PAST MASTERS 201

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and more

PAST MASTERS 201

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

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1: The Glory of France

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Christmas Bulletin, 7 Dec 1929

Hrold Mercer served with the Australian Infantry Force (AIF) in France in the first world war.

THAT subtle fragrance of the garden came to meet you as you trod the road, a change from the hard scent of gum and wild honeysuckle that lay heavily on the bush surroundings; and, as I reached the fence and saw its riot of roses and garden blooms, the beauty of it held me.

"Hey, Corp! *Merci*!" The hail came suddenly, followed by a sound of hurrying feet as a man dashed up the path. The next moment my hand was being shaken vigorously by one whose face was familiar enough, though my memory refused to name him; and I found myself drawn upon the verandah and seated there.

I was remembering now. It seemed that I was back again in a smoke-filled estaminet in France, crowded with Diggers who had just come into camp nearby. Marie, with others, was flitting about fulfilling the orders for drinks, pausing to exchange laughing badinage with some of the men. Rumors of a French success had come through, and though the stories had proved to be wholly false, there was elation in the atmosphere.

Then suddenly, at someone's suggestion, Marie was on a table, head in the air, singing with defiant spirit the *Marseillaise*. A moment, and her voice alone was heard, vibrant with patriotic fervor; with the light of the oil-lamps flickering on her vaguely and the cigarette-smoke curling around her, she seemed like the very spirit of France. Soon the Diggers commenced to roar or to shout their cheers in the most familiar passages, and the song finished with a pandemonium of applause mingling with the grating of chairs and clinking of upraised glasses. The spirit of this movement caught the girl; and as if herself holding aloft a glass she cried, "The Glory of France!"

"The glory of France— *you* are!" Sergeant Royle exclaimed, standing below her at the head of the table, with his laughing eyes on her face. She laughed down at him in return; then he held his arms to help her, and as she leapt he caught her in a tight embrace. He would have kissed her, but with reddened face she pushed herself free.

A light blow fell on his cheek.

"I am sorry, Ma'moiselle," he said; "I apologise. Compree apologise?"

"*Oui*, you are ver' sorrie. So am I, M'sieur the Sergeant. That blow was for Pierre, my betroth'."

"He's a lucky chap," said the sergeant.

"He is a soldier of France," she said proudly. And then, as if afraid of giving offence: "Pardon! You, too, are a soldier— *for* France. He is your comrade, is he not?"

A chorus approved the sentiment, which established Marie's position with us. "She put it neat, that shiela," Old Dan whispered to me. "It isn't playing the game to try to take a cobber down for his girl."

Marie again was laughing about the place, carrying her bottles and biscuits; and Jim Royle, always trying to catch her eye and exchange a word with her, was noisily merry with those around him.

There was a diversion when Clay, the postal orderly, came in, and a rush to him directly he spoke.

"A bit of a mail just come up, and I thought you fellows might like to git your letters." A good fellow Clay. "Private Horley here?" he asked.

Somewhat shakily a youngish Digger rose at the table next to mine.

"A letter?" he asked.

"No; there's a message come through for you up at the orderly-room."

"About the wife?"

"You'd better come up."

"It's about the wife— I'm expecting it. Is she dead? Is she dead, man— is she dead?"

"You're to be given a week off duty if you want it," Clay said awkwardly.

Horley rose, staggering towards the door. There he paused, came heavily back and slumped into his chair.

"Bear up, Pete," said Daniels, putting an arm over his shoulder.

"I was expecting it," said Horley brokenly. "Curse the damned office-hounds in Australia! They reported me killed; and she went down. Been ill ever since. We'd been fond of each other since we were kids. Then I enlisted, and all of a sudden we decided to get married. Only a day that was before l left— and when I go back she won't be there."

The note of tragedy had subdued the riot. Not to intrude on his grief, the groups had turned again to their own affairs. A few men, deciding to leave, gripped his hand silently as they passed out. And Marie, coming to him, softly, unasked, stooped with a quick impulse, one hand over his shoulder, and kissed his cheek.

Jim Royle sprang up on seeing that, but sat down again.

Afterwards Royle's infatuation for Marie became a camp jest. The alert, good-looking youngster had earned a reputation for efficiency outside the war matters that had earned him his stripes; the amorous adventures attributed to him had certainly not left any impress upon him.

Possibly because the shadow of death was hanging over us more definitely than usual, it was a time when jests, however cheap, were welcome. We were stunt-practising instead of doing ordinary drill work, preparing for tactical operations which might mean the end of most of us. The sheep were being made ready for the shambles, which were to be faced in possibly a day's time, possibly a week's, but soon.

Apart from that, the stunting had an advantage; our practice through, we were free, and camp leave was frequent. And even when leave was not legitimately available, Royle was often at the estaminet that claimed Marie as an ornament. He had established himself in favor, too.

Lying amidst the grass in the fields under the spring sky, with its blue flecked by fleecy clouds, it was possible to get many dreams of peace from the heads of the spring flowers that nodded gently amongst the green. I liked to spend spare time like this, with a magazine for a companion ; and so I heard the voices of Royle and Marie talking beyond the hedge. I was about to move; but it seemed a mere friendly, laughing conversation, so I stayed. Suddenly, however, there was a protest from the girl.

"I'm only trying to tell you, in the right way, that. I'd like to take you back to Australia with me," he insisted.

"La, la, it is not to kees me that you need to tell me anything," she laughed. "You should remember Pierre— as I do."

"Oh, hang Pierre! I'll swear I love you, Marie, as well as he does. And I think you love me a bit."

"Why, of course, I love you, Jimmee; but I love Pierre, and I am to marry Pierre. He is fighting for France, and he trusts me."

"Well, he can't blame other fellows for wanting to kiss you. Just a kiss— what does it matter?"

I was glad that Marie broke away from him, for there was something in her voice that told me she really did love Royle very much; and, not being in Jimmy's shoes myself, I felt that loyalty to Pierre should be considered.

It seemed they had gone a good time when my own dry throat suggested refreshments ; and I turned towards the estaminet: but I passed the pair still oil the way, and still talking earnestly as they strolled.

There was a French soldier in the estaminet, a pleasant-faced fellow, already fraternising with the few Diggers who had arrived. He turned from them, leaping to his feet at the cry of "Pierre!" as Marie rushed to him, extending her two hands, which he took in his and raised to his lips.

"You two— you must be comrades," said Marie, standing between Jimmy, who had followed her, and Pierre. She was laughing; her emotion might have

been ascribed to her sudden meeting with her lover, but her face was at one moment white and the next red.

There was instantly a sense of hostility between the two men. Jimmy showed it clearly; but in a moment, Pierre, obeying the wish of his fiancee, leaped forward with a hearty, outstretched hand which Royle had to accept. It may be that so Pierre hoped to put an obligation of comradeship in the way of rivalry.

Whatever Royle's feelings, he had little cause for impatience. Pierre's regiment was passing on the way to reinforce the French troops now placed on our left, where the Portuguese had lost the long-held Messines ridge. Pierre had merely begged an hour of leave to see his sweetheart.

We got the news on evening parade that in the early morning, after stacking our packs and surplus equipment and getting into battle order, we were to move for the line.

It was Horley I met as I made my way across the camp after getting my equipment ready. "I don't mind." he said. "I hope we go straight in and that a bullet finds me. That's how I feel. So let's have a last drink."

Camp leave had, of course, been stopped, but there was a way through the hedge and across a field. How sweet the wine tastes that you think may be the last!

We had little time, however; by regulation the estaminets had to close early. It struck us that it would be best for us to leave by a rear way. Horley fell back upon me as he opened the door. Surprised, I looked over his shoulder, and in the dim twilight saw Marie seized fiercely in Jimmy's arms.

"You have told me you love me," he was saying passionately. "I have made you tell me you love me, and I know you do. But I want your kisses, Marie. To-morrow I am going up the line— I may not come back. Are you going to send me away coldly?"

She was fighting off his face with her hands as his lips sought hungrily for hers.

"Oh, Jimmee, Jimmee!" she panted. I do love you so my heart might break. But Pierre— he trusts me, and he is fighting too. He too may be killed. It is not loyal, it is not true!"

He was about to turn when she sprang upon him, taking his face in her hands.

"Oh, Jim-mee! Jim-mee! You must come back to me! God must keep you safe, my love— my love!"

She reeled from him sobbing towards the door. I don't think Royle waited to see how she threw herself on the ground sobbing out her prayers and her

love for him. He just stared as one dazed with some new realisation, and then, turning, plunged off towards the camp, blundering into shrubs as he passed.

"Dirty dog!" remarked Horley as we threaded our own way through the quickly gathering darkness after him. "That poor French chap! What right had Royle—"

"Oh, I don't know. War makes things different; we may all be dead to-morrow,"

I said. And then, after a pause: "Royle made a joke of love, but he's got a dose of the real thing now."

Down in the trenches at Meteren he showed it— a changed Royle, alert as ever, but pensive. Contrary to expectations, we were comparatively quiet; the activity was on our left towards Mont Kernel. Here nightly, amid a chaos of sound, there was a carnival of lights; the flashes of the guns roaring into action on the slopes, the flying fragments of the shells bursting up into a pyrotechnic display, mingling with the incessantly rising Verey lights, the red and green signal flares and the ground lights. Through it we could almost see the lines of the attacking French, dashing into the maelstrom of fire, to be hurled back again and again.

Intently Royle watched it all: the flashes of the guns gave light enough to show the thoughtfulness of his face.

"Poor devils!" he said; and I knew him too well to think that he had any but good wishes for the man who was creating such a problem for him.

And then at last our own turn came to spell.

We were like men reprieved as, out of the mire of the trenches, we made our way back into the village estaminet again. Marie, dressed in black, flashed a gay, expectant smile towards us, a smile of greeting, with something also of disappointment.

"Does she know about Royle?" I asked Horley, finding myself seated beside him.

"The black is for the chap she was engaged to— Pierre. He's been killed," Horley said.

The Diggers were boisterous; the gaps were less numerous than we had expected, and the reaction inclined us all to merry riot. Marie bustled about with the wine; every time the door opened her eyes flashed towards it, always to meet disappointment.

She could bear the suspense no longer. Several times she had paused as it about to put the question; at last it had to be spoken: "Where is he? Where is Sergeant Jimmee?"

"Wasn't Jimmie the sergeant that was skittled on patrol?" asked Hawkins. He had joined us in the line, and had not previously been in this estaminet.

Her tray clattered on the table. She stood like a statue, her face suddenly as white as any marble.

"He died bravely," I said, hurriedly following on the words of the blundering fool, and then I remembered a phrase: "For the glory of France."

"Oh, la, la, yes! For the glory of France! she cried with a peal of laughter; and in a minute she was on the table singing defiantly and full-throatedly as she had done when first she had impressed herself upon me. But now, although many of the Diggers joined in with her, there was something wild, demented about her. She finished with a shrill laugh, and then dropped on to one knee, sobbing into her hands. Half a dozen were ready to catch her as she tell swooning.

IT WAS ALL this I pictured, forgetting the verandah fronting the Eden-like garden forgetting even the old battalion mate whose face although not his name was remembered. And he was talking.

"I could not help thinking of her and her wild grief ever afterwards; and when the war was over I took my leave in France just to see what had become of her. In the little village they thought her half-mad. She loved France still; but it had become a tomb to her. She was hoping to go to Australia; it was the land that he had come from, the man she had learnt to love in spite of her wish to be loyal to her Frenchman. War makes wrecks like that: I know you remember how it killed my wife."

It flashed upon me now who he was; but he had changed mightily.

"It seemed to me that we who had come through had to piece together what was broken. She was eager to come to Australia— and so she married me," said Horley simply.

"You married—" I had begun; and then my eyes, which had been cast down as I listened to him, sprang up.

A gracious-looking woman had stolen upon us. Leaning over her husband's shoulder, her hands had grasped his with understanding, sympathy and gratitude. She smiled her recognition of me as I looked. And I knew that here, out of it all, these two at least had garnered a rich harvest of happiness.

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2: The Last Straw

Robert Barr

1849-1912

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 24 June 1914

YOUNG Mrs. Stansfield (it isn't necessary to designate her as Mrs. Edward Stansfield for there were now no others of the name in the neighborhood except her youthful, easy-going husband), Priscilla Stansfield stood beside the stone-mullioned window, one of three, and looked southward down the avenue, watching for the postman, who was a little late that morning. Her husband had just finished a letter which the postman must take away with him, and if he missed this Government official, Edward would be compelled to bestride his horse and ride five miles to the village of Morton Farwell, for the letter must be in London by next morning.

After folding the letter, he looked for some moments at the cheque he had signed, wondering if on second thoughts the banker would refuse it.

Never before had Stansfield met such difficulty in persuading the manager of the Morton-Farwell branch to allow him to overdraw, and now having received this permission, the young man knew not where to turn; for money to square his bank account within the time he had promised the manager, to shift his balance from the wrong side to the right side of his credit line.

"He's coming, Ned." said the girl, turning half round.

"All right; I'm ready for him," replied her husband, as he sealed and stamped the letter.

The young woman rang an old-fashioned pull bell (there was no electricity in the dilapidated Manor House) and when the grimy maid-of-all-work responded, the letter was handed to her, and she disappeared to meet the postman.

Priscilla sat down beside her husband, and laid her hand on his, that had just relinquished the pen.

"Discouraged, Edward?" she asked.

"Well, Priscilla, I am, rather. What an insatiable monster a mortgage is! Night and day the interest accumulates, and it does seem as if the periods of payment tread on each other's heels."

"Ah, but now this is settled, you have another six months to turn round in."

"I've had to turn round so often, Priscilla, that I am becoming giddy with the process. I tell you what it is, my girl; I'm a rank failure."

"Not as a husband, Ned."

The young man permitted himself a little wan smile.

"A husband's first duty is to provide sufficient money for the household, and that I seem unable to do. Why, Priscilla, should any of my creditors

persistently press a claim, even if only for a sovereign, I shall go smash, and curiously enough, I'm haunted by a sort of semi-certainty that the postman is bringing the claim, putting upon my back that well-hackneyed object, the last straw."

"A letter for you, sir," said the servant, entering, and placing the missive on the table, address side down. Stansfield did not lift it up.

"Aren't you going to read it?" asked his wife.

"I'm afraid," said the young man, with a wry grin. "See how thin it is! I'm certain it's the last straw."

"I don't think so," said Priscilla. "The last straw would be a bill, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose it might take that shape."

"Well, a bill is thicker than that envelope, and is usually sent with a half-penny stamp. This communication is sealed."

"You're optimistic, Priscilla. Bearing a half-penny stamp ; it would merely say 'A cheque would oblige,' but a sealed letter from a creditor is ominous. This man has not sent a bill. He simply informs me that as his previous requests for a settlement have been ignored, he is most reluctantly obliged to take proceedings for the recovery of six pounds three and ten pence, and signs himself 'Yours and so forth' instead of 'Yours obediently' or 'Yours respectfully.' "

"I'll bear half the straw!" cried Priscilla. "Let's take the plunge," and before he could prevent her, she turned the letter face upwards.

"Tracts, by Jingo!" exclaimed Edward.

"Both wrong. A Canadian stamp, as I live."

"I'm not wrong. I said from the first it wasn't the straw," insisted Priscilla. "Courage, dear boy, and open it."

"Let us enjoy a respite while we may. That handwriting is unknown to me. it has a decidedly foreign look, and the person who wrote it never went to school in England. I judge him to be an unlettered man, probably a western farmer."

"Go on with your surmises," said Priscilla. "I'm a practical person, and always prefer certainty to doubt."

With that she took up a penknife lying on the table, slit open the envelope, and drew forth the letter; four closely written pages on very thin paper. The huge hand of her husband came down flat upon the missive, preventing her from reading it. With his other hand he picked up the envelope, and scrutinised it.

"An ignorant man, I should say, for he has placed a five-cent stamp on this letter, apparently not knowing that penny postage has been inaugurated between Canada and England."

"You're very tantalising, Ned. Either read it yourself, or allow me to read it."

With a harassed laugh the young man withdrew his hand.

"You read it, my dear, for my nerves are rather unstrung. Better peruse it in silence, and then break, the news to me gently."

He leaned back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head, and closed his eyes.

"Hello! ' He begins with an insult!" exclaimed Priscilla, in tones of indignation tinged with dismay. "Have you any relatives in Canada?"

Edward opened his eyes. "Not that I know of, but it seems to me I heard my father say— I think he got an impertinent letter. What does it say, Priscilla?"

"Sir,— I suppose there is a fraudulent Stansfield at Stansfield-Morton as there has been any time this last twenty or thirty years. All right, says I. You people have had a good long innings, and it's time you should turn out, for I am the rightful Edward Stansfield, and you know it. Whenever I think of you I get mad clear through. Often when I have to sleep by the side of a road or under a haystack, or in the woods, and I think of my snobbish English relatives rolling in the lap of luxury, with money to burn, and a Manor house equal to Windsor Castle, full of servants and flunkies and lackies and those sort of animals...."

"Good Lord!" groaned Edward.

"... Why, then I sit up and swear till all's blue.

"Of course you know all about it, and so it isn't for your information but for the legal purposes that I write down the particulars. My grandfather, who seems to have been a good deal of a fool, like the majority of the family, got mad at his father, both of them Edward Stansfields, and vamoosed the ranch, coming over here to do hard pioneer work. The estate belonged to him, and his old man couldn't will it away, even if he wanted to. He wrote for money after he cooled down, but none was sent him. That put his back up, so he saw a lawyer about it, and the lawyer said he could have the estate any time he went to claim it. My grandfather didn't want to go back just then, so the lawyer told him he could keep the claim alive by writing for money every now and then, stating these facts. He did that, and my father did that, and now I do it, only I differ from the rest of them; I'm going right across there now to take possession, and don't you forget it. And so that you may know you've got a tough nut to deal with, I state right here that I'm a tramp, and have been all my life. I always tell folks that ask me why I live the life I do that I guess there must be something of the English gentleman about me, because I always did hate work, and never would do it, and now I'd rather sleep out of doors than in. "But

nevertheless, right is right, and that property is mine, so you may expect me when you see me, and I give you fair notice I'm going to jump your claim. I shall land in Liverpool from a tramp steamer, which is the kind of boat that suits my way of life, and then I'll hoof it from the port to Stansfield-Morton.

"Your affectionate forty-second cousin,

"Edward Stansfield.

"(The genuine article.)"

Edward Stansfield, "the imitation, if this letter were true, was now wide awake, and sitting straight enough.

"Priscilla," he said, "this isn't the last straw. It's a whole straw stack, weighing 20 tons. By Jove," he added, laughing, "I'll dismiss my hundred flunkies, and let the last straw have the place, mortgage and all. He'll be the fellow lying awake then, wondering how he's to raise the money for the interest!"

"Oh, Edward, don't laugh," pleaded the girl, her face pale. "Is there any truth in this awful letter?"

"I rather think there is, my dear, but don't you see it doesn't matter in the least? It's more than likely that the claim is outlawed long ago, but it would just serve the impertinent chap right if I dumped on his shoulders all that's left of the Manor. The lap of luxury! Windsor Castle, indeed, when the old roof won't keep out the weather much longer!"

A WEEK LATER the last straw put in an appearance. They watched him coming up the avenue, slouching, with a hang-dog look, pausing every now and then as if making a mental estimate about the value of the property. He was not exactly in rags, but his rough clothing looked' as though it ought to be tattered. Edward and his wife stook back from the window so that they could not be seen from outside.

"I say, Priscilla," remarked the young man, "I'm going out to greet my relative."

"Oh dear, ob dear," she sighed, "he'll be here soon enough."

"Not at the rate he's coming on, Do you know, dear, I feel sorry for him. There's not a soul in all England that he knows, and in spite of his slouch there is something Stansfieldian about him."

The young wife covered her face with open hands, as if to shut out the horrid vision, and she shuddered as Edward left her.

"Good-day to you!" he cried, going down the avenue. The tramp had been standing still since the door opened. "Is this my long-lost relative?"

"It's the genuine article," said the last straw, with an accent on the "uine." "I suppose you're the imitation?"

The Englishman laughed, and held out his hand, which the other took somewhat reluctantly.

"I understand," continued the English Stansfield, "we're to fight that out in the Law Courts."

"Just as you say," replied the tramp, indifferently. "I'm as independent as a hog on ice; go or stay, that's me."

"I should say off-hand that a hog on ice is rather helpless," commented Stansfield. but the other went on:

"And now say, Mr. Imitation, I don't want to intrude, and if you'd just as lief I wouldn't come into the house, say so."

"Why, I've come out to drag you in. Do you think we're going to let you escape? We're not so simple here in old England as you imagine. Behold Windsor Castle!"

He waved his hand toward the house. "The flunkies are all concealed, and the lackies under cover, but the moment we get you in, and the door shut, down you go through a trap door into a dungeon cell. That's the welcome the rightful heir always gets when he comes home, and we do this sort of thing every day in England."

The tramp grinned. He appeared to have a sense of humor.

"All right. Bring on your dungeon. I guess I have slept in worse places, and I suppose you feed your prisoners?"

"Yes; your bread and water will be laid out in the dining-room as soon as you can come in."

"Good enough," replied the tramp. "I hope there's plenty of bread, for I'm hungry. So this is the Manor House, is it? It seems a little out of repair."

"Yes," said Stansfield. "We're gradually letting it go to ruin so that we may make money by charging excursionists sixpence each for being shown over the place."

"Well, you don't get any sixpence from me."

"I didn't expect one; besides, we haven't begun the caretaking trade yet, telling the history of the house in expectation of a tip."

"Has it got a history? Do any ghosts wander round it?"

"Only myself and my wife, accompanied by the ghost of prosperity. There is a sort of legend that the prosperity of Stansfield-Morton would depart this life if ever the rightful heir abandoned the estate and that seems to be true, for there was plenty of money in your grandfather's time and before that, but since his departure we younger members of the family have managed very badly. The estate has been gradually eaten up with mortgages, and we've lost

bit by bit, until only part of the Home Farm remains, and considering the price of agricultural land nowadays, I doubt if a sale would , produce the money lent on it."

"Humph!" growled the tramp. "That doesn't seem very encouraging to the rightful heir."

"I'm sorry," said Stansfield, "if you are disappointed. Had you given me time, and an address in Canada, I should have written to you, and revealed our real situation."

"Oh, would you?" sneered the mendicant. "I very much doubt it. Your branch of the family never answered the letters sent by the elder line, so if you had written, it's not likely I'd have believed you. Sure there's no gold hidden in one of the dungeons?"

Edward Stansfield laughed.

"You're quite welcome to search, and if you find any, I hope you'll give me a share of it."

By this time they had reached the dining-room, and Priscilla, watching their entrance, gazed upon her kinsman by marriage with something like fear and repulsion.

He was a very rough- looking customer, unkempt and rather haggard, seemingly between 45 and 50 years of age. His shaggy locks tinged with grey showed no acquaintance with either scissors or comb, and his hard, deeply-lined face was burnt to a deep brown by the action of an ardent sun and exposure to all kinds of weather.

"My dear," said her husband, "this is our kinsman and my namesake, Edward Stansfield, of Canada."

Priscilla could not conscientiously say she was pleased to see him, but extending a half-reluctant hand, she gave him what greeting she could call to her lips. He seemed abashed and awkward in her presence, and his volubility of a short time before sank into silence. His embarrassment, however, did not interfere with his appetite, and he evidently relished the meal prepared for him.

"Did you walk all the way from Liverpool?" asked Priscilla.

"Yes, ma'am, every step," he replied. "England doesn't seem to be a very friendly country," he went on. "If I'd been tramping in Canada, and a man drove past, he'd be sure to offer me a ride, but nobody did that over here."

This was the beginning of a very unhappy month for Priscilla. She did not know what to do with the last straw, as she and her husband invariably termed their visitor when they were alone. He proved a most embarrassing guest, paying no attention to household rules. He despised the best bedroom, preferring to sleep out of doors, or perhaps in one of the farm buildings. He

tramped all over the place, and would sometimes disappear for days together without giving any notice. He pretended to be anxious about correspondence from Canada, and when day after day they told him no letter had arrived, he did not conceal a suspicion that they might have intercepted it. Priscilla's dislike of him grew as time went on, but this dislike her husband did not share. The man interested him, and he related to his wife a conversation they had had, each reproaching the other for his method of life.

"Why," the tramp has said, "you're the most inane, helpless individual I ever saw. Here you are with a farm of your own in the very centre of the world's best markets, yet you aren't able to grow enough to keep yourself alive, let alone pay your debts. You allow farmers from the backwoods of Canada to beat you in market right at your doors. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a young man like you."

Stansfield had laughed.

"I like that," he replied, "coming from a tramp. What on earth is more shiftless than an individual who begs his way from door to door? Good gracious; if I'm useless, you're worse, for you live on the provender earned by others. You don't seem to care for any useful work. Why haven't you a farm of your own in Canada, if you can beat us English farmers so easily?"

The man had shrugged his shoulders. "I couldn't content myself," he said, "settling down in any one place. I've simply got to be tramping the country. I've always done it, and I suppose always shall until I die, and then," he said, with a harsh laugh, "they'll find I've left everything to you, for I haven't any other relative that I know of, and I rather like you, though you're no good."

"Why doesn't he dispossess us if he's going to," cried the exasperated wife. "He says nothing but insulting things, and yet he stops on and on. It's like the sword of Damocles hanging over us."

"I rather imagine," mused her husband, "that my offer to turn the place over to him without any legal compulsion has mollified his rancour, and after all, there's a certain shrewdness about the man. He sees quite plainly that instead of acquiring an asset, he is taking over a liability. I think he'll leave us before very long, and I confess that I shall miss him."

"Well, I shan't," replied Mrs. Stansfield.

One morning the last straw became in reality the last straw so far as Priscilla was concerned. The tramp had come down early, and the morning's mail being on the dining-room table, he had actually opened a letter which, though addressed to Edward Stansfield, he must have known was not intended for him. He did not await breakfast, but went off no one knew where. Priscilla

found the opened letter, and her indignation was tinged with dismay When she discovered written on it, in the tramp's uneducated handwriting:

"Opened in mistake, by the Last Straw."

The terrible man had learned in some manner their nickname for him, and perhaps he took this way of showing his resentment. Her husband laughed when he read the message, but his merriment ceased as he read the curt note within the violated envelope.

"Sir," wrote the banker: "If the £43 7s 6d which you borrowed a month ago is not paid within three days, I shall reluctantly be compelled to take proceedings for its recovery."

"Oh, lord!" exclaimed Edward, "the sword of Damocles has fallen, and it isn't the Last Straw that has cut the thread."

Absent-mindedly he tore open the remaining letters, and from one of them fell out a document which he scrutinised with wide-open eyes. It was a draft on the Canadian Bank of Commerce, No. 2 Lombard-street, London, E.C., for £6,342 14s 10d.

"Great heavens!" he cried, turning to the covering letter.

"Dear Mr. Stansfield," it said:—

"I enclose current dividend from your Cobalt mine. You will see that it amounts to more than the thirty thousand dollars you anticipated, but your estimate was pretty nearly correct. I enclose as ordered a draft on the Bank of Commerce to your order for six thousand three hundred and forty-two pounds, fourteen shillings and tenpence.

"Yours most sincerely,

"Alexander S. McLeod."

Stansfield glanced at the envelope. It bore a Canadian stamp and a Toronto postmark.

"By Jove!" he cried, "here's the Last Straw's long-expected communication, and I have opened it. So you see, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. The Last Straw is evidently a rich man. I wonder if he'll help me with my banker?"

That night they waited dinner half an hour for the Last Straw, but the tramp did not enter until the meal was half finished.

"I'm as hungry as a hear," he said, sitting down in his usual place.

"Say, I opened a letter of yours this morning, and what's more, I read it. Seems to me, my friend, you're up against it. That banker of yours isn't going to wait."

"I'm not up against it," said Stansfield.

"You've got the cash, then?"

"I haven't got the cash, but something just as satisfactory. One good turn deserves another, you know. You opened my letter from a bank, and I've opened your letter from a bank. You found that I was short about fifty pounds, and I find you're in funds to the extent of nearly six thousand five hundred pounds, so I'll either borrow the fifty pounds from you, or charge you fifty pounds for transferring this estate to you without any law suit, whichever you like," and Stansfield, from the end of the table, tossed over the letter from Canada.

The tramp looked at his draft, and muttered: "Six thousand three hundred and forty-two pounds, fourteen shillings and tenpence. I say, Farmer," he cried, looking up, "how much is that in real money? Why the deuce don't you adopt decimal currency in this benighted country? What is this in real dollars?"

"In round numbers, about thirty-one thousand, seven hundred."

"And you've had this draft in your possession all day?"

"Since breakfast time; yes."

"And the bank manager a-threatening of you? Why didn't you take it and cash it in?"

"For the simple reason it wasn't mine."

"But it's made out in your name, don't you see? Well, Ned, you're a pretty honest fellow. You know, I couldn't have resisted the temptation to go to that bank manager, plank the draft down on his counter and say, 'Put this to my credit, and don't trouble me for trivialities like fifty pounds.'

"I'm going back to Canada to-morrow. This country's too damp to sleep out-doors. and besides, it's too civilised and cultivated. If a man lies down behind a hedge he's sure to be disturbed by a policeman. I'd as soon think of sleeping out in Yonge-street, Toronto. I've slept in the woods and in shanties and in camps for the last thirty years, always prospecting for minerals, and I've got some of the best mines there is. I'm a tramp in spirit, all right enough, yet I've an income of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year that's no particular use to me, for I've no family to inherit. Always was a bachelor; always will be.

"Now, you take this draft and put it in your bank, and tell that manager not to write to one of our family in the discourteous way he did that letter I opened."

"That's merely business form, cousin."

"Oh, I know all about business forms. You'll see his business form change to abjectness when this six thousand tumbles into your balance. Now, after I'm gone, you find out quietly what it will cost to buy the Stansfield-Morton estate as it was in my grandfather's time, and I'll send over the money to do it. I don't

believe I'll ever come back to this slow old country, but there's no saying what crazy thing a man may do when he begins to get on in years. Anyhow, the representative of the elder branch of the family will be partner with a representative of the younger branch, and we'll see if that doesn't bring back the Stansfield luck you were speaking about."

3: Ladies Should Not Listen

Frank Condon

1882-1940

Collier's July 23 1938

Smith's Weekly (NSW), 3 Sep 1938

American journalist, short story writer and silent movie screenwriter. Not to be confused with Richard Condon, thriller writer and author of "The Manchurian Candidate".

IT began raining as we pulled out of Honolulu for Japan. The decks were wet, the companion-ways slippery, and that is how it happened. With never a wicked thought in my mind, starting down from A deck to B deck, my heel slid off a strip of stair, metal, my hand jerked free of the rail, and I went on down out of control. There happened to be a person of the opposite sex either walking or contemplating Nature on B deck, and my arrival knocked her feet from under her, and she sprawled over backward, coming to rest on my back.

We arose in unison, with me doing the work.

"Sorry, miss," I said in a penitent voice, and observing she was neither aged nor ugly, "I hope you are not hurt."

"Do you ever try walking downstairs?" she asked coldly, smoothing herself. "Many people find it the best way."

She was so pretty and indignant that I liked her at once, while she stood there in the Pacific breezes, frowning at me. She had brownish hair with red undertones, and it blew nicely about her face. Her eyes were friendly and you could tell that such a mouth was never intended to sustain a frown.

"I was the one underneath," I said in meek apology. "You fell on top of me, and as I am not hurt you cannot be hurt, so kindly stop glaring. My foot slipped and I fell downstairs at great risk of life and limb. My name is Wood— Peter Wood, and a very nice passenger indeed, when not falling downstairs."

She began to laugh and, as I knew it would, her smile lighted up the sea for several waves.

She was called Bernice Cornell; she was headed around the world for purposes of feminine exploration, adventure and possibly romance. All girls stepping on steamers have in their minds the shy thought that perhaps they will meet a tall and noble male and marry him after a pleasant courtship on the boat deck.

MISS CORNELL was travelling alone. I came aboard at Honolulu, destination Egypt, didn't know a soul, but now I knew somebody, and a very charming somebody she turned out to be. Ordinarily I don't care a hang about girls and would much rather avoid them, play poker in the smoke room and listen to

male passengers lie entertainingly about their adventures in China. I have had considerable experience with girls on ocean liners, and while they love to dance and have you wrap them up in steamer rugs, still they all run rapidly out of conversation about the second day.

I said most girls. This Bernice Cornell happily belonged to a different school. She wouldn't have bored even George Bernard Shaw. Furthermore, she was so attractive and young and vivacious that although the steamer *Singapore* was only six days out already two of the gentlemen customers were goggle-eyed about her and wandered around the boat cursing each other in low tones.

It so happens that young women trust me instinctively, and almost automatically, as I am not a frivolous fellow nor romantic to the eye. I look a little like a faded print of Abe Lincoln when he was thin. There is a rugged honesty to be seen in my countenance that invites friendly disclosures from the young of the opposite sex, but seems to discourage sentimental philanderings; and if I begin telling a strange dame that I have never, never met anyone like her, that her voice is like the murmur of a brook at eventide, and her eyes are twin stars, she generally looks politely interested, but does not have any heart-throbs.

SO I quit that line years ago, after rueful experiences. I was forced into the belief that romance was not down my alley, and that state isn't really terrifying. Once you have it firmly implanted that you are an onlooker in the Heart Handicap, it's, rather comfortable, for you can go about freely with all sorts of girls and say anything. You don't even have to be polite. As intimated, girls seem to recognise all this, and that is why they trust me and often ask my advice, and so it came about on the *Singapore*.

Without being in any way to blame, Bernice was in a sentimental jam, as both passengers desired to marry her and kept asking her day by day, insisting on a showdown.

"What would you do about it?" she inquired, after we came to be good pals, which was the second day. "I like them both. They're nice boys. It's embarrassing."

"Shouldn't be. Just select the one you like best. You can't like them both the same. No woman ever did that since time began. Pick out the one you love madly, and then tell the other one the bad news."

She replied that she couldn't and wouldn't do it, being a tender-hearted creature, and meanwhile the good ship *Singapore* rolled onward toward Japan and China. This was before Japan began actively civilising China from the air and you could still get into Shanghai.

I became acquainted with both contestants for the lady's hand and it was a simple job to give good advice, which is my dish. There was really no problem. She had first encountered young John Dunbar, who wrote plays, sulked when offended, drank rum punches with great joy and regarded the other passengers as cockroaches in clothes. He joined in none of the ship's social activities, moped about by himself and parked his deck chair in a secluded cubbyhole, where he wrote dramas and, while I never saw a Dunbar play, I'll bet they were stinkers. I didn't either like or dislike him, the same as I feel about rivets or tea-trees. He was thin and intense-looking, seeming always to be miles away in his thoughts. He was definitely daffy about the Bernice person and was getting on smoothly until the other chap cut in.

THE second suitor was down as Forest E. Inmann on the passenger list, but by the time I arrived aboard they were all calling him Whitey. He had a head of tousled blond hair and was the North Pole opposite of John Dunbar. Everybody grinned at Whitey when he clattered past on the deck, and he grinned back, with a pleasant word for even the aged ones. He did everything and he did it with vim and vigor.

Ship passengers admire lively fellows who gallop about energetically and never appear self-conscious. It was Whitey Inmann who borrowed the leader's cap, led the orchestra in ribald swing, played the piano for hours unending, gave imitations of Jolson, Cantor and Penner, and stood on his head. It was Whitey who thought up the most original costumes for the masquerades, danced the best among the men, laughed the loudest and longest and won the bean race in the deck sports. He won the wood-sawing contest and evoked the heartiest howls in the turtle race. When the amateurs required a master of ceremonies for the ship's night club, Whitey was M.C. Old ladies adored him, the men regarded him as a regular guy and the girls were coy and teased him with their come-hitherest smiles.

Among the damsels, he selected Bernice to fall in love with, and in his bluff, roistering way he demanded action and a definite reply. He wanted to know if she loved him and would marry him and when. Nobody could blame him, for it was easy to see that if he— or Johnny Dunbar— won a wife like Bernice, then the voyage was a success.

Like, many another puzzled young gazelle, adored by two, she faltered, hesitated to speak, and sought solace in consultation with old Peter Wood, advice free at all hours.

"Marry Whitey," I stuck to it, time and again. "He's smart and he's pleasant by nature, whereas this other mental case may have fits of temperament. Whitey won't.

"Whitey is in the tyre business, and I know about that, as I sell cars. It's a good, solid business, and he's a solid businessman, which means that you will continue to eat at regular intervals, and can have Easter hats through life."

"I realise all that," Bernice said, looking dreamy.

"Then Where's the problem?"

"John is the problem. He wants to know. He insists that I tell , him whether I will or won't, and also tell him if I have agreed to marry Whitey."

"The Whitey part is none of his business. But you'll certainly have to inform him that you cannot be his bride this trip. You know there is a law about having two husbands."

MISS BERNICE CORNELL, picking a flawless moonlight night to do it, stood beside Mr. Dunbar on the top deck, looked at the glimmering sea, and let him have both barrels. She said she was sorry and wouldn't wilfully wound the feelings of any man. She said she enjoyed talking to him, admired him, and hoped he would continue to be her friend, but that she could never marry him, as she was going to marry Whitey Inmann.

"Have you told him you would?" Dunbar asked, speaking in low, sad accents.

"Not yet."

Dunbar looked at her like a dying doe, and that night he got himself extensively corned on Spanish sherry and English ale, which, when mixed together in copious abundance and eased down the human thorax, will eventually produce results and a hang-over of splendid proportions. He shunted himself about the decks, leaning on walls and posts, and threatened to fall downstairs until the stewards forcibly put him to bed.

Next morning he looked quite sick. From that time on, Mr. Dunbar ceased writing his plays on the secluded deck and spent time preserving himself in alcohol, hoping thus to forget the blow. I suppose he dramatised himself, like one of his characters, and I never did see a spurned soul destroy so much live liquor. He lit himself up like a Christmas tree and kept on adding candles, and any jilted lover who believes he can win back the lady by chinning himself on whisky is as wrong as Heil Hitler.

I wasted little sympathy on the jiltee, as I don't approve of sulky people, or lofty ones, and he was both. He continued to pester Miss Cornell, and I knew about the occasions but Whitey didn't, and a good thing, as he most likely would have taken a poke.

Dunbar wasn't content with being turned down. He wished to know if she was surely going to marry Whitey and had she actually consented.

"Why don't you tell him it's none of his business?" I asked her.

"I'm sorry for him and I feel as if it were my fault. He looks so miserable."

"Well, then, tell him you said yes to Whitey, if that's what he wants to hear. I certainly wouldn't worry if I were you. As he is going now, it will only be a month before spontaneous combustion sets in."

Following my advice, she informed the pale lover that her marriage with Whitey was a certainty, that she had said definitely "yes," and that revelation occurred at Shanghai, where the steamer docked for two days. The news was conveyed to Dunbar as we were hauling out and heading down the Whangpoo, with a tug pushing lustily against our nose. It might have been four in the afternoon.

At five, Mr. Johnny Dunbar contributed to the interest of the trip by jumping overboard from the stern rail, apparently with motives of suicide.

YOU cannot stop a large ocean liner on the Whangpoo tide and go chasing suicidal dramatists, so the crew tossed life belts and Mr. Dunbar splashed around astern until picked up by a wandering junk.

Halfway across the Pacific, and long before this item of the Dunbar jumping, I had noticed in myself symptoms of some new disorder. I suffered from uneasy feelings and a nameless distress, like when a person is bilious or is going to have the yellow jaundice, and, as I am a healthy person, it bothered me no end. As the days passed, I sat beside Bernice, talked over her little problems, danced with her of an evening and got along serenely. During this time, I was being the big brother and helpful friend. Consequently, I gave no thought to the possible danger of falling in love with her myself as she travelled across the world. She was having her troubles, and when I joined the ship two men were mad about her— which would seem plenty.

I awakened one morning about three o'clock, somewhere north of Wake Island, stared a long time at the steel ceiling and realised that the food and the water had nothing to do with my uneasy state.

I was in love.

"So," I said in the dim light, "that's the way it is. You had to go and pick yourself a girl who is already as good as married."

This fresh knowledge in no way affected my relations with Bernice, which continued along the high plane of perfect friendship. And in the course of time and with no intervening events, we plugged along, through the tropic seas and docked at Colombo.

I gloomed around in my newfound condition, wondering how that had ever happened to me, of all persons. I believed nobody on board knew about me and my secret, although Captain Lowry asked me once if I felt all right! It gave me genuine pleasure to sit and listen to Bernice talk, even about Whitey and

what a fine chap he was, and at no moment did she remotely suspect that my inner cosmos was in turmoil and that at intervals I was aware of a startling impulse to take Whitey by the trousers and heave him to the sharks.

THE gangplanks went over in the morning and eager passengers flocked ashore in search of quaint adventure,, phoney jade, local beer, and teakwood elephants. I lingered up top with Captain Lowry, a hard-eyed young man of fifty, who could still lick his own weight in wildcats; if not too wild. Captain Ken Lowry has been shoving liners around the world for many years, knows all, sees all and was once the line's champion roughneck and trouble-shooter. I had travelled with him on a previous voyage and we got along fine, played poker in his cabin and discussed passengers with great freedom and brutality.

We stood there, gazing down at the dock, watching the passengers scurry off, and among them was Bernice, her arm turned into Whitey's, and, seeing us, she waved gaily. I made a humorous gesture and the skipper shook his fist at her.

"They make a handsome couple, don't they?" I inquired.

"Who?"

"Bernice and Whitey."

"Two of the best," he said with a grin. "Nice people. I like them both."

"Might turn out to be a good marriage. The luck of the sea." He turned slowly and fastened me with a blue, cold eye.

"What was that last crack?"

"I said they'd likely make a success of matrimony. Both amiable,. calm people. You knew they are about to be married, didn't you?"

"I did not," said he, "and they are not."

I chuckled and looked after the disappearing throng. "You should try to keep up with the social news aboard your own scow, *el capitano*. Bernice is going to marry Whitey Inmann. First, Mr. Johnny Dunbar had the inside track, but he drank too much and finally leaped overboard, as you must know, even if you are a peculiarly dumb captain. Now it's Whitey, and I know, as I am the one who advised her to marry him."

It was his turn to chuckle, which he did, breaking his bronzed sea mug into a grin.

"Spelled out in capital letters, that makes bigamy," he chortled. "Whitey has a wife. He married her in Alexandria, Egypt. She is now at home, waiting for him and probably bright-eyed with news about an oncoming heir."

I turned on the deck and looked to see if he meant it.

"Are you kidding me?"

"I am not kidding anybody. He not only has his present wife, but he had a former one some years ago, and she divorced him for reasons unknown. He came around with me two years ago to forget domestic troubles, met his second wife in San Francisco, and married her. I ought to know. I was there."

I COULD feel myself gurgling inside, as if I had swallowed small alarm clocks at the moment of explosion, and glared at the skipper, who is my pal.

"Then why didn't ' you stop this?" I demanded. "Wasn't it your job to get in there and warn Bernice?"

"It was not. I run this steamboat, but not the social life on board. If I were to bust into the romantic affairs of passengers, they'd travel exclusively on rival lines, and this one would fire me. The motto is— let 'em have a little fun."

"Fun!" I yelled and started down the deck, full speed, with the skipper shouting after me that I'd do my nose a favor to keep it out of other people's business.

In the afternoon I picked up a clue from Mr. Ronald Delong, one of the tour conductors and a good friend. He said he believed Whitey and Bernice had joined a crowd from the ship and were hastening out of town to witness a native ceremonial at some joint known as the Temple of the Seven Serpents. A taxicab romped me out of town, and in fifteen minutes I was standing before the sacred structure, along with about one third of the ship's passenger list, all popeyed with curiosity and milling around with the natives of Ceylon, who are blacker than ink and smell in any weather.

Some sort of ceremonial or incantation was about to take place at the Temple of the Seven Serpents, which was a gray, one-story joss house, and might have made a good garage if equipped with windows. A young maharaja. with a rich sepia complexion, was having something official and important done to him, amid bursts of oratory from the medicine men of the tribe, and it looked to me as if it might be coronation day— either that, or he was being confirmed, or taking the veil or getting his first elephant.....

His old man, presumably the receding maharaja, was in charge of the ritual, clad in modest scarlet robes, and you could feel it was all very important, like the opening of the baseball season. Natives beat on drums and blew bugles, and the young princeling stood on a raised platform and apparently recited the Gettysburg Address in his own tongue.

There was a sacred cow tied to a sacred cow post and an elderly elephant, clad in a red dinner coat and soon to die if I am any judge of health in elephants. The tourist onlookers staged and stared, totally unable to figure it out, and over near the sacred cow stood Bernice, who saw me first and turned

to nod a greeting. Whitey was right beside her and fondly explaining the mysteries of the Orient.

IT will always be my contention that the next few minutes were purely accidental, for I had no intention of starting a personal brawl on the island of Ceylon. I knew perfectly well that Bernice should be removed from the company of a scalawag, so I proceeded to help her, as I had helped her before. I took her by the arm and gently shunted her aside, maybe three feet off, whereat she looked astonished, and so did Whitey.

"And now you get out of here," I said to him in a low voice, so as not to disturb the coronation. "Start now and do not pause to ask questions."

Whitey only looked amused.

"Are you crazy," he asked, "or drunk?"

"Maybe both, only I am not married, which you are, with your wife at home and perchance a new child when you get home from your philandering on steamers. There is a feeling on these boats that married men should not go around posing as single and asking nice girls to marry them."

"Who told you I was married?" he asked, but not smiling now. "Captain Lowry."

"He's a liar!"

"No doubt. You tell him that later when you see him. Meanwhile, I remember asking you to get yourself out of here and leave Miss—"

Whatever ultimatum I was about to deliver remained unsaid, as it was here I ducked a left swing, which went harmlessly over my head. Now I am no Joe Louis or Henry Armstrong with the fists, having been reared in a quiet neighborhood. I always avoided athletics in any form, as they make me weary. The next thing was a hard punch that hit me on the bridge of the nose, causing my eyes to water freely and disturb my sight. It is a strange sensation to be hit hard on the nose and not be able to see. I did as well as I could, swung my own fists with great vigor and hit Whitey somewhere, seeming in the act to break all the bones in my hand.

Details of the brawl are vague in my mind, but I recall that I was filled with a definite urge to tear Whitey into small strips and put them back wrong. I believe I won the fight, but am not certain as the crowd closed in and a few black men fell on me. When strong hands dragged one of us off the other, I was the one on top. There was a deal of native jabbering and the local constabulary took charge, one group seizing me and the other Whitey. We were under arrest.

Bernice walked over to where I stood, surrounded by police and rubbing one of the sorest noses in Ceylon. I was still breathing hard and both eyes were closing so that I beheld her imperfectly.

"If I don't see you again," she said quietly, "remember that I hate you."

AND if that isn't a nice reward to get for being a true friend and doing your duty! That's the way it is with life and people. You do the right thing, or what seems to you the right thing, and presently you are in the doghouse, with people pointing the finger of scorn. Sometimes you even go to gaol, and that's what we did, Whitey and myself, he having his own guard and travelling ahead of me.

They didn't give us a ride to the hoosegow, but made us walk it, the population following at our heels and demanding that we be hanged, as we bad committed a mortal sin by fighting on the temple grounds.

We two had insulted the maharaja and his papa and his mamma. It transpired that the elder statesman bossed the province and cared little for foreigners, especially pugilists. It was he who signed word to the notice that he didn't like any part of our afternoon frolic, and in fifteen minutes Whitey was safely in his cell and I was in another cell, and if you ever saw the inside of an Indian gaol you can tell we were in something. The ceilings were covered with lizards, each cockroach had his own bodyguard and I heartily wished I had remained on the ship, playing solitaire.

Even in a gaol where you can talk English and the attendants can talk English, it is sometimes difficult to get out. but when you are locked in an Indian gaol for conduct offensive to the main lama, you may as well take off your hat and see if they have any books.

Two hours before the *Singapore* hauled in her gangplank, there were noises outside my cell and a gent with a red fez opened the gate and let me out. He made Oriental gestures and I followed him out front and there sat Captain Ken Lowry, one skipper who can drag a felon out of most any gaol.

"Step on it," he said, rising. "I've got things to do besides rescuing imbecile passengers."

"Where's Whitey?"

"He's still here. The official report states that he insulted the old boy and that is why you're loose. He hit you first."

"Then he won't be on the *Singapore*?"

"Not unless there's a miracle."

"Neither will I, Mr. Lowry. Thank you for ungaoling me as the acoustics in there are pretty crumby. I'll take my bags off the ship and wait here for another."

"Why?"

"Because it will save Miss Cornell the trouble of looking at me from here to Italy. No doubt she feels pretty awful, and I got her into that Whitey business."

THE skipper said nothing further until we reached the ship, where I made motions to leave him and go' on down to my cabin. We had an hour left.

"I'll pack now," I said, "and see you before I go."

He stopped and turned on that sea grin of his. He always made me think of Jack Dempsey.

"Listen, Pete," he said. "You're just a fool." He used three or four words in here to qualify fool and sort of light it up.

"Why am I?"

"For a man who thinks, he has a brain, you're pathetic. The biggest sap doesn't come out of a tree. It comes out of your cabin."

