accept that as sufficient recompense and undertake to pay what is necessary in your own way and in your own name, keeping us entirely out of it?"

"I will do that with pleasure," I promised, "and I will accept the balance as you suggest. To tell you the truth, though," I went on, "I am not quite sure whether I am taking on any more political business. I can get all the excitement I want as a straightforward criminal."

The colonel looked at me and there was something of that appearance of shock still in his face.

"Young man or middle-aged man, or whatever you are," he said, "the sooner you get out of this place the better. You have done a wonderful stroke of work, but I pray to heaven that we never see or hear of you again."

I sighed, buttoned up my pocket-book and picked up my cane and gloves.

"A trifle ungrateful, Colonel," I remonstrated. "I have been murdered by proxy, walked on the brink of eternity for three days and used up one of my best and soundest identities. As I remarked before, I think in future I will stick to my own line of business."

The colonel waved his hand in silent adieu. As a matter of fact, as I descended the stairs I realised that I was wandering far from the truth. There was a pleasant sense of buoyancy about my whole being— I held my head high, I had tasted adventure, fierce, maddening adventure. I had succeeded in my enterprise against terrible odds and there was no sense of shame to mar my triumph. This was one of the days when I felt the change that was coming. I walked up to Trafalgar Square puzzled, a little worried. For once, I was scarcely honest with myself. I found myself wondering whether some day I might unlock the gates and walk with other men in the world where the prizes were fewer but the burden less grievous.

_____

10: The Bloodhound of the Deep

Sumner Locke

1881-1917

Western Mail (Perth) 23 Oct 1914

Sumner Locke, married to Henry Logan Elliott during World War 1, died in childbirth. She was a succsessful novelist, short story writer and playwright. The baby survived, and achieved his own fame as Australian-American novelist and playwright Sumner Locke Elliott.

A DEEP STAIN of blue was on the pacific waters, but the man crouching against the wall of rock, hidden from his pursuers could only see red— and more red. The red was in his mind only since he had no-ticed the swirl of the tide against the elevated fin of a great sea-monster that had insistently invaded the deep water below the shadow of the rock.

The first sun of the day crept round the cliff wall like the lights from the side wings of a proscenium. It showed up a second figure on the rock, lying prone and almost insensible to anything that might be taking place around her. Possibly the woman had an easier mind than that of the man, for she had not seen the shark turning and swaying against the tide. Like a flicker of electric light from a live wire, the shimmering fin rose in the sun.

The man shivered, though his body ran sweat and there was almost a fever of fear upon him. This monster guarded the only safe exit from the rocky shelter, and there was but a few hours at most in which something must be done to relieve them of the starvation and endurance they had suffered for days.

He crept on his hands and knees— careful to keep his body as much as possible from being sighted by anyone who might be lurking on the horseshoe bend of cliffs near— and spoke close to the woman's ear.

"Can you hear, dear?"

"Yes." It was all the woman could manage. He gave her a little of the water he had in a bottle near, and talked while he thought that she was sufficiently conscious to understand him.

"I'm going down," he said in a breaking voice.... "we can't stay here even at the risk of my being caught? Dear... try and listen if you can....We're at the tether end now, and something has to be done."

Two deep eyes, as blue as the stained sea, opened upon him.

"I knew that something must be done, but you must do it...." She was making a tremendous effort to regulate things her mind.... "It's four days, isn't it? and they won't be searching the cliffs any longer.... you go.... down...."

Almost dropping into unconsciousness, she stopped speaking, but the man knew what was in her mind.

"I can't leave you— dear— you've given up all for me. It's not likely that I'm going to desert now and let you— you... "

He sat another hour watching. At times the shark edged round the base of the rock fully fifty feet below, and the man could almost feel the drive of that knife-like fin against his own flesh. He leaned down almost fascinated, and saw the opalescent changes of the long shaft-like body that rose and fell in the morning light.

"He knows..." he said mentally... "the brute... he knows more than I do, that she won't get better.... after all too ... we might have got away if she could have climbed down and swam to that point to the left.... She'll never do it now; and with that death waiting... the other might be better after all."

Then he went over in his mind the days before. The hasty blow that he had driven at a man who ill-treated such a woman as this one whom he loved— had loved all the days of her miserable marriage. The reckless hurling of his fist at the very moment when he had really meant to kill... and kill quickly. Yes, he had always meant to kill the husband, the man who had hurt his love... and this was the result. A day of fearful pursuit; a hiding in the rocks above the tide which they only knew through the childish memory of times long ago when they had climbed after the sea-birds' eggs. The following days and nights, when something had struck the woman down. She had said she would not leave him now that he had risked his life to relieve her of the strain of such a marriage. She had fought her way with him carrying a bag of food and a little water; and the only way to safety lay in swimming the width between that point of land and the next promontory. When children they had been as used to the open sea as the seagulls. The chart distance between the two points of land would have been done in half an hour with the firm strokes of healthy young limbs. The man knew now that it was the surest chance for him but... for the shark. The monster skimming the surface below showed a long line of opalescent body that cut and drove like a silver knife severing all hope of escape by way of the sea.

Behind the barrier of cliffs there waited a line of men set at different points like sentinels who neither slept nor relinquished their watching... in front was the bloodhound of the deep.

After a time the woman seemed to take a fresh hold on the things around her.

"It's all such beautiful blue water," she said. "I'd like you to lift me, Joey, so that I'm— nearer."

To the man watching there, the blue had darkened again. The surface of the deep was drenched with the red that he saw every time the brute below reared the shining fin. For the first time in his life he felt the cruelty of the

thing he loved so much. The great wide bay with its peace and cooing melodies. Now it was but a grave— open— ready with death playing in the sun to the rhythm of a dreadful requiem.

"You'll lift me, Joey— because I want to see the water."

The man turned cold. He knew that if he moved her an inch she could look over and see the shark.

"Rest where you are," he said. "See, I am going to climb down the way we came and give myself up... it is so little to do for you; and there will be help presently and kindness, I'm sure, to bring you back to proper life.... I must go... dear, and you must try and..."

"Don't leave me, Joey... I couldn't live if you went. Without you now I'd rather sleep— down there."

"Oh, no-no-no," rang from the man's dry throat, "a thousand times— no-no-no!"

"It is such beautiful blue," she said "Lift me, Joey."

The man moved her gently with her face towards the sun. He thought that may close her eyes to the abounding glitter of sky and sea if he put her that way.

But she turned her head with a sudden resisting of the weakness that was upon her. She saw the horseshoe curve of rock wall and the pacific sea. She saw every thing, but the shark had for the moment disappeared.

Under the lee of the ledge of rock he skimmed and twisted near his prey. He was content to wait. His watch was as keen and as confident as those men behind the scrub and rocky barrier.

"You must go, Joey," said the woman presently, shutting her eyes a moment. "I can follow you from here until you are safe... for I don't think that I'll keep.... awake longer than that. You see I'll go in peace, if I know you're round I that bend .... they won't dream you could do it; but we know, don't we...? done it before in the old days— Twenty minutes one day— I beat you..."

Wandering on with her face in the sun-light she lay there. The man saw the shark flicker to the surface out a bit, and then take his plunging disappearing dive.

Be held his breath and waited, but she had not seen it.

"Joey— to please me— go... climb down to the ledge below us with the rope and— and— you'll do it in twenty minutes or half an hour.... the beautiful blue will help you— oh, the kind, kind sea..."

But the man put his face to hers and whispered of his love.... the pain it would give him to leave her— of the joy if he could get her safely back to life.

"Not at the cost of your life," she said, "and I know that— there would not— be time."

Again she asked him to lift her. To take her into the warmth of his arms. It was chilly, she said, even in the sun.

And then he held her— held her closely and death waited— waited... while she I gave him her kiss.

"Won't you go, Joey .... so that I may I watch you while I can?"

"I won't leave you," was all he said and held her drooping body with all the warmth and power in him.

She was facing the width of 6ca now and the man knew that even in her failing strength she could notice the twisting shaft of danger lurking below. He noticed her eyes riveted once or twice, then she set them in one place and looked— and looked.

He placed a tender hand across her eyes. "Don't!" he said, and his voice shivered. But she forced them away with some new spirit.

"I know, now, Joey ... I know. Dear God .... so long as that watches you must stay here.... Hold me, I want to— pray."

So long he held her against him, that he wondered if the silence meant her complete rest. He moved her face so that he could look at her, but the blanched lips moved slowly.

"Joey, I want— you to offer— my body, I want you to take your chance... I want you to lower...."

"Ah, God, no!" It was all he could Gay as he clasped her hands and held them to him, forcing her face round from the horrible fate.

"Yes ... I should never know.... and it would be much the same as the birds.... Lower me presently, Joey."

But the man sat mute. The dreadful realisation of what she expected him to do silenced him as if he had been suddenly bereft of his sense. To give her body to the brute.... to appease for a time, sufficiently long enough for him to swim the intervening waters and get away— the dreadful lust of the bloodhound of the deep. To lower her beautiful form to such a ghastly feast .... he knew that whatever happened he would never do that.

His eyes drooped to hers. They were wonderfully clear he thought, and then was in them something that men have when they bid companions good-bye on battlefield.

"Joey—" she almost whispered, "take this as my— last— offering— as the complete .... glorious sacrifice of a woman who loves you.... Ah..."

Her hands were stiffening about him and the look in her eyes was turning grey and dull; and then the mist of death passed slowly across.

He tried to lay her down, but she twisted in a frantic struggle to keep herself upright, and with firm resolve, even as death granted an extra allowance of strength that lasted but the fractionary part of a minute, she

hurled from him— dropping out of sight sheer down— down to the depth of her beautiful blue.

The man sat staring through the space of sunshine with her words crying to him in the quivering mystic air.

"Take— this— as last offering— the sacrifice of a woman who loves you...."

Mutely he leaned over the edge. There was but a golden path made by the sun across his only line of escape, and the sea bore a trail of red— real red. ... as the bloodhound took a final dive... satisfied!

_____

11: The Man Who Fell in Love With the Co-Operative Stores

Stella Benson

1892–1933

In: *Collected Short Stories*, Macmillan, 1936

I HAD BEEN reading the embittered, yet amorous, memoirs of an old man who called himself the Don Juan of modern times, and reflecting on the odd fact that Don Juans— either ancient or modern— so often pay for delight and receive disappointment, though, of course, they make the best of it, poor dears, when describing their careers to us. The episode that especially rankled in the memory of my adventurer was an arrangement by which a young lady (a renowned beauty of the 'nineties) was persuaded, by means of a present of many tens of thousands of francs, to become our Don Juan's love. A few happy weeks passed, during which the shops of the Rue de la Paix appear to have been ransacked for articles of expensive hardware of a kind that might have been expected to nail down a beautiful young lady's love— and then, alas, our naïf Don Juan fell into the hands of gambling sharpers and lost every sou that he possessed. To his innocent amazement, the beautiful young lady he had bought immediately passed into the hands of a higher bidder. Poor man, for quite six weeks he made no further investments in love. Are not these Don Juans, I thought, more innocent than they suppose? I remembered that most true and dreadful story of Maria Edgeworth's— *Rosamond and the Purple Jar*— which tells of another dare-devil capitalist who deliberately invested— at enormous sacrifice— in a broken heart.

As I was thinking by the fire, I became aware that I had a visitor sitting opposite to me— a drooping, old-young man, with pale, thin hair, and pale, thin bones.

"You were mentioning broken hearts," he said. "You see before you a broken-hearted man."

"An unhappy love affair?" I murmured, sympathetically, for I could see that he was the sort of person who would always love one who loved another.

"You see before you," he said, "the man who fell in love with the Co-operative Stores."

"With the Co— Well, well, well.... But surely your love was safe in such chaste, substantial, and irreproachable hands?"

"One would have thought so... I thought so— poor fool that I was," he said, with a harsh, bitter laugh. "I was only one and twenty at the time— on the threshold of life. One thinks no evil then; one believes in love."

"How did it all come about?" I asked, gently, knowing by experience that an attentive ear is the only comfort one can offer to members of that garrulous tribe— unlucky lovers.

"How does love ever come about? I was always rather an aloof sort of chap; I thought I had no heart. Of course, I had dallied with various institutional charmers in my time— I remember one riotous New Year's Eve spent at Fortnum and Mason's, and my name— as an eligible young bachelor about town— had been coupled, too, with one or two of the smarter hotels— and even for a few weeks with the Victoria and Albert Museum— but my heart had never been touched and I thought I was safe. How could I dream that I should be so completely bowled over— and by an establishment in a really second-rate district, too— I, who had flirted with Dorchester House! I had missed a train to Redhill and was just strolling aimlessly, putting in a spare hour— when I was knocked endways, suddenly, by meeting the gaze of those bright, soft windows looking out from under level brows.... Oh, if only I could make you see— as I saw it at that amazing moment— the invitation expressed in the generous, sensuous lines of the doorway— the sweet come hither of the steps that led up to the doorway.... There was at once nothing else in the world for me; the wisdom or unwisdom of a surrender to such enchantment did not enter my mind. I went instantly to my bank, to see how my credit stood, and— "

"Why did you do that?" I asked crudely.

"Why did I do that? What do you mean? A man doesn't come penniless to the arms of his love, does he? Well, by a chance that seemed to me most fortunate, my quarter's allowance had just been paid in by my father— a generous allowance, for he was a rich man and I his only son. I took a taxi back to my adored at once— if flying had been quicker I would have flown.... The tenderly voluptuous façade seemed to me, on that second winged approach, more irresistible even than before; what had I done, I thought ecstatically, to deserve such good fortune as finding such a perfect object for my love— and at the same time having the means to secure the return of my passion? I rushed up the steps, suffocated with emotion.... It would be impossible to tell you— now, in cold blood— the details of that first morning of rapture. Of course, I threw everything I had at the feet of my charmer; in every department of that matchless organization I spent money like water; I ordered diamonds— champagnes— orchids— silks and satins— those thousand and one little knick-knacks that lovers love.... I paid on the nail by cheque for everything— I demanded no discount— I grudged nothing.... And my loved one responded, mark you—"

"I don't doubt it," I murmured.

"Yes, my Co-co (I evolved that tender little pet-name, Co-co) responded rapturously. Never can it be said that I had not ample cause to think that my love was returned. In every department I was welcomed most lovingly; I could

have sworn that the welcome was genuine; the feeling behind it, I was certain— poor fool that I was— was for me alone, and was prompted by unmercenary passion...."

"But why should you suppose so?" I asked. "Since—" But he pressed on, hiding his sorrow-twisted face in his hands.

"As soon as we were parted that day, I took my pen in hand and poured out my foolish hot heart in writing. Delivery vans blocked the street outside my flat; my rooms were heaped with tangible proofs of my love's good faith. By the first post next morning I had letters— such sweet little notes— I have them here." He slapped a bulging inner pocket, and, after a moment's tender, heartbroken hesitation, handed me a letter.

"Dear sir... your esteemed orders of even date... our very best attention... we shall spare no efforts to give you satisfaction... your good self... trust you will have no cause to complain... Hoping for the favour of your further esteemed patronage. . . ."

"Best attention! No cause for complaint! My good self..." cried my visitor with his terrible mirthless laugh; he seemed to know the letter by heart. "I could show you dozens of such letters received by me within the next few days— all in the same tender vein, breathing spontaneous affection in every line, as it seemed to me. Even now, re-reading these artless little outpourings, I can scarcely believe... ah, well—" He dashed his hand roughly across his eyes. "The idyll was soon over. That is the one peculiarity all idylls have in common— that they end soon— terribly soon— and end in bitterness...." He was silent for a moment and then continued in a strained voice. "Next day I spent as recklessly as before, with the same enchanting results. It was that evening that the manager of my bank rang me up. I told him some lie about having won a prize in a sweepstake. I tell you I had lost all moral sense. My whole being was canalized into this one passionate groove. I would have forged my father's name if I had had the skill to do so. It didn't quite come to that, but I was mad— utterly mad.... I spent a fortune that week, and the daily— almost hourly— letters of my love became rapturous. I could show you— but no, I can't... it all hurts too much... one phrase ran, I remember, a most valued customer.... Ha-ha... most valued.... I found afterwards that, after the first day, Co-co had been in constant touch with their most valued customer's bank account— to see how deep the poor sucker's pocket was.... That's how much the artless Co-co valued an ardent lover. Well, to cut a long and miserable story short, I went far beyond those limits— I sacrificed my honour— my good name— my all— for Co-co. The bank began kicking towards the end of that delirious week; I got an overdraft with the greatest difficulty— then I had to borrow from the Jews, on the wildest security. My Co-co was insatiable—

invitations to further orgies of spending continually lured me on; my Co-co evidently would love me to distraction— as long as I could pay. The matter naturally came to my father's ears. He paid my debts once— twice— three times.... He pleaded with me— reasoned with me— threatened me. I answered him with the violence of youth; death itself, I swore, should not stop my laying all that I had— more, far more, than I had— at the feet of my love. My father took energetic ruthless steps— he cut me off; I was penniless suddenly. There had been for some days a note of acerbity in Co-co's letters to me— and after the crash, when there was no more cash to be screwed out of me, the letters became definitely hostile— finally even threatening. The artless creature had, it seemed, been hoarding my ardent written promises to pay and now trotted them all out, to grind me more deeply into the mire. Never one word of sympathy for a lover whose only mistake was to love too well.... My father finally bought Co-co off— and with a cynical brazenness that I found almost incredible, the creature I had loved so well began writing the same alluring little invitations, roguish little declarations, grateful little notes, to him. As for me, I never heard a word from Co-co again. I found afterwards— quite by chance— that my charmer was carrying on with a friend of mine— even from the first day of our amour. It broke my life. You see before you a broken man— wholly disillusioned— wholly ruined. My own young passionate warm heart was my undoing."

"No— your purse was your undoing," I said. "You gave your purse— I beg your pardon, I mean your heart— most unwisely. You deliberately—"

"There is no wisdom in the beginning of love," mourned the unfortunate lover, "and nothing but disillusionment at the end of it."

"On the contrary— you showed an obvious disillusionment from the beginning, in choosing as an object of your passion, something that could be paid for. Your experience, it seems to me, was a foregone conclusion. Now had you fallen in love with the British Museum— or with St. Paul's Cathedral— — "

"Oh, but it's so cold— that virtuous love— so austere— so undemanding.... A man wants to spend himself on his love— a man wants that spice of extravagance— of danger— of unwisdom in love...."

"Well— you can't have it both ways," I said unsympathetically. "If you pay for disappointment you can't be surprised if you get it. You must pull yourself together— start afresh.... What are your plans for the future?"

"I have none," he said, shrinking from my briskness. "Arrangements have been made to admit me into an almshouse—"

"An almshouse? Why— there you are. There you have an institution willing to give you everything for nothing. Doesn't that rather dispel your sense of disillusionment?"

"No— why should it?" mourned my visitor. "It was love I wanted— it was love I made my heroic bid for— it was my love that was spurned— trampled in the dust— spat upon.... I know now, of course, that there is no such thing as love...."

I started, for I suddenly realized that my visitor had faded away. I shook away sleep and returned to the page of memoirs in front of me. The last words were "...so she left me. I had spent at least four hundred thousand francs on her, but what was that to her? On the day of my ruin, she left me for a richer lover. I know now, of course, that there is no such thing as love."

_____

12: The Uncle of Hip Wong Ting

Ralph Bergengren

1871-1947

The Popular Magazine, 1 Feb, 1914

ON the shaded veranda of the Village Green Club, where the smell of honeysuckle was sweet to tired business noses, half a dozen members and one guest of that organization lounged in wicker chairs and stared gloomily— except the guest— at a large sign directly opposite.

The sign dominated the landscape. While it stood there, it was difficult to realize the sleepy charm of the "village," with its small near-colonial houses, its well-kept lawns, and general air of refined comfort. There is unquestionably in well-to-do American communities a marked prejudice against Chinese neighbors, and Village Green, formerly West Derby, was no exception. Probably there is the same feeling in well-to-do Chinese neighborhoods against American neighbors. And if there was one thing on which Village Green prided itself that thing was exclusiveness. It was essentially a "nice place for nice people." And here in the midst of it, advertising itself immodestly to every passer, painted in giant letters of black on a white boarding that almost hid the lower windows of the house it advertised, stood the statement :

THIS HOUSE FOR SALE
CHEAP TO A CHINAMAN
NO OTHER NEED APPLY

If the disgraceful notice had been there before the clubhouse was finished, the members would not have put their front veranda on the back of the house. As matters stood, they suffered in spirit, and were getting the habit of not asking anybody down from the city to spend the night.

"The old skeezies who owns that house," Bartley Campbell was explaining to the stranger whom he had to-day rather reluctantly brought down with him, "was one of the original settlers. Ten years ago, this place was mostly run-down farms and abandoned pasture, a kind of vermiform appendix to Derby. There were a few genuine old houses, pretty good architecture but going to seed like everything else. You'd hardly believe it, but right here, twenty minutes from town by train, was a regular, worn-out, mossback community; and sooner or later somebody was bound to see the possibilities of development for suburban living. This man Warren— 'Stevie' Warren, as he's known locally— owned about half the property, and had a reputation that reached all over Derby. Talk about the paper on the wall— why, they used to say that Stevie Warren was so close that he got between the wall and the

paper! Anyway, he sold most of his land to the real-estate people who took up the development, and the sale made him independently well-to-do."

"Rather playing in luck, I should say," commented the stranger.

"You'd have thought so," said another of the club members bitterly. "But not Stevie! After he'd sold, he got it into his head that he ought to have held out for a higher price. Maybe he'd have got it, and maybe he wouldn't. What he did get was a fair price for his land and a perpetual grouch against the people who are now living on it. You see, Stevie isn't just the kind of man that you instinctively take into the bosom of the family, and that hasn't helped the amenities. And then we had to stop him from keeping pigs. We had to go to court about it just as we are now having to about that confounded sign."

"The crowning beauty of it from Stevie's point of view," growled Campbell, "is that no Chinaman would come and live in a place like Village Green, anyway. But there we are! The genesis of that sign is a combination of pig and billboard. Originally, you know, this place was called West Derby. You felt as if you were living in that side of a hat. Well, we managed to get the name changed to Village Green, secured our own post office, and had the little flag station turned into a real railway station with a ticket window in it. Prettiest station on the line, at that. Then we succeeded in getting through the Derby city government a sort of home rule in the matter of billboards, pigs, and such pretty industries. Stevie used to have a billboard just where the sign is now that he let out to patent medicines, circuses, corsets, breakfast foods, and what not. The thing was an eyesore, and we stopped it. The Village Improvement Society made him take it down, and he swore that he'd have a billboard there some day that would stand till the Judgment. When we built this clubhouse, we tried to buy across the street, but Rockefeller wouldn't have been able to get it. And as soon as the clubhouse was opened, up went the pretty little notion that you see opposite."

"Stuck it up there the day of our opening reception," interpolated a stout member, "and sat all day on the fence in his shirt sleeves to see what we ~ thought of it."

"And some of us were fools enough to go across and expostulate,"' said Campbell regretfully. "I was one of 'em. I told him no Chinaman would come and live in Village Green; and he said he guessed I was about right, but the sign would stay there till one of 'em did. "

"A sign like that doesn't come under the definition of a billboard," added the stout member. "But of course it depreciates property. There's a chap I know myself who was thinking of coming here to settle— just the kind of a man we want, too!— but when he was here the other day he saw that sign and everything was off. It makes Village Green look as if it must be a full-fledged,

rat-eating Chinese quarter already. It's the first thing anybody sees when he comes up the main street; and I guess it's the one thing we have that everybody who sees it is likely to remember."

"Didn't I see a picture of it the other day in a morning paper?" asked the guest thoughtfully.

"Everybody else in town saw a picture of it in the morning paper!" snapped a thin member. "I guess you're not the exception. But we'll fix him presently. The Improvement Society has applied for an injunction, and of course that brought the camera brigade down here and gave us a little undesirable publicity. That's why we didn't want to take the matter into court, but Warren forced us into it just as he did with the pigs and the billboard. The way we look at it, sir, is that that sign is a public nuisance, put up for the sole purpose of annoying the rest of us and depreciating our property. I thought myself that Judge McPherson would grant an injunction immediately, but he reserved judgment. What the deuce there can be to look into—"

"There's Henderson coming up from the train," said the stout member. He got up and went to the edge of the veranda. Everybody waited and listened as the newcomer turned into the path leading to the clubhouse. "Anything in that paper about the injunction, Henderson?" called the stout member.

Henderson, a large, ruddy man, somewhat out of breath by his walk, sank down into-a wicker chair, and held out the newspaper. He said nothing, but his manner was eloquent and the paper already so folded that-a single column stood out prominently. Bartley Campbell captured it, perched himself on the railing, and read feelingly:

ONLY CHINAMEN NEED APPLY

Any Chinaman wishing a happy suburban home in one of our most delightful communities can now apply to Mr. Stephen Warren, of Village Green.

Mr. Warren is fond of Chinamen, so much so that he maintains a large sign offering to sell a house in that community at a bargain to one of that admired race. Judge McPherson to-day refused the request of the Village Green Improvement Society for an injunction restraining Mr. Warren from a course that seems to peeve many of his less broad-gauge neighbors. In handing down this decision, Judge McPherson pointed out that as the house belongs to Mr. Warren, he is within his legal rights in selling it to any favored nationality. No proof has been forthcoming that Mr. Warren does not intend to sell under the stipulated condition, and the contested sign is therefore legal unless it can be shown that Mr. Warren has erected it without intention to sell, but with intention to annoy and embarrass his neighbors.

Village Green, according to latest report has accepted the ruling philosophically, an the villagers are now studying Chinese in the hope that when the property is disposed of it will go to a nice Chinaman, who will be a real addition to the social life of a highly cultivated suburban community.

Moy Sing, or, as he was also known, Charlie Duck, was a conscientious reader of the daily newspaper, preferring those with the largest type and the most generous display of pictures. From his first appearance in these United States he had been a versatile and intelligent Chinaman. At the very time when the Sunday school was teaching him to read the newspaper, the Chinese quarter, then smaller and not so used to American ways as it has become since, was paying him tribute for preventing the police from raiding fan-tan games.

Moy, to be sure, did not have all this influence with the police. But by the simple process of telling the police where a game was in progress, and then running ahead and warning the players, he had gained a lucrative reputation as one in the confidence of the local police captain.

This, of course, had not lasted longer than the time it took the police to get on to it; but there remain more ways in which a semi-Americanized Chinaman can blackmail his fellows in the Chinese quarter of an American city than have yet been enumerated. Charlie Duck became expert in all of them; and the more expert he became the less he attracted outside attention. And the simplest way of all, as well as the most difficult for police captains to put their fingers on, is to threaten your victim with violent death unless he postpones extinction by a cash payment— and occasionally prove how serious you are by spectacularly murdering somebody who has ventured to object to the process. This object lesson is often described as a "Tong War"; and, although there may be tong wars independent of blackmail, blackmail usually affords the unseen incentive.

There are good tongs and bad tongs, and Charlie Duck, being a versatile fellow, belonged to both kinds, and was highly respected in each. His nominal occupation was that of a merchant. He imported a great many things, on which he paid duty like a man, and which he sold afterward to large but fairly honest profit. He imported other things on which he paid no duties— principally other Chinamen whom he distributed to a chain of laundries in which he was interested. And with so many activities there were times when Charlie Duck wished he had some place to live where nobody would be likely to come and look for him. Just at present, however, he was a fine specimen, in the public eye, of a good Chinaman. He had even seen his own picture in the newspaper as one of our leading. Chinese merchants.

It was a couple of weeks after Judge McPherson had handed down the decision that apparently doomed Village Green to the perpetual observation of Stevie Warren's sign, that two men alighted at the Village Green station and asked their way to Mr. Warren's residence. One of these men was small, brisk,

and sharp-featured, wearing a tweed business suit, and the other was a thin, sallow young man, whose black cutaway coat and derby hat did not conceal the fact that he was an unmistakable candidate for Mr. Warren's real estate. Although he could well enough afford to do so, Stevie Warren kept no servant, and himself ushered them into his living room. He had kept the farmhouse in which he had lived when Village Green was still West Derby, and a small farm, without pigs, still occupied his chief attention. He was a dried-up old man with a frequent dry chuckle that had no mirth in it.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, casting a disapproving glance of his pale-blue eye at the coiled pigtail that came into view when the younger of the two removed his hat, "I hope ye haven't been led astray by what ye seen in the papers and come after that house. Because that sign is a kind of little joke of my own on—"

The man who had no pigtail waved aside the remark, and extracted a card from his pocketbook. He handed it to Stevie; the name was unfamiliar, but the card also bore the words, "Attorney at Law" in impressive letters.

"We thought there might be some question of that, Mr. Warren," he remarked affably, "and for that reason my friend, Mr. Hip Wong Ting, asked me to accompany him. He is much in earnest in wishing to acquire a residence in some quiet, respectable neighborhood."

"I've sold all the property hereabouts that I mean to at present," declared Mr. Warren flatly.

"In that case," said the man with the card carelessly, "I suppose you are willing to take the consequences if the Village Green Improvement Society is informed that you have refused a bona-fide offer of purchase. Unless I am mistaken, the society will be in a position to sue you for having displayed the sign we have just examined on your premises. There is also the little matter of perjury in view of your statement on oath that you intended to sell as soon as you found a purchaser."

Stevie Warren thought rapidly and uncomfortably. What the man said sounded only too plausible. The triumph of the Village Green Improvement Society loomed like a sudden thundercloud.

"I suppose you'll stand for a clause in the papers that the sale is invalid and the land comes back to me ef ye sell arterward to anybody but a Chinaman?" he asked shrewdly.

"Certainly," said the lawyer. "My client is not acting for the local people. You can set your mind easy there, Mr. Warren. This is a straight transaction on our side, bearing in mind, of course, that you offer to sell at what may reasonably be called cheap."

Stephen Warren grunted. "I suppose ye'll give me time to think the business over."

"Wantee house now," said the Chinaman. "Much soon."

"The fact is, Mr. Warren," said the lawyer, "that we shall be sadly disappointed not to close the deal immediately. We should like to make the preliminary agreement at once. Otherwise, being right here in Village Green, there can hardly be a more convenient time than the present to report your refusal to sell this house to us to those of your neighbors who are most interested."