"All right, skipper. You have your fun. I don't mind."

"It would never occur to you that maybe Bernice doesn't want you to stay behind in Ceylon."

"You're my friend, Ken. I know that. But you are also what is known as nuts. She hates me."

"Who said so?"

"She did."

He moved his head from side to side and made vague throat noises. There was a Colombo beetle on the deck, going somewhere, and he spit at it without rancor.

"And you are the one who had gall enough to go around this ship advising people how to manage their matrimonial affairs! Sweet papa! Well, go ahead. Get your bags and duck. You're not worth saving. Who do you think got you out of this lousy gaol?"

"Captain Lowry, my old pal."

"I did not. If it wasn't for Bernice, you'd be there still. It was she came to the bridge and begged me and that's why I did it. So pack your bags and go hide yourself under a lizard."

He rumbled off down the deck and I went along to my cabin, thinking things over as I descended. I don't like Colombo and who does? A long time I sat there with my foot on the washstand and finally the whistle blew, meaning there were ten minutes left. Instead of getting off. I changed clothes, the current suit being banged up a trifle, and went along to dinner. where everybody ginned at me meaningly and asked me how my eye was.

I could see fairly well, but not Bernice, for she was not in her usual chair. Mr. Inmann's chair was likewise unoccupied and that raised my spirits. I could

see him in that peaceful gaol, trying to talk English and digging little crawlers out of his watch pocket.

THERE was a grand sunset at sea that night, one of those Indian Ocean babies, with fluted towers on the horizon and golden gates with horses and knights in armor; and when I discovered her, dusk was moving in and the gold was fading from the sunset. She was standing alone al the rail, with her chin in her palm, and as . I walked slowly toward her I felt low in my mind and ashamed.

She knew I was there before I said a word, and turned to me.

"All I can say," I began, "is that I am sorry. I suppose I talk too much, and especially to young ladies, and also, perhaps I am not as smart about, some things as I believe."

She stood there, saying nothing at all, just looking at me, and sunset bathing her in curious colors.

"Where the mistake was made," I went on, "was back there in Japan, when I warned you about Johnny Dunbar. I should have shut my mouth and left it all to your own instincts. It may be that Johnny was the man, and if that's the case, it isn't too late even now. You could reach him in Shanghai with a radio and he might catch a steamer and follow—"

"Listen, Peter," she said, very quietly, "if it's all the same to you from now on, I'll try to get along without your advice. I know you mean all right and you advise honestly, but maybe I could handle my own affairs from here on."

"That suits me," I returned, "just so long as you don't hate me and can bear the sight of me walking around these decks. You don't hate me, do you?"

"No, Peter," said she, "I don't hate you."

Well, it was funny the way she said it. There was something odd in her tone that you couldn't miss, so I turned her slowly around and made her look up at me, and without me doing the slightest thing about it she was right there in my arms and I could feel her lips brushing lightly over the bum eyes.

The rest of that voyage was a dream and you don't have dreams like that twice in a career. I went around on clouds, very much like those of the sunsets, and we didn't even bother to let the other passengers in on the news— except Lowry. That tough old seadog only grinned when I told him of the remarkable situation, patted. Bernice on the shoulder and swore at me.

When we left the *Singapore* for good, which occurred in the harbor of Naples, he was scowling on the bridge in his usual place and we went down to watch the steamer pull out and head for America. We stood on the roof of a warehouse adjoining and talked across until the *Singapore* began backing out. Bernice hanging on to my arm.

"Goodbye, pal." I said, when she began to move.

"So long, Pete. Take good care of that person with you. You got something there."

"I know. I'll take good care of her."

The gap was widening slowly; we had to raise our voices and a hell was jangling on the bridge. Ken spoke a final word.

"He might be married at that," he bellowed, his bronze map wrinkled into a smile.

"Who?"

"Whitey Inmann— he might be. Lotta fellows like that get married."

"You mean you don't know?"

"I don't know a darn' thing about the man— never did." He beamed across the open water.

"You lied!" I yelled at him.

"Certainly I lied. What do you care? You got her, haven't you? In fifty years, what's the difference?"

Then the bell rang louder than ever and he disappeared inside.

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4: Mr. Devlin's Deceit

Frank Condon

The Cavalier 15 Feb 1913
Express and Telegraph (Adelaide), 27 Sep 1913

THE MARRIAGE of Mr. Lawrence Devin to Miss Ernestine Childs occurred promptly at 2 o'clock in the afternoon at St. Bartholomew's Church, and a small number of intimate friends attended the ceremony.

The usual remarks were made by the clergyman, and the still more usual ones by the spectators, after which the newly joined pair went happily away.

The day before his wedding young Mr. Devlin was what the newspapers would term "a prominent young millionaire," meaning that he possessed large quantities of money.

When the ceremony took place Mr. Devlin was worth, approximately, the cost of the suit of clothes he wore. A company had sunk with all hands on board, carrying with it all his money.

In the motor which carried them from the church, Lawrence looked sadly, and thoughtfully at his smiling bride. She knew nothing of the financial crash. His friends knew nothing. To all outward appearances he was still a "prominent young millionaire."

"Dearest," Lawrence said, taking his bride's hand tenderly in his own, "we are going to be very happy, are we not?"

"Yes, Lawrence," replied Ernestine, pressing his hand.

"And to contribute to our supreme happiness, to provide for us an unusual and unique experience, I have thought out a plan in which I am sure you will concur. We have been accustomed to the good things of life; to luxuries in every form; to servants, motors, theatres, and all the thousand little extravagances that make life easy. But we have never had an opportunity to try the other sort of life— the life exactly opposed to our own— the life of the poor. What would be a finer thing than to pretend we were very poor; to live as the poor live; to deny ourselves the things to which we have been accustomed?"

"I am sure it would be delightful," his bride responded.

"We could take a small flat," Lawrence continued, his enthusiasm growing. "We could pretend we had scarcely any money, we would have plain food, do our own housework, and study the lives of those poverty-stricken people. Would you like to try it?"

"Lawrence, dear," said Ernestine, "I will gladly do anything you do, and share your life, no matter what happens. I think it will be very interesting to live as the poor live. We shall have no end of fun."

"Then it is agreed," her husband continued, breathing a sigh of relief.

The beautiful girl smiled happily at her husband's content. Lawrence promised to attend to the flat-hunting in the morning.

With that decision as a broad foundation, the newly wedded couple took a small flat. Mr. Devlin paid £3 a month for it. Ernestine gazed about her with the interested eyes of a traveller who has come upon a strange and foreign country.

Each morning Ernestine rose and prepared a frugal meal. With her own hands she washed the dishes, dusted the imitation oak furniture, and scrubbed the floor. Lawrence sometimes helped her.

Lawrence had said—

"My dear girl, much as I dislike to be away from your side for even a brief moment, there are certain weighty financial matters requiring my presence in town. We are, at the present time, in the midst of a complex railway reorganisation and my interests in the company require my constant attention. As I am chairman of the board of directors, my task is heavy. Tomorrow I shall have to be in town very early. Shall we have breakfast at 7?"

"My love," Ernestine answered fondly, "I will prepare your breakfast at 6 if you wish it."

So Mr. Devlin left, the flat at half-past 7 in the Morning and spent the day looking for a job. In the evening he appeared for supper."

"You look drawn and weary, dearest," said his bride.

"We had a hard day," said Lawrence. "What have we to eat?'

"Tripe, Lawrence, dear," replied Ernestine.

She showed him a burnt spot on her arm where she had touched a hot pan. He kissed: it with tears of pride in his eyes.

Promptly every morning as the whistles blew, young Mr. Devlin hurried away to guard his mythical millions. Promptly at six each night he returned. Ernestine was trying to run the flat on 12/ a week, and was delighted with her success.

The scene changes.

At noon Ernestine hung the dishcloth over the clothesline in the kitchen and yawned wearily. A dull afternoon stared her in the face.

"I think," she said to herself musingly, "that I shall go to a matinee to-day."

She dressed leisurely in garments long unused, selected a popular musical comedy, and went gaily forth.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the Strand was packed with traffic. Hundreds of motor cars drew up before the theatres and waited for their owners.

Young Mrs. Devlin came forth with the handsomely dressed throng of women and children and held up her hand. A taxi cab darted through the seemingly impenetrable welter of traffic and halted at the kerb before her.

She glanced at the man on the chauffeur's seat and stifled a scream. It was her husband.

"Where to, madam?" he asked.

Lawrence looked back at her stonily. He was dressed in a leather coat, with leather leggings and a chauffeur's cap.

Ernestine stumbled into the cab. "Home," she said huskily.

When the cab had cleared the thick of the traffic, Ernestine leant forward.

"Lawrence," she asked, "what is the meaning of this joke?"

"Sweetheart," replied her husband, skilfully avoiding a small child carrying a rag doll, "this is no joke. This is taxi-cab No. 709, owned by the Blue Taxi-cab Company, and I am one of the official chauffeurs. You have found me out. I must make a clean breast of it."

"Do you mean," Ernestine asked in a trembling voice, "that you have lost your money?"

'"Precisely," Lawrence answered without turning in his seat. "My yarn about the railroad was pure fiction. The day we were married I was ruined. I haven't a penny in the world except what I earn in this way."

"You brave boy!" his wife whispered tearfully.

On the drive home Ernestine became thoughtful. Lawrence proceeded with speed and skill, and in the course of time drew up before the doorway of their modest home.

He opened the door and turned up the flag on the meter.

"It will be four shillings and sixpence, dearest," he said jocosely.

"It will be nothing of the kind," Ernestine retorted, stepping daintily to the curb.

"You refuse to pay me?" Lawrence enquired.

"I certainly do," answered his wife.

"Then I shall have to summon you. I have done that several times to trouble some fares."

"When I ride in a taxi-cab I never pay," Ernestine answered.

"You will get into trouble with the company, Ernestine, dear. I must demand payment," said Lawrence.

"It has been my custom to deal with the Blue Taxi-Cab Company, Lawrence, because I have a pass."

"A pass?" Lawrence enquired.

"Because," Ernestine continued, patting her husband's arm, "as the owner of the Blue Taxi-Cab Company I should be foolish to pay. If you will look at the

little strip of metal back of the seat you will notice the words, 'Childs, Ltd.' I am Childs!"

Lawrence gazed at his wife in amazement.

"And now," she continued sternly, "as head of the company, I can discharge any employee I wish. You are hereby discharged. Take the car to the garage. You are no longer in my employment.

Then Ernestine kissed the chauffeur.

"We move back to civilisation tonight," she said going up the steps to the little flat.

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5: The Mount of Misfortune

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Australian Town and Country Journal 16 Dec 1899

THE HILL, or mountain, as it was generally called, stood sheer on the bank of the river, which wheeled sharply around its base. The river was broad and sandy, and in its deeper pools the crocodiles of the Northern Territory disported themselves, and in the sunny hours of the winter days could be seen basking on the sandbanks in sleepy ease and contentment.

The mount itself was the termination of a range some sixty miles long, which started from the locality of a gold field, and all along its course the daring, prospector had threaded his way, taking, his life in his hand as ho did so, for the blacks at that time were, still savage and dangerous.

On the mount by the river several parties had obtained good results; but, strangely enough, none were able to follow it up. Nearly every party obtained one good prospect, and after that were mocked by the color of gold only.

Worse than all, no party had ever camped at the mount but what death, in some shape, had overtaken one of its members. One had gone to the river to wash, his clothes. His mates searched in vain for him when he did not return. The clothes were there, but the crocodiles had got the man. Another had sickened of the malarial fever of the north and died, and been buried there. Another had stuck his pick into his foot, and he, poor follow, died a dreadful death, in the agony of lockjaw. Two had gone there, and only one had come back again, disappeared in a day or two, and the story went round that he had murdered his mate.

So the tales ran about the mountain on the bank of the Railly River; and men began to get shy of going there.

"The next lot will get chawed up by the niggers," was the opinion of one old digger. "They haven't had an innings yet, and it's about their turn now."

"Whoever they, get, they won't get me. I wouldn't go down there for an ounce a day, unless, there was a regular camp," said another....

"What's the matter with the place?" asked a tall young fellow, who was sitting by the fire with the others, a new arrival from Queensland.

They told him the story, and he laughed as they all did at first when these yarns were told by the old hands.

"Everybody gets a good prospect to start with and then they can never get any more? Hanged if I don't try my luck there."

"We'll find your bones in a black's oven," said the old man who had first spoken.

"Blacks!" returned the other, contemptuously. "You shouldn't talk to an old Palmer man about niggers."

"You may be in nigger country for years, and one fine day, when you're smoking your pipe and reckoning that you're as safe as the Lord Mayor of London, crash will go your skull, and nothing will trouble you any more. "

"I know 'em," said the other.

"So do I," said the young man, "they tackled us like devils twice on the Roper, when, we were coming across, and speared my best horse. I owe them something. But about this mountain is it a true bill about the prospects?"

"True as gospel; there's men in the camp here who have been there and found it: always the same— one good prospect and nothing more."

"It must be traced somehow. I'll have a try, anyhow. By the way, a brother of mine came over here about a year ago, and I have never heard of him since. Tall fellow, not unlike me; Sid Thomson was his name— used to be called Lanky Sid!"

"Good Lord!" said the old man. "Thought there was something familiar about the cut of you. Yes, your brother came here, worse luck, but where he is now nobody can say."

"How's that?" said the other, quickly.

"Because he went down to that there mountain, and he never came back again."

"Tell me all about it. I came over here from the Palmer, partly in the hope of finding him. Sid and I were always great chums from boys."

"I'll tell you, Thomson, if that's your name," went on Pranks, the old digger, "but it's a queer story, mind you, and none too pleasant for you to hear. Your brother Sid, I knew him well. He went down to the Railly River Mountain; would go against all we said, just the same as you, and he hasn't come back yet."

"How long ago was that?"

"More than six months. But that's not all. He had a mate with him— a fellow called Radforth. Radforth came back alone. Didn't say much to anyone— and disappeared. Clean gone, nobody know where."

"Didn't anybody ask about my brother?"

"Of course they did, naturally. But he answered in a way that made 'em think that Sid was still down there, and he had just come up for rations. Leastways, he bought rations, and vamoosed, without a word to anybody. This made some people who didn't like him— for he was an ugly tempered animal— suspect that something was wrong, and a party was made to go down. Well, they went, down there, but devil a thing could they find, beyond

old tracks and old camps. Some think, maybe; that your brother and Radforth went across to the Victoria River, and so on to West Australia, but— I don't."

"I'll go down there at once, and alone, too. I'll find this thing out for myself, by God! If my brother has met with foul play, I'll hunt up this Radford if he's on earth."

"Steady! There's no proof that your brother Is dead, nor that Radford killed him; but the rumor has got about here. Still there may be no truth in it."

"Anyhow, I'm going down to have a look at the place. I suppose you can tell me how to find It?"

"Simple as possible. You have only to follow the range round, and the mountain is right on the bank of the river. You'll see scores of old tracks. But look out for the niggers! Look here, boy; they'll get the next man."

"I'm going, and I'll find out what's become of my brother," said Thomson; "and I'll start tomorrow."

TO A MAN who had been through the Palmer rush, and finally overland to the Northern Territory, a trip of 60 miles was neither here nor there. Following the range along, he came on the second day to the Mount of Misfortune, round the base of which ran the Railly River. Lonely as was the place, young Thomson did not feel it so, so much was his mind occupied with his brother's fate, but although there wore no fresh tracks of blacks about, visible to his experienced eye, he took the precaution of camping some way up the slope of the mountain. There was good feed on the flat and there was no fear of his horses straying far during the night.

It was a beautifully clear moonlight night, and Thomson lay for some time smoking and thinking of the quest he was engaged in, when suddenly he heard a sound that caused him to raise himself up on his elbow and listen attentively. There was no mistake. Somebody was working with a pick on some part of the. mountain. The night was noiseless, there was not even a wild dog howling, or a breath of wind stirring, and clearly and distinctly came the sounds of the strokes of a pick.

Thomson did not hesitate long. He picked up his Martini carbine, and stole carefully and as silently as possible in the direction of the mysterious sound. It was hard to trace, the echoes amongst the ranges were, confusing, but at last he located it, and leaning over the edge of the rocky descent into a steep gully, he saw the worker.

A man was digging down in the bed of the dry creek that ran down the bottom of the gully. Working, and had been working for some long time, as Thomson's digger's eye could see by the long heap of wash dirt piled up. Someone had penetrated the mystery of the mountain, and the source of the

intermittent patches of gold, and was working it out quietly for himself. Who was the man?

"I'll watch till daylight, but I'll find out,'' thought Thomson.

For hours the solitary worker continued his labor, and the watcher at his post watched him. He congratulated himself on bringing his carbine; a man with the lust of gold in his brain would not hesitate to commit murder to preserve his secret.

It was about one o'clock in the morning before the digger ceased his toil, put down his tools, and straightened and stretched himself. Then he commenced to follow the gully down, and Thomson strode silently after him. Down, down, following every turn and twist, the two went, for Thomson had now descended into the gully, and kept his man well in sight.

Soon the river was in view, and still the stranger kept on until he reached the bank. He never looked back, but descended the path by a well-worn pad, and went out on the sand to the edge of a deep waterhole that extended down the river for a long way. There was an island covered with undergrowth just behind where he had taken up his position, and here Thomson concealed himself, so close that he could hear every word the man uttered. He wondered much that his presence had not been detected before; but the man before him seemed as though he was acting in a trance.

He was sitting at the edge of the water, looking down into its moonlit surface, and talking strangely to himself, as was but natural in a "hatter."

"Are you there, Sid? Was it painful when the crocodiles took you? Come up and tell me about it. I've got the lead right enough, and the secret of the mountain. Come up, old man, and don't grin down there. Bah! It wasn't painful— you were killed quick. Come up, man, and see how well I'm getting on."

Thomson could no longer restrain himself. There was no doubt in his mind that this was Radforth, the murderer of his brother in order to gain and keep to himself the secret of the mysterious mountain. He sprang down from the island, and stood beside the talker.

Radforth jumped upright, and looked at him aghast. The resemblance between the brothers was only a general one, but in the moonlight it sufficed.

"So you've come at last. Come at last," cried Radforth, falling back. "Go, take it; I'll take your place." Turning quickly away, he plunged into the bottomless hole, where the crocodiles that haunted it received him joyfully. He never rose again. Thomson watched for long, but the moonlit surface was unrippled after the commotions of the plunge had subsided.

In the morning he found the camp of the recluse, whom solitude and remorse had evidently driven crazy, and, in a diary, found his worse fears

confirmed. His brother and Radforth had discovered what promised to be the true lead of the mountain source of the gold. They had not quarrelled, but the prospects were so rich that the greed of gold grew in Radforth's breast, and he killed his unsuspecting comrade.

He took his body to the waterhole, where one could always see the small eyes of a crocodile and a snout floating on the surface. There he left it, but the crocodiles did not touch lt. Day after day, night after night, it lay there, and the crocodiles would not touch the dead body, nor hide the murder. Then in desperation he buried it in the sand, and that night the crocodiles dug it up, and in the morning it was floating at the brink of the sand-spit. And there it floated till the flesh dropped from the bone, and the awful thing sank. But the curse was on the man, and every night after his hidden toil in the gully he was constrained to go down to where the bones were lying; and all I this he had written down.

In the morning Thomson went down to the edge of the waterhole, and under the clear water opposite where Radforth had been sitting he saw the bones and skull of what he felt sure was his brother's body. He recovered them, and buried them before he returned to the old camp. He told old Franks, and they kept silence, and went back to the mountain on the Railly River.

The first loads of the washdirt piled up by the wretched murderer washed out handsomely. The remainder, which they were too disgusted to go all through, contained but specks. The man had been driving himself mad over piling up load upon load of worthless dirt. The mystery of the Mountain of Misfortune is a mystery still.

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6: Tomasina

Rosaline Masson

1867-1949

The Queen, 21 Sep 1912

Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), 25 Dec 1912

Scottish author, biographer, historian, and campaigner, daughter of women's suffragist Emma Rosaline Orme and David Masson

TOMASINA CORNISH'S mother had no tact. She insisted on calling their new home "Sunset," simply because it faced the western sky. No one ever thought of connecting the idea of sunset with Mrs. Cornish herself; although, as Nature demanded, she was somewhat Tomasina's senior. Mrs. Cornish had been wooed and won, and widowed; but her sun was still so high overhead that she cast no shadow— save indeed the one she cast over Tomasina.

Tomasina certainly was completely shadowed. It was not want of affection on her mother's part. Nobody in the world loved Tomasina so fondly as did her mother. Tomasina was often reminded of this, when she grew impotently rebellious; but somehow the reminder was not in itself consoling. It is a beautiful thing to feel sure one is loved by one's God and one's mother; but it does not tend to give a woman a stake in the Empire.

Tomasina's admiration of her mother extended to her mother's art of utilising all her— Tomasina's— little varied scraps of knowledge. It was Tomasina who read the daily papers, and told her mother all that was going on, both at Westminster and in the civilised world. It was Mrs. Cornish, however, who volubly discussed the political situation with old Colonel Sprott, who was an ardent Tory and very hot-headed and right-minded.

"A wonderful woman that!" he declared. "I always go to her when I want a little intelligent conversation."

Mrs. Cornish liked Crackwait and its society. She had selected the place because several of her friends had recommended it for its exceptional advantages. These advantages included Daily Services, a Circulating Library, a Marine Parade, and gravel soil. There were not wanting, also, great social excitements to stir Crackwait to its foundations. There was a Bazaar in aid of the Church Extension Fund, at which Mrs. Cornish consented to take the parcel stall— it was an inexpensive stall in the matter of initial outlay. The parcel stall was a great attraction. Mrs. Cornish leant over the counter, and chatted to everyone, and made many friends. Tomasina was busy at the back doing up the parcels, assisted by their parlormaid. Then there was the tennis tournament, followed by a ball Tomasina did not play tennis, neither did she go to the ball; but a great many people dropped in next day to tell Mrs. Cornish

all about it, and Tomasina poured out tea for them. The next, social excitement was quite of a different order— the whole town was placarded with it. It was a Woman's Franchise Meeting, and the posters informed the public that the Right Hon. Mary, Countess of Elmsdale, was to preside. On the evening of the meeting the feminine population of Crackwait were present in the Town Hall, and also seven men, including one man speaker on the platform, two reporters below the platform, and the door-keeper. But this, as Lady Elmsdale assured them in her opening remarks, must not be taken as a fair sample of the proportion of men who take active interest in any great public question not immediately affecting their own material interests.

"Seeing that there is a man present," the ladies of Crackwait whispered, "it would surely have been only the proper thing to have asked him to take the chair."

The business of the meeting, however, seemed to be in the hands of the women, and very quietly and effectively it was carried out. Their tone and spirit breathed accustomed freedom of thought and expression, and a breezy freshness of high altitude; but the women of Crackwait were accustomed to sit at home with shut windows, and to leave open air existence to their men-kind. It was not till the man speaker was called upon that the audience lost its expression of dubious disapproval.

The programme announced him to be the. Hon. Francis Horne, Prospective Conservative Candidate for the Gordale Division of Enchester. At the end of his speech the women who had heard him turned and looked each her neighbor in the face. Were they really all this? Had they indeed these responsibilities and duties? He had spoken to them as no one had ever spoken to them before. How different this from being addressed as "You ladies," by the rector! Could they live up to the high social and political position that this man with the vibrating voice and the quiet gestures accorded to them?

At the close of the proceedings Lady Elmsdale rose,, graceful in her clinging draperies and her plumed hat, and smilingly and ingratiatingly asked if anyone present had any question to put, or anything to say. This broke the tension, and resulted in a general flutter and much subdued mirth. And suddenly, just as the Chair was about to put a resolution to the meeting, someone rose in the body of the hall, and Lady Elmsdale smiled graciously, and leant back.

It was Mrs. Cornish. She spoke for six and a half minutes, and addressed her remarks entirely to the Prospective Candidate for the Gordale Division of Enchester; and she spoke warmly in favor of the Enfranchisement of Women. Her speech received at its termination a little burst of clapping, second only to that which had greeted Mr. Horne's, and he too applauded vigorously. The

Chair thanked her, put the resolution, declared it carried, and the meeting broke up.

Someone hurried down the side aisle and touched Mrs. Cornish on the arm, as she was surrounded by a group of chattering friends.

"Would you come up and speak to us? Lady Elmsdale sent me," she urged.

Mrs. Cornish followed her, flushed and pleased, and Tomasina remained behind, and heard all about it afterwards.

"I thought it wonderful of you, mother!" Tomasina told her. "What did they all say to you?"

"Took it quite for granted, my dear— the hussies! And Mr. Horne was very polite, but he had to catch a train. What's the use of telling us we are men's social and political equals, and then having to catch a train the moment you are introduced? Tomasina, I wish I had spoken on the other side!"

"Why?" exclaimed Tomasina, open-eyed in wonder. "Oh, no!" she added, below her breath.

"Well, of course, I did it to please— but I think the Anti-Suffragists are the wisest."

"Why?" Tomasina cried again.

"Well, they know the men don't like it, dear."

TOMASINA stood for a moment looking at her mother. Then she gave a little laugh. It was only a moment; but in that moment she had seen it all— the old subtle fetter, forged when the world was young— the desire to please. She saw it all; and her little narrow world split and widened in front of her, breaking into a thousand dim vistas. And in the centre of her crumbling conceptions she saw the Curate in his true perspective. And if a young woman in a small country town can see the only bachelor in it, and he a Curate, in his true perspective, she is more likely to be the heroine of a biography than the heroine of a novel.

"He said we were citizens of an Empire," she reminded herself, "and that every bit of work, however humble, done well, was done for the Empire He mentioned farming, and fishing, and lace-making." (The Hon. Francis Horne had inquired what were the local industries.)

"Mother," she said, a week later, "do you think that on three afternoons a week you could pour out the tea for yourself and anyone that called? And that on two mornings in the week you could walk along the Parade alone?"

"Tomasina, are you going to get married?"

"I?— no, mother."

"Well, even stranger things have happened," said Mrs. Cornish, tactfully.

"I have taken out a course of agriculture at Wrackminster College, and I have bought a season ticket. I am going to study farming."

Mrs. Cornish made much conversational capital out of Tomasina's new fad. She drew humorous pictures of Tomasina in market towns, probing fat pigs with her parasol, and she sometimes accompanied her to Wrackminster, and shopped and paid calls, and dined with Tomasina at the County Hotel, where she insisted on ordering "Farmer's Ordinary."

One muggy November day Tomasina returned, damp and weary, to find Mrs. Cornish unusually elated.

"I have heard from Joseph!" she said, stroking a letter. "Poor Joseph!"

"Who is Joseph, mother?"

"My second cousin, Joseph Armstrong. You must often have heard me speak or him."

"No; I never have."

"Ah! well, I have not heard a word of him for the last thirty-five years."

"And now you have had that letter, Mother— is it a mere chance I was not christened Josephine?"

Mrs. Mrs. Cornish laughed delightedly.

"Go and take off your damp boots, and don't be pert!" she cried. And then she ran to the door after her, and called up the stairs, "Oh, Tomasina! Tomasina! This will interest you! I forgot— Joseph Armstrong is a farmer!"

"But, mother," Tomasina said, as she read the letter over the fire, ten minutes later, while her mother poured her out her tea, and looked doubtfully at the only remaining scone to see if it were still hot, "this letter is in answer to one from you!"

"Yes; I saw his loss in the papers, and I sent a card," Mrs. Cornish replied, complacently.

"His loss?"

"His wife— of double pneumonia. So I sent a card. It seemed only civil. I forgot to tell you, Tomasina. You leave me so much alone, nowadays."

Tomasina was still reading.

"It is a very nice letter," she said, at the end.

Tomasina never did say much. Mrs. Cornish talked about it all the evening, and by midnight Joseph Armstrong had become the never-forgotten hero of her youth. She answered the letter next day; and the correspondence continued, with fitful regularity. In spring she and Tomasina accepted an invitation to spend a fortnight with the bereaved widower.

His farm lay in the heart of one of the most beautiful of the Home counties, and Mrs. Cornish was charmed with the farm, but was disappointed in their host. Joseph Armstrong had not, to her mind, improved with years.

"Well. Time's told on you, too, Emma," had been his greeting, when he met them at the station.

Mrs. Cornish had prepared herself to be a little sentimental. "Ah, yes, Joseph!" she responded softly, "and we have both lost our—"

"Speak up, woman! I've lost my hearing as well!"

Of Tomasina he took no notice, but Tomasina was used to that.

"His early disappointments have soured him a little," was Mrs. Cornish's first whispered comment to Tomasina; but later in the day: "he is a perfect boor!" she announced.

It was not until dinner time next day that Tomasina's own interest in farming was mentioned. The allusion was indirectly due to Mrs. Cornish's want of tact. She had been regaling her host with some society gossip.

"But the other daughter," she concluded, "gave a shock to the family pride by marrying a farmer or something."

"Mother!" breathed Tomasina.

"I'm a farmer— or something," said the terrible old man. "Oh, very different! You are a gentleman farmer, Joseph! I meant that she married—"

"A gentleman farmer?— God forbid!" he cried, with unexpected vehemence. "What's a 'gentleman farmer,' pray? I know the type! There's a young chap here, over the river— they call him a 'gentleman farmer.' Master of the Hounds, he is— pink coat, and all the rest of it. Electric light in his stable— and in his byres, too! I suppose his cows like to read French novels at night. Self-reaping machines and cream separators! Puts more into his farm than ever he takes out— and so I told him; but he only laughed. Vineries and peach-houses, and garden parties with ices in the model dairy! That's your gentleman farmer!"

"Dear me!" cried Mrs Cornish, with deep interest. "You might invite him while we are here, Joseph."

"And, again, I might not," was the reply.

Mrs. Cornish flushed, and Tomasina interposed hastily with a question about the self-reaping machine.

"Tomasina," exclaimed Mrs. Cornish, who was always peaceful and wishful to please, even a boor, "Tomasina is studying farming, you know."

Mr. Armstrong did not know— Mrs. Cornish had never mentioned it in her letters.

"What for?" he asked gruffly. He was still ruffled.

"Well," Mrs. Cornish replied, "Girls all take up some interest after a little time. She has attended lectures on agriculture all the winter— I think it is very original of her, instead of Church work or anything. Very chic."

She nodded encouragingly at Tomasina. But she had put a match to Joseph Armstrong's slumbering wrath.

"Senseless notion!" he growled. "Couldn't you have done better for your girl, Emma? I suppose she's missed her market."

Mrs. Cornish flashed fire at him, and she half rose, as if to leave the table. Certainly no one in the world loved Tomasina as did her mother, and certainly her little tactless mother loved Tomasina better even than she loved the world.

But again Tomasina interposed. She, who saw things in their true perspective, laughed good-naturedly.

"Is a woman farmer worse than a gentleman farmer, Mr. Armstrong?" she asked.

"Quite as bad!" he growled, mollified.

"Tomasina does it," Mrs. Cornish announced with icy dignity, "to be of some service to the Empire."

Joseph Armstrong laid down his knife and fork, and gave vent to a huge guffaw. "God bless me!" he shouted genially, "if a woman wants to serve the Empire, I can tell you now she can serve it best!"

"How?" inquired Mrs. Cornish innocently, not having read Anti-Suffragist literature.

"By becoming the mother of a dozen children!" shouted her host.

And to Mrs. Cornish's horror, Tomasina joined in the laugh.

"What would be the use of a dozen children, if they were all to be poisoned by eating imported Chinese pork, Mr. Armstrong?" she asked him. "Some or us must be farmers."

Joseph Armstrong became suddenly serious. Again he laid down his knife and fork, and gazed at Tomasina, seeming to see her for the first time. Then he turned slowly round on his chair towards Mrs. Cornish.

"Your girl's got none of your looks, Emma." he said, 'but, by God!— she's got common sense."

Mrs. Mrs. Cornish made up her mind to go next day. The Fates, however, ordained otherwise. She caught a bad summer cold, and was obliged to stay in bed, waited on assiduously, with many comforting home brews and possets, by the anxious housekeeper. And so it came about that Tomasina went many drives with their crotchety old host, no longer in the back seat, but by his side, and also tramped the fields with him, and they had their meals together.

"I have learnt more about , farming in a day than I learnt the whole winter at College," she told him the first night.

"That's because you listen," he answered. "I never met a woman before that listened."

"I have been so accustomed to listen," replied Tomasina.

It was during Tomasina's last drive with the crabbed old man, behind the fast-trotting grey mare, along the now familiar country roads, that Joseph Armstrong told her about his son. His wife's death seven months previously had not been the sorrow of his life— that had been nine years before, and had killed the wife, too.

"She never picked up, poor woman."

They had had one son, "the only one we reared— the others died as children," and he had grown to manhood; and he had died of his wounds in South Africa.

"So it was for the Empire, too— as you said— as you try to do-r-" the old man ended, jerkily.

Tomasina said nothing; but she put out her hand and took his. The old farmer drove without a whip, and one hand lay free. He clasped hers in a grip of iron. Presently they passed great gates, and a trim lodge, and Joseph Armstrong jerked his hand away in order to point at them with his thumb.

"He went too." he said.

"Who— where?" asked Tomasina, puzzled.

"To the war— the 'gentleman farmer.' He came back— with his V.C. God forgive me— that's why I can't abide him!"

"But yours had the greater honor— he died for his Queen and his country!" she cried.

"Yes, we didn't grudge him, the wife and I— not after just the first." He rapped the reins on the mare's back. And then, just as they slackened pace for the hill to home, he turned to her.

"If he'd lived— if my Joe had lived— I'd have wished that he'd Wave married you," he said.

"Married me?"

"Yes," he said, as Mrs. Cornish had done, "stranger things have happened. You're just the woman I'd have chosen for a daughter. Mind that! Just you mind that!"

Mrs. Cornish and Tomasina left next day.

"Well, you've come to me in summer for your own pleasure— will you come back in winter for mine?" were Mr. Armstrong's last words at the train window. And it was Tomasina who cried, "Yes!— yes!— willingly!" and waved to him as the train moved out of the station.

"Never will I be the guest of that man again!" gasped Mrs. Cornish. And she spoke the truth: but she was to return to the farm all the same, only not as his guest; for shortly after Christmas Joseph Armstrong died suddenly, of heart failure, and he left all he possessed to Tomasina.

"He must have cared for me very much!" Mrs. Cornish cried, with tearful voice, as she read the lawyer's letter.

"He must indeed, mother!" Tomasina answered, with honest and humble conviction, as she stroked her mother's little hand, "for he was so kind to me from the first."

It was Mrs. Cornish who insisted on their wearing mourning, and her own was of the deepest, and included a widow's bonnet and veil. She forgot any little uncouthness lit their late host.

"All those years!" she said. "Think of it! What wonderful faithfulness!— Oh, Tomasina!"

It was to her that all the neighbors and friends in Crackwait offered their congratulations and condolences.

"It is quite a romance," they said among themselves. A large gathering of people came to see them off; and at least three half-pay Colonels handed Mrs. Cornish huge bouquets, with stiff military bows and looks of dogged yearning in their eyes. No one brought Tomasina a bouquet. It was just as well, as there were so many small packages, and several changes.

"I am glad I have kept on Sunset," Mrs. Cornish said thoughtfully when the train had started and the station had vanished.

"We will go back sometimes to Sunset for a little to see everyone again, and keep in touch." Tomasina turned from stowing the parcels in the rack.

"Oh! mother— I hope you won't feel homesick!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly not! It will be very different now— the County will call, you will find. I don't fancy your step— I mean your— that is— Mr. Armstrong knew many of the County people. You remember his strange prejudice against the 'gentleman farmer.' We shall, of course, know him now— poor Joseph!"

"I don't feel as if I wanted ever to know that 'gentleman farmer., ' Tomasina answered.

"Why not?"

Tomasina made no reply.

"And, Tomasina!" cried Mrs. Cornish, not noticing her silence— she was used to it, "the Member will call!"

"The Member?"

"Yes! Oh! did I forget to tell you? Do you know who is our Member?"

Tomasina wrinkled her forehead. "I ought to know," she said. "Yes; you ought! It is just within the Gordale Division of Enchester, and so our Member is— what's his name— who spoke, you know—"

"Francis Horne," said Tomasina, quietly.

"Yes, who spoke at that Franchise meeting. Do you remember?"

"I remember," said Tomasina.

"Well, perhaps he will call, as you will he a constituent."

Tomasina said nothing. Very often she said nothing.

But again the Hon. Francis Horne played no part in their lives. He lived in London, having represented the Gordale Division of Enchester ever since the General Election, when the Conservatives were returned to power. Two years after Mrs. Cornish and Tomasina had taken up their residence at the beautiful old Tudor farm house— eighteen months, that is, since Mrs. Cornish had tentatively refused old Colonel Petersham for the second time— feeling disinclined to return to the circumscribed life at Crackwait, she and Tomasina both had the pleasure of recording their votes for Mr. Horne, when he had to re-contest his seat on being appointed Junior Lord of the Treasury.

It was just three months after the Conservative Government had enfranchised the women of their country, and it was thought to be a most, appropriate thing that the first bye-election after this reform should occur in the constituency held by Mr. Horne, who had for so long been so eloquent and so brave an upholder of the Rights of Women Mrs. Cornish voted on. The property was Tomasina's, but Mrs. Cornish voted on the stable.

Tomasina interested herself a good deal in the election. There was not only her own vote and her mother's, but there were the votes of all the farm laborers she employed, who naturally were not so highly educated as herself, and came to her for instruction and guidance.

So it came about that the new Junior Lord of the Treasury took the opportunity of being in the little county town to drive out with his agent and pay his respects to one or two of his more influential supporters, old and new, in this corner of his constituency. Among other places, he called at Tomasina's farm.

Tomasina was out; but Mrs. Cornish received and charmed them, and told Tomasina on her return that their member had something in his eye when he smiled that reminded her of poor dear Tom, "after whom I christened you. I suppose," but that, of course, he was older than Tom was; "and I don't believe," she added, "Tom would have grown so stout."

"Stout?" repeated Tomasina.

"Decidedly," replied Mrs. Cornish.

"Did you mention that suffrage meeting, long ago?" Tomasina inquired.

"Yes, indeed! It wasn't so very long ago, Tomasina. It was three years ago. Oh, yes, we spoke of it. I told him he had quite converted me!"

And that was all that was said about it. It was all she had said about it. Tomasina's mother had no tact.

The day after Mr. Horne had called at the farm, he was again driving with his agent, this time to call on the "gentleman farmer" who had so roused the

ire of old Joseph Armstrong by his electric byres, his pink hunting coat, and his Victoria Cross.

As they drove, they came up behind a smart little cart filled with mangel-wurzels and driven by a small whistling boy. The cart bore the legend, "Tomasina Cornish, Farmer," in white paint on its green side.

"That's the daughter of the lady you liked, on whom we called yesterday," explained the agent.

"Good Heavens! What are the women coming to?" replied the member.

At that moment a motor car appeared suddenly round a bend of the road. It was going very slowly, as it was climbing a steep hill.

"And here comes Miss Cornish herself," whispered the agent, as he drew his gig up to the side of the road to let the car pass. And then simultaneously the member and the agent recognised the square-shouldered man with a motor cap pulled over his keen eyes, who sat beside Tomasina in the driving seat. The member's greetings to him were very cordial— for was he not one of Francis Horne's most influential supporters, as well as by far his most popular chairman?

"I suppose," said the Agent, as soon us the car had passed them, "that, as it was upon him that you were going to call, we may as well turn back?"

"Yes!— oh, yes!— turn!" cried, the Member. "Can't we stop them?— I say— can't we stop them? I should like—"

He looked round as he spoke; and at the same time Tomasina, who had not even recognised him, but had just been told who it was by her companion, turned also, and their eyes met. So she saw him once again, but did not speak to him. At that moment the top of the hill was reached, and with a sudden start forward the car sped into the distance.

"Well, we can't stop them now, I am afraid," the Agent said. "They would scarcely have thanked us," he added, with a smile. "It is to be a match, that is."

"I did not recognise him," Tomasina was saying in a puzzled voice. "How he has altered!" She raised her eyes to her lover.

"Yes," the soldier farmer answered, carelessly. "He does himself too well, that man. But he is a good enough Member— or as good as we can get. He is a most persuasive speaker, anyway."

That evening Tomasina Cornish accepted the "gentleman farmer."

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7: Sally Intervenes

Annie S. Swan

1859-1943

Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), 22 July 1914

Scottish journalist and prolific novelist and short story writer. Described as "one of the most commercially successful popular novelists of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."

SALLY was a maid-of-all-work in a small suburban home. The precise designation of that suburb is immaterial to this story. The incident with which it deals," and which led up to a crisis, might have happened in any suburb.

Sally was the sole domestic help in the household of Robert Lidgate, who was a confidential clerk, to a firm of highly respectable solicitors in the neighborhood of Gray's Inn. Sally was the child of a Brixton slum, and had been raised in a rag-and-bone store, where her early lot had been conspicuously hard. A good lady who had established a girls' club in that area, liking the girl for her bright face and smart ways, had taken special pains to have her trained in domestic service. She had indeed taken her for three months into her own home to be trained by one of her own domestic treasures, thereby seriously endangering the peace of her household.

At the end of that time Sally obtained her first place as a maid-of-all-work to Mrs. Robert Lidgate, a young bride, before whom she promptly fell down and worshipped. Ethel Lidgate and Sally between them had no great store of domestic efficiency, and Robert suffered at first, as many young husbands do, from the doubtful quality of the viands set before him. But love is merciful to inferior cooking, and the first three months was got over without catastrophe. The young wife was so adorably anxious to please, and looked so pretty with the flush of apprehension on her face, that no husband worthy of the name could have allowed a single stricture to pass his lips.

Lidgate was fifteen years older than his wife, and a matured bachelor, when he married Ethel at twenty-three. Such a situation has its pitfalls, and as Ethel was very pretty, Robert's particular pitfall was an inordinate jealousy. It arose out of the humbleness of his nature. He was constantly asking himself what a beautiful girl like Ethel could have seen in a plain, unattractive fellow like himself. He had solid qualities, and his business prospects were bright, pointing even to a partnership at Gray's Inn, but he had none of the meretricious charms which are supposed to be dear to the heart of a pretty, attractive young woman.

Nevertheless, Ethel had married him out of genuine affection; if he could have been assured of that all would have gone well. His jealousy prompted him

to shut his wife up, or at least to keep her away from quarters where she would be likely to meet men more attractive than himself. This made Ethel angry. She was only human, and she liked brightness and variety, likewise she resented her husband's lack of trust.

One day, about ten months after their marriage, something happened which bade fair to destroy their happiness, and which in its most acute crisis necessitated the intervention of Sally.

The Lidgates breakfasted at eight o'clock every morning, which enabled Robert to eat his meal in comfort, and get the train at eight-forty at the station five minutes.' walk from the house. When they wore first married Ethel had cooked the breakfast herself, but Sally was now supreme in the kitchen, and had developed a real genius for cooking. Her scrambled eggs Uncle Christopher had pronounced when he came for a week-end, had never been excelled.

Uncle Christopher was the only uncle of Mrs. Lidgate, and Ethel had some expectations from him. He was a gruff old gentleman, with whom Robert did not get on very well, and he had disapproved in a kind of general way of the wedding. He thought his favorite niece ought to have done better.

Ethel got down usually before her husband just to see that all was right in the little dining-room, but on this particular morning she had some trouble with a refractory waist belt, so that Robert got down first. There were several letters for the Lidgates, Ethel especially had a good many friends. Three lay on her plate. When her eyes fell on them as she passed to her place her color rose a little, and she began to make the tea without offering to open them.

This was unusual. Often Lidgate had to remind her gently that time was passing, and that they must get on with breakfast.

She pushed the letters aside, and put the sugar into the cups, and even after she had been served with a portion of fish, she began to eat without so much as looking at them.

"Aren't you going to read your letters, dear?" asked Lidgate, his eyes blinking slightly under his glasses. Ethel professed to love those glasses and indeed they were more becoming to Lidgate than to most men, and gave him a particularly professional look.

"Presently, there isn't any hurry. Have you not had any that you are so anxious about mine?"

"Only one from the Church secretary about the funds, and the second call for the Amalgamated shares. It doesn't seem any time since we had the first, does it?"

"Not long, certainly, but I suppose you can meet it all right," answered Ethel, and Lidgate imagined her tone absent, her interest lukewarm.

"I dare say it can be met. Who's your foreign correspondent?" he asked rather drily.

Ethel's face, flushed again, for now she knew that already Robert had carefully examined the letters before she came down.

"Looks like my cousin Charlie's writing. I haven't heard from him for ages—not since I wrote him that I was going to be married to you."

"Won't you open it then, and see what he has to say?" he suggested pointedly.

Reflecting that she really had no reason for refusing, Ethel broke the seal, and behind the tea cosy proceeded to read the letter, Lidgate watching her with ill-concealed anxiety and suspicion. Presently she stopped reading, and thrust it in her pocket, and her cheeks were very red.

"Charlie's a very silly boy," she said quickly. "I'm sorry I can't let you see the letter, Robert."

"Why cant you let me see it?"

"You're ungenerous to ask," she retorted rather hotly. "But if you will have it, Charlie imagined himself in love with me before he went away, and this letter is simply a reproach from beginning to end. But he hasn't any right to write like that, Bob, because what I told you when we got engaged was perfectly true. I had three offers, Charlie's was one of them, but you were my first real sweetheart."

Lidgate made no reply to this charming confession, but bent his frowning brows on his plate. This sight made Ethel feel very unamiable, and she proceeded to punish him for it with that touch of pure maliciousness which lurks deep down, even in the best of women.

"He's coming home. He's 'struck ile,' as he expresses it, out there in the far west, and giving himself a treat. I must go out to Putney, and see Aunt Lulu this very afternoon. How frightfully pleased she will be."

Lidgate pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. His ruddy color was gone, and he looked oddly pale. Ethel did not feel in the least sorry for him. Indeed; she could, with very great satisfaction to herself, have given him a good shaking. So she merely went on with her breakfast in the most unconcerned way.

"May I see that letter, Ethel? I think it is my right."

"Oh, no, it isn't". I'm sure you could have forty if you liked from other women. I should never ask or wish to see them. They would not interest me in the least," replied Ethel recklessly, but every word was accepted by the good but slightly ponderous Lidgate as gospel of the most disquieting kind. It proved how utterly indifferent Ethel was, and the memory of the flush and the imagined tender light in her eyes when she was reading her cousin's letter was

proof positive, if he needed any, that she cared for this handsome scamp to whom the gods had been so kind.

"It is time I was going," he said stiffly. "Good morning."

He walked out of the room, and Ethel sat. on pretending to eat breakfast, while listening for the sound of all his movements in the hall. She heard the creaking door of the little hall wardrobe, where he went to seek his overcoat, the brushing of his hat, the rattle of the umbrella in the stand. Usually she was on the spot to act as valet to her lord and master. This was absolutely the first time she had missed, but something would not let her go. She was feeling hurt and sore and conscious of having been badly treated. Robert must be punished; he must be shown that he should treat her with more confidence and respect. So she sat on.

Sally, familiar with every sound in the house, missed the cheerful echo of voices in the hall, and, looking from the kitchen window, observed her master walking down the stone pathway by himself. Now such a thing had not been known. Sally had often smiled to herself over the lingering farewell that was spoken at that gate every morning. She pondered on the mystery, and presently crept up with her tray to inquire whether she could clear the table.

When she saw her mistress sitting to the table with her hands before her face, her heart seemed to stand still. Sally was a tall, thin slip of a girl, with a white eager face, and a pair of remarkably fine eyes. She had also a mop of black hair, which she confined with difficulty under her tiny cap.

She set down the tray on the clear end of the table; and stood looking askance at her mistress. It did not occur to her to go away. She desired to know what distressed her, and whether she could do anything to help. Presently Ethel rose, pushed back her chair, and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Yes, you can clear, Sally," she said in a voice which all her effort could not steady.

"Yes'm, presently. Wot's the trouble, please'm? 'Ope it ain't anythink very dreadful."

"Oh, no," answered Mrs. Lidgate. "Only if you're a wise girl, Sally, you'll never get married, not to the best butcher or dustman that ever lived."

So saying she walked out of the room. Sally went on clearing the table with sundry nods, indicating that she fully comprehended the situation. She was a devourer of halfpenny fiction, and had no difficulty in piecing the bits together.

"They've 'ad a tiff, but it'll all come rite. Thought it couldn't last. Jimmimy, it wor too much like 'eaven."

The tiff lasted, however, longer than any of them anticipated. Immediately after her early luncheon, Ethel, still smarting under a sense of injustice,

dressed herself to pay her visit to her aunt at Putney. When she was quite ready to go, she called Sally from her own domain.

"If I should not happen to get back in time for dinner, Sally, I know you can manage nicely. There is the cold lamb and the mint sauce, and don't forget to mix the salad as I showed you. Don't do that till six o'clock."

"Please'm, yes; but I 'opes you'll be 'ome. Marster wont like it."

"He won't mind," replied Ethel firmly. "You can heat the jam puffs, and make a custard pudding, and don't forget the celery with the cheese; and make the coffee as well as you know how. If I'd known I was going out this afternoon I should have made enough for two nights, then you would only have had to heat it."

"Marster?" said Sally rather imploringly, as her mistress began to move towards the door. "Is there any message, please'm? Wot shall I say when he asks when you'll be 'ome?"

"He won't ask," replied Ethel, in the same hard, firm tone, and walked out of the house.

Lidgate came home by an earlier train than usual, bearing a small basket of fruit as a peace offering. Reflection had caused him to regret his mood of the morning, and he was prepared to make amends. But when he found his wife absent for the first time since their marriage, and learned from Sally that she was not expected back for dinner, his anger rose again. He ate his dinner, or at least made a pretence of eating it, but did not wait for the coffee.

When Ethel returned home at half-past eight, she found an empty house, and Sally on the verge of tears. She went to bed early, and it was after midnight before she heard her husband's key in the door.

She imagined all sorts of terrors, but was too proud to ask a single question. He came to bed quietly, without speaking, and Ethel lay awake half the night.

Now a quarrel arising out of a trifle is generally the most difficult to patch up, and the days went by without bringing about a full reconciliation between Lidgate and his wife. They maintained a studied politeness towards one another, and talked a little at meals, more especially for the benefit of Sally.

But that astute damsel was not in the least deceived, and she began to tremble for the ultimate happiness of the young couple to whom she was so devoted.

She did not dare to say anything, for in her unhappiness Mrs. Lidgate was very distant and cold in her manner. The delightful hours in the little kitchen when mistress and maid entered into a partnership to make the little home as near perfection as possible had come to an end, Mrs. Lidgate grew careless about her cooking, she no longer read out toothsome recipes to her

handmaiden, and discussed the cost of ingredients. She simply did what she was obliged, and spent a great many afternoons away from her home, far more than Sally approved.

She was only young, but she had great knowledge of life, and she knew what is likely to happen to a young wife, disappointed in her own home, and with much unoccupied time on her hands. Sally grew thinner than ever, pondering on the mystery and the pity of it, and so several weeks passed away.

Then the crisis came.

One afternoon Lidgate had occasion to leave his office in Gray's Inn, being sent on business of his firm, to call at a certain house in the neighborhood of Hyde Park. He walked part of the way, and as it was a beautiful summer afternoon, he enjoyed his outing. The , Park was thronged, and he was looking about him interestedly as he walked rather quickly from Knightsbridge towards the Achilles statue, when suddenly he saw something which obscured the sun for the rest of the afternoon, and made all sorts of dark pictures rise up before him. The chairs under the trees were all occupied, and suddenly he saw in the distance two, set a little apart from the others. On one sat Ethel, a lovely vision in white, with a pink parasol, and on the other, drawn unnecessarily close to her, a very handsome young man, whom he recognised from the miniature as her cousin Charlie.

Now he had never heard of Furnival's return, for the subject had not been mentioned between, them since the day when the little rift came into the lute; and now here was proof positive that she did not care for him, had never cared for him, and that her whole heart was given to the handsome scapegrace. Something swam before his eyes, obscuring the picture, but not before he had seen how animated Ethel was, how her eyes shone, until they fell on him, then she went as white as the chiffon on her gown, and seemed to grow faint.

He stalked on past the chairs never once glancing at them as he drew nearer, and presently he was beyond them, making his way out of the park, where he hailed an omnibus and climbed to the top.

Lidgate does not know to this day how he got back to Gray's Inn, or what sort of statement he made regarding the business of the afternoon. He saw nothing but a lurid sky above him, where the woman he loved had forgotten him, and given her heart to another. He did not know how he got through the day, but at last the time came for him to go home, and contrary to his expectation, Ethel was there to receive him. She was the first to break the silence which was now so common in the little home that neither of them seemed to observe it.

"I saw you in the Park this afternoon, Bob, and knew that you saw us. You might have spoken to Charlie. He has never done you any harm."

"Hasn't he? Well, seeing I was unaware that, he was in this country, or"— he added with cold deliberation— "that you were in the habit of spending your afternoons with him in the Park, I may be excused, I think, for not intruding myself upon what you seemed to think very delightful company."

"He is certainly very, jolly, and he has plenty of money to spend. If you had. not been so disagreeable of late you might have heard that he arrived, at Plymouth last Saturday, and that I have seen him just three times. He wants me to dine at the Savoy to-morrow night, and do a theatre after, and he'll bring me home in his new motor. I suppose you don't mind?"

"Oh, no; far from it, in fact, I like it," said Lidgate drily. "Pray don't consider me in the least. I can amuse myself elsewhere. Now how much longer are we to wait for dinner? I have to meet a man at the club at half-past eight."

Ethel flew off, biting her lips. She had declined the invitation to the Savoy because her common-sense and her wifely feeling told her it was the right thing to do, but now she felt so angry that she thought of writing to her cousin to say she had changed her mind. The meal passed in uncomfortable silence, and almost immediately after it Lidgate went out.

When Sally brought in the little coffee tray, which her mistress had taught her to prepare and to serve so daintily, she found her alone in the drawing-room, and her eyes were suspiciously dim.

"No coffee, thank you, Sally, your master has gone out. I'll take a cup of tea later, perhaps. Just take the tray away."

Sally bit her lip. Her expression was a little desperate, and she was torn between her natural respect and her fierce desire to have a finger in this very troublesome domestic pie.

"Oh, please'm, don't be angry, but why is lit like this? I can't bear it.. It ain't like wot "it used to be. Carn't anythink be done? It's a'killin' of us all."

"Nothing can be done, Sally, and don't you be a silly child. Go now, I have some letters to write, and I don't want to be disturbed." She wrote the letters by-and-by, a great many of them, but finally tore them all up but one, which she sent Sally out to post at a quarter to 10.

A few minutes later Lidgate returned, bringing a man with him whom Ethel disliked intensely, and whom she had asked him not to bring to the house any more.

She only stayed in the room a few moments, and then went to her own. She did not go to bed, however, but busied herself with the contents of her wardrobe, carrying things from it on the tray of a dress trunk, and folding them neatly in the trunk, where it stood in the little box room at the end of the passage. By the time she had finished her packing, it was 11 o'clock, then she crept into bed to sob herself to sleep.

Next morning she did not go down to breakfast.

"I'm sorry you have a headache," he said lamely. "Shall I call in at the doctor's on the way down and ask him to look in?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I'll be all right presently. It isn't much. I shall be getting up directly you are gone."

Something in the tone irritated Lidgate again. He merely said: "All right," and disappeared.

So these two foolish people went on, and the breach grew wider and wider.

At 9 o'clock Ethel rose, and after she was dressed went down to the kitchen to have a consultation with Sally.

"Listen, Sally, I'm going away for a few days, and you must manage as best you can. I'm sure you will do your best to make master comfortable, won't you?"

"Yes'm," answered Sally, but her big eyes had a curious look of reproach in them as they searched her mistress' face. "Yes'm, but it ain't rite. I don't want you to go. Don't go, pleas'm, unless master is goin' too."

"That's all right, Sally," said Mrs. Lidgate, and proceeded in a calm, judicial tone to arrange dinners for several days ahead. She wrote her final instructions on the slate, and then went to look up trains, and before noon was out of the house.

Lidgate returned at half-past 2 to find her gone.

"Missus took a big trunk, sir, an' a 'at box as well, and said she didn't know when she'd be back," said Sally, when questioned, and she saw a livid shade cross her master's gloomy face. She did not know how swift and dreadful was the fear that smote him like a two-edged sword, and made him for the time being a man distraught. He went upstairs to roam through the rooms that Ethel's presence had brightened, but found no message nor trace of her. He hardened himself then, and said he would wait for her message, but none came.

At night he put on his evening dress, and went to the Savoy to eat a solitary dinner, which cost him 12s 6d, but he saw no sign of Ethel. His heart urged him to go out to Putney afterwards, and learn the worst; but his cold resentment intervened, and bade him wait.

On the Sunday Sally ventured on a remark which set him thinking.

"It'll be very pretty down in the country just now, sir, where the missus has gone."

"Did she tell you where she was going then, Sally?" he asked, taken off his guard for a moment.

"No, sir, she didn't, but the letter I posted the night before she went away was to Surrey, to the gentleman she calls her Uncle Christopher."

"Oh," said Lidgate, and drew a long breath. After Sally had gone out of the room he took the time-table and studied the trains. Uncle Christopher lived about three miles from Dorking, and Lidgate could quite easily make the return journey in the course of the day. Should he? Something whispered to him that the time had come, yet his wicked pride, intervened again, and he dallied with his conflicting passions till the afternoon was well spent.

Finally, about 4 o'clock, he journeyed to Waterloo, and at 20 minutes to 5 took train for Dorking. He called himself all sort of hard names for his folly, in spite of Sally's intervention he did not believe that he should find his wife at her uncle's house. He could call, however, and easily frame an excuse by saying he was in the neighborhood.

It was a most lovely evening when he reached the beautiful old Surrey town, and set out to walk to Deepdene, the house of Uncle Christopher. Ethel and he had already spent one delightful week-end there, so that the whole way was familiar to him. He did not approach the house by the lodge gates, but went through a wicket in the hedge, which brought him through the woods to the back of it.

Right in the green heart of the woods, at an old bridge which spanned the stream, he suddenly caught the gleam of a white frock. Yes, it was Ethel, quite alone, leaning over the mossy parapet of the bridge, watching the flow of the stream with a very wistful expression on her face. He would have withdrawn himself even at the eleventh hour, only that she saw him. The color broke and flamed on her cheek, her eyes shone, and with a sudden impulsive movement she darted forward and threw herself on his breast.

"Oh, Bob, I prayed all day that you would come. I don't think really I could have borne another day. Did you know how miserable I was, and are you miserable, too? Oh, what fools we have been! Uncle Christopher asked this morning if you were coming down for the day, and I said yes. How did you know?"

Lidgate's answer was to strain her to his heart with a grip which hurt. In that moment of surrender he saw himself as he was: hard, unjust, suspicious, and he felt himself bitterly abased. Presently, and before Ethel could prevent him, he was kneeling at her feet.

"Darling, forgive me, I've been a brute! I don't know what came over me, but everything looked black. You see, I was never worthy of you, and I thought you regretted our marriage, and— and—"

"I know, Cousin Charlie!" she said with her hands on his lips. "Don't let us say a single solitary thing about it any more. I do want to be happy again. It's like an eternity since we were happy."

Next day Sally was glorified by beholding a complete return of the old conditions to the little home she loved so well.

"If ever you marry, and I hope you will some day, Sally," said her mistress as she mixed the ingredients of the best pudding Lidgate had ever eaten in his life, "don't forgot always to be open and, above board, and don't play with fire. It's dangerous, for you never know when the spark is going to jump up into a big blaze."

Sally merely smiled and shook her head.

8: The Rest of the Story

A. J. Dawson

Alec John Dawson, 1872-1951

Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), 4 March 1903

English traveller, novelist and short story writer, who spent much of the 1890s in Australia.

There are possibly no men who do quite so much harm in their own particular community as do fools. Merely weak men run the fools very close, however, in this regard. The fools score, In that they do the wrong thing more frequently; and the weak men gain ground, because there comes a time in their affairs when they exert strength, and take decided steps to retrieve the consequences of Inconsequence,

And by reason of this last peculiarity, weak men earn, perhaps, a larger share of scorn and abuse than falls to the lot of the average fool.

Very likely this is as it should be, since the well-meaning man is a very fearsome thing. But it is just as well that the man's motives should be known something of by those who condemn his actions. Such knowledge widens one's vituperative scope, and has other advantages. Of course, one should never allow insight into the causes of a weak man's apparently causeless wrong-doing to lessen one's scorn, far less lead to one's justifying the weak man himself.

Men at my club say Carew was a beast, and that is how they dismiss the Morton-Carew business. They say he was slacker than ditchwater; and they believe they know all about the matter. They don't know anything about it. And what they think absolutely the most impossible sort of thing Carew ever did may— I don't say it will— scrape him through where some of us may be told to stand down when the last reckoning comes, and the bed-rock motives of things are inquired into. Anyhow, he will not be damned on the same counts over which men on this side have condemned him.

I suppose his people and the Mortons decided before Daisy Morton could walk that she should marry Henry Carew, and so unite the Hampshire properties. This deputy-destiny business is worse than foolishness. When she was learning to walk, and teaching everyone to bow to her imperious little ways, Harry was six years old, and a well-informed boy, because he found doing what he was told to do required less effort than did disobedience. He left a very fair record behind him at Eton, having followed the line of least resistance there, and thus avoided lectures and punishment. He meandered through his time at Oxford, and for want of an easier course, did all that is expected of the average man at a University.

Then he dawdled about the Continent for six months, and returned home in time for Daisy's "coming-out" ball, on her nineteenth birthday. There were very few men in England then who loved colour and beauty more than did Harry Carew. It is a toss up whether Heine or Schiller most filled his head. Shelley and Keats held the man's heart. And his theories and Ideals were beautiful.

Daisy was beautiful, too, and as imperious as ever. A trifle spoiled by her people perhaps, but a dainty, charming, winsome little queen. And none of those concerned had been quite foolish enough to let her suspect anything of the deputy-destiny business.

It would be hard to say exactly how the thing was managed, but in some way, when the night of Daisy's ball arrived, Harry Carew was distinctly the man of the moment. News had just reached Hampshire of a very striking piece of bravery by which he had saved a man's life in the Pyrenees. And he was praised the more for this because he had not mentioned it to anyone. Daisy was, of course, more than ever queen of the hour; and all things, including arrangements made by the older folk, tended to place these two together on a plane of their own.

The details one cannot explain. The lights were brilliant, the decorations beautiful, and the occasion inspiriting. The surroundings suggested sentiment. The suggestions of environment wore always first cause, and law absolute, to Harry Carew. In a dimly-lighted, flowers-scented conservatory winsome Daisy grew tender with her old playmate. The situation demanded its curtain. The line of least resistance was the man's only course. He throw back his head to tho pleasing intoxication of it all, told Daisy he loved her, and won her promise to be his wife.

Then the last extra was danced, and the lovers parted.

"Well, she's a dear little girl, anyhow!" said Harry to himself, as he stood at his bedroom window watching the sun rise over the New Forest.

Within the next few days the very unnecessary formality of asking for consent had been gone through, and Daisy Morton and Harry Carew were recognised as belonging to each other. For various reasons it was decided that the marriage should not take place till after Daisy's twentieth birthday, and to this arrangement neither of the contracting parties had any objection.

Just a month after the engagement news reached old Mr. Carew in Hampshire of certain complications connected with some of his extensive station property in New South Wales. An absconding manager and a serious bush fire were amongst the difficulties, and Mr. Carew's Sydney solicitors strongly advised a visit to the south, and the personal setting to rights of things. The delicate state of his wife's health and his own duties as a member

of Parliament made leaving England at that time impossible for Mr. Carew. And so he was a good deal troubled by this news from Australia.

In discussing the matter with his father, Harry Carew, without for a moment thinking of his engagement, expressed his readiness to go to New South Wales, just as he might have offered to run up to London. The interests at stake were considerable, and the old gentleman very gladly accepted his son's offer. So Harry explained the situation to his fiancée, and prepared to leave England for Brindisi at once, promising that his trip should not occupy more than three or four months at the most.

Then it was that Daisy Morton discovered that she really loved the easy-going man she had promised to marry. The discovery showed her, among other things, that when she had given her promise she had been merely "fond" of Harry. Now she loved him, and experienced a feeling of dread in parting from him, which she could not quite explain to herself, but which could have been explained to her by the poet of "Any Wife to Any Husband."

The dread arose from a misty half-consciousness that in allowing her lover to go away from her she was giving back to women, and the world, the something which had become hers when, standing at her side in the flower fragrant conservatory in Hampshire, Harry had said he loved her. So there were tears in pretty Daisy's eyes as she said "Good-bye" to Carew on the Brindisi express departure platform at Victoria station.

But the time had passed for any alteration of plans, and after all, she told herself, the separation would only last a few months. And Carew reminded her of this when he parted from her at the station.

Harry Carew only stayed three days in Sydney. Then, with the breath of things English still fresh In his nostrils, he started for the North, where his father's stations were. What he saw from the box of the "Cobb's Royal Mail" between Tibberena and Meryula was his first glimpse of the Bush— the great, grey wilderness, in which Nature appears to have made all her early experiments, or all those mot subsequently adopted for general application. The glimpse gripped his interest.

The Bush does lay hold of weak, idealising natures, and of strong appreciative men. The average nature does not respond to its appeal. The average man hurries on oppressed by a sense of the uncanniness of a vast desert of primitive, rudimentary life forms. Or, more frequently still, he sees only monotony and desolateness.

He says: "Yes. H'm. Yes. Now, when I get out of this place I'll," etc.

That is his feeling regarding the Bush.

Carew looked, and saw, a little and was interested. It takes a goodish time to see comprehendingly, but there does come a period at which one has a

desire, on reaching the Bush from an outpost of civilisation, to bare one's head before its naked, solitary grandeur. Carew had, of course, not reached this period when he dismounted from Cobb's Mail outside the Meryula Store.

So far, Harry Carew merely wondered. He had not begun to feel love or reverence for the Bush. So, at the little iron and weatherboard shanty which in Meryula is called "The Royal Hotel," he hired a wiry little broken-in brumby at about half the cost of the out-right purchase of a horse in the same locality, and said he would ride out to the Cootra homestead alone.

He rode out quite a considerable distance in the direction indicated by Larry Poley of the hotel as the road to Cootra. And then he gradually realised that he had lost his way, and himself. This rather frightened him, even with his misty little conception of what the Bush was and of what being lost in it meant. He mentioned, addressing the ears of his grey brumby, that "it" was "a beastly nuisance." He was not over-stating the case in this remark to the pony.

Though he did not realise the fact, his losing the track, there in the Meryula country, was, until that time, the catastrophe par excellence of his life. In the Meryula country old hands have died, mad and starved, bushed within five mile of a township.

While Carew was talking to his pony, the sun was setting. Later on came a little moonlight: not much, but enough to make that weird Meryula country many times more weird and bewildering than it had been in the evening sunlight. Carey spent the night in realising his position. And before daylight came, he was very weary and grey, and a little hysterical.

I fancy I can understand how Harry Carew felt, because, in country not very far from Meryula, I was once bushed myself for two whole nights and one whole day, and during that time was never more than three miles from a boundary-rider's gunya. Everyone else ought to understand Carew's feeling, because his experience has been so often and so graphically described, by people who have seen the Bush and others.

In the very early morning sunlight, the dancing, laughing, baby-hood of the Bush day, when every ragged gum-leaf is a spray of jewels, and every hanging twig is girdled by dew-pearls, Carew lifted up his tired eyes from the withers of the Meryula brumby, and thanked his Maker for the sound of a human voice. An atheist with cast-iron principles of unbelief will do this sort of thing at times, In the Bush.

The voice Carew heard was a rich, untrained contralto, and the trilling, joyous words that reached the man's wondering ears were: "Up in the morning"— and then a break. Perhaps there was a stumble and a change of stride in some hollow—

"Riding through wet grass, the bushman's on his way;
The bullock bells they ring, along the hillside there,
And—"

And then Carew pushed his brumby hurriedly to one side, to make way for a horse, flying at full gallop, down the side of the little ridge at the foot of which, he, Carew, had been waiting and listening.

"Hullo! Who's there?"

In three or four times its own length the galloping horse was reined on to its haunches, with a "Darkey! Wa! Steady— steady!" And Carew saw that the singer was a girl, whose long, glossy hair streamed behind her, dew-spangled, and whose face had a warm, moist bloom upon it, such us a custard apple has, when plucked before the day's heat begins.

This was Aileen, the eighteen-years-old daughter of James O'Malley, the missing and absconding manager of Cootra. Men might come and go. Her father, said Aileen, would return shortly, and put matters to rights. A new manager, was installed now, with his wife, at Cootra homestead. Aileen kept her own room still, however, And in the meantime she had her horse, Darkey, wild and untamed as herself: and the Bush— the Bush they both loved. So she had stayed on at the homestead, living her old life, and waiting with unquestioning faith for her father's return.

So now, in the course of her customary morning's gallop, she found Harry Carew, lost in the Bush, just three and a half miles from the home paddock slip-rails of his father's principal station.

Aileen interested Carew, because she was beautiful, and because she seemed so entirely part of the strange, great wilderness in which she had found him.

"I was born here, you see, and I rode before I could walk, I think— it was Patchy I rode then. There wasn't anyone much to teach me to walk, because mother— died before then: but everyone on the run helped teach me to ride. It does seem funny to think of you losing your way but I believe strangers do find Meryula country difficult. And I suppose there's no Bush in England?"

"No," said Carew, as he rode by her side "There's no Bush in England." Then he added to himself, "And, by gad, there are no Bush girl In England."

Late that evening the Englishmen rose from a hammock-chair on the verandah at Cootra, after a long talk over affairs of the station with Grantham, the new manager.

"By the way," said Grantham. "Regarding the girl— Miss O'Malley. Of course, if you think Mr. Carew, that she ought not to remain here I will arrange at once for—"

"Well, I don't know," broke in Carew, slowly. The girl had shown him something of her history and intentions during that early morning ride. in which she had been his guide to the station. "I think, perhaps, if Mrs. Grantham won't mind taking her as a lodger— er— she seems attached to the place, and is evidently absolutely trusting and innocent as far as her father is concerned. I think, if you can manage it, you had better let me pay Mrs. Grantham some allowance, and—"

"I see! Very well, Mr. Carew. Of course we shall have no objection in the world to her staying as long as she pleases."

Then the two men parted for the night, and for a long while Harry Carew sat at his open bedroom window, looking out across the wide back verandah of Cootra, over the moist, sweets smelling grass, to where the Wydah hills loomed, dark and billowy, against a fleecy sky, septa-splashed by the moonlight. Now and again one bell on a grazing horse's neck would tinkle lazily, as the animal jerked at a tough mouthful of grass. Once or twice, from the foot of the hills, came the intensely melancholy note of the Ishmaelite dingo's howl. And in the little creek below the homestead, bull-frogs were crooning monotonously. Through it all trickled the indescribable fragrance of the Bush night; oddly blended scent of wattles and gum leaves, with the perfume of wet cedar-bark, and of dew drenched sassafras.

Carew drank it all in, from his seat at the open window. He felt the silence which a thousand little sounds go to produce. And the fascinating loneliness of it all, filtered into his mind slowly.

"It's very like that child. By Jove! It's very like Aileen," he muttered, as at last, he turned away from the little square frame through which he had seen this picture.

CAREW woke very early next morning, when the sky over the Wydah Hills was a misty rift of purple and grey, slashed in places with thin rapier cute of sunrise gold. He had a hunger for the cool, wet morning, the breath of which came in at his open window as he dressed. The homestead was still silent and asleep, when Carew looked out from his door, down the wide, shadowy hall. So he closed the door again and stepped out through his bedroom window on to the verandah. A bandicoot, sitting by the verandah side, stared at him for an instant with beady eyes of wonder, and then scampered off through the long, wet grass, with a queer little cough of surprise.

Just then, the Englishman noticed a horse standing, saddled and bridled, at the door of one of the homestead's half-dozen out-houses. His stepped off the verandah and moved towards the horse, noticing then that the saddle on its back was a lady's. The animal looked round as he approached, and at that

moment Aileen appeared at the out-house door, holding a quince switch in her hand.

"Oh, good morning, Miss O'Malley," said Carew.

The girl smiled brightly as she passed one slim arm through Darkey's bridle.

"Good morning!" she replied. "You shouldn't call me 'Miss O'Malley,' though. No one ever does, that."

"I beg your pardon. Aileen is so infinitely prettier, that I— I suppose I should have known, but for my English ignorance. I wish I could follow your example in the matter of the morning ride, but my first experience makes me rather shy of venturing out alone."

"Well, why don't you catch Gold-dust, there, and come with me? You could take Mr. Grantham's saddle. He won't mind."

Under the circumstances. Carew thought he might risk Mr. Grantham's displeasure, as far as the saddle was concerned. So he caught Gold-dust, not without some assistance from that gelding's devoted friend, Aileen; and five minutes later he was cantering along by Darkey's side, towards the lower slopes of the Wydah Hills.

That ride by the side of this strange, beautiful child of the Bush, was the first, and perhaps to Carew, the pleasantest of a long series of morning and evening wanderings about Cootra. To the girl it was the beginning of all things. And as the beginning it was beautiful. The Englishman's companionship and attentions, she accepted not as a matter of course, but yet with perfectly unaffected enjoyment, as a new and splendid gift from the great Father of her belief, who gave her access to the Bush; and to all the glorious exhilaration of Bush riding.

Carew in his inconsequent way had left no instructions in Sydney for *poste restante* letters to be forwarded to him. And so, it happened that week after week slipped by in the uneventful Cootra life, without any communication from the outside world coming to remind the Englishman that he had ties and responsibilities in a place where no Bush was.

Then, one hazy summer's evening, when Carew was preparing for a ride with Aileen, came a station-hand from Meryula with a batch of Hampshire and other letters, forwarded from Sydney by the Cootra solicitors. Carew postponed his evening ride, and sat down with a dawning of seriousness in his eyes, to open and read his letters. He read them— his father's and his fiancée's— and at every line his face grew a little more serious, and a little more foreign in the phase of Nature worship, and lotus-eating in the Bush, through which he hand been passing.

That was on a Thursday evening, and as he laid aside the last letter of the batch, he decided to return to Sydney at the end of that week. Just then

Aileen's big kangaroo dog Breezer came sauntering into the room, and stood with its long pointed muzzle resting on Carew's knees, looking affectionately up into his face.

"H'm! Yes! Yes, it's the devil, but it's absolutely unavoidable, Breezer, old man."

That is what Carew said to the kangaroo dog, when he had decided to leave Cootra. During those weeks of brilliant sunshine, and scented moonlight, he had received no reminder of his other life and its responsibilities; and so he had given no thought to these things. He reproached himself, as such men will, and made up his mind to set about retrieving his forgetfulness.

Meantime, Aileen— well, the details of such things one cannot explain. But a moment's reflection shows Aileen's position in the matter. A new world had begun from that morning, when she found Carew in the bush. She had for ever left her old world of loneliness. And Harry Carew was, in her new world, sun, moon, and stars, land, sea, and atmosphere. The new world was Harry Carew. And now he had to go away for a time.

He found himself absolutely incapable of hurting her feelings, or producing a light of pain in her big eyes, by telling her that he would not return; that their parting was to be as final as their meeting had been accidental. The line of least resistance was embodied in the word, "Auf wiedersehen." "Good-bye," therefore, was impossible. Carew shuddered at the thought. In any case, he told himself, he had provided for her living always at the homestead, where she would be taken care of.

Aileen rode with him to Meryula, and two bright tears trickled down from her black eyes when she said "Good-bye!" before Carew mounted the coach.

"Good-bye, little girl! That is *au revoir*, you know. And— No! I shan't forget. Be as happy as you can till I come again."

And then the coach lumbered off down the dusty road, and Aileen stood at Darkey's head shading her eyes with one little brown hand, and gazing after her new world, till the coach became only a distant cloud of dust. That last look of hers was not easy to forget.

She had lost her new world for a time, and the old world was for ever cut off. So, for a little while she must sit in the greyness— the no man's land— between the two, till her lover came back, bringing the world she loved. But in the meantime she had memories, and the future. So, riding slowly back through the Bush to Cootra, she talked to Breezer. He had been fond of Breezer.

"I daresay 'tis better after all, Breezer, because, you see, father will be home again, I expect, before he comes back, and then I shall be able to tell father all about him. And— yes, I shall be able to learn a lot of the things he

talked about; and— Breezer! Whisper! He will love us the more for that— you and me."

It was curious that Breezer should, have whined instead of barking in reply to this confidence of Aileen's. Meantime, Carew was hurrying on to Sydney; and James O'Malley, Aileen's father, was settling down to life in the Argentine Republic.

No doubt Carew did all that it was necessary for him to do in Sydney. But he did not spend more time over it than he could help, and as soon as was conveniently possible he set sail in the old *Carthage* for England and the world he had left some five or six months before.

He landed at Plymouth, and went straight to Hampshire instead of going round by London. Everyone knows what happened then. That is the part of the story known to the men at my club; and on the strength of which, regarding it as the whole story, they dismiss the affair by calling Carew a beast. I suppose it comes to the same thing in the end. Only they might just as well know the other part. A judge always inquires into a prisoner's "previous record."

There is no need for me to tell how Harry Carew pressed for an early date for his wedding. Queenly little Daisy was very glad to have her lover back again, and lost all her capriciousness in undisguised happiness and in the enjoyment of her life. Carew had managed to arrange his father's Australian affairs very satisfactorily; and the two Hampshire households were as happy as any in England when the week of Daisy's wedding arrived.

Howard Kerr was in England then, and he was asked down to old Mr. Carew's place for the wedding. So was I, and so, for the matter of that, were a lot of the men of the club. The other men went down the day before the marriage, but I had a dinner engagement for that evening, and so arranged to leave London by an early train next morning.

On the afternoon before the event, the bridegroom was in London, making certain final arrangements for his honeymoon tour through Southern Europe. I think his feelings must have been a little mixed that day, or he would have gone home by an early train. I met him on the steps of Venci's restaurant at seven o'clock, and asked if he meant to stay in town for dinner. He looked a good deal worried, and left me rather hurriedly. He said he would not dine in town, but had one or two appointments to keep, and was just going to have some tea with a friend. I smiled, because one hardly goes to Venci's, and at seven o'clock, for tea. So I left him, and I remembered thinking how curiously a man was affected by being in love.

It does not matter how I know the rest of it. I do know it, and this is what happened.

At ten o'clock that evening, Carew was strolling through Soho, making, I fancy, for his club. As he turned a corner near Regent-street, a girl, quite young, and prettily dressed, stepped forward in front of him, and laid her hand on his arm. She was very pale and looked ill, but she was rather expensively dressed, and— well, the man was thinking of other things. He was to be married next day. We are most of us rather brutal. He murmured something commonplace, and tried to push past the girl. Then she caught, hold of his sleeve.

"God, have you no pity? I am starving!"

That was what the girl said, and it startled Carew. He apologised, and his hand moved towards his pocket. Noticing the movement, the girl gave a little moan. But whether Carew was a beast, or not, he was a gentleman. He raised his hat instead, and offered the girl his arm. Then he took her to a restaurant— everyone knows the place— and ordered, dinner, or supper: a meal anyhow, for two.

The girl was simply fainting for want of food. There was no possibility of mistake about that. Carew had ordered the meal, out of consideration for the girl, in a private room. The man's most, chivalrous part was uppermost in him. She ate ravenously, seeing nothing but her food, until such time as that animal which lives in us all, had in the girl been appeased. They then began to talk.

The girl's appearance gave the chapter headings of her life's story. A sad, bad story, old, and containing no light to relieve its pathos, of a man's betrayal of a woman's trust, and afterwards of a dreary mist of weakness in the land where one side sows— and the other reaps— wild oats. But she spoke as a woman speaks, whose early days have been good and sweet; too good and sweet for the memory of them to have faded.

Her appearance showed the title page and table of contents; and now, sitting with the man who had supplied her need when her need was at its worst, the girl filled in the story of her life. Carew sat listening, fitting parts of the story to his own life as most men might fit it to theirs. He shivered once or twice, when the girl's weakness made her lean back in her chair, and pause for a minute in the telling of her story. He was living in the part of the man, and shivered when it struck him that only in a very few details would he have given a different rendering of it.

At last the story was told, and the girl sighed, exhausted, and full of gratitude to Carew. It rather stung him, the gratitude. Then he began to talk. Of course there was no virtue in it. The situation demanded it, and anyhow, he talked a good deal. He had ascertained that the girl's mother was a widow, and lived near Liverpool. The girl talked of sleeping in the park that night. She had been turned adrift from her lodgings, starving.

There is a train which leaves Euston at twelve o'clock every night for Liverpool. At ten minutes to twelve, Harry Carew helped the girl into a first-class carriage in that train. There was an "engaged" label on the window of the carriage, and though the girl had no luggage, there was in her seat a soft rug, a bundle of Illustrated papers, and a little basket from the refreshment-room.

"Good-bye!" said Carew, as the train began to move. He was standing on the footboard, and holding the girl's hand in his. "You'll tell your mother what I told you?"

"Yes, yes! May 'God In heaven bless— oh! Good-bye!"

Carew hailed a hansom outside the station and drove to his club.

Everyone knows that Daisy Morton insisted on driving to the church at the appointed time next morning. Although two hours before Carew had not arrived at his people's place, yet Queen Daisy said he would be at the church. And so the carriages started. Daisy's little face was very white when she reached the church, but it showed only firm, unquestioning confidence, and she looked more the queen than ever. Everybody was there, except the bridegroom and the bridegroom's father. The bridegroom did not come at all, and when the bridegroom's father came, he carried in his hand a telegram, the wording of which filled two blue sheets. Then little Queen Daisy gave way, and old Dr. Gordon stayed all night at the Morton's place, and a good part of the next day.

The telegram, though it did occupy two sheets, said only that Harry Carew was sorry; and then again that he was sorry— very sorry. He would never be seen in Hampshire again; and once more, he was sorry. It was then that the men at my club pronounced him a beast.

I know now that shortly after noon on the day fixed for his wedding, Carew landed in Plymouth by the express from Waterloo. He had only a small Gladstone in the carriage with him, but in the luggage van were a couple of new, regulation tin trunks, and their labels were addressed thus: "H. R. Carew, R.M.S. *Massilia*, Plymouth." Underneath was written: "Passenger to Sydney." And elsewhere appeared: "For use on voyage."

I also know now that two months after leaving England, Carew married Aileen O'Malley in the little tin church of Tibberena; and up till a few months ago at all events, he has been living with her somewhere under the Southern Cross, ever since.

I do not say that the men at my club are not right in what they say about him, but they might as well know the whole story.

———————————

9: The Mazemore Diamonds.

Beatrice Heron-Maxwell

1859-1927

Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW) 6 Sep 1911

SHE WAS standing in the west gallery, just under her great-great-grand-mother's portrait, I remember, was Miss Eveleine, on the day that Mr. Vanscombe first came to Mazemore. I can see him now with his bold light eyes fixed on her, as they came along together, old Sir Richard and he; I heard him say under his breath as he passed me, where I stood in the oriel window, "What a lovely face."

And well he might, for it is not often you see anyone like Miss Eveleine. He noticed the likeness, too, for after Sir Richard had introduced him and they had shaken hands, he looked up to it and read the name aloud.

"The Lady Sirena Mazemore as the Poetic Muse," and then he said slowly to Sir Richard while still he kept his eyes on any little lady, "One would have known that she was an ancestress even without the inscription. A singularly beautiful woman. Your daughter is her living counterpart."

Sir Richard seemed so pleased at this open compliment, that I guessed then and there he had some scheme on hand with this man, and I hated them both, for I knew it must concern her.

My little lady turned pale; it was a way she had when anything vexed her, and gave him a quick glance of scorn for making so free; though he was right enough in what he said. Mr. Vanscombe saw she was not pleased, I think, and he turned to the bracket just under the picture and said, "A handsome old pyx; may I look at it?"

I heard Miss Eveleine telling him it belonged to the Lady Sirena, and had always stood in her little private orison-chapel; and they talked together for some minutes on the beauty of the chased gold and silver work, and the meaning of the gems set in it.

The pyx was in the form of a cross, with a large square crystal in the centre in a rim of silver opening with a hinge, so that the holy wafer could be set in the gold niche between it. Close to it stood a small iron coffer, with curious devices beaten into it, and a solid lid, inside which— in the centre— a Maltese cross was pierced deep into the metal.

This had belonged to the Lady Sirena also, and people said that she had kept it always on her altar, where the pyx stood, and that she had wished it to contain her heart, embalmed, after death.

But it was as empty now as it was when they forced it open, as I have heard, thinking to find all her jewels there, and found nothing. My great-grandmother could remember her well, and she told my mother, who often

told me about Lady Sirena's life and tragic death which Miss Eveleine was never tired of hearing again from me.

"Are you there, Arbell?" she called out presently, when Sir Richard was hobbling off down the gallery, leaving the two alone together. I came forward and dropped a curtsey, for I prize my little lady's sweetness far too much to take advantage of it with her, and she stretched out her hand and pulled me to her side.

"This is Miss Arbell Repton," she said, "my foster-sister and constant companion. She can tell you all about my great-grand mother, for she knows the whole story by heart. Arbell, Mr. Lester Vanscombe is interested in our family history. Will you tell him of Lady Sirena's fate "

All this time he had been scrutinising me, and I, though more secretly, him. I told Mr. Vanscombe all about Lady Sirena, and how she persuaded her husband, who was Sir Hew— the ninth baronet— to let her realise most of her dowry and spend it on jewels, and how 'twas said she never wore them but meant to keep them for her second son, to go to him with Mazemore. For Mazemore was hers on her wedding-day, sold to her father, the Earl of Walmsbury, for a large sum. She knew how to turn men round her little finger, Lady Sirena did, and when she made up her mind to marry Sir Hew and her father said no, because he had no fortune, she said, "You shall give him the fortune so that he can keep me as your daughter should be kept, and I will have Mazemore in return, and take it to him as my dowry with so much more as you will give me besides." And she had her way. But she had no love for her first-born, and there were quarrels in which he and his father sided together, and she took the part of her other boy, whom she adored passionately. So at last she said to the elder, Crispian, "You shall have all your father can leave you, but Hew shall inherit Mazemore from me."

That made bad blood between them, but she cared for nothing when her mind was made. Then came the great flood that swept all through the Morelands and carried away part of the house, and Lady Sirena, who was at her prayers in the little garden chapel, was swept away too and drowned. They hunted everywhere for her will and for the jewels, but never found either; people said it was a judgment on her for having sowed dissension between brothers. And then they turned on Hew and said he must have taken the jewels, for that his mother had boasted she meant them for him. He shook the dust of Mazemore off his feet that very day, and swore he wouldn't stay to be called a thief; and he went away abroad and married a Miss Carruthers, and took her name. That is how Mr. Hew comes to be second cousin to Miss Eveleine, though he is not a Mazemore.

"Very interesting," said Mr. Vanscombe when I had finished. "These are, of course, handed down as family relics? He looked again at the pyx and coffer.

"I would like to find them," she answered, clasping her hands, and with the eager look still on her face, "and then I could—"

She broke off. She had forgotten she was talking to a stranger. But I knew well in what she would do with them; sell them and give the money to Sir Richard so that Mazemore need not pass out of their hands. For Crispian Mazemore had dissipated all the fortune that his father left him, and the mortgages he had begun on Mazemore had been growing heavier ever since. So that, as Miss Eveleine and I knew, Sir Richard was looking out for a rich buyer who would neither bargain nor cheat, and who would restore the old place to its former grandeur. Then Sir Richard would take Miss Eveleine a to London, and as soon as her face was seen there would be no want of suitors. But who could she marry here— buried alive as she was all the year round with only the villagers and the hill-folk to gape at her loveliness?

Who else, indeed, until lately, and lately, it is true, there had been someone else. It was a hard day for Mr. Hew Carruthers when Sir Richard caught him kissing his cousin's hand in the ruined chapel. I was not far off, and I heard some of what he said and how he told Mr. Hew not to venture to dark en his door again.

"I'll have no beggars hanging round here to steal my daughter," shouted Sir Richard to her one day.

"He is no beggar," she answered with her little mouth quivering and proud, "he is an honest soldier and our nearest kin."

Sir Richard muttered something about honesty and the old story of the jewels, and said if he was a soldier how was it he had no work to do.

"He has work and plenty," she said, "but he came to see the old place, expecting a welcome after all these years; and we ought to be ashamed not to give it to him."

Then Sir Richard stormed again until my little lady's face was pale with anger and she left him. But that evening after Mr. Vanscombe's arrival she ran out across the More to the High Fell, and I knew she had gone to meet him, and rejoiced.

Well, the days went by like leaden weights, for there was no doubt now what Sir Richard meant, and what Miss Eveleine would have to do— or it would go hard with her. Mazemore was to be Mr. Vanscombe's, but he was to choose a bride as well as a home, and the only condition attached was that he should take the old name and tack it on to his, so that there should still be Mazemore on the Morelands.

True, the bride's consent had to be gained, and she was put to it to fight her battle out, for her father bent all his will to break hers, and when that failed he pleaded with her and, traded on his age and penury. And it was then Miss Eveleine began to yield a little. It was in my mind to tell her more than once what manner of man Mr. Lester Vanscombe was; for I knew from his man, who told fine tales in the housekeeper's room after supper, and besides I knew it too from himself.

"They spoil you here, Arbell," he said to me. "I suppose it's because of your looks. You will miss it if you ever leave Miss Mazemore."

I know what he meant, but I laughed at his threat, for he had not won Miss Eveleine yet. I heard him curse me under his breath as I ran away from him.

That was the day before the great storm. The noise of the waterfall on the High Fell came quite distinctly through the stillness; I had never heard it so loudly before. Miss Eveleine was very restless all day; I had never seen her look so pale, nor yet so pretty.

She came out from her father's study after an interview with him and Mr. Vanscombe; and I could see things had gone badly with her; her eyes were so feverishly bright and her lips so set. Sir Richard sent for me about a book he wanted after that, and I heard Mr. Vanscombe say as I reached the door; "If she still says no, I shall give up the thought of Mazemore. It must be both for me, or neither."

And I knew Sir Richard would never lose the chance of all Mr. Vanscombe's wealth for Mazemore.

The next day there was the same stifling oppression in the air, and the village people who came up to Mazemore declared it would be the worst storm we had ever known.

"Hark to the Maze moaning," one said to me; "that means mischief. The river does not speak for nothing."

I know Miss Eveleine was going across the fell to keep tryst with Mr. Hew for the last time, and I made up my mind I would go to meet her on her way back in case the storm should break.

There had been flashes of lightning playing about as the afternoon went on, and heavy thunder, and every now and then a whirling breeze would come and bend the trees and dash the flowers to pieces, and then there would be a lull once more and the same strange stillness. I think Mr. Vanscombe had got to Know something about Mr. Hew, for after hanging about the garden most of the afternoon, he struck off towards the High Fell, and I followed him.

It was getting dusk by that time, and a sort of pall of blackness hung over the fell, so that one could distinguish nothing but the blurred mass of trees and rocks. I lost sight of Mr. Vanscombe as soon as he had crossed the last open

field, and knew he must be working his way up towards the gorge under cover of the pines.

A violent gust of wind and some drops of rain, heavy and cold, that flung them selves into my face as I hurried after him startled me; I wished I had any little lady safe at home. Then I suddenly realised that there was a new sound in the air that was neither wind nor rain, and I stopped, with my heart beating in terror, to listen. And as I waited, breathless, some one came running towards me, and out of the misty sheet, for the rain was coming now in good earnest, rushed Mr. Vanscombe like one distraught, and when he saw that he was passing someone he called out:

"Run for your life; the river is coming!"

I could have laughed even in my fear at the madness of running a race with the river. Instead I made for the steep zig-zag that led right up to the head of the gorge, and as I climbed up it I could see and hear the sheet of water that was rushing down past me making a new course for itself instead of winding down through the gorge. As I reached the top I could see the Maze leap in the air, where usually it flowed placidly to the head of the Fell, and make a new torrent, straight down the fell side towards the Morelands.

I called out to my little lady again and again, but there was no answer, until at last a faint halloo reached me and I recognised Mr. Hew's voice below. I hastened down to him as fast as I could go and found him wild with fear for her, as I was.

"She left me half an hour ago," he said. "She was going towards the garden when I saw the last glimpse of her. My God, if the river should have been too quick for her! It hadn't overflowed then. Come, Arbell! we must find her."

We hurried down together, keeping at the side of the river's new course, and as we reached the lower ground we found it was a broad, dark, angry stream that flowed across the fields through the home farm and on into the garden. We dared not stay, for our one thought was of Miss Eveleine, and there at last ahead of us was the steep walk with high grass banks on either side— a river now— leading to the garden chapel, and the water gliding past and through it. Somehow we both knew that she was there; indeed, it seemed as if I had always known that this would happen.

Mr. Hew never stayed for an instant; he flung off his coat and plunged into the stream, deeper now than his own height twice over, and swam straight to the ruins. The top of the old roofless walls was all that one could see, but we neither of us doubted that the river had Miss Eveleine in its grip. Mr. Hew dragged himself up to the edge, and after a moment dived again, this time inside the wall; and I ran through the blinding rain and whirling wind towards the house calling for help, but my voice was drowned in the noise of the storm.

I had almost reached the terrace when the gardener heard me, and ran on for me to tell Sir Richard, while I turned back to the chapel. A great white flash of lightning came as I sped towards it, and illumined the whole garden, and I saw them— Miss Eveleine lying at the top of the bank all drenched and lifeless, and Mr. Hew, spent and scarcely conscious, beside her. We lifted her and carried her to the house, the pitiless rain beating down on my little lady as though it would dash out any spark of life left by the river, and she was laid on the big couch in the hall, while we all strove— without hope— to bring her pack to life.

Mr. Hew swooned away as he stumbled in with her, for he had had a hard battle with the water for Miss Eveleine, and was badly hurt, one wrist broken, and his poor hand hanging useless.

It seemed as though we must lose them both; and the words kept ringing in my head all through those hours that followed:

For the Maze will have,
and the Maze, will keep
The best of the More;
'twixt wake and sleep.

Mr. Vanscombe was quite useless; he had reached the house in safety by sheer good luck, but he was all unstrung with the shock, and even Sir Richard looked askance contemptuously at him.

I shall never forget the moment when my little lady opened her sweet eyes and looked at me as though from another world. I could have sobbed with tears and laughter, and I dared say nothing for fear of sending her straight back there again, and letting the Maze get the better of us after all. She looked at me intently, and then she sighed and stirred, and presently, after closing her eyes again she said, "I have found it, Arbell."

And she tried to lift her hand and show me what she still held clasped there— a quaint old chatelaine, rusted, and bent and broken, but with a curious key attached to it, widening at the end into a square, which shaped a Maltese cross.

"Bring me the coffer, Arbell," she said, faintly, and I knew what she meant, and sent for it at once.

There in the lid of Lady Sirena's casket was the Maltese cross, into which the key, after we had rubbed and oiled it, fitted; and when Miss Eveleine turned it, there, in a little silver case, was a roll of paper with writing on it. And as my little lady read the words, puzzling over them, for they were in strange old English, her face flushed as I have seen it flush, and she cried out, "Arbell,

Arbell, I can't believe it! It's too strange to be true. Send for the pyx— quick, Arbell!"

She was all life and; eagerness now, and the shadow of death. had lifted' from her. When the pyx was brought, she looked for, and found, a little knob of gold below one of the gems, and this she pressed; and with that the back swung open and there were, the long-lost jewels of the Lady Sirena, hidden safely all those years; and the secret of their hiding-place guarded by her will in the lid of the coffer.

Then nothing would satisfy Miss Eveleine but that her father, must come to her, and take her presently to the bedside of Mr. Hew, who by the doctor's orders had been placed in the west wing, and was not to be moved, for days.

"You must come, too, Arbell," she said. And I went. And she knelt down by Mr. Hew's side, and took his right hand— his left was all bandaged— and said:

"We have wronged you, cousin Hew, these many years, but all unknowingly. See, here is our great-great-grandmother's will, and Mazemore is yours, and all the jewels are yours; and I am so glad. It was well worth being drowned to find them."

And he looked right into her eyes before Sir Richard, too, and said: "Sweetheart, they and I are yours, and yours alone."

So Sir Richard, strangely subdued and humbled now, and I, came away and left them together, for the doctor said: "There is nothing that heals so quickly as happiness."

But I could not resist, when I met Mr. Vanscombe in the hall and saw his discomfiture, dropping a curtsey and saying I hoped he had got over the fright that the Maze had given him. He never answered a word, for he knew he had shown himself a coward and a fool; and he went away that afternoon as soon as Sir Richard told him about Mr. Hew and Miss Eveleine.

It was strange, the next day, when the storm had passed, to see the way the Maze had swept down, cutting the Morelands in twain, and working havoc wherever it went; the garden chapel had disappeared altogether, and there was only a heap of stones and bricks remaining when the water subsided.

The village folk say there will not be a flood again for two or three hundred years, and perhaps never, because the Maze was cheated this time. But I think the Maze got its own way, really; it did not mean the Morelands to pass into strange hands, and so it gave them, with the best thing in them— my little lady herself to their rightful owner. You can still see how the water flowed round in a complete circle, shutting in Mazemore itself like a ring-fence, as though it took its rights first before it yielded them to Mr. Hew.

And that is how Mazemore passed over to the younger branch! I have had to tell the story many times, for people love romance, especially when it's all true and really happened.

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10: The Passing of Marcus O'Brien

Jack London

John Griffith Chaney, 1876-1916

The Reader January 1908

'IT IS THE JUDGMENT of this court that you vamose the camp... in the customary way, sir, in the customary way.'

Judge Marcus O'Brien was absent-minded, and Mucluc Charley nudged him in the ribs. Marcus O'Brien cleared his throat and went on—

'Weighing the gravity of the offence, sir, and the extenuating circumstances, it is the opinion of this court, and its verdict, that you be outfitted with three days' grub. That will do, I think.'