"Ye look to me like a couple of blackmailers," said Mr. Warren acidly. "But I'II sell ye the property."

As a community, Village Green was too polite to be curious, and in the relief that followed the disappearance of Stevie's "billboard" the Village Green Club would have welcomed almost anything opposite. As a matter of fact, a few weeks showed the possibility of having a Chinese neighbor and hardly knowing the difference. If Village Green had neither the desire nor the intention of becoming personally acquainted with Hip Wong Ting, the new neighbor certainly had no desire to force the acquaintance.

He "fixed up" the old house, had the lawn cared for, imported another Chinaman to wait on him and do errands at the grocery; and, without effacing himself, merged rapidly and comfortably into the landscape. He did not start a laundry; nor was he addicted to gongs and firecrackers. In fact, after he had been there a month, Village Green was quite used to him. Male villagers got into the way of passing the time of day and the state of the weather with him on the railway train.

It was surmised that he was some kind of drummer for a Chinese merchant, for he was away at intervals, and, when at-home, went daily to some unknown occupation in the Chinese quarter. Occasionally he brought other Chinamen down from the city, and very likely they played fan-tan to while away a Celestial evening; but, as Bartley Campbell remarked, bridge in the club was not essentially different, although somewhat more complicated. The real beauty of Hip Wong Ting, however, was that he had eliminated Stevie's signboard and now attracted so little attention himself that it was only by special favor that strangers in Village Green were let into the secret of his existence. His most frequent visitor was his uncle, an older man, with long, thin mustaches, a frankly revealed pigtail, and a pair of tinted spectacles. Village Green also got quite used to seeing him.

Moy Sing, otherwise Charlie Duck, had disappeared; gone, but anything except forgotten. His face, which looked a good deal like that of a Sioux squaw wearing a derby hat and white collar, was in many newspapers; what was

more important and lasting, it was in practically all the police stations from one end of the country to the other. He was "wanted" with an almost impassioned intensity by the police. Railway terminals were being watched for him. Chinese quarters were being gone over as with a fine-toothed comb.

For the inevitable had at last happened. Link by link, the chain was complete, from the four pigtailed victims of the latest tong battle to Charlie Duck placidly reading the morning paper in the back room of the Oriental store, with "Moy Sing, Merchant," in gilt letters on the sign outside of it. Temporarily, at least, the public knew that the Ten Ting Tong, whose representative gunmen had given a wild West show in Chinatown, was not a thousand-year-old secret society, romantically perpetuating a thousand-year-old feud, but actually a well-organized blackmailing company, of which Charlie Duck was the promoter and chief official.

If the four deceased Chinamen had "come across" sensibly, according to Charlie Duck's notion, there would have been no need of killing them as an object lesson. It was a plain business proposition. And if the fifth, who happened to survive, hadn't had the amazing nerve to report his own situation to the police and ask for protection, the affair would have blown over after making a certain amount of picturesque newspaper copy.

Unfortunately for the future activity of the Ten Ting Tong, a little first-hand information had been enough for a starter; and with that to go on, the whole story had been unraveled. Moy Sing's partners, vice president and treasurer of the delectable society, had been caught and held for trial; nor had they hesitated to try to wriggle out by laying the chief blame on the stocky shoulders of Charlie Duck.

Then the earth had apparently opened for Charlie Duck's benefit. His Joss had been good to him; and as China is directly under us, the possibility was that he had fallen straight through and come up again on his own side. Or, more likely, he had taken advantage of his own expert knowledge of how to get Chinamen into America and successfully smuggled himself out of it.

Two or three times Moy Sing was reported captured with convincing details, but each time he turned out to be somebody else, for to the average American eye one Chinaman looks a good deal like another; and the reward offered for Moy Sing made people optimistic about recognizing him.

Stevie Warren sat in his untidy living room, smoking his short clay pipe and darning a sock when a knock at the door interrupted this combination of pleasure and business. He glanced from the window, saw the neat red wagon of the Derby Sunshine Laundry, and deduced the delivery man on his doorstep.

Being a widower, Stevie patronized the Sunshine Laundry; and, being a practical economist, he patronized it as little as possible. Once a month was

about his limit, and now, as he took the bundle, it seemed rather smaller than usual. But as the charge corresponded to the size, he found the necessary tribute to conventional cleanliness, paid the delivery man, and carried his bundle into the living room. There it remained until Stevie needed a collar, which was not until the following Sunday.

Mr. Warren loved a dollar for its own sake, and for the sense of security that it gave him, more than for anything that he could buy with it; in fact, there was almost nothing in life that he really wanted, except his pipe, his chickens, and his quarrel with the community. And he hated Hip Wong Ting with the intensity due to a Chinaman who had not only bought his house and eliminated the sign that had made Village Green unhappy, but had also insisted upon buying the house at what was undoubtedly a bargain.

During the week, Stevie rarely wore a collar; Sunday he celebrated by a shave and a clean shirt; and so nicely did he figure out the laundry proposition that when one laundry came in the next laundry was within one shirt of being ready to go out. The shirt he discarded on Sunday was the last item in the monthly package that the delivery man would call for Monday morning. Thus it followed that when Mr, Warren opened his bundle he cursed diligently.

Colored shirts and white collars did not appeal to him; and there was nothing for it but to upset his program by wearing his present white shirt a day or two longer and putting on one of this other man's collars if he was lucky enough to find that it fit him. The Derby Sunshine Laundry should learn Stevie's opinion of its business management. Meantime, a collar was a collar.

Without looking at the size, Mr. Warren turned to the mirror over the mantel, which reflected the back side of a clock, a match box, a shaving mug, and other miscellany, and essayed disgustedly to button this collar to his week-a-day shirt. But the thing was too big for him. It was sizes too big for him; it lapped over; he might almost have buttoned the front of it at the back of his neck. It was the largest collar Mr. Stephen Warren had ever seen, or imagined, or heard of.

But was it the largest collar he had ever heard of?

Mr. Warren stopped swearing, stared, and examined the collar more closely. The Sunshine Laundry had obliterated the size. It remained, simply, an unbelievably large collar. And where, Mr. Warren asked himself, had he lately heard of somebody who wore an unbelievably large collar?

Whoever he was, wherever he had heard of him, the man must be somewhere within the circle of influence of the Sunshine Laundry; and wherever he was he had Stevie Warren's shirts and collars. Pleasant time he'd have trying to wear 'em!

Mad as he was, Stevie grinned at the thought— and then stopped grinning with the abruptness of a man who remembers. The recollection was vivid: He had seen it in a newspaper two or three weeks ago. The man with such an unusual neck was Charlie Duck— and there was a reward of a thousand dollars for information leading to his discovery! And there was one Chinaman living in Village Green— no one knew that better than Stevie Warren— a small Chinaman— a thin fellow with a thin neck— and an uncle

With trembling hands, Mr. Warren examined the bundle further. Yes, here were other collars that might fit a man with a small neck; six small collars, and six astoundingly large ones! Early that evening— in fact, as soon as darkness had settled— a company of men in blue coats cautiously surrounded the house that Stevie Warren had once advertised as for sale only to a Chinaman. And inside that house they found Charlie Duck, whom they very much wanted, together with an unopened bundle of laundry that belonged to Mr. Warren. But they did not find Hip Wong Ting. He was not there that Sunday.

Evidently, his Joss was looking out for him. He was a modest young man, whose connection with Charlie Duck was never satisfactorily determined, and if he grieved when Mr. Duck was electrocuted, he wept far from the scene. As for the house, it was eventually sold at auction for unpaid taxes. The Village Green Club got it, although Mr. Warren bid until his breaking heart refused to allow him to go fifty cents higher.

———————

13: The Philanthropist and the Happy Cat

H. H. Munro

1870-1916

The Morning Post, 27 January 1914

Unusually for this author, this story was published as by H. H. Munro rather than by his well-known psuedonym "Saki."

JOCANTHA BESSBURY was in the mood to be serenely and graciously happy. Her world was a pleasant place, and it was wearing one of its pleasantest aspects. Gregory had managed to get home for a hurried lunch and a smoke afterwards in the little snuggery; the lunch had been a good one, and there was just time to do justice to the coffee and cigarettes. Both were excellent in their way, and Gregory was, in his way, an excellent husband. Jocantha rather suspected herself of making him a very charming wife, and more than suspected herself of having a first-rate dressmaker.

"I don't suppose a more thoroughly contented personality is to be found in all Chelsea," observed Jocantha in allusion to herself; "except perhaps Attab," she continued, glancing towards the large tabby-marked cat that lay in considerable ease in a corner of the divan. "He lies there, purring and dreaming, shifting his limbs now and then in an ecstasy of cushioned comfort. He seems the incarnation of everything soft and silky and velvety, without a sharp edge in his composition, a dreamer whose philosophy is sleep and let sleep; and then, as evening draws on, he goes out into the garden with a red glint in his eyes and slays a drowsy sparrow."

"As every pair of sparrows hatches out ten or more young ones in the year, while their food supply remains stationary, it is just as well that the Attabs of the community should have that idea of how to pass an amusing afternoon," said Gregory. Having delivered himself of this sage comment he lit another cigarette, bade Jocantha a playfully affectionate good-bye, and departed into the outer world.

"Remember, dinner's a wee bit earlier to-night, as we're going to the Haymarket," she called after him.

Left to herself, Jocantha continued the process of looking at her life with placid, introspective eyes. If she had not everything she wanted in this world, at least she was very well pleased with what she had got. She was very well pleased, for instance, with the snuggery, which contrived somehow to be cosy and dainty and expensive all at once. The porcelain was rare and beautiful, the Chinese enamels took on wonderful tints in the firelight, the rugs and hangings led the eye through sumptuous harmonies of colouring. It was a room in which one might have suitably entertained an ambassador or an archbishop,

but it was also a room in which one could cut out pictures for a scrap-book without feeling that one was scandalising the deities of the place with one's litter. And as with the snuggery, so with the rest of the house, and as with the house, so with the other departments of Jocantha's life; she really had good reason for being one of the most contented women in Chelsea.

From being in a mood of simmering satisfaction with her lot she passed to the phase of being generously commiserating for those thousands around her whose lives and circumstances were dull, cheap, pleasureless, and empty. Work girls, shop assistants and so forth, the class that have neither the happy-go-lucky freedom of the poor nor the leisured freedom of the rich, came specially within the range of her sympathy. It was sad to think that there were young people who, after a long day's work, had to sit alone in chill, dreary bedrooms because they could not afford the price of a cup of coffee and a sandwich in a restaurant, still less a shilling for a theatre gallery.

Jocantha's mind was still dwelling on this theme when she started forth on an afternoon campaign of desultory shopping; it would be rather a comforting thing, she told herself, if she could do something, on the spur of the moment, to bring a gleam of pleasure and interest into the life of even one or two wistful-hearted, empty-pocketed workers; it would add a good deal to her sense of enjoyment at the theatre that night. She would get two upper circle tickets for a popular play, make her way into some cheap tea-shop, and present the tickets to the first couple of interesting work girls with whom she could casually drop into conversation. She could explain matters by saying that she was unable to use the tickets herself and did not want them to be wasted, and, on the other hand, did not want the trouble of sending them back. On further reflection she decided that it might be better to get only one ticket and give it to some lonely-looking girl sitting eating her frugal meal by herself; the girl might scrape acquaintance with her next-seat neighbour at the theatre and lay the foundations of a lasting friendship.

With the Fairy Godmother impulse strong upon her, Jocantha marched into a ticket agency and selected with immense care an upper circle seat for the "Yellow Peacock," a play that was attracting a considerable amount of discussion and criticism. Then she went forth in search of a tea-shop and philanthropic adventure, at about the same time that Attab sauntered into the garden with a mind attuned to sparrow stalking. In a corner of an A.B.C. shop she found an unoccupied table, whereat she promptly installed herself, impelled by the fact that at the next table was sitting a young girl, rather plain of feature, with tired, listless eyes, and a general air of uncomplaining forlornness. Her dress was of poor material, but aimed at being in the fashion, her hair was pretty, and her complexion bad; she was finishing a modest meal

of tea and scone, and she was not very different in her way from thousands of other girls who were finishing, or beginning, or continuing their teas in London tea-shops at that exact moment. The odds were enormously in favour of the supposition that she had never seen the "Yellow Peacock"; obviously she supplied excellent material for Jocantha's first experiment in haphazard benefaction.

Jocantha ordered some tea and a muffin, and then turned a friendly scrutiny on her neighbour with a view to catching her eye. At that precise moment the girl's face lit up with sudden pleasure, her eyes sparkled, a flush came into her cheeks, and she looked almost pretty. A young man, whom she greeted with an affectionate "Hullo, Bertie," came up to her table and took his seat in a chair facing her. Jocantha looked hard at the new-comer; he was in appearance a few years younger than herself, very much better looking than Gregory, rather better looking, in fact, than any of the young men of her set. She guessed him to be a well-mannered young clerk in some wholesale warehouse, existing and amusing himself as best he might on a tiny salary, and commanding a holiday of about two weeks in the year. He was aware, of course, of his good looks, but with the shy self-consciousness of the Anglo-Saxon, not the blatant complacency of the Latin or Semite. He was obviously on terms of friendly intimacy with the girl he was talking to, probably they were drifting towards a formal engagement. Jocantha pictured the boy's home, in a rather narrow circle, with a tiresome mother who always wanted to know how and where he spent his evenings. He would exchange that humdrum thraldom in due course for a home of his own, dominated by a chronic scarcity of pounds, shillings, and pence, and a dearth of most of the things that made life attractive or comfortable. Jocantha felt extremely sorry for him. She wondered if he had seen the "Yellow Peacock"; the odds were enormously in favour of the supposition that he had not. The girl had finished her tea and would shortly be going back to her work; when the boy was alone it would be quite easy for Jocantha to say: "My husband has made other arrangements for me this evening; would you care to make use of this ticket, which would otherwise be wasted?" Then she could come there again one afternoon for tea, and, if she saw him, ask him how he liked the play. If he was a nice boy and improved on acquaintance he could be given more theatre tickets, and perhaps asked to come one Sunday to tea at Chelsea. Jocantha made up her mind that he would improve on acquaintance, and that Gregory would like him, and that the Fairy Godmother business would prove far more entertaining than she had originally anticipated. The boy was distinctly presentable; he knew how to brush his hair, which was possibly an imitative faculty; he knew what colour of tie suited him, which might be intuition; he

was exactly the type that Jocantha admired, which of course was accident. Altogether she was rather pleased when the girl looked at the clock and bade a friendly but hurried farewell to her companion. Bertie nodded "good-bye," gulped down a mouthful of tea, and then produced from his overcoat pocket a paper-covered book, bearing the title "Sepoy and Sahib, a tale of the great Mutiny."

The laws of tea-shop etiquette forbid that you should offer theatre tickets to a stranger without having first caught the stranger's eye. It is even better if you can ask to have a sugar basin passed to you, having previously concealed the fact that you have a large and well-filled sugar basin on your own table; this is not difficult to manage, as the printed menu is generally nearly as large as the table, and can be made to stand on end. Jocantha set to work hopefully; she had a long and rather high-pitched discussion with the waitress concerning alleged defects in an altogether blameless muffin, she made loud and plaintive inquiries about the tube service to some impossibly remote suburb, she talked with brilliant insincerity to the tea-shop kitten, and as a last resort she upset a milk-jug and swore at it daintily. Altogether she attracted a good deal of attention, but never for a moment did she attract the attention of the boy with the beautifully-brushed hair, who was some thousands of miles away in the baking plains of Hindostan, amid deserted bungalows, seething bazaars, and riotous barrack squares, listening to the throbbing of tom-toms and the distant rattle of musketry.

Jocantha went back to her house in Chelsea, which struck her for the first time as looking dull and over-furnished. She had a resentful conviction that Gregory would be uninteresting at dinner, and that the play would be stupid after dinner. On the whole her frame of mind showed a marked divergence from the purring complacency of Attab, who was again curled up in his corner of the divan with a great peace radiating from every curve of his body.

But then he had killed his sparrow.

14: Sense of Humour

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Cosmopolitan, Sept 1934

Damon Runyon's "Broadway" tales can be romantic, humorous, sentimental— and sometimes quite ruthless….

ONE NIGHT I am standing in front of Mindy's restaurant on Broadway, thinking of practically nothing whatever, when all of a sudden I feel a very terrible pain in my left foot. In fact, this pain is so very terrible that it causes me to leap up and down like a bullfrog, and to let out loud cries of agony, and to speak some very profane language, which is by no means my custom, although of course I recognize the pain as coming from a hot foot, because I often experience this pain before.

Furthermore, I know Joe the Joker must be in the neighbourhood, as Joe the Joker has the most wonderful sense of humour of anybody in this town, and is always around giving people the hot foot, and gives it to me more times than I can remember. In fact, I hear Joe the Joker invents the hot foot, and it finally becomes a very popular idea all over the country.

The way you give a hot foot is to sneak up behind some guy who is standing around thinking of not much, and stick a paper match in his shoe between the sole and the upper along about where his little toe ought to be, and then light the match. By and by the guy will feel a terrible pain in his foot, and will start stamping around, and hollering, and carrying on generally, and it is always a most comical sight and a wonderful laugh to one and all to see him suffer.

No one in the world can give a hot foot as good as Joe the Joker, because it takes a guy who can sneak up very quiet on the guy who is to get the hot foot, and Joe can sneak up so quiet many guys on Broadway are willing to lay you odds that he can give a mouse a hot foot if you can find a mouse that wears shoes. Furthermore, Joe the Joker can take plenty of care of himself in case the guy who gets the hot foot feels like taking the matter up, which sometimes happens, especially with guys who get their shoes made to order at forty bobs per copy and do not care to have holes burned in these shoes.

But Joe does not care what kind of shoes the guys are wearing when he feels like giving out hot foots, and furthermore, he does not care who the guys are, although many citizens think he makes a mistake the time he gives a hot foot to Frankie Ferocious. In fact, many citizens are greatly horrified by this action, and go around saying no good will come of it.

This Frankie Ferocious comes from over in Brooklyn, where he is considered a rising citizen in many respects, and by no means a guy to give hot foots to, especially as Frankie Ferocious has no sense of humour whatever. In fact, he is always very solemn, and nobody ever sees him laugh, and he certainly does not laugh when Joe the Joker gives him a hot foot one day on Broadway when Frankie Ferocious is standing talking over a business matter with some guys from the Bronx.

He only scowls at Joe, and says something in Italian, and while I do not understand Italian, it sounds so unpleasant that I guarantee I will leave town inside of the next two hours if he says it to me.

Of course Frankie Ferocious's name is not really Ferocious, but something in Italian like Feroccio, and I hear he originally comes from Sicily, although he lives in Brooklyn for quite some years, and from a modest beginning he builds himself up until he is a very large operator in merchandise of one kind and another, especially alcohol. He is a big guy of maybe thirty-odd, and he has hair blacker than a yard up a chimney, and black eyes, and black eyebrows, and a slow way of looking at people.

Nobody knows a whole lot about Frankie Ferocious, because he never has much to say, and he takes his time saying it, but everybody gives him plenty of room when he comes around, as there are rumours that Frankie never likes to be crowded. As far as I am concerned, I do not care for any part of Frankie Ferocious, because his slow way of looking at people always makes me nervous, and I am always sorry Joe the Joker gives him a hot foot, because I figure Frankie Ferocious is bound to consider it a most disrespectful action, and hold it against everybody that lives on the Island of Manhattan.

But Joe the Joker only laughs when anybody tells him he is out of line in giving Frankie the hot foot, and says it is not his fault if Frankie has no sense of humour. Furthermore, Joe says he will not only give Frankie another hot foot if he gets a chance, but that he will give hot foots to the Prince of Wales or Mussolini, if he catches them in the right spot, although Regret, the horse player, states that Joe can have twenty to one any time that he will not give Mussolini any hot foots and get away with it.

Anyway, just as I suspect, there is Joe the Joker watching me when I feel the hot foot, and he is laughing very heartily, and furthermore, a large number of other citizens are also laughing heartily, because Joe the Joker never sees any fun in giving people the hot foot unless others are present to enjoy the joke.

Well, naturally when I see who it is gives me the hot foot I join in the laughter, and go over and shake hands with Joe, and when I shake hands with him there is more laughter, because it seems Joe has a hunk of Limburger

cheese in his duke, and what I shake hands with is this Limburger. Furthermore, it is some of Mindy's Limburger cheese, and everybody knows Mindy's Limburger is very squashy, and also very loud.

Of course I laugh at this, too, although to tell the truth I will laugh much more heartily if Joe the Joker drops dead in front of me, because I do not like to be made the subject of laughter on Broadway. But my laugh is really quite hearty when Joe takes the rest of the cheese that is not on my fingers and smears it on the steering-wheels of some automobiles parked in front of Mindy's, because I get to thinking of what the drivers will say when they start steering their cars.

Then I get talking to Joe the Joker, and I ask him how things are up in Harlem, where Joe and his younger brother, Freddy, and several other guys have a small organization operating in beer, and Joe says things are as good as can be expected considering business conditions. Then I ask him how Rosa is getting along, this Rosa being Joe the Joker's ever-loving wife, and a personal friend of mine, as I know her when she is Rosa Midnight and is singing in the old Hot Box before Joe hauls off and marries her.

Well, at this question Joe the Joker starts laughing, and I can see that something appeals to his sense of humour, and finally he speaks as follows:

'Why,' he says, 'do you not hear the news about Rosa? She takes the wind on me a couple of months ago for my friend Frankie Ferocious, and is living in an apartment over in Brooklyn, right near his house, although,' Joe says, 'of course you understand I am telling you this only to answer your question, and not to holler copper on Rosa.'

Then he lets out another large ha-ha, and in fact Joe the Joker keeps laughing until I am afraid he will injure himself internally. Personally, I do not see anything comical in a guy's ever-loving wife taking the wind on him for a guy like Frankie Ferocious, so when Joe the Joker quiets down a bit I ask him what is funny about the proposition.

'Why,' Joe says, 'I have to laugh every time I think of how the big greaseball is going to feel when he finds out how expensive Rosa is. I do not know how many things Frankie Ferocious has running for him in Brooklyn,' Joe says, 'but he better try to move himself in on the mint if he wishes to keep Rosa going.'

Then he laughs again, and I consider it wonderful the way Joe is able to keep his sense of humour even in such a situation as this, although up to this time I always think Joe is very daffy indeed about Rosa, who is a little doll, weighing maybe ninety pounds with her hat on and quite cute.

Now I judge from what Joe the Joker tells me that Frankie Ferocious knows Rosa before Joe marries her and is always pitching to her when she is singing in the Hot Box, and even after she is Joe's ever-loving wife, Frankie occasionally

calls her up, especially when he commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn, although of course Joe does not learn about these calls until later. And about the time Frankie Ferocious commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn, things begin breaking a little tough for Joe the Joker, what with the depression and all, and he has to economise on Rosa in spots, and if there is one thing Rosa cannot stand it is being economised on.

Along about now, Joe the Joker gives Frankie Ferocious the hot foot, and just as many citizens state at the time, it is a mistake, for Frankie starts calling Rosa up more than somewhat, and speaking of what a nice place Brooklyn is to live in— which it is, at that and between these boosts for Brooklyn and Joe the Joker's economy, Rosa hauls off and takes a subway to Borough Hall, leaving Joe a note telling him that if he does not like it he knows what he can do.

'Well, Joe,' I say, after listening to his story, 'I always hate to hear of these little domestic difficulties among my friends, but maybe this is all for the best. Still, I feel sorry for you, if it will do you any good,' I say.

'Do not feel sorry for me,' Joe says. 'If you wish to feel sorry for anybody, feel sorry for Frankie Ferocious, and,' he says, 'if you can spare a little more sorrow, give it to Rosa.'

And Joe the Joker laughs very hearty again and starts telling me about a little scatter that he has up in Harlem where he keeps a chair fixed up with electric wires so he can give anybody that sits down in it a nice jolt, which sounds very humorous to me, at that, especially when Joe tells me how they turn on too much juice one night and almost kill Commodore Jake.

Finally Joe says he has to get back to Harlem, but first he goes to the telephone in the corner cigar store and calls up Mindy's and imitates a doll's voice, and tells Mindy he is Peggy Joyce, or somebody, and orders fifty dozen sandwiches sent up at once to an apartment in West Seventy-second Street for a birthday party, although of course there is no such number as he gives, and nobody there will wish fifty dozen sandwiches if there is such a number.

Then Joe gets in his car and starts off, and while he is waiting for the traffic lights at Fiftieth Street, I see citizens on the sidewalks making sudden leaps, and looking around very fierce, and I know Joe the Joker is plugging them with pellets made out of tin foil, which he fires from a rubber band hooked between his thumb and forefinger.

Joe the Joker is very expert with this proposition, and it is very funny to see the citizens jump, although once or twice in his life Joe makes a miscue and knocks out somebody's eye. But it is all in fun, and shows you what a wonderful sense of humour Joe has.

Well, a few days later I see by the papers where a couple of Harlem guys Joe the Joker is mobbed up with are found done up in sacks over in Brooklyn,

very dead indeed, and the coppers say it is because they are trying to move in on certain business enterprises that belong to nobody but Frankie Ferocious. But of course the coppers do not say Frankie Ferocious puts these guys in the sacks, because in the first place Frankie will report them to Headquarters if the coppers say such a thing about him, and in the second place putting guys in sacks is strictly a St. Louis idea and to have a guy put in a sack properly you have to send to St. Louis for experts in this matter.

Now, putting a guy in a sack is not as easy as it sounds, and in fact it takes quite a lot of practice and experience. To put a guy in a sack properly, you first have to put him to sleep, because naturally no guy is going to walk into a sack wide awake unless he is a plumb sucker. Some people claim the best way to put a guy to sleep is to give him a sleeping powder of some kind in a drink, but the real experts just tap the guy on the noggin with a blackjack, which saves the expense of buying the drink.

Anyway, after the guy is asleep, you double him up like a pocket-knife, and tie a cord or a wire around his neck and under his knees. Then you put him in a gunny sack, and leave him some place, and by and by when the guy wakes up and finds himself in the sack, naturally he wants to get out and the first thing he does is to try to straighten out his knees. This pulls the cord around his neck up so tight that after a while the guy is all out of breath.

So then when somebody comes along and opens the sack they find the guy dead, and nobody is responsible for this unfortunate situation, because after all the guy really commits suicide, because if he does not try to straighten out his knees he may live to a ripe old age, if he recovers from the tap on the noggin.

Well, a couple of days later I see by the papers where three Brooklyn citizens are scragged as they are walking peaceably along Clinton Street, the scragging being done by some parties in an automobile who seem to have a machine gun, and the papers state that the citizens are friends of Frankie Ferocious, and that it is rumoured the parties with the machine gun are from Harlem.

I judge by this that there is some trouble in Brooklyn, especially as about a week after the citizens are scragged in Clinton Street, another Harlem guy is found done up in a sack like a Virginia ham near Prospect Park, and now who is it but Joe the Joker's brother, Freddy, and I know Joe is going to be greatly displeased by this.

By and by it gets so nobody in Brooklyn will open as much as a sack of potatoes without first calling in the gendarmes, for fear a pair of No.8 shoes will jump out at them.

Now one night I see Joe the Joker, and this time he is all alone, and I wish to say I am willing to leave him all alone, because something tells me he is hotter than a stove. But he grabs me as I am going past, so naturally I stop to talk to him, and the first thing I say is how sorry I am about his brother.

'Well,' Joe the Joker says, 'Freddy is always a kind of a sap. Rosa calls him up and asks him to come over to Brooklyn to see her. She wishes to talk to Freddy about getting me to give her a divorce,' Joe says, 'so she can marry Frankie Ferocious, I suppose. Anyway,' he says, 'Freddy tells Commodore Jake why he is going to see her. Freddy always likes Rosa, and thinks maybe he can patch it up between us. So,' Joe says, 'he winds up in a sack. They get him after he leaves her apartment. I do not claim Rosa will ask him to come over if she has any idea he will be sacked,' Joe says, 'but,' he says, 'she is responsible. She is a bad-luck doll.'

Then he starts to laugh, and at first I am greatly horrified, thinking it is because something about Freddy being sacked strikes his sense of humour, when he says to me, like this:

'Say,' he says, 'I am going to play a wonderful joke on Frankie Ferocious.'

'Well, Joe,' I say, 'you ate not asking me for advice, but I am going to give you some free, gratis, and for nothing. Do not play any jokes on Frankie Ferocious, as I hear he has no more sense of humour than a nanny goat. I hear Frankie Ferocious will not laugh if you have Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn and Joe Cook telling him jokes all at once. In fact,' I say, 'I heat he is a tough audience.'

'Oh,' Joe the Joker says, 'he must have some sense of humour somewhere to stand for Rosa. I hear he is daffy about her. In fact, I understand she is the only person in the world he really likes, and trusts. But I must play a joke on him. I am going to have myself delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack.'

Well, of course I have to laugh at this myself, and Joe the Joker laughs with me. Personally, I am laughing just at the idea of anybody having themselves delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack, and especially Joe the Joker, but of course I have no idea Joe really means what he says.

'Listen,' Joe says, finally. 'A guy from St. Louis who is a friend of mine is doing most of the sacking for Frankie Ferocious. His name is Ropes McGonnigle. In fact,' Joe says, 'he is a very dear old pal of mine, and he has a wonderful sense of humour like me. Ropes McGonnigle has nothing whatever to do with sacking Freddy,' Joe says, 'and he is very indignant about it since he finds out Freddy is my brother, so he is anxious to help me play a joke on Frankie.

'Only last night,' Joe says, 'Frankie Ferocious sends for Ropes and tells him he will appreciate it as a special favour if Ropes will bring me to him in a sack. I

suppose,' Joe says, 'that Frankie Ferocious hears from Rosa what Freddy is bound to tell her about my ideas on divorce. I have very strict ideas on divorce,' Joe says, 'especially where Rosa is concerned. I will see her in what's-this before I ever do her and Frankie Ferocious such a favour as giving her a divorce.

'Anyway,' Joe the Joker says, 'Ropes tells me about Frankie Ferocious propositioning him, so I send Ropes back to Frankie Ferocious to tell him he knows I am to be in Brooklyn to-morrow night, and furthermore, Ropes tells Frankie that he will have me in a sack in no time. And so he will,' Joe says.