Arizona Jack cast a bleak glance out over the Yukon. It was a swollen, chocolate flood, running a mile wide and nobody knew how deep. The earth-bank on which he stood was ordinarily a dozen feet above the water, but the river was now growling at the top of the bank, devouring, instant by instant, tiny portions of the top-standing soil. These portions went into the gaping mouths of the endless army of brown swirls and vanished away. Several inches more, and Red Cow would be flooded.

'It won't do,' Arizona Jack said bitterly. 'Three days' grub ain't enough.'

'There was Manchester,' Marcus O'Brien replied gravely. 'He didn't get any grub.'

'And they found his remains grounded on the Lower River an' half eaten by huskies,' was Arizona Jack's retort. 'And his killin' was without provocation. Joe Deeves never did nothin', never warbled once, an' jes' because his stomach was out of order, Manchester ups an' plugs him. You ain't givin' me a square deal, O'Brien, I tell you that straight. Give me a week's grub, and I play even to win out. Three days' grub, an' I cash in.'

'What for did you kill Ferguson?' O'Brien demanded. 'I haven't any patience for these unprovoked killings. And they've got to stop. Red Cow's none so populous. It's a good camp, and there never used to be any killings. Now they're epidemic. I'm sorry for you, Jack, but you've got to be made an example of. Ferguson didn't provoke enough for a killing.'

'Provoke!' Arizona Jack snorted. 'I tell you, O'Brien, you don't savve. You ain't got no artistic sensibilities. What for did I kill Ferguson? What for did Ferguson sing 'Then I wisht I was a little bird'? That's what I want to know. Answer me that. What for did he sing 'little bird, little bird'? One little bird was enough. I could a-stood one little bird. But no, he must sing two little birds. I gave 'm a chanst. I went to him almighty polite and requested him kindly to discard one little bird. I pleaded with him. There was witnesses that testified to that.

'An' Ferguson was no jay-throated songster,' some one spoke up from the crowd.

O'Brien betrayed indecision.

'Ain't a man got a right to his artistic feelin's?' Arizona Jack demanded. 'I gave Ferguson warnin'. It was violatin' my own nature to go on listening to his little birds. Why, there's music sharps that fine-strung an' keyed-up they'd kill for heaps less'n I did. I'm willin' to pay for havin' artistic feelin's. I can take my medicine an' lick the spoon, but three days' grub is drawin' it a shade fine, that's all, an' I hereby register my kick. Go on with the funeral.'

O'Brien was still wavering. He glanced inquiringly at Mucluc Charley.

'I should say, Judge, that three days' grub was a mite severe,' the latter suggested; 'but you're runnin' the show. When we elected you judge of this here trial court, we agreed to abide by your decisions, an' we've done it, too, b'gosh, an' we're goin' to keep on doin' it.'

'Mebbe I've been a trifle harsh, Jack,' O'Brien said apologetically—'I'm that worked up over those killings; an' I'm willing to make it a week's grub.' He cleared his throat magisterially and looked briskly about him. 'And now we might as well get along and finish up the business. The boat's ready. You go and get the grub, Leclaire. We'll settle for it afterward.'

Arizona Jack looked grateful, and, muttering something about 'damned little birds,' stepped aboard the open boat that rubbed restlessly against the bank. It was a large skiff, built of rough pine planks that had been sawed by hand from the standing timber of Lake Linderman, a few hundred miles above, at the foot of Chilcoot. In the boat were a pair of oars and Arizona Jack's blankets. Leclaire brought the grub, tied up in a flour-sack, and put it on board. As he did so, he whispered— 'I gave you good measure, Jack. You done it with provocation.'

'Cast her off!' Arizona Jack cried.

Somebody untied the painter and threw it in. The current gripped the boat and whirled it away. The murderer did not bother with the oars, contenting himself with sitting in the stern-sheets and rolling a cigarette. Completing it, he struck a match and lighted up. Those that watched on the bank could see the tiny puffs of smoke. They remained on the bank till the boat swung out of sight around the bend half a mile below. Justice had been done.

The denizens of Red Cow imposed the law and executed sentences without the delays that mark the softness of civilization. There was no law on the Yukon save what they made for themselves. They were compelled to make it for themselves. It was in an early day that Red Cow flourished on the Yukon—1887— and the Klondike and its populous stampedes lay in the unguessed future. The men of Red Cow did not even know whether their camp was

situated in Alaska or in the North-west Territory, whether they drew breath under the stars and stripes or under the British flag. No surveyor had ever happened along to give them their latitude and longitude. Red Cow was situated somewhere along the Yukon, and that was sufficient for them. So far as flags were concerned, they were beyond all jurisdiction. So far as the law was concerned, they were in No-Man's land.

They made their own law, and it was very simple. The Yukon executed their decrees. Some two thousand miles below Red Cow the Yukon flowed into Bering Sea through a delta a hundred miles wide. Every mile of those two thousand miles was savage wilderness. It was true, where the Porcupine flowed into the Yukon inside the Arctic Circle there was a Hudson Bay Company trading post. But that was many hundreds of miles away. Also, it was rumoured that many hundreds of miles farther on there were missions. This last, however, was merely rumour; the men of Red Cow had never been there. They had entered the lone land by way of Chilcoot and the head-waters of the Yukon.

The men of Red Cow ignored all minor offences. To be drunk and disorderly and to use vulgar language were looked upon as natural and inalienable rights. The men of Red Cow were individualists, and recognized as sacred but two things, property and life. There were no women present to complicate their simple morality. There were only three log-cabins in Red Cow— the majority of the population of forty men living in tents or brush shacks; and there was no jail in which to confine malefactors, while the inhabitants were too busy digging gold or seeking gold to take a day off and build a jail. Besides, the paramount question of grub negatived such a procedure. Wherefore, when a man violated the rights of property or life, he was thrown into an open boat and started down the Yukon. The quantity of grub he received was proportioned to the gravity of the offence. Thus, a common thief might get as much as two weeks' grub; an uncommon thief might get no more than half of that. A murderer got no grub at all. A man found guilty of manslaughter would receive grub for from three days to a week. And Marcus O'Brien had been elected judge, and it was he who apportioned the grub. A man who broke the law took his chances. The Yukon swept him away, and he might or might not win to Bering Sea. A few days' grub gave him a fighting chance. No grub meant practically capital punishment, though there was a slim chance, all depending on the season of the year.

Having disposed of Arizona Jack and watched him out of sight, the population turned from the bank and went to work on its claims— all except Curly Jim, who ran the one faro layout in all the Northland and who speculated in prospect-holes on the sides. Two things happened that day that were

momentous. In the late morning Marcus O'Brien struck it. He washed out a dollar, a dollar and a half, and two dollars, from three successive pans. He had found the streak. Curly Jim looked into the hole, washed a few pans himself, and offered O'Brien ten thousand dollars for all rights— five thousand in dust, and, in lieu of the other five thousand, a half interest in his faro layout. O'Brien refused the offer. He was there to make money out of the earth, he declared with heat, and not out of his fellow-men. And anyway, he didn't like faro. Besides, he appraised his strike at a whole lot more than ten thousand.

The second event of moment occurred in the afternoon, when Siskiyou Pearly ran his boat into the bank and tied up. He was fresh from the Outside, and had in his possession a four-months-old newspaper. Furthermore, he had half a dozen barrels of whisky, all consigned to Curly Jim. The men of Red Cow quit work. They sampled the whisky— at a dollar a drink, weighed out on Curly's scales; and they discussed the news. And all would have been well, had not Curly Jim conceived a nefarious scheme, which was, namely, first to get Marcus O'Brien drunk, and next, to buy his mine from him.

The first half of the scheme worked beautifully. It began in the early evening, and by nine o'clock O'Brien had reached the singing stage. He clung with one arm around Curly Jim's neck, and even essayed the late lamented Ferguson's song about the little birds. He considered he was quite safe in this, what of the fact that the only man in camp with artistic feelings was even then speeding down the Yukon on the breast of a five-mile current.

But the second half of the scheme failed to connect. No matter how much whisky was poured down his neck, O'Brien could not be brought to realize that it was his bounden and friendly duty to sell his claim. He hesitated, it is true, and trembled now and again on the verge of giving in. Inside his muddled head, however, he was chuckling to himself. He was up to Curly Jim's game, and liked the hands that were being dealt him. The whisky was good. It came out of one special barrel, and was about a dozen times better than that in the other five barrels.

Siskiyou Pearly was dispensing drinks in the bar-room to the remainder of the population of Red Cow, while O'Brien and Curly had out their business orgy in the kitchen. But there was nothing small about O'Brien. He went into the bar-room and returned with Mucluc Charley and Percy Leclaire.

'Business 'sociates of mine, business 'sociates,' he announced, with a broad wink to them and a guileless grin to Curly. 'Always trust their judgment, always trust 'em. They're all right. Give 'em some fire-water, Curly, an' le's talk it over.'

This was ringing in; but Curly Jim, making a swift revaluation of the claim, and remembering that the last pan he washed had turned out seven dollars,

decided that it was worth the extra whisky, even if it was selling in the other room at a dollar a drink.

'I'm not likely to consider,' O'Brien was hiccoughing to his two friends in the course of explaining to them the question at issue. 'Who? Me?— sell for ten thousand dollars! No indeed. I'll dig the gold myself, an' then I'm goin' down to God's country— Southern California— that's the place for me to end my declinin' days— an' then I'll start... as I said before, then I'll start... what did I say I was goin' to start?'

'Ostrich farm,' Mucluc Charley volunteered.

'Sure, just what I'm goin' to start.' O'Brien abruptly steadied himself and looked with awe at Mucluc Charley. 'How did you know? Never said so. Jes' thought I said so. You're a min' reader, Charley. Le's have another.'

Curly Jim filled the glasses and had the pleasure of seeing four dollars' worth of whisky disappear, one dollar's worth of which he punished himself— O'Brien insisted that he should drink as frequently as his guests.

'Better take the money now,' Leclaire argued. 'Take you two years to dig it out the hole, an' all that time you might be hatchin' teeny little baby ostriches an' pulling feathers out the big ones.'

O'Brien considered the proposition and nodded approval. Curly Jim looked gratefully at Leclaire and refilled the glasses.

'Hold on there!' spluttered Mucluc Charley, whose tongue was beginning to wag loosely and trip over itself. 'As your father confessor— there I go— as your brother— O hell!' He paused and collected himself for another start. 'As your frien'— business frien', I should say, I would suggest, rather— I would take the liberty, as it was, to mention— I mean, suggest, that there may be more ostriches... O hell!' He downed another glass, and went on more carefully. 'What I'm drivin' at is... what am I drivin' at?' He smote the side of his head sharply half a dozen times with the heel of his palm to shake up his ideas. 'I got it!' he cried jubilantly. 'Supposen there's slathers more'n ten thousand dollars in that hole!'

O'Brien, who apparently was all ready to close the bargain, switched about.

'Great!' he cried. 'Splen'd idea. Never thought of it all by myself.' He took Mucluc Charley warmly by the hand. 'Good frien'! Good 's'ciate!' He turned belligerently on Curly Jim. 'Maybe hundred thousand dollars in that hole. You wouldn't rob your old frien', would you, Curly? Course you wouldn't. I know you— better'n yourself, better'n yourself. Le's have another: We're good frien's, all of us, I say, all of us.'

And so it went, and so went the whisky, and so went Curly Jim's hopes up and down. Now Leclaire argued in favour of immediate sale, and almost won the reluctant O'Brien over, only to lose him to the more brilliant counter-

argument of Mucluc Charley. And again, it was Mucluc Charley who presented convincing reasons for the sale and Percy Leclaire who held stubbornly back. A little later it was O'Brien himself who insisted on selling, while both friends, with tears and curses, strove to dissuade him. The more whiskey they downed, the more fertile of imagination they became. For one sober pro or con they found a score of drunken ones; and they convinced one another so readily that they were perpetually changing sides in the argument.

The time came when both Mucluc Charley and Leclaire were firmly set upon the sale, and they gleefully obliterated O'Brien's objections as fast as he entered them. O'Brien grew desperate. He exhausted his last argument and sat speechless. He looked pleadingly at the friends who had deserted him. He kicked Mucluc Charley's shins under the table, but that graceless hero immediately unfolded a new and most logical reason for the sale. Curly Jim got pen and ink and paper and wrote out the bill of sale. O'Brien sat with pen poised in hand.

'Le's have one more,' he pleaded. 'One more before I sign away a hundred thousan' dollars.'

Curly Jim filled the glasses triumphantly. O'Brien downed his drink and bent forward with wobbling pen to affix his signature. Before he had made more than a blot, he suddenly started up, impelled by the impact of an idea colliding with his consciousness. He stood upon his feet and swayed back and forth before them, reflecting in his startled eyes the thought process that was taking place behind. Then he reached his conclusion. A benevolent radiance suffused his countenance. He turned to the faro dealer, took his hand, and spoke solemnly.

'Curly, you're my frien'. There's my han'. Shake. Ol' man, I won't do it. Won't sell. Won't rob a frien'. No son-of-a-gun will ever have chance to say Marcus O'Brien robbed frien' cause frien' was drunk. You're drunk, Curly, an' I won't rob you. Jes' had thought— never thought it before— don't know what the matter 'ith me, but never thought it before. Suppose, jes' suppose, Curly, my ol' frien', jes' suppose there ain't ten thousan' in whole damn claim. You'd be robbed. No, sir; won't do it. Marcus O'Brien makes money out of the groun', not out of his frien's.'

Percy Leclaire and Mucluc Charley drowned the faro dealer's objections in applause for so noble a sentiment. They fell upon O'Brien from either side, their arms lovingly about his neck, their mouths so full of words they could not hear Curly's offer to insert a clause in the document to the effect that if there weren't ten thousand in the claim he would be given back the difference between yield and purchase price. The longer they talked the more maudlin and the more noble the discussion became. All sordid motives were banished.

They were a trio of philanthropists striving to save Curly Jim from himself and his own philanthropy. They insisted that he was a philanthropist. They refused to accept for a moment that there could be found one ignoble thought in all the world. They crawled and climbed and scrambled over high ethical plateaux and ranges, or drowned themselves in metaphysical seas of sentimentality.

Curly Jim sweated and fumed and poured out the whisky. He found himself with a score of arguments on his hands, not one of which had anything to do with the gold-mine he wanted to buy. The longer they talked the farther away they got from that gold-mine, and at two in the morning Curly Jim acknowledged himself beaten. One by one he led his helpless guests across the kitchen floor and thrust them outside. O'Brien came last, and the three, with arms locked for mutual aid, titubated gravely on the stoop.

'Good business man, Curly,' O'Brien was saying. 'Must say like your style— fine an' generous, free-handed hospital... hospital... hospitality. Credit to you. Nothin' base 'n graspin' in your make-up. As I was sayin'—'

But just then the faro dealer slammed the door.

The three laughed happily on the stoop. They laughed for a long time. Then Mucluc Charley essayed speech.

'Funny— laughed so hard— ain't what I want to say. My idea is... what wash it? Oh, got it! Funny how ideas slip. Elusive idea— chasin' elusive idea— great sport. Ever chase rabbits, Percy, my frien'? I had dog— great rabbit dog. Whash 'is name? Don't know name— never had no name— forget name— elusive name— chasin' elusive name— no, idea— elusive idea, but got it— what I want to say was— O hell!'

Thereafter there was silence for a long time. O'Brien slipped from their arms to a sitting posture on the stoop, where he slept gently. Mucluc Charley chased the elusive idea through all the nooks and crannies of his drowning consciousness. Leclaire hung fascinated upon the delayed utterance. Suddenly the other's hand smote him on the back.

'Got it!' Mucluc Charley cried in stentorian tones.

The shock of the jolt broke the continuity of Leclaire's mental process.

'How much to the pan?' he demanded.

'Pan nothin'!' Mucluc Charley was angry. 'Idea— got it— got leg-hold— ran it down.'

Leclaire's face took on a rapt, admiring expression, and again he hung upon the other's lips.

'...O hell!' said Mucluc Charley.

At this moment the kitchen door opened for an instant, and Curly Jim shouted, 'Go home!'

'Funny,' said Mucluc Charley. 'Shame idea— very shame as mine. Le's go home.'

They gathered O'Brien up between them and started. Mucluc Charley began aloud the pursuit of another idea. Leclaire followed the pursuit with enthusiasm. But O'Brien did not follow it. He neither heard, nor saw, nor knew anything. He was a mere wobbling automaton, supported affectionately and precariously by his two business associates.

They took the path down by the bank of the Yukon. Home did not lie that way, but the elusive idea did. Mucluc Charley giggled over the idea that he could not catch for the edification of Leclaire. They came to where Siskiyou Pearly's boat lay moored to the bank. The rope with which it was tied ran across the path to a pine stump. They tripped over it and went down, O'Brien underneath. A faint flash of consciousness lighted his brain. He felt the impact of bodies upon his and struck out madly for a moment with his fists. Then he went to sleep again. His gentle snore arose on the air, and Mucluc Charley began to giggle.

'New idea,' he volunteered, 'brand new idea. Jes' caught it— no trouble at all. Came right up an' I patted it on the head. It's mine. 'Brien's drunk— beashly drunk. Shame— damn shame— learn'm lesshon. Trash Pearly's boat. Put 'Brien in Pearly's boat. Casht off— let her go down Yukon. 'Brien wake up in mornin'. Current too strong— can't row boat 'gainst current— mush walk back. Come back madder 'n hatter. You an' me headin' for tall timber. Learn 'm lesshon jes' shame, learn 'm lesshon.'

Siskiyou Pearly's boat was empty, save for a pair of oars. Its gunwale rubbed against the bank alongside of O'Brien. They rolled him over into it. Mucluc Charley cast off the painter, and Leclaire shoved the boat out into the current. Then, exhausted by their labours, they lay down on the bank and slept.

Next morning all Red Cow knew of the joke that had been played on Marcus O'Brien. There were some tall bets as to what would happen to the two perpetrators when the victim arrived back. In the afternoon a lookout was set, so that they would know when he was sighted. Everybody wanted to see him come in. But he didn't come, though they sat up till midnight. Nor did he come next day, nor the next. Red Cow never saw Marcus O'Brien again, and though many conjectures were entertained, no certain clue was ever gained to dispel the mystery of his passing.

Only Marcus O'Brien knew, and he never came back to tell. He awoke next morning in torment. His stomach had been calcined by the inordinate quantity of whisky he had drunk, and was a dry and raging furnace. His head ached all over, inside and out; and, worse than that, was the pain in his face. For six

hours countless thousands of mosquitoes had fed upon him, and their ungrateful poison had swollen his face tremendously. It was only by a severe exertion of will that he was able to open narrow slits in his face through which he could peer. He happened to move his hands, and they hurt. He squinted at them, but failed to recognize them, so puffed were they by the mosquito virus. He was lost, or rather, his identity was lost to him. There was nothing familiar about him, which, by association of ideas, would cause to rise in his consciousness the continuity of his existence. He was divorced utterly from his past, for there was nothing about him to resurrect in his consciousness a memory of that past. Besides, he was so sick and miserable that he lacked energy and inclination to seek after who and what he was.

It was not until he discovered a crook in a little finger, caused by an unset breakage of years before, that he knew himself to be Marcus O'Brien. On the instant his past rushed into his consciousness. When he discovered a blood-blister under a thumb-nail, which he had received the previous week, his self-identification became doubly sure, and he knew that those unfamiliar hands belonged to Marcus O'Brien, or, just as much to the point, that Marcus O'Brien belonged to the hands. His first thought was that he was ill— that he had had river fever. It hurt him so much to open his eyes that he kept them closed. A small floating branch struck the boat a sharp rap. He thought it was some one knocking on the cabin door, and said, 'Come in.' He waited for a while, and then said testily, 'Stay out, then, damn you.' But just the same he wished they would come in and tell him about his illness.

But as he lay there, the past night began to reconstruct itself in his brain. He hadn't been sick at all, was his thought; he had merely been drunk, and it was time for him to get up and go to work. Work suggested his mine, and he remembered that he had refused ten thousand dollars for it. He sat up abruptly and squeezed open his eyes. He saw himself in a boat, floating on the swollen brown flood of the Yukon. The spruce-covered shores and islands were unfamiliar. He was stunned for a time. He couldn't make it out. He could remember the last night's orgy, but there was no connection between that and his present situation.

He closed his eyes and held his aching head in his hands. What had happened? Slowly the dreadful thought arose in his mind. He fought against it, strove to drive it away, but it persisted: he had killed somebody. That alone could explain why he was in an open boat drifting down the Yukon. The law of Red Cow that he had so long administered had now been administered to him. He had killed some one and been set adrift. But whom? He racked his aching brain for the answer, but all that came was a vague memory of bodies falling upon him and of striking out at them. Who were they? Maybe he had killed

more than one. He reached to his belt. The knife was missing from its sheath. He had done it with that undoubtedly. But there must have been some reason for the killing. He opened his eyes and in a panic began to search about the boat. There was no grub, not an ounce of grub. He sat down with a groan. He had killed without provocation. The extreme rigour of the law had been visited upon him.

For half an hour he remained motionless, holding his aching head and trying to think. Then he cooled his stomach with a drink of water from overside and felt better. He stood up, and alone on the wide-stretching Yukon, with naught but the primeval wilderness to hear, he cursed strong drink. After that he tied up to a huge floating pine that was deeper sunk in the current than the boat and that consequently drifted faster. He washed his face and hands, sat down in the stern-sheets, and did some more thinking. It was late in June. It was two thousand miles to Bering Sea. The boat was averaging five miles an hour. There was no darkness in such high latitudes at that time of the year, and he could run the river every hour of the twenty-four. This would mean, daily, a hundred and twenty miles. Strike out the twenty for accidents, and there remained a hundred miles a day. In twenty days he would reach Bering Sea. And this would involve no expenditure of energy; the river did the work. He could lie down in the bottom of the boat and husband his strength.

For two days he ate nothing. Then, drifting into the Yukon Flats, he went ashore on the low-lying islands and gathered the eggs of wild geese and ducks. He had no matches, and ate the eggs raw. They were strong, but they kept him going. When he crossed the Arctic Circle, he found the Hudson Bay Company's post. The brigade had not yet arrived from the Mackenzie, and the post was completely out of grub. He was offered wild-duck eggs, but he informed them that he had a bushel of the same on the boat. He was also offered a drink of whisky, which he refused with an exhibition of violent repugnance. He got matches, however, and after that he cooked his eggs. Toward the mouth of the river head-winds delayed him, and he was twenty-four days on the egg diet. Unfortunately, while asleep he had drifted by both the missions of St. Paul and Holy Cross. And he could sincerely say, as he afterward did, that talk about missions on the Yukon was all humbug. There weren't any missions, and he was the man to know.

Once on Bering Sea he exchanged the egg diet for seal diet, and he never could make up his mind which he liked least. In the fall of the year he was rescued by a United States revenue cutter, and the following winter he made quite a hit in San Francisco as a temperance lecturer. In this field he found his vocation. 'Avoid the bottle' is his slogan and battle-cry. He manages subtly to convey the impression that in his own life a great disaster was wrought by the

bottle. He has even mentioned the loss of a fortune that was caused by that hell-bait of the devil, but behind that incident his listeners feel the loom of some terrible and unguessed evil for which the bottle is responsible. He has made a success in his vocation, and has grown grey and respected in the crusade against strong drink. But on the Yukon the passing of Marcus O'Brien remains tradition. It is a mystery that ranks at par with the disappearance of Sir John Franklin.

11: Aalila

Christopher Blayre

Edward Heron-Allen, 1861-1943

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THERE IS NOT— or at any rate there should not be— any romance in "*Nature*." You will observe the italics and the inverted commas, which indicate that I refer to the Journal and not to the Dame. "*Nullius in verba*" is the inexorable motto of the Royal Society of London, which means that you must not state a fact unless you can table, or screen, the evidence which supports and proves it. It will be difficult, indeed impossible, to observe this rule in recording the story of Aalila, but I will do my best.

Among the "Notes" which supply to the Curious the scientific news of the week in "*Nature*" of the— well, perhaps it may be better to refer the Curious to his file of that admirable journal for the exact date, for I am writing face to face with the gorgeous panorama of the Pyrennees as seen from the Hotel de France at Pau, and I have only the paragraph— cut out— with me. It reads:

"We regret to announce the death of Professor Alured Markwand, which took place suddenly in his Observatory at Piping Pebworth on the 14th instant. The cause and manner of his death is unknown, the coroner's jury having, as directed, returned an open verdict. It seems probable that Professor Markwand met his death by electrocution, as his body, strangely scarred, was found beside a powerful dynamo which generated the electric current of an arc light in the Observatory. It is well known that he was engaged in researches upon the development of photo-telephony, and his Observatory was fitted with an arc-light apparatus of exceptionally high voltage." Then follow biographical details for which the Curious may be referred to the columns of "*Who's Who*."

I have given anxious thought to the question whether I should record the manner of his death, or allow the "open verdict" of the coroner's jury to stand as the only (and official) account of the matter. My own reputation for veracity, for reliability as an observer, for scientific method of record— nay, I may say for sanity itself— is at stake. In any case this record cannot be published in my lifetime; my position as Professor of Psychology in the University of Cosmopoli would be seriously compromised, and though, as I believe myself to be, not lacking in physical or moral courage, I should shrink from facing the genial gathering of my colleagues in the tea-room of the Royal Society on Thursday afternoons, and probably feeling that I am relegated to that small coterie of eminent men of science who have flown— and unhappily have published an account of their flights— into the cloudy atmosphere of metaphysical— research? experiment? self-delusion?— call it what you will.

Thus much by way of apologia. But I feel myself compelled to record, to enregister, the most amazing and overwhelming experience of my life.

In the reports of the inquest, it will be remembered that it appeared that it was I who gave evidence as to the discovery of Alured Markwand's body. It was stated in those reports, that entering his Observatory at 8 a.m. on the day in question— I had been spending a month with him in Warwickshire— I found his body lying against the dynamo as described. This is not true. I dragged it there— it was the only thing to do— an explanation of some kind had to be forthcoming. *I was there when he died*.

IT HAS BEEN noted in "*Nature*" (*ut suprá*) that Markwand was actively engaged in the study of photo-telephony. Those who were privileged to be present at the Soirée of the Royal Society in 1919 will remember the demonstration given by Dr. A. O. Rankine of this remarkable method of sound-transmission. The beam of light that extended above the heads of the assembled guests from the Council Chamber to the furthest of the library, the telephones attached to the mirror which caught the beam, and the delicate apparatus of Selenium cells, which enabled people to hear in the library what Dr. Rankine's assistant spoke into the receiver in the Council Chamber, and how the speech was interrupted when a sheet of card was interposed, cutting off the beam from the receiving mirror, will be within the memory of all who were present. I remember one exquisitely pretty red-haired girl who— but, however, she has nothing to do with this record. Markwand was explaining, or trying to explain, it to me— I knew he had an installation of his own— and, intimate as I was with him, as the result of a friendship that dated from boyhood and had persisted through Eton and Trinity until we found ourselves colleagues on the Professorial Staff at the University of Cosmopoli, I was vaguely distressed at the nervous absorption with which he discussed the matter.

"It is extraordinarily interesting," said I.

"Interesting!" he exclaimed, in the tone he might have adopted to the Yankee girl who, on seeing the Falls of Niagara for the first time and by moonlight, remarked 'Well— well, *ain't that cunning*!' "Interesting!" he said. "Good God! it's overwhelming— it's terrible!"

I looked at him in some disquiet; it had not struck me in that light. His face was ashy, and his lips, like his hands, trembled. I knew he had been overworking. I felt very uneasy. I had been trying to persuade him to go down to his cottage and Observatory at Piping Febworth for a real rest, and he had promised to go as soon as the term was over, on condition that I would go with him. Meanwhile I succeeded in getting him back early that evening to his

rooms, where, over a pipe and a whiskey and soda, he made half-confidences. It seemed to me he was on the verge of a serious breakdown, if not of actual insanity. I felt called upon to remonstrate with him, gently, as one would humour a patient suffering from acute neurasthenia.

"Come, Markwand," I said, "what is all this about? You are overstraining the cord. It will snap if you are not careful. A Professor of Astronomy— a mathematician— should, of all people, keep a level head. Remember our motto '*Nullius in verba*,' if you didn't seem to be in such deadly earnest I should say you are simply talking tosh."

"I am in deadly earnest," he replied quietly. "This *is* '*Nullius in verba*,' I know what I'm talking about— and it's too much to know. You think I'm going mad? Well— if I don't talk about it pretty soon to somebody I *shall* go mad. And I've made up my mind to talk to *you*."

"Fire ahead."

"Not now. I'm too tired. And there's still something more to be done. I'll tell you all about it when we get down there. Meanwhile, think, man! Try to realise what photo-telephony means— the carrying power of a beam of light; the illimitable spaces of aether, across which beams of light are still reaching us from planets that became extinct thousands of years ago. Think of the lines of light that are connecting us at this moment with the other planets— Mars, Jupiter, Venus. Venus!" he repeated, reaching for his tumbler, and I saw that his hand shook like a contact-breaker. "Think of it! Has it never occurred to you that between talking from one end to the other of the Society's rooms, and talking from here to, say, Venus, is only a question of degree? Why not?" And he looked at me as if challenging me to express an unbelief— as who should say "Can I go on? Are you safe? Do you think it is worth while to listen?"

I was extremely uncomfortable. I hated to leave him, wrought up as he was, but on the other hand I was afraid to let him go on— then. I decided rapidly.

"Anyhow, it is frightfully suggestive— extraordinarily interesting— but it's too big a subject to go into now. I'm off home. See you at lunch tomorrow."

And so we parted for that time. Next day, as we smoked in the Common Room after lunch there was no trace visible of his agitation of the night before. Indeed he appeared to be so entirely his normal self that I felt emboldened to revert to Rankine's demonstration.

"Oh, yes," he said. "A delightful entertainment for an evening party. I quite envied Rankine's assistant, fitting the receivers over the prettiest possible ears of the prettiest possible people, and listening to their delighted squeals of astonishment. But you know," and he became graver, "our friend has hardly touched the fringe of the subject. Wait till you get to Piping Pebworth and see

what I can do. I'll astonish you! And by the way, do you remember years ago, the talk there was of transmitting designs— drawings, portraits— by wire? There were pictures of it on the back sheet of the 'Daily Mail.' Well, if by wire, why not by wireless? If by wireless, why not by light? Think it over. I must get back. I've got a lecture. See you later." And he was gone with a jovial nod and a quaint expression as of one who pulls the leg.

Though I saw a good deal of him both in college and out, until the end of term, we never referred to the subject again, and when the University closed for the summer vacation we found ourselves "by divers mesne assignments," as the lawyers say, at his adorable little cottage in Warwickshire, where he had his private observatory and did his own work, uninterrupted by the need of imparting such knowledge as might be necessary to enable his students to proceed to a science degree.

I AM to assume that you, who read this, know all that is necessary to be known about the equipment of a stargazer's observatory. Markwand's observatory was like any other in all essentials. The noticeable feature was an extremely powerful arc-light apparatus, to which the current was supplied by a powerful dynamo. This he used for his experiments in photo-telephony, and I quickly realised that he had made no idle boast when he said the subject was yet in its infancy. From his observatory he could throw a beam of light some four hundred yards into his den at the house, where, caught by the mirror and the Selenium cell apparatus, you could carry on a conversation as comfortably as if the conversant had been in the room. He could "ring up" along his beam before switching in the voice receiver, and by the same means could transmit written words, drawings, and even his own features to the receiving screen. It was positively uncanny to me who am in no sense a Physicist— it was as a Psychologist that the state of exaltation in which Markwand lived interested, and, I am bound to confess, sometimes alarmed me.

He showed me many beautiful experiments and results, but at his own research work he would never allow me to be present. He would laugh and say:

"You are too inquisitive, my dear fellow. You would fidget about and make me nervous. I should always be afraid of your monkeying with the dynamo, or touching a live wire somehow. I don't want to have you on my hands as a horrid little burnt corpse."

And so it went on. I was genuinely resting, but whatever may have been the nature of Markwand's holiday researches, he certainly was not. All that I could get out of him was that he was observing certain phenomena connected with the planet Venus. He would come over from the observatory sometimes

in a state of almost wild elation, at others utterly worn out and dejected, but always shrouded in a mantle, as it were, of absorbed introspection. One day when for forty-eight hours he had been more abstracted and "nervy" than usual, he startled me by saying:

"You remember my chaff about you and the dynamo? Look here, if anything of that kind were to happen to me you will know how it happened, if any enquiry should be made. But before anything of that kind happens, and people— executors, all that sort of rot you know— come messing about, take this key off my watch-chain. It opens this writing case. Take the case and pack it up in your luggage, and take it away. You can read the papers yourself afterwards, but not until I am buried." I was very much shocked, and begged him to relax in his work, to accept my help in so far as it might be of any avail, but he only laughed queerly and said: "I am only putting a very unlikely and hypothetical case. I'm all right. But a research worker should always be prepared for the most unlikely eventualities. As for help, my work is purely personal, no one can help."

"When shall you publish?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

He thought for a moment, and then he said "I have gone too far. The world is not yet fit to know what I know. Don't think I am mad, I am not. I'm deadly sane. Some day someone else will happen on the same results, and who knows what may happen then? I won't be responsible. It's too much." By this time he was apparently talking to himself. He had forgotten all about me.

By the way, I don't think I have mentioned that Markwand was a bachelor.

I HAD BEEN with him about a fortnight, and every day it had seemed to me that he was becoming more exalted— a stupid word, but I can think of no other. He spent the days as it were in a dream, seldom speaking except upon the most conventional subjects, rather impatient if I referred to our work at the University.

"Don't talk shop for goodness sake, old man. That's our work-a-day world, this is something different. Another world? Hardly, but perhaps the threshold."

I didn't like this. "The Threshold" is one of the cant terms in the Jargon of the Spiritualist, the Esoteric Buddhist, the Rosicrucian, and it turned me cold.

"I say, old fellow," I said, "you know I'm broad-minded, and I don't sneer at poor old A, B, and C, who believe in spooks, and commune with those who have 'passed over'; I look upon it as a mental disease, exploited by quacks (who are, I understand, generally charwomen when not doing the Prospero act), just as some physical diseases are exploited by the quacks of a different

walk in life. But I do think the result is the same. The incurable is the quarry of the quack. But that you should have any truck with that kind of thing is unthinkable. Threshold of what?" I concluded rather inconsequently.

"Oh, don't be afraid. I'm not disturbing the sainted spirit of my Aunt Jemima. When I said 'threshold,' I meant a real Threshold, like a flight of steps, or a plank. Difficult to find a word. But I can't explain. I'm sorry."

I thought seriously of writing in confidence to Sir George Amboyne, our Regius Professor of Medicine to ask him to invite himself down for a day or two to have a look at Markwand.

However I didn't, and I am glad now that I didn't. One night I woke up in his den, where I used to read, and smoke, and wait for him to come over to bed. It was just day-break, and, gadzooks, I was stiff! He hadn't come in, so I risked his displeasure and walked over to the observatory. The east was just reddening, and the plantation was full of the little sounds that animals and birds make when they shake themselves to start the day's work. I could see that the arc-light was burning, and I could hear purring of the dynamo. Thinking he must be asleep I reached my hand towards the door and was just about to turn the handle when the light went out and a wild cry came from beyond it— a word? A name? An exclamation? What?

"Aalila!"

Drawn out on the first syllable "A-a-lila!" I opened the door. Markwand was standing by his telescope, his arms extended over his head, looking at me. He blinked like an owl in daytime, though the struggling dawn made light hardly visible. He looked at me stupidly for a moment and then looked at the Sidereal clock.

"Good heavens," he said quite calmly. "I *am* sorry. It's daylight. I had forgotten the time, and you, and everything else. I don't wonder either. Haven't *you* been to bed? I'm a rotten host. Come and have a bath."

And we walked back to the house as if nothing at all had happened. Markwand was in splendid form. We bathed, made coffee, fried bacon and potatoes, and went down to the stream to fish.

"You're overdoing it, Markwand," I said, after a rather long silence.

"Am I?" he replied laughing, and landing a trout. "Do I look like it? I've had a splendid night. Do I look the worn-out scientist?"

He certainly did not.

Later in the day we were lazing in two chairs on the lawn under a tree. I caught Markwand looking at me in the manner which is described by story-writers as "whimsical." I fell to an irresistible temptation.

"What is Aalila?" I said.

"If you only knew!" he replied. "Well, you shall; I'm going to tell you."

Then he plunged into it. Later I verified every detail of his marvellous story, and was able to fill in a mass of others which he left out or slurred over.

I WAS observing Venus— conscientiously from full-Venus to no-Venus— last year. You will find all the notes in the Observatory Record; all that matter to the star-gazers. I shall communicate them very shortly. The rest is in that writing case. You know the one I mean.

One night, at about half-Venus, I was lying in the chair, watching and making notes, when on the dark part, near the outer edge, I saw a bright spot. I couldn't make out what it was of course, but as I watched, it flickered, went out. And look here, don't laugh or say a word or I shall dry up. It flashed S.O.S: **... ---...** Morse, you know. I assumed that I was dreaming, or that my eyes were tired or playing me a trick. It went out, and then it came again. Then it made a lot of letters, all higgledy-piggledy, but I swear to you that every group was a perfect letter. It went on for over an hour, and as each letter was made I wrote it down. You know I was a signaller in the regiment during the war? Then it stopped dead. I tried to make sense of the jumble of letters; of course there was nothing in it, but the last two letters were Vick E: **…** —. The Signaller— don't laugh, I warn you— knew how to end a message anyhow.

The next night, the same performance over again. I had read a lot of what I regard as tosh about "signalling from Mars"; it's a hardy perennial, but I was as certain as I am that you are sitting there, that Venus was signalling to Earth and signalling in mad hysterical Morse at that. I found that night, and verified by references to the transcript of the night before, that before every pause in the flashes came the regulation full stop Ack-Ack-Ack **.-.-.-** Lord, man! can you imagine what I felt! I'll tell you what I did. I trained the mirror of my arc-light on to the spot as near as I could make it out, aiming by the telescope, and next night the moment it began— as usual, with S.O.S. I flashed it back, cutting the ray with a sheet of tin plate. Venus "went out" for a minute, and then repeated S.O.S. Same reply from me. Then came other letters, in no kind of sequence, but I repeated each one religiously. When this had gone on for an hour, I took the initiative in a pause and flashed "Vick E." Venus understood; she flashed it back, and then Ack-Ack-Ack. That was all that night.

I won't weary you with what followed during months, whenever Venus was observable, but you'll find it all there. I took the initiative again, and flashed the whole alphabet from A to Z, and got every letter back; and at last the whole alphabet came back to me in its proper order. Venus was profiting by its lessons. And then came the climax. I can't think why it had not occurred to me before. I switched in the Selenium cells and put on the receiver. Instantly I heard a noise, sounds, linguals and labials. "Mu, ma, mu, la, lo, la" and vowel

sounds. It was, at least, clear that Venus had a photo-telephone in circuit, ready for me in case we had got so far as that on Earth. After listening for a minute or so I flashed "Ack-Ack-Ack." Venus knew that that was a stop, but not the "very end"— Vick E. I connected the transmitter. I flashed Ack, and *said* the letter A. It came back— both flash and sound! So on through the alphabet.

After this I began teaching Venus to spell— like a child with a spelling-book— AB— ab, BO— bo, and so on, and after a time— you understand I am condensing weeks into words— the "conversation," if you can call it one, always began "Aa-li-la" and after "Vick E." again, always "Aa-li-la." Man! I realized that this was the name of the Thing that was signalling. I tell you one thing and that is that Venus, the Thing, was much cleverer than I; it tried to make me understand sounds, but I couldn't make head or tail of one, and meanwhile It was beginning to say English words. And what is more it had an apparatus which repeated perfectly, and improved upon, everything that mine did.

For nights I tried to get an impression upon a photo-transmission plate, but for at least a week there was no result whatever. Then one night I said "Aalila" and tried to transmit the letters, in Morse of course, but in dots and dashes on the plate. I only found out later what happened up there— I say "up" for the sake of definition— but my plate went mad and got covered with scratches in all directions. Aalila had caught on to the idea, and was doing her— I was certain somehow it was "her"— best, and at last one night after weeks of patient scratching I got Aalila's face. Lord, man! it was lovely. Just imagine to yourself a— but what's the good? She was— she is— indescribable!

MARKWAND paused and looked away with that strange exalted air that had puzzled me so often.

"Is?" I queried softly. I was afraid of, as he said, drying him up.

"Yes, *is*."

"You see her picture then?"

"I see *her*."

To say that I was flabbergasted is to use a miserably inadequate expression. What was all this about? Was I talking to a madman? But if it was a delusion, as of course it must be, it was the sanest and most deliberately nurtured delusion that ever a man originated.

THAT WAS ALL Markwand told me that day. I think his idea was to let me so far into his amazing secret, and to let what he had told me sink in, so as to judge by my manner how I took it, and whether I were worthy of further confidence. But it was evidently a great relief to him to be able to talk at all

about it. He often set little traps for me, to see if I would laugh, or doubt, or sneer, but as time went on and I always listened with a keen interest which required no simulation, he arrived at telling me the progress of his adventure, step by step, and as I have said, what he left out then, I could supply from his journal of the affair— afterwards.

It would take far too long; it would indeed fill a volume of no mean size, were I to set down here the gradual "anastomosis" (to borrow a term from the Physiologists) of Markwand and Aalila, how they arrived at the meanings of words, and how, out of the chaos of incomprehensible sounds, they arrived at conversation. It is not enough, but it must be taken as enough, to record that Markwand little by little arrived at knowing all about Aalila, and about life the planet Venus, where the Physical Sciences had reached a development which would stagger the imagination of a Jules Verne produced to the power of n. What is really most important was the stunning fact that Markwand was in love with Aalila as only a bachelor of his age can be, when he makes his first acquaintance with the grand passion.

It will be observed that I have not hitherto touched upon a very important point. You will not unnaturally have been asking yourself how on earth— or rather in Venus— had Aalila learned the Morse Alphabet? As soon as I felt that I could safely ask questions without "drying him up" I put this to Markwand.

"Oh," he replied, "of course I ought to have told you that. She learnt from our Fleet Signallers during the War."

"WHAT?"

"It takes some believing, doesn't it? The question of interplanetary signalling has always been a burning one up there. They signal to many other planets already, but they had never 'picked up' Earth, which, by the way, they call Waluma. Aalila, you will not be surprised to hear, is a great astronomical 'nut' up there, and she has been searching Waluma for a sign for years. In August, 1914, and onwards, she observed that our seas were constantly starred with intermittent flashes— of course their telescopes are to ours what Big Bertha was to a pop-gun— and after puzzling over them for months she found that there was a regular sequence in them, that certain groups of dots and dashes continually recurred, especially 'ringing up' with a series of 'E's,' and that a single 'E' at a short distance always stopped it. She got on to the full stop 'Ack-Ack-Ack,' and the 'Vick E' at the end of a message, almost directly. And from this she gradually worked out all our letters, not in their order of course. One of her first questions when we could talk was to enquire what were 'Toc,' and 'E'— T and E, our commonest letters. She had got a lot of common words pat— 'and, the, it' and so on."

"What did she make of it?"

"Why— the inference was obvious to her— we were signalling to Venus!"

"Good heavens!"

"What confused her most were the constant and reiterated 'E's' on land. Those were the flashes of the great guns."

It made one's brain reel. I seldom had to ask questions after that.

And here it becomes very difficult for me to write at all about it. I have been so shocked by the death of Markwand and all that it meant and conveyed to *me*, the terrible proof, as it would seem, that this amazing adventure was no delusion at all, but drew to its inevitable and tragic end, irresistibly, that I cannot think with equanimity of anyone even smiling at details which would readily lend themselves to humorous treatment, but which were in themselves the very essence of the tragedy. In the foremost place there stood the fact that Aalila had, conformably with the customs of her planet, seven husbands— a multiple fact that did not in any way appear to militate against her full reciprocation of Markwand's passion. Husbands in Venus appear to be of a singularly easy-going disposition, to our mundane intelligence, but an exception would appear to occur at intervals, and one of these loomed large in Aalila's cosmogony in the shape of an infuriated and jealous male. Highly intellectual as Aalila was, and occupying an exalted position in the scientific world of the planet, this husband, Illuha by name, was to Aalila what an ignorant woman (only one of course) would be to a Regius Professor in one of our own Universities— a woman who sets her own personal gratification and feelings far above the career and the life-interests of her husband. And so in her "affair" with Markwand, Aalila had to be very careful— in certain mundane circles her attitude would probably be described as "wily."

It was all very well for Aalila to shut herself up in her observatory and communicate with her Terrestrial Lover. Illuha, who was of course not ignorant of the vast potentiality of Astral physics in Venus, was, it appeared, far from easy in his mind as to the scope and extent of Aalila's researches, and— well, as I have said, Aalila had to be very careful. Very frequently the nightly communion would be intercepted by unreasonably uxorious reproaches, not to mention physical interruptions, which scared Aalila intempestatively from the photo-telephone; and it seems from a note of Markwand's that Aalila had in a moment of relaxed vigilance allowed Illuha to catch sight of sundry telephoto-graphs of Markwand, and, to put it perhaps somewhat crudely, Illuha was on the prowl.

All might, however, have been well had it not been for the high quality of Aalila's scientific knowledge, attainments and ambitions. From transmitting very remarkable, and I am bound to say often highly compromising pictures of herself, she soared to the ambition of, and devoted much research to, the

accomplishment of transmitting *herself*; that is to say a replica, an astral body of herself, perfect in every essential detail, and of a bodily consistency adequate to all practical purposes. Of the development and ultimate success of this crowning triumph of Aalila's scientific career I can only gather the broad outlines, for Markwand himself seems to have grown shy of his record in this matter, and the scientific accuracy of his register is marred from this point by a doubtless proper and laudable discretion, which leaves certain details, but not many, to the imagination, and tends therefore to the detriment of scientific knowledge. It must remain enough to say that the semi— but not too-ethereal Aalila came to Earth and visited Markwand in his observatory, whenever she could get away, whilst her physical body remained on guard, as it were, in her observatory in Venus. And it must be recorded to her credit that she never attempted to conceal from Markwand the paramount, the terrible danger of these astral excursions. Though her physical body remained behind, she brought her intellect to earth with her, and this it was that in fullness of time brought her and Markwand to grief. For the physical body, temporarily bereft of its directing mind was not up to controlling the apparatus, and the romance of her interviews with Markwand must have been seriously hampered by the necessity of keeping an eye on the screen, and an ear at the photo-telephone.

Consequently these amazing interviews had to be arranged for occasions when Illuha could be counted upon to be absent from home, or at any rate not likely to come bothering after her at the observatory. From what one could gather, the position of husbands in Venus is— setting aside, of course, their plurality— much the same as that of wives in the so-called civilized portions of the earth, and, perhaps, vice versa.

Markwand was, as I have indicated, reticent as to the details of his interviews with Aalila in conversation with me, and *a fortiori* recorded in his scientific journal only political, economical, and sometimes ethnological details of life on the planet, and looking over the record, it may be said that the personal equation must have bulked largely in their communion, for lengthy meetings with Aalila frequently furnished but a few lines in either his private or scientific journals. He tried to explain to me, however, the nature of the risks they ran, but the explanation was largely beyond my powers of comprehension— Hertzian waves— Potential— Amperage, and other technical terms bristled in his exposition, and I gave up trying to become an expert in the matter. I only knew that the physical Aalila left behind had mechanical control of the projection apparatus, and if disturbed, or damaged, might work irretrievable disaster. It was clear that the interference of any unauthorized or inexperienced person in the observatory might, and probably would, divert the

full force of Aalila's generating plant along the communicating beam. Upon what would happen in that event Markwand did not care to speculate.

"The physical Aalila," he said, "would almost certainly be destroyed, and what would happen here it is difficult to conjecture. I should imagine some form of instantaneous annihilation— volatilization— I don't know. But we take all necessary and possible precautions."

I hazarded a question.

"Is the replica-Aalila of sufficient substance to suffer physical hurt?"

He thought for a moment— and I am not sure that he did not blush a little. Then he replied:

"Oh, yes. There is little doubt about that."

"Take another postulate," I said. "Supposing some unauthorized person" (we seldom or never mentioned Illuha by name, from motives of delicacy no doubt) "were to get at the apparatus in her replica-absence, and supposing that person found himself— or herself" (I hastily added), "projected along the ray in some way? What then?"

Markwand, I am sorry to say, shrugged his shoulders and laughed; yes, he positively laughed, and instead of answering he turned away, chaunting under his breath a line of an old plantation song which ran:

"The congregation all stand up, and sing— Hallelujah!"

MY STAY with Markwand was drawing to its close, but I lingered on, obsessed with a vague feeling of apprehension. Though in no way regarding myself in any degree in the light of a chaperon, I did not think it quite safe, or quite proper, to leave him alone with Aalila. I hinted at a visit elsewhere, accompanied by him; I would have liked to see him safely back to town, but he would not hear of it. Markwand was lovelorn. And he was very happy. I grew more and more apprehensive, and, I will admit it, more and more curious. I endeavoured to convey to him that I would like to be present at one of their interviews, and then it was Markwand's turn to be shocked. I felt at once that I had been guilty of a most indelicate indiscretion, so there was nothing for it but to wait, on the chance of being of some use should an emergency arise.

We come therefore to the night, or rather the early morning of the 14th. For some days Markwand had been preoccupied, nervy, and I gathered that things were not going as pleasantly as they might. In a word, Illuha was giving trouble, and it became an increasing strain to keep in touch, so to speak, with the observatory in Venus, whilst occupied in the researches and instructive discourse which should, from their point of view, have exclusively occupied their periods of companionship.

"It's rather difficult sometimes," he admitted, "to keep the necessary amount of attention fixed upon what is going on up there. For instance, only the other day" then he broke off, and I never knew (nor was there any record among his private memoranda) what had disturbed the primrose path of scientific research on this occasion.

I was sitting in the den waiting for Markwand as usual. I never liked to go to bed till he returned and I knew that Aalila had been safely packed off "home," and I had been to sleep, also as usual.

Suddenly the beam from the observatory swung into the den, and the gong sounded furiously. I snatched up the receiver but nothing came excepting confused sounds and a violent crackling like that of a radiogram transmitter. I flung it down and rushed over to the observatory and burst in. It was full of a brilliant violet light, independently of the arc-light, and a smell of burning.

Markwand was standing as I entered, and whether my over-wrought senses deceived me or not I cannot tell now, but it seemed to me that a female form— overwhelmingly comely, I must admit— was kneeling on the floor at his feet, her arms encircling his waist, and her head turned towards the complicated mirrors and cells which constituted Markwand's end of the apparatus. Terror was in the beautiful dark face, and she seemed to be trying to shield him, to protect him from something invisible to me. But the whole vision only lasted a second or two. Then a sort of seismic cataclysm took place; all the lights went out and the observatory was in pitch darkness, save that on the floor appeared a circle about a yard in diameter, not exactly luminous, but scintillating. I fumbled for the lighting switch. I got no light, but I got a shock that I shall remember to my dying day. It made me violently sick. After a delay, which seemed to me to be like an age in length, I got at my matches and struck a light and lit a couple of candles which always stood on the table in case of the current failing at any time.

The photo-telephone apparatus was wrecked, it looked like the debris of a spring mattress in a marine storekeeper's back yard. The telescope was twisted off its massive base and was hanging nearly to the floor; there was a rent in the dome beside the observation slit. I was vividly aware of an uncanny silence, and then I saw that the Sidereal clock and the Heliostat had both stopped— their sonorous tick would have been such a comfort.

I was alone with Markwand.

He was lying on the floor, where I had seen him standing, quite motionless, and quite normal, save that his lips were drawn back showing both rows of teeth in a ghastly grin.

Recollection of "first-aid" classes came to me. Electric shock, artificial respiration, and so on. I loosened his waistcoat, trousers-band, and shirt-collar,

and began to apply my inadequate knowledge. There was a sickening smell as I gradually got him undressed. Then I knew he was dead. I made a violent effort to retain my presence of mind, my sanity, to think. There would be doctors, an inquest, people prying about, viewing the body. Horrible! I felt that at all hazards *I must view it first*. I undressed Markwand very carefully. The instantaneous blanching of death had made his fair skin look whiter, and he was physically uninjured, externally at any rate.

But round his waist, where I had seen the arms of Aalila, was a deep brown and blistered band. He had been girt in a zone of fire, fire which had burnt deeply beyond the skin into his body, but his clothes were not even singed. A detail: in the small of his back was the burnt impress of a small right hand, deepest at the finger tips. All I could think about was "I wonder where her other hand was?"

I sat and looked at Markwand, I don't know how long, but suddenly through the rent in the dome I saw it was dawn. I dressed him carefully. I wonder if you have any idea of how difficult it is to dress a dead body? He was also growing stiff.

I made myself *think* with a mighty effort. How did he die? The newspapers, the obituary notices, the coroner. Of course— the dynamo! I dragged Markwand over to the dynamo which was apparently wrecked too. I forced up his stiff arm so that the hand rested on the commutator. I took the key off his watch-chain.

Where I had seen the scintillating circle in the darkness lay a ring of pale grey dust. This struck me, and taking a small ordinary collector's corked tube from Markwand's laboratory bench I filled it with the dust and put it into my waistcoat pocket.

Then I crept back, like a murderer, to the study, found the writing-case, and put it into my portmanteau.

Then I roused the house.

12: The Shadow of a Shadow

Ernest Favenc

Evening News (Sydney) 21 Sept 1895

THE moon shone brightly through the many chinks of the old hut, in the walls of which were several gaps caused by the slabs having fallen down. Two travellers who were camped on the hard earthen floor for the night were suddenly aroused by a wailing sound that seemed to pass by their resting place like the sigh of a breeze.

Both raised themselves on their elbows and listened. The wail came round once more, and as it swept by a passing gloom seemed to glide through the hut, as though the moon's light had been eclipsed for one brief instant...

The men were silent. Rising with one accord, they went to one of the gaps and looked out, for the sound was approaching once more. It came, it passed, and for an instant there was again a shade of gloom, and both men afterwards swore positively to seeing a plainly-defined shadow cross the broad path of moonlight. Not a shadowless man, but a shadow without the necessary substance to cast it.

The wail died down in the distance, and the men broke their silence.

'Rum sort o' thing, Jim. See that shadder?'

'My oath I did. And did yer hear what the thing cried out?'

'Sounded to me as if it was calling out, "Blind, blind."'

'Just what I took it to be.'

'Blame these old huts,' said the first speaker, as they returned to their blankets. 'A fellow never knows what he's going to get. If they're not chockful of fleas, why, it's ghosts as come moanin' around.'

When the men reached the next township, some thirty odd miles away, they told their tale. They were two fencers who had just finished a contract and were well known in the district as steady, decent men, not by any means given to romancing.

The story seized on the superstitious feelings of the townsmen, of which every man has a more or less sized share, the oldest inhabitant failing to recall any tragic story connected with the old hut and several excursions were made to test the truth of it by daring spookhunters. They all, with one exception, came back unsuccessful, the exception being a party of three, who, having loaded themselves up inside and out with whisky, returned with a richly-embroidered yarn of ghosts, devils, imps, and hobgoblins, sufficient to satisfy the yearnings of the wildest imagination.

In due time the story was forgotten, save by one man, who, having a theory of his own, had carefully noted the date of the vision of the shadow,

and on the following year departed without beat of drum one morning of that date.

Although the moon's age was slightly different, it was old enough to give a good light, and the night was clear and still, and the inquirer after the supernatural slept restlessly, as a man would do who had exchanged a comfortable bed for a blanket on a hard floor. He was awakened by footsteps, not by the mysterious sounds heard by the former temporary occupants. A man's figure appeared at the doorless aperture, peered in, then entered.

'Who's that?' demanded the first tenant.

'Hell!' replied a voice, somewhat cracked and shaky. 'Who's that yourself? I'm not frightened of you, darn you.'

The ghost-seeker struck a match, and saw before him an old swagman, with a white, tobacco-stained beard, having the usual swag over one shoulder. He blinked at the sudden flare of light, then remarked:

'Dossing here, old man? What brought you out here? Don't look as though you were in the bluey line.'

'No; I came here to find out if this hut's haunted as they say it is.'

'Yes, that blessed yarn got in the papers, and as I was coming around this way, I thought I'd just go out of my road a bit to have a look myself; so I'll keep you company.'

And he threw his swag on the ground. At that moment a wail of downright agony, a cry of 'Blind! blind!' rang through the forest without, startling both the men in the hut.

On it came, and with it the gruesome darkening of the moonlight. The ghost-seeker had not recovered himself sufficiently to look out for the moving shadow the others averred they had seen; but on the second approach of the ghostly voice, now wailing loudly, as though knowing that there were listeners to shriek its torments to, he went to the open door and stepped out. There was no doubt of it— a shadow did cross the open space in front of the old hut. A shadow, it seemed to the watcher's excited fancy, like that of a man, stumbling along, holding both hands to his eyes.

He waited for the third repetition, and just as the weird shadow became visible he felt himself thrust on one side, and the old sundowner pushed past him, saying, 'He's come for me. I must go after him, and see what came of him.'

He went on and followed the invisible presence, and the ghost-seeker felt himself constrained to follow too and see the end. On through the silent forest they went, the viewless leader, the muttering old man, and the entranced spectator. On, on, a zig-zag course they kept, until at last they stopped.

The old man looked about still talking to himself, saying:

'He must'a bin about here, must'a bin here as he died.'

The supernatural voice had ceased, and presently the old man squatted down on the ground, with his back against a tree, and the other stooped over him and urged him to get up and return.

'I'm a-going to stop here,' he replied. 'Come daylight, p'raps I'll find Ibid.' This was all that could be got out of him.

Suddenly the other asked, 'What do you know about this?'

'Know about it? Why, I knows all about it. Just you listen and I'll tell you. You can't see in the dark, but I'm a boko' (one-eyed) 'and it was Bill Simmons as made me so. It was nigh upon thirty years ago, and I could make good wages anywhere, and one night we was having a bit of a jamboree, and Bill was there, and he was one of the nastiest-tempered fellows in his drink as ever you came across. Bill got on to me, and presently he got my monkey up, and I gives him the lie straight out

' "Say that again," he shouts; "call me a blooming liar again, and I'll split y're skull open."

'Of course, I ups and calls him no end of a thundering liar, and what does the cur do but let drive at me with one of them big, heavy tumblers. It caught me fair in the eye, and smashed all to bits, and a piece of it cut right into my eyeball.

'The other fellows bandaged me up, and took me to the doctor, and he said I must go to the hospital; and they took me there. Some of 'em went for Bill, but he never seemed sorry; said it served me jolly well right for calling such names, and he'd never given any provocation, and paid out a lot of slack of that kind. I had to stop weeks in the hospital, and while I was there he cleared out of the district: and you bet he didn't give any address where to find him. When I came out, t'other eye was a bit bandy— doctor says as how it was for sympathy. Queer sort of sympathy, it seemed to me.

'Well, all my bad luck set in then. First of all, a young woman as was going to marry me went back on me— says as how she never could abide a man with one eye; didn't seem natural like. Beside, that dead eye of mine would give her the jim-jams— always reminded her of an old horse her father had who took fright at some washing hanging out and smashed the cart. I told her as how I didn't intend to take fright at no washing; but she wouldn't have it at any price, and I got left. A few of the people who knew what a good workman I had been gave me an odd job, but it was poor truck, and gradually I had to drift about, travelling, getting anything I could do. So years went on, and I never clapped my one eye on Bill Simmons, until one blazing hot day I come to that old hut where you was camped. It was sound enough then, and there was a shepherd there with a flock of sheep. But there was no sheep about when I came there—

only a man with his eyes tied up lying groaning on the bunk, and my colonial! if it wasn't Bill Simmons, blind as a bat with sandy blight. I knowed him by his snarly voice, with which he cussed me for letting the light in.

' "I say, damn you, whoever you are," he said, "will you go into the head station and tell 'em as I'm stone blind with the sandy, and 'the sheep's all over the country, and they must send out and get 'em together 'fore the dogs get among 'em?"

' "No, I'm hanged if I will," says I. "My name's Jim Donnelly, who you made a boko of years ago with chucking a glass at him, and you just about ruined me. you cur."

' "Jim Donnelly, are you?" he said. "Yes, I am, and you can just lie on your bunk and swear until somebody comes out from the station. If you wasn't as you are I'd take it out of your hide."

'He lay quiet for a bit; then he said: ' "I'm sorry, Jim Donnelly," in a humble kind of voice, and I thought he was going to cry small; but he burst out as savage as a meat-axe, "as I didn't knock both of your cussed, squinting eyes out when I was at it!"

'This got my hair off at once. "You'll repent those words, Bill," I says.

' "I repent 'em! When I get right I'll follow you up and just wallop the soul out of your carcass."

'Well, he kept on raving and abusing of me, and I got madder and madder as I thought of all the years of my life wasted through that wretch lying there blaspheming at me; but I kept cool. I cooked myself a feed of the best in the hut. How he did swear when he heard me opening his pickles and jam.

'When I'd finished, I says, 'Now, Bill Simmons, you want bringing down off your perch a bit— a peg lower will suit you,' so I went over to him and just took the bandage off his eyes. What a scream he gave, just like the way that ghost shrieked.

' "You've blinded me," he cried, putting his hands up to his eyes; but there was a. devil in me, and I only laughed at him. I took all the things out of the hut, as I thought he could find and make fresh bandages of, and emptied all the water away; then I went and sat down on the bundle and smoked his tobacco until sundown.

"He'd stopped raving after a bit, and when it was dark I heard him calling in a very pitiful voice 'Jim Donnelly! Jim! for the Lord's sake bring me a little water to wash my eyes, the lids is all glued together."

I would not answer him, though I felt sorry, so after a while he fell to cursing me agin, and presently he got up and I heard him groping his blind way out. He'd got his boots off, and was feeling for the track to the waterhole with his naked feet. He passed close to me, but I made never a move, although I

was beginning to think better of it, and making up my mind that I would doctor his eyes up again and leave him.

' "Blast you, Jim Donnelly," he kept saying as he stumbled along. "May a blind shadder haunt you all your days.'

By and bye he gets off the track, and then he comes to grief agin a stump, and gets so outrageous mad over this that he muddled himself up together, and finally got on a sheep track and started to follow that I calls out to I him as he's wrong, but he was so busy swearing that he didn't hear me, so after letting him go on a bit I started after him meaning to bring him back, but being boko of one eye and not seeing well out of the other, I come to grief myself over a stump, and bringing my head agin a tree, and lay there stunned like for a bit. When I picked myself up Bill Simmons was nowhere in sight and I never set eyes on him again, no more did anybody else, although I looked high and low. He must have lost himself altogether, and wandered in the blazing sun next day till he died of thirst, and being without a hat.

'I heard of this yer yarn about, them fencer chaps seeing a shadder at this hut as called out it was blind, so I thought I'd just check up to see if Bill had been found; that's to say his bones or whatever left of him. Now, as it's pretty well daylight, we'll have a look round for 'em, they're dead sure to be about here somewheres.'

The two looked for the bones of Bill without success, until the sun got high, then the ghost seeker tried to induce Donnelly to return to the hut, but without avail. The old fellow announced his intention of staying there until he found Bill's bones or died there.

When the ghost seeker got back to the township, and told of the success of his adventure he became a temporary hero, much to the jealousy of the oldest identity, who now professed to have remembered all about the mysterious disappearance of Bill Simmons, and predicted that the dead body of Donnelly would be found beside the bones of the lost man.

It wasn't, however, for when some curious people went out they found neither the old sundowner nor the swag he had left in the hut; nor has the wailing shadow ever been heard again, nor the bones of the bad-tempered Bill Simmons found.

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13: The Bell-Tower

Herman Melville

1819-1891

Putnam's Monthly, Aug 1855

In: *The Piazza Tales*, 1856

IN THE SOUTH of Europe, nigh a once frescoed capital, now with dank mould cankering its bloom, central in a plain, stands what, at distance, seems the black mossed stump of some immeasurable pine, fallen, in forgotten days, with Anak and the Titan.

As all along where the pine tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound— last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable, and true gauge which cometh by prostration— so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain.

From that tree-top, what birded chimes of silver throats had rung. A stone pine; a metallic aviary in its crown: the Bell–Tower, built by the great mechanician, the unblest foundling, Bannadonna.

Like Babel's, its base was laid in a high hour of renovated earth, following the second deluge, when the waters of the Dark Ages had dried up, and once more the green appeared. No wonder that, after so long and deep submersion, the jubilant expectation of the race should, as with Noah's sons, soar into Shinar aspiration.

In firm resolve, no man in Europe at that period went beyond Bannadonna. Enriched through commerce with the Levant, the state in which he lived voted to have the noblest Bell–Tower in Italy. His repute assigned him to be architect.

Stone by stone, month by month, the tower rose. Higher, higher; snail-like in pace, but torch or rocket in its pride.

After the masons would depart, the builder, standing alone upon its ever-ascending summit, at close of every day, saw that he overtopped still higher walls and trees. He would tarry till a late hour there, wrapped in schemes of other and still loftier piles. Those who of saints' days thronged the spot— hanging to the rude poles of scaffolding, like sailors on yards, or bees on boughs, unmindful of lime and dust, and falling chips of stone— their homage not the less inspirited him to self-esteem.

At length the holiday of the Tower came. To the sound of viols, the climax-stone slowly rose in air, and, amid the firing of ordnance, was laid by Bannadonna's hands upon the final course. Then mounting it, he stood erect, alone, with folded arms, gazing upon the white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of bluer Alps off-shore— sights invisible from the plain.

Invisible, too, from thence was that eye he turned below, when, like the cannon booms, came up to him the people's combustions of applause.

That which stirred them so was, seeing with what serenity the builder stood three hundred feet in air, upon an unrailed perch. This none but he durst do. But his periodic standing upon the pile, in each stage of its growth— such discipline had its last result.

Little remained now but the bells. These, in all respects, must correspond with their receptacle.

The minor ones were prosperously cast. A highly enriched one followed, of a singular make, intended for suspension in a manner before unknown. The purpose of this bell, its rotary motion, and connection with the clock-work, also executed at the time, will, in the sequel, receive mention.

In the one erection, bell-tower and clock-tower were united, though, before that period, such structures had commonly been built distinct; as the Campanile and Torre del 'Orologio of St. Mark to this day attest.

But it was upon the great state-bell that the founder lavished his more daring skill. In vain did some of the less elated magistrates here caution him; saying that though truly the tower was Titanic, yet limit should be set to the dependent weight of its swaying masses. But undeterred, he prepared his mammoth mould, dented with mythological devices; kindled his fires of balsamic firs; melted his tin and copper, and, throwing in much plate, contributed by the public spirit of the nobles, let loose the tide.

The unleashed metals bayed like hounds. The workmen shrunk. Through their fright, fatal harm to the bell was dreaded. Fearless as Shadrach, Bannadonna, rushing through the glow, smote the chief culprit with his ponderous ladle. From the smitten part, a splinter was dashed into the seething mass, and at once was melted in.

Next day a portion of the work was heedfully uncovered. All seemed right. Upon the third morning, with equal satisfaction, it was bared still lower. At length, like some old Theban king, the whole cooled casting was disinterred. All was fair except in one strange spot. But as he suffered no one to attend him in these inspections, he concealed the blemish by some preparation which none knew better to devise.

The casting of such a mass was deemed no small triumph for the caster; one, too, in which the state might not scorn to share. The homicide was overlooked. By the charitable that deed was but imputed to sudden transports of esthetic passion, not to any flagitious quality. A kick from an Arabian charger; not sign of vice, but blood.

His felony remitted by the judge, absolution given him by the priest, what more could even a sickly conscience have desired.

Honoring the tower and its builder with another holiday, the republic witnessed the hoisting of the bells and clock-work amid shows and pomps superior to the former.

Some months of more than usual solitude on Bannadonna's part ensued. It was not unknown that he was engaged upon something for the belfry, intended to complete it, and surpass all that had gone before. Most people imagined that the design would involve a casting like the bells. But those who thought they had some further insight, would shake their heads, with hints, that not for nothing did the mechanician keep so secret. Meantime, his seclusion failed not to invest his work with more or less of that sort of mystery pertaining to the forbidden.

Ere long he had a heavy object hoisted to the belfry, wrapped in a dark sack or cloak— a procedure sometimes had in the case of an elaborate piece of sculpture, or statue, which, being intended to grace the front of a new edifice, the architect does not desire exposed to critical eyes, till set up, finished, in its appointed place. Such was the impression now. But, as the object rose, a statuary present observed, or thought he did, that it was not entirely rigid, but was, in a manner, pliant. At last, when the hidden thing had attained its final height, and, obscurely seen from below, seemed almost of itself to step into the belfry, as if with little assistance from the crane, a shrewd old blacksmith present ventured the suspicion that it was but a living man. This surmise was thought a foolish one, while the general interest failed not to augment.

Not without demur from Bannadonna, the chief-magistrate of the town, with an associate— both elderly men— followed what seemed the image up the tower. But, arrived at the belfry, they had little recompense. Plausibly entrenching himself behind the conceded mysteries of his art, the mechanician withheld present explanation. The magistrates glanced toward the cloaked object, which, to their surprise, seemed now to have changed its attitude, or else had before been more perplexingly concealed by the violent muffling action of the wind without. It seemed now seated upon some sort of frame, or chair, contained within the domino. They observed that nigh the top, in a sort of square, the web of the cloth, either from accident or design, had its warp partly withdrawn, and the cross threads plucked out here and there, so as to form a sort of woven grating. Whether it were the low wind or no, stealing through the stone lattice-work, or only their own perturbed imaginations, is uncertain, but they thought they discerned a slight sort of fitful, spring-like motion, in the domino. Nothing, however incidental or insignificant, escaped their uneasy eyes. Among other things, they pried out, in a corner, an earthen cup, partly corroded and partly encrusted, and one whispered to the other,

that this cup was just such a one as might, in mockery, be offered to the lips of some brazen statue, or, perhaps, still worse.

But, being questioned, the mechanician said, that the cup was simply used in his founder's business, and described the purpose; in short, a cup to test the condition of metals in fusion. He added, that it had got into the belfry by the merest chance.

Again, and again, they gazed at the domino, as at some suspicious incognito at a Venetian mask. All sorts of vague apprehensions stirred them. They even dreaded lest, when they should descend, the mechanician, though without a flesh and blood companion, for all that, would not be left alone.

Affecting some merriment at their disquietude, he begged to relieve them, by extending a coarse sheet of workman's canvas between them and the object.

Meantime he sought to interest them in his other work; nor, now that the domino was out of sight, did they long remain insensible to the artistic wonders lying round them; wonders hitherto beheld but in their unfinished state; because, since hoisting the bells, none but the caster had entered within the belfry. It was one trait of his, that, even in details, he would not let another do what he could, without too great loss of time, accomplish for himself. So, for several preceding weeks, whatever hours were unemployed in his secret design, had been devoted to elaborating the figures on the bells.

The clock-bell, in particular, now drew attention. Under a patient chisel, the latent beauty of its enrichments, before obscured by the cloudings incident to casting, that beauty in its shyest grace, was now revealed. Round and round the bell, twelve figures of gay girls, garlanded, hand-inhand, danced in a choral ring— the embodied hours.

"Bannadonna," said the chief, "this bell excels all else. No added touch could here improve. Hark!" hearing a sound, "was that the wind?"

"The wind, Excellenza," was the light response. "But the figures, they are not yet without their faults. They need some touches yet. When those are given, and the— block yonder," pointing towards the canvas screen, "when Haman there, as I merrily call him— him? *it*, I mean— when Haman is fixed on this, his lofty tree, then, gentlemen, will I be most happy to receive you here again."

The equivocal reference to the object caused some return of restlessness. However, on their part, the visitors forbore further allusion to it, unwilling, perhaps, to let the foundling see how easily it lay within his plebeian art to stir the placid dignity of nobles.

"Well, Bannadonna," said the chief, "how long ere you are ready to set the clock going, so that the hour shall be sounded? Our interest in you, not less

than in the work itself, makes us anxious to be assured of your success. The people, too— why, they are shouting now. Say the exact hour when you will be ready."

"To-morrow, Excellenza, if you listen for it— or should you not, all the same— strange music will be heard. The stroke of one shall be the first from yonder bell," pointing to the bell adorned with girls and garlands, "that stroke shall fall there, where the hand of Una clasps Dua's. The stroke of one shall sever that loved clasp. To-morrow, then, at one o'clock, as struck here, precisely here," advancing and placing his finger upon the clasp, "the poor mechanic will be most happy once more to give you liege audience, in this his littered shop. Farewell till then, illustrious magnificoes, and hark ye for your vassal's stroke."

His still, Vulcanic face hiding its burning brightness like a forge, he moved with ostentatious deference towards the scuttle, as if so far to escort their exit. But the junior magistrate, a kind-hearted man, troubled at what seemed to him a certain sardonical disdain, lurking beneath the foundling's humble mien, and in Christian sympathy more distressed at it on his account than on his own, dimly surmising what might be the final fate of such a cynic solitaire, nor perhaps uninfluenced by the general strangeness of surrounding things, this good magistrate had glanced sadly, sideways from the speaker, and thereupon his foreboding eye had started at the expression of the unchanging face of the Hour Una.

"How is this, Bannadonna?" he lowly asked, "Una looks unlike her sisters."

"In Christ's name, Bannadonna," impulsively broke in the chief, his attention, for the first attracted to the figure, by his associate's remark, "Una's face looks just like that of Deborah, the prophetess, as painted by the Florentine, Del Fonca."

"Surely, Bannadonna," lowly resumed the milder magistrate, "you meant the twelve should wear the same jocundly abandoned air. But see, the smile of Una seems but a fatal one. 'Tis different."

While his mild associate was speaking, the chief glanced, inquiringly, from him to the caster, as if anxious to mark how the discrepancy would be accounted for. As the chief stood, his advanced foot was on the scuttle's curb.

Bannadonna spoke:

"Excellenza, now that, following your keener eye, I glance upon the face of Una, I do, indeed perceive some little variance. But look all round the bell, and you will find no two faces entirely correspond. Because there is a law in art— but the cold wind is rising more; these lattices are but a poor defense. Suffer me, magnificoes, to conduct you, at least, partly on your way. Those in whose well-being there is a public stake, should be heedfully attended."

"Touching the look of Una, you were saying, Bannadonna, that there was a certain law in art," observed the chief, as the three now descended the stone shaft, "pray, tell me, then —."

"Pardon; another time, Excellenza;— the tower is damp."

"Nay, I must rest, and hear it now. Here— here is a wide landing, and through this leeward slit, no wind, but ample light. Tell us of your law; and at large."

"Since, Excellenza, you insist, know that there is a law in art, which bars the possibility of duplicates. Some years ago, you may remember, I graved a small seal for your republic, bearing, for its chief device, the head of your own ancestor, its illustrious founder. It becoming necessary, for the customs' use, to have innumerable impressions for bales and boxes, I graved an entire plate, containing one hundred of the seals. Now, though, indeed, my object was to have those hundred heads identical, and though, I dare say, people think them; so, yet, upon closely scanning an uncut impression from the plate, no two of those five-score faces, side by side, will be found alike. Gravity is the air of all; but, diversified in all. In some, benevolent; in some, ambiguous; in two or three, to a close scrutiny, all but incipiently malign, the variation of less than a hair's breadth in the linear shadings round the mouth sufficing to all this. Now, Excellenza, transmute that general gravity into joyousness, and subject it to twelve of those variations I have described, and tell me, will you not have my hours here, and Una one of them? But I like —."

Hark! is that— a footfall above?

"Mortar, Excellenza; sometimes it drops to the belfry-floor from the arch where the stonework was left undressed. I must have it seen to. As I was about to say: for one, I like this law forbidding duplicates. It evokes fine personalities. Yes, Excellenza, that strange, and— to you— uncertain smile, and those fore-looking eyes of Una, suit Bannadonna very well."

"Hark!— sure we left no soul above?"

"No soul, Excellenza; rest assured, no *soul*— Again the mortar."

"It fell not while we were there."

"Ah, in your presence, it better knew its place, Excellenza," blandly bowed Bannadonna.

"But, Una," said the milder magistrate, "she seemed intently gazing on you; one would have almost sworn that she picked you out from among us three."

"If she did, possibly, it might have been her finer apprehension, Excellenza."

"How, Bannadonna? I do not understand you."

"No consequence, no consequence, Excellenza— but the shifted wind is blowing through the slit. Suffer me to escort you on; and then, pardon, but the toiler must to his tools."

"It may be foolish, Signor," said the milder magistrate, as, from the third landing, the two now went down unescorted, "but, somehow, our great mechanician moves me strangely. Why, just now, when he so superciliously replied, his walk seemed Sisera's, God's vain foe, in Del Fonca's painting. And that young, sculptured Deborah, too. Ay, and that —."

"Tush, tush, Signor!" returned the chief. "A passing whim. Deborah?— Where's Jael, pray?"

"Ah," said the other, as they now stepped upon the sod, "Ah, Signor, I see you leave your fears behind you with the chill and gloom; but mine, even in this sunny air, remain, Hark!"

It was a sound from just within the tower door, whence they had emerged. Turning, they saw it closed.

"He has slipped down and barred us out," smiled the chief; "but it is his custom."

Proclamation was now made, that the next day, at one hour after meridian, the clock would strike, and— thanks to the mechanician's powerful art— with unusual accompaniments. But what those should be, none as yet could say. The announcement was received with cheers.

By the looser sort, who encamped about the tower all night, lights were seen gleaming through the topmost blind-work, only disappearing with the morning sun. Strange sounds, too, were heard, or were thought to be, by those whom anxious watching might not have left mentally undisturbed— sounds, not only of some ringing implement, but also— so they said— half-suppressed screams and plainings, such as might have issued from some ghostly engine, overplied.

Slowly the day drew on; part of the concourse chasing the weary time with songs and games, till, at last, the great blurred sun rolled, like a football, against the plain.

At noon, the nobility and principal citizens came from the town in cavalcade, a guard of soldiers, also, with music, the more to honor the occasion.

Only one hour more. Impatience grew. Watches were held in hands of feverish men, who stood, now scrutinizing their small dial-plates, and then, with neck thrown back, gazing toward the belfry, as if the eye might foretell that which could only be made sensible to the ear; for, as yet, there was no dial to the tower-clock.

The hour hands of a thousand watches now verged within a hair's breadth of the figure 1. A silence, as of the expectation of some Shiloh, pervaded the swarming plain. Suddenly a dull, mangled sound— naught ringing in it; scarcely audible, indeed, to the outer circles of the people— that dull sound dropped heavily from the belfry. At the same moment, each man stared at his neighbor blankly. All watches were upheld. All hour-hands were at— had passed— the figure 1. No bell-stroke from the tower. The multitude became tumultuous.

Waiting a few moments, the chief magistrate, commanding silence, hailed the belfry, to know what thing unforeseen had happened there.

No response.

He hailed again and yet again.

All continued hushed.

By his order, the soldiers burst in the tower-door; when, stationing guards to defend it from the now surging mob, the chief, accompanied by his former associate, climbed the winding stairs. Half-way up, they stopped to listen. No sound. Mounting faster, they reached the belfry; but, at the threshold, started at the spectacle disclosed. A spaniel, which, unbeknown to them, had followed them thus far, stood shivering as before some unknown monster in a brake: or, rather, as if it snuffed footsteps leading to some other world.

Bannadonna lay, prostrate and bleeding, at the base of the bell which was adorned with girls and garlands. He lay at the feet of the hour Una; his head coinciding, in a vertical line, with her left hand, clasped by the hour Dua. With downcast face impending over him, like Jael over nailed Sisera in the tent, was the domino; now no more becloaked.

It had limbs, and seemed clad in a scaly mail, lustrous as a dragon-beetle's. It was manacled, and its clubbed arms were uplifted, as if, with its manacles, once more to smite its already smitten victim. One advanced foot of it was inserted beneath the dead body, as if in the act of spurning it.

Uncertainty falls on what now followed.

It were but natural to suppose that the magistrates would, at first, shrink from immediate personal contact with what they saw. At the least, for a time, they would stand in involuntary doubt; it may be, in more or less of horrified alarm. Certain it is, that an arquebuss was called for from below. And some add, that its report, followed by a fierce whiz, as of the sudden snapping of a main-spring, with a steely din, as if a stack of sword-blades should be dashed upon a pavement, these blended sounds came ringing to the plain, attracting every eye far upward to the belfry, whence, through the lattice-work, thin wreaths of smoke were curling.

Some averred that it was the spaniel, gone mad by fear, which was shot. This, others denied. True it was, the spaniel never more was seen; and,

probably, for some unknown reason, it shared the burial now to be related of the domino. For, whatever the preceding circumstances may have been, the first instinctive panic over, or else all ground of reasonable fear removed, the two magistrates, by themselves, quickly rehooded the figure in the dropped cloak wherein it had been hoisted. The same night, it was secretly lowered to the ground, smuggled to the beach, pulled far out to sea, and sunk. Nor to any after urgency, even in free convivial hours, would the twain ever disclose the full secrets of the belfry.

From the mystery unavoidably investing it, the popular solution of the foundling's fate involved more or less of supernatural agency. But some few less unscientific minds pretended to find little difficulty in otherwise accounting for it. In the chain of circumstantial inferences drawn, there may, or may not, have been some absent or defective links. But, as the explanation in question is the only one which tradition has explicitly preserved, in dearth of better, it will here be given. But, in the first place, it is requisite to present the supposition entertained as to the entire motive and mode, with their origin, of the secret design of Bannadonna; the minds above-mentioned assuming to penetrate as well into his soul as into the event. The disclosure will indirectly involve reference to peculiar matters, none of, the clearest, beyond the immediate subject.

At that period, no large bell was made to sound otherwise than as at present, by agitation of a tongue within, by means of ropes, or percussion from without, either from cumbrous machinery, or stalwart watchmen, armed with heavy hammers, stationed in the belfry, or in sentry-boxes on the open roof, according as the bell was sheltered or exposed.

It was from observing these exposed bells, with their watchmen, that the foundling, as was opined, derived the first suggestion of his scheme. Perched on a great mast or spire, the human figure, viewed from below, undergoes such a reduction in its apparent size, as to obliterate its intelligent features. It evinces no personality. Instead of bespeaking volition, its gestures rather resemble the automatic ones of the arms of a telegraph.

Musing, therefore, upon the purely Punchinello aspect of the human figure thus beheld, it had indirectly occurred to Bannadonna to devise some metallic agent, which should strike the hour with its mechanic hand, with even greater precision than the vital one. And, moreover, as the vital watchman on the roof, sallying from his retreat at the given periods, walked to the bell with uplifted mace, to smite it, Bannadonna had resolved that his invention should likewise possess the power of locomotion, and, along with that, the appearance, at least, of intelligence and will.

If the conjectures of those who claimed acquaintance with the intent of Bannadonna be thus far correct, no unenterprising spirit could have been his. But they stopped not here; intimating that though, indeed, his design had, in the first place, been prompted by the sight of the watchman, and confined to the devising of a subtle substitute for him: yet, as is not seldom the case with projectors, by insensible gradations, proceeding from comparatively pigmy aims to Titanic ones, the original scheme had, in its anticipated eventualities, at last, attained to an unheard of degree of daring.

He still bent his efforts upon the locomotive figure for the belfry, but only as a partial type of an ulterior creature, a sort of elephantine Helot, adapted to further, in a degree scarcely to be imagined, the universal conveniences and glories of humanity; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work; stocking the earth with a new serf, more useful than the ox, swifter than the dolphin, stronger than the lion, more cunning than the ape, for industry an ant, more fiery than serpents, and yet, in patience, another ass. All excellences of all God-made creatures, which served man, were here to receive advancement, and then to be combined in one. Talus was to have been the all-accomplished Helot's name. Talus, iron slave to Bannadonna, and, through him, to man.

Here, it might well be thought that, were these last conjectures as to the foundling's secrets not erroneous, then must he have been hopelessly infected with the craziest chimeras of his age; far outgoing Albert Magus and Cornelius Agrippa. But the contrary was averred. However marvelous his design, however apparently transcending not alone the bounds of human invention, but those of divine creation, yet the proposed means to be employed were alleged to have been confined within the sober forms of sober reason. It was affirmed that, to a degree of more than skeptic scorn, Bannadonna had been without sympathy for any of the vain-glorious irrationalities of his time. For example, he had not concluded, with the visionaries among the metaphysicians, that between the finer mechanic forces and the ruder animal vitality some germ of correspondence might prove discoverable. As little did his scheme partake of the enthusiasm of some natural philosophers, who hoped, by physiological and chemical inductions, to arrive at a knowledge of the source of life, and so qualify themselves to manufacture and improve upon it. Much less had he aught in common with the tribe of alchemists, who sought, by a species of incantations, to evoke some surprising vitality from the laboratory. Neither had he imagined, with certain sanguine theosophists, that, by faithful adoration of the Highest, unheard-of powers would be vouchsafed to man. A practical materialist, what Bannadonna had aimed at was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by conjuration, not by altars;

but by plain vice-bench and hammer. In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure some one else to bind her to his hand;— these, one and all, had not been his objects; but, asking no favors from any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. He stooped to conquer. With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God.

Nevertheless, in his initial step, so far as the experimental automaton for the belfry was concerned, he allowed fancy some little play; or, perhaps, what seemed his fancifulness was but his utilitarian ambition collaterally extended. In figure, the creature for the belfry should not be likened after the human pattern, nor any animal one, nor after the ideals, however wild, of ancient fable, but equally in aspect as in organism be an original production; the more terrible to behold, the better.

Such, then, were the suppositions as to the present scheme, and the reserved intent. How, at the very threshold, so unlooked for a catastrophe overturned all, or rather, what was the conjecture here, is now to be set forth.

It was thought that on the day preceding the fatality, his visitors having left him, Bannadonna had unpacked the belfry image, adjusted it, and placed it in the retreat provided— a sort of sentry-box in one corner of the belfry; in short, throughout the night, and for some part of the ensuing morning, he had been engaged in arranging everything connected with the domino; the issuing from the sentry-box each sixty minutes; sliding along a grooved way, like a railway; advancing to the clock-bell, with uplifted manacles; striking it at one of the twelve junctions of the four-and-twenty hands; then wheeling, circling the bell, and retiring to its post, there to bide for another sixty minutes, when the same process was to be repeated; the bell, by a cunning mechanism, meantime turning on its vertical axis, so as to present, to the descending mace, the clasped hands of the next two figures, when it would strike two, three, and so on, to the end. The musical metal in this time-bell being so managed in the fusion, by some art, perishing with its originator, that each of the clasps of the four-and-twenty hands should give forth its own peculiar resonance when parted.

But on the magic metal, the magic and metallic stranger never struck but that one stroke, drove but that one nail, served but that one clasp, by which Bannadonna clung to his ambitious life. For, after winding up the creature in the sentry-box, so that, for the present, skipping the intervening hours, it should not emerge till the hour of one, but should then infallibly emerge, and, after deftly oiling the grooves whereon it was to slide, it was surmised that the mechanician must then have hurried to the bell, to give his final touches to its sculpture. True artist, he here became absorbed; and absorption still further

intensified, it may be, by his striving to abate that strange look of Una; which, though, before others, he had treated with such unconcern, might not, in secret, have been without its thorn.

And so, for the interval, he was oblivious of his creature; which, not oblivious of him, and true to its creation, and true to its heedful winding up, left its post precisely at the given moment; along its well-oiled route, slid noiselessly towards its mark; and, aiming at the hand of Una, to ring one clangorous note, dully smote the intervening brain of Bannadonna, turned backwards to it; the manacled arms then instantly up-springing to their hovering poise. The falling body clogged the thing's return; so there it stood, still impending over Bannadonna, as if whispering some post-mortem terror. The chisel lay dropped from the hand, but beside the hand; the oil-flask spilled across the iron track.

In his unhappy end, not unmindful of the rare genius of the mechanician, the republic decreed him a stately funeral. It was resolved that the great bell— the one whose casting had been jeopardized through the timidity of the ill-starred workman— should be rung upon the entrance of the bier into the cathedral. The most robust man of the country round was assigned the office of bell-ringer.

But as the pall-bearers entered the cathedral porch, naught but a broken and disastrous sound, like that of some lone Alpine land-slide, fell from the tower upon their ears. And then, all was hushed.

Glancing backwards, they saw the groined belfry crashed sideways in. It afterwards appeared that the powerful peasant, who had the bell-rope in charge, wishing to test at once the full glory of the bell, had swayed down upon the rope with one concentrate jerk. The mass of quaking metal, too ponderous for its frame, and strangely feeble somewhere at its top, loosed from its fastening, tore sideways down, and tumbling in one sheer fall, three hundred feet to the soft sward below, buried itself inverted and half out of sight.

Upon its disinterment, the main fracture was found to have started from a small spot in the ear; which, being scraped, revealed a defect, deceptively minute in the casting; which defect must subsequently have been pasted over with some unknown compound.

The remolten metal soon reassumed its place in the tower's repaired superstructure. For one year the metallic choir of birds sang musically in its belfry-bough-work of sculptured blinds and traceries. But on the first anniversary of the tower's completion— at early dawn, before the concourse had surrounded it— an earthquake came; one loud crash was heard. The stone-pine, with all its bower of songsters, lay overthrown upon the plain.

So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So the bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it. And so pride went before the fall.

14: Nerves

Fred M. White

1859-1935

The Windsor Magazine, Jan 1911

The Telegraph (Brisbane) 4 Dec 1917

REX BRUNELL drummed on the table with carefully polished fingernails.

"Pinero," he said, "has aptly described a capitalist as a pawnbroker with an imagination. Now, I regard that as essentially true. I have had considerable experience with the fraternity in question, and incidentally I have been ruined by one of them. I can afford to tell you men this now, because I am about to get my own back— and more. I never met a capitalist yet who was not a nervous man, or one blessed with a good digestion. Goldmark is no exception to the rule."

James Goldmark smiled. The great man was entertaining a select circle of friends in his suite of rooms at the Majestic Hotel. There were four of them, all intimates of Rex Brunell, all of them with fingers more or less scarred by contact with high finance. "A fool and his money are soon parted," Goldmark said cynically. "Brunell was bound to lose his money. It struck me that I might as well have it as anybody else."

A laugh greeted this sally. It was quite characteristic of Goldmark. He grinned behind his glasses, his teeth were taut over the inevitable black cigar. A waiter came into the dining-room and laid a card on the table before Goldmark.

"I'll get you to excuse me one moment," the capitalist said, and vanished.

The smoke-laden air seem to clarify as the door closed upon Goldmark. Three pairs of glittering eager eyes were turned upon Brunell. He waved his hand carelessly.

"Patience," he said. "No explanation is needed. That man was going to make our fortunes. Instead of which he has practically beggared the lot of us. He is not in the least ashamed of himself. He has used us as a blind to deceive others. In a less effete civilisation than ours we should shoot him and pitch his black, attenuated carcase into the Thames. Now we dine with him instead. After all, it is only a question of financial methods. Goldmark adopts them and we don't. Therefore he gets the best of us. Now, I object to be ruined on principle. We all do, in fact. Therefore we are going to adopt his methods. I have thought it all out, and that is why we are here to-night. Watch me, play up to my lead, and all will be well. Hush! For the moment let us dissemble."

Goldmark returned to the dining-room again, followed by a dapper little man with a waxed moustache and a wonderfully groomed exterior. He brought the genuine Parisian flavour with him.

"It was not me, but you, that this gentleman wanted to see, Brunell," the financier explained. "The waiter delivered the card to me by mistake. I explained to Dr. Chassier that any friend of yours was a friend of mine. Doctor, a glass of champagne?"

"This is a pleasant surprise," Brunell cried. "Regan and Powell and Hartigan, this is my friend Dr. Chassier, of Paris University. I need not remind you that he is the great authority on the eye. Of his reputation I say nothing, because it speaks for itself. Now, this is kind of you, Chassier. I hope you have not come merely because I mentioned that certain unpleasant symptoms of mine "

"Well, partly," the doctor admitted with a smile. "The astigmatism you mentioned— nothing serious, of course, but still... I am glad to hear that you have dropped the cigarettes."

"Tobacco is bad in certain circumstances?" Goldmark asked. "Do have a glass of champagne."

The expert began to talk, at first quietly, till he warmed to his subject. It was "shop" of the kind that this neurotic age takes to so kindly. He spoke of the marvels of his branch of surgical science. He had them all quivering before long as to what particular form of ocular weakness they were suffering from. Goldmark sprawled across the table, puffing at his black cigar.

"Ugh! How it gets on one's nerves!" he shuddered. "I hope you chaps won't laugh at me, but those funny little globular discs that come flashing before one's eyes at times—"

"A pawnbroker with an imagination," Brunell murmured. "My dear fellow, I don't feel in the least like laughing. Anything wrong with the eyes— To think of it! And Chassier told me that I should lose my sight if I didn't chuck the cigarettes."

Goldmark laid down his cigar, gazed at it, and took it up again.

"Of course that is all bosh," he said uneasily.

"By no means, my dear sir," Chassier said gravely. "Cases of smoker's blindness are by no means uncommon. I had one case the other day— a man retired from your Guards. He came to me so far gone that I nearly paralysed him with strychnine. I had to. There were times when he could not rise from his bed. It was a long struggle, but I cured him. Another week later—"

Chassier shrugged his shoulders. The room had suddenly grown strangely silent. Goldmark pitched his cigar into the fireplace. He was pale and anxious; a little bead stood on his forehead.

"You could tell the symptoms at a glance?" he asked. "In my case, for instance?"

The specialist nodded. He crossed the room and touched Goldmark on the forehead and chin with the tips of his long white fingers. The gesture was

typically professional. The sleek dark head of the capitalist was turned up to the light as Chassier lifted an eyelid.

"Heavens!" he muttered under his breath. "Man alive, but there is— Still— "

Goldmark caught the whispered words. They gripped his heart; he was suffocating. The room swam round him, the damp beads broke out on his face like a gentle rain.

"A pawnbroker with an imagination," Brunell repeated.

"Nothing of the sort," Chassier said drily. "There is no imagination here. Monsieur Goldmark, I should like to make a little test. There are certain things— drugs— that I always carry with me... Just a spot or two in a glass of water. No ill effect, I assure you... Merely to exaggerate certain features, so that I may be better able to judge of your— er— "

Goldmark watched the clear yellow drops measured into a champagne glass like a man who dreams.

"Is it as bad as all that?" he asked piteously.

"I have expressed no opinion," Chassier said professionally. "Please to drink this."

When Goldmark came to himself again, he was in a darkened room. He was conscious of the fact that he was still in possession of his sight, much as if he were seeing things under water. Everything was waved and blurred; stagnant things seemed to be in slow motion. In a way his surroundings were familiar; he was in his own arm-chair in his sitting-room at the hotel; he could dimly make out the outline of the table. This gripping paroxysm of fear passed presently; his scattered thoughts were growing coherent. What were they saying about all this in the City?

"Is there anybody here?" he asked.

"I am here," the voice of Chassier responded. "There is nothing to be alarmed about."

"I must have fainted," Goldmark groaned. "What is the matter with my eyes? And where are the others?"

"Well, they went home last night, of course. I asked them to leave me here. Your eyes will be quite normal, say, in a day or two. I had to use belladonna at once. Not a whisper of this has got out, of course. We thought that you would prefer it. But you'll have to cut those cigars off altogether. Another week or two, and you would be beyond my assistance. A pipe, now—"

"Never mind that," Goldmark cried. "I gather that I have been here all night. What time is it now?"

"About two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon."

"Good Heavens! I should have been in the City at ten. My people there will think that I have gone mad. Have they been here? Are any inquiries being made?"

"Your secretary called you up, of course. Several other inquiries, as a matter of fact. It seemed to me to be discreet to put them off. You are supposed to be suffering from acute gastritis brought about by eating some impregnated oysters. The people here are under the impression that I am a doctor who was specially summoned to attend you. I have had great financiers in my hands before, therefore I have taken special pains to disguise the truth. If your enemies in the City get hold of this— "

"By Heavens, I should be ruined!" Goldmark groaned. "They'd be at my throat in a moment. If anything happens to the Santa Anna group of mines just now, I'm done. I may not be able to see, but, by Jove, I can do business! Push my chair over to the telephone, please. I must call up Gregory."

Chassier raised no objection. So long as the patient made no use of his eyes, all would be well. Possibly they might have to be bandaged for a day or two, but, at any rate, they would be saved. Goldmark worried at the handle of the telephone savagely, and the reply came at length.

"Give me 99976 London Wall," he said. "What? Oh, yes! Is that you, Gregory. Here's a precious nice mess. Something gone wrong with my eyes. What? Told me I was smoking too many cigars. Well, that's just what Dr. Chassier, of Paris, says. Lucky thing for me he happened to be in London. I've got to stay in a darkened room for a day or two, though nobody knows it but yourself. Supposed to be suffering from acute gastritis. For Heaven's sake, keep this to yourself! What? What? Rather serious this is. I can only just hear what you say. See Razuli as to those mines. You might get 'em up at least two points before closing-time. Keep the game going till Saturday, when that matter over the Mexican concession is settled. Mind I am posted from time to time during the day. And tell everybody that I shall be in the City certain to-morrow."

The slow day dragged on, with frequent calls on the telephone. A nurse appeared presently and brought Goldmark food. She read the City article from The Times to him in a clear pleasant voice; she put him to bed in due course, with the intimation that she was close at hand in case he needed anything.

"It's all very good of you, doctor," Goldmark groaned. "You won't find me haggling over your fees when the time comes for payment. What a lucky thing it was that you happened to look up Brunell! Another week, and it would have been too late!"

"Another week, and it would have been too late," Chassier said gravely.

"Well, I am grateful," Goldmark replied. "On the whole, I'm not doing so badly. I never appreciated the telephone as I have done the last two days. Keeps me in constant touch with Gregory. Rather bad instrument, but I can just make out what he says. Odd thing is that he can hear me distinctly."

"A not uncommon peculiarity of telephones," Chassier replied. "Anyway, you can comfort yourself with the assurance that you are making rapid progress towards recovery. When you wake up to-morrow morning, you will be able to make out objects in this room quite distinctly. I shall come and ser you before the evening. I have another delicate operation to perform."