'Well,' I say, 'personally, I see no percentage in being delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack, because as near as I can make out from what I read in the papers, there is no future for a guy in a sack that goes to Frankie Ferocious. What I cannot figure out,' I say, 'is where the joke on Frankie comes in.'

'Why,' Joe the Joker says, 'the joke is, I will not be asleep in the sack, and my hands will not be tied, and in each of my hands I will have a John Roscoe, so when the sack is delivered to Frankie Ferocious and I pop out blasting away, can you not imagine his astonishment?'

Well, I can imagine this, all right. In fact when I get to thinking of the look of surprise that is bound to come to Frankie Ferocious's face when Joe the Joker comes out of the sack I have to laugh, and Joe the Joker laughs right along with me.

'Of course,' Joe says, 'Ropes McGonnigle will be there to start blasting with me, in case Frankie Ferocious happens to have any company.'

Then Joe the Joker goes on up the street, leaving me still laughing, from thinking of how amazed Frankie Ferocious will be when Joe bounces out of the sack and starts throwing slugs around and about. I do not hear of Joe from that time to this, but I hear the rest of the story from very reliable parties.

It seems that Ropes McGonnigle does not deliver the sack himself, after all, but sends it by an expressman to Frankie Ferocious's home. Frankie Ferocious receives many sacks such as this in his time, because it seems that it is a sort of passion with him to personally view the contents of the sacks and check up on them before they are distributed about the city, and of course Ropes McGonnigle knows about this passion from doing so much sacking for Frankie.

When the expressman takes the sack into Frankie's house, Frankie personally lugs it down into his basement, and there he outs with a big John Roscoe and fires six shots into the sack, because it seems Ropes McGonnigle tips him off to Joe the Joker's plan to pop out of the sack and start blasting.

I hear Frankie Ferocious has a very strange expression on his pan and is laughing the only laugh anybody ever hears from him when the gendarmes break in and put the arm on him for murder, because it seems that when

Ropes McGonnigle tells Frankie of Joe the Joker's plan, Frankie tells Ropes what he is going to do with his own hands before opening the sack. Naturally, Ropes speaks to Joe the Joker of Frankie's idea about filling the sack full of slugs, and Joe's sense of humour comes right out again.

So, bound and gagged, but otherwise as right as rain in the sack that is delivered to Frankie Ferocious, is by no means Joe the Joker, but Rosa.

15: The Limitations of Pambé Serang

Rudyard Kipling

1865-1936

The St. James's Gazette 4 Oct 1887

IF YOU CONSIDER the circumstances of the case, it was the only thing that he could do. But Pambé Serang has been hanged by the neck till he is dead, and Nurkeed is dead also.

Three years ago, when the Elsass-Lothringen steamer *Saarbruck* was coaling at Aden and the weather was very hot indeed, Nurkeed, the big fat Zanzibar stoker who fed the second right furnace thirty feet down in the hold, got leave to go ashore. He departed a 'Seedee boy,' as they call the stokers; he returned the full-blooded Sultan of Zanzibar— His Highness Sayyid Burgash, with a bottle in each hand. Then he sat on the fore-hatch grating, eating salt fish and onions, and singing the songs of a far country. The food belonged to Pambé, the Serang or head man of the lascar sailors. He had just cooked it for himself, turned to borrow some salt, and when he came back Nurkeed's dirty black fingers were spading into the rice.

A serang is a person of importance, far above a stoker, though the stoker draws better pay. He sets the chorus of 'Hya! Hulla! Hee-ah! Heh!' when the captain's gig is pulled up to the davits; he heaves the lead too; and sometimes, when all the ship is lazy, he puts on his whitest muslin and a big red sash, and plays with the passengers' children on the quarter-deck. Then the passengers give him money, and he saves it all up for an orgie at Bombay or Calcutta, or Pulu Penang. 'Ho! you fat black barrel, you're eating my food!' said Pambé, in the Other Lingua Franca that begins where the Levant tongue stops, and runs from Port Said eastward till east is west, and the sealing-brigs of the Kurile Islands gossip with the strayed Hakodate junks.

'Son of Eblis, monkey-face, dried shark's liver, pigman, I am the Sultan Sayyid Burgash, and the commander of all this ship. Take away your garbage;' and Nurkeed thrust the empty pewter rice-plate into Pambé's hand.

Pambé beat it into a basin over Nurkeed's woolly head. Nurkeed drew his sheath-knife and stabbed Pambé in the leg. Pambé drew his sheath-knife; but Nurkeed dropped down into the darkness of the hold and spat through the grating at Pambé, who was staining the clean foredeck with his blood.

Only the white moon saw these things; for the officers were looking after the coaling, and the passengers were tossing in their close cabins. 'All right,' said Pambé— and went forward to tie up his leg— 'we will settle the account later on.'

He was a Malay born in India: married once in Burma, where his wife had a cigar-shop on the Shwe Dagon road; once in Singapore, to a Chinese girl; and

once in Madras, to a Mahomedan woman who sold fowls. The English sailor cannot, owing to postal and telegraph facilities, marry as profusely as he used to do; but native sailors can, being uninfluenced by the barbarous inventions of the Western savage. Pambé was a good husband when he happened to remember the existence of a wife; but he was also a very good Malay; and it is not wise to offend a Malay, because he does not forget anything. Moreover, in Pambé's case blood had been drawn and food spoiled.

Next morning Nurkeed rose with a blank mind. He was no longer Sultan of Zanzibar, but a very hot stoker. So he went on deck and opened his jacket to the morning breeze, till a sheath-knife came like a flying-fish and stuck into the woodwork of the cook's galley half an inch from his right armpit. He ran down below before his time, trying to remember what he could have said to the owner of the weapon. At noon, when all the ship's lascars were feeding, Nurkeed advanced into their midst, and, being a placid man with a large regard for his own skin, he opened negotiations, saying, 'Men of the ship, last night I was drunk, and this morning I know that I behaved unseemly to some one or another of you. Who was that man, that I may meet him face to face and say that I was drunk?'

Pambé measured the distance to Nurkeed's naked breast. If he sprang at him he might be tripped up, and a blind blow at the chest sometimes only means a gash on the breast-bone. Ribs are difficult to thrust between unless the subject be asleep. So he said nothing; nor did the other lascars. Their faces immediately dropped all expression, as is the custom of the Oriental when there is killing on the carpet or any chance of trouble. Nurkeed looked long at the white eyeballs. He was only an African, and could not read characters. A big sigh— almost a groan— broke from him, and he went back to the furnaces. The lascars took up the conversation where he had interrupted it. They talked of the best methods of cooking rice.

Nurkeed suffered considerably from lack of fresh air during the run to Bombay. He only came on deck to breathe when all the world was about; and even then a heavy block once dropped from a derrick within a foot of his head, and an apparently firm-lashed grating on which he set his foot, began to turn over with the intention of dropping him on the cased cargo fifteen feet below; and one insupportable night the sheath-knife dropped from the fo'c's'le, and this time it drew blood. So Nurkeed made complaint; and, when the *Saarbruck* reached Bombay, fled and buried himself among eight hundred thousand people, and did not sign articles till the ship had been a month gone from the port. Pambé waited too; but his Bombay wife grew clamorous, and he was forced to sign in the Spicheren to Hongkong, because he realised that all play and no work gives Jack a ragged shirt. In the foggy China seas he thought a

great deal of Nurkeed, and, when Elsass-Lothringen steamers lay in port with the Spicheren, inquired after him and found he had gone to England via the Cape, on the Gravelotte. Pambé came to England on the *Worth*. The *Spicheren* met her by the Nore Light. Nurkeed was going out with the *Spicheren* to the Calicut coast.

'Want to find a friend, my trap-mouthed coal-scuttle?' said a gentleman in the mercantile service. 'Nothing easier. Wait at the Nyanza Docks till he comes. Every one comes to the Nyanza Docks. Wait, you poor heathen.'

The gentleman spoke truth. There are three great doors in the world where, if you stand long enough, you shall meet any one you wish. The head of the Suez Canal is one, but there Death comes also; Charing Cross Station is the second— for inland work; and the Nyanza Docks is the third. At each of these places are men and women looking eternally for those who will surely come. So Pambé waited at the docks. Time was no object to him; and the wives could wait, as he did from day to day, week to week, and month to month, by the Blue Diamond funnels, the Red Dot smoke-stacks, the Yellow Streaks, and the nameless dingy gypsies of the sea that loaded and unloaded, jostled, whistled, and roared in the everlasting fog.

When money failed, a kind gentleman told Pambé to become a Christian; and Pambé became one with great speed, getting his religious teachings between ship and ship's arrival, and six or seven shillings a week for distributing tracts to mariners. What the faith was Pambé did not in the least care; but he knew if he said 'Native Ki-lis-ti-an, Sar' to men with long black coats he might get a few coppers; and the tracts were vendible at a little public-house that sold shag by the 'dottel,' which is even smaller weight than the 'half-screw,' which is less than the half-ounce, and a most profitable retail trade.

But after eight months Pambé fell sick with pneumonia, contracted from long standing still in slush; and much against his will he was forced to lie down in his two-and-sixpenny room raging against Fate.

The kind gentleman sat by his bedside, and grieved to find that Pambé talked in strange tongues, instead of listening to good books, and almost seemed to become a benighted heathen again— till one day he was roused from semi-stupor by a voice in the street by the dock-head. 'My friend— he,' whispered Pambé. 'Call now— call Nurkeed. Quick! God has sent him!'

'He wanted one of his own race,' said the kind gentleman; and, going out, he called 'Nurkeed!' at the top of his voice. An excessively coloured man in a rasping white shirt and brand-new slops, a shining hat, and a breastpin, turned round. Many voyages had taught Nurkeed how to spend his money and made him a citizen of the world.

'Hi! Yes!' said he, when the situation was explained. 'Command him — black nigger— when I was in the *Saarbruck*. Ole Pambé, good ole Pambé. Dam lascar. Show him up, Sar;' and he followed into the room. One glance told the stoker what the kind gentleman had overlooked. Pambé was desperately poor. Nurkeed drove his hands deep into his pockets, then advanced with clenched fists on the sick, shouting, 'Hya, Pambé. Hya! Hee-ah! Hulla! Heh! Takilo! Takilo! Make fast aft, Pambé. You know, Pambé. You know me. Dekho, jee! Look! Dam big fat lazy lascar!'

Pambé beckoned with his left hand. His right was under his pillow. Nurkeed removed his gorgeous hat and stooped over Pambé till he could catch a faint whisper. 'How beautiful!' said the kind gentleman. 'How these Orientals love like children!'

'Spit him out,' said Nurkeed, leaning over Pambé yet more closely.

'Touching the matter of that fish and onions—' said Pambé— and sent the knife home under the edge of the rib-bone upwards and forwards.

There was a thick sick cough, and the body of the African slid slowly from the bed, his clutching hands letting fall a shower of silver pieces that ran across the room.

'Now I can die!' said Pambé.

But he did not die. He was nursed back to life with all the skill that money could buy, for the Law wanted him; and in the end he grew sufficiently healthy to be hanged in due and proper form.

Pambé did not care particularly; but it was a sad blow to the kind gentleman.

16: The Mysterious Death On The Underground Railway

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

The Royal Magazine July 1901

Collected in: *The Old Man in the Corner*, 1908

IT WAS ALL VERY well for Mr. Richard Frobisher (of the London Mail) to cut up rough about it. Polly did not altogether blame him.

She liked him all the better for that frank outburst of man-like ill-temper which, after all said and done, was only a very flattering form of masculine jealousy.

Moreover, Polly distinctly felt guilty about the whole thing. She had promised to meet Dickie— that is Mr. Richard Frobisher— at two o'clock sharp outside the Palace Theatre, because she wanted to go to a Maud Allan *matinée*, and because he naturally wished to go with her.

But at two o'clock sharp she was still in Norfolk Street, Strand, inside an A.B.C. shop, sipping cold coffee opposite a grotesque old man who was fiddling with a bit of string.

How could she be expected to remember Maud Allan or the Palace Theatre, or Dickie himself for a matter of that? The man in the corner had begun to talk of that mysterious death on the underground railway, and Polly had lost count of time, of place, and circumstance.

She had gone to lunch quite early, for she was looking forward to the *matinée* at the Palace.

The old scarecrow was sitting in his accustomed place when she came into the A.B.C. shop, but he had made no remark all the time that the young girl was munching her scone and butter. She was just busy thinking how rude he was not even to have said "Good morning," when an abrupt remark from him caused her to look up.

"Will you be good enough," he said suddenly, "to give me a description of the man who sat next to you just now, while you were having your cup of coffee and scone."

Involuntarily Polly turned her head towards the distant door, through which a man in a light overcoat was even now quickly passing. That man had certainly sat at the next table to hers, when she first sat down to her coffee and scone: he had finished his luncheon— whatever it was— moment ago, had paid at the desk and gone out. The incident did not appear to Polly as being of the slightest consequence.

Therefore she did not reply to the rude old man, but shrugged her shoulders, and called to the waitress to bring her bill.

"Do you know if he was tall or short, dark or fair?" continued the man in the corner, seemingly not the least disconcerted by the young girl's indifference. "Can you tell me at all what he was like?"

"Of course I can," rejoined Polly impatiently, "but I don't see that my description of one of the customers of an A.B.C. shop can have the slightest importance."

He was silent for a minute, while his nervous fingers fumbled about in his capacious pockets in search of the inevitable piece of string. When he had found this necessary "adjunct to thought," he viewed the young girl again through his half-closed lids, and added maliciously:

"But supposing it were of paramount importance that you should give an accurate description of a man who sat next to you for half an hour to-day, how would you proceed?"

"I should say that he was of medium height—"

"Five foot eight, nine, or ten?" he interrupted quietly.

"How can one tell to an inch or two?" rejoined Polly crossly. "He was between colours."

"What's that?" he inquired blandly.

"Neither fair nor dark— his nose—"

"Well, what was his nose like? Will you sketch it?"

"I am not an artist. His nose was fairly straight— his eyes—"

"Were neither dark nor light— his hair had the same striking peculiarity— he was neither short nor tall— his nose was neither aquiline nor snub—" he recapitulated sarcastically.

"No," she retorted; "he was just ordinary looking."

"Would you know him again— say to-morrow, and among a number of other men who were 'neither tall nor short, dark nor fair, aquiline nor snub-nosed,' etc.?"

"I don't know— I might— he was certainly not striking enough to be specially remembered."

"Exactly," he said, while he leant forward excitedly, for all the world like a Jack-in-the-box let loose. "Precisely; and you are a journalist— call yourself one, at least— and it should be part of your business to notice and describe people. I don't mean only the wonderful personage with the clear Saxon features, the fine blue eyes, the noble brow and classic face, but the ordinary person— the person who represents ninety out of every hundred of his own kind— the average Englishman, say, of the middle classes, who is neither very tall nor very short, who wears a moustache which is neither fair nor dark, but which masks his mouth, and a top hat which hides the shape of his head and

brow, a man, in fact, who dresses like hundreds of his fellow-creatures, moves like them, speaks like them, has no peculiarity.

"Try to describe *him*, to recognize him, say a week hence, among his other eighty-nine doubles; worse still, to swear his life away, if he happened to be implicated in some crime, wherein *your* recognition of him would place the halter round his neck.

"Try that, I say, and having utterly failed you will more readily understand how one of the greatest scoundrels unhung is still at large, and why the mystery on the Underground Railway was never cleared up.

"I think it was the only time in my life that I was seriously tempted to give the police the benefit of my own views upon the matter. You see, though I admire the brute for his cleverness, I did not see that his being unpunished could possibly benefit any one.

"In these days of tubes and motor traction of all kinds, the old-fashioned 'best, cheapest, and quickest route to City and West End' is often deserted, and the good old Metropolitan Railway carriages cannot at any time be said to be overcrowded. Anyway, when that particular train steamed into Aldgate at about 4 p.m. on March 18th last, the first-class carriages were all but empty.

"The guard marched up and down the platform looking into all the carriages to see if anyone had left a halfpenny evening paper behind for him, and opening the door of one of the first-class compartments, he noticed a lady sitting in the further corner, with her head turned away towards the window, evidently oblivious of the fact that on this line Aldgate is the terminal station.

"'Where are you for, lady?' he said.

"The lady did not move, and the guard stepped into the carriage, thinking that perhaps the lady was asleep. He touched her arm lightly and looked into her face. In his own poetic language, he was 'struck all of a 'eap.' In the glassy eyes, the ashen colour of the cheeks, the rigidity of the head, there was the unmistakable look of death.

"Hastily the guard, having carefully locked the carriage door, summoned a couple of porters, and sent one of them off to the police-station, and the other in search of the station-master.

"Fortunately at this time of day the up platform is not very crowded, all the traffic tending westward in the afternoon. It was only when an inspector and two police constables, accompanied by a detective in plain clothes and a medical officer, appeared upon the scene, and stood round a first-class railway compartment, that a few idlers realized that something unusual had occurred, and crowded round, eager and curious.

"Thus it was that the later editions of the evening papers, under the sensational heading, 'Mysterious Suicide on the Underground Railway,' had

already an account of the extraordinary event. The medical officer had very soon come to the decision that the guard had not been mistaken, and that life was indeed extinct.

"The lady was young, and must have been very pretty before the look of fright and horror had so terribly distorted her features. She was very elegantly dressed, and the more frivolous papers were able to give their feminine readers a detailed account of the unfortunate woman's gown, her shoes, hat, and gloves.

"It appears that one of the latter, the one on the right hand, was partly off, leaving the thumb and wrist bare. That hand held a small satchel, which the police opened, with a view to the possible identification of the deceased, but which was found to contain only a little loose silver, some smelling-salts, and a small empty bottle, which was handed over to the medical officer for purposes of analysis.

"It was the presence of that small bottle which had caused the report to circulate freely that the mysterious case on the Underground Railway was one of suicide. Certain it was that neither about the lady's person, nor in the appearance of the railway carriage, was there the slightest sign of struggle or even of resistance. Only the look in the poor woman's eyes spoke of sudden terror, of the rapid vision of an unexpected and violent death, which probably only lasted an infinitesimal fraction of a second, but which had left its indelible mark upon the face, otherwise so placid and so still."

"The body of the deceased was conveyed to the mortuary. So far, of course, not a soul had been able to identify her, or to throw the slightest light upon the mystery which hung around her death.

"Against that, quite a crowd of idlers— genuinely interested or not— obtained admission to view the body, on the pretext of having lost or mislaid a relative or a friend. At about 8.30 p.m. a young man, very well dressed, drove up to the station in a hansom, and sent in his card to the superintendent. It was Mr. Hazeldene, shipping agent, of 11, Crown Lane, E.C., and No. 19, Addison Row, Kensington.

"The young man looked in a pitiable state of mental distress; his hand clutched nervously a copy of the *St. James's Gazette*, which contained the fatal news. He said very little to the superintendent except that a person who was very dear to him had not returned home that evening.

"He had not felt really anxious until half an hour ago, when suddenly he thought of looking at his paper. The description of the deceased lady, though vague, had terribly alarmed him. He had jumped into a hansom, and now begged permission to view the body, in order that his worst fears might be allayed.

"You know what followed, of course," continued the man in the corner, "the grief of the young man was truly pitiable. In the woman lying there in a public mortuary before him, Mr. Hazeldene had recognized his wife.

"I am waxing melodramatic," said the man in the corner, who looked up at Polly with a mild and gentle smile, while his nervous fingers vainly endeavoured to add another knot on the scrappy bit of string with which he was continually playing, "and I fear that the whole story savours of the penny novelette, but you must admit, and no doubt you remember, that it was an intensely pathetic and truly dramatic moment.

"The unfortunate young husband of the deceased lady was not much worried with questions that night. As a matter of fact, he was not in a fit condition to make any coherent statement. It was at the coroner's inquest on the following day that certain facts came to light, which for the time being seemed to clear up the mystery surrounding Mrs. Hazeldene's death, only to plunge that same mystery, later on, into denser gloom than before.

"The first witness at the inquest was, of course, Mr. Hazeldene himself. I think every one's sympathy went out to the young man as he stood before the coroner and tried to throw what light he could upon the mystery. He was well dressed, as he had been the day before, but he looked terribly ill and worried, and no doubt the fact that he had not shaved gave his face a careworn and neglected air.

"It appears that he and the deceased had been married some six years or so, and that they had always been happy in their married life. They had no children. Mrs. Hazeldene seemed to enjoy the best of health till lately, when she had had a slight attack of influenza, in which Dr. Arthur Jones had attended her. The doctor was present at this moment, and would no doubt explain to the coroner and the jury whether he thought that Mrs. Hazeldene had the slightest tendency to heart disease, which might have had a sudden and fatal ending.

"The coroner was, of course, very considerate to the bereaved husband. He tried by circumlocution to get at the point he wanted, namely, Mrs. Hazeldene's mental condition lately. Mr. Hazeldene seemed loath to talk about this. No doubt he had been warned as to the existence of the small bottle found in his wife's satchel.

"'It certainly did seem to me at times,' he at last reluctantly admitted, 'that my wife did not seem quite herself. She used to be very gay and bright, and lately I often saw her in the evening sitting, as if brooding over some matters, which evidently she did not care to communicate to me.'

"Still the coroner insisted, and suggested the small bottle.

"'I know, I know,' replied the young man, with a short, heavy sigh. 'You mean— the question of suicide— I cannot understand it at all— it seems so sudden and so terrible— she certainly had seemed listless and troubled lately— but only at times— and yesterday morning, when I went to business, she appeared quite herself again, and I suggested that we should go to the opera in the evening. She was delighted, I know, and told me she would do some shopping, and pay a few calls in the afternoon.'

"'Do you know at all where she intended to go when she got into the Underground Railway?'

"'Well, not with certainty. You see, she may have meant to get out at Baker Street, and go down to Bond Street to do her shopping. Then, again, she sometimes goes to a shop in St. Paul's Churchyard, in which case she would take a ticket to Aldersgate Street; but I cannot say.'

"'Now, Mr. Hazeldene,' said the coroner at last very kindly, 'will you try to tell me if there was anything in Mrs. Hazeldene's life which you know of, and which might in some measure explain the cause of the distressed state of mind, which you yourself had noticed? Did there exist any financial difficulty which might have preyed upon Mrs. Hazeldene's mind; was there any friend— to whose intercourse with Mrs. Hazeldene— you— er— at any time took exception? In fact,' added the coroner, as if thankful that he had got over an unpleasant moment, 'can you give me the slightest indication which would tend to confirm the suspicion that the unfortunate lady, in a moment of mental anxiety or derangement, may have wished to take her own life?'

"There was silence in the court for a few moments. Mr. Hazeldene seemed to every one there present to be labouring under some terrible moral doubt. He looked very pale and wretched, and twice attempted to speak before he at last said in scarcely audible tones:

"'No; there were no financial difficulties of any sort. My wife had an independent fortune of her own— she had no extravagant tastes—'

"'Nor any friend you at any time objected to?' insisted the coroner.

"'Nor any friend, I— at any time objected to,' stammered the unfortunate young man, evidently speaking with an effort.

"I was present at the inquest," resumed the man in the corner, after he had drunk a glass of milk and ordered another, "and I can assure you that the most obtuse person there plainly realized that Mr. Hazeldene was telling a lie. It was pretty plain to the meanest intelligence that the unfortunate lady had not fallen into a state of morbid dejection for nothing, and that perhaps there existed a third person who could throw more light on her strange and sudden death than the unhappy, bereaved young widower.

"That the death was more mysterious even than it had at first appeared became very soon apparent. You read the case at the time, no doubt, and must remember the excitement in the public mind caused by the evidence of the two doctors. Dr. Arthur Jones, the lady's usual medical man, who had attended her in a last very slight illness, and who had seen her in a professional capacity fairly recently, declared most emphatically that Mrs. Hazeldene suffered from no organic complaint which could possibly have been the cause of sudden death. Moreover, he had assisted Mr. Andrew Thornton, the district medical officer, in making a postmortem examination, and together they had come to the conclusion that death was due to the action of prussic acid, which had caused instantaneous failure of the heart, but how the drug had been administered neither he nor his colleague were at present able to state.

"'Do I understand, then, Dr. Jones, that the deceased died, poisoned with prussic acid?'

"'Such is my opinion,' replied the doctor.

"'Did the bottle found in her satchel contain prussic acid?'

"'It had contained some at one time, certainly.'

"'In your opinion, then, the lady caused her own death by taking a dose of that drug?'

"'Pardon me, I never suggested such a thing; the lady died poisoned by the drug, but how the drug was administered we cannot say. By injection of some sort, certainly. The drug certainly was not swallowed; there was not a vestige of it in the stomach.'

"'Yes,' added the doctor in reply to another question from the coroner, 'death had probably followed the injection in this case almost immediately; say within a couple of minutes, or perhaps three. It was quite possible that the body would not have more than one quick and sudden convulsion, perhaps not that; death in such cases is absolutely sudden and crushing.'

"I don't think that at the time any one in the room realized how important the doctor's statement was, a statement which, by the way, was confirmed in all its details by the district medical officer, who had conducted the postmortem. Mrs. Hazeldene had died suddenly from an injection of prussic acid, administered no one knew how or when. She had been travelling in a first-class railway carriage in a busy time of the day. That young and elegant woman must have had singular nerve and coolness to go through the process of a self-inflicted injection of a deadly poison in the presence of perhaps two or three other persons.

"Mind you, when I say that no one there realized the importance of the doctor's statement at that moment, I am wrong; there were three persons,

who fully understood at once the gravity of the situation, and the astounding development which the case was beginning to assume.

"Of course, I should have put myself out of the question," added the weird old man, with that inimitable self-conceit peculiar to himself. "I guessed then and there in a moment where the police were going wrong, and where they would go on going wrong until the mysterious death on the Underground Railway had sunk into oblivion, together with the other cases which they mismanage from time to time.

"I said there were three persons who understood the gravity of the two doctors' statements— the other two were, firstly, the detective who had originally examined the railway carriage, a young man of energy and plenty of misguided intelligence, the other was Mr. Hazeldene.

"At this point the interesting element of the whole story was first introduced into the proceedings, and this was done through the humble channel of Emma Funnel, Mrs. Hazeldene's maid, who, as far as was known then, was the last person who had seen the unfortunate lady alive and had spoken to her.

"'Mrs. Hazeldene lunched at home,' explained Emma, who was shy, and spoke almost in a whisper; 'she seemed well and cheerful. She went out at about half-past three, and told me she was going to Spence's, in St. Paul's Churchyard, to try on her new tailor-made gown. Mrs. Hazeldene had meant to go there in the morning, but was prevented as Mr. Errington called.'

"'Mr. Errington?' asked the coroner casually. 'Who is Mr. Errington?'

"But this Emma found difficult to explain. Mr. Errington was— Mr. Errington, that's all.

"'Mr. Errington was a friend of the family. He lived in a flat in the Albert Mansions. He very often came to Addison Row, and generally stayed late.'

"Pressed still further with questions, Emma at last stated that latterly Mrs. Hazeldene had been to the theatre several times with Mr. Errington, and that on those nights the master looked very gloomy, and was very cross.

"Recalled, the young widower was strangely reticent. He gave forth his answers very grudgingly, and the coroner was evidently absolutely satisfied with himself at the marvellous way in which, after a quarter of an hour of firm yet very kind questionings, he had elicited from the witness what information he wanted.

"Mr. Errington was a friend of his wife. He was a gentleman of means, and seemed to have a great deal of time at his command. He himself did not particularly care about Mr. Errington, but he certainly had never made any observations to his wife on the subject.

"'But who is Mr. Errington?' repeated the coroner once more. 'What does he do? What is his business or profession?'

"'He has no business or profession.

"'What is his occupation, then?

"He has no special occupation. He has ample private means. But he has a great and very absorbing hobby.'

"'What is that?'

"'He spends all his time in chemical experiments, and is, I believe, as an amateur, a very distinguished toxicologist.'"

ii

"DID YOU ever see Mr. Errington, the gentleman so closely connected with the mysterious death on the Underground Railway?" asked the man in the corner as he placed one or two of his little snap-shot photos before Miss Polly Burton.

"There he is, to the very life. Fairly good-looking, a pleasant face enough, but ordinary, absolutely ordinary.

"It was this absence of any peculiarity which very nearly, but not quite, placed the halter round Mr. Errington's neck.

"But I am going too fast, and you will lose the thread.

"The public, of course, never heard how it actually came about that Mr. Errington, the wealthy bachelor of Albert Mansions, of the Grosvenor, and other young dandies' clubs, one fine day found himself before the magistrates at Bow Street, charged with being concerned in the death of Mary Beatrice Hazeldene, late of No. 19, Addison Row.

"I can assure you both press and public were literally flabbergasted. You see, Mr. Errington was a well-known and very popular member of a certain smart section of London society. He was a constant visitor at the opera, the racecourse, the Park, and the Carlton, he had a great many friends, and there was consequently quite a large attendance at the police court that morning.

"What had transpired was this:

"After the very scrappy bits of evidence which came to light at the inquest, two gentlemen bethought themselves that perhaps they had some duty to perform towards the State and the public generally. Accordingly they had come forward, offering to throw what light they could upon the mysterious affair on the Underground Railway.

"The police naturally felt that their information, such as it was, came rather late in the day, but as it proved of paramount importance, and the two gentlemen, moreover, were of undoubtedly good position in the world, they

were thankful for what they could get, and acted accordingly; they accordingly brought Mr. Errington up before the magistrate on a charge of murder.

"The accused looked pale and worried when I first caught sight of him in the court that day, which was not to be wondered at, considering the terrible position in which he found himself.

"He had been arrested at Marseilles, where he was preparing to start for Colombo.

"I don't think he realized how terrible his position really was until later in the proceedings, when all the evidence relating to the arrest had been heard, and Emma Funnel had repeated her statement as to Mr. Errington's call at 19, Addison Row, in the morning, and Mrs. Hazeldene starting off for St. Paul's Churchyard at 3.30 in the afternoon.

"Mr. Hazeldene had nothing to add to the statements he had made at the coroner's inquest. He had last seen his wife alive on the morning of the fatal day. She had seemed very well and cheerful.

"I think every one present understood that he was trying to say as little as possible that could in any way couple his deceased wife's name with that of the accused.