The telephone went utterly wrong about five o'clock, and Goldmark grizzled for the rest of the evening. It was quite early when the nurse insisted upon putting Goldmark to bed, followed by the administration of a medicine that filled him with a feeling of sublime contentment. He turned over contentedly and fell asleep. What did all the mines in the world matter to him just then?

A golden bath of sunshine filled the bedroom as Goldmark awoke in the morning. The blind was up as Goldmark turned round with a clear view before him. The queer sensation had gone from his eyes; familiar objects had assumed their proper proportions.

As a matter of fact, there was not one familiar object to be seen. Here was a strange bed in a strange room sparely furnished. On a chair Goldmark's clothes lay neatly folded. Here were his boots and frock coat and top hat together with a change of linen. On the dining table was all that was necessary for the toilette, including one of his own clean collars. Here also was his breakfast flanked by a Thermos flask of hot coffee. On the bed lay a copy of The Times as yet unfolded.

In his pyjamas Goldmark sprang from the bed and rushed into the sitting-room. There was nothing there but a table and arm-chair, together with the telephone in the corner. The rest of the house was empty. Down in the basement was the other end of the telephone into which Goldmark had been speaking for the past two days.

Now, what had happened to him? How had those fellows managed it, and why? How had they contrived to move him from the Majestic in the dead of the night and bring him to this desolated house?

Possibly that day's **Times** might throw a light on the darkness. It did.

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
OF MR. JAMES GOLDMARK

Little doubt is now expressed that Mr. Goldmark has been the victim of some accident, or that he has deliberately made away with himself. Since he so mysteriously vanished from

the Majestic Hotel on the night of Wednesday last, nothing has been seen or heard of him. Nobody saw him leave the hotel, and no letter has come from him. It is hardly necessary to say that this remarkable mystery has created something like a panic in the City, especially in the mining market. Taking advantage of Mr. Goldmark's absence, the bears for the last two days have kept up a vigorous attack on the Santa Anna group, so that the stock was quoted yesterday as low as 11 3⁄4, after which it suddenly declined to 7 3⁄16, which price was freely offered by the bears— a striking contrast to the prices of Monday last. Scotland Yard is silent in the matter, and up to the time of going to press has nothing to communicate.

Jabez Goldmark was a man of nerves and imagination, nevertheless he kept his head at that crisis. He shaved, in cold water, without so much as a scratch, and partook of an excellent breakfast. He was so far awake to the situation that he subsequently took his cigar-case from his pocket and lighted one of the big black weeds.

He would very much liked to have met Dr. Chassier at that moment. He stifled his regrets as he stepped into a taxi and drove Citywards.

The cool and immaculate Gregory nearly fell off his padded chair as Goldmark strode into his office. The latter poured out a tornado of questions.

"Tell you all about it later on," he said. "Call it one of my little games, if you like. This affair is going to cost over half a million, but it can't be helped. "We've got to get those shares back to par again, and a few points over. Please 'phone our bankers to come here at once. I'll give the bears something to chew before four o'clock."

Friday, October 19, 19— , was a day long remembered in the City. The sight of Goldmark, cool and stern and immaculate outside the Stock Exchange, gave the bears cold fits. Then there were excursions and alarums, followed by a battle which lasted till three o'clock, and a subsequent flight of the bears, leaving their dead and murdered on the field. Goldmark figured it all out on the back of an old envelope.

"Cost me half a million, all the same," he said. "Only nobody need know that. And it's nobody's business where I have been the last two days. Gregory, ring up Mr. Brunell, and ask him where I can conveniently see him this evening."

"That's all right, sir," Gregory said a few minutes later. "Mr. Brunell will be very pleased to see you at his rooms to dinner this evening at eight o'clock."

Goldmark nodded his approval. At eight o'clock he strode into Brunell's room, to find himself confronted by Regan and Powell and Hartigan, as well as his host.

"I should like," he said quietly— "I should like a little explanation."

"Only natural," Brunell said politely. "I ordered dinner for 8.15 on purpose. We are not going to quarrel over this matter, my dear sir. And you are quite at

liberty to make it public if you like. But, unless I am greatly mistaken, you will do nothing of the kind. The last thing in the world you want is for people to laugh at you. Now, you robbed me quite in the way of business, and no doubt enjoyed it. Anyway, I didn't. So I decided to fight you with your own weapons. It seemed to me that if it came to scheming, I could scheme as well as you can. That is why I invented a double for Dr. Chassier, and very well he acted his part. He came on the scene in the most natural manner in the world, and he frightened you very nearly to death. As I am fond of saying, a financier is a pawnbroker with an imagination. You have a most vivid imagination, and I played on it. When the sham Chassier gave you those drops to take, he drugged you. 'Chassier' had a room at the hotel close to yours, and we carried you there. You were placed in a big packing-case and smuggled over to Charing Cross, whence you were fetched to the house where the comedy was played out. Hartigan, who is great at theatricals, acted the part of your nurse. We had only to keep you quiet for a day or two, and the thing was done. As you may imagine, your disappearance created the wildest excitement. All sorts of things were said. You had committed suicide, you had absconded, you could not face your creditors. Your mines hardly needed the efforts of the bears to send them down with a bump. At the lowest point we all bought steadily. We knew that by to-day everything would be up again, and we bought till we could buy no longer. No, you are not going to teach us a lesson, as that flash in your eyes indicates, because we have unloaded already. By the way, how are your eyes feeling? Quite all right again?"

"You are a clever lot!" Goldmark sneered.

"I flatter myself that we are," Brunell said coolly. "That little artistic touch as to the telephone was quite smart. Gave you a telephone, and you could be more or less content. Regan fitted the 'phone, and added a few thicknesses of flannel over the transmitter so as to deaden the voice of Powell, who successfully played the part of your man Gregory. All the time you thought that everything was going well, Gregory was in a cold bath of perspiration over your disappearance. We got our knowledge of the drug business from a doctor whom we carefully pumped for information. I put the belladonna in your eyes, and the sham Chassier— whom you do not know even by sight, though he is one of your victims— administered the sleeping draught that put you all right again. Now, you must admit that all this is infinitely more artistic and civilised than taking you by the scruff of the neck and giving you the thrashing that you so richly deserve, Goldmark. We have got our own back, and a lot more. We have fined you half a million, and, so far as we are concerned, we are quite prepared to let bygones be bygones. What do you say?"

"I could get you five years if I liked!" Goldmark muttered.

"Precisely. The facts are beyond dispute. But are you going to do it? Are you going to let the whole world know how delightfully you have been fooled?"

Goldmark capitulated at discretion.

"Let us go in to dinner," he suggested.

"By all means," Brunell smiled. "Pawnbroker with an imagination, proceed. I've got some special cigars for you to try presently— very strong, but, in the circumstances, I know you won't mind that."

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15: We Girls must Hang Together

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

Illustrated, 22 April 1939

Adelaide Mail 25 Nov 1939

WHETHER you like to call it 'sex-appeal,' 'biological urge,' or merely 'a way with women' is your own affair. Whatever it is, Mr Alonzo MacTavish had it.

Perhaps it was the whimsical smile that played about his finely carved mouth: possibly it was the suavity indicated by his green eyes-glass: probably it was the sinister huskiness of his quiet voice. I don't know and I really don't care. I merely wish to indicate that he had this quality plus, and knew how to use said quality. Also, he had a sweet nerve.

Having established that let us now proceed to business. At four-thirty on a nice spring afternoon, Mr. Alonzo MacTavish. looking like all the flowers in May in a well-cut suit of very small grey-brown check, a brown homburg hat, and yellow gloves, wandered into a famous teashop in St James's street, and. having secured a quiet table in the little recess by the window, proceeded to order tea and to ruminate.

The rumination— which concerned a little matter of burglary that he was contemplating for the near future— was suddenly interrupted by a feminine but nevertheless incisively spoken sentence which emanated from the opposite side of the room. The sentence being. 'We girls must hang together!'

Alonzo looked up and saw with amazement and surprise a very handsome trio of ladies drinking tea at a table on the other side of the café and conversing in the most serious manner on a topic which had brought their, superbly coiffured heads very close together.

Permit me to introduce these ladies. They were:— Mrs. Enrico d'AIdardo. a chic and slim woman of amazing beauty. Mrs. d'AIdardo— whose name was Dolores— wore a perpetual smile and a flock of excellent diamond bracelets. Her husband was, I regret to say, serving a sentence of 15 years in Alcatraz after a one-sided argument with some G-men.

The second lady was Mrs. Looley Ferbes, a well-rounded blonde with taking ways. Mrs. Ferbes's husband was engaged just then in doing a five-year stretch in Maidstone over a matter of £5,000 worth of jewellery which Scotland Yard suggested had been removed by him from its rightful owner.

Lastly, but not leastly, the third, lady was none other than Mrs. Vic Felpins, whose husband— one of the most successful confidence men in Europe— had, I am sorry to say, suffered from a lapse of over-confidence and got himself knocked off by some rough French policeman after having separated a hard-headed American business man from everything except his sock suspenders.

Here, then, were three grass widows on whom no grass had ever grown.

Sipping his tea and thanking his stars that he was adequately concealed in the recess. Alonzo permitted himself to wonder what the conference was about. He also wondered, with a whimsical grin, what the three ladies would have said if they had known that he was watching them. For let us admit it, Mr. MacTavish had not been at all popular with any of the ladies' husbands when they had been in circulation. All three gentlemen had agreed to dislike Mr. MacTavish owing to a little matter of a £10,000 haul which he had got away with and they hadn't.

But if the sight of the beauteous trio had surprised Alonzo, a still greater surprise was in store, for as he looked at them they were joined by a fourth lady, who, he noted with a lifted eyebrow, was none other than the good-looking young woman who worked on the telephone switchboard at his Jermyn street apartment.

Here was a plot afoot, and MacTavish thought with a smile, he was prepared to bet all the tea in China to a bad egg, that he was the subject of it. He waited patiently until they had gone, then adjusting his eyeglass carefully he wandered back to Jermyn street. At 7.30 Alonzo, having got himself into a dinner suit, telephoned downstairs for two double Martinis and also requested the young lady on the switchboard to step up to his apartment on a matter of importance.

When she arrived he presented her with a Martini and a sweet smile, locked the door, and ordered her to sit down. 'All is discovered, my child,' he said. 'It was too bad that this afternoon I should be in that tea place just at the wrong time. I saw you come in and join the trio of youth and beauty.

'I am also prepared to lay a slight shade of odds that those three good-looking honeypots have been paying you plenty to keep an eye on me. listen to my telephone conversations, report as to my arrangements for going away next Thursday, etcetera, etcetera. Am I right?'

She grinned. 'Dead right,' she said. 'They got me the job here for the express purpose and paid me £50 to do it.'

'Spoken like a true soldier,' said Alonzo with a smile. 'Do you think you'd like to confide in me?'

He walked over to a desk in the corner of the room, unlocked a drawer, and took out some banknotes. 'Here's one hundred pounds for you if you talk.'

She smiled mischievously. 'I've had their fifty.' she said. 'So I'll take your £100, talk, and get out while the going's good. I wouldn't like to be round when d'Aldardo finds out that I've been doing a squealing act.'

'Nice, sensible girl,' murmured Alonzo. He handed over the notes. 'Talk please,' he commanded.

'Those three have got it in for you,' she said. 'At least that's what they tell each other.' She smiled. 'They all seem to hate you so much generally that I shouldn't be surprised if they weren't a bit stuck on your individually. Well... they know what you're at. They know you're after that Rembrandt picture at the Hall at Mallows.

'I've told them that you're going from here on Thursday night, that you'd taken a room at the inn at Southing— near Mallows.

'They know you'll do the job that night because they know the family go away from Mallows Hall in the evening and that, except for the deaf caretaker. there'll be no one there. They know you're going down in your car because I've told 'em you've got the garage checking it for return here that day.

'They know that you'll do the job about one o'clock in the morning, leave your car at the back of the spinney, drive back to Southing, pick up your bag, and come back here, that you'll park the Rembrandt in a safe place and get it over to France when the excitement's all over. They know all that.'

'Knowledgeable women,' murmured Alonzo. 'And what are they planning to do with me?'

She smiled at him wickedly. 'They're going to hijack you,' she said. 'They think you'll arrive at Mallows Hall for the job at 12.30. You've got to leave your car off the main road and the obvious place is the spinney. They're going to park their own car across the exit from the spinney, and when you try to drive out they're going to stick you up with a gun and grab the picture.

'And they tell me that Looley Ferbes is very good with a .38 automatic!'

'Thank you. sweetheart,' said Alonzo with a grin. 'Now, if I were you I'd pack my little bag and get out before Looley Ferbes gets at you. She might feel like doing a little target practice.

'Another thing,' he continued, 'I think you're rather nice. You never sounded to me like a telephone girl, and I think you should know that if you were the sort of girl who went about the place being kissed promiscuously. I'd kiss you promiscuously '

'Thank you, sir,' she said. 'Well, I am that sort of girl.'

'Excellent.' said Alonzo. 'That being so I shall kiss you promiscuously.' Which he did.

At 9.30, Mr. MacTavish, who had got all the ladies' telephone numbers from his informant, telephoned through to Mrs. Looley Ferbes. 'Looley, darling,' he said, when she came on the line. 'This is Alonzo MacTavish speaking. Listen to me, honey. That girl you put in here lost her head and blew the works. She's told me the whole story about your little plan to hijack that Rembrandt.

'Well. Looley, in spite of the fact that your husband doesn't like me, I've always been crazy about you. You know that, don't you, Looley? There's something about you, sweet, that hits me for six. I'm absolutely insane every time I think of you.

'Now, then, honey, I want to prove to you that I'm for you, I want you to come in on this job and, ditch the other two girls, see?

'I'm going to change my plans. Instead of going after that Rembrandt at midnight on Thursday, I'm going to do the job at 11 o'clock. You wait for me at Southing Station and I'll pick you up on my way back at 11.30. I'll split 50-50 with you. Will you, Looley... dear Looley?'

He said a lot of other things, too! After a bit, Looley said she would. Mr. MacTavish then got his breath and proceeded to telephone first to Dolores d'AIdardo and afterwards to Viola Felpins. He told them both the same story, although he varied the terms of endearment. He called Dolores a 'sweet little snowball' and he told Viola in his most winning way that she was 'a cherub from the skies, with everything it takes.'

Dolores took three minutes to think about it before she said she would. Viola didn't think at all. She just said, 'Oke,' and blew kisses through the telephone.

Alonzo hung up and got himself a whisky and soda. He thought it was just too cute the way these girls hung together!

After which he did some more telephoning. He rang through to an old friend of his who was in the antique picture business, and they had a long talk together. Then Alonzo heaved a great sigh and went to bed.

ON Thursday night at eleven o'clock, Mr. MacTavish, who had carefully parked his car behind a five-barred gate on the east side of Mallows Hall, made a well-chosen entrance through the half-window in the butler's pantry, went up the main staircase, picked the lock on the library door, removed the Rembrandt— a not too large picture— from the wall, carefully wrapped it— frame and all— in an oiled silk cover, and then departed the way he had come. He reached his car, put the picture in the luggage boot, and drove straight back to London via Linley, carefully avoiding Southing Station. He drove fast and was back in Jermyn street at 12.15.

At 12.30 there was a knock on the outer door of his apartment. He went through the hall and opened the door. Outside, a nasty-looking automatic in her hand, stood Looley. Behind her were Dolores and Viola. They looked very angry.

'We didn't think we'd worry the night porter,' said Looley. 'We just came straight up the stairs. Just back in quietly, will you?'

'Certainly, Looley,' said Alonzo. 'I'm sorry you're taking it this way. I'm sure I can explain.'

A gasp of amazement, mingled with rage and feminine spleen issued from three charming mouths.

'You can explain, can you?' hissed Looley. 'You can explain! My God! Have you got your nerve! First of all you get that double-crossing little cat we put in here to blow the works on our scheme.

'Then you telephone each one of us and pull a big Clark Gable on us so that we don't know which way we're pointing, and can only say 'Yes' like a lot of hypnotised high school kids, after which you proceed to ditch the lot of us, do the job, get back here, and then you have the nerve to say that "you can explain." '

She sank into a chair still holding the gun pointing ominously at Alonzo's stomach. 'I've a damn good mind to shoot you now,' she said. 'Just to see you wriggle.'

'Me too!' hissed Viola, who looked radiant in a striking evening frock under a Persian lamb coat. 'Here I am all dressed up to kill, sticking round Southing Station when these two girls arrive suddenly, one at each end of the platform, and I suddenly get it that you've pulled the same tale on the whole three of us. I could have torn you apart.'

'What's the use?' said Dolores, in her husky voice. 'I can't even get annoyed with him. But I could murder him with a knife and like it.'

'Pipe down, Dolores,' said Looley. She got up.

'Now, listen, Alonzo,' she said. 'We've all had enough of you. But we've made up our minds about one thing. We're going to have that Rembrandt. I've got the car outside and we're taking it away with us right now.

'Either you hand over that picture or I'm going to put a bullet into you where It'll keep you quiet for three or four weeks, and we'll take it. Well— what about it?' Alonzo shrugged his shoulders.

'Look, girls,' he said. 'Did you ever hear the story of the fellow who thought he was awfully clever, and he was such a mug that he even double-crossed himself? Well, you're looking at him. I'm him.'

He flopped into a chair. 'If you want, revenge on me,' he said, 'you just listen to this one. I got my original information about this Rembrandt from Duboray in Paris. I paid him £100 to check on all details so that I was absolutely certain that this was the small Rembrandt— the one he painted four years before he died. Then I came over here. I paid Jimmy Detingle £75 I to go down to Mallows and case the job, to inspect the way in, photograph the windows, plan the exact location of the picture, and all the rest of it. Then I paid that girl

you put in here as telephone girl £100 to tell me what you were at. That's £275, isn't it?' He looked at them. His face was a picture of abject misery.

'Listen, Dolores,' he continued. 'You know something about pictures. Well, take a look at that Rembrandt!'

Dolores went over and tore the covering from the picture. She held it up underneath the electric lamp.

'It's a fake,' she said. 'A damn good fake, that's all!'

She put the picture down and looked at Alonzo. They all looked at him. Then they began to laugh. They laughed and laughed. Looley put the automatic back into her handbag.

'Good-night, sweetheart,' she said. 'So the laugh was on you this time. And it cost you £275 for a fake. Hear me laugh!'

'Me too!' said Viola.

'And me.' said Dolores. They walked out of the flat— still laughing. Five minutes later the telephone rang.

'Hello,' said a feminine voice. 'Is that Alonzo?'

''Correct,' said MacTavish. ''This is he. Who are you?'

'I'm the girl who was the telephone operator,' said the voice. 'I've been standing in the doorway on the other side of the street watching your flat. I thought it might be interesting tonight. It has been. I saw the girls arrive looking very angry and I've just watched them leave. They were laughing themselves sick. I feel they've pulled a fast one on you. Are you still in one piece?'

'Luckily, yes!' said Alonzo. 'You see, they came up here to get the picture with a gun. But Dolores has just discovered it's a fake.'

'Too bad,' said the girl. 'I fell for you. Do you think you could do with a little walk and some sympathy?'

'Could I?' replied Alonzo, in his most sinister voice. 'I'll be down in five minutes— or perhaps you'd like to come up and help?'

'Doing what, sir?' she asked.

'Well.' said Alonzo, 'you see this Rembrandt ain't a fake after all. I got a friend of mine to get me a copy of the picture, and when I arrived back here tonight I took the picture out of the frame and stuck the copy over it and put the frame back again.

'You see, I felt when the girls met each other on Southing Station they'd feel annoyed and might come along here, so I had a little set ready for them.'

'Well— goodnight,' said the girl.

'Oh, I say,' said Alonzo. 'You can't go out of my life like this.'

She laughed. 'I'll come to lunch tomorrow,' she said. 'But before I go I ought to tell you that I feel rather proud of being the only woman in the quartet who actually made £100 out of Mr. MacTavish.

'Well,' he said, 'Talking about that, please don't try to spend any of it, will you? You see, those banknotes aren't very good. A friend of mine made them specially for me. Good-night, sweet!'

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16: The Bogie in the Creek

Sumner Locke

1881-1917

Western Mail (Perth) 27 Feb 1914

THROUGH THE DOOR I see a strip of country whitewashed by the moon and scented with the little violets in the grass.

The black boy— Jimmy— who has just come home from a long and tiresome ride after cattle which my husband intends branding in the yard during the next few days, is out there too. He is shivering and saying in palpitating guttural tones: "Debil-debil," and his hand quivers black against the line of white that runs between the distant belt of trees silhouetted against tho moon

The black boy has good reason to say "debil-debil," for out there, too, is a strange weird whiteness that my baby-child noticed too, and which suddenly stops her play on the long verandah. She comes inside to me and says,

"Mummy— there is a bogie in the creek a 'really' bogie in the creek."

And I know that what she says is true, and that what the black boy points to is true, and that what we can all see standing there way out in the moon is true— the indescribable something that the child thinks is a fairy story coming real— coming very, very real— most "really" true.

Then, my eyes are fixed like a prism upon the night. A night in the bush that is like the morning of another world. In the clearness I can see inverted lights that crawl and creep and dazzle-and fall into line— and then blur out again. Just a dim smudge of a difference that is as much an entity as the moving life around. Yes, I know too well that it is a very "really true" bogie going into the creek.

And now my husband, who works till there is scarcely enough of the night left for sleep at this time of the year, is calling to the black boy, who stands still pointing to the line of whiteness through the trees.

"Come here, you devil, and don't waste my time," he says. And the black boy drags up his shoulders and the liquid white of his eyes seems to run all over the black, and there is a picture of fearful fright before me. I cannot tell him to stay, but he understands that he must go to my husband; so I say,

"Can you not hear? Boss— him swear Jimmy make quick and hurry long way in little time."

And he and my husband go off to the yards, and the yards are near— near to that bogie in the creek.

Then again my little child comes to me and laughs. She says in peculiar baby tones:

"Funny bogie— funny bogie— bogie runs all hisself into the water— bogie get drowned."

And out of consideration for myself I put the baby-child to bed, away from the apparition that is so evident and that forms a distinct presence out in the night. I tuck her away out of hearing, out of sight, out of my way— for I cannot answer all her questions about that bogie in the creek.

Later my husband comes to me and says: "Isn't it strange that these niggers imagine so? Now I have seen that spectre or whatever you like to call it, ever since the baby was born— every year I have noticed it about this time. But why get up and shake over it? One must allow the bush it's traditional ghosts, for, after all, they are only made by moon and trees— and here you have the black man getting down on his knees to pray and shiver and talk some heathenish gibberish about devils and such. Jimmy will be useless to me tonight. He keeps coming round and rolling his eyes till you think he's having some sort of fit.

" 'Debil-debil,' he says 'I not go at all now at once him long pfeller make flighten and run himself,' beggar wants whipping."

And to my husband I cannot laugh, for there is no laughter in my soul. And presently, when the black boy has been whipped into subordination by the tongue of the "boss," and he has been made to shut his wide lips over his chattering teeth, they both go into the shed nearer the house and there is much hammering, for tho boss is man who has his next day's work ready before he takes his rest.

And then I make a sudden resolve about that bogie in the creek. I will go down to the water edge— where the duck weed scents the air past the little violet dotted grass, past the line of trees silhouetted, against the moon. I will go down and wait— wait till I can face, without shame and without fear, that apparition that the baby-child says has run into the creek. It is a strange, white, weird, soundless something that has dropped into the glimmering pool.

Black lights cling and shudder at the edge where the grass is long and where the wattles hang low. They dance like wiry phantoms in circles on the water— yet all is motionless. The moon can only reach the rim, for the pool hides its width in shadow and in the shadow I can see the specks of curly blackness which dance so weirdly to the rhythm in my own brain.

Then tho moon dips away from the misty range of bills, a curlew strikes a note and slurs the open sky with a moan of peculiar meaning. A night bird tips wing just softly on the edge or the water and flutters along by my feet. No, I am not frightened now.

Only once I was afraid of the bogie in the creek.

Once— once— the bogie was a real one. He used to come and stand looking at me through my window, and he used to say:

"Come, let me steal you away— come, let me carry you from your father. I am your master, come— come, come." But that was before the baby-girl; and before I cared. My husband was but a dear dream of the best in myself, and the best in myself had not been born then.

The bogie used to come and lean on the rail fence of my father's land, right out there in the dense country. He used to smile and say.

"I am your master. I shall steal you away." And one foolish day I believed him— and— I allowed him "to steal me away."

We went into strange places, where my father could not find me, where even God seemed to have forgotten that we wanted light. For days and days I give him all his pleasure and thought it mine, too— thought with a mind of a girl unbroken, a girl who had never been in the traces, a girl who only thought— and never knew— about love. There was no baby-child, and the bogie signed me down as his wife at a tumbled down store where such things were made legal by the government, which didn't trouble much about it or come any nearer to see that it was correctly observed afterwards,

I was a signed and delivered bond— I was the wife of the bogie— but there was no little child— no baby-child to tell me things.

And as the years went on, and the bogie grew in giant-terrorism I knew that he was my master as well. I had no mind to stir when he wanted to remain hidden, or to do unlawful things with other men's cattle, except when he bid me take a hand. I learned that the brand belonging to my own father's cattle was easily obliterated by a process worked by the bogie.

In time I knew too, full well, that the loneliness of the far-bush had ended but a greater monotony was in my soul. With the monotony was the sin of utter subjection to all evil— evil made by the man who had become from that time nothing but a fearsome terror which could only be named, even then in those way back years— the bogie of my life.

And for a long time I countenanced the wrong, thinking that my master was strength to a girl alone, and the bush moon never rose in white-washed raiment but that I felt the blackness of my heart and soul like a thing smutted within me. And so we wandered and lived on the fizzing froth that came up from the gush of a stream that flowed easily and splendidly through a world of sin.

Branded cattle, the double brand branded souls that in the end made but the double sin.

Then there came a time that I fled. I fled like a water rat that dreaded the things that it had done. Like the vermin in the slime of years I scrimmaged my way along the edge of the country, and hoped— hoped that none would cast the stone— and again I fled, and after that— I fell no more.

And the bogie remained in the dense country, tracing me where he could, but never coming far among the denizens of men to hinder me again. Once he found my steps lagged by a mental weariness, but he could only get words to me.

"Come back, or I shall treat you with fire— come back, or I shall make a different kill."

And this I dreaded more than the sin. And again he found me lying in the bed of a hospital, and he laughed. It was then that I felt how great a bogie he was to me. He could not kill me there, but he told me calmly what he would do.

"I shall take you out to the furthest mountain-top," he said, sitting there while I writhed in my weakness. "Take you out and feed you on the winds and the darkness. Your father has forgotten you; I made him do that— he knew you left with me, and he knows now that we have lived on the profits gained by his fattest stock. He does not want to remember you again."

And all this was as a fresh burning of my soul, and I felt the brand that he had put upon me cutting still deeper into my whole life.

"....I will make you mine by stronger means," he said, when he had found me there in the sick ward of a small town where I could flee no more. "I shall brand you on the arm— and across the shoulder near your left breast: and if necessary I shall mark you on the forehead, just under you waving hair your pretty hair will not cover it in the wind if you run away— you will walk quietly after that."

And I lay and thought and spoke not at all. I just lay and thought and planned. He would brand me as he had branded other men's cattle— brand me over the shoulder and the left breast. Upon my brow, too, if necessary— the brow my mother kissed when I was a tiny baby-girl ' lying dying in her arms.

Would he brand me with the mark of sin and sear me with his horrid name? Had he not done so already? Would he do it with irons of fire to show that I bore his shameless name indeed? Would he keep me chained to the mountaintop— or no chains would be more necessary to hold me there than the thoughts of what he had done. I should not care to be an outcast marked among women who lived only good lives in the quiet, spotless white bush.

God— how I thought that night!

I crawled afterwards from my bed unnoticed. I found the cupboard where the good women who attended to me usually kept my clothes. With them under my arm I ran into the night, and all behind me and around I could hear the steps of the bogie though he was not near enough to even know had

escaped. I could hear his laugh and see the branding iron upheld to torment me.

My brows went into drops of sweat and my eyes filled with pain. My strength had not returned sufficiently in the days I lay abed to enable me to keep my footing and my senses, as I fled. Streaming down my body I could feel a frightful agony of pain from my left breast— the brand was sinking deeper— yet my steps were not being followed. I lived the pain thirty times that night lived as I ran and as I stumbled into the blurred light, that came suddenly in front of me. I fell into the arms of a giant-man standing at the door of a small hut, and he seemed stronger than the mountain top.

And that was all for a time.

The next thing was— my death. I mean, the death of all the bad things in my life, the death of my name, the name of the bogie— my father's name; and everything that had a part in my world up till then. I became a different being, created in a fresh, pulsing, atmosphere-moving, breathing and enjoying the things about me as if they had just been there familiar to me since the beginning. I never woke from that state of drugged memory till I had married the giant, married the good deliverer of my poor tortured body, in all splendid faith with my own soul, I married him and said that my name was his, thinking in my new mind that this was correct. My brain had burned out and had been relighted from the moment that I had touched the safety of the giant man's arms.

The pressure on my deceased mind had kindly obliterated the real trouble for a time and I was certain that I was just a girl again who had never fallen. I could not remember all the years that I had travelled along. That part of me was my death. Afterwards I thanked God for the oblivion.

And with the giant-man I thrived, with him grew affluent, and when the baby-child came, we moved to another place— the place where I have stood mother and wife ever since— the place where there is nothing to bother me now— but a bogie in the creek.

My broken memory was not mended till one night-one strange, weird, pulsing night, when in a white moon-fog I wandered along looking for a little lamb that the baby had lost, and which I wanted to rescue from the dew.

As I wandered I stumbled over a rock hidden in the long grass and by the rock was a man asleep-his face was hidden in the grass, but his body l recognised. God! Like a match suddenly struck on a raspy surface, I remembered all.

This was the bogie of my life, the bogie that I had run away from when I was weak and ill. The bogie who had stolen me from my father and made me do the things unlawful and unfilial, in my ignorance.

This was the bogie who had threatened my life till my mind had gone out.

Behind me I could see the house and hear the baby-child— so very small then— chuckling as the giant-man my husband, tossed her about in his arms. My whole world was there with those two, and the end of that world was here if this wretched man woke now. The end— with this bogie so near so near to the creek.

My startled senses gripped me into action at once; the whole stream of trouble broke upon me, and I knew that my heart was filled with the hot blood of suffering, not only for myself, but for those two whom I had wronged when I had taken up this second life, in my mental aberration. My head throbbed with the pain, and my heart emptied again of the hot blood so that I remained cold and shivering. The knowledge that had just come upon me was like a living death, and I began to pray without a movement or a breath from my body. Mine was the chance to take, and keep the world that I had made— to keep the giant-man and the baby-girl— mine the chance while the bogie slept with the breath exuding through his brutal nostrils from his powerfully drugged lungs. How heavily he slept? He must have been drinking until he had lost his way-lost his way to mine-my way my way, oh, God.... he had found my way at last.

I leaned nearer with my body lost in the grass behind him-my fingers on his neck did not make him stir, and when I ran from him he did not move or alter his heavy breathing.

I got two bricks from the yard, and some thin wire rope, and I bound the bricks so that they could not slip, and I caught the noose about his thick neck.

He only laughed with the dreams of a debauch in his tones, and I carefully rolled him.... rolled him.... rolled him, down the incline through the soft grass— soft for a death like this.

With my madness of strength I could move him quite easily, and when be touched the water all things laughed as he had done. I could hear the ripples as one hears a merry laugh from a stranger in the dark, and the ripples' were in the blackness of the water, and the shining depths were made into rings and rings of joy in my soul. Ripples and ripples were there, and rings and rings widening and widening— then bubbles and bubbles, and a squeeze of air pressed from underneath to the open where I stood. Then a final sound of a weight dropped, and the same faint ripples, dying wide and wide.

And now there is a bogie in the creek. My husband is in the sheds still, with the black boy, and I am here alone waiting, waiting for the wraith of the past to rise from the black slime of the pool, and confront me with its vengeance.

Vengeance? Is that what the bogie demands for my deed, so neatly executed and so carefully hidden? The sentinel of the past is saying to me:

"You shall go no further into the future's swelling tide of happiness, till you have paid for the wickedness of the past."

What then does the sentinel demand? Shall I drop my body quietly into the slime of the pool to compensate the evil but half effaced by the dark water? No. for the double deed would not repay. The bogie waits to return again and again to frighten me into just payment. Again I turn and look to the house. In the shed I can see a light— the men continue to make ready implements for the morrow. Then— through the haze of moon and shadow, I fancy I see a wisp of a filmy whiteness rise and curl just where the living-room of the house is situated, a stone's throw from the shed.

It circles into larger clouds as I run a few steps nearer to try and discern what it means. Just then my husband comes from the shed, and hurriedly, as if he had been called away. I hear him shout as he reaches the house, and he does not hurry out again.

Tripping and stumbling, I reach the room myself, where a few minutes before I had left a quiet, and a log burning on the hearth. The fire, had been replenished by the black boy, so that they could heat the soldering irons required by my husband.

Stroke blinds me as I reach the room my husband is beating out small flames that mount the curtains and eat the coverings about the place. While he is doing this, I stumble again, and pick up my child— my little, baby-child, who has become a thing blackened about the head and arms by her fall into the fire.

"Good God— she must have walked in her sleep," I hear my husband say but I am losing consciousness. The black boy has come creeping in on his hands and knees, and in my ears sounds his words again, "Debil-debil," and I know it is true, for there on the little child's forehead, is the mark of the iron bars across the fire place.

I shiver as I grip my senses, only to lose them again.

For there are two lines seared across the baby flesh— two lines, creasing the width of her small chest— two lines forcing the double brand that had been used by the bogie once— once long ago and now again, when the spirit had bidden the baby-child to walk in her sleep.

The Sentinel of the past changes over. I have paid.

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17: A Tree that Grew Awry

Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

The Bulletin (Sydney) 15 Feb 1896

Australian poet and author.

LONG AGO, in the dark dawn of our history, a man and woman met and married in Sydney settlement. They had been convicts, but specious liberty, in the shape of a ticket-of-leave, was granted them on their union. They built a little shanty on the Western road, just outside the settlement, and there they made a home. A few months after there began in them a moral revolution. Perhaps it was due to some far-off Puritan forbears, with white blood and starved desires, that these people suddenly recognised that life for them was a foul and loathly thing.

A twelve-month afterward a girl-child was born.

On the night of its birth, the father came to the mother, some seeds in his hand.

"Wife," he said, "these are from the crooked gum-tree on the hill. Shall I plant them as we agreed?"

"Plant them," she answered, "I will abide."

He kissed the mother and the child, and took a spade and went away. Where the soil was soft he dug a hole, put in the seeds and covered them up. Then he came back.

"Wife," he said, "it is done. I have given them a fairer chance than the parent, and as the tree grows we will do."

The wife said nothing, but clasped her hands across her eyes, and perhaps prayed.

This man and woman were said to be half-witted. It was held that a long life of crime had sapped their reason. They were called the "Crazy Couple." And yet some there have been of whom the same was said who saw great truths and gathered them for their maligners.

A year after, the seeds had sent up a sprig to the height of a foot, and the girl could just walk. She was a pale little creature with a few pearls under her lips.

Every evening the parents took her hands and led her to the young tree. There they would stand, with beating hearts and bowed heads, watching it for an hour at a time. Sometimes they smiled and were happy, but once the wife drew a curved line in the air with her finger, and went away weeping.

Up and down the road in front of the house went a good deal of traffic. Once the Governor rode by, in his naval uniform and cocked hat, and with a

sword at his side. By him rode his lady, and the man, the woman, and the child came to the door and looked at her. She was a pale, sweet being, and had done many good deeds.

"If the tree grows straight!" said the woman, and sighed.

Another time, as they stood outside, they heard shouts and songs, and up the long road came a party of cursing men and a drunken woman. The husband and wife looked at the woman, but let the men pass unnoticed. She was a grand creature, rich with spoilt beauty, delirious and songful. As she passed, she turned and laughed at the couple for a curious pair, and went round a bend in the road with her arm about a convict's neck.

"Wife, if it should grow crooked?" said the husband.

THREE YEARS passed, and the youngster had grown a strange child. Children of four are usually full of prattle. She was silent. Those who met her described her as uncanny. It seemed as though she knew that Fate, in the semblance of Nature, was shaping her destiny. She had an old soul in a young body, they said. Perhaps they were right. Children of this description are rare. They are beings of the twilight, and live in a grey world. When they cry it is as if an old anguish deepens their sobs. When they smile a wintry white gleam shines from a distance. Yet it may be the child's unchildishness was due to her environment. On one side was the great grey forest where the shadows moved with the sun, and the silent ants crept to and fro in long files. On the other was the bloated human world, scarred with crime and malice, with which she must not mix. How should the young life shape between these?

At length came a day in the summer when the husband said to the wife— "The young tree grows awry."

The wife answered, "Nay, it is no time to judge. Let it strengthen— it may grow straight."

But the man replied: "Put on your cloak and come. There is something I would show you."

Then they walked through the gum-trees, the child between them. As they neared the settlement others joined them. The man, the woman, and the child were very silent; but of those that joined them many danced and more sang. They looked so merry as they journeyed on that the woman, turning to her husband, asked what festival was being celebrated.

"Wait and see," replied the man, and said no more. But a convict, hearing the woman, shouted, "A festival, aye a festival, and Old Merriment dances her last dance."

The man and woman, slackening their pace, endeavoured to draw apart from the crowd. But a brazen woman with thick blue lips came and kissed the

ex-convict's wife and held rum to her mouth. She thrust the creature aside and spat in the dust.

"Hush!" she said, covering the child's ears with her hands, "for the little one's sake be quiet!"

When the woman had gone the husband and wife looked into each other's eyes, and a heaviness was there.

"Husband, it is an ill world."

"Aye, wife, and shame to keep it going. "

Towards noon they came to a camp crowded with soldiers and convicts. On a scaffold stood a big woman with yellow hair and round, red lips. It was the same, that some time before had passed the ex-convict's home.

"Who is that?" said the ex-convict. (And to his wife, "Listen.")

"The Wife of the Regiment," answered a soldier.

"Old Merriment, we call her," added a convict.

"Hold your tongue, Swiper, or I'll slice it," said the soldier.

"Why do they hang her?" asked the ex-convict.

The convict made a coarse joke and ducked his head to avoid the soldier's musket. But the military man laughed, nevertheless, and called the convict "a damned scurvy nag." Everyone seemed happy except the man, the woman and the child.

"She struck the sergeant with his bayonet."

And now all eyes were turned on the grand animal standing on the scaffold and the pale chaplain beside her. As they fixed the rope about her neck, the chaplain whispered in her ear. She paid no heed to his words, but threw back her golden head, swept the crowd with her large eyes, and sang a song of the "Currency Lass." In this wise they shoved her off the scaffold. They did things rudely in those days. But they do the same things now. It is only in the polish they have added that the difference lies.

When the crowd had broken up and gone the husband said:

"She was once a girl."

"And perhaps innocent," said the wife.

"Nay, never that."

Who knows? " the wife answered— "some are born white."

"Yet, whether or no, it is better she hangs there," replied the husband.

"Had fairer things happened, husband, she might have been a good woman. "

"They did not," said the man; "but instead the wind hailed always from the one quarter, and blew the tree awry."

Then they looked at the child, and a chill blackness swam before them. The woman clenched her hands.

A strong nor'-easter blew, and the sky was marbled with a stretch of cloud. They turned about and faced homeward.

That night, as they sat by the open door, the man and woman talked.

"Wife, are you satisfied?"

"Is there no escape?" she asked.

"None."

"No God?"

"Nay, I do not know," said the man, "I have never seen Him, nor felt His hand."

The sky had grown black as ink. One level leaden cloud roofed the earth. As they paused, staring at each other through the dark, they felt the nor'-east wind was dying. It was soughing like a lost wind with a low, dreadful plaining that hinted of unquiet waters and dead men on frothy seas.

The man rose.

"Wife, cursed be the hour that made the thing necessary!"

"Husband," the woman answered, "we were thoughtless."

"It is no crime we do, they cannot call it crime. The crime would be in not doing it."

"Husband, perhaps we are wrong."

But the husband took two steps towards the little room where the child slept.

"Wife," he said, "shall I?"

"I love her," the woman answered.

"And I," said the husband, "else there would be no need for this."

The wind was dead now, and no leaf stirred. The man and woman heard their own breathing, and it was quick and loud.

Again the husband said:

"Wife, shall I?"

The wife answered:

"She is young and pretty."

"Remember the Wife of the Regiment," said the man.

"Do it," said the woman shortly.

AN HOUR LATER they came to the settlement.

"We have killed our child," they said.

"Why?" asked an officer.

"Because a tree grew crooked."

18: Vindicated

Dorothy Frances Perry

1879-1937

Australasian (Melbourne) 10 May 1930

Australian poet and author, with several collections of poetry published; and some fiction. Suffering from cancer and depression, she committed suicide a few months after her husband's death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Timothy gave the youth adenoids, the fat lady an internal thyroid, and the priest galloping consumption, barely waiting for his departure before be pronounced his diagnosis. At last, to Mr. Timothy's relief, his own turn came. Timothy was a hypochondriac, and his antics were assumed to conceal acute

nervousness. Mrs. Croft's heart beat fast with sympathy, as she followed him into the surgery.

There were more pink azaleas on the mantelpiece, and straight pink curtains. They formed a good back ground for the doctor's fine silvery head and shrewd, florid face. He did not wear spectacles, and looked as if he had just had a bath— the type of man Mrs. Timothy liked. He was sensible, she was sure, and would not unduly alarm Timothy. Poor Timothy had such a horror of symptoms, sickness, and death, though how he had not killed himself long ago with patent medicines she could not imagine.

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

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

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

"Three, I think, Alice."

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

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

"And your appetite?"

"Well— capricious."

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

"You have a maid?"

Timothy settled his tie and slipped on his coat. .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was so exhausted that she did not look up when she heard the nurse re-enter a moment later. Had she done so. she would have been startled by

the girl's expression. Nor did she re-open her eyes when, with a muttered apology, the doctor hurried from the room hard on the heels of the flying pink gowned figure. She just sat on feeling pleasantly tired. The prolonged ringing of an electric bell roused her from her torpor at last, and moving uncertainly to the door, she tottered slowly towards the waiting-room.

No one was there but the doctor and the nurse, who with their backs to the door were kneeling beside something or some one stretched on the floor by the couch. A fit or a seizure, she supposed. She must find Timothy. Timothy had such a horror of epilepsy or violence. Then as the nurse shifted her position and looked up, Mrs. Timothy shrieked like a trapped hare, for her short-sighted eyes recognised who it was that lay in silent majesty at their feet.

Embolism they called it, and pride triumphed over Mrs. Timothy's passionate grief when she heard their verdict. Timothy had cried wolf for the last time, and this thought restrained her as she sank in the lift to the ground floor an hour later wedged securely between Timothy's tall sons.

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

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19: The Tortoise Shell Comb

The Fantasy of a Mad Brain

Roylston Markham

1885-1950

Weird Tales April 1923

"WELL, the ghosts of the men hung at Is-Sur-Tille have company. For myself, I wouldn't even want a photograph of the place. No, sir, not me. I can remember it without that. That's why they've put me in this hospital with all these crazy people. Yet a tortoise shell comb is as good an alibi as any....

"What? Ghosts? No sir, of course not; I don't believe in 'em, not on this side of the Atlantic.... who ever told you I believed in ghosts.

"The hospital interne? If they'd kept me 'round that chateau in the woods at Is-Sur-Tille, it might 'a' been different. It had a queer story about it, that chateau. That's what set me off; that and the fact that I never did like Captain Bott.

"He was hardboiled, that guy was. No, sir; he didn't own that French chateau, although at one time he acted as though he thought he did.... I'm coming to that.

"Over there the frogs said the original owner of the place, in his youth, had fallen madly in love with a young girl and married her. He must 'a' been crazy about her all right because, according to their story, he often was seen combing her hair— yes, sir, the French folks are like that; that's romance— combing her long red hair as it hung over the back of her chair, touching the floor.

"I particularly remember that they said her hair was long, very long, and red, like copper is red in candle light. After a year, she died, suddenly, of heart disease— 'killed by love itself,' one of the frogs said; that's romance, and he, her husband, the owner of that chateau there in the woods at Is-Sur-Tille, left that part of the country on the very day of her funeral. The place, probably, is there yet, like it was when I saw it, late in the summer of 1918.

"The house was set back from the road among the trees. It looked, then, as though it had been deserted for a long time. Most of the furniture had been removed from it, except in one room— I'm coming to that— and the gate leading into the yard had fallen open on one rusty hinge. Grass filled the paths; and you couldn't tell the flowerbeds from the lawns except by the weeds.

"Nobody had used the place, even in wartime, until our outfit was billeted at Is-Sur-Tille. That ghost story of a dead bride begging some one to comb her hair had kept the Frenchies off the place. But Captain Bott was a hard-boiled guy.

"We went into the house late one afternoon, Captain Bott and me. He led the way into the kitchen and through the first floor into a large hall, where the stairs went up to the floor above. Dust was over everything. The only room in the house that looked at all as though it had been occupied in years was that bedroom upstairs where, they had told us, the bride had slept and died. We recognized it because it was the only room in the house where the door was shut.

"We opened it— that is, Captain Bott did— and went in. I stood in the doorway until he swore at me and ordered me to follow him in. The room smelled moldy. It smelled dead- It was a fine room for a ghost. It waa dark in there, but gradually my eyes got accustomed to the gloom enough to make out that there was a bed in it. On the captain's orders, I went to the window to open it for light, but I had to break the rusty hinges of the outside shutters before I could loosen them.

"At the court martial inquiry they wouldn't believe me when I said that was the only reason I went into the room, and on the captain's orders.

"The room was on the north side of the house and the sun was setting, so opening the window didn't help much. There was pillows and a mattress and sheets— yellow sheets, yellow with age— on the bed. The chairs seemed all in confusion. There was another door in the room, probably leading to a closet. It was closed.

"Captain Bott went over and felt of the mattress and patted the pillows— the pillows on which they had said the bride's head, nestled in its mass of copper-colored hair, had rested when she died. Captain Bott was hard-boiled, like I just said. He didn't believe in ghosts.

"He said it was the best shakedown he'd seen in weeks.

" 'I'll damned soon get a good night's rest,' he said.

"And he ordered me to go for some candles and his stuff; and, when I got back, I was to clear the place up. I went. I was glad to go. But I hated like hell to return."

"WHEN I did get back into the house, it was twilight and, inside, as dark as a black cat's belly. Downstairs, in the kitchen, I lighted one of the candles and held it before me in one hand, the other being occupied with the captain's luggage. Then. I went through the first floor into the large hall where the stairs went up to the floor above.

"In the light of my candle at the landing I saw that the door into the bedroom was closed again, as it had been the only room in the house where the door was shut when we first went up there together— the captain who didn't believe in ghosts and I, who did, over there.... No sir, of course not; I

don't believe in 'em, not on *this* side of the Atlantic. But, in the woods, at Is-Sur-Tille at night, that's different.

"And it must be worse, since they hung those men there.... and with Captain Bott who thought the bed of a dead bride was a handsome billet. He was sure hard-boiled, that guy. I hated him for it.

"When I left him to go for the candles, that door had been open. When I returned, it was closed. I didn't like to open it again. But he was alone there in the dark in that bedroom. I knew that if I waited for him to come to open the door, stumbling across chairs and things, he sure would cuss me out— that's the hell of being a private and a servant to an officer; no white man likes it— so, finally, I opened the door, with the hand which held the candle.

"Everything seemed as before, but so quiet. My ears were straining for sound like they used to do at the sudden cessation of barrage-firing. But I heard nothing, nothing at all. And the place smelled moldy. It smelled dead. It was a fine room for a ghost. I thought of it then.

"And, as I stepped across the threshold, I noticed that that other door in the room, probably that of a closet, was open. It had been closed. I thought perhaps that the captain had opened it while I was gone. It wasn't so dark when I left him as when I returned, and maybe he would 'a' been snooping around a bit, out of curiosity, perhaps. I'm not curious like that. But Captain Bott was hard-boiled. And he didn't believe in ghosts. . . .

"All these things I'm telling you about what I saw and thought and felt, they wouldn't hardly listen to at the court martial inquiry.... "I don't know how long it was from the time I lighted the candle in the kitchen downstairs until I stood with it in the doorway of the bedroom of the dead bride. Not very long, probably, because the melting candle grease was just beginning to run hot onto my fingers when I turned to glance toward the bed, wondering why the captain had kept so damned quiet. It wasn't like him.

"And there he was, lying across the bed on his back, the tips of his shoes just touching the floor. Asleep t No. I don't know how I knew he wasn't asleep.... the court martial inquiry kept asking me that....

"But I saw he had something wound round his neck, something that glinted in the candle light like the braid of a woman's copper-red hair. And his hands were above his head. One of them clutched a tortoise-shell comb. I knew he wasn't asleep. I knew he was *dead*! ....

"How I knew, I couldn't tell you nor any damned court martial inquiry on earth. God knows they drove me crazy enough asking me that and what else I saw....

"Didn't I see nothing else? No, but I thought I *heard* or *felt* something move near that black hole where that other door opened yawning into a closet. My candle went out— maybe it was only the night wind from the window— and I dropped it. I dropped the bundle of things belonging to Captain Bott. I crossed the threshold. I went down the stairs in the dark, running.

"I fell at the bottom. I remember that... And I told the court martial inquiry so; 'twas about the only thing those smug guys believed that I told them.... But I was on my feet and out of that house before I knew I had fallen...."

"Ha! I can see it! You, too, think I'm soft-boiled.... So did the court martial inquiry. That's why they sent me here, among these crazy people. But say, Buddy, don't believe what the hospital interne tells you. He's crazy, like the rest of 'em. He's as hard-boiled, too, as Captain Bott was. And that guy was so hardboiled he didn't believe in French ghost stories."

"THAT nut you just talked with tells his story to anyone who will listen," the interne remarked casually, as we returned to the office of the commandant of the Army and Navy Insane Asylum. "Probably you think you've heard a crackin' good ghoet story, but what you really heard was the confession of a crazy murderer who ought to have been the third on the gallows at Is-Sur-Tille."

"Isn't there a haunted chateau at Is-Sur-Tille, and didn't the officer he tells about die in the bedroom there?"

"*Oui, mais certainement*! as the frogs have it. If that chateau isn't haunted, it ought to be. There's a story in the village of the bride's death there. And Captain Bott died there all right enough. But that thing they found twined around his neck 'like the braid of a woman's copper-red hair' was, in fact, real copper— copper wire stolen from a lineman's kit. It might look like hair to a crazy man."

"But that comb?" I persisted, "What about that tortoise-shell comb?"

"That? Oh, the nut stole that, too. It belonged to one of the girls of the town whom the private knew before the captain beat his time with her."

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20: Hey, Waiter!

Robert Benchley

1889-1945

In: *Chips Off the Old Benchley*, 1949

Humourist and movie actor. He wrote countless short funny items for magazines and newspapers, and appeared as a character actor in more than 50 movies. He also starred in a series of "shorts".

MR. PETERS usually had his lunch sent in to his office, since it consisted of a glass of milk and perhaps a wisp of chicken. It seemed hardly worth while to check one's coat and hat at a restaurant for just that, to say nothing of unfolding a napkin and telling a waiter about it. And besides, Mr. Peters was still a little self-conscious in restaurants. Something left over from his boyhood still haunted him with the feeling that he had got into the wrong dining-room. For, in spite of his long list of murder victims, Mr. Peters was at heart a timid and retiring citizen.

On certain occasions, however, he had to go out to lunch, as, for instance, when some out-of-town representative wanted to talk business. Out-of-town representatives can always talk business better when munching on a roll, and tablecloths are notoriously better scratch pads than office stationery, possibly because they cannot be saved and held against the scratcher. So on this particular day (you have no reason to know on *what* particular day yet, but you will have in just a minute) Mr. Peters found himself headed for the Belvidere grill with Mr. Hertz of the Oldtown Drop Forge and Tool company, to settle several unimportant things over a curry of lamb.

Mr. Hertz was no stranger to Mr. Peters, but he was not what you would call a "crony." He was a rather disagreeable man, who always wore a stiff white shirt and a bow tie with a batwing collar, having decided early in his business career that an important man should dress in an important manner. In fact, his dress was one of the few ways that Mr. Hertz had of showing that he *was* an important man. His dress and his attitude toward underlings. In his attitude toward underlings he acted as Mussolini looks. (Come to think of it, when Mussolini is not dressed up as a *carabinieri* or a *bersaglieri* he also seems to be wearing a stiff white shirt and a batwing collar. This is probably just a coincidence.)

As they checked their hats and coats, Mr. Hertz began his campaign to show the employees of the establishment that he was not going to be imposed upon.

"Hang that coat somewhere where you can find it, now," he said to the girl. "I don't want to have to stand around all night waiting when I come out." And

then he added to Mr. Peters: "You have to watch these girls. They're a dumb bunch."

The girl, who was a friend of Mr. Peters, said she would do her best to put the coat where she could remember it. Mr. Peters slipped her a wink and a quarter in advance. It wouldn't be such a great loss, he thought to himself, if Mr. Hertz *did* lose that coat. It was like something you take along on a camping trip in case the nights get cold.

The head waiter, who was also a friend of Mr. Peters, led them to a table by the window, usually considered a choice location by those who like to see what they are eating, especially if it is bluefish. But Mr. Hertz took it as a personal affront.

"What are you trying to do; freeze us to death?" he growled at the head waiter.

His tone implied that the man was a member of a gang in conspiracy to get this guy Hertz at any cost. He even went to the window and examined the casing.

"There's a draft here that would blow you out of your chair," he said. "Give us another table!"

"I thought—" began the head waiter.

"Never mind what *you* thought," snapped Mr. Hertz. "It's what *I* think. I'm paying for this lunch."

And he picked out a table that pleased him better and sat down. It happened to be a table whose occupants had just left.

"And get some of this stuff cleared off, too," he said, adding sarcastically, "unless you are just being paid to wear a dress suit in the daytime."

Mr. Peters laughed apologetically, trying to make the head waiter think that Mr. Hertz was just an old joker. The head waiter laughed, too, but without spirit. Mr. Hertz didn't laugh at all.

"These captains think they own the world," he said to Mr. Peters. "They'd kill you if they could." And Mr. Peters thought that maybe it wasn't a bad idea.

"Now let's see," muttered Mr. Hertz, picking up the menu and turning to the waiter who stood by, "what's here that's fit to eat? Anything?"

"The chicken hash is very nice today, sir," said the waiter.

"You *would* suggest that," snapped Mr. Hertz. "I never sat down at a table that the waiter didn't try to make me take the chicken hash. What do you get, a rakeoff on all the chicken hash you sell?"

The waiter smiled uneasily.

"Good *night*!" said Mr. Hertz. "What a layout. Why don't you have something that people can eat once in a while? What's that you've got on your shirt front? That looks good."

The waiter looked in embarrassed fashion at his shirt front, but couldn't think up a good answer. There was a spot there, but he didn't know what it was. So he said nothing.

"A surly boy, eh?" said Mr. Hertz. "Well, that takes a quarter off your tip." And then, with a knowing nod to Mr. Peters, "*That's* the only language these wops understand."

"Eric is a Swede, aren't you, Eric?" asked Mr. Peters with forced geniality, trying to get the conversation out of its nasty tone.

"Swedes are the worst of all," said Mr. Hertz. "Well, Swede, have you got any mussels?"

"Not this time of year," said the waiter. "The clams are very good, sir."

"O, not this time of year eh? Well, that's the first time I ever knew that mussels had to have a certain time of year. What do they do, just come out in the summer? Why don't you just say that you haven't got 'em? Nobody asked you their habits."

"I'll have some chicken hash," put in Mr. Peters. He really didn't want it, but he wanted to do something to discredit Mr. Hertz.

"Well, you're easier than I am," said Mr. Hertz. "I can't eat any of this truck on here. Broil me a small steak and make it snappy. And have it well done on the edges, too. Don't bring it to me half cooked."

"Any potatoes, sir?" asked the waiter, in evident relief that the first stage of the ordeal was over.

"I *said* potatoes! Are you deaf? *Hashed in cream potatoes!* Do you want me to write it out for you? And some new peas, too, if you think you can remember all that."

The waiter disappeared, perspiring from every pore.

"These waiters give me a pain in the eye," said Mr. Hertz. "They never listen and then when they get out in the kitchen they match to see what they'll bring you. In my traveling around the country I've found that the only way is to treat 'em rough if you want to get any service at all."

"That's one way," replied Mr. Peters, snapping a piece of roll at the saltcellar.

Mr. Hertz drew out of his pocket a neat packet of letters, from which he extracted one. It proved to be something written in connection with the Oldtown Drop Forge and Tool company, and it interested Mr. Peters only slightly more than it would interest you if I were to tell you about it. Mr. Peters would not have been interested in the private correspondence of Lucretia Borgia if offered to him by Mr. Hertz. In fact, Mr. Hertz was in a precarious position, if he only knew it.

A detailed résumé of this document consumed perhaps four minutes, at the end of which Mr. Hertz looked around the room and then banged heavily on the table, frightening Mr. Peters out of his rather sinister musings and attracting the attention of the head waiter.

"Come here!" he shouted.

The head waiter came over.

"What are they doing— fishing for that food out in the river? We've been waiting half an hour."

"I'm sorry, sir," said the head waiter. "You ordered something that took a little extra time to prepare. I'll see where it is.

"Extra time! How long does it take you to put a steak on the fire and broil it? It's been three-quarters of an hour now. I could slap a cow to death and get a steak out of it in the time you've taken."

Unfortunately, the waiter put in an appearance at this moment, bearing Mr. Peters' chicken hash.

"Well, here you are!" snarled Mr. Hertz. "What do you do out there in the kitchen— play chess?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said the waiter. "Your steak took a few minutes—"

"*You're* sorry? What do you think *I* am? I'm *hungry*! My God, I've seen rotten service in my time, but never anything that could beat this. Where's my steak?"

"I'm getting it right now, sir," said the waiter.

Mr. Hertz's voice was now raised to a pitch in which most men speak over a long distance telephone.

"Where's the manager?" he bellowed. "I've stood all of this I'm going to!" And he pushed his chair back like a man about to go and look for a manager.

Now, as any friend of Mr. Peters knows, there is one thing which upsets him probably more than anything else, and that is to be made conspicuous in a public place. And Mr. Hertz was rapidly attaining a conspicuousness usually reserved for men with sidewalk fits. As he turned to project his venom more fully on the members of the restaurant staff, Mr. Peters reached over and dropped something in his glass. And Mr. Hertz, to refresh himself after his tirade, immediately obliged by drinking it.

The waiter came rushing up with the steak, but Mr. Peters was alone at the table.

"The gentleman has left the room, Eric," he said. "I don't think he'll be back for his steak. I'll take the check— and here's something for yourself." And, taking one more bite of his chicken hash, Mr. Peters put his napkin on the table and walked out.

As he passed through the anteroom he sensed a commotion in the gentlemen's lavatory, but, as two hospital attendants seemed to be headed in that direction, he decided to go back to his office.

"You can give Mr. Hertz's overcoat to some good horse," he said to the coatroom girl as he passed. "He won't need it where he's going."

21: A Strange Film Adventure

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

In: *The Mixer*, 1927

Anthony Smith, a gentleman crook (and something of an ancestor of the Saint), appeared in a series of short stories in the 1920s, collected in 1927. His alias was "The Mixer".

BILBAO on a hot day is very hot indeed, but the lady who sat under a red-striped awning on the broad stone balcony of Bilbao's best hotel did not notice the heat. She was young and pretty, though her beauty was somewhat marred by the perpetual frown upon her face, and she was attired after the Spanish fashion in black. On the hotel register she was described as Madame Gilot, of Paris, but the police of half the world knew her as Milwaukee Meg, and the man who had just joined her as Van Deahy— the name he most frequently used.

The girl looked round as he flung himself into a chair beside her.

"Well?" she asked.

"No news," growled her companion. "These Spanish detectives will discover nothing."

She shook her head.

"I don't agree with you. Gonzalez was the cleverest detective in Spain until he went crooked and was kicked out of the force."

"The Mixer is too smart for us."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the girl sharply. "He is no smarter than the police. We've got the better of them for years— I'm not going to knuckle under to an amateur. Do you realise that this fellow has got the. bulk of my fortune?"

The man laughed softly.

"Let me remind you, my dear Meg," he said, "that we have still a very comfortable fortune— quite sufficient to live on for the rest of our lives. I was with you in your desire for revenge, up to a point, but I think that for you to come into Spain on the track of The Mixer, having in your possession considerably over sixty thousand pounds, is an act little short of madness."

"You are afraid of him," she scoffed.

"I am," he admitted. "I am afraid of his ingenuity and genius. Isn't there reason? Look at the matter as I do. Here is a young Britisher, a brilliantly clever man, who decides in cold blood to rob the robbers. Even the two who sometimes assist him— one is an officer of distinguished service, and the other a soldier with a first-class record. If his activities were generally known, he'd have all the sympathies of the public behind him. As it is, the people he fleeces dare not bleat for fear of bringing down the police upon themselves. You and I

have cleared up pretty well," he went on, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, "and, in addition to the money which you have so foolishly brought to Spain, we have very considerable investments in South American banks. Therefore I say, my dear Meg, let us cut our losses and clear out. That was the view I expressed to you on our way back to Devonport when the British destroyer came to our aid."

The woman rose abruptly.

"And that is the advice I reject," she stormed. "If you have got cold feet, why, that's your business. I am going out after the loot right here in Spain, and when I have got that loot, and not before, I will throw in my hand, and retire to South America."

Van Deahy shrugged, and was about to say something when one of the hotel servants came deferentially through the French windows, and said something in Spanish to his companion.

"Show him in," the girl replied in the same language. Then turning to her confederate—" It is Gonzalez," she explained. A few seconds later a stout little man with a heavy black moustache and an unshaven chin followed the servant through the doors on to the balcony.

"Well?" asked the girl.

Señor Gonzalez did not immediately reply. He bowed ceremoniously to the girl and to Van Deahy before he seated himself, then, after mopping his brow, produced a voluminous package of papers, which he consulted from time to time.

"Señora," he reported, "I have been very successful in tracing the *caballero*. He arrived here sixteen days ago in a small motor launch, with two others. He was accompanied by a young lady, a very beautiful young lady. They stayed at the Hotel of the Four Nations, and the lady went back to England by the first boat.

Milwaukee Meg nodded.

"They sent her to a place of safety, eh?" she remarked grimly. "Well, I think they were wise. You've lost your girl, Van."

Van Deahy laughed.

"When I lost my money I lost most of the things that were worth living for," he replied dryly.

"Well?" continued Meg, addressing Gonzalez, "what happened then?"

"Afterwards," replied the detective, again reading his notes, "the three *caballeros* lived for a little time at the hotel, all together, as friends, and then took their departure by the Madrid mail. They arrived in Madrid a week ago, and stayed at the Hotel de la Paix on the Puerta del Sol.

"They are there now?" asked the girl quickly, but the detective shook his head.

"No, Señora, they are not there now," he replied triumphantly. "Gonzalez has traced them back to Burgos, where they are living in a small villa which they have rented from the Marquis d'Algeciras. Apparently only one is there, an English noble gentleman with two servants, but the two servants are the señors who were staying at the Hotel of the Four Nations."

"Yes. One's his valet, and the other his secretary," interrupted Van Deahy, "when he hasn't got other uses for them."

"The secretary is possibly posing as another servant," said Meg, and turned to Gonzalez. "How long are they likely to remain there?" The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"He has taken the villa for three months, though why anybody should take a villa, or even build a villa in Burgos is beyond my comprehension, señora, because it is the most diabolical type—"

The girl interrupted him with a gesture.

"Put your men on to watch the place. Inform me when he leaves," she commanded, "and hold yourself ready to act as I shall direct."

She took a bundle of Spanish notes from her pocket, and handed them to the detective, who received them with a flourish.

"At your disposition, señora," he said, conventionally.

A FORTNIGHT LATER, Anthony and his secretary sat in the secluded orangery of the Burgos villa. The day was stiflingly hot, despite the thunderstorm which had passed that morning, but the garden was shady, and whatever breezes there were came to them from the eastern hills.

"I have often heard the expression 'a castle in Spain'," observed Paul, lazily reaching for a cigarette, "but never realised how sultry such a place could be."

Anthony did not reply. His eyes were fixed far away, and he was biting his lips like a man who was solving a problem.

"That's the third time I've spoken to him," soliloquised Paul, aloud. "If he doesn't feel like answering, or is too hot to talk, it would be a great help if he'd make a significant gesture. Spain is a land of significant gestures, and we've been here long enough to acquire the habit."

"I beg your pardon," apologised Anthony, waking up. "I didn't hear you speak."

Paul laughed.

"She's been back in England over a week now," he remarked, soothingly. "You ought to be getting a letter soon."

Anthony went red.

"What the dickens are you talking about?" he demanded angrily.

"Sorry," murmured Paul. "I thought I was talking about what you were thinking about."

"Don't be an ass," growled Anthony. Paul hastened to change the subject.

"May I ask, in the words of the comic song," he inquired, "'where do we go from here?'"

"Anywhere," said Anthony indifferently. "I thought of taking a trip to Australia. We could work our way down through Spain, and pick up the mail boat at Gibraltar."

"And be picked up on the mail boat at Gibraltar?" exclaimed Paul. "It's a hot place is Spain, but personally, if I may say so, I'd prefer to put in another ten years here."

"Perhaps you're right. It would be risky," assented The Mixer.

"What about your old friend Milwaukee Meg?" asked Paul, suddenly, "has she arrived in South America yet?"

"Milwaukee Meg!" repeated Anthony slowly. "Milwaukee Meg has not even left England— at least, the last time I heard of her she was in Devonport."

"You don't say! Did she go back to England?"

Anthony nodded.

"When I'd relieved her of her ill-gotten gains, the Captain of the ship wirelessed to Devonport, and a destroyer came out. Milwaukee Meg decided to return in that destroyer."

"She was taking a risk," said Paul.

"Milwaukee Meg would risk a lot," rejoined Anthony, "for the sake of getting even with me, and I don't mind telling you it is any odds that her ladyship is somewhere in Spain looking for me with a gun. And talking of guns," he continued, putting his hand in his hip-pocket and taking out a letter, "reminds me that I have had a letter from the big gun from whom I hired this villa."

"The Marquis of Algeciras?"

"The same gentleman," said Anthony. "It appears that this villa of his has a history. It was originally built by the Cid. And now a Spanish film company, the Hispano, has applied to the Marquis for permission to film an historical scene with his chateau in the background. He has written to me a letter full of apologies asking whether I would allow myself to be inconvenienced."

"I always thought you would get on the films sooner or later," murmured Paul.

"I shan't be asked to get on the films. They are bringing their own actors, and this is not a comic film, anyway."

"You do yourself an injustice," rejoined Paul, politely. "When are they coming?"

"In two or three days' time. I've telegraphed to the Marquis that I haven't the slightest objection. And in the meantime the director of the film company, anticipating my agreement, has sent me a florid letter of thanks telling me that he will be here at nine o'clock in the morning with a choice assortment of men in armour, brigands, knights of chivalry, and distressed females."

"Which sounds very interesting," announced Paul.

The Wednesday morning brought the troupe, under the charge of a tall, voluble Spaniard, who spent a quarter of an hour apologising for the liberty which the company intended taking.

Anthony listened, amused and amiable.

"We have one favour to ask your excellency," went on the director, "it is that you yourself will be good enough to keep away from the house, also all your servants, who are in modern garments. The appearance of anyone in twentieth century clothes would, as your excellency knows, detract from the beauty of the film."

"That I see," conceded Anthony. "Exactly what is going to happen?"

The tall man explained that the story was of a beautiful señora who was imprisoned in the house, and who begged the help of a passing knight from an upper window. The beautiful señora was apparently to be a nun of the period.

"She'll be veiled, then?" asked Anthony quickly.

"Certainly, senor," replied the other. "The nuns of the period were closely veiled."

"And the knight? What of the knight?" continued Anthony, who was now thoroughly interested. "Will his face be seen?"

The other shook his head with a smile.

"No, senor, the knight will have his visor lowered."

"Oh, yes," said Anthony softly, "will you tell me the names of the excellent actor and actress who will play these parts?"

But here the director could not assist him. They were great actors who had been specially engaged for the parts, and they were French, he understood. In fact, the idea of the film had come from France, and the director had only to gather together the subsidiary actors and work according to the scenario provided by his French employers. He expected the leading actor and actress at any moment, he said, glancing at his florid watch. They were staying at a small inn about twenty miles away, and were arriving by motor car.

Afterwards they were leaving directly for France. This the director knew because he had seen their baggage strapped to the carrier at the back of the big touring car that had brought them to the village.

"I see," said Anthony, and went in search of his secretary.

"Tell Sandy to pack up our things in as small a compass as possible," he directed in a low voice. "Shift them to the little wood, which is three or four miles on the northern road. If you see a motor car approaching, keep out of sight."

"What's the matter?"

"I'll tell you all about it later. I'm going to give you the joke of your life. Wait for me in the wood, both of you."

"If there's any trouble coming along," began Paul, but Anthony stopped him.

"Do as you are told, like a good boy, and that's all the help I require."

It was not until eleven o'clock that morning that the big car, after bowling down the road in a cloud of dust, came to a purring halt before the great gate which led to the villa's garden. From this car emerged two strange figures—one a man dressed in silvery armour, the other a veiled, slim figure. They were greeted effusively by the director and his little bunch of medieval-looking actors.

"Everything is in readiness," he said. "The señor who occupies this house has given us full permission to do as we please. Let me show you the way into the house, señora."

The veiled figure murmured its thanks, and followed the tall director down the path, through the great doors of the villa, into the cool flagged hall.

Here Anthony was waiting, a nonchalant figure in white duck. He offered his hand to the nun, and murmured a few commonplaces in French. The girl shrank back for a second before taking the hand that was offered to her, and the director led the way up the stairs to Anthony's bedroom (for such it was) from whence she was to be rescued.

Anthony strolled out into the garden, and watched the play for a few minutes before walking away. The tall director grew apoplectic in the course of the rehearsal that followed, only the knight in armour being exempt from his frantic directions.

"You will stand here, Pizario."

"But—"

"You will register on your face a look of villainy— fool, that is not villainy, that is stupidity! You, Gomez, will walk across the courtyard like a soldier, glancing up to the window where the señora is imprisoned. Now, monsieur,"—he turned to the man in armour, "you will come forward, keeping within range of the camera, and when I say 'right' you will draw your sword and attack these men. Then the lady will let down a ladder, up which you will climb."

Van Deahy, perspiring behind the closed visor of his helmet, cursed the director and his artistic sense, and looked up through the bars of his helmet to the room where Milwaukee Meg was, as he knew, making her inspection of the Mixer's treasure-house.

He had to give her time. There might be cases to open, as indeed there was a case by the side of the bed, and Milwaukee Meg was at that moment manipulating keys very deftly and cleverly— but for all he knew there might be a dozen and one handicaps, and it was Van Deahy's business to delay the taking of the scene until Milwaukee Meg was ready.

Presently she appeared at the window and gave a signal. So she had been successful. His heart leapt joyfully at the thought. He had been against this expedition, and had opposed it, but now he forgot all his objections in the sense of achievement.

The girl at the window held clutched against her breast a stout package wrapped in black silk paper, and there was exultation in her voice when she cried—

"Got it!"

To the confoundment of the film director, she did not drop a rope ladder over the sill, but disappeared, and came down a few moments later through the door.

"Got it!" she cried again, and then in Spanish. "The picture-taking is postponed, señor."

"But— but— but—" wailed the director. "I have all the people here."

"It is postponed," she said firmly. "Come."

She gripped the mailed arm and walked rapidly back towards the car, but the gate which had been open was now closed and locked, and through the steel bars she witnessed a sight more remarkable than any she had expected to see that day.

The chauffeur of her car was gone— he had been sent to the kitchen by the obliging gentleman who now sat in his place.

Anthony turned to the "nun" with a grin.

"My trick, Meg," he smiled. "I see you've got your bags packed, and I guess the rest of your loot is on board this car somewhere. You hired this company from France— a clever idea!"

The girl tore the veil from her flaming face, and her eyes were hard with hate.

"That's a fair exchange, Mr. Mixer," she cried, and held up the packet in her hand.

"Old newspapers, my darling," said Anthony. "I planted them for you the moment I'd tumbled to your trick. So long!"

As the car moved forward the girl pulled a pistol from her blouse and fired twice. Before a third shot could be fired Anthony and the car had disappeared round the wall, and she saw him speeding up the north road toward the wood now shimmering in the heat haze, where his two companions were waiting for him.

A week was to pass before she heard from The Mixer again. The letter that came to her was addressed to Milwaukee Meg, and she found it stuck in the letter rack of her Bilbao hotel.

"Dearest Meg," the letter ran*, "I have left Spain, and business having lately been so prosperous, I intend to take a holiday. I should feel tremendously guilty if I thought I had taken your every penny, but I have an idea that you have still enough money to live upon, so that my conscience is not pricking so vigorously as it might otherwise do. If you wish to keep what you have, do not follow me. It may interest you to know that I am devoting half of the treasure you so kindly had waiting for me in the car to the establishment of an extensive farm in the colonies to be run by ex-service men. If you will advertise your address in the agony columns I will arrange for them to send you the first lamb born on the estate.— Yours sincerely, 'The Mixer.'"*

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22: Ring Around a Rosy

Sinclair Lewis

1885-1951

The Saturday Evening Post, 6 June 1931

T. ELIOT HOPKINS was a nice young man at forty-two, and he had done nicely all the nice things— Williams College, a New York brokerage office, his first million, his first Phyfe table, careful polo at Del Monte, the discovery that it was smart to enjoy the opera and the discovery that it was much smarter to ridicule it. In fact, by the time he had a penthouse on Park Avenue, Eliot understood the theory of relativity as applied to the world of fashion— that a man is distinguished not by what he likes but by what he is witty enough to loathe.

As for Eleanor, his wife, she came from Chicago, so naturally she had a cousin married to a French count and another cousin who would have married an Italian marquis if it had not been discovered that he was already married and not a marquis. Still, he really was Italian.

Their first year in the penthouse was ecstatic. Thirty stories up, atop 9999 Park Avenue, looking to east and north and south, it had a terrace exclamatory with scarlet wicker chairs, Pompeian marble benches, and a genuine rose garden attended by a real gardener— at three dollars an hour, from the florist's. On the terrace opened the duplex living room, fifty feet long, its Caen stone walls and twenty-foot windows soaring up to a raftered ceiling of English oak. But to a nosey and domestic mind, to one who had known Eleanor when she lived in a six-room bungalow in Wilmette, these glories of city-dominating terrace and castle hall were less impressive than the little perfections of the apartment: The kitchen which was a little like a chemist's laboratory and more like the cabin of an electric locomotive; the bathrooms of plate glass and purple tile, and the master's bathroom with an open fireplace. Through this domain Eleanor bustled for a year, slipping out to look across the East River to the farthest hills and gas houses of Long Island, dashing inside to turn on the automatic pipe organ, plumping down at her most Art Moderne desk of silver, aluminum and black glass to write dinner invitations. And they entertained. Vastly. These gigantic rooms demanded people, and sometimes there were forty guests at the unique diamond-shaped dinner table, with five old family retainers sneaked in from the caterer's. With such a turnover of guests, there weren't always enough bank vice presidents and English authors and baronets and other really worthwhile people on the market, and Eleanor had to fall back on persons who were nothing but old friends, which was pretty hard on a girl. So she was not altogether contented, even before things happened.

They were important things. Eliot sold short before the stock-market depression. His first million was joined by two others, and he immediately took up reading, art criticism and refined manners. He also bought new jodhpurs. I am not quite sure what jodhpurs are, but then T. Eliot hadn't known, either, six years before. They have to do with polo, though whether they are something you ride or wear or hit the ball with, I have not been informed. But I do know that Eliot's jodhpurs were singularly well spoken of at Meadowbrook, and whatever else they may have been, they were not cursed by being American. They were as soundly English as cold toast.

Now, selling short at a time when everyone else is dismally long is likely to have a large effect on nice people, and Eleanor agreed with Eliot that it was shocking— it was worse than shocking, it was a bore— that they should have to go on slaving their lives away among commercial low-brows, when in England, say, people of Their Class led lives composed entirely of beauty, graciousness, leisure and servants who didn't jiggle the tea tray.

The penthouse seemed to her a little gaudy, a little difficult. With the stupidity of servants, it took her hours a day to prepare for even the simplest dinner party. It was like poor Eliot's having to dash out and be in his office in the dawn, at ten o'clock, and often give up his afternoons of golf because his clerks were so idiotically dumb that he couldn't trust them.

When they had taken the penthouse, a friend of Eleanor's had been so conservative as to buy a quiet little house in Turtle Bay and furnish it with English antiques. Mahogany. White fireplaces. Just a shack. But now Eleanor found the shack restful. The drawing-room did not seem empty with but two of them for tea, and the little befrilled maid was not too humble, as she would have been in the vastnesses of the penthouse.

All the way home Eleanor looked wistfully out of the limousine. She wished that there weren't a law against her walking, this warm June evening. But she wanted to be walking, not on an avenue but in a real certificated English lane— rosy cottages, old women curtsying, nightingales rising from the hedges, or whatever nightingales do rise from; witty chatter at the gate with their neighbor, General Wimbledom, former C. in C. in India; not one of these horrid New Yorkers who talk about bond issues.

When Eliot dragged home, hot, his eyes blurred with weariness, he groaned at Eleanor, 'I'm glad we're not going out tonight! Let's dine on the terrace.'

'But we are going out, my pet! I'm restless. I can't stand this private Grand Central. I feel like a redcap. Let's go to that nice little French speak-easy on Forty-ninth and try to make ourselves believe we've had sense enough to go to Europe.'

'All right. I wish we had gone. If nothing begins to happen in the market— Maybe we'll be abroad before the summer's over.'

The Chez Edouard has, like all distinguished French restaurants, a Swiss manager, Czech waiters, a Bavarian cook, a Greek coat checker, and scenes from Venice painted on the walls of a decayed drawing-room, and, unlike most of them, it has German wine. Eleanor crooned over the thought of onion soup, chicken cutlet Pojarski, crêpes suzette, and Oppenheimer Kreuz Spätlese.

'America— New York— isn't so bad after all, if you belong, if you know where to go,' exulted Eleanor.

Then the waiter wouldn't wait.

Eleanor raised a gracious finger, Eleanor raised an irritated hand, Eliot sank so low as to snap his fingers, and the waiter merely leered at them and did not come. He was attending a noisy group of six business men, who were beginning a sound meal with six cocktails apiece— tip after each round.

'It's absolutely dreadful what America does even to good foreign servants!' Eleanor raged. 'They become so impertinent and inefficient! It's something in the air of this awful country. They're so selfish and inconsiderate— and yet so nice as long as they stay abroad. I wish we were there— in Europe— where we could lead a civilized life.'

'Yes,' said Eliot. 'Little inns. Nice.'

When they were finally served with chicken cutlets Pojarski, and Eleanor had come to believe that after all she would live through it, she encountered the most terrible affliction of all. One of the so noisy interlopers wambled across and addressed her: 'Sister, I just noticed we're taking more of the waiter's time than we ought to. You had to bawl him out before he brought your chicken croquettes. Excuse us! If you and the gentleman would come over and join us in a little libation— Excuse the liberty, but we've got some pretty decent, old-fashioned, house-broken rye, and if we could have the pleasure— '

During this shocking affront Eleanor had gaped at Eliot in terror. He rescued her in a brave and high-toned manner; he said dryly to the intruder. 'Very kind of you, but we have quite enough to drink here, thank you, and we must be going immediately.'

'Imagine a dreadful thing like that happening in any other country! England, for instance!' Eleanor murmured afterward. 'Simply no privacy anywhere in America. Dreadful! Let's get out of this dreadful restaurant.'

Nor was she any the more pleased when the checking girl, whisking her white flannel topcoat across the counter, gurgled, 'Here you are, dearie.'

'And no respect for their betters! Just Bolshiviks!' pronounced Eleanor.

They had sent away the car. Eleanor— as a girl she had often walked six miles on a picnic— suggested to Eliot, 'It would be awfully jolly and adventurous to walk home!'

They came on the new Titanic Talkie Theater— Cooled Air— Capacity 4000. Eliot yawned, 'Ever been in one of these super-movie palaces? I never have. Let's see what it's like.'

'You know what it will be like. Dreadful. Vulgar. But let's see.'

The lobby was a replica, but somewhat reduced, of Seville Cathedral. A bowing doorman, in gold lace, scarlet tunic and a busby with a purple plume, admitted them through gilded bronze doors to an inner lobby, walled with silk tapestry, floored with the largest Oriental rug in the world, and dotted with solid silver statues of negligent ladies, parrakeets in golden cages on pedestals of Chinese lacquer, a fountain whose stream was illuminated with revolving lights, lemon-colored and green and crimson, and vast red club chairs beside which, for ash receivers, were Florentine wine jars.

'Oh! This hurts!' wailed Eleanor.

A line of ushers, young men in the uniforms of West Point cadets, stood at attention. One of them galloped forward and, bending from the waist, held out a white-gloved hand for their tickets.

'I'm paralyzed! This is like an opium eater's dream of a mid-Victorian royal palace. Must we go in?' fretted Eleanor.

'No! Let's go home. Think how nice a cool Tom Collins would be on the terrace,' said Eliot, and to the usher: 'Thanks, I think we've seen enough.'

The stateliness, the choiceness and aristocracy of their exit were a little crumpled by the military usher's blatting behind them, 'Well, can you lay that! The Prince of Wales and Tex Guinan— that's who they are!' And at the door they heard from a comfortable woman enthroned in a tall Spanish chair, addressing her lady friend, 'I always did like a good artistic talkie with Doug Fairbanks and some old antique castles, and like that. I can't stand this low-down sex stuff. Gotta have art or nothing.'

Eleanor had lived in New York so long that she rarely saw it. She did tonight, with liveliness and hatred.

Broadway was turned into a county fair, with orange-juice stands, pineapple-juice stands, show windows with nuts arranged in circles and diamonds, radio shops blaring, shops jammed with clothing models draped in aching brown suits with green shirts, green ties, green-bordered handkerchiefs. The people on Broadway Eleanor lumped as 'impossible'— hoarse newsboys, Hungarians and Sicilians and Polish Jews guffawing on corners, tight-mouthed men with gray derbies concealing their eyes, standing in snarling conferences, silk-stockinged girls laughing like grackles.

'Dreadful!' she observed.

They looked east to a skyscraper like a gigantic arm threatening the sky with the silver mace that was its tower.

'Our buildings are so big and pretentious! Nothing kindly, nothing civilized about them. So— oh, so new!' complained Eleanor.

'Um— yes,' said Eliot.

At home, from their terrace, they looked across the East River, then south and west to the wriggling electricity of Broadway, where tawdry signs, high on hotels, turned crimson and gold and aching white with hysterical quickness. A searchlight wounded the starless dark. And the noises scratched her nerves. Once she had felt that together they made a symphony; now she distinguished and hated them. Tugboats brayed and howled on the river. Trains on the three elevated railways clanked like monstrous shaken chains, and street cars bumped with infuriating dullness. A million motors snarled, four million motor tires together joined in a vast hissing, like torn silk, and through all the uproar smashed the gong of an ambulance.

'Let's get out of it! Let's have a house in England!' cried Eleanor. 'Peace! Civilized society! Perfect servants! Old tradition! Let's go!'

IN THE OFFICES of Messrs. Trottingham, Strusby and Beal, Estate Agents, London, Eliot and Eleanor, once they had convinced a severe lady reception clerk that, though they were Americans, they really did want to lease a house, were shown a portfolio of houses with such ivy-dripping Tudor walls, such rose gardens, such sunny slopes of lawn between oaks ancient as Robin Hood, that they wriggled like children in a candy shop. They had been well trained by reading fiction and the comic papers; they knew enough not to laugh when they read '16 bd., 2 bthrms., usual offices, choice fernery, stbling., 12, garge., 1 car.' So they were taken into favor, and young Mr. Claude Beal himself drove them down to Tiberius Hall, in Sussex.

'The Hall,' he said, 'belongs to Sir Horace and Lady Mingo. You will remember that Sir Horace was formerly solicitor-general.'

'Oh, yes,' said Eliot.

'Quite,' said Eleanor.

'Sir Horace wishes to rent only because his health is not good. He is no longer a young man. He requires a hotter climate. He is thinking of Italy. Naturally Lady Mingo and he hate to leave so charming a place, you will understand.'

'I see,' said Eliot.

'Hush,' said Eleanor.

'But if they find really reliable tenants, they might— you see? But you understand that I'm not trying to do a bit of selling, as you Yankees say.'

'I see. Yes,' said Eliot.

They passed through the gateway of Tiberius Hall— the stone gateposts were worn by three centuries— and saw the gatekeeper's lodge. On the shoulder of the stone chimney were gargoyles that had looked on the passing Queen Elizabeth, and before the latticed windows, with crocus-yellow curtains, were boxes of red geraniums.

Laburnums edged the quarter mile of driveway and shut off most of the estate, but they saw a glade with deer feeding in a mistiness of tender sunlight. 'Not,' mused Eleanor, 'like our dreadful, glaring, raw sunlight at home.' They came suddenly on the Hall. It was of Tudor, pure, the stone mellow. The chimneys were fantastically twisted; the red-tiled roof was soft with mosses; the tall windows of the ground floor gave on a terrace of ancient flagging. But what grasped at her, caressed her, more than the house itself was the lawn at one side where, under the shadow of oaks, half-a-dozen people sat in basket chairs at tea, attended by a butler whose cheeks were venerable pouches of respectability, and by a maid fresh as a mint drop in her cap and apron.

'We're going to take it,' Eleanor whispered.

'We certainly are!'

'Here, we'll really live!'

'Yes! Tea, with servants like that! Polo and golf with gentlemen, not with money grubbers! Neighbors who've actually read a book! Nell, we've come home!'

'THIS COUNTRY,' said Sir Horace Mingo, 'has gone utterly to the dogs.'

'It has indeed,' said Lady Mingo. 'No competent servants since the war. Not one. The wages they demand, and their incredible stupidity— impossible to find a cook who can do a gooseberry trifle properly— and their impertinence! Did I tell you how pertly Bindger answered me when I spoke to her about staying out till ten?'

'You did, beloved. In extenso, if you will permit me to say so, I agree with you. My man— and to think of paying him twenty-two bob a week; when I was a youngster the fellow would have been delighted to have ten— he cannot press trousers so that they won't resemble bags. "Higgs," I often say to him, "I don't quite understand why it is that when you have given your loving attention to my trousers they always resemble bags"; and as to his awakening me when I tell him to, he never fails to be either five minutes late or, what is essentially more annoying, ten minutes early, and when your confounded

Bindger brings my tea in the morning it is invariably cold, and if I speak to her about it she merely sniffs and tosses her head and— but—'

While Sir Horace is catching his breath it must be interjected that this conversation of the Mingos, before the James II fireplace at Tiberius Hall, had been patriotically enjoyed three months before Eliot and Eleanor Hopkins, on their penthouse terrace, had decided to flee from the land of electricity and clamor.

'But,' rumbled Sir Horace, in that port-and-Stilton voice which had made him the pursuing fiend to the sinful when he had been solicitor-general, 'the fact that in the entire length and breadth of England today, and I dare say Scotland as well, it is utterly impossible, at any absurd wage, to find a servant who is not lazy, ignorant, dirty, thieving— and many of them dare to be impertinent, even to me!— this indisputable decay in English service is no more alarming than the fact that in our own class, good manners, sound learning and simple decency appear to have vanished. Young men up at Oxford who waste their time on Socialism and chemistry— chemistry! for a gentleman!— instead of acquiring a respectable knowledge of the classics! Young women who smoke, curse, go about exhibiting their backs— '

'Horace!'

'Well, they do! I'm scarcely to blame, am I? Have I ever gone about exhibiting my back? Have I caused whole restaurants to be shocked by the spectacle of my back? And that is not all. Everywhere! The pictures instead of Shakespeare! Motors making our lanes a horror and a slaughter! Shops that have electric lights and enormous windows and everything save honest wares and shop attendants with respectful manners! Shopkeepers setting themselves up to be better and certainly richer than the best county families! In fact, the whole blasted country becoming Americanized... And cocktails! Cocktails! My word, if anybody had ever offered my old father a cocktail, I should think he would have knocked him down!

'England has always had a bad climate. But there was a day when the manners of the gentry and the charms of domestic life made up for it. But now I can see no reason why we should remain here. Why can't we go to Italy? That fellow Mussolini, he may not be English, but he has taught the masses discipline. You don't find impertinent servants and obscene gentlewomen there, I'll wager!'

'Yes. Why don't we go, Horace?'

'How can we? With this expensive place on our hands? If I were some petrol johnny, or a City bloke, or someone who had made his money selling spurious remedies, we might be able to afford it. But having been merely a

servant of His Majesty all my life, merely devoting such legal knowledge and discernment as I might chance to have to the cause of Justice and— '

'But we might rent the place, Horace. Oh! Think of a jolly little villa at San Remo or on Lake Maggiore, with the lovely sunshine and mountains and those too sweet Italian servants who retain some sense of the dignity and joy of service!'

'Rent it to whom— whom? Our class are all impoverished.'

'But there's the Argentines and Americans and Armenians. You know. All those curious A races where everyone is a millionaire. How they would appreciate a place with lawns! I'm told there isn't a single pretty lawn in America. How could there be? They would be so glad—'

'Though I couldn't imagine any American being trusted with our Lord Penzance sweetbriers!'

'But, Horace, a sweet little peasant villa at Baveno; just ten or twelve rooms.'

'Well— After all, Victoria, why should people of some breeding, as I flatter myself we do possess, be shut up in this shocking country, when we might be in the sun of Italy— and Doctor Immens-Bourne says it would be so much better for my rheumatism. Shall we speak to an estate agent? If there are any honest and mannerly estate johnnys left in this atrocious country!'

ON THE TERRACE of crumbling pink and yellow tiles, sufficiently shaded by the little orange trees in pots, Sir Horace and Lady Mingo sat looking across Lake Maggiore to the bulk of Sasso del Ferro, along whose mountain trails perched stone villages. A small steamer swaggered up the lake; after its puffing there was no sound save goat bells and a clattering cart.

'Oh, the peace of it! Oh, the wise old peace of Italy!' sighed Lady Mingo, and the wrinkles in her vellumlike cheeks seemed smoother, her pale old eyes less weary.

'Yes!' said Sir Horace. He was not so pontifical as he had been at Tiberius Hall. 'Peace. No jazz! No noisy English servants yelping music-hall songs and banging things about!'

From the kitchen, a floor below the terrace, a sound of the cook banging his copper pots, and a maid yelping a few bars of Traviata.

'Yes! The sweet Italian servants! So gay and yet so polite! Smiling! And the lovely sun all day! Why we ever stayed— Oh, Horace, I do hope I shan't be punished for saying such things. Of course England is the greatest country in the world, and when I think of people like my father and the dean, of course no other country could ever produce great gentlemen like them, but at the same time, I really don't care if we never leave Italy again! And those sweet ruins at

Fiesole! And the trains always quite absolutely on time since Mussolini came! And— Oh, Horace, it's really quite too simply perfect!'

'Rather! Quite! You know, I'd thought I should worry about Tiberius Hall. But that's a very decent chap— that Hoffman Eliot— Hopkins— Eliot Hopkins— what is the chap's absurd name?— quite gentlemanly, for an American. I was astonished. None of these strange clothes Americans wear. I really quite took him for an English gentleman, until he opened his mouth. Astonishing! He hadn't a red sweater or a great, huge felt hat or a velvet dinner jacket, or any of these odd things that Americans ordinarily wear. And now we must dress, my dear. Professor Pulciano will be here at half after seven. So decent of him to rent us this— this paradise!'

HE WAS YOUNGISH and rather rich, but Carlo Pulciano had not remained in the Italian army after the war, though his brother was commanding general of one of the departments, nor would he listen to his sister-in-law's insistence that he blossom in the salons of Rome.

He had previously scandalized them by teaching economics in the University of Pisa, by sitting over buckram-bound books full of tedious figures, and when the Black Shirts had marched on Rome and taken over the country, when it was not wise to speculate too much about economics, Pulciano had the more offended his people by buying this largish villa on the Pallanza peninsula at Lake Maggiore and retiring to his books and bees.

But in that still paradise he became restless and a little confused. All through the morning he would, in discussions none the less mad because they were entirely within his head, be completely pro-Fascist, admiring the Fascist discipline, the ideal of planned industry, the rousing of youngsters from sun loafing into drilling. Then, all afternoon, he would be Communistic or Social Democratic.

But whatever he was, here he was forever nothing. He had no one with whom to talk. It was not safe. And to Carlo Pulciano talking was life; talking late at night, feverishly, over cigarettes and Lacrima Cristi; talking on dusty walks; talking through elegant dinners so ardently that he did not notice whether he was eating veal stew or zabaglione. Forever talking!

He would not have minded turning Fascist complete, provided he might have lived in a place where everyone hated Fascismo, so that furiously, all night, he might have defended it. He admitted, with one of the few grins this earnest young man ever put on, that he didn't so much want any particular social system as the freedom to discuss, in any way, at any time, over any kind of liquor, all social systems.

He longed for Germany, where he had studied economics as a young man. Germany! There was the land where he could talk unendingly! There was the land where, though the Politzei might harry you off the grass, you could say precisely what you thought or, greater luxury yet, say what you didn't think at all, just for the pleasure of it.

Pulciano cursed the fact that he had sunk most of his money in this villa and could not afford to go live in Germany. He had loved Italy; for it he had been wounded on the Piave. He had loved this villa and the peace of its blue lake waters. He had come to hate them both.

He hated the servants— so ready to promise everything and so unlikely to do anything; so smiling of eye and so angry in their hearts. He hated the climate. 'It would be in Italy that we have the chilliest and wettest winters in Christendom, yet the mush-headed people insist it's always sunny and will not put in even fireplaces.' He hated the food. 'I'd give all the confounded pastes and fruits in the world for a decent Mass of dark beer and a pig's knuckle at Munich!' He hated funeral processions, policemen with cocks' plumes on their hats, plaster shrines, the silly wicker on wine bottles, wax matches that burned his fingers, and even— so far was he gone in treason against Italy— cigars with straws in them. But he did nothing about it. He was too busy hating to do much of anything.

He was delighted when the manager of the Grand Hotel d'Isola Bella came inquiring whether he might not care to lease his villa to a crazy English nobleman named Sir Mingo. Yes, for a year.

A week later, with many bundles and straw suitcases, Carlo Pulciano was on the train for Berlin and free talk, free thinking— long free thoughts over long cheap beers.

THE DOCTRINE of most American and British caricaturists, and all French ones, is that every German is fat, tow-headed, and given to vast beers, while every German woman is still fatter, and clad invariably in a chip hat and the chintz covering for a wing-chair.

Baron Helmuth von Mittenbach, Silesian Junker and passionate mechanical engineer, had ruddy hair and blue eyes filled with light. He was slender, and looked rather more English than the Prince of Wales. The Baroness, Hilda, was slim as an icicle and as smooth, and she liked dancing in the night clubs off the Kurfürstendamm, in Berlin, till four of the morning. Neither of them liked beer, nor had ever drunk it since school days.

During the war, which ended when he was thirty, Helmuth had tried to join the flying circus of his friend Von Richthofen. He would have enjoyed swooping, possibly even being swooped upon. But he was too good a designer,

and headquarters kept him improving the tank, and the one time when he sneaked off to try out his own tank at the front, they strafed him so that he stayed back of the line after that, fuming in a room verminous with steel shavings.

He was, therefore, more excited after the war than during it. Now he could take a real part! Now engineers were to be not assistants and yes men, like quartermasters or photographers or royal princes, but the real lords, shaping a new Germany.

He believed that the struggle to rebuild German glory would be a crusade holy and united. Now that the republic had come, with so little blood spilling, the political parties would join; the politicians would give up that ultimate selfishness of insisting on the superiority of their own ideals.

He was certain that the salvation of Germany was in industrial efficiency. They hadn't the man power and raw stuffs of America or Russia, nor the army of France, nor the ships and empire of Great Britain. They must make things more swiftly, better and more economically than any other land. They must no longer grudgingly adopt machinery when they had to admit that a machine could do the work of a hundred men, but take machinery as a religion.

Helmuth took it so. It is definitely not true that Helmuth and the youngish men who worked with him in those driving days thought mostly, or even much at all, about the profits they and their bosses might make out of machinery and rationalization. It was not true that they saw machinery as the oppressor of ordinary men. Rather, they saw it as the extension of man's force and dignity.

Here you had an ordinary human, with an ordinary, clumsy fist. Put a lever or an electric switch into it, and it had the power of a thousand elephants. Man that walked wearily, swam like a puppy, and flew not at all, man that had been weakest and most despicable of all the major mammals, was with motor and submarine and plane, with dynamo and linotype, suddenly to be not mammal at all but like the angels. So dreamed Baron Mittenbach, while he grunted and hunched his shoulders over his drawing board, while in the best parade-ground manner he called a careless foreman an accursed-swine-hound-thunder-weather-once-again-for-the-sake-of-Heaven.

He had gone as chief engineer to the great A.A.G.— the so-called Universal Automobile Trust. His hobbies were light, cheap tractors for small farms, and light, cheap cars. He planned sedans which would sell, when exchange was normal again, for what, in American, would be a hundred and fifty dollars. By night, at home, he planned other devices, some idiotic, some blandly practical— eighteen-thousand-ton liners to leave out the swimming pools and marble pillars streaked like oxtail soup and to cross the Atlantic in three days; floating aviation fields, a string of fifteen of them across the ocean, so that a

fallen plane would never be more than an hour from rescue; a parachute to ease down an entire plane, should the motor die or a wing drop off. Crazy as any other poet, and as excited. But happier.