"And yet, from the servant's evidence, it undoubtedly leaked out that Mrs. Hazeldene, who was young, pretty, and evidently fond of admiration, had once or twice annoyed her husband by her somewhat open, yet perfectly innocent, flirtation with Mr. Errington.

"I think every one was most agreeably impressed by the widower's moderate and dignified attitude. You will see his photo there, among this bundle. That is just how he appeared in court. In deep black, of course, but without any sign of ostentation in his mourning. He had allowed his beard to grow lately, and wore it closely cut in a point.

"After his evidence, the sensation of the day occurred. A tall, dark-haired man, with the word 'City' written metaphorically all over him, had kissed the book, and was waiting to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth.

"He gave his name as Andrew Campbell, head of the firm of Campbell & Co., brokers, of Throgmorton Street.

"In the afternoon of March 18th Mr. Campbell, travelling on the Underground Railway, had noticed a very pretty woman in the same carriage as himself. She had asked him if she was in the right train for Aldersgate. Mr. Campbell replied in the affirmative, and then buried himself in the Stock Exchange quotations of his evening paper.

"At Gower Street, a gentleman in a tweed suit and bowler hat got into the carriage, and took a seat opposite the lady.

"She seemed very much astonished at seeing him, but Mr. Andrew Campbell did not recollect the exact words she said.

"The two talked to one another a good deal, and certainly the lady appeared animated and cheerful. Witness took no notice of them; he was very much engrossed in some calculations, and finally got out at Farringdon Street. He noticed that the man in the tweed suit also got out close behind him, having shaken hands with the lady, and said in a pleasant way: '*Au revoir*! Don't be late to-night.' Mr. Campbell did not hear the lady's reply, and soon lost sight of the man in the crowd.

"Every one was on tenter-hooks, and eagerly waiting for the palpitating moment when witness would describe and identify the man who last had seen and spoken to the unfortunate woman, within five minutes probably of her strange and unaccountable death.

"Personally I knew what was coming before the Scotch stockbroker spoke.

"I could have jotted down the graphic and lifelike description he would give of a probable murderer. It would have fitted equally well the man who sat and had luncheon at this table just now; it would certainly have described five out of every ten young Englishmen you know.

"The individual was of medium height, he wore a moustache which was not very fair nor yet very dark, his hair was between colours. He wore a bowler hat, and a tweed suit— and— and— that was all— Mr. Campbell might perhaps know him again, but then again, he might not— he was not paying much attention— the gentleman was sitting on the same side of the carriage as himself— and he had his hat on all the time. He himself was busy with his newspaper— yes— he might know him again— but he really could not say.

"Mr. Andrew Campbell's evidence was not worth very much, you will say. No, it was not in itself, and would not have justified any arrest were it not for the additional statements made by Mr. James Verner, manager of Messrs. Rodney & Co., colour printers.

"Mr. Verner is a personal friend of Mr. Andrew Campbell, and it appears that at Farringdon Street, where he was waiting for his train, he saw Mr. Campbell get out of a first-class railway carriage. Mr. Verner spoke to him for a second, and then, just as the train was moving off, he stepped into the same compartment which had just been vacated by the stockbroker and the man in the tweed suit. He vaguely recollects a lady sitting in the opposite corner to his own, with her face turned away from him, apparently asleep, but he paid no special attention to her. He was like nearly all business men when they are travelling— engrossed in his paper. Presently a special quotation interested him; he wished to make a note of it, took out a pencil from his waistcoat pocket, and seeing a clean piece of paste-board on the floor, he picked it up,

and scribbled on it the memorandum, which he wished to keep. He then slipped the card into his pocket-book.

"'It was only two or three days later,' added Mr. Verner in the midst of breathless silence, 'that I had occasion to refer to these same notes again.

"'In the meanwhile the papers had been full of the mysterious death on the Underground Railway, and the names of those connected with it were pretty familiar to me. It was, therefore, with much astonishment that on looking at the paste-board which I had casually picked up in the railway carriage I saw the name on it, "Frank Errington."'

"There was no doubt that the sensation in court was almost unprecedented. Never since the days of the Fenchurch Street mystery, and the trial of Smethurst, had I seen so much excitement. Mind you, I was not excited— I knew by now every detail of that crime as if I had committed it myself. In fact, I could not have done it better, although I have been a student of crime for many years now. Many people there— his friends, mostly— believed that Errington was doomed. I think he thought so, too, for I could see that his face was terribly white, and he now and then passed his tongue over his lips, as if they were parched.

"You see he was in the awful dilemma— a perfectly natural one, by the way— of being absolutely incapable of *proving* an *alibi*. The crime— if crime there was— had been committed three weeks ago. A man about town like Mr. Frank Errington might remember that he spent certain hours of a special afternoon at his club, or in the Park, but it is very doubtful in nine cases out of ten if he can find a friend who could positively swear as to having seen him there. No! no! Mr. Errington was in a tight corner, and he knew it. You see, there were— besides the evidence— two or three circumstances which did not improve matters for him. His hobby in the direction of toxicology, to begin with. The police had found in his room every description of poisonous substances, including prussic acid.

"Then, again, that journey to Marseilles, the start for Colombo, was, though perfectly innocent, a very unfortunate one. Mr. Errington had gone on an aimless voyage, but the public thought that he had fled, terrified at his own crime. Sir Arthur Inglewood, however, here again displayed his marvellous skill on behalf of his client by the masterly way in which he literally turned all the witnesses for the Crown inside out.

"Having first got Mr. Andrew Campbell to state positively that in the accused he certainly did *not* recognize the man in the tweed suit, the eminent lawyer, after twenty minutes' cross-examination, had so completely upset the stockbroker's equanimity that it is very likely he would not have recognized his own office-boy.

"But through all his flurry and all his annoyance Mr. Andrew Campbell remained very sure of one thing; namely, that the lady was alive and cheerful, and talking pleasantly with the man in the tweed suit up to the moment when the latter, having shaken hands with her, left her with a pleasant '*Au revoir*! Don't be late to-night.' He had heard neither scream nor struggle, and in his opinion, if the individual in the tweed suit had administered a dose of poison to his companion, it must have been with her own knowledge and free will; and the lady in the train most emphatically neither looked nor spoke like a woman prepared for a sudden and violent death.

"Mr. James Verner, against that, swore equally positively that he had stood in full view of the carriage door from the moment that Mr. Campbell got out until he himself stepped into the compartment, that there was no one else in that carriage between Farringdon Street and Aldgate, and that the lady, to the best of his belief, had made no movement during the whole of that journey.

"No; Frank Errington was *not* committed for trial on the capital charge," said the man in the corner with one of his sardonic smiles, "thanks to the cleverness of Sir Arthur Inglewood, his lawyer. He absolutely denied his identity with the man in the tweed suit, and swore he had not seen Mrs. Hazeldene since eleven o'clock in the morning of that fatal day. There was no *proof* that he had; moreover, according to Mr. Campbell's opinion, the man in the tweed suit was in all probability not the murderer. Common sense would not admit that a woman could have a deadly poison injected into her without her knowledge, while chatting pleasantly to her murderer.

"Mr. Errington lives abroad now. He is about to marry. I don't think any of his real friends for a moment believed that he committed the dastardly crime. The police think they know better. They do know this much, that it could not have been a case of suicide, that if the man who undoubtedly travelled with Mrs. Hazeldene on that fatal afternoon had no crime upon his conscience he would long ago have come forward and thrown what light he could upon the mystery.

"As to who that man was, the police in their blindness have not the faintest doubt. Under the unshakable belief that Errington is guilty they have spent the last few months in unceasing labour to try and find further and stronger proofs of his guilt. But they won't find them, because there are none. There are no positive proofs against the actual murderer, for he was one of those clever blackguards who think of everything, foresee every eventuality, who know human nature well, and can foretell exactly what evidence will be brought against them, and act accordingly.

"This blackguard from the first kept the figure, the personality, of Frank Errington before his mind. Frank Errington was the dust which the scoundrel

threw metaphorically in the eyes of the police, and you must admit that he succeeded in blinding them— to the extent even of making them entirely forget the one simple little sentence, overheard by Mr. Andrew Campbell, and which was, of course, the clue to the whole thing— the only slip the cunning rogue made—'*Au revoir*! Don't be late to-night.' Mrs. Hazeldene was going that night to the opera with her husband—

"You are astonished?" he added with a shrug of the shoulders, "you do not see the tragedy yet, as I have seen it before me all along. The frivolous young wife, the flirtation with the friend?— all a blind, all pretence. I took the trouble which the police should have taken immediately, of finding out something about the finances of the Hazeldene *ménage*. Money is in nine cases out of ten the keynote to a crime.

"I found that the will of Mary Beatrice Hazeldene had been proved by the husband, her sole executor, the estate being sworn at £15,000. I found out, moreover, that Mr. Edward Sholto Hazeldene was a poor shipper's clerk when he married the daughter of a wealthy builder in Kensington— and then I made note of the fact that the disconsolate widower had allowed his beard to grow since the death of his wife.

"There's no doubt that he was a clever rogue," added the strange creature, leaning excitedly over the table, and peering into Polly's face. "Do you know how that deadly poison was injected into the poor woman's system? By the simplest of all means, one known to every scoundrel in Southern Europe. A ring— yes! a ring, which has a tiny hollow needle capable of holding a sufficient quantity of prussic acid to have killed two persons instead of one. The man in the tweed suit shook hands with his fair companion— probably she hardly felt the prick, not sufficiently in any case to make her utter a scream. And, mind you, the scoundrel had every facility, through his friendship with Mr. Errington, of procuring what poison he required, not to mention his friend's visiting card. We cannot gauge how many months ago he began to try and copy Frank Errington in his style of dress, the cut of his moustache, his general appearance, making the change probably so gradual, that no one in his own *entourage* would notice it. He selected for his model a man his own height and build, with the same coloured hair."

"But there was the terrible risk of being identified by his fellow-traveller in the Underground," suggested Polly.

"Yes, there certainly was that risk; he chose to take it, and he was wise. He reckoned that several days would in any case elapse before that person, who, by the way, was a business man absorbed in his newspaper, would actually see him again. The great secret of successful crime is to study human nature,"

added the man in the corner, as he began looking for his hat and coat. "Edward Hazeldene knew it well."

"But the ring?"

"He may have bought that when he was on his honeymoon," he suggested with a grim chuckle; "the tragedy was not planned in a week, it may have taken years to mature. But you will own that there goes a frightful scoundrel unhung. I have left you his photograph as he was a year ago, and as he is now. You will see he has shaved his beard again, but also his moustache. I fancy he is a friend now of Mr. Andrew Campbell."

He left Miss Polly Burton wondering, not knowing what to believe.

And that is why she missed her appointment with Mr. Richard Frobisher (of the *London Mail*) to go and see Maud Allan dance at the Palace Theatre that afternoon.

17: Four Meetings

Henry James

1843-1916

Scribner's Monthly, Nov 1877

I SAW HER only four times, but I remember them vividly; she made an impression upon me. I thought her very pretty and very interesting— a charming specimen of a type. I am very sorry to hear of her death; and yet, when I think of it, why should I be sorry? The last time I saw her she was certainly not— But I will describe all our meetings in order.

Chapter 1

THE FIRST ONE took place in the country, at a little tea-party, one snowy night. It must have been some seventeen years ago. My friend Latouche, going to spend Christmas with his mother, had persuaded me to go with him, and the good lady had given in our honor the entertainment of which I speak. To me it was really entertaining; I had never been in the depths of New England at that season. It had been snowing all day, and the drifts were knee-high. I wondered how the ladies had made their way to the house; but I perceived that at Grimwinter a *conversazione* offering the attraction of two gentlemen from New York was felt to be worth an effort.

Mrs. Latouche, in the course of the evening, asked me if I "didn't want to" show the photographs to some of the young ladies. The photographs were in a couple of great portfolios, and had been brought home by her son, who, like myself, was lately returned from Europe. I looked round and was struck with the fact that most of the young ladies were provided with an object of interest more absorbing than the most vivid sun-picture. But there was a person standing alone near the mantelshelf, and looking round the room with a small gentle smile which seemed at odds, somehow, with her isolation. I looked at her a moment, and then said, "I should like to show them to that young lady."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Latouche, "she is just the person. She doesn't care for flirting; I will speak to her."

I rejoined that if she did not care for flirting, she was, perhaps, not just the person; but Mrs. Latouche had already gone to propose the photographs to her.

"She's delighted," she said, coming back. "She is just the person, so quiet and so bright. "And then she told me the young lady was, by name, Miss Caroline Spencer, and with this she introduced me.

Miss Caroline Spencer was not exactly a beauty, but she was a charming little figure. She must have been close upon thirty, but she was made almost

like a little girl, and she had the complexion of a child. She had a very pretty head, and her hair was arranged as nearly as possible like the hair of a Greek bust, though indeed it was to be doubted if she had ever seen a Greek bust. She was "artistic," I suspected, so far as Grimwinter allowed such tendencies. She had a soft, surprised eye, and thin lips, with very pretty teeth. Round her neck she wore what ladies call, I believe, a "ruche," fastened with a very small pin in pink coral, and in her hand she carried a fan made of plaited straw and adorned with pink ribbon. She wore a scanty black silk dress. She spoke with a kind of soft precision, showing her white teeth between her narrow but tender-looking lips, and she seemed extremely pleased, even a little fluttered, at the prospect of my demonstrations. These went forward very smoothly, after I had moved the portfolios out of their corner and placed a couple of chairs near a lamp. The photographs were usually things I knew— large views of Switzerland, Italy, and Spain, landscapes, copies of famous buildings, pictures, and statues. I said what I could about them, and my companion, looking at them as I held them up, sat perfectly still, with her straw fan raised to her under-lip. Occasionally, as I laid one of the pictures down, she said very softly, "Have you seen that place?" I usually answered that I had seen it several times (I had been a great traveller), and then I felt that she looked at me askance for a moment with her pretty eyes. I had asked her at the outset whether she had been to Europe; to this she answered, "No, no, no," in a little quick, confidential whisper. But after that, though she never took her eyes off the pictures, she said so little that I was afraid she was bored. Accordingly, after we had finished one portfolio, I offered, if she desired it, to desist. I felt that she was not bored, but her reticence puzzled me, and I wished to make her speak. I turned round to look at her, and saw that there was a faint flush in each of her cheeks. She was waving her little fan to and fro. Instead of looking at me she fixed her eyes upon the other portfolio, which was leaning against the table.

"Won't you show me that?" she asked, with a little tremor in her voice. I could almost have believed she was agitated.

"With pleasure," I answered, "if you are not tired."

"No, I am not tired," she affirmed. "I like it— I love it."

And as I took up the other portfolio she laid her hand upon it, rubbing it softly.

"And have you been here too?" she asked.

On my opening the portfolio it appeared that I had been there. One of the first photographs was a large view of the Castle of Chillon, on the Lake of Geneva.

"Here," I said, "I have been many a time. Is it not beautiful?" And I pointed to the perfect reflection of the rugged rocks and pointed towers in the clear still water. She did not say, "Oh, enchanting!" and push it away to see the next picture. She looked a while and then she asked if it was not where Bonivard, about whom Byron wrote, was confined. I assented, and tried to quote some of Byron's verses, but in this attempt I succeeded imperfectly.

She fanned herself a moment, and then repeated the lines correctly, in a soft, flat, and yet agreeable voice. By the time she had finished she was blushing. I complimented her and told her she was perfectly equipped for visiting Switzerland and Italy. She looked at me askance again, to see whether I was serious, and I added, that if she wished to recognize Byron's descriptions she must go abroad speedily; Europe was getting sadly dis-Byronised.

"How soon must I go?" she asked.

"Oh, I will give you ten years."

"I think I can go within ten years," she answered very soberly.

"Well," I said, "you will enjoy it immensely; you will find it very charming." And just then I came upon a photograph of some nook in a foreign city which I had been very fond of, and which recalled tender memories. I discoursed (as I suppose) with a certain eloquence; my companion sat listening, breathless.

"Have you been *very* long in foreign lands?" she asked, some time after I had ceased.

"Many years," I said.

"And have you travelled everywhere?"

"I have travelled a great deal. I am very fond of it; and, happily, I have been able."

Again she gave me her sidelong gaze. "And do you know the foreign languages?"

"After a fashion."

"Is it hard to speak them?"

"I don't believe you would find it hard," I gallantly responded.

"Oh, I shouldn't want to speak— I should only want to listen," she said. Then, after a pause, she added— "They say the French theater is so beautiful."

"It is the best in the world."

"Did you go there very often?"

"When I was first in Paris I went every night."

"Every night!" And she opened her clear eyes very wide. "That to me is—" and she hesitated a moment— "is very wonderful." A few minutes later she asked— "Which country do you prefer?"

"There is one country I prefer to all others. I think you would do the same."

She looked at me a moment, and then she said softly—"Italy?"

"Italy," I answered softly, too; and for a moment we looked at each other. She looked as pretty as if, instead of showing her photographs, I had been making love to her. To increase the analogy, she glanced away, blushing. There was a silence, which she broke at last by saying—

"That is the place which— in particular— I thought of going to."

"Oh, that's the place— that's the place!" I said.

She looked at two or three photographs in silence. "They say it is not so dear."

"As some other countries? Yes, that is not the least of its charms."

"But it is all very dear, is it not?"

"Europe, you mean?"

"Going there and travelling. That has been the trouble. I have very little money. I give lessons," said Miss Spencer.

"Of course one must have money," I said, "but one can manage with a moderate amount."

"I think I should manage. I have laid something by, and I am always adding a little to it. It's all for that." She paused a moment, and then went on with a kind of suppressed eagerness, as if telling me the story were a rare, but a possibly impure satisfaction. "But it has not been only the money; it has been everything. Everything has been against it. I have waited and waited. It has been a mere castle in the air. I am almost afraid to talk about it. Two or three times it has been a little nearer, and then I have talked about it and it has melted away. I have talked about it too much," she said, hypocritically; for I saw that such talking was now a small tremulous ecstasy. "There is a lady who is a great friend of mine; she doesn't want to go; I always talk to her about it. I tire her dreadfully. She told me once she didn't know what would become of me. I should go crazy if I did not go to Europe, and I should certainly go crazy if I did."

"Well," I said, "you have not gone yet, and nevertheless you are not crazy."

She looked at me a moment, and said— "I am not so sure. I don't think of anything else. I am always thinking of it. It prevents me from thinking of things that are nearer home—things that I ought to attend to. That is a kind of craziness."

"The cure for it is to go," I said.

"I have a faith that I shall go. I have a cousin in Europe!" she announced.

We turned over some more photographs, and I asked her if she had always lived at Grimwinter.

"Oh no, sir," said Miss Spencer. "I have spent twenty-three months in Boston."

I answered, jocosely, that in that case foreign lands would probably prove a disappointment to her; but I quite failed to alarm her.

"I know more about them than you might think," she said, with her shy, neat little smile. "I mean by reading; I have read a great deal. I have not only read Byron; I have read histories and guide-books. I know I shall like it!"

"I understand your case," I rejoined. "You have the native American passion— the passion for the picturesque. With us, I think it is primordial— antecedent to experience. Experience comes and only shows us something we have dreamt of."

"I think that is very true," said Caroline Spencer. "I have dreamt of everything; I shall know it all!"

"I am afraid you have wasted a great deal of time."

"Oh yes, that has been my great wickedness."

The people about us had begun to scatter; they were taking their leave. She got up and put out her hand to me, timidly, but with a peculiar brightness in her eyes.

"I am going back there," I said, as I shook hands with her. "I shall look out for you."

"I will tell you," she answered, "if I am disappointed."

And she went away, looking delicately agitated, and moving her little straw fan.

Chapter 2

A FEW MONTHS after this I returned to Europe, and some three years elapsed. I had been living in Paris, and, toward the end of October, I went from that city to Havre, to meet my sister and her husband, who had written me that they were about to arrive there. On reaching Havre I found that the steamer was already in; I was nearly two hours late. I repaired directly to the hotel, where my relatives were already established. My sister had gone to bed, exhausted and disabled by her voyage; she was a sadly incompetent sailor, and her sufferings on this occasion had been extreme. She wished, for the moment, for undisturbed rest, and was unable to see me more than five minutes; so it was agreed that we should remain at Havre until the next day. My brother-in-law, who was anxious about his wife, was unwilling to leave her room; but she insisted upon his going out with me to take a walk and recover his land-legs. The early autumn day was warm and charming, and our stroll through the bright-colored, busy streets of the old French seaport was sufficiently entertaining We walked along the sunny, noisy quays, and then turned into a wide, pleasant street, which lay half in sun and half in shade— a

French provincial street, that looked like an old water-color drawing: tall, gray, steep-roofed, red-gabled, many-storied houses; green shutters on windows and old scroll-work above them; flower-pots in balconies, and white-capped women in doorways. We walked in the shade; all this stretched away on the sunny side of the street and made a picture. We looked at it as we passed along; then, suddenly, my brother-in-law stopped— pressing my arm and staring. I followed his gaze and saw that we had paused just before coming to a café, where, under an awning, several tables and chairs were disposed upon the pavement. The windows were open behind; half a dozen plants in tubs were ranged beside the door; the pavement was besprinkled with clean bran. It was a nice little, quiet, old-fashioned café; inside, in the comparative dusk, I saw a stout handsome woman, with pink ribbons in her cap, perched up with a mirror behind her back, smiling at some one who was out of sight. All this, however, I perceived afterwards; what I first observed was a lady sitting alone, outside, at one of the little marble-topped tables. My brother-in-law had stopped to look at her. There was something on the little table, but she was leaning back quietly, with her hands folded, looking down the street, away from us. I saw her only in some thing less than profile; nevertheless, I instantly felt that had seen her before.

"The little lady of the steamer!" exclaimed my brother-in-law.

"Was she on your steamer?" I asked.

"From morning till night. She was never sick. She used to sit perpetually at the side of the vessel with her hands crossed that way, looking at the eastward horizon."

"Are you going to speak to her?"

"I don't know her. I never made acquaintance with her. I was too seedy. But I used to watch her and— I don't know why— to be interested in her. She's a dear little Yankee woman. I have an idea she is a schoolmistress taking a holiday—for which her scholars have made up a purse."

She turned her face a little more into profile, looking at the steep gray house fronts opposite to her. Then I said— "I shall speak to her myself."

"I wouldn't; she is very shy," said my brother-in-law.

"My dear fellow, I know her. I once showed her photographs at a tea-party."

And I went up to her. She turned and looked at me, and I saw she was in fact Miss Caroline Spencer. But she was not so quick to recognize me; she looked startled. I pushed a chair to the table and sat down.

"Well," I said, "I hope you are not disappointed!"

She stared, blushing a little; then she gave a small jump which betrayed recognition.

"It was you who showed me the photographs— at Grimwinter!"

"Yes, it was I. This happens very charmingly, for I feel as if it were for me to give you a formal reception here— an official welcome. I talked to you so much about Europe."

"You didn't say too much. I am so happy!" she softly exclaimed.

Very happy she looked. There was no sign of her being older; she was as gravely, decently, demurely pretty as before. If she had seemed before a thin-stemmed, mild-hued flower of Puritanism, it may be imagined whether in her present situation this delicate bloom was less apparent. Beside her an old gentleman was drinking absinthe; behind her the *dame de comptoir* in the pink ribbons was calling "Alcibiade! Alcibiade!" to the long-aproned waiter. I explained to Miss Spencer that my companion had lately been her shipmate, and my brother-in-law came up and was introduced to her. But she looked at him as if she had never seen him before, and I remembered that he had told me that her eyes were always fixed upon the eastward horizon. She had evidently not noticed him, and, still timidly smiling, she made no attempt whatever to pretend that she had. I stayed with her at the café door, and he went back to the hotel and to his wife. I said to Miss Spencer that this meeting of ours in the first hour of her landing was really very strange, but that I was delighted to be there and receive her first impressions.

"Oh, I can't tell you," she said; "I feel as if I were in a dream. I have been sitting here for an hour, and I don't want to move. Everything is so picturesque. I don't know whether the coffee has intoxicated me; it's so delicious."

"Really," said I, "if you are so pleased with this poor prosaic Havre, you will have no admiration left for better things. Don't spend your admiration all the first day; remember it's your intellectual letter of credit. Remember all the beautiful places and things that are waiting for you; remember that lovely Italy!"

"I'm not afraid of running short," she said gaily, still looking at the opposite houses. "I could sit here all day, saying to myself that here I am at last. It's so dark, and old, and different."

"By the way," I inquired, "how come you to be sitting here? Have you not gone to one of the inns?" For I was half amused, half alarmed, at the good conscience with which this delicately pretty woman had stationed herself in conspicuous isolation on the edge of the sidewalk.

"My cousin brought me here," she answered. "You know I told you I had a cousin in Europe. He met me at the steamer this morning."

"It was hardly worth his while to meet you if he was to desert you so soon"

"Oh, he has only left me for half an hour," said Miss Spencer. "He has gone to get my money."

"Where is your money?"

She gave a little laugh. "It makes me feel very fine to tell you! It is in some circular notes."

"And where are your circular notes?"

"In my cousin's pocket."

This statement was very serenely uttered, but— I can hardly say why— it gave me a sensible chill. At the moment I should have been utterly unable to give the reason of this sensation, for I knew nothing of Miss Spencer's cousin. Since he was her cousin, the presumption was in his favor. But I felt suddenly uncomfortable at the thought that, half an hour after her landing, her scanty funds should have passed into his hands.

"Is he to travel with you?" I asked.

"Only as far as Paris. He is an art-student in Paris. I wrote to him that I was coming, but I never expected him to come off to the ship. I supposed he would only just meet me at the train in Paris. It is very kind of him. But he *is* very kind— and very bright."

I instantly became conscious of an extreme curiosity to see this bright cousin who was an art-student

"He is gone to the banker's?" I asked.

"Yes, to the banker's. He took me to an hotel— such a queer, quaint, delicious little place, with a court in the middle, and a gallery all round, and a lovely landlady, in such a beautifully-fluted cap, and such a perfectly-fitting dress! After a while we came out to walk to the banker's, for I haven't got any French money.

But I was very dizzy from the motion of the vessel, and I thought I had better sit down. He found this place for me here, and he went off to the banker's himself. I am to wait here till he comes back."

It may seem very fantastic, but it passed through my mind that he would never come back. I settled myself in my chair beside Miss Spencer and determined to await the event. She was extremely observant; there was something touching in it. She noticed everything that the movement of the street brought before us— peculiarities of costume, the shapes of vehicles, the big Norman horses, the fat priests, the shaven poodles. We talked of these things, and there was something charming in her freshness of perception and the way her book-nourished fancy recognized and welcomed everything.

"And when your cousin comes back, what are you going to do?" I asked.

She hesitated a moment. "We don't quite know."

"When do you go to Paris? If you go by the four o'clock train, I may have the pleasure of making the journey with you."

"I don't think we shall do that. My cousin thinks I had better stay here a few days."

"Oh!" said I; and for five minutes said nothing more. I was wondering what her cousin was, in vulgar parlance, "up to." I looked up and down the street, but saw nothing that looked like a bright American art-student. At last I took the liberty of observing that Havre was hardly a place to choose as one of the aesthetic stations of a European tour. It was a place of convenience, nothing more; a place of transit, through which transit should be rapid. I recommended her to go to Paris by the afternoon train, and meanwhile to amuse herself by driving to the ancient fortress at the mouth of the harbor— that picturesque circular structure which bore the name of Francis the First, and looked like a small castle of St Angelo. (It has lately been demolished.)

She listened with much interest; then for a moment she looked grave.

"My cousin told me that when he returned he should have something particular to say to me, and that we could do nothing or decide nothing until I should have heard it. But I will make him tell me quickly, and then we will go to the ancient fortress. There is no hurry to get to Paris; there is plenty of time."

She smiled with her softly severe little lips as she spoke those last words. But I, looking at her with a purpose, saw just a tiny gleam of apprehension in her eye.

"Don't tell me," I said, "that this wretched man is going to give you bad news!"

"I suspect it is a little bad, but I don't believe it is very bad. At any rate, I must listen to it."

I looked at her again an instant. "You didn't come to Europe to listen," I said. "You came to see!" But now I was sure her cousin would come back; since he had something disagreeable to say to her, he certainly would turn up. We sat a while longer, and I asked her about her plans of travel. She had them on her fingers' ends, and she told over the names with a kind of solemn distinctness; from Paris to Dijon and to Avignon, from Avignon to Marseilles and the Cornice road; thence to Genoa, to Spezia, to Pisa, to Florence, to Rome. It apparently had never occurred to her that there could be the least incommodity in her travelling alone; and since she was unprovided with a companion I of course scrupulously abstained from disturbing her sense of security.

At last her cousin came back. I saw him turn towards us out of a side street, and from the moment my eyes rested upon him I felt that this was the bright American art-student. He wore a slouch hat and a rusty black velvet jacket, such as I had often encountered in the Rue Bonaparte. His shirt-collar revealed a large section of a throat which, at a distance, was not strikingly statuesque.

He was tall and lean; he had red hair and freckles. So much I had time to observe while he approached the café, staring at me with natural surprise from under his umbrageous coiffure. When he came up to us I immediately introduced myself to him as an old acquaintance of Miss Spencer. He looked at me hard with a pair of little red eyes, then he made me a solemn bow in the French fashion, with his sombrero.

"You were not on the ship?" he said.

"No, I was not on the ship. I have been in Europe these three years."

He bowed once more, solemnly, and motioned me to be seated again. I sat down, but it was only for the purpose of observing him an instant— I saw it was time I should return to my sister. Miss Spencer's cousin was a queer fellow. Nature had not shaped him for a Raphaelesque or Byronic attire, and his velvet doublet and naked throat were not in harmony with his facial attributes. His hair was cropped close to his head; his ears were large and ill-adjusted to the same. He had a lackadaisical carriage and a sentimental droop which were peculiarly at variance with his keen strange-colored eyes. Perhaps I was prejudiced, but I thought his eyes treacherous. He said nothing for some time; he leaned his hands on his cane and looked up and down the street. Then at last, slowly lifting his cane and pointing with it, "That's a very nice bit," he remarked, softly. He had his head on one side, and his little eyes were half closed. I followed the direction of his stick; the object it indicated was a red cloth hung out of an old window. "Nice bit of color," he continued; and without moving his head he transferred his half-closed gaze to me. "Composes well," he pursued. "Make a nice thing." He spoke in a hard vulgar voice.

"I see you have a great deal of eye," I replied. "Your cousin tells me you are studying art." He looked at me in the same way without answering, and I went on with deliberate urbanity— "I suppose you are at the studio of one of those great men."

Still he looked at me, and then he said softly— "Gérome."

"Do you like it?" I asked.

"Do you understand French?" he said.

"Some kinds," I answered.

He kept his little eyes on me; then he said— "*J'adore la peinture*!"

"Oh, I understand that kind!" I rejoined. Miss Spencer laid her hand upon her cousin's arm with a little pleased and fluttered movement; it was delightful to be among people who were on such easy terms with foreign tongues. I got up to take leave, and asked Miss Spencer where, in Paris, I might have the honor of waiting upon her. To what hotel would she go?

She turned to her cousin inquiringly, and he honored me again with his little languid leer. "Do you know the Hotel des Princes?"

"I know where it is."

"I shall take her there."

"I congratulate you," I said to Caroline Spencer. "I believe it is the best inn in the world; and in case I should still have a moment to call upon you here, where are you lodged?"

"Oh, it's such a pretty name," said Miss Spencer, gleefully. "À la Belle Normande."

As I left them her cousin gave me a great flourish with his picturesque hat.

Chapter 3

MY SISTER, as it proved, was not sufficiently restored to leave Havre by the afternoon train; so that, as the autumn dusk began to fall, I found myself at liberty to call at the sign of the Fair Norman. I must confess that I had spent much of the interval in wondering what the disagreeable thing was that my charming friend's disagreeable cousin had been telling her. The "Belle Normande" was a modest inn in a shady by-street, where it gave me satisfaction to think Miss Spencer must have encountered local color in abundance. There was a crooked little court, where much of the hospitality of the house was carried on; there was a staircase climbing to bedrooms on the outer side of the wall; there was a small trickling fountain with a stucco statuette in the midst of it; there was a little boy in a white cap and apron cleaning copper vessels at a conspicuous kitchen door; there was a chattering landlady, neatly laced, arranging apricots and grapes into an artistic pyramid upon a pink plate. I looked about, and on a green bench outside of an open door labelled *Salle à Manger,* I perceived Caroline Spencer. No sooner had I looked at her than I saw that something had happened since the morning. She was leaning back on her bench, her hands were clasped in her lap, and her eyes were fixed upon the landlady, at the other side of the court, manipulating her apricots.

But I saw she was not thinking of apricots She was staring absently, thoughtfully; as I came near her I perceived that she had been crying. I sat down on the bench beside her before she saw me; then, when she had done so, she simply turned round, without surprise, and rested her sad eyes upon me. Something very bad indeed had happened; she was completely changed.

I immediately charged her with it. "Your cousin has been giving you bad news; you are in great distress."

For a moment she said nothing, and I supposed that she was afraid to speak, lest her tears should come back. But presently I perceived that in the

short time that had elapsed since my leaving her in the morning she had shed them all, and that she was now softly stoical— intensely composed.

"My poor cousin is in distress," she said at last. "His news was bad." Then, after a brief hesitation— "He was in terrible want of money."

"In want of yours, you mean?"

"Of any that he could get— honestly. Mine was the only money."

"And he has taken yours?"

She hesitated again a moment, but her glance, meanwhile, was pleading. "I gave him what I had."

I have always remembered the accent of those words as the most angelic bit of human utterance I had ever listened to; but then, almost with a sense of personal outrage, I jumped up. "Good heavens!" I said, "do you call that getting it honestly?"

I had gone too far; she blushed deeply. "We will not speak of it," she said.

"We *must* speak of it," I answered, sitting down again. "I am your friend; it seems to me you need one. What is the matter with your cousin?"

"He is in debt."

"No doubt! But what is the special fitness of your paying his debts?"

"He has told me all his story; I am very sorry for him."

"So am I! But I hope he will give you back your money."

"Certainly he will; as soon as he can."

"When will that be?"

"When he has finished his great picture."

"My dear young lady, confound his great picture! Where is this desperate cousin?"

She certainly hesitated now. Then— "At his dinner," she answered.

I turned about and looked through the open door into the *salle à manger.* There, alone at the end of a long table, I perceived the object of Miss Spencer's compassion— the bright young art-student. He was dining too attentively to notice me at first; but in the act of setting down a well-emptied wine-glass he caught sight of my observant attitude. He paused in his repast, and, with his head on one side and his meagre jaws slowly moving, fixedly returned my gaze. Then the landlady came lightly brushing by with her pyramid of apricots.

"And that nice little plate of fruit is for him?" I exclaimed.

Miss Spencer glanced at it tenderly "They do that so prettily!" she murmured.

I felt helpless and irritated. "Come now, really," I said; "do you approve of that long strong fellow accepting your funds?" She looked away from me; I was evidently giving her pain. The case was hopeless; the long strong fellow had "interested" her.

"Excuse me if I speak of him so unceremoniously," I said. "But you are really too generous, and he is not quite delicate enough. He made his debts himself— he ought to pay them himself."

"He has been foolish," she answered; "I know that. He has told me everything. We had a long talk this morning; the poor fellow threw himself upon my charity. He has signed notes to a large amount."

"The more fool he!"

"He is in extreme distress; and it is not only himself. It is his poor wife."

"Ah, he has a poor wife?"

"I didn't know it— but he confessed everything. He married two years since, secretly."

"Why secretly?"

Caroline Spencer glanced about her, as if she feared listeners. Then softly, in a little impressive tone— "She was a Countess!"

"Are you very sure of that?"

"She has written me a most beautiful letter."

"Asking you for money, eh?"

"Asking me for confidence and sympathy," said Miss Spencer. "She has been disinherited by her father. My cousin told me the story, and she tells it in her own way, in the letter. It is like an old romance. Her father opposed the marriage, and when he discovered that she had secretly disobeyed him he cruelly cast her off. It is really most romantic. They are the oldest family in Provence."

I looked and listened in wonder. It really seemed that the poor woman was enjoying the "romance" of having a discarded Countess-cousin, out of Provence, so deeply as almost to lose the sense of what the forfeiture of her money meant for her.

"My dear young lady," I said, "you don't want to be ruined for picturesqueness' sake?"

"I shall not be ruined. I shall come back before long to stay with them. The Countess insists upon that."

"Come back! You are going home, then?"

She sat for a moment with her eyes lowered, then with an heroic suppression of a faint tremor of the voice— "I have no money for travelling!" she answered.

"You gave it *all* up?"

"I have kept enough to take me home."

I gave an angry groan, and at this juncture Miss Spencer's cousin, the fortunate possessor of her sacred savings and of the hand of the Provençal Countess, emerged from the little dining-room. He stood on the threshold for

an instant, removing the stone from a plump apricot which he had brought away from the table; then he put the apricot into his mouth, and while he let it sojourn there, gratefully, stood looking at us, with his long legs apart and his hands dropped into the pockets of his velvet jacket. My companion got up, giving him a thin glance which I caught in its passage, and which expressed a strange commixture of resignation and fascination— a sort of perverted exaltation. Ugly, vulgar, pretentious, dishonest, as I thought the creature, he had appealed successfully to her eager and tender imagination. I was deeply disgusted, but I had no warrant to interfere, and at any rate I felt that it would be vain.

The young man waved his hand with a pictorial gesture. "Nice old court," he observed. "Nice mellow old place. Good tone in that brick. Nice crooked old staircase."

Decidedly, I couldn't stand it; without responding I gave my hand to Caroline Spencer. She looked at me an instant with her little white face and expanded eyes, and as she showed her pretty teeth I suppose she meant to smile.

"Don't be sorry for me," she said, "I am very sure I shall see something of this dear old Europe yet."

I told her that I would not bid her good-bye— I should find a moment to come back the next morning. Her cousin, who had put on his sombrero again, flourished it off at me by way of a bow— upon which I took my departure.

The next morning I came back to the inn, where I met in the court the landlady, more loosely laced than in the evening. On my asking for Miss Spencer,— "*Partie*, monsieur," said the hostess. "She went away last night at ten o'clock, with her— her— not her husband, eh?— in fine, her *Monsieur*. They went down to the American ship." I turned away; the poor girl had been about thirteen hours in Europe.

Chapter 4

I MYSELF, more fortunate, was there some five years longer. During this period I lost my friend Latouche, who died of a malarious fever during a tour in the Levant. One of the first things I did on my return was to go up to Grimwinter to pay a consolatory visit to his poor mother. I found her in deep affliction, and I sat with her the whole of the morning that followed my arrival (I had come in late at night), listening to her tearful descant and singing the praises of my friend. We talked of nothing else, and our conversation terminated only with the arrival of a quick little woman who drove herself up to the door in a "carry-all," and whom I saw toss the reins upon the horse's

back with the briskness of a startled sleeper throwing back the bed-clothes. She jumped out of the carry-all and she jumped into the room. She proved to be the minister's wife and the great town gossip, and she had evidently, in the latter capacity, a choice morsel to communicate. I was as sure of this as I was that poor Mrs. Latouche was not absolutely too bereaved to listen to her. It seemed to me discreet to retire, I said I believed I would go and take a walk before dinner.

"And, by the way," I added, "if you will tell me where my old friend Miss Spencer lives, I will walk to her house."

The minister's wife immediately responded. Miss Spencer lived in the fourth house beyond the Baptist church; the Baptist church was the one on the right, with that queer green thing over the door; they called it a portico, but it looked more like an old-fashioned bedstead.

"Yes, do go and see poor Caroline," said Mrs. Latouche. "It will refresh her to see a strange face."

"I should think she had had enough of strange faces!" cried the minister's wife.

"I mean, to see a visitor," said Mrs. Latouche, amending her phrase.

"I should think she had had enough of visitors!" her companion rejoined. "But *you* don't mean to stay ten years," she added, glancing at me.

"Has she a visitor of that sort?" I inquired, perplexed.

"You will see the sort!" said the minister's wife. "She's easily seen; she generally sits in the front yard. Only take care what you say to her, and be very sure you are polite."

"Ah, she is so sensitive?"

The minister's wife jumped up and dropped me a curtsey— a most ironical curtsey.

"That's what she is, if you please. She's a Countess!"

And pronouncing this word with the most scathing accent, the little woman seemed fairly to laugh in the Countess's face. I stood a moment, staring, wondering, remembering.

"Oh, I shall be very polite!" I cried; and grasping my hat and stick, I went on my way.

I found Miss Spencer's residence without difficulty. The Baptist church was easily identified, and the small dwelling near it, of a rusty white, with a large central chimney-stack and a Virginia creeper, seemed naturally and properly the abode of a frugal old maid with a taste for the picturesque. As I approached I slackened my pace, for I had heard that some one was always sitting in the front yard, and I wished to reconnoitre. I looked cautiously over the low white fence which separated the small garden-space from the unpaved

street; but I descried nothing in the shape of a Countess. A small straight path led up to the crooked door-step, and on either side of it was a little grass-plot, fringed with currant-bushes. In the middle of the grass, on either side, was a large quince-tree, full of antiquity and contortions, and beneath one of the quince-trees were placed a small table and a couple of chairs. On the table lay a piece of unfinished embroidery and two or three books in bright-colored paper covers. I went in at the gate and paused halfway along the path, scanning the place for some farther token of its occupant, before whom— I could hardly have said why— I hesitated abruptly to present myself. Then I saw that the poor little house was very shabby. I felt a sudden doubt of my right to intrude; for curiosity had been my motive, and curiosity here seemed singularly indelicate. While I hesitated, a figure appeared in the open doorway and stood there looking at me. I immediately recognized Caroline Spencer, but she looked at me as if she had never seen me before. Gently, but gravely and timidly, I advanced to the door-step, and then I said, with an attempt at friendly badinage—

"I waited for you over there to come back, but you never came."

"Waited where, sir?" she asked softly, and her light-colored eyes expanded more than before.

She was much older; she looked tired and wasted.

"Well," I said, "I waited at Havre."

She stared; then she recognized me. She smiled and blushed and clasped her two hands together. "I remember you now," she said. "I remember that day." But she stood there, neither coming out nor asking me to come in. She was embarrassed.

I, too, felt a little awkward. I poked my stick into the path. "I kept looking out for you, year after year," I said.

"You mean in Europe?" murmured Miss Spencer.

"In Europe, of course! Here, apparently, you are easy enough to find."

She leaned her hand against the unpainted door-post, and her head fell a little to one side. She looked at me for a moment without speaking, and I thought I recognized the expression that one sees in women's eyes when tears are rising. Suddenly she stepped out upon the cracked slab of stone before the threshold and closed the door behind her. Then she began to smile intently, and I saw that her teeth were as pretty as ever. But there had been tears too.

"Have you been there ever since?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Until three weeks ago. And you— you never came back?"

Still looking at me with her fixed smile, she put her hand behind her and opened the door again. "I am not very polite," she said. "Won't you come in?"

"I am afraid I incommode you."

"Oh no!" she answered, smiling more than ever. And she pushed back the door, with a sign that I should enter.

I went in, following her. She led the way to a small room on the left of the narrow hall, which I supposed to be her parlour, though it was at the back of the house, and we passed the closed door of another apartment which apparently enjoyed a view of the quince-trees. This one looked out upon a small wood-shed and two clucking hens. But I thought it very pretty, until I saw that its elegance was of the most frugal kind; after which, presently, I thought it prettier still, for I had never seen faded chintz and old mezzotint engravings, framed in varnished autumn leaves, disposed in so graceful a fashion. Miss Spencer sat down on a very small portion of the sofa, with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. She looked ten years older, and it would have sounded very perverse now to speak of her as pretty. But I thought her so; or at least I thought her touching. She was peculiarly agitated. I tried to appear not to notice it; but suddenly, in the most inconsequent fashion— it was an irresistible memory of our little friendship at Havre— I said to her— "I do incommode you. You are distressed."

She raised her two hands to her face, and for a moment kept it buried in them. Then, taking them away— "It's because you remind me..." she said.

"I remind you, you mean, of that miserable day at Havre?"

She shook her head. "It was not miserable. It was delightful."

"I never was so shocked as when, on going back to your inn the next morning, I found you had set sail again."

She was silent a moment; and then she said—"Please let us not speak of that."

"Did you come straight back here?" I asked.

"I was back here just thirty days after I had gone away."

"And here you have remained ever since?"

"Oh yes!" she said, gently.

"When are you going to Europe again?"

This question seemed brutal; but there was something that irritated me in the softness of her resignation, and I wished to extort from her some expression of impatience.

She fixed her eyes for a moment upon a small sunspot on the carpet, then she got up and lowered the window blind a little, to obliterate it. Presently, in the same mild voice, answering my question, she said— "Never!"

"I hope your cousin repaid you your money."

"I don't care for it now," she said, looking away from me.

"You don't care for your money?"

"For going to Europe."

"Do you mean that you would not go if you could?"

"I can't— I can't," said Caroline Spencer. "It is all over; I never think of it."

"He never repaid you, then!" I exclaimed.

"Please— please," she began.

But she stopped; she was looking toward the door. There had been a rustling and a sound of steps in the hall.

I also looked toward the door, which was open, and now admitted another person— a lady who paused just within the threshold. Behind her came a young man. The lady looked at me with a good deal of fixedness— long enough for my glance to receive a vivid impression of herself. Then she turned to Caroline Spencer, and, with a smile and a strong foreign accent—

"Excuse my interruption!" she said. "I knew not you had company— the gentleman came in so quietly."

With this she directed her eyes toward me again.

She was very strange: yet my first feeling was that I had seen her before. Then I perceived that I had only seen ladies who were very much like her. But I had seen them very far away from Grimwinter, and it was an odd sensation to be seeing her here. Whither was it the sight of her seemed to transport me! To some dusky landing before a shabby Parisian *quatrième*— to an open door revealing a greasy ante-chamber, and to Madame leaning over the banisters while she holds a faded dressing-gown together and bawls down to the portress to bring up her coffee. Miss Spencer's visitor was a very large woman, of middle age with a plump dead-white face, and hair drawn back *à la chinoise*. She had a small penetrating eye, and what is called in French an agreeable smile. She wore an old pink cashmere dressing-gown covered with white embroideries, and, like the figure in my momentary vision, she was holding it together in front with a bare and rounded arm and a plump and deeply-dimpled hand.

"It is only to spick about my *café*," she said to Miss Spencer, with her agreeable smile. "I should like it served in the garden under the leetle tree."

The young man behind her had now stepped into the room, and he also stood looking at me. He was a pretty-faced little fellow, with an air of provincial foppishness— a tiny Adonis of Grimwinter. He had a small pointed nose, a small pointed chin, and, as I observed, the most diminutive feet. He looked at me foolishly, with his mouth open.

"You shall have your coffee," said Miss Spencer, who had a faint red spot in each of her cheeks.

"It is well!" said the lady in the dressing-gown. "Find your book," she added, turning to the young man.

He looked vaguely round the room. "My grammar, d'ye mean?" he asked, with a helpless intonation.

But the large lady was looking at me curiously, and gathering in her dressing-gown with her white arm.

"Find your book, my friend," she repeated.

"My poetry, d'ye mean?" said the young man, also gazing at me again.

"Never mind your book," said his companion. "Today we will talk. We will make some conversation. But we must not interrupt. Come," and she turned away. "Under the leetle tree," she added, for the benefit of Miss Spencer.

Then she gave me a sort of salutation, and a "Monsieur!"— With which she swept away again, followed by the young man.

Caroline Spencer stood there with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"The Countess, my cousin."

"And who is the young man?"

"Her pupil, Mr. Mixter."

This description of the relation between the two persons who had just left the room made me break into a little laugh. Miss Spencer looked at me gravely.

"She gives French lessons; she has lost her fortune."

"I see," I said. "She is determined to be a burden to no one. That is very proper."

Miss Spencer looked down on the ground again. "I must go and get the coffee," she said.

"Has the lady many pupils?" I asked.

"She has only Mr. Mixter. She gives all her time to him."

At this I could not laugh, though I smelt provocation. Miss Spencer was too grave. "He pays very well," she presently added, with simplicity. "He is very rich. He is very kind. He takes the Countess to drive." And she was turning away.

"You are going for the Countess's coffee?" I said.

"If you will excuse me a few moments."

"Is there no one else to do it?"

She looked at me with the softest serenity. "I keep no servants."

"Can she not wait upon herself?"

"She is not used to that."

"I see," said I, as gently as possible. "But before you go, tell me this: who is this lady?"

"I told you about her before— that day. She is the wife of my cousin, whom you saw."

"The lady who was disowned by her family in consequence of her marriage?"

"Yes; they have never seen her again. They have cast her off."

"And where is her husband?"

"He is dead."

"And where is your money?"

The poor girl flinched, there was something too methodical in my questions. "I don't know," she said wearily.

But I continued a moment. "On her husband's death this lady came over here?"

"Yes, she arrived one day."

"How long ago?"

"Two years."

"She has been here ever since?"

"Every moment."

"How does she like it?"

"Not at all."

"And how do *you* like it?"

Miss Spencer laid her face in her two hands an instant, as she had done ten minutes before. Then, quickly, she went to get the Countess's coffee.

I remained alone in the little parlour; I wanted to see more— to learn more. At the end of five minutes the young man whom Miss Spencer had described as the Countess's pupil came in. He stood looking at me for a moment with parted lips. I saw he was a very rudimentary young man.

"She wants to know if you won't come out there?" he observed at last.

"Who wants to know?"

"The Countess. That French lady."

"She has asked you to bring me?"

"Yes, sir," said the young man feebly, looking at my six feet of stature.

I went out with him and we found the Countess sitting under one of the little quince-trees in front of the house. She was drawing a needle through the piece of embroidery which she had taken from the small table. She pointed graciously to the chair beside her and I seated myself. Mr. Mixter glanced about him, and then sat down in the grass at her feet. He gazed upward, looking with parted lips from the Countess to me.

"I am sure you speak French," said the Countess, fixing her brilliant little eyes upon me.

"I do, madam, after a fashion," I answered in the lady's own tongue.

"*Voilà!*" she cried most expressively. "I knew it so soon as I looked at you. You have been in my poor dear country."

"A long time."

"You know Paris?"

"Thoroughly, madam." And with a certain conscious purpose I let my eyes meet her own.

She presently, hereupon, moved her own and glanced down at Mr. Mixter. "What are we talking about?" she demanded of her attentive pupil.

He pulled his knees up, plucked at the grass with his hand, stared, blushed a little. "You are talking French," said Mr. Mixter.

"*La belle découverte!*" said the Countess. "Here are ten months," she explained to me, "that I am giving him lessons. Don't put yourself out not to say he's a fool; he won't understand you."

"I hope your other pupils are more gratifying," I remarked.

"I have no others. They don't know what French is in this place; they don't want to know. You may therefore imagine the pleasure it is to me to meet a person who speaks it like yourself." I replied that my own pleasure was not less, and she went on drawing her stitches through her embroidery, with her little finger curled out. Every few moments she put her eyes close to her work, near-sightedly. I thought her a very disagreeable person; she was coarse, affected, dishonest, and no more a Countess than I was a caliph. "Talk to me of Paris," she went on. "The very name of it gives me an emotion! How long since you were there?"

"Two months ago."

"Happy man! Tell me something about it. What were they doing? Oh, for an hour of the boulevard!"

"They were doing about what they are always doing—amusing themselves a good deal."

"At the theaters, eh?" sighed the Countess. "At the *cafés-concerts*— at the little tables in front of the doors? *Quelle existence!* You know I am a Parisienne, Monsieur," she added, "— to my finger-tips."

"Miss Spencer was mistaken, then," I ventured to rejoin, "in telling me that you are a Provençale."

She stared a moment, then she put her nose to her embroidery, which had a dingy, desultory aspect. "Ah, I am a Provençale by birth; but I am a Parisienne by— inclination."

"And by experience, I suppose?" I said.

She questioned me a moment with her hard little eyes. "Oh, experience! I could talk of experience. If I wished. I never expected, for example, that experience had *this* in store for me." And she pointed with her bare elbow, and with a jerk of her head— at everything that surrounded her— at the little white house, the quince-tree, the rickety paling, even at Mr. Mixter.

"You are in exile!" I said, smiling.

"You may imagine what it is! These two years that I have been here I have passed hours— hours! One gets used to things, and sometimes I think I have got used to this. But there are some things that are always beginning over again. For example, my coffee."

"Do you always have coffee at this hour?" I inquired.

She tossed back her bead and measured me.

"At what hour would you prefer me to have it? I must have my little cup after breakfast."

"Ah, you breakfast at this hour?"

"At mid-dayHere they breakfast at a quarter past seven! That 'quarter past' is charming!"— *comme cela se fait*.

"But you were telling me about your coffee," I observed, sympathetically.

"My *cousine* can't believe in it; she can't understand it. She's an excellent girl; but that little cup of black coffee, with a drop of cognac, served at this hour— they exceed her comprehension. So I have to break the ice every day, and it takes the coffee the time you see to arrive. And when it arrives, Monsieur! If I don't offer you any of it you must not take it ill. It will be because I know you have drunk it on the boulevard."

I resented extremely this scornful treatment of poor Caroline Spencer's humble hospitality; but I said nothing, in order to say nothing uncivil. I only looked on Mr. Mixter, who had clasped his arms round his knees and was watching my companion's demonstrative graces in solemn fascination. She presently saw that I was observing him; she glanced at me with a little bold explanatory smile. "You know, he adores me," she murmured, putting her nose into her tapestry again. I expressed the promptest credence, and she went on. "He dreams of becoming my lover! Yes, it's his dream. He has read a French novel; it took him six months. But ever since that he has thought himself the hero, and me the heroine!"

Mr. Mixter had evidently not an idea that he was being talked about; he was too preoccupied with the ecstasy of contemplation. At this moment Caroline Spencer came out of the house, bearing a coffee-pot on a little tray. I noticed that on her way from the door to the table she gave me a single quick, vaguely-appealing glance. I wondered what it signified; I felt that it signified a sort of half-frightened longing to know what, as a man of the world who had been in France, I thought of the Countess. It made me extremely uncomfortable. I could not tell her that the Countess was very possibly the runaway wife of a little hair-dresser. I tried suddenly, on the contrary, to show a high consideration for her. But I got up; I couldn't stay longer. It vexed me to see Caroline Spencer standing there like a waiting-maid.

"You expect to remain some time at Grimwinter?" I said to the Countess.

She gave a terrible shrug.

"Who knows? Perhaps for years. When one is in misery!... *Chère belle*," she added, turning to Miss Spencer, "you have forgotten the cognac!"

I detained Caroline Spencer as, after looking a moment in silence at the little table, she was turning away to procure this missing delicacy. I silently gave her my hand in farewell. She looked very tired, but there was a strange hint of prospective patience in her severely mild little face. I thought she was rather glad I was going. Mr. Mixter had risen to his feet and was pouring out the Countess's coffee. As I went back past the Baptist church I reflected that poor Miss Spencer had been right in her presentiment that she should still see something of that dear old Europe.

18: The Blue Room

Lettice Galbraith

Lettice Susan Gibson, 1859-1932

Macmillan's Magazine Oct 1897

IT HAPPENED twice in my time. It will never happen again, they say, since Miss Erristoun (Mrs Arthur, that is now,) and Mr Calder-Maxwell between them found out the secret of the haunted room, and laid the ghost; for ghost it was, though at the time Mr Maxwell gave it another name, Latin, I fancy, but all I can remember about it now is that it somehow reminded me of poultry-rearing. I am the housekeeper at Mertoun Towers, as my aunt was before me, and her aunt before her, and first of all my great-grandmother, who was a distant cousin of the Laird, and had married the chaplain, but being left penniless at her husband's death, was thankful to accept the post which has ever since been occupied by one of her descendants. It gives us a sort of standing with the servants, being, as it were, related to the family; and Sir Archibald and my Lady have always acknowledged the connection, and treated us with more freedom than would be accorded to ordinary dependants.

Mertoun has been my home from the time I was eighteen. Something occurred then of which, since it has nothing to do with this story, I need only say that it wiped out for ever any idea of marriage on my part, and I came to the Towers to be trained under my aunt's vigilant eye for the duties in which I was one day to succeed her.

Of course I knew there was a story about the blue tapestry room. Everyone knew that, though the old Laird had given strict orders that the subject should not be discussed among the servants, and always discouraged any allusion to it on the part of his family and guests. But there is a strange fascination about everything connected with the supernatural, and orders or no orders, people, whether gentle or simple, will try to gratify their curiosity; so a good deal of surreptitious talk went on both in the drawing-room and the servants' hall, and hardly a guest came to the house but would pay a visit to the Blue Room and ask all manner of questions about the ghost. The odd part of the business was that no one knew what the ghost was supposed to be, or even if there were any ghost at all. I tried hard to get my aunt to tell me some details of the legend, but she always reminded me of Sir Archibald's orders, and added that the tale most likely started with the superstitious fancy of people who lived long ago and were very ignorant, because a certain Lady Barbara Mertoun had died in that room.

I reminded her that people must have died, at some time or other, in pretty nearly every room in the house, and no one had thought of calling them haunted, or hinting that it was unsafe to sleep there.

She answered that Sir Archibald himself had used the Blue Room, and one or two other gentlemen, who had passed the night there for a wager, and they had neither seen nor heard anything unusual. For her part, she added, she did not hold with people wasting their time thinking of such folly, when they had much better be giving their minds to their proper business.

Somehow her professions of incredulity did not ring true, and I wasn't satisfied, though I gave up asking questions. But if I said nothing, I thought the more, and often when my duties took me to the Blue Room I would wonder why, if nothing had happened there, and there was no real mystery, the room was never used; it had not even a mattress on the fine carved bedstead, which was only covered by a sheet to keep it from the dust. And then I would steal into the portrait gallery to look at the great picture of the Lady Barbara, who had died in the full bloom of her youth, no one knew why, for she was just found one morning stiff and cold, stretched across that fine bed under the blue tapestried canopy.

She must have been a beautiful woman, with her great black eyes and splendid auburn hair, though I doubt her beauty was all on the outside, for she had belonged to the gayest set of the Court, which was none too respectable in those days, if half the tales one hears of it are true; and indeed a modest lady would hardly have been painted in such a dress, all slipping off her shoulders, and so thin that one can see right through the stuff. There must have been something queer about her too, for they do say her father-in-law, who was known as the wicked Lord Mertoun, would not have her buried with the rest of the family; but that might have been his spite, because he was angry that she had no child, and her husband, who was but a sickly sort of man, dying of consumption but a month later, there was no direct heir; so that with the old Lord the title became extinct, and the estates passed to the Protestant branch of the family, of which the present Sir Archibald Mertoun is the head. Be that as it may, Lady Barbara lies by herself in the churchyard, near the lych-gate, under a grand marble tomb indeed, but all alone, while her husband's coffin has its place beside those of his brothers who died before him, among their ancestors and descendants in the great vault under the chancel.

I often used to think about her, and wonder why she died, and how; and then It happened and the mystery grew deeper than ever.

There was a family gathering that Christmas, I remember, the first Christmas for many years that had been kept at Mertoun, and we had been very busy arranging the rooms for the different guests, for on New Year's Eve there was a ball in the neighbourhood, to which Lady Mertoun was taking a large party, and for that night, at least, the house was as full as it would hold.

I was in the linen-room, helping to sort the sheets and pillow-covers for the different beds, when my Lady came in with an open letter in her hand.

She began to talk to my aunt in a low voice, explaining something which seemed to have put her out, for when I returned from carrying a pile of linen to the head-housemaid, I heard her say: 'It is too annoying to upset all one's arrangements at the last moment. Why couldn't she have left the girl at home and brought another maid, who could be squeezed in somewhere without any trouble?'

I gathered that one of the visitors, Lady Grayburn, had written that she was bringing her companion, and as she had left her maid, who was ill, at home, she wanted the young lady to have a bedroom adjoining hers, so that she might be at hand to give any help that was required. The request seemed a trifling matter enough in itself, but it just so happened that there really was no room at liberty. Every bedroom on the first corridor was occupied, with the exception of the Blue Room, which, as ill-luck would have it, chanced to be next to that arranged for Lady Grayburn.

My aunt made several suggestions, but none of them seemed quite practicable, and at last my Lady broke out: 'Well, it cannot be helped; you must put Miss Wood in the Blue Room. It is only for one night, and she won't know anything about that silly story.'

'Oh, my Lady!' my aunt cried, and I knew by her tone that she had not spoken the truth when she professed to think so lightly of the ghost.

'I can't help it,' her Ladyship answered: 'beside I don't believe there is anything really wrong with the room. Sir Archibald has slept there, and he found no cause for complaint.'

'But a woman, a young woman,' my aunt urged; 'indeed I wouldn't run such a risk, my Lady; let me put one of the gentlemen in there, and Miss Wood can have the first room in the west corridor.'

'And what use would she be to Lady Grayburn out there?' said her Ladyship. 'Don't be foolish, my good Marris. Unlock the door between the two rooms; Miss Wood can leave it open if she feels nervous; but I shall not say a word about that foolish superstition, and I shall be very much annoyed if anyone else does so.'

She spoke as if that settled the question, but my aunt wasn't easy. 'The Laird,' she murmured; 'what will he say to a lady being put to sleep there?'

'Sir Archibald does not interfere in household arrangements. Have the Blue Room made ready for Miss Wood at once. I will take the responsibility— if there is any.'

On that her Ladyship went away, and there was nothing for it but to carry out her orders. The Blue Room was prepared, a great fire lighted, and when I

went round last thing to see all was in order for the visitor's arrival, I couldn't but think how handsome and comfortable it looked. There were candles burning brightly on the toilet-table and chimney-piece, and a fine blaze of logs on the wide hearth. I saw nothing had been overlooked, and was closing the door when my eyes fell on the bed. It was crumpled just as if someone had thrown themselves across it, and I was vexed that the housemaids should have been so careless, especially with the smart new quilt. I went round, and patted up the feathers, and smoothed the counterpane, just as the carriages drove under the window.

By and by Lady Grayburn and Miss Wood came upstairs, and knowing they had brought no maid, I went to assist in the unpacking. I was a long time in her Ladyship's room, and when I'd settled her I tapped at the next door and offered to help Miss Wood. Lady Grayburn followed me almost immediately to inquire the whereabouts of some keys. She spoke very sharply, I thought, to her companion, who seemed a timid, delicate slip of a girl, with nothing noticeable about her except her hair, which was lovely, pale golden, and heaped in thick coils all round her small head.

'You will certainly be late,' Lady Grayburn said. 'What an age you have been, and you have not half finished unpacking yet.' The young lady murmured something about there being so little time. 'You have had time to sprawl on the bed instead of getting ready,' was the retort, and as Miss Wood meekly denied the imputation, I looked over my shoulder at the bed, and saw there the same strange indentation I had noticed before. It made my heart beat faster, for without any reason at all I felt certain that crease must have something to do with Lady Barbara.

Miss Wood didn't go to the ball. She had supper in the schoolroom with the young ladies' governess, and as I heard from one of the maids that she was to sit up for Lady Grayburn, I took her some wine and sandwiches about twelve o'clock. She stayed in the schoolroom, with a book, till the first party came home soon after two. I'd been round the rooms with the housemaid to see the fires were kept up, and I wasn't surprised to find that queer crease back on the bed again; indeed, I sort of expected it. I said nothing to the maid, who didn't seem to have noticed anything out of the way, but I told my aunt, and though she answered sharply that I was talking nonsense, she turned quite pale, and I heard her mutter something under breath that sounded like 'God help her!'

I slept badly that night, for, do what I would, the thought of that poor young lady alone in the Blue Room kept me awake and restless. I was nervous, I suppose, and once, just as I was dropping off, I started up, fancying I'd heard a scream. I opened my door and listened, but there wasn't a sound, and after waiting a bit I crept back to bed, and lay there shivering till I fell asleep.

The household wasn't astir as early as usual. Everyone was tired after the late night, and tea wasn't to be sent to the ladies till half-past nine. My aunt said nothing about the ghost, but I noticed she was fidgety, and asked almost first thing if anyone had been to Miss Wood's room. I was telling her that Martha, one of the housemaids, had just taken up the tray, when the girl came running in with a scared, white face. 'For pity's sake, Mrs Marris,' she cried, 'come to the Blue Room; something awful has happened!'

My aunt stopped to ask no questions. She ran straight upstairs, and as I followed I heard her muttering to herself, 'I knew it, I knew it. Oh Lord! what will my Lady feel like now?'

If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that poor girl's face. It was just as if she'd been frozen with terror. Her eyes were wide open and fixed, and her little hands clenched in the coverlet on each side of her as she lay across the bed in the very place where that crease had been.

Of course the whole house was aroused. Sir Archibald sent one of the grooms post-haste for the doctor, but he could do nothing when he came; Miss Wood had been dead for at least five hours.

It was a sad business. All the visitors went away as soon as possible, except Lady Grayburn, who was obliged to stay for the inquest.

In his evidence, the doctor stated death was due to failure of heart's action, occasioned possibly by some sudden shock; and though the jury did not say so in their verdict, it was an open secret that they blamed her Ladyship for permitting Miss Wood to sleep in the haunted room. No one could have reproached her more bitterly than she did herself, poor lady; and if she had done wrong she certainly suffered for it, for she never recovered from the shock of that dreadful morning, and became more or less of an invalid till her deathfive years later.

ALL THIS happened in 184—. It was fifty years before another woman slept in the Blue Room, and fifty years had brought with them many changes. The old Laird was gathered to his fathers, and his son, the present Sir Archibald, reigned in his stead; his sons were grown men, and Mr Charles, the eldest, married, with a fine little boy of his own. My aunt had been dead many a year, and I was an old woman, though active and able as ever to keep the maids up to their work. They take more looking after now, I think, than in the old days before there was so much talk of education, and when young women who took service thought less of dress and more of dusting. Not but what education is a fine thing in its proper place, that is, for gentlefolk. If Miss Erristoun, now, hadn't been the clever, strong-minded young lady she is, she'd never have

cleared the Blue Room of its terrible secret, and lived to make Mr Arthur the happiest man alive.

He'd taken a great deal of notice of her when she first came in the summer to visit Mrs Charles, and I wasn't surprised to find she was one of the guests for the opening of the shooting-season. It wasn't a regular house-party (for Sir Archibald and Lady Mertoun were away), but just half-a-dozen young ladies, friends of Mrs Charles, who was but a girl herself, and as many gentlemen that Mr Charles and Mr Arthur had invited. And very gay they were, what with lunches at the covert-side, and tennis-parties, and little dances got up at a few hours' notice, and sometimes of an evening they'd play hide-and-seek all over the house just as if they'd been so many children.

It surprised me at first to see Miss Erristoun, who was said to be so learned, and had held her own with all the gentlemen at Cambridge, playing with the rest like any ordinary young lady; but she seemed to enjoy the fun as much as anyone, and was always first in any amusement that was planned. I didn't wonder at Mr Arthur's fancying her, for she was a handsome girl, tall and finely made, and carried herself like a princess. She had a wonderful head of hair, too, so long, her maid told me, it touched the ground as she sat on a chair to have it brushed. Everybody seemed to take to her, but I soon noticed it was Mr Arthur or Mr Calder-Maxwell she liked best to be with.

Mr Maxwell is a Professor now, and a great man at Oxford; but then he was just an undergraduate the same as Mr Arthur, though more studious, for he'd spend hours in the library poring over those old books full of queer black characters, that they say the wicked Lord Mertoun collected in the time of King Charles the Second. Now and then Miss Erristoun would stay indoors to help him, and it was something they found out in their studies that gave them the clue to the secret of the Blue Room.

For a long time after Miss Wood's death all mention of the ghost was strictly forbidden. Neither the Laird nor her Ladyship could bear the slightest allusion to the subject, and the Blue Room was kept locked, except when it had to be cleaned and aired. But as the years went by the edge of the tragedy wore off, and by degrees it grew to be just a story that people talked about in much the same way as they had done when I first came to the Towers; and if many believed in the mystery and speculated as to what the ghost could be, there were others who didn't hesitate to declare Miss Wood's dying in that room was a mere coincidence, and had nothing to do with supernatural agency. Miss Erristoun was one of those who held most strongly to this theory. She didn't believe a bit in ghosts, and said straight out that there wasn't any of the tales told of haunted houses which could not be traced to natural causes, if people had courage and science enough to investigate them thoroughly.

It had been very wet all that day, and the gentlemen had stayed indoors, and nothing would serve Mrs Charles but they should all have an old-fashioned tea in my room and 'talk ghosts', as she called it. They made me tell them all I knew about the Blue Room, and it was then, when everyone was discussing the story and speculating as to what the ghost could be, that Miss Erristoun spoke up. 'The poor girl had heart-complaint,' she finished by saying, 'and she would have died the same way in any other room.'

'But what about the other people who have slept there?' someone objected.

'They did not die. Old Sir Archibald came to no harm, neither did Mr Hawksworth, nor the other man. They were healthy, and had plenty of pluck, so they saw nothing.'

'They were not women,' put in Mrs Charles; 'you see the ghost only appears to the weaker sex.'

'That proves the story to be a mere legend,' Miss Erristoun said with decision. 'First it was reported that everyone who slept in the room died. Then one or two men did sleep there, and remained alive; so the tale had to be modified, and since one woman could be proved to have died suddenly there, the fatality was represented as attaching to women only. If a girl with a sound constitution and good nerve were once to spend the night in that room, your charming family-spectre would be discredited forever.'

There was a perfect chorus of dissent. None of the ladies could agree, and most of the gentlemen doubted whether any woman's nerve would stand the ordeal. The more they argued the more Miss Erristoun persisted in her view, till at last Mrs Charles got vexed, and cried: 'Well, it is one thing to talk about it, and another to do it. Confess now, Edith, you daren't sleep in that room yourself.'

'I dare and I will,' she answered directly. 'I don't believe in ghosts, and I am ready to stand the test. I will sleep in the Blue Room to-night, if you like, and tomorrow morning you will have to confess that whatever there may be against the haunted chamber, it is not a ghost.'

I think Mrs Charles was sorry she'd spoken then, for they all took Miss Erristoun up, and the gentlemen were for laying wagers as to whether she'd see anything or not. When it was too late she tried to laugh aside her challenge as absurd, but Miss Erristoun wouldn't be put off. She said she meant to see the thing through, and if she wasn't allowed to have a bed made up, she'd carry in her blankets and pillows, and camp out on the floor.

The others were all laughing and disputing together, but I saw Mr Maxwell look at her very curiously. Then he drew Mr Arthur aside, and began to talk in

an undertone. I couldn't hear what he said, but Mr Arthur answered quite short:

'It's the maddest thing I ever heard of, and I won't allow it for a moment.'

'She will not ask your permission perhaps,' Mr Maxwell retorted. Then he turned to Mrs Charles, and inquired how long it was since the Blue Room had been used, and if it was kept aired. I could speak to that, and when he'd heard that there was no bedding there, but that fires were kept up regularly, he said he meant to have the first refusal of the ghost, and if he saw nothing it would be time enough for Miss Erristoun to take her turn.

Mr Maxwell had a kind of knack of settling things, and somehow with his quiet manner always seemed to get his own way. Just before dinner he came to me with Mrs Charles, and said it was all right, I was to get the room made ready quietly, not for all the servants to know, and he was going to sleep there.

I heard next morning that he came down to breakfast as usual. He'd had an excellent night, he said, and never slept better.

It was wet again that morning, raining 'cats and dogs', but Mr Arthur went out in it all. He'd almost quarrelled with Miss Erristoun, and was furious with Mr Maxwell for encouraging her in her idea of testing the ghost-theory, as they called it. Those two were together in the library most of the day, and Mrs Charles was chaffing Miss Erristoun as they went upstairs to dress, and asking her if she found the demons interesting. Yes, she said, but there was a page missing in the most exciting part of the book. They could not make head or tail of the context for some time, and then Mr Maxwell discovered that a leaf had been cut out. They talked of nothing else all through dinner, the butler told me, and Miss Erristoun seemed so taken up with her studies, I hoped she'd forgotten about the haunted room. But she wasn't one of the sort to forget. Later in the evening I came across her standing with Mr Arthur in the corridor. He was talking very earnestly, and I saw her shrug her shoulders and just look up at him and smile, in a sort of way that meant she wasn't going to give in. I was slipping quietly by, for I didn't want to disturb them, when Mr Maxwell came out of the billiard-room. 'It's our game,' he said; 'won't you come and play the tie?'

'I'm quite ready,' Miss Erristoun answered, and was turning away, when Mr Arthur laid his hand on her arm. 'Promise me first,' he urged, 'promise me that much, at least.'

'How tiresome you are!' she said quite pettishly. 'Very well then, I promise; and now please, don't worry me anymore.'

Mr Arthur watched her go back to the billiard-room with his friend, and he gave a sort of groan. Then he caught sight of me and came along the passage. 'She won't give it up,' he said, and his face was quite white. 'I've done all I can;

I'd have telegraphed to my father, but I don't know where they'll stay in Paris, and anyway there'd be no time to get an answer. Mrs Marris, she's going to sleep in that d— room, and if anything happens to her— I— ' he broke off short, and threw himself on to the window-seat, hiding his face on his folded arms.

I could have cried for sympathy with his trouble. Mr Arthur has always been a favourite of mine, and I felt downright angry with Miss Erristoun for making him so miserable just out of a bit of bravado.

'I think they are all mad,' he went on presently. 'Charley ought to have stopped the whole thing at once, but Kate and the others have talked him round. He professes to believe there's no danger, and Maxwell has got his head full of some rubbish he has found in those beastly books on Demonology, and he's backing her up. She won't listen to a word I say. She told me point-blank she'd never speak to me again if I interfered. She doesn't care a hang for me; I know that now, but I can't help it; I— I'd give my life for her.'

I did my best to comfort him, saying Miss Erristoun wouldn't come to any harm; but it wasn't a bit of use, for I didn't believe in my own assurances. I felt nothing but ill could come of such tempting of Providence, and I seemed to see that other poor girl's terrible face as it had looked when we found her dead in that wicked room. However, it is a true saying that 'a wilful woman will have her way', and we could do nothing to prevent Miss Erristoun's risking her life; but I made up my mind, to one thing, whatever other people might do, I wasn't going to bed that night.

I'd been getting the winter-hangings into order, and the upholstress had used the little boudoir at the end of the long corridor for her work. I made up the fire, brought in a fresh lamp, and when the house was quiet, I crept down and settled myself there to watch. It wasn't ten yards from the door of the Blue Room, and over the thick carpet I could pass without making a sound, and listen at the keyhole. Miss Erristoun had promised Mr Arthur she would not lock her door; it was the one concession he'd been able to obtain from her. The ladies went to their rooms about eleven, but Miss Erristoun stayed talking to Mrs Charles for nearly an hour while her maid was brushing her hair. I saw her go to the Blue Room, and by and by Louise left her, and all was quiet. It must have been half-past one before I thought I heard something moving outside. I opened the door and looked out, and there was Mr Arthur standing in the passage. He gave a start when he saw me. 'You are sitting up,' he said, coming into the room; 'then you do believe there is evil work on hand to-night? The others have gone to bed, but I can't rest; it's no use my trying to sleep. I meant to stay in the smoking-room, but it is so far away; I couldn't hear

there even if she called for help. I've listened at the door; there isn't a sound. Can't you go in and see if it's all right? Oh, Marris, if she should—'

I knew what he meant, but I wasn't going to admit that possible— yet. 'I can't go into a lady's room without any reason,' I said; 'but I've been to the door every few minutes for the last hour and more. It wasn't till half-past twelve that Miss Erristoun stopped moving about, and I don't believe, Mr Arthur, that God will let harm come to her, without giving those that care for her some warning. I mean to keep on listening, and if there's the least hint of anything wrong, why I'll go to her at once, and you are at hand here to help.'

I talked to him a bit more till he seemed more reasonable, and then we sat there waiting, hardly speaking a word except when, from time to time, I went outside to listen. The house was deathly quiet; there was something terrible, I thought, in the stillness; not a sign of life anywhere save just in the little boudoir, where Mr Arthur paced up and down, or sat with a strained look on his face, watching the door.

As three o'clock struck, I went out again. There is a window in the corridor, angle for angle with the boudoir-door. As I passed, someone stepped from behind the curtains and a voice whispered: 'Don't be frightened Mrs Marris; it is only me, Calder-Maxwell. Mr Arthur is there, isn't he?' He pushed open the boudoir door. 'May I come in?' he said softly. 'I guessed you'd be about, Mertoun. I'm not at all afraid myself, but if there is anything in that little legend, it is as well for some of us to be on hand. It was a good idea of yours to get Mrs Marris to keep watch with you.'

Mr Arthur looked at him as black as thunder. 'If you didn't know there was something in it,' he said, 'you wouldn't be here now; and knowing that, you're nothing less than a blackguard for egging that girl on to risk her life, for the sake of trying to prove your insane theories. You are no friend of mine after this, and I'll never willingly see you or speak to you again.'

I was fairly frightened at his words, and for how Mr Maxwell might take them; but he just smiled, and lighted a cigarette, quite cool and quiet.

'I'm not going to quarrel with you, old chap,' he said. 'You're a bit on the strain to-night, and when a man has nerves he mustn't be held responsible for all his words.' Then he turned to me. 'You're a sensible woman, Mrs Marris, and a brave one too, I fancy. If I stay here with Mr Arthur, will you keep close outside Miss Erristoun's door? She may talk in her sleep quietly; that's of no consequence; but if she should cry out, go in at once, at once, you understand; we shall hear you, and follow immediately.'

At that Mr Arthur was on his feet. 'You know more than you pretend,' he cried. 'You slept in that room last night. By Heaven, if you've played any trick on her I'll—'

Mr Maxwell held the door open. 'Will you go, please, Mrs Marris?' he said in his quiet way. 'Mertoun, don't be a d— fool.'

I went as he told me, and I give you my word I was all ears, for I felt certain Mr Maxwell knew more than we did, and that he expected something to happen.

It seemed like hours, though I know now it could not have been more than a quarter of that time, before I could be positive someone was moving behind that closed door.

At first I thought it was only my own heart, which was beating against my ribs like a hammer; but soon I could distinguish footsteps, and a sort of murmur like someone speaking continuously, but very low. Then a voice (it was Miss Erristoun's this time) said, 'No, it is impossible; I am dreaming, I must be dreaming.' There was a kind of rustling as though she were moving quickly across the floor. I had my fingers on the handle, but I seemed as if I'd lost power to stir; I could only wait for what might come next.

Suddenly she began to say something out loud. I could not make out the words, which didn't sound like English, but almost directly she stopped short. 'I can't remember any more,' she cried in a troubled tone. 'What shall I do? I can't—' There was a pause. Then— 'No, no!' she shrieked. 'Oh, Arthur, Arthur!'

At that my strength came back to me, and I flung open the door.

There was a night-lamp burning on the table, and the room was quite light. Miss Erristoun was standing by the bed; she seemed to have backed up against it; her hands were down at her sides, her fingers clutching at the quilt. Her face was white as a sheet, and her eyes staring wide with terror, as well they might— I know I never had such a shock in my life, for if it was my last word, I swear there was a man standing close in front of her. He turned and looked at me as I opened the door, and I saw his face as plain as I did hers. He was young and very handsome, and his eyes shone like an animal's when you see them in the dark.

'Arthur!' Miss Erristoun gasped again, and I saw she was fainting. I sprang forward, and caught her by the shoulders just as she was falling back on to the bed.

It was all over in a second. Mr Arthur had her in his arms, and when I looked up there were only us four in the room, for Mr Maxwell had followed on Mr Arthur's heels, and was kneeling beside me with his fingers on Miss Erristoun's pulse.

'It's only a faint,' he said, 'she'll come round directly. Better take her out of this at once; here's a dressing-gown.' He threw the wrapper round her, and would have helped to raise her, but Mr Arthur needed no assistance. He lifted Miss Erristoun as if she'd been a baby, and carried her straight to the boudoir.

He laid her on the couch and knelt beside her, chafing her hands. 'Get the brandy out of the smoking room, Maxwell,' he said. 'Mrs Marris, have you any salts handy?'

I always carry a bottle in my pocket, so I gave it to him, before I ran after Mr Maxwell, who had lighted a candle, and was going for the brandy. 'Shall I wake Mr Charles and the servants?' I cried. 'He'll be hiding somewhere, but he hasn't had time to get out of the house yet.'

He looked as if he thought I was crazed. 'He— who?' he asked.

'The man,' I said; 'there was a man in Miss Erristoun's room. I'll call up Soames and Robert.'

'You'll do nothing of the sort,' he said sharply. 'There was no man in that room.'

'There was,' I retorted, 'for I saw him; and a great powerful man too. Someone ought to go for the police before he has time to get off.'

Mr Maxwell was always an odd sort of gentleman, but I didn't know what to make of the way he behaved then. He just leaned against the wall, and laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

'It is no laughing matter that I can see,' I told him quite short, for I was angry at his treating the matter so lightly; 'and I consider it no more than my duty to let Mr Charles know that there's a burglar on the premises.'

He grew grave at once then. 'I beg your pardon, Mrs Marris,' he said seriously; 'but I couldn't help smiling at the idea of the police. The vicar would be more to the point, all things considered. You really must not think of rousing the household; it might do Miss Erristoun a great injury, and could in no case be of the slightest use. Don't you understand? It was not a man at all you saw, it was an— well, it was what haunts the Blue Room.'

Then he ran downstairs leaving me fairly dazed, for I'd made so sure what I'd seen was a real man, that I'd clean forgotten all about the ghost.

Miss Erristoun wasn't long regaining consciousness. She swallowed the brandy we gave her like a lamb, and sat up bravely, though she started at every sound, and kept her hand in Mr Arthur's like a frightened child. It was strange, seeing how independent and stand-off she'd been with him before, but she seemed all the sweeter for the change. It was as if they'd come to an understanding without any words; and, indeed, he must have known she had cared for him all along, when she called out his name in her terror.

As soon as she'd recovered herself a little, Mr Maxwell began asking questions. Mr Arthur would have stopped him, but he insisted that it was of the greatest importance to hear everything while the impression was fresh; and when she had got over the first effort, Miss Erristoun seemed to find relief

in telling her experience. She sat there with one hand in Mr Arthur's while she spoke, and Mr Maxwell wrote down what she said in his pocket-book.

She told us she went to bed quite easy, for she wasn't the least nervous, and being tired she soon dropped off to sleep. Then she had a sort of dream, I suppose, for she thought she was in the same room, only differently furnished, all but the bed. She described exactly how everything was arranged. She had the strangest feeling too, that she was not herself but someone else, and that she was going to do something— something that must be done, though she was frightened to death all the time, and kept stopping to listen at the inner door, expecting someone would hear her moving about and call out for her to go to them. That in itself was queer, for there was nobody sleeping in the adjoining room. In her dream, she went on to say, she saw a curious little silver brazier, one that stands in a cabinet in the picture-gallery (a fine example of *cinque cento* work, I think I've heard my Lady call it), and this she remembered holding in her hands a long time, before she set it on a little table beside the bed. Now the bed in the Blue Room is very handsome, richly carved on the cornice and frame, and especially on the posts, which are a foot square at the base and covered with relief-work in a design of fruit and flowers. Miss Erristoun said she went to the left-hand post at the foot, and after passing her hand over the carving, she seemed to touch a spring in one of the centre flowers, and the panel fell outwards like a lid, disclosing a secret cupboard out of which she took some papers and a box. She seemed to know what to do with the papers, though she couldn't tell us what was written on them; and she had a distinct recollection of taking a pastille from the box, and lighting it in the silver brazier. The smoke curled up and seemed to fill the whole room with a heavy perfume, and the next thing she remembered was that she awoke to find herself standing in the middle of the floor, and— what I had seen when I opened the door was there.

She turned quite white when she came to that part of the story, and shuddered. 'I couldn't believe it,' she said; 'I tried to think I was still dreaming, but I wasn't, I wasn't. It was real, and it was there, and— oh, it was horrible!'

She hid her face against Mr Arthur's shoulder. Mr Maxwell sat, pencil in hand, staring at her. 'I was right then,' he said. 'I felt sure I was; but it seemed incredible.'

'It is incredible,' said Miss Erristoun; 'but it is true, frightfully true. When I realised that I was awake, that it was actually real, I tried to remember the charge, you know, out of the office of exorcism, but I couldn't get through it. The words went out of my head; I felt my will-power failing; I was paralysed, as though I could make no effort to help myself and then— then I— ' she looked

at Mr Arthur and blushed all over her face and neck. 'I thought of you, and I called— I had a feeling that you would save me.'

Mr Arthur made no more ado about us than if we'd been a couple of dummies. He just put his arms round her and kissed her, while Mr Maxwell and I looked the other way.

After a bit, Mr Maxwell said: 'One more question, please; what was it like?'

She answered after thinking for a minute. 'It was like a man, tall and very handsome. I have an impression that its eyes were blue and very bright.' Mr Maxwell looked at me inquiringly, and I nodded. 'And dressed?' he asked. She began to laugh almost hysterically. 'It sounds too insane for words, but I think— I am almost positive it wore ordinary evening dress.'

'It is impossible,' Mr Arthur cried. 'You were dreaming the whole time, that proves it.'

'It doesn't,' Mr Maxwell contradicted. 'They usually appeared in the costume of the day. You'll find that stated particularly both by Scott and Glanvil; Sprenger gives an instance too. Besides, Mrs Marris thought it was a burglar, which argues that the— the manifestation was objective, and presented no striking peculiarity in the way of clothing.'

'What?' Miss Erristoun exclaimed. 'You saw it too?' I told her exactly what I had seen. My description tallied with hers in everything, but the white shirt and tie, which from my position at the door I naturally should not be able to see.

Mr Maxwell snapped the elastic round his note-book. For a long time he sat silently staring at the fire. 'It is almost past belief,' he said at last, speaking half to himself, 'that such a thing could happen at the end of the nineteenth century, in these scientific rationalistic times that we think such a lot about, we, who look down from our superior intellectual height on the benighted superstitions of the Middle Ages.' He gave an odd little laugh. 'I'd like to get to the bottom of this business. I have a theory, and in the interest of psychical research and common humanity, I'd like to work it out. Miss Erristoun, you ought, I know, to have rest and quiet, and it is almost morning; but will you grant me one request. Before you are overwhelmed with questions, before you are made to relate your experience till the impression of to-night's adventure loses edge and clearness, will you go with Mertoun and myself to the Blue Room, and try to find the secret panel?'

'She shall never set foot inside that door again,' Mr Arthur began hotly, but Miss Erristoun laid a restraining hand on his arm.

'Wait a moment, dear,' she said gently; 'let us hear Mr Maxwell's reasons. Do you think,' she went on, 'that my dream had a foundation in fact; that

something connected with that dreadful thing is really concealed about the room?'

'I think,' he answered, 'that you hold the clue to the mystery, and I believe, could you repeat the action of your dream, and open the secret panel, you might remove forever the legacy of one woman's reckless folly. Only if it is to be done at all, it must be soon, before the impression has had time to fade.'

'It shall be done now,' she answered; 'I am quite myself again. Feel my pulse; my nerves are perfectly steady.'

Mr Arthur broke out into angry protestations. She had gone through more than enough for one night, he said, and he wouldn't have her health sacrificed to Maxwell's whims.

I have always thought Miss Erristoun handsome, but never, not even on her wedding-day, did she look so beautiful as then when she stood up in her heavy white wrapper, with all her splendid hair loose on her shoulders.

'Listen,' she said; 'if God gives us a plain work to do, we must do it at any cost. Last night I didn't believe in anything I could not understand. I was so full of pride in my own courage and common sense, that I wasn't afraid to sleep in that room and prove the ghost was all superstitious nonsense. I have learned there are forces of which I know nothing, and against which my strength was utter weakness. God took care of me, and sent help in time; and if He has opened a way by which I may save other women from the danger I escaped, I should be worse than ungrateful were I to shirk the task. Bring the lamp, Mr Maxwell, and let us do what we can.' Then she put both hands on Mr Arthur's shoulders. 'Why are you troubled?' she said sweetly. 'You will be with me, and how can I be afraid?'

It never strikes me as strange now that burglaries and things can go on in a big house at night, and not a soul one whit the wiser. There were five people sleeping in the rooms on that corridor while we tramped up and down without disturbing one of them. Not but what we went as quietly as we could, for Mr Maxwell made it clear that the less was known about the actual facts, the better. He went first, carrying the lamp, and we followed. Miss Erristoun shivered as her eyes fell on the bed, across which that dreadful crease showed plain, and I knew she was thinking of what might have been, had help not been at hand.

Just for a minute she faltered, then she went bravely on, and began feeling over the carved woodwork for the spring of the secret panel. Mr Maxwell held the lamp close, but there was nothing to show any difference between that bit of carving and the other three posts. For full ten minutes she tried, and so did the gentlemen, and it seemed as though the dream would turn out a delusion after all, when all at once Miss Erristoun cried, 'I have found it,' and with a little

jerk, the square of wood fell forward, and there was the cupboard just as she had described it to us.

It was Mr Maxwell who took out the things, for Mr Arthur wouldn't let Miss Erristoun touch them. There were a roll of papers and a little silver box. At the sight of the box she gave a sort of cry; 'That is it,' she said, and covered her face with her hands.

Mr Maxwell lifted the lid, and emptied out two or three pastilles. Then he unfolded the papers, and before he had fairly glanced at the sheet of parchment covered with queer black characters, he cried, 'I knew it, I knew it! It is the missing leaf.' He seemed quite wild with excitement. 'Come along,' he said. 'Bring the light, Mertoun; I always said it was no ghost, and now the whole thing is as clear as daylight. You see,' he went on, as we gathered round the table in the boudoir, 'so much depended on there being an heir. That was the chief cause of the endless quarrels between old Lord Mertoun and Barbara. He had never approved of the marriage, and was forever reproaching the poor woman with having failed in the first duty of an only son's wife. His will shows that he did not leave her a farthing in event of her husband dying without issue. Then the feud with the Protestant branch of the family was very bitter, and the Sir Archibald of that day had three boys, he having married (about the same time as his cousin) Lady Mary Sarum, who had been Barbara's rival at Court and whom Barbara very naturally hated. So when the doctors pronounced Dennis Mertoun to be dying of consumption, his wife got desperate, and had recourse to black magic. It is well known that the old man's collection of works on Demonology was the most complete in Europe. Lady Barbara must have had access to the books, and it was she who cut out this leaf. Probably Lord Mertoun discovered the theft and drew his own conclusions. That would account for his refusal to admit her body to the family vault. The Mertouns were staunch Romanists, and it is one of the deadly sins, you know, meddling with sorcery. Well, Barbara contrived to procure the pastilles, and she worked out the spell according to the directions given here, and then— Good God! Mertoun, what have you done?'

For before anyone could interfere to check him, Mr Arthur had swept papers, box, pastilles, and all off the table and flung them into the fire. The thick parchment curled and shrivelled on the hot coals, and a queer, faint smell like incense spread heavily through the room. Mr Arthur stepped to the window and threw the casement wide open. Day was breaking, and a sweet fresh wind swept in from the east which was all rosy with the glow of the rising sun.

'It is a nasty story,' he said; 'and if there be any truth in it, for the credit of the family and the name of a dead woman, let it rest for ever. We will keep our

own counsel about to-night's work. It is enough for others to know that the spell of the Blue Room is broken, since a brave, pure-minded girl has dared to face its unknown mystery and has laid the ghost.'

Mr Calder-Maxwell considered a moment. 'I believe you are right,' he said, presently, with an air of resignation. 'I agree to your preposition, and I surrender my chance of world-wide celebrity among the votaries of Psychical Research; but I do wish, Mertoun, you would call things by their proper names. It was not a ghost. It was an—'

But as I said, all I can remember now of the word he used is, that it somehow put me in mind of poultry-rearing.

Note— The reader will observe that the worthy Mrs Marris, though no student of Sprenger, unconsciously discerned the root-affinity of the incubator of the hen-yard and the incubus of the MALLEUS MALEFICARUM.

19: The Supreme Getaway

George Allan England

1877-1936

People's Magazine, October 1916.

A Pod and Bender tale

"SERENE, INDIFFERENT to fate." Slatsey leaned back with a sigh of almost perfect bliss in the huge, padded Morris chair and drew at his priceless panatela.

Dr. Bender, in the depths of a leather rocking chair, his slippered feet on the table, smiled with beatitude.

For their rooms in the extreme privacy of the neat little Hotel de Luxe were marvels of bachelor comfort.

On the table reposed a tray with fragmentary remnants of a delectable feed— always including Pod's ultimate joy, rich rice pudding with lots of butter and cream, and with fat raisins of the juiciest.

"Pretty smooth dump, this," grunted Pod, with another sigh. During the past weeks of inactivity and gorging, he had put on a trifle of forty or fifty pounds.

"Me for the De Looks, every time! Ever since the big gilt dropped into our kicks, after that Vanderpool race, an' we stowed away, I've been strong for the resher-shay stuff they hand out here. The way they act certainly makes a hit with muh!"

"And no fly-cops butting in, either," added Ben. "I tell you, Pod, this con-throwing isn't such a much, beside the real refinements of a home like this. Now that we've brought home the bunting, me for squaring it, a bundle of A-1 bonds, and respectability.

"That's my dope— that, and a continuation of this chow, with a little something dry on the side. What more could a couple of honest, retired congents require?"

Pod sighed again, still more deeply; but this sigh held less of happiness than the first.

Bender's reference to "home" had stirred the smoldering coals of a new sentiment in his huge heart— love-coals, now being blown upon by Birdy McCue.

And in Pod's disturbed mind visions began to rise. Not even the memories of rice and raisins could quite smother the growing flame.

Birdy was the pals' own particular waitress. Her complexion was of cream and rose-petals, her eyes a May-sky blue, her luxuriant hair a yellow wherein no H_2O_2 had ever mingled its corrupting influence.

Birdy's bare arm was firm and rounded and very white, also her V-cut waitress's shirtwaist disclosed a full throat, and her apron-straps rested over a more than Junoesque bosom.

In addition to all this, an occasional glimpse of her ankle as she swung in and out the double-doors of the dining room disclosed it to be of that trim and silk-stockinged variety which oft-times leads to reveries.

In fine, Birdy was one buxom, healthy, beautiful young woman, full of life and the joy of life, weighing-one hundred and forty-two, age twenty-five, ripe and fair— yes, a peach.

Pod sighed for the third time, very heavily, and forgot to smoke. Had his rubicund face been capable of it, he would have paled slightly.

Ben shot a quick, keen glance at him, by the mellow light of the frosted electric table-lamp. His brow wrinkled. Did he, too, sigh; or was it an extra deep inhalation of the perfumed cigarette-smoke he loved so well?

Pod noticed neither the look nor the possible sigh of his running-mate. For he was thinking— of Birdy; pondering on the blissful existence of the past few weeks, so warm, well-fed, and secure, disturbed only by the gnawings of the insistent love-bug which, its period of . . . incubation now past, was beginning to bite in real earnest.

He was mentally reviewing the situation. He had, well he knew, made no false step; he felt himself in favor with his Juno.

The first day at the De Luxe he had slipped her a five-spot, from an obese roll.

"This is just kind of a starter, kid," he had remarked nonchalantly. "I'm an extensive feeder, an' I want you to remember me. I can talk to a chicken egg cassy-roll louder than any man in Manhat.

"I can reach further an' stab a pie deeper than a Mafia knifing a snitch, an' I hold the international rice-puddin' long-distance record, bar none.

"Crab-meat is where I live, see? I'll stow away grouse and truffles against all comers. Are you on? You be the fixin' kid and keep things comin'; shove a little chick lunch up to the room every p.m. about eleven; let me do the bill o' fare through, an' repeat, an' you'll gather. Got it?"

"I'm on!" she had smiled with a dazzle of white teeth. "And your friend?"

"Oh, him? Say, he's dyspeptic. A good fella, you know, but— It's me that's the bear on eats. So chase 'em in lively, kiddo, and— you know!"

Birdy had remembered, and had chased 'em in. Every night, too, the tray had come up to No. 18 with succulent dainties piled; and not once had there been dearth of sugared rice-pudding and raisins simply bursting with juice.

And the love-bug, hidden among all those ambrosial dainties, had bitten deep. Now Pod was simply one vast culture-medium for the virus. Every ounce of his three hundred and fifty-seven pounds was potentially enamored of a goddess who could steer such eats to him. Which made the case extremely serious.

"Say, Ben!"

"Huh?"

Pod only shifted uneasily in the huge chair, and sucked at his smoke, which had gone out.

"Oh, nothin'," he mumbled. "I was just thinkin', that's all."

ABOUT a week after this first faint flapping of the wings of self-exposition, a wonderful September moon, full and round and golden, shone through the heat of the city haze and flooded the windows of the pals' sitting room. They sat smoking, lights out, with their feet on the sill; and the magic of the night, the orb, the breeze, stirred Slats to confidences.

"Say, Ben," he commenced once more, embarrassed as a schoolboy. He could face the world with a smile, and "con" it without batting an eye; but to open his huge heart to his pal caused the sweat to bead his brow. Uneasily he mopped it. "Ben?"

"Huh?"

"Say— you an' me— we— you know."

"Know what? Uneasy? Want to beat out on the pike again, and put the trimming tools to work once more? Forget it! All off, Bo! We—"

"Back up! You're in wrong! You an' me, we've been runnin'-mates now for ten or twelve years. We've nicked high an' panhandled low. Sometimes we've been on the outside, lookin' in, sometimes the reverse.

"We've got ours in about every known country in the world, an' some unknown countries; we've laid on velvet an' again on the rods. Our little mob of two has certainly been some swell mob, an' you've been one classy pal, but— well—"

"Well, what?" demanded Ben, with a sharp, half-guilty glance at the huge bulk beside him in the moonlight. "What you got on your chest?"

"I— this— I mean, this single life proposition ain't the silky frame-up it's touted to be, after all," Pod continued hoarsely.

"When a gink is young an' everythin's fallin' his way, he naturally rolls away from anythin' permanent in the skirt line. All right! But when the ivories begins

to shy off and the noble brow begins to connect with the neck, right over the dome of the bean— aw, nothin' to it, kid, nothin' to it!"

Slats made an out-sweep with his huge fist, as though to drive dull bachelorhood away, and sighed powerfully. "It's then a man gets ripe to tumble for something smooth in the she-line, Ben! It's then he's the fall guy for the cozy home idea! Say! Ain't you never framed it, what? Ain't you never fell for none o' this here cream stuff, yourself?"

Ben only shifted uneasily in his chair, and grunted something unintelligible.

One might have thought a sudden chill of hostility had all at once fallen over him; but if so, Slats took no heed. Instead, with a rapt smile at the moon and a new timbre in his mighty voice, he went on resistlessly:

"Love, ah, love! It's some best bet, believe me. It's a right steer, an' no come-back! Love builds the cottage where the birds do a warble an' they's ivy round the door, like in them illustrated songs, Ben.

"Love comes across with the prattle of innocent voices an' the patter of feet that ain't never hiked on no White Ways. Love greets you at the door with a glad fin, after you've had the rough toss outside.

"It bats you on the knob with baby mitts an' whispers 'Dad!' in your receiver. It sets on your knee an' hands you a kiss, front o' the fireplace when the snow is blowin' outside. Oh, it's the smooth proposition, kid, surest thing you know!"

"Uh-huh?"

"Nix on this rovin', Ben! Nix, not, no more! No more raw deals. All it means is, even hidin' up like here, always afraid somebody's goin' to cook us, after all.

"It means stir, in time; a slip-up, somewhere, some day; and for a finish, the slab an' the table. I been thinkin', kid, thinkin' long an' hard.

"Me for the happy home, the family, the peachy frau, the lawn-mower, hose, garden, an' all thereto appertain-in'. An' when it's time to blow my light out, no crocus carvin' me an' no pine board, but a right pebble over me, plumb respectable, Ben— past all squared an' forgotten— A-1 turn-out with a dozen hacks, an' the 'Sacred to the Memory of' just as big as any of 'em!"

Pause. Silence. In the moonlight a close observer could have perceived the huge fellow's Adam's-apple working convulsively, while a tear gleamed in his blinking eye.

Ben seemed pondering. Up to the pals, from the asphalted side street, rose a clack-clack-clack of hoofs. A trolley-gong clashed on the avenue, and, farther off, the roar of an "L" train broke the evening calm.

Ben, his face very grim, yet with a certain air of relief, tossed his cigar out of the window and turned toward his side-partner.

"Straight dope?" he demanded sternly. "No phony gag, but the real thing?"

"Realest ever! I got the love-bug, kid. It's put this con life of ours on the fritz, for fair! I'm goin' to square it, an' be a hick, myself. Why? You ain't peeved with me, are you?"

"Peeved nothing! Delighted! Here, let me mitt you, old boy. Go to it!"

Ben thrust out his hand, which Pod wrung with a sudden burst of gratitude and affection.

"That's the way to pass it out!" exclaimed the big fellow, in a choking voice. "I been leary of pullin' it on you, kid, 'cause I didn't know but you'd sit up and howl. But I see now—"

"You're on. Congratulations! Fact is, old boy, the same idea has been flagging me, too, some time past. Only I didn't hardly dare to pull it on you. But now—"

"You?" blurted Pod, gaping. "You stung, too? My Gawd! So then, if we split, it'll be O. K. on both sides, an' both of us in the clover-bed? Fine! Who's the skirt, Ben? Who, what, an' where?"

A knock on the door interrupted this heart-to-heart.

"Come!" boomed Slats.

A bellhop appeared with the usual evening tray, neatly overspread with a spotless damask. As though well used to the task, he switched on the light, and deftly spread the festive board on the pals' center table.

The two old friends and co-grafters watched the proceedings with satisfaction. Evidently, love as yet had not advanced to the stage where appetite had begun to fail.

His work done, the hop departed. Pod and Ben drew up to the bounteous feast, but something was on the big fellow's mind. He gazed on the pudding and shook his head, then glanced at his pal inquiringly.

"Ben?"

"What?"

"You didn't know I was some writer, did you?"

Ben, just unfolding his napkin, stared in amazement.

"Writer? Scratch-work, or how?"

"No, billy-doo's. Say, Ben, I— I don't feel like the eats till I've got this off my chest, like. I want you to listen to this here letter I've doped out for— for her, you tumble.

"Listen, an' then throw me the straight spiel. Is it the right goods or ain't it? Is it billed to make a center-shot an' ring the bell, the weddin'-bell, or— or is it a frosty freeze? Is—"

"You mean you've been framing some love-stuff?"

Slats nodded.

"Just hold back on the feeds till you let this trickle into your think-tank," he adjured, producing a folded sheet of scented lavender paper from his breast pocket, left side, nearest the cardiac apparatus.

"Go ahead and fire!" exclaimed Ben, eagerly eying the tray.

"All right, kid. Now, you just listen to some proposal!"

Hotel de Luxe,
Today and Every Day.
My Own Hummingbird!
My Bunch Of Velvet Taffy!

Oh, you kid! This is to Wise you that you have certainly Put one over hard on Yours Forever. For many years I thought I never would Kick in on this here Love whirl, but you have Sloughed me for fair. To say you are the Goods, is putting it so feeble it's almost an insult. When I gaze upon you, I am just Nuts to tear into the Sweet Home racket, with Ivy round the door. Do you get me, Hun?

I am truly Dippy to throw my Net over you and cop yon off, all for my lonesome. I've got the strong Hunch we could lope to where the Roses bloom and the robins nest again, and you would be my Dove and I would be your Pouter pigeon for life.

"Say, Ben, ain't that some poetical?"

You are my great, big beautiful Doll, believe me! This is no needle monologue, but the goods, and I have the Wad to back it. The first time I ever Lamped you, it was a knockout, and I took the mat for ten. I could see you Coming, even then, and ever since, you've been Getting it on me, worse and more of it, Now, Dear heart, don't Crab a loving soul by no icy Mitt gag, for believe me, though I may not be such a Romeo to look at, my heart and Bundle are in the right place.

I know I could carry some class, myself, with you for a running-mate. When I get my front on, I'm not half hard to behold. And I'm strictly on the Level in this deal, no Phony. You tie up to me, and you'll know you've got a real man, no Shrimp half portions, but the 18-K article.

The Rose is red, the Grass is green,
You are my Queen,
The fairest ever Seen,
So be mine, or I'll repine,
Be my Love, my beautiful Dove,
And forever I'll be true to you,
With Ivy twining round the door!

POD PAUSED, breathing heavily, and swabbed his brow with a napkin.

"How about it, kid?" he demanded anxiously. "Is it the goods, or ain't it? Poetry, too!"

"Some literature, all right!" asserted Ben, gazing away, "But do you think 'you' and 'door' make an O. K. rime? 'You' and 'in the stew' would go, but— "

Slats snorted with disgust.

"Stew, you lob!" he cried. "That shows how much poetic feelin' you got! Why, this here's blank verse, the last two lines. Blank verse! That's the swellest kind!"

"Oh, that's so, too. I forgot. It's blank, all right. Yes, it's the goods. Any more?"

"Some! And it ought to be the hot stuff, too. Took me the best part of ten days to frame it! There's better comin', too. Just take a slant at this, will you?"

If you think you could fall for me, Kiddo, say the word and you're on, for life! Cupid has went and handed you my whole flock of goats, that's no pipe. What do you say we bunch our play, from now on? You'd sure be some Classy pal for me! Any time you want to frame up with me, working Double harness, I'm your Pippin. Can't you see me, Dovey? If we hitch, I know we can give the Census and the course of Human events a right Sassy push, all right, so don't Shy off. But be my Molasses Bunch, till death us do pry Apart!

All I ask is your Heart and hand, and a Continuation of the swell Eats, as per this last month.

Ben started suddenly, with a quick glance at Pod, but the latter was far too absorbed in his reading to notice anything.

No use for you to be a side stem in this Hashery, when you can be the main tent in a Cottage with Ivory— Ivy— round the door. Shed that apron, kid, and I'll show you the real silks, cut on the Bias, with fringe and doll-fixings all from Paris. Get me? Cut out the tay-ta-tay confabs with that fresh new Night clerk, same as I've been wise to, the past Week, and accept a Loving heart that beats only for you.

Ben leaned forward, his face darkening, fist clenched, and eyes staring. His mouth was set in a thin line. Pod blissfully pursued the letter.

Your blue lamps and hair and the Way you Double up on the rice pudding have won my heart, Baby. The coin I've staked you to, for that stock-game, and the eats-money I've slipped you, is only a taste beside what I'll slide your way when we're Hitched, So say the word, and—

The letter was never finished, for with a wordless cry Ben started up. His fist fell on the table with a bang. The dishes rattled. A cup fell crashing to the floor.

Pod, startled, dropped the letter and stared, wide-eyed.

"Wh— wh— why, what th—" he stammered blankly.

"You— you!" hissed Ben, shaking a passionate forefinger right under Pod's nose. "So that's your game, is it, you scab? Rat! You— I—"

"For Gawd's sake, Ben!"

"Copping my girl right under my very eyes, you sneak!"

"Your— your—"

"Yes, mine! For three weeks now—"

"But— first thing we blew in here, Ben, I slid her a V! Every week since, another one! An' I've slipped her coin for a stock-deal she's in— an' these here classy feeds she sends up are all for me, an' she's mine—"

"Ah-ha! So, eh?" Ben's fist shook violently in the huge fellow's astonished face. "So? But we'll see about that, we'll see! These feeds are for you, are they? Why, you poor boob, they're mine! Ten a week she's had from me— ten bucks per, you tumble? An' as for the deal in stocks— "

"You been touched, too?"

"Have I? Why, sure! But— I didn't know you— you— had! Why— er— see here, Pod—"

"Huh?"

Ben's fist fell, and over his pale face a strange expression passed. His eyes sought Pod's, and for the space of ten heartbeats their looks met in silence.

At last Ben spoke:

"Pod!"

"Ben?"

"Whoa, back! Back up, both of us!"

"You mean—"

Pod was leaning forward now, gripping the table-edge with a fat though powerful hand. On his brow the sweat had started thicker than ever, and his breath was coming hard.

"Ben, you mean we— we're in wrong?"

"Wrong— dead wrong, so help me! There's more behind all this soft-soap biz and all this swell night-lunch racket than we're wise to yet.

"Pod, we're being played against each other, both ends toward the middle! A skirt is trying to do the oceana roll over us and con each of us into thinking we're it!

"I had it all doped to land solid with Birdy two or three weeks ago. So did you. Each of us has been passing the gilt to her—"

"Don't, Ben— don't!" Pod's eyes were leaking and he stretched out an imploring hand. "I'm wise a plenty, so cut that explanation stuff! But— it hurts, Ben; hurts like— jus' same; when I had it all doped I was goin' to bust into married bliss— ivy round the door—"

"No more o' that now! We're both leery, now we've got a peek at the works. Just a throw-off she was steering us, Pod— that's all. How big a haymow of the green has she raked off you already?"

"Oh, maybe four, five hundred— on Consolidated Copper. She said her cousin in Wall Street—"

"I'm in for a thousand. Only it was her uncle!"

"Ben! An' we, we are— supposed to be— the smoothest con-workers in the U. S. A. or out!"

Bender stared a moment, then burst into a laugh of mingled bitterness and relief.

"My feed I thought it was all the time!" he cried. "You thought it was yours. Both wrong— just as wrong as in our size-up of Birdy and her affections. Who's nuts now? Pod, Bender & Co.! And the answer is—"

Pod Slattery arose, with all the dignity of his three hundred and fifty-seven pounds, and faced his old-time pal. In his eyes still gleamed the dew of heartfelt disappointment, but his lips were smiling as he spoke.

"Ben, old boss," said he, "the answer is, a new deal and reorganization of the film on a long lease Birdy's. smooth O.K.

"We've let a skirt near trim us and if it gets out our rep ain't worth a hoot in Tophet. She's no ordinary poke-getter or cold hand worker, Birdy ain't. No, this was no penny ante game she was up to, she was stakin' to make a kill, what with all them kind woids an'— an' juicy raisins an' cream—

"A classy hex, all right aimin' to fetch down a big bundle when she had us hog tied right. In a while longer she'd had our whole roll an' us spoutin' our sparks for pad-money! Oh an onion, kid! But now we're hep— an' it's one big hike for ours!"

" 'Hike'!" echoed Ben enthusiastically. "The quicker, the sooner— far, far away!"

"Pack your keister!" Pod directed dramatically, with a sweep of his arm. "This very night we flit! See her again after all them ivy visions? Nix! Us for the big getaway, P.D.Q!

"I can't pull much of this here sentimental stuff on friendship, kid, but you know what I mean."

"That time you dug me out o' Sing Sing I ain't passin' up. No, nor the times we carried the banner in India, did a Marathon on the African veldt, dodged a smash in Yokohama, an'— an all the hundreds of other times, some velvet, some sand paper, we been through together.

"What? Let a peek-a-boo and a hobble pry us apart? Nix not! We must ha' been pipes, Ben, you an' me, to even think it! All over kid! It's you an' me again, with no Buttinskies, to the finish! An' my mitt to bind it!" In silence Ben took the huge and generous hand. For a minute their eyes met. Then Pod turned away.

"Ivy, hell," he whispered under his breath and with a kind of savage joy began routing his effects out of closet and chiffonier and hurling them into his suitcase.

Untouched, the tempting night lunch stood on the table. The savory pot of tea grew cold, the sherbet melted, and the fat raisins oozed out their juice forsakenly into the thick cream, which now had lost all its charm.

Half an hour later an envelope lay on the table, addressed to the hotel management. Within it reposed coin of the realm to pay the bill up to and including the following Saturday night.

Down the fire escape, meanwhile, Pod, Ben, and the suitcases wended their way to the alley at the rear of the hotel.

And the friendly September night received them; and the great world opened out once more ahead of them— the world of ventures and of games, of losses and of winnings, of honest grafts and touches— best of all, of friendship and the brotherhood of long-tried pals.

Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan, Pylades and Orestes, Nisus and Euryalus had nothing on these two incomparable running mates as they hailed a taxi on the avenue and sped toward the Grand Central in time for the Bombshell Limited for Chicago and all points West.

Midnight found them still consuming fat cigars in the luxurious smoking-compartment of the Pullman and basking in the newfound joy of freshly consolidated partnership.

"Some getaway this time!" murmured Ben, lighting another panatela. "Speaking of narrow cracks, this latest riffle sure has all past performances riveted to the post. I seem to be sitting on a leather cushion, bo; but really I'm down on all fours, thanking Heaven!"

Pod smiled, drew from his pocket a scented, lavender sheet of paper, set it afire with a match and with it fired up afresh his smoldering cigar. He held the paper carefully till it was but a crinkling bit of black, run through with crawling sparks.

Then with great precision and gusto he dropped it into the cuspidor.

Leaning back with a huge sigh of comfort and relief he exhaled a cloud of smoke and cheerfully contemplated the roof in eloquent silence.

The pals' great joy would without fail have leaped up one thousand per cent had they known this simple fact, viz.: that in the rice pudding on the table, back in the De Luxe, reposed at that moment enough chloral hydrate or knock-out drops to have put them sound asleep for many hours.

The drops had been considerately added unto the pudding by said Birdy McCue, in view of a large prospective reward from the new night-clerk, who— let me tell you confidentially— was none other than William J. Shearns of the

Cosmos Detective Agency, which had long "wanted" them for several little matters.

"Where ignorance is bliss," eh?

You're on!

_____

20: Magnetism

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

The Saturday Evening Post, 3 March 1928

THE PLEASANT, ostentatious boulevard was lined at prosperous intervals with New England Colonial houses— without ship models in the hall. When the inhabitants moved out here the ship models had at last been given to the children. The next street was a complete exhibit of the Spanish-bungalow phase of West Coast architecture; while two streets over, the cylindrical windows and round towers of 1897— melancholy antiques which sheltered swamis, yogis, fortune tellers, dressmakers, dancing teachers, art academies and chiropractors— looked down now upon brisk buses and trolley cars. A little walk around the block could, if you were feeling old that day, be a discouraging affair.

On the green flanks of the modern boulevard children, with their knees marked by the red stains of the mercurochrome era, played with toys with a purpose— beams that taught engineering, soldiers that taught manliness, and dolls that taught motherhood. When the dolls were so banged up that they stopped looking like real babies and began to look like dolls, the children developed affection for them. Everything in the vicinity— even the March sunlight — was new, fresh, hopeful and thin, as you would expect in a city that had tripled its population in fifteen years.

Among the very few domestics in sight that morning was a handsome young maid sweeping the steps of the biggest house on the street. She was a large, simple Mexican girl with the large, simple ambitions of the time and the locality, and she was already conscious of being a luxury— she received one hundred dollars a month in return for her personal liberty. Sweeping, Dolores kept an eye on the stairs inside, for Mr Hannaford's car was waiting and he would soon be coming down to breakfast. The problem came first this morning, however— the problem as to whether it was a duty or a favour when she helped the English nurse down the steps with the perambulator. The English nurse always said 'Please', and 'Thanks very much', but Dolores hated her and would have liked, without any special excitement, to beat her insensible. Like most Latins under the stimulus of American life, she had irresistible impulses towards violence.

The nurse escaped, however. Her blue cape faded haughtily into the distance just as Mr Hannaford, who had come quietly downstairs, stepped into the space of the front door.

'Good morning.' He smiled at Dolores; he was young and extraordinarily handsome. Dolores tripped on the broom and fell off the stoop. George

Hannaford hurried down the steps, reached her as she was getting to her feet cursing volubly in Mexican, just touched her arm with a helpful gesture and said, 'I hope you didn't hurt yourself.'

'Oh, no.'

'I'm afraid it was my fault; I'm afraid I startled you, coming out like that.'

His voice had real regret in it; his brow was knit with solicitude.

'Are you sure you're all right?'

'Aw, sure.'

'Didn't turn your ankle?'

'Aw, no.'

'I'm terribly sorry about it.'

'Aw, it wasn't your fault.'

He was still frowning as she went inside, and Dolores, who was not hurt and thought quickly, suddenly contemplated having a love affair with him. She looked at herself several times in the pantry mirror and stood close to him as she poured his coffee, but he read the paper and she saw that that was all for the morning.

Hannaford entered his car and drove to Jules Rennard's house. Jules was a French Canadian by birth, and George Hannaford's best friend; they were fond of each other and spent much time together. Both of them were simple and dignified in their tastes and in their way of thinking, instinctively gentle, and in a world of the volatile and the bizarre found in each other a certain quiet solidity.

He found Jules at breakfast.

'I want to fish for barracuda,' said George abruptly. 'When will you be free? I want to take the boat and go down to Lower California.'

Jules had dark circles under his eyes. Yesterday he had closed out the greatest problem of his life by settling with his ex-wife for two hundred thousand dollars. He had married too young, and the former slavey from the Quebec slums had taken to drugs upon her failure to rise with him. Yesterday, in the presence of lawyers, her final gesture had been to smash his finger with the base of a telephone. He was tired of women for a while and welcomed the suggestion of a fishing trip.

'How's the baby?' he asked.

'The baby's fine.'

'And Kay?'

'Kay's not herself, but I don't pay any attention. What did you do to your hand?'

'I'll tell you another time. What's the matter with Kay, George?'

'Jealous.'

'Of who?'

'Helen Avery. It's nothing. She's not herself, that's all.' He got up. 'I'm late,' he said. 'Let me know as soon as you're free. Any time after Monday will suit me.'

George left and drove out by an interminable boulevard which narrowed into a long, winding concrete road and rose into the hilly country behind. Somewhere in the vast emptiness a group of buildings appeared, a barnlike structure, a row of offices, a large but quick restaurant and half a dozen small bungalows. The chauffeur dropped Hannaford at the main entrance. He went in and passed through various enclosures, each marked off by swinging gates and inhabited by a stenographer.

'Is anybody with Mr Schroeder?' he asked, in front of a door lettered with that name.

'No, Mr Hannaford.'

Simultaneously his eye fell on a young lady who was writing at a desk aside, and he lingered a moment.

'Hello, Margaret,' he said. 'How are you, darling?'

A delicate, pale beauty looked up, frowning a little, still abstracted in her work. It was Miss Donovan, the script girl, a friend of many years.

'Hello. Oh, George, I didn't see you come in. Mr Douglas wants to work on the book sequence this afternoon.'

'All right.'

'These are the changes we decided on Thursday night.' She smiled up at him and George wondered for the thousandth time why she had never gone into pictures.

'All right,' he said. 'Will initials do?'

'Your initials look like George Harris's.'

'Very well, darling.'

As he finished, Pete Schroeder opened his door and beckoned him. 'George, come here!' he said with an air of excitement. 'I want you to listen to some one on the phone.'

Hannaford went in.

'Pick up the phone and say “Hello”,' directed Schroeder. 'Don't say who you are.'

'Hello,' said Hannaford obediently.

'Who is this?' asked a girl's voice.

Hannaford put his hand over the mouthpiece. 'What am I supposed to do?'

Schroeder snickered and Hannaford hesitated, smiling and suspicious.

'Who do you want to speak to?' he temporized into the phone.

'To George Hannaford, I want to speak to. Is this him?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, George; it's me.'

'Who?'

'Me— Gwen. I had an awful time finding you. They told me— '

'Gwen who?'

'Gwen— can't you hear? From San Francisco— last Thursday night.'

'I'm sorry,' objected George. 'Must be some mistake.'

'Is this George Hannaford?'

'Yes.'

The voice grew slightly tart: 'Well, this is Gwen Becker you spent last Thursday evening with in San Francisco. There's no use pretending you don't know who I am, because you do.'

Schroeder took the apparatus from George and hung up the receiver.

'Somebody has been doubling for me up in Frisco,' said Hannaford.

'So that's where you were Thursday night!'

'Those things aren't funny to me— not since that crazy Zeller girl. You can never convince them they've been sold because the man always looks something like you. What's new, Pete?'

'Let's go over to the stage and see.'

Together they walked out a back entrance, along a muddy walk, and opening a little door in the big blank wall of the studio building entered into its half darkness.

Here and there figures spotted the dim twilight, figures that turned up white faces to George Hannaford, like souls in purgatory watching the passage of a half-god through. Here and there were whispers and soft voices and, apparently from afar, the gentle tremolo of a small organ. Turning the corner made by some flats, they came upon the white crackling glow of a stage with two people motionless upon it.

An actor in evening clothes, his shirt front, collar and cuffs tinted a brilliant pink, made as though to get chairs for them, but they shook their heads and stood watching. For a long while nothing happened on the stage— no one moved. A row of lights went off with a savage hiss, went on again. The plaintive tap of a hammer begged admission to nowhere in the distance; a blue face appeared among the blinding lights above and called something unintelligible into the upper blackness. Then the silence was broken by a low clear voice from the stage:

'If you want to know why I haven't got stockings on, look in my dressing-room. I spoiled four pairs yesterday and two already this morning... This dress weighs six pounds.'

A man stepped out of the group of observers and regarded the girl's brown legs; their lack of covering was scarcely distinguishable, but, in any event, her expression implied that she would do nothing about it. The lady was annoyed, and so intense was her personality that it had taken only a fractional flexing of her eyes to indicate the fact. She was a dark, pretty girl with a figure that would be full-blown sooner than she wished. She was just eighteen.

Had this been the week before, George Hannaford's heart would have stood still. Their relationship had been in just that stage. He hadn't said a word to Helen Avery that Kay could have objected to, but something had begun between them on the second day of this picture that Kay had felt in the air. Perhaps it had begun even earlier, for he had determined, when he saw Helen Avery's first release, that she should play opposite him. Helen Avery's voice and the dropping of her eyes when she finished speaking, like a sort of exercise in control, fascinated him. He had felt that they both tolerated something, that each knew half of some secret about people and life, and that if they rushed towards each other there would be a romantic communion of almost unbelievable intensity. It was this element of promise and possibility that had haunted him for a fortnight and was now dying away.

Hannaford was thirty, and he was a moving-picture actor only through a series of accidents. After a year in a small technical college he had taken a summer job with an electric company, and his first appearance in a studio was in the role of repairing a bank of Klieg lights. In an emergency he played a small part and made good, but for fully a year after that he thought of it as a purely transitory episode in his life. At first much of it had offended him — the almost hysterical egotism and excitability hidden under an extremely thin veil of elaborate good-fellowship. It was only recently, with the advent of such men as Jules Rennard into pictures, that he began to see the possibilities of a decent and secure private life, much as his would have been as a successful engineer. At last his success felt solid beneath his feet.

He met Kay Tomkins at the old Griffith Studios at Mamaroneck and their marriage was a fresh, personal affair, removed from most stage marriages. Afterwards they had possessed each other completely, had been pointed to: 'Look, there's one couple in pictures who manage to stay together.' It would have taken something out of many people's lives— people who enjoyed a vicarious security in the contemplation of their marriage— if they hadn't stayed together, and their love was fortified by a certain effort to live up to that.

He held women off by a polite simplicity that underneath was hard and watchful; when he felt a certain current being turned on he became emotionally stupid. Kay expected and took much more from men, but she, too,

had a careful thermometer against her heart. Until the other night, when she reproached him for being interested in Helen Avery, there had been an absolute minimum of jealousy between them.

George Hannaford was still absorbed in the thought of Helen Avery as he left the studio and walked towards his bungalow over the way. There was in his mind, first, a horror that anyone should come between him and Kay, and second, a regret that he no longer carried that possibility in the forefront of his mind. It had given him a tremendous pleasure, like the things that had happened to him during his first big success, before he was so 'made' that there was scarcely anything better ahead; it was something to take out and look at— a new and still mysterious joy. It hadn't been love, for he was critical of Helen Avery as he had never been critical of Kay. But his feeling of last week had been sharply significant and memorable, and he was restless, now that it had passed.

Working that afternoon, they were seldom together, but he was conscious of her and he knew that she was conscious of him.

She stood a long time with her back to him at one point, and when she turned at length, their eyes swept past each other's, brushing like bird wings. Simultaneously he saw they had gone far, in their way; it was well that he had drawn back. He was glad that someone came for her when the work was almost over.

Dressed, he returned to the office wing, stopping in for a moment to see Schroeder. No one answered his knock, and, turning the knob, he went in. Helen Avery was there alone.

Hannaford shut the door and they stared at each other. Her face was young, frightened. In a moment in which neither of them spoke, it was decided that they would have some of this out now. Almost thankfully he felt the warm sap of emotion flow out of his heart and course through his body.

'Helen!'

She murmured 'What?' in an awed voice.

'I feel terribly about this.' His voice was shaking.

Suddenly she began to cry; painful, audible sobs shook her. 'Have you got a handkerchief?' she said.

He gave her a handkerchief. At that moment there were steps outside. George opened the door halfway just in time to keep Schroeder from entering on the spectacle of her tears.

'Nobody's in,' he said facetiously. For a moment longer he kept his shoulder against the door. Then he let it open slowly.

Outside in his limousine, he wondered how soon Jules would be ready to go fishing.

ii

FROM THE age of twelve Kay Tompkins had worn men like rings on every finger. Her face was round, young, pretty and strong; a strength accentuated by the responsive play of brows and lashes around her clear, glossy, hazel eyes. She was the daughter of a senator from a Western state and she hunted unsuccessfully for glamour through a small Western city until she was seventeen, when she ran away from home and went on the stage. She was one of those people who are famous far beyond their actual achievement.

There was that excitement about her that seemed to reflect the excitement of the world. While she was playing small parts in Ziegfeld shows she attended proms at Yale, and during a temporary venture into pictures she met George Hannaford, already a star of the new 'natural' type then just coming into vogue. In him she found what she had been seeking.

She was at present in what is known as a dangerous state. For six months she had been helpless and dependent entirely upon George, and now that her son was the property of a strict and possessive English nurse, Kay, free again, suddenly felt the need of proving herself attractive. She wanted things to be as they had been before the baby was thought of. Also she felt that lately George had taken her too much for granted; she had a strong instinct that he was interested in Helen Avery.

When George Hannaford came home that night he had minimized to himself their quarrel of the previous evening and was honestly surprised at her perfunctory greeting.

'What's the matter, Kay?' he asked after a minute. 'Is this going to be another night like last night?'

'Do you know we're going out tonight?' she said, avoiding an answer.

'Where?'

'To Katherine Davis'. I didn't know whether you'd want to go— '

'I'd like to go.'

'I didn't know whether you'd want to go. Arthur Busch said he'd stop for me.'

They dined in silence. Without any secret thoughts to dip into like a child into a jam jar, George felt restless, and at the same time was aware that the atmosphere was full of jealousy, suspicion and anger. Until recently they had preserved between them something precious that made their house one of the pleasantest in Hollywood to enter. Now suddenly it might be any house; he felt common and he felt unstable. He had come near to making something bright and precious into something cheap and unkind. With a sudden surge of

emotion, he crossed the room and was about to put his arm around her when the doorbell rang. A moment later Dolores announced Mr Arthur Busch.

Busch was an ugly, popular little man, a continuity writer and lately a director. A few years ago they had been hero and heroine to him, and even now, when he was a person of some consequence in the picture world, he accepted with equanimity Kay's use of him for such purposes as tonight's. He had been in love with her for years, but, because his love seemed hopeless, it had never caused him much distress.

They went on to the party. It was a housewarming, with Hawaiian musicians in attendance, and the guests were largely of the old crowd. People who had been in the early Griffith pictures, even though they were scarcely thirty, were considered to be of the old crowd; they were different from those coming along now, and they were conscious of it. They had a dignity and straightforwardness about them from the fact that they had worked in pictures before pictures were bathed in a golden haze of success. They were still rather humble before their amazing triumph, and thus, unlike the new generation, who took it all for granted, they were constantly in touch with reality. Half a dozen or so of the women were especially aware of being unique. No one had come along to fill their places; here and there a pretty face had caught the public imagination for a year, but those of the old crowd were already legends, ageless and disembodied. With all this, they were still young enough to believe that they would go forever.

George and Kay were greeted affectionately: people moved over and made place for them. The Hawaiians performed and the Duncan sisters sang at the piano. From the moment George saw who was here he guessed that Helen Avery would be here, too, and the fact annoyed him. It was not appropriate that she should be part of this gathering through which he and Kay had moved familiarly and tranquilly for years.

He saw her first when someone opened the swinging door to the kitchen, and when, a little later, she came out and their eyes met, he knew absolutely that he didn't love her. He went up to speak to her, and at her first words he saw something had happened to her, too, that had dissipated the mood of the afternoon. She had got a big part.

'And I'm in a daze!' she cried happily. 'I didn't think there was a chance and I've thought of nothing else since I read the book a year ago.'

'It's wonderful. I'm awfully glad.'

He had the feeling, though, that he should look at her with a certain regret; one couldn't jump from such a scene as this afternoon to a plane of casual friendly interest. Suddenly she began to laugh.

'Oh, we're such actors, George— you and I.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know what I mean.'

'I don't.'

'Oh, yes, you do. You did this afternoon. It was a pity we didn't have a camera.'

Short of declaring then and there that he loved her, there was absolutely nothing more to say. He grinned acquiescently. A group formed around them and absorbed them, and George, feeling that the evening had settled something, began to think about going home. An excited and sentimental elderly lady— someone's mother— came up and began telling him how much she believed in him, and he was polite and charming to her, as only he could be, for half an hour. Then he went to Kay, who had been sitting with Arthur Busch all evening, and suggested that they go.

She looked up unwillingly. She had had several highballs and the fact was mildly apparent. She did not want to go, but she got up after a mild argument and George went upstairs for his coat. When he came down Katherine Davis told him that Kay had already gone out to the car.

The crowd had increased; to avoid a general good-night he went out through the sun-parlour door to the lawn; less than twenty feet away from him he saw the figures of Kay and Arthur Busch against a bright street lamp; they were standing close together and staring into each other's eyes. He saw that they were holding hands.

After the first start of surprise George instinctively turned about, retraced his steps, hurried through the room he had just left, and came noisily out the front door. But Kay and Arthur Busch were still standing close together, and it was lingeringly and with abstracted eyes that they turned around finally and saw him. Then both of them seemed to make an effort; they drew apart as if it was a physical ordeal. George said good-bye to Arthur Busch with special cordiality, and in a moment he and Kay were driving homeward through the clear California night.

He said nothing, Kay said nothing. He was incredulous. He suspected that Kay had kissed a man here and there, but he had never seen it happen or given it any thought. This was different; there had been an element of tenderness in it and there was something veiled and remote in Kay's eyes that he had never seen there before.

Without having spoken, they entered the house; Kay stopped by the library door and looked in.

'There's someone there,' she said, and she added without interest: 'I'm going upstairs. Good night.'

As she ran up the stairs the person in the library stepped out into the hall.

'Mr Hannaford—'

He was a pale and hard young man; his face was vaguely familiar, but George didn't remember where he had seen it before.

'Mr Hannaford?' said the young man. 'I recognize you from your pictures.' He looked at George, obviously a little awed.

'What can I do for you?'

'Well, will you come in here?'

'What is it? I don't know who you are.'

'My name is Donovan. I'm Margaret Donovan's brother.' His face toughened a little.

'Is anything the matter?'

Donovan made a motion towards the door. 'Come in here.' His voice was confident now, almost threatening.

George hesitated, then he walked into the library. Donovan followed and stood across the table from him, his legs apart, his hands in his pockets.

'Hannaford,' he said, in the tone of a man trying to whip himself up to anger, 'Margaret wants fifty thousand dollars.'

'What the devil are you talking about?' exclaimed George incredulously.

'Margaret wants fifty thousand dollars,' repeated Donovan.

'You're Margaret Donovan's brother?'

'I am.'

'I don't believe it.' But he saw the resemblance now. 'Does Margaret know you're here?'

'She sent me here. She'll hand over those two letters for fifty thousand, and no questions asked.'

'What letters?' George chuckled irresistibly. 'This is some joke of Schroeder's, isn't it?'

'This ain't a joke, Hannaford. I mean the letters you signed your name to this afternoon.'

iii

AN HOUR later George went upstairs in a daze. The clumsiness of the affair was at once outrageous and astounding. That a friend of seven years should suddenly request his signature on papers that were not what they were purported to be made all his surroundings seem diaphanous and insecure. Even now the design engrossed him more than a defence against it, and he tried to re-create the steps by which Margaret had arrived at this act of recklessness or despair.

She had served as a script girl in various studios and for various directors for ten years; earning first twenty, now a hundred dollars a week. She was lovely-looking and she was intelligent; at any moment in those years she might have asked for a screen test, but some quality of initiative or ambition had been lacking. Not a few times had her opinion made or broken incipient careers. Still she waited at directors' elbows, increasingly aware that the years were slipping away.

That she had picked George as a victim amazed him most of all. Once, during the year before his marriage, there had been a momentary warmth; he had taken her to a Mayfair ball, and he remembered that he had kissed her going home that night in the car. The flirtation trailed along hesitatingly for a week. Before it could develop into anything serious he had gone East and met Kay.

Young Donovan had shown him a carbon of the letters he had signed.

They were written on the typewriter that he kept in his bungalow at the studio, and they were carefully and convincingly worded. They purported to be love letters, asserting that he was Margaret Donovan's lover, that he wanted to marry her, and that for that reason he was about to arrange a divorce. It was incredible. Someone must have seen him sign them that morning; someone must have heard her say: 'Your initials are like Mr Harris's.'

George was tired. He was training for a screen football game to be played next week, with the Southern California varsity as extras, and he was used to regular hours. In the middle of a confused and despairing sequence of thought about Margaret Donovan and Kay, he suddenly yawned. Mechanically he went upstairs, undressed and got into bed.

Just before dawn Kay came to him in the garden. There was a river that flowed past it now, and boats faintly lit with green and yellow lights moved slowly, remotely by. A gentle starlight fell like rain upon the dark, sleeping face of the world, upon the black mysterious bosoms of the trees, the tranquil gleaming water and the farther shore.

The grass was damp, and Kay came to him on hurried feet; her thin slippers were drenched with dew. She stood upon his shoes, nestling close to him, and held up her face as one shows a book open at a page.

'Think how you love me,' she whispered. 'I don't ask you to love me always like this, but I ask you to remember.'

'You'll always be like this to me.'

'Oh no; but promise me you'll remember.' Her tears were falling. 'I'll be different, but somewhere lost inside me there'll always be the person I am tonight.'

The scene dissolved slowly but George struggled into consciousness. He sat up in bed; it was morning. In the yard outside he heard the nurse instructing his son in the niceties of behaviour for two-month-old babies. From the yard next door a small boy shouted mysteriously: 'Who let that barrier through on me?'

Still in his pyjamas, George went to the phone and called his lawyers. Then he rang for his man, and while he was being shaved a certain order evolved from the chaos of the night before. First, he must deal with Margaret Donovan; second, he must keep the matter from Kay, who in her present state might believe anything; and third, he must fix things up with Kay. The last seemed the most important of all.

As he finished dressing he heard the phone ring downstairs and, with an instinct of danger, picked up the receiver.

'Hello... Oh, yes.' Looking up, he saw that both his doors were closed. 'Good morning, Helen... It's all right, Dolores. I'm taking it up here.' He waited till he heard the receiver click downstairs.

'How are you this morning, Helen?'

'George, I called up about last night. I can't tell you how sorry I am.'

'Sorry? Why are you sorry?'

'For treating you like that. I don't know what was in me, George. I didn't sleep all night thinking how terrible I'd been.'

A new disorder established itself in George's already littered mind.

'Don't be silly,' he said. To his despair he heard his own voice run on: 'For a minute I didn't understand, Helen. Then I thought it was better so.'

'Oh, George,' came her voice after a moment, very low.

Another silence. He began to put in a cuff button.

'I had to call up,' she said after a moment. 'I couldn't leave things like that.'

The cuff button dropped to the floor; he stooped to pick it up, and then said 'Helen!' urgently into the mouthpiece to cover the fact that he had momentarily been away.

'What, George?'

At this moment the hall door opened and Kay, radiating a faint distaste, came into the room. She hesitated.

'Are you busy?'

'It's all right.' He stared into the mouthpiece for a moment.

'Well, good-bye,' he muttered abruptly and hung up the receiver. He turned to Kay: 'Good morning.'

'I didn't mean to disturb you,' she said distantly.

'You didn't disturb me.' He hesitated. 'That was Helen Avery.'

'It doesn't concern me who it was. I came to ask you if we're going to the Coconut Grove tonight.'

'Sit down, Kay.'

'I don't want to talk.'

'Sit down a minute,' he said impatiently. She sat down. 'How long are you going to keep this up?' he demanded.

'I'm not keeping up anything. We're simply through, George, and you know it as well as I do.'

'That's absurd,' he said. 'Why, a week ago—'

'It doesn't matter. We've been getting nearer to this for months, and now it's over.'

'You mean you don't love me?' He was not particularly alarmed. They had been through scenes like this before.

'I don't know. I suppose I'll always love you in a way.' Suddenly she began to sob. 'Oh, it's all so sad. He's cared for me so long.'

George stared at her. Face to face with what was apparently a real emotion, he had no words of any kind. She was not angry, not threatening or pretending, not thinking about him at all, but concerned entirely with her emotions towards another man.

'What is it?' he cried. 'Are you trying to tell me you're in love with this man?'

'I don't know,' she said helplessly.

He took a step towards her, then went to the bed and lay down on it, staring in misery at the ceiling. After a while a maid knocked to say that Mr Busch and Mr Castle, George's lawyer, were below. The fact carried no meaning to him. Kay went into her room and he got up and followed her.

'Let's send word we're out,' he said. 'We can go away somewhere and talk this over.'

'I don't want to go away.'

She was already away, growing more mysterious and remote with every minute. The things on her dressing-table were the property of a stranger.

He began to speak in a dry, hurried voice. 'If you're still thinking about Helen Avery, it's nonsense. I've never given a damn for anybody but you.'

They went downstairs and into the living-room. It was nearly noon— another bright emotionless California day. George saw that Arthur Busch's ugly face in the sunshine was wan and white; he took a step towards George and then stopped, as if he were waiting for something— a challenge, a reproach, a blow.

In a flash the scene that would presently take place ran itself off in George's mind. He saw himself moving through the scene, saw his part, an

infinite choice of parts, but in every one of them Kay would be against him and with Arthur Busch. And suddenly he rejected them all.

'I hope you'll excuse me,' he said quickly to Mr Castle. 'I called you up because a script girl named Margaret Donovan wants fifty thousand dollars for some letters she claims I wrote her. Of course the whole thing is—' He broke off. It didn't matter. 'I'll come to see you tomorrow.' He walked up to Kay and Arthur, so that only they could hear.

'I don't know about you two— what you want to do. But leave me out of it; you haven't any right to inflict any of it on me, for after all it's not my fault. I'm not going to be mixed up in your emotions.'

He turned and went out. His car was before the door and he said 'Go to Santa Monica' because it was the first name that popped into his head. The car drove off into the everlasting hazeless sunlight.

He rode for three hours, past Santa Monica and then along towards Long Beach by another road. As if it were something he saw out of the corner of his eye and with but a fragment of his attention, he imagined Kay and Arthur Busch progressing through the afternoon. Kay would cry a great deal and the situation would seem harsh and unexpected to them at first, but the tender closing of the day would draw them together. They would turn inevitably towards each other and he would slip more and more into the position of the enemy outside.

Kay had wanted him to get down in the dirt and dust of a scene and scramble for her. Not he; he hated scenes. Once he stooped to compete with Arthur Busch in pulling at Kay's heart, he would never be the same to himself. He would always be a little like Arthur Busch; they would always have that in common, like a shameful secret. There was little of the theatre about George; the millions before whose eyes the moods and changes of his face had flickered during ten years had not been deceived about that. From the moment when, as a boy of twenty, his handsome eyes had gazed off into the imaginary distance of a Griffith Western, his audience had been really watching the progress of a straightforward, slow-thinking, romantic man through an accidentally glamorous life.

His fault was that he had felt safe too soon. He realized suddenly that the two Fairbankses, in sitting side by side at table, were not keeping up a pose. They were giving hostages to fate. This was perhaps the most bizarre community in the rich, wild, bored empire, and for a marriage to succeed here, you must expect nothing or you must be always together. For a moment his glance had wavered from Kay and he stumbled blindly into disaster.

As he was thinking this and wondering where he would go and what he should do, he passed an apartment house that jolted his memory. It was on

the outskirts of town, a pink horror built to represent something, somewhere, so cheaply and sketchily that whatever it copied the architect must have long since forgotten. And suddenly George remembered that he had once called for Margaret Donovan here the night of a Mayfair dance.

'Stop at this apartment!' he called through the speaking-tube.

He went in. The negro elevator boy stared open-mouthed at him as they rose in the cage. Margaret Donovan herself opened the door.

When she saw him she shrank away with a little cry. As he entered and closed the door she retreated before him into the front room. George followed.

It was twilight outside and the apartment was dusky and sad. The last light fell softly on the standardized furniture and the great gallery of signed photographs of moving-picture people that covered one wall. Her face was white, and as she stared at him she began nervously wringing her hands.

'What's this nonsense, Margaret?' George said, trying to keep any reproach out of his voice. 'Do you need money that bad?'

She shook her head vaguely. Her eyes were still fixed on him with a sort ofterror; George looked at the floor.

'I suppose this was your brother's idea. At least I can't believe you'd be sostupid.' He looked up, trying to preserve the brusque masterly attitude of one talking to a naughty child, but at the sight of her face every emotion except pity left him. 'I'm a little tired. Do you mind if I sit down?'

'No.'

'I'm a little confused today,' said George after a minute. 'People seem to have it in for me today.'

'Why, I thought—' her voice became ironic in mid-sentence— 'I thought everybody loved you, George.'

'They don't.'

'Only me?'

'Yes,' he said abstractedly.

'I wish it had been only me. But then, of course, you wouldn't have been you.'

Suddenly he realized that she meant what she was saying.

'That's just nonsense.'

'At least you're here,' Margaret went on. 'I suppose I ought to be glad of that. And I am. I most decidedly am. I've often thought of you sitting in that chair, just at this time when it was almost dark. I used to make up little one-act plays about what would happen then. Would you like to hear one of them? I'll have to begin by coming over and sitting on the floor at your feet.'

Annoyed and yet spellbound, George kept trying desperately to seize upon a word or mood that would turn the subject.

'I've seen you sitting there so often that you don't look a bit more real than your ghost. Except that your hat has squashed your beautiful hair down on one side and you've got dark circles or dirt under your eyes. You look white, too, George. Probably you were on a party last night.'

'I was. And I found your brother waiting for me when I got home.'

'He's a good waiter, George. He's just out of San Quentin prison, where he's been waiting the last six years.'

'Then it was his idea?'

'We cooked it up together. I was going to China on my share.'

'Why was I the victim?'

'That seemed to make it realer. Once I thought you were going to fall in love with me five years ago.'

The bravado suddenly melted out of her voice and it was still light enough to see that her mouth was quivering.

'I've loved you for years,' she said— 'since the first day you came West and walked into the old Realart Studio. You were so brave about people, George. Whoever it was, you walked right up to them and tore something aside as if it was in your way and began to know them. I tried to make love to you, just like the rest, but it was difficult. You drew people right up close to you and held them there, not able to move either way.'

'This is all entirely imaginary,' said George, frowning uncomfortably, 'and I can't control—'

'No, I know. You can't control charm. It's simply got to be used. You've got to keep your hand in if you have it, and go through life attaching people to you that you don't want. I don't blame you. If you only hadn't kissed me the night of the Mayfair dance. I suppose it was the champagne.'

George felt as if a band which had been playing for a long time in the distance had suddenly moved up and taken a station beneath his window. He had always been conscious that things like this were going on around him. Now that he thought of it, he had always been conscious that Margaret loved him, but the faint music of these emotions in his ear had seemed to bear no relation to actual life. They were phantoms that he had conjured up out of nothing; he had never imagined their actual incarnations. At his wish they should die inconsequently away.

'You can't imagine what it's been like,' Margaret continued after a minute. 'Things you've just said and forgotten, I've put myself asleep night after night remembering— trying to squeeze something more out of them. After that night you took me to the Mayfair other men didn't exist for me any more. And

there were others, you know— lots of them. But I'd see you walking along somewhere about the lot, looking at the ground and smiling a little, as if something very amusing had just happened to you, the way you do. And I'd pass you and you'd look up and really smile: “Hello, darling!” “Hello, darling” and my heart would turn over. That would happen four times a day.'

George stood up and she, too, jumped up quickly.

'Oh, I've bored you,' she cried softly. 'I might have known I'd bore you. You want to go home. Let's see— is there anything else? Oh, yes; you might as well have those letters.'

Taking them out of a desk, she took them to a window and identified them by a rift of lamplight.

'They're really beautiful letters. They'd do you credit. I suppose it was pretty stupid, as you say, but it ought to teach you a lesson about— about signing things, or something.' She tore the letters small and threw them in the wastebasket: 'Now go on,' she said.

'Why must I go now?'

For the third time in twenty-four hours sad and uncontrollable tears confronted him.

'Please go!' she cried angrily— 'or stay if you like. I'm yours for the asking. You know it. You can have any woman you want in the world by just raising your hand. Would I amuse you?'

'Margaret— '

'Oh, go on then.' She sat down and turned her face away. 'After all you'll begin to look silly in a minute. You wouldn't like that, would you? So get out.'

George stood there helpless, trying to put himself in her place and say something that wouldn't be priggish, but nothing came.

He tried to force down his personal distress, his discomfort, his vague feeling of scorn, ignorant of the fact that she was watching him and understanding it all and loving the struggle in his face. Suddenly his own nerves gave way under the strain of the past twenty-four hours and he felt his eyes grow dim and his throat tighten. He shook his head helplessly. Then he turned away— still not knowing that she was watching him and loving him until she thought her heart would burst with it— and went out to the door.

iv

THE CAR stopped before his house, dark save for small lights in the nursery and the lower hall. He heard the telephone ringing but when he answered it, inside, there was no one on the line. For a few minutes he wandered about in

the darkness, moving from chair to chair and going to the window to stare out into the opposite emptiness of the night.

It was strange to be alone, to feel alone. In his overwrought condition the fact was not unpleasant. As the trouble of last night had made Helen Avery infinitely remote, so his talk with Margaret had acted as a catharsis to his own personal misery. It would swing back upon him presently, he knew, but for a moment his mind was too tired to remember, to imagine or to care.

Half an hour passed. He saw Dolores issue from the kitchen, take the paper from the front steps and carry it back to the kitchen for a preliminary inspection. With a vague idea of packing his grip, he went upstairs. He opened the door of Kay's room and found her lying down.

For a moment he didn't speak, but moved around the bathroom between. Then he went into her room and switched on the lights.

'What's the matter?' he asked casually. 'Aren't you feeling well?'

'I've been trying to get some sleep,' she said. 'George, do you think that girl's gone crazy?'

'What girl?'

'Margaret Donovan. I've never heard of anything so terrible in my life.'

For a moment he thought that there had been some new development.

'Fifty thousand dollars!' she cried indignantly. 'Why, I wouldn't give it to her even if it were true. She ought to be sent to jail.'

'Oh, it's not so terrible as that,' he said. 'She has a brother who's a pretty bad egg and it was his idea.'

'She's capable of anything,' Kay said solemnly. 'And you're just a fool if you don't see it. I've never liked her. She has dirty hair.'

'Well, what of it?' he demanded impatiently, and added: 'Where's Arthur Busch?'

'He went home right after lunch. Or rather I sent him home.'

'You decided you were not in love with him?'

She looked up almost in surprise. 'In love with him? Oh, you mean this morning. I was just mad at you; you ought to have known that. I was a little sorry for him last night, but I guess it was the highballs.'

'Well, what did you mean when you— ' He broke off. Wherever he turned he found a muddle, and he resolutely determined not to think.

'My heavens!' exclaimed Kay. 'Fifty thousand dollars!'

'Oh, drop it. She tore up the letters— she wrote them herself— and everything's all right.'

'George.'

'Yes.'

'Of course Douglas will fire her right away.'

'Of course he won't. He won't know anything about it.'

'You mean to say you're not going to let her go? After this?'

He jumped up. 'Do you suppose she thought that?' he cried.

'Thought what?'

'That I'd have them let her go?'

'You certainly ought to.'

He looked hastily through the phone book for her name.

'Oxford—' he called.

After an unusually long time the switchboard operator answered: 'Bourbon Apartments.'

'Miss Margaret Donovan, please.'

'Why—' The operator's voice broke off. 'If you'll just wait a minute, please.' He held the line; the minute passed, then another. Then the operator's voice: 'I couldn't talk to you then. Miss Donovan has had an accident. She's shot herself. When you called they were taking her through the lobby to St Catherine's Hospital.'

'Is she— is it serious?' George demanded frantically.

'They thought so at first, but now they think she'll be all right. They're going to probe for the bullet.'

'Thank you.'

He got up and turned to Kay.

'She's tried to kill herself,' he said in a strained voice. 'I'll have to go around to the hospital. I was pretty clumsy this afternoon and I think I'm partly responsible for this.'

'George,' said Kay suddenly.

'What?'

'Don't you think it's sort of unwise to get mixed up in this? People might say—'

'I don't give a damn what they say,' he answered roughly.

He went to his room and automatically began to prepare for going out. Catching sight of his face in the mirror, he closed his eyes with a sudden exclamation of distaste, and abandoned the intention of brushing his hair.

'George,' Kay called from the next room, 'I love you.'

'I love you too.'

'Jules Rennard called up. Something about barracuda fishing. Don't you think it would be fun to get up a party? Men and girls both?'

'Somehow the idea doesn't appeal to me. The whole idea of barracuda fishing—'

The phone rang below and he started. Dolores was answering it.

It was a lady who had already called twice today.

'Is Mr Hannaford in?'

'No,' said Dolores promptly. She stuck out her tongue and hung up the phone just as George Hannaford came downstairs. She helped him into his coat, standing as close as she could to him, opened the door and followed a little way out on the porch.

'Meester Hannaford,' she said suddenly, 'that Miss Avery she call up five-six times today. I tell her you out and say nothing to missus.'

'What?' He stared at her, wondering how much she knew about his affairs.

'She call up just now and I say you out.'

'All right,' he said absently.

'Meester Hannaford.'

'Yes, Dolores.'

'I deedn't hurt myself thees morning when I fell off the porch.'

'That's fine. Good night, Dolores.'

'Good night, Meester Hannaford.'

George smiled at her, faintly, fleetingly, tearing a veil from between them, unconsciously promising her a possible admission to the thousand delights and wonders that only he knew and could command. Then he went to his waiting car and Dolores, sitting down on the stoop, rubbed her hands together in a gesture that might have expressed either ecstasy or strangulation, and watched the rising of the thin, pale California moon.

End