He had reason at first for his excitement and his happiness. Though the Germans gabbled of every known political scheme, from union with Russia to union with England, they jumped into the deification of modern industry, as schoolboys into a summer lake. They worked ten hours a day, twelve, fourteen, not wearily but with a zest in believing that their sweat was cementing a greater Germany. They ruthlessly stripped factories and at whatever cost put in rows of chemical retorts a quarter mile long, conveyor belts, automatic oil furnaces, high-speed steel.

Helmuth was fortunate in being able to have a decent and restful house not too far from his factory, for though he drove at a speed which caused the police to look pained, he could not, he told himself, take all morning getting to work. There were too many exciting things to do. The factory was in the Spandau district of Berlin, and reasonably near, among the placid villas and linden rows of Grunewald, Hilda and Helmuth took a brick-and-stucco house with a mosaic eagle shining over the tile balcony.

The attic floor had been a private gaming room. Snorting at these signs of idleness and pride, Helmuth stripped out the card tables, roulette wheel, billiard table, dumped them in the basement, and set up a lathe, a work-bench, a drawing board, an electric furnace.

Here all evening, while Hilda restlessly studied Russian or yawned over cross-word puzzles, this grandson of a field marshal, in a workman's jumper and atrocious felt slippers, experimented with aluminum alloys or drew plans of a monorail which would do the six hundred and sixty miles from Berlin to Paris in six hours, with carriages like drawing-rooms, glass walled, twenty feet wide.

It was a good time— for a year. The destruction of the currency did not worry Helmuth; he was convinced that man should be saved by gasoline alone. But after two years, or three, he roused from his dream to see that the German recovery was not altogether a pure, naïve crusade; that the politicians would not forget their petty little differences. There were not two or three parties, as in Britain and America, but eight, ten, a dozen; and these parties clamorously advocated almost everything save total immersion. They advocated the return of the Kaiser, or immediate Communism; they advocated a cautious state Socialism, or wider power for the industrialists; they advocated combining with Austria, or the independence of Bavaria.

Outside the political parties, there were some thousands of noisy and highly admired prophets who had no interest in Helmuth's turret lathes and

r.p.m.'s, but who shouted in little halls and little blurry magazines that the world was to be saved by vegetarianism, or going naked, or abolishing armies, or integrating spoken plays with the movie film, or growing carrots instead of wheat, or colonizing Brazil, or attending spiritualist seances, or mountain-climbing, or speaking Esperanto.

In his worship of clean, driving, unsentimental steel, Helmuth despised equally all cult mongers and all politicians, however famous. They talked; they chewed over old straw; they pushed themselves into personal notoriety. He didn't, just now, care a hang whether he lived under a democracy or a monarchy or a Soviet, so long as they would let him make more tractors.

The more eloquent the politicians were, in their bright oratory in the Reichstag or the jolly conferences at Lausanne and Geneva, the more he hated them. His gods were Duisberg and Citroen and Ford and Edison and the Wright brothers, and since most of the pantheon were Americans, he came to worship that country as his Olympus.

The German politicians talked— all the Germans talked, he snarled. They were so proud of having mental freedom. Yes, snorted Helmuth, and the Irish were so proud of having fairies! Freedom for what— for escape from discipline into loquacious idleness, or for the zest of hard work? He hated peculiarly— doubtless unjustly— the intellectuals whom he had known in the university, who gabbled that there was something inescapably evil about machines; that because the transition from handicrafts to machinery had certainly produced unemployment, this unemployment must always continue; who whimpered that we must all go back to the country and live perfectly simple old-fashioned lives— with, however, telephones and open plumbing and typewriters and automobiles and electric lights and quick mail and newspapers.

'Yah! My picture of those gentry,' Helmuth grumbled to Hilda, 'is that they sit in machine-made modernistic metal chairs, telephoning to one another that they want us to stop manufacturing telephones and just beautifully write them! Good night. Tomorrow I must be up early and write a carburetor and sculp a grease gun.'

Thus irritated, he looked daily more toward America. There, he believed, everybody was united in the one common purpose of solving economic injustices, not by turning every capitalist into a starved proletarian but by making all competent proletarians into capitalists. The more he read American magazines and yearned for American vitality and ingenuity, the more he grumbled about Germany. And his Hilda, who was most of the time happily ignorant of everything he was saying, here joined him.

In America, she had heard, there was no need of servants, because everything was done, and perfectly, by machinery. And she was so sick, she

confided, of German servants since the war. What had got into them? Regular Communists! They no longer had respect for the better classes, and the government was supporting them in their demands. What with compulsory insurance and the law that you couldn't, without notice, kick out even the most impertinent maid, there was no running a house. She longed for electric dishwashers and washing machines, but their landlord was old-fashioned; he would not put them in.

America!

Just when Helmuth and Hilda were keenest about it, he met McPherson Jones, of the Engel & Jones High Speed Tractor Company of Long Island City, who was scouting about Europe looking for new efficiencies. Helmuth spoke a photographic English. Jones and he went to Essen, to the Ruhr, and argued about beer and about torque in aviation. Jones offered him a place high on the staff of Engel & Jones, with a breath-taking salary; and a month later Helmuth and Hilda were on the high seas— to the miserable Hilda it was evident why they were called high.

Helmuth had sublet his house to an Italian, a Prof. Carlo Pulciano, who was going to study something or other at the university. Helmuth did not leave Berlin till a fortnight after he had turned the house over to Pulciano. He called to say good-by, and Pulciano proudly showed him the changes he had made. On the top floor Helmuth did a little youthful suffering. Pulciano had ripped out the lathe, the work-bench, the drawing board, and fitted up the room in imitation of an old Bavarian inn, with heavy wooden tables, stone beer mugs, a barrel of beer, and painted mottoes announcing that men who gave earnest attention to anything save drinking, kissing, singing and snoring were invariably jackasses.

'I tell you,' cried Pulciano, 'here I shall have again the good free talk of my German student days! I am in your Germany so happy! You Germans realize that the purpose of life is not just doing, but thinking, and setting thoughts in jeweled words— and again I get decent red cabbage!'

'Ja?' said Helmuth. It can sound extraordinarily like 'Yeah?'

He groaned to himself, 'Just the old, thick-necked, beer-steaming Germany we have been trying to kill! I want a race stark and lean and clear and cold bathed and unafraid of the song of flywheels!'

WITH HILDA seasick, Helmuth found solace in the smoking room of the steamer. By the end of three days he knew a dozen Americans— a banker, the superintendent of a steel plant, two automobile-foreign-sales men, a doctor who had been studying gross pathology in Vienna.

He expected them to resent his coming to America in rivalry with their earnings; he expected them to smile at his English. But they welcomed him to the tournament. 'Come on! If you can get anything away from us in America, it just makes the game better,' they said; and: 'Your English? Listen, baron. The only trouble with you is, you went to a school where they let the teams weaken themselves by looking at books between the halves. By the way, will you happen to be in Detroit, time of the Michigan-Notre Dame game? Wish you'd come stay with us and I'll drive you down. Like to have you meet the wife and show her up— she thinks she can parley Deutsch.'

'They are,' Helmuth glowed to Hilda, 'the kindest and politest people I have ever known. But just the same, *ich sage Dir bestimmt*, that Mr. Tolson is all wrong about the front-wheel drive.... I wonder about the market for speed boats in Norway?'

He had accepted invitations to Bar Harbor, Seattle, Moose Jaw, Gramercy Square, Franconia Notch, and Social Circle, Georgia, before he saw the skyscrapers from New York Harbor.

'They are my friends! I have never had so many friends— not in my life!' he rejoiced, and with a feeling that the towers of New York were his own, he pointed them out to a slightly shaky Hilda beside him.

'They are very pretty. They are not all worn, like cathedral spires,' he said. 'I wonder what the wind pressure per square meter is with a sixty-kilometer wind? I wonder if electric welding costs more than riveting? I wonder whether the marble here comes from Italy or Vermont? Yes, it is exciting; I am very thrilled.... I wonder what is the tensile strength of the steel in these buildings?'

But his friend, Doctor Moore, the Omaha surgeon, could not answer any of these obvious questions, though he was a real American.

A week after their arrival, Baron and Baroness Mittenbach leased a penthouse atop the apartment house at 9999 Park Avenue. It belonged to some people named Hopkins, now living in the South of England.

They took possession on an autumn afternoon. Hilda raced through the great living room ecstatically. 'I say to you, Helmuth, so a beautiful room have I never seen! Stone walls! And the rafters! Windows like a cathedral! And the organ, quite gold! It is no larger than the great Hall in my father's Schloss, but so much more wonderful. Always I hated those tattered tapestries and the moldy stag horns! But this room is indeed something noble!'

Squealing, with Helmuth beside her and not much less childish, she explored the wonders of the kitchen and butler's pantry— electric dishwasher and coffee urn and toaster and vacuum-cleaner and clock and egg cooker. She couldn't quite make out the electric waffle iron; she wasn't sure whether it was for cooking or pleating. But on the automatic refrigerator they both fell with

shouts. This was a possession they had envied their richer friends in Berlin. They cautiously pulled out an ice tray and gazed with fatuous admiration on the beautiful cubes of ice.

'Much better than diamonds,' said Helmuth.

Refrigerator, gas stove, small electric range, luxurious enameled sink and kitchen cabinet were all finished in white and canary yellow; the kitchen was gayer than any boudoir.

'Already I am a— how is it called?— hunnerd-procent American,' observed Helmuth in what he believed to be English. 'The old system, it was to make beautiful the salon and the chapel, and make hateful the kitchen, the heart of the house. Yes, I am a modern! We do something, we engineers. We do not believe that the more a room is used, the less gemütlich it should be. Modern, yes, and very old. We go back to medieval days, when men were not ashamed to eat and love, and when kitchens were more important than reception rooms, and when—'

'Here,' said Hilda, 'I would be happy if we had no servants at all, and I did all the work. I shall cook the dinner— tomorrow. Tonight let us find that lovely spikizzy— is right?— of which the doctor has spoken on the steamer.'

When, on the wine list of the Chez Edouard, they found an Oppenheimer Kreuz Spätlese, they asked each other why anyone should go to Europe. Their only trouble was that the waiter was a bit slow. But they understood, for he was much engaged with a jolly group of six men at the next table.

One of the six noticed the plight of the Von Mittenbachs and, coming to their table, said, 'Sorry we're grabbing off so much of the waiter's time. Afraid we're holding up your dinner. So, meanwhile— if you'll excuse the liberty— won't you folks come have a drink with us?'

'That would be very nice,' said Helmuth.

He was, after all, a shy young man, and he was grateful for the way in which these strangers took him in. They were all, it seemed, in motor manufacturing. When they learned that he had just come from Germany to join them, instantly a card was out of every pocket, and address was scribbled, and each had insisted that when he went to South Bend, or Toledo, or Detroit, he must dine with them— 'and I hope the missus will be along with you.'

In a glow that burned out of him all the loneliness he had felt that afternoon in the cold shadow of the monstrous skyscrapers, Helmuth returned with Hilda to their table and dinner.

'So kind to a foreigner, a poor unknown engineer,' said Helmuth. 'No wonder no American ever wants to go abroad for more than a visit of a month!'

FROM THE terrace before their penthouse they stared across the East River, then south and west to the wriggling electricity of Broadway. They were thirty stories up; they seemed to be looking on the whole world, but a world transformed into exultant light.

'It is as though we were in a castle on a huge sheer cliff, a castle on the Matterhorn himself, and yet in the midst of Berlin and London and Paris joined into one,' said Helmuth. 'This is perhaps— not true, Hilda?— the greatest spectacle of the world! Why speak they of the Acropolis, the Colosseum, the Rhineland, when they have this magic?'

Tugboats shouted cheerily on the East River; liners roared gallantly from the North River; the elevated trains, streaks of golden light, chanted on their three tracks; and the million motor horns spoke of the beautiful and exciting places to which the cars were going.

'And it's ours now! We've found our home! We shall know all this city, all those people in the lovely motors down there! I think we stay here the rest of our lives!' said Helmuth.

Hilda pondered, 'Yes, except— except neither Germany nor America has any mystery. I want us some day to go to China, Japan. There it gives mystery. And I hear the servants are divine, and so cheap. Don't you think we might go live in China— soon?'

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23: Honor Among Sportsmen

Richard Connell

1893-1949

The Saturday Evening Post, 4 Feb 1922

EACH WITH HIS favorite hunting pig on a stout string, a band of the leading citizens of Montpont moved in dignified procession down the Rue Victor Hugo in the direction of the hunting preserve.

It was a mild, delicious Sunday, cool and tranquil as a pool in a woodland glade. To Perigord alone come such days. Peace was in the air, and the murmur of voices of men intent on a mission of moment. The men of Montpont were going forth to hunt truffles.

As Brillat-Savarin points out in his "Physiology of Taste"— "All France is inordinately truffliferous, and the province of Perigord particularly so." On week-days the hunting of that succulent subterranean fungus was a business, indeed, a vast commercial enterprise, for were there not thousands of Perigord pies to be made, and uncounted tins of *pâté de foie gras* to be given the last exquisite touch by the addition of a bit of truffle?

But on Sunday it became a sport, the chief, the only sport of the citizens of Montpont. A preserve, rich in beech, oak and chestnut trees in whose shade the shy truffle thrives, had been set apart and here the truffle was never hunted for mercenary motives but for sport and sport alone. On week-days truffle hunting was confined to professionals; on Sunday, after church, all Montpont hunted truffles. Even the sub-prefect maintained a stable of notable pigs for the purpose. For the pig is as necessary to truffle-hunting as the beagle is to beagling.

A pig, by dint of patient training, can be taught to scent the buried truffle with his sensitive snout, and to point to its hiding place, as immobile as a cast-iron setter on a profiteer's lawn, until its proud owner exhumes the prize. An experienced pointing pig, with a creditable record, brings an enormous price in the markets of Montpont.

At the head of the procession that kindly Sunday marched Monsieur Bonticu and Monsieur Pantan, with the decisive but leisurely tread of men of affairs. They spoke to each other with an elaborate, ceremonial politeness, for on this day, at least, they were rivals. On other days they were bosom friends. To-day was the last of the fall hunting season, and they were tied, with a score of some two hundred truffles each, for the championship of Montpont, an honor beside which winning the Derby is nothing and the *Grand Prix de Rome* a mere bauble in the eyes of all Perigord. To-day was to tell whether the laurels would rest on the round pink brow of Monsieur Bonticu or the oval olive brow of Monsieur Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu was the leading undertaker of Montpont, and in his stately appearance he satisfied the traditions of his calling. He was a large man of forty or so, and in his special hunting suit of jade-hued cloth he looked, from a distance, to be an enormous green pepper. His face was vast and many chinned and his eyes had been set at the bottom of wells sunk deep in his pink face; it was said that even on a bright noon he could see the stars, as ordinary folk can by peering up from the bottom of a mine-shaft. They were small and cunning, his eyes, and a little diffident. In Montpont, he was popular. Even had his heart not been as large as it undoubtedly was, his prowess as a hunter of truffles and his complete devotion to that art— he insisted it was an art— would have endeared him to all right-thinking Montpontians. He was a bachelor, and said, more than once, as he sipped his old Anjou in the Café de l'Univers, "I marry? Bonticu marry? That is a cause of laughter, my friends. I have my little house, a good cook, and my Anastasie. What more could mortal ask? Certainly not an Eve in his paradise. I marry? I be dad to a collection of squealing, wiggling cabbages? I laugh at the idea."

Anastasie was his pig, a prodigy at detecting truffles, and his most priceless treasure. He once said, at a truffle-hunters' dinner, "I have but two passions, my comrades. The pursuit of the truffle and the flight from the female."

Monsieur Pantan had applauded this sentiment heartily. He, too, was a bachelor. He combined, lucratively, the offices of town veterinarian and apothecary, and had written an authoritative book, "*The Science of Truffle Hunting*." To him it was a science, the first of sciences. He was a fierce-looking little man, with bellicose eyes and bristling moustachio, and quick, nervous hands that always seemed to be rolling endless thousands of pills. He was given to fits of temper, but that is rather expected of a man in the south of France. His devotion to his pig, Clotilde, atoned, in the eyes of Montpont, for a slightly irascible nature.

The party, by now, had reached the hunting preserve, and with eager, serious faces, they lengthened the leashes on their pigs, and urged them to their task. By the laws of the chase, the choicest area had been left for Monsieur Bonticu and Monsieur Pantan, and excited galleries followed each of the two leading contestants. Bets were freely made.

IN A SCANT nine minutes by the watch, Anastasie was seen to freeze and point. Monsieur Bonticu plunged to his plump knees, whipped out his trowel, dug like a badger, and in another minute brought to light a handsome truffle, the size of a small potato, blackish-gray as the best truffles are, and studded with warts. With a gesture of triumph, he exhibited it to the umpire, and popped it into his bag. He rewarded Anastasie with a bit of cheese, and urged

her to new conquests. But a few seconds later, Monsieur Pantan gave a short hop, skip and jump, and all eyes were fastened on Clotilde, who had grown motionless, save for the tip of her snout which quivered gently. Monsieur Pantan dug feverishly and soon brandished aloft a well-developed truffle. So the battle waged.

At one time, by a series of successes, Monsieur Bonticu was three up on his rival, but Clotilde, by a bit of brilliant work beneath a chestnut tree, brought to light a nest of four truffles and sent the Pantan colors to the van.

The sun was setting; time was nearly up. The other hunters had long since stopped and were clustered about the two chief contestants, who, pale but collected, bent all their skill to the hunt. Practically every square inch of ground had been covered. But one propitious spot remained, the shadow of a giant oak, and, moved by a common impulse, the stout Bonticu and the slender Pantan simultaneously directed their pigs toward it. But a little minute of time now remained. The gallery held its breath. Then a great shout made the leaves shake and rustle. Like two perfectly synchronized machines, Anastasie and Clotilde had frozen and were pointing. They were pointing to the same spot.

Monsieur Pantan, more active than his rival, had darted to his knees, his trowel poised for action. But a large hand was laid on his shoulder, politely, and the silky voice of Monsieur Bonticu said, "If Monsieur will pardon me, may I have the honor of informing him that this is my find?"

Monsieur Pantan, trowel in mid-air, bowed as best a kneeling man can.

"I trust," he said, coolly, "that Monsieur will not consider it an impertinence if I continue to dig up what my Clotilde has, beyond peradventure, discovered, and I hope Monsieur will not take it amiss if I suggest that he step out of the light as his shadow is not exactly that of a sapling."

Monsieur Bonticu was trembling, but controlled.

"With profoundest respect," he said from deep in his chest, "I beg to be allowed to inform Monsieur that he is, if I may say so, in error. I must ask Monsieur, as a sportsman, to step back and permit me to take what is justly mine."

Monsieur Pantan's face was terrible to see, but his voice was icily formal.

"I regret," he said, "that I cannot admit Monsieur's contention. In the name of sport, and his own honor, I call upon Monsieur to retire from his position."

"That," said Monsieur Bonticu, "I will never do."

They both turned faces of appeal to the umpire. That official was bewildered.

"It is not in the rules, Messieurs," he got out, confusedly. "In my forty years as an umpire, such a thing has not happened. It is a matter to be settled between you, personally."

As he said the words, Monsieur Pantan commenced to dig furiously. Monsieur Bonticu dropped to his knees and also dug, like some great, green, panic-stricken beaver. Mounds of dirt flew up. At the same second they spied the truffle, a monster of its tribe. At the same second the plump fingers of Monsieur Bonticu and the thin fingers of Monsieur Pantan closed on it. Cries of dismay rose from the gallery.

"It is the largest of truffles," called voices. "Don't break it. Broken ones don't count." But it was too late. Monsieur Bonticu tugged violently; as violently tugged Monsieur Pantan. The truffle, indeed a giant of its species, burst asunder. The two men stood, each with his half, each glaring.

"I trust," said Monsieur Bonticu, in his hollowest death-room voice, "that Monsieur is satisfied. I have my opinion of Monsieur as a sportsman, a gentleman and a Frenchman."

"For my part," returned Monsieur Pantan, with rising passion, "it is impossible for me to consider Monsieur as any of the three."

"What's that you say?" cried Monsieur Bonticu, his big face suddenly flamingly red.

"Monsieur, in addition to the defects in his sense of honor is not also deficient in his sense of hearing," returned the smoldering Pantan.

"Monsieur is insulting."

"That is his hope."

Monsieur Bonticu was aflame with a great, seething wrath, but he had sufficient control of his sense of insult to jerk at the leash of Anastasie and say, in a tone all Montpont could hear:

"Come, Anastasie. I once did Monsieur Pantan the honor of considering him your equal. I must revise my estimate. He is not your sort of pig at all."

Monsieur Pantan's eyes were blazing dangerously, but he retained a slipping grip on his emotions long enough to say:

"Come, Clotilde. Do not demean yourself by breathing the same air as Monsieur and Madame Bonticu."

The eyes of Monsieur Bonticu, ordinarily so peaceful, now shot forth sparks. Turning a livid face to his antagonist, he cried aloud:

"Monsieur Pantan, in my opinion you are a puff-ball!"

This was too much. For to call a truffle-hunter a puff-ball is to call him a thing unspeakably vile. In the eyes of a true lover of truffles a puff-ball is a noisome, obscene thing; it is a false truffle. In truffledom it is a fighting word. With a scream of rage Monsieur Pantan advanced on the bulky Bonticu.

"By the thumbs of St. Front," he cried, "you shall pay for that, Monsieur Aristide Gontran Louis Bonticu. Here and now, before all Montpont, before all Perigord, before all France, I challenge you to a duel to the death."

Words rattled and jostled in his throat, so great was his anger. Monsieur Bonticu stood motionless; his full-moon face had gone white; the half of truffle slipped from his fingers. For he knew, as they all knew, that the dueling code of Perigord is inexorable. It is seldom nowadays that the Perigordians, even in their hottest moments, say the fighting word, for once a challenge has passed, retirement is impossible, and a duel is a most serious matter. By rigid rule, the challenger and challenged must meet at daybreak in mortal combat. At twenty paces they must each discharge two horse-pistols; then they must close on each other with sabers; should these fail to settle the issue, each man is provided with a poniard for the most intimate stages of the combat. Such duels are seldom bloodless. Monsieur Bonticu's lips formed some syllables. They were:

"You are aware of the consequences of your words, Monsieur Pantan?"

"Perfectly."

"You do not wish to withdraw them?" Monsieur Bonticu despite himself injected a hopeful note into his query.

"I withdraw? Never in this life. On the contrary, not only do I not withdraw, I reiterate," bridled Monsieur Pantan.

In a *requiescat in pace* voice, Monsieur Bonticu said:

"So be it. You have sealed your own doom, Monsieur. I shall prepare to attend you first in the capacity of an opponent, and shortly thereafter in my professional capacity."

Monsieur Pantan sneered openly.

"Monsieur the undertaker had better consider in his remaining hours whether it is feasible to embalm himself or have a stranger do it."

With this thunderbolt of defiance, the little man turned on his heel, and stumped from the field.

Monsieur Bonticu followed at last. But he walked as one whose knees have turned to *meringue glace*. He went slowly to his little shop and sat down among the coffins. For the first time in his life their presence made him uneasy. A big new one had just come from the factory. For a long time he gazed at it; then he surveyed his own full-blown physique with a measuring eye. He shuddered. The light fell on the silver plate on the lid, and his eyes seemed to see engraved there:

Monsieur Aristide Gontran Louis Bonticu
Died in the forty-first year of his life on the field of honor.
"*He was without peer as a hunter of truffles*."

May he rest in peace.

With almost a smile, he reflected that this inscription would make Monsieur Pantan very angry; yes, he would insist on it. He looked down at his fat fists and sighed profoundly, and shook his big head. They had never pulled a trigger or gripped a sword-hilt; the knife, the peaceful table knife, the fork, and the leash of Anastasie— those had occupied them. Anastasie! A globular tear rose slowly from the wells in which his eyes were set, and unchecked, wandered gently down the folds of his face. Who would care for Anastasie? With another sigh that seemed to start in the caverns of his soul, he reached out and took a dusty book from a case, and bent over it. It contained the time-honored dueling code of ancient Perigord. Suddenly, as he read, his eyes brightened, and he ceased to sigh. He snapped the book shut, took from a peg his best hat, dusted it with his elbow, and stepped out into the starry Perigord night.

AT HIGH NOON, three days later, as duly decreed by the dueling code, Monsieur Pantan, in full evening dress, appeared at the shop of Monsieur Bonticu, accompanied by two solemn-visaged seconds, to make final arrangements for the affair of honor. They found Monsieur Bonticu sitting comfortably among his coffins. He greeted them with a serene smile. Monsieur Pantan frowned portentously.

"We have come," announced the chief second, Monsieur Duffon, the town butcher, "as the representatives of this grossly insulted gentleman to demand satisfaction. The weapons and conditions are, of course, fixed by the code. It remains only to set the date. Would Friday at dawn in the truffle preserve be entirely convenient for Monsieur?"

Monsieur Bonticu's shrug contained more regret than a hundred words could convey.

"Alas, it will be impossible, Messieurs," he said, with a deep bow.

"Impossible?"

"But yes. I assure Messieurs that nothing would give me more exquisite pleasure than to grant this gentleman"— he stressed this word— "the satisfaction that his honor"— he also stressed this word— "appears to demand. However, it is impossible."

The seconds and Monsieur Pantan looked at Monsieur Bonticu and at each other.

"But this is monstrous," exclaimed the chief second. "Is it that Monsieur refuses to fight?"

Monsieur Bonticu's slowly shaken head indicated most poignant regret.

"But no, Messieurs," he said. "I do not refuse. Is it not a question of honor? Am I not a sportsman? But, alas, I am forbidden to fight."

"Forbidden."

"Alas, yes."

"But why?"

"Because," said Monsieur Bonticu, "I am a married man."

The eyes of the three men widened; they appeared stunned by surprise. Monsieur Pantan spoke first.

"You married?" he demanded.

"But certainly."

"When?"

"Only yesterday."

"To whom? I demand proof."

"To Madame Aubison of Barbaste."

"The widow of Sergeant Aubison?"

"The same."

"I do not believe it," declared Monsieur Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu smiled, raised his voice and called.

"Angelique! Angelique, my dove. Will you come here a little moment?"

"What? And leave the lentil soup to burn?" came an undoubtedly feminine voice from the depths of the house.

"Yes, my treasure."

"What a pest you are, Aristide," said the voice, and its owner, an ample woman of perhaps thirty, appeared in the doorway. Monsieur Bonticu waved a fat hand toward her.

"My wife, Messieurs," he said.

She bowed stiffly. The three men bowed. They said nothing. They gaped at her. She spoke to her husband.

"Is it that you take me for a Punch and Judy show, Aristide?"

"Ah, never, my rosebud," cried Monsieur Bonticu, with a placating smile. "You see, my own, these gentlemen wished—"

"There!" she interrupted. "The lentil soup! It burns." She hurried back to the kitchen.

The three men— Monsieur Pantan and his seconds— consulted together.

"Beyond question," said Monsieur Duffon, "Monsieur Bonticu cannot accept the challenge. He is married; you are not. The code says plainly: 'Opponents must be on terms of absolute equality in family responsibility.' Thus, a single man cannot fight a married one, and so forth. See. Here it is in black and white."

Monsieur Pantan was boiling as he faced the calm Bonticu.

"To think," stormed the little man, "that truffles may be hunted— yes, even eaten, by such a man! I see through you, Monsieur. But think not that a Pantan can be flouted. I have my opinion of you, Monsieur the undertaker."

Monsieur Bonticu shrugged.

"Your opinions do not interest me," he said, "and only my devotion to the cause of free speech makes me concede that you are entitled to an opinion at all. Good morning, Messieurs, good morning." He bowed them down a lane of caskets and out into the afternoon sunshine. The face of Monsieur Pantan was black.

Time went by in Perigord. Other truffle-hunting seasons came and went, but Messieurs Bonticu and Pantan entered no more competitions. They hunted, of course, the one with Anastasie, the other with Clotilde, but they hunted in solitary state, and studiously avoided each other. Then one day Monsieur Pantan's hairy countenance, stern and determined, appeared like a genie at the door of Monsieur Bonticu's shop. The rivals exchanged profound bows.

"I have the honor," said Monsieur Pantan, in his most formal manner, "to announce to Monsieur that the impediment to our meeting on the field of honor has been at last removed, and that I am now in a position to send my seconds to him to arrange that meeting. May they call to-morrow at high noon?"

"I do not understand," said Monsieur Bonticu, arching his eyebrows. "I am still married."

"I too," said Monsieur Pantan, with a grim smile, "am married."

"You? Pantan? Monsieur jests."

"If Monsieur will look in the newspaper of to-day," said Monsieur Pantan, dryly, "he will see an announcement of my marriage yesterday to Madame Marselet of Pergieux."

There was astonishment and alarm in the face of the undertaker. Then reverie seemed to wrap him round. The scurrying of footsteps, the bumble of voices, in the rooms over the shop aroused him. His face was tranquil again as he spoke.

"Will Monsieur and his seconds do me the honor of calling on me day after to-morrow?" he asked.

"As you wish," replied Monsieur Pantan, a gleam of satisfaction in his eye.

Punctual to the second, Monsieur Pantan and his friends presented themselves at the shop of Monsieur Bonticu. His face, they observed, was first worried, then smiling, then worried again.

"Will to-morrow at dawn be convenient for Monsieur?" inquired the butcher, Duffon.

Monsieur Bonticu gestured regret with his shoulders, and said:

"I am desolated with chagrin, Messieurs, believe me, but it is impossible."

"Impossible. It cannot be," cried Monsieur Pantan. "Monsieur has one wife. I have one wife. Our responsibilities are equal. Is it that Monsieur is prepared to swallow his word of insult?"

"Never," declared Monsieur Bonticu. "I yearn to encounter Monsieur in mortal combat. But, alas, it is not I, but Nature that intervenes. I have, only this morning, become a father, Messieurs."

As if in confirmation there came from the room above the treble wail of a new infant.

"Behold!" exclaimed Monsieur Bonticu, with a wave of his hand.

Monsieur Pantan's face was purple.

"This is too much," he raged. "But wait, Monsieur. But wait." He clapped his high hat on his head and stamped out of the shop.

Truffles were hunted and the days flowed by and Monsieur Pantan and his seconds one high noon again called upon Monsieur Bonticu, who greeted them urbanely, albeit he appeared to have lost weight and tiny worry-wrinkles were visible in his face.

"Monsieur," began the chief second, "may I have the honor—"

"I'll speak for myself," interrupted Monsieur Pantan. "With my own voice I wish to inform Monsieur that nothing can now prevent our meeting, at dawn to-morrow. To-day, Monsieur the undertaker, I, too, became a father!"

The news seemed to interest but not to stagger Monsieur Bonticu. His smile was sad as he said:

"You are too late, Monsieur the apothecary and veterinarian. Two days ago I, also, became a father again."

Monsieur Pantan appeared to be about to burst, so terrible was his rage.

"But wait," he screamed, "but wait." And he rushed out.

Next day Monsieur Pantan and his seconds returned. The moustachios of the little man were on end with excitement and his eye was triumphant.

"We meet to-morrow at daybreak," he announced.

"Ah, that it were possible," sighed Monsieur Bonticu. "But the code forbids. As I said yesterday, Monsieur has a wife and a child, while I have a wife and children. I regret our inequality, but I cannot deny it."

"Spare your regrets, Monsieur," rejoined the small man. "I, too, have two children now."

"You?" Monsieur Bonticu stared, puzzled. "Yesterday you had but one. It cannot be, Monsieur."

"It can be," cried Monsieur Pantan. "Yesterday I adopted one!"

The peony face of Monsieur Bonticu did not blanch at this intelligence. Again he smiled with an infinite sadness.

"I appreciate," he said, "Monsieur Pantan's courtesy in affording me this opportunity, but, alas, he has not been in possession of the facts. By an almost unpardonable oversight I neglected to inform Monsieur that I had become the father not of one child, but of two. Twins, Messieurs. Would you care to inspect them?"

Monsieur Pantan's face was contorted with a wrath shocking to witness. He bit his lip; he clenched his fist.

"The end is not yet," he shouted. "No, no, Monsieur. By the thumbs of St. Front, I shall adopt another child."

AT HIGH NOON next day three men in grave parade went down the Rue Victor Hugo and entered the shop of Monsieur Bonticu. Monsieur Pantan spoke.

"The adoption has been made," he announced. "Here are the papers. I, too, have a wife and three children. Shall we meet at dawn to-morrow?"

Monsieur Bonticu looked up from his account books with a rueful smile.

"Ah, if it could be," he said. "But it cannot be."

"It cannot be?" echoed Monsieur Pantan.

"No," said Monsieur Bonticu, sadly. "Last night my aged father-in-law came to live with me. He is a new, and weighty responsibility, Monsieur."

Monsieur Pantan appeared numbed for a moment; then, with a glare of concentrated fury, he rasped.

"I, too, have an aged father-in-law."

He slammed the shop door after him.

THAT NIGHT when Monsieur Bonticu went to the immaculate little stye back of his shop to see if the pride of his heart, Anastasie, was comfortable, to chat with her a moment, and to present her with a morsel of truffle to keep up her interest in the chase, he found her lying on her side moaning faintly. Between moans she breathed with a labored wheeze, and in her gentle blue eyes stood the tears of suffering. She looked up feebly, piteously, at Monsieur Bonticu. With a cry of horror and alarm he bent over her.

"Anastasie! My Anastasie! What is it? What ails my brave one?" She grunted softly, short, stifled grunts of anguish. He made a swift examination. Expert in all matters pertaining to the pig, he perceived that she had contracted an acute case of that rare and terrible disease, known locally as Perigord pip, and he knew, only too well, that her demise was but a question of hours. His Anastasie would never track down another truffle unless— He

leaned weakly against the wall and clasped his warm brow. There was but one man in all the world who could cure her. And that man was Pantan, the veterinarian. His "Elixir Pantan," a secret specific, was the only known cure for the dread malady.

Pride and love wrestled within the torn soul of the stricken Bonticu. To humble himself before his rival— it was unthinkable. He could see the sneer on Monsieur Pantan's olive face; he could hear his cutting words of refusal. The dew of conflicting emotions dampened the brow of Monsieur Bonticu. Anastasie whimpered in pain. He could not stand it. He struck his chest a resounding blow of decision. He reached for his hat.

Monsieur Bonticu knocked timidly at the door of the apothecary-veterinarian's house. A head appeared at a window.

"Who is it?" demanded a shrill, cross, female voice.

"It is I, Bonticu. I wish to speak with Monsieur Pantan."

"Nice time to come," complained the lady. She shouted into the darkness of the room: "Pantan! Pantan, you sleepy lout. Wake up. There's a great oaf of a man outside wanting to speak to you."

"Patience, my dear Rosalie, patience," came the voice of Monsieur Pantan; it was strangely meek. Presently the head of Monsieur Pantan, all nightcap and moustachios, was protruded from the window.

"You have come to fight?" he asked.

"But no."

"Bah! Then why wake me up this cold night?"

"It is a family matter, Monsieur," said the shivering Bonticu. "A matter the most pressing."

"Is it that Monsieur has adopted an orphanage," inquired Pantan. "Or brought nine old aunts to live with him?"

"No, no, Monsieur. It is most serious. It is Anastasie. She— is— dying."

"A thousand regrets, but I cannot act as pall-bearer," returned Monsieur Pantan, preparing to shut the window. "Good-night."

"I beg Monsieur to attend a little second," cried Monsieur Bonticu. "You can save her."

"I save her?" Monsieur Pantan's tone suggested that the idea was deliciously absurd.

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Bonticu, catching at a straw. "You alone. She has the Perigord pip, Monsieur."

"Ah, indeed."

"Yes, one cannot doubt it."

"Most amusing."

"You are cruel, Monsieur," cried Bonticu. "She suffers, ah, how she suffers."

"She will not suffer long," said Pantan, coldly.

There was a sob in Bonticu's voice as he said:

"I entreat Monsieur to save her. I entreat him as a sportsman."

In the window Monsieur Pantan seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I entreat him as a doctor. The ethics of his profession demand—"

"You have used me abominably, Monsieur," came the voice of Pantan, "but when you appeal to me as a sportsman and a doctor I cannot refuse. Wait."

The window banged down and in a second or so Monsieur Pantan, in hastily donned attire, joined his rival and silently they walked through the night to the bedside of the dying Anastasie. Once there, Monsieur Pantan's manner became professional, intense, impersonal.

"Warm water. Buckets of it," he ordered.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Olive oil and cotton."

"Yes, Monsieur."

With trembling hands Monsieur Bonticu brought the things desired, and hovered about, speaking gently to Anastasie, calling her pet names, soothing her. The apothecary-veterinarian was busy. He forced the contents of a huge black bottle down her throat. He anointed her with oil, water and unknown substances. He ordered his rival about briskly.

"Rub her belly."

Bonticu rubbed violently.

"Pull her tail."

Bonticu pulled.

"Massage her limbs."

Bonticu massaged till he was gasping for breath.

The light began to come back to the eyes of Anastasie, the rose hue to her pale snout; she stopped whimpering. Monsieur Pantan rose with a smile.

"The crisis is passed," he announced. "She will live. What in the name of all the devils—"

This last ejaculation was blurred and smothered, for the overjoyed Bonticu, with the impulsiveness of his warm Southern nature, had thrown his arms about the little man and planted loud kisses on both hairy cheeks. They stood facing each other, oddly shy.

"If Monsieur would do me the honor," began Monsieur Bonticu, a little thickly, "I have some ancient port. A glass or two after that walk in the cold would be good for Monsieur, perhaps."

"If Monsieur insists," murmured Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu vanished and reappeared with a cob-webbed bottle. They drank. Pantan smacked his lips. Timidly, Monsieur Bonticu said:

"I can never sufficiently repay Monsieur for his kindness."

He glanced at Anastasie who slept tranquilly. "She is very dear to me."

"Do I not know?" replied Monsieur Pantan. "Have I not Clotilde?"

"I trust she is in excellent health, Monsieur."

"She was never better," replied Monsieur Pantan. He finished his glass, and it was promptly refilled. Only the sound of Anastasie's regular breathing could be heard. Monsieur Pantan put down his glass. In a manner that tried to be casual he remarked,

"I will not attempt to conceal from Monsieur that his devotion to his Anastasie has touched me. Believe me, Monsieur Bonticu, I am not unaware of the sacrifice you made in coming to me for her sake."

Monsieur Bonticu, deeply moved, bowed.

"Monsieur would have done the same for his Clotilde," he said. "Monsieur has demonstrated himself to be a thorough sportsman. I am grateful to him. I'd have missed Anastasie."

"But naturally."

"Ah, yes," went on Monsieur Bonticu. "When my wife scolds and the children scream, it is to her I go for a little talk. She never argues."

Monsieur Pantan looked up from a long draught.

"Does your wife scold and your children scream?" he asked.

"Alas, but too often," answered Monsieur Bonticu.

"You should hear my Rosalie," sighed Monsieur Pantan. "I too seek consolation as you do. I talk with my Clotilde."

Monsieur Bonticu nodded, sympathetically.

"My wife is always nagging me for more money," he said with a sudden burst of confidence. "And the undertaking business, my dear Pantan, is not what it was."

"Do I not know?" said Pantan. "When folks are well we both suffer."

"I stagger beneath my load," sighed Bonticu.

"My load is no less light," remarked Pantan.

"If my family responsibilities should increase," observed Bonticu, "it would be little short of a calamity."

"If mine did," said Pantan, "it would be a tragedy."

"And yet," mused Bonticu, "our responsibilities seem to go on increasing."

"Alas, it is but too true."

"The statesmen are talking of limiting armaments," remarked Bonticu.

"An excellent idea," said Pantan, warmly.

"Can it be that they are more astute than two veteran truffle-hunters?"

"They could not possibly be, my dear Bonticu."

There was a pregnant pause. Monsieur Bonticu broke the silence.

"In the heat of the chase," he said, "one does things and says things one afterwards regrets."

"Yes. That is true."

"In his excitement one might even so far forget himself as to call a fellow sportsman— a really excellent fellow— a puff-ball."

"That is true. One might."

Suddenly Monsieur Bonticu thrust his fat hand toward Monsieur Pantan.

"You are not a puff-ball, Armand," he said. "You never were a puff-ball!"

Tears leaped to the little man's eyes. He seized the extended hand in both of his and pressed it.

"Aristide!" was all he could say. "Aristide!"

"We shall drink," cried Bonticu, "to the art of truffle-hunting."

"The science—" corrected Pantan, gently.

"To the art-science of truffle-hunting," cried Bonticu, raising his glass.

The moon smiled down on Perigord. On the ancient, twisted streets of Montpont it smiled with particular brightness. Down the Rue Victor Hugo, in the middle of the street, went two men, a very stout big man and a very thin little man, arm in arm, and singing, for all Montpont, and all the world, to hear, a snatch of an old song from some forgotten revue.

"Oh, Gaby, darling Gaby.
Bam! Bam! Bam!
Why don't you come to me?
Bam! Bam! Bam!
And jump in the arms of your own true love,
While the wind blows chilly and cold?
Bam! Bam! Bam!"

———————

24: Not in the Ritual

Georges Surdez

1900-1949

Adventure 15 Mar 1931

THE ORCHESTRA had concluded selections from "The Chimes of Normandy"; the last notes still vibrated in the warmth of the spring night. A tepid breath from the nearby sea stirred and rustled the long, droopy leaves of the palm trees edging the main public square of Oran, across the street, where the Sidi-Brahim shaft slashed a long shadow across the pool of whitened cement. On the cafe's terrace, through the crackling of applause, rose the clicking of glasses, the hum of conversation, the voices of the waiters darting to collect orders.

"One Byhr-Cassis— one beer— two Dubonets."

"One special— two coffees— one chocolate ice."

The light colors of the women's dresses, the blues and scarlets of military uniforms, livened the drab mass of the civilians clustered around the iron tables. After one hundred years of French occupation, the contrast of races still amazed. Yet equally at home were the young lieutenant of cavalry, the white cloaked Arab kaid, the sleek, pouchy, clean shaven grandson of a mellah woman.

The violinist, a dapper, dark Spaniard from Valencia, bowed, glanced at his musicians, lifted his bow. Newcomers hastened to their chairs. Two men sat down some distance from the table I occupied with my comrade, Markes, separated from us by several groups. The tall young captain was Farral. Once seen, there could be no mistaking his strong, graceful silhouette. I knew his companion also, Sub-Lieutenant Bruckner, a Prussian by birth, but in the Foreign Legion since 1910. Farral gave an order to the waiter, settled back to listen to "Les Millions d'Arlequin ," a cigaret between his lips. Bruckner closed his eyes; his heavily fleshed, tanned, mustached face was solemn.

His attitude, his evident enjoyment, amused me. String music does reach deeper into one's being on hot North African nights, but Bruckner sensitive to the strains of a violin struck me as ludicrous. I had been in Algeria four months, had come especially to see the reformed Legion— I had last beheld it when in the turmoil of reconstruction after the terrific losses of the World War— and had consequently met many officers. I had been greeted courteously, if with varying degrees of warmth, by all save Bruckner.

On our first meeting in Sidi-bel-Abbes, he had made his attitude clear: He knew what had been written, what had already been published on the Corps in America and England. He said that while others might permit themselves to be deceived by my frank approach, he was not at all taken in. Contrasted with the

intelligent understanding of others, his stubborn distrust had been offensive. His glare made me uneasy, and I did not deem him very clever. His presence here tonight, with Farral, who appeared of an entirely different mold racially, morally and physically, puzzled me.

"You have met Farral, haven't you?" Markes asked me.

He had been in the Legion twelve years— ten as a sergeant— and had been discharged because of severe wounds. He had appointed himself my guide in Legion matters, and had no drawbacks— save, perhaps, that he proselyted for the mixing of grenadine in beer, which makes a nasty mess for an untrained palate.

"I met him down south, yes—"

"The desert is up from Oran, not down" he corrected me. "Got along well with him? Fine. Now, if you wish to hear tales of the Legion, go to him. He's smart and he'll know what you're after, but he is obliging and polite."

"He'll look me up tomorrow, probably. He said he would."

"No doubt. But why not speak to hint tonight?"

"He has not seen me and I do not wish to bother him— you understand?"

"Because I am with you? It's all right; I'm not sensitive. You can drop me."

Markes could not get it through his head that it would be quite proper for him to sit with officers, as a civilian. The habit of twelve years was hard to dismiss. When his former chiefs stopped him on the street, to shake his hand, he felt no humility. And he knew perfectly well that I did not mind his presence in the least— he was afraid to follow me across the crowded terrace to speak to a captain, that was all.

"I spoke to Farral about you," I retorted, "and he recalls you quite well. Said to fix up an evening together during his stay here. You were with him in the Middle Atlas, weren't you? So you see that's not what stops me—" I hesitated, aware in advance that it was unwise to voice criticism of a Legionnaire to Markes. "To tell you the truth, it's Bruckner. He doesn't like me, and I don't like him."

"How do you know he doesn't?"

"Took care that I heard about it. Journalists, writers, all garbage from the same refuse can. He'll come and snoop a week or so, go home and lie about us for money.' "

"Must be your fault; he's a good guy."

"Looks like a brute to me."

"What d'you mean, a brute?"

"A man incapable of a fine feeling. I admit he is a fine soldier, and I'll grant that he didn't buy that hardware on his chest. But he looks like the

materialization of all the rotten noncoms of the Legion you read about in books. The kind of a bird who'd kick a fainting trooper to make him get up."

Markes looked at me with growing pity.

"You're dumb— and if you do get money for anything you think of in America, it truly is a wonderful country! You don't know a man when you see one. Let me tell you a story..."

THIS YARN [Markes started] can't be told as I gathered it. Understand right now that I was not a witness to all of the events that happened. But I shall not bother telling you each time where and when I got details. You should know by this time how things become known in the Legion. An orderly tells the cook, the cook tells the mess sergeant, who carries it on. A fellow comes back from somewhere and tells you: "This is what occurred here, and there; what I heard, what I saw." To end with, you can piece together a pretty complete story. See?

You're going to grin at first, and pat yourself on the back as a good judge of men, for it will look as if you were right. But remember that there are two sides to any wall, and many more sides to any man. Bruckner is a gentleman, if ever there lived one. Does not show often, but when it shows— well, that's what I'm going to talk about.

Guess you start a yarn with how the man looks, what he is. Here's what I know about Bruckner: He is a Prussian, a year or so under forty, and has been in the Legion quite a space. He was pretty young when he came into it, and possibly had good reasons to change climates. I have an idea what that was, but that's for him to tell you some day. He picked up French quickly, was not long a private, and was with the first column into southern Morocco. He has seventeen citations to his credit, any of which you would frame and hang on your wall, if you could claim it.

He is a sub-lieutenant now, but when what I'm relating happened, he was sergeant-chief with the Instruction Company at Sidi-bel-Abbes. The recruits at that time were numerous, German boys in plenty, but many, many Russians. The Ruskies came down like locusts, in ragged uniforms, a riding boot on one leg, a carpet slipper on the other foot, and showed epaulettes and tin crosses wrapped in old paper.

The new Madsen automatic rifle— that's since been replaced by the '24 model— had just been issued, and it was

Bruckner's job to teach the new guys how it worked. He'd take them beyond the barracks, on the drill field between the ramparts and the Spahis stables, and lecture them. Many of the lads knew no French, and owing to the Russians, Bruckner could not speak German to make himself clear. He has an

accent in French, you've noticed, and when he tries to talk slowly and simply it gets thicker and thicker.

One afternoon he was in the middle of a complicated explanation when he looked up from the tarpaulin on which he had lined the pieces of an automatic. He saw, or believed he saw, one of the recruits grinning. That made him sore, because he knew there was something to be amused at.

"Laughing at me?" he asked.

"No, Sergeant."

"Deny laughing?"

"No, Sergeant."

"Think you could do better?"

Bruckner then got quite a start. The fellow stepped forward. He was tall, dark, slender, and looked like a man with good blood back of him. The sergeant saw he was no Russian. But what knocked him flat was the guy's answer.

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Go ahead— show us."

The private squatted and assembled the gun, quicker than Bruckner could have managed. His fingers flew, he seemed to know what to do every second. He straightened, saluted.

"Ready, Sergeant."

Bruckner could not believe it. He tried the weapon, and it worked very well. He gaped a bit. Then he saw that the others were enjoying his surprise and annoyance, and got very hot under the collar.

"Not the first time you do it, eh?"

"No, Sergeant."

"If you know how to work this new gun, I know what you were. And I know what you must be now— "

"My private affair. Sergeant."

"You have nothing to be smart about. Your name?"

"Verdier, Jacques, matricular number 11657, Sergeant."

"Well, Verdier, here's two days' clink at the end of your nose. If you pipe back, they'll breed like guinea pigs."

You must remember that it was pretty hot and dusty and that Bruckner, despite the three V stripes on his sleeves, was human and thirsty as any man there.

"All right, Sergeant," Verdier said with a smile.

He served his two days without trying to have them lifted, which he could have done, as Bruckner is no liar and would have admitted the truth. In fact, Verdier was so cheerful about it that the sergeant grew sorer than ever, and tipped off the other noncoms that there was a "smart one" among the recruits.

No matter how well a man may dress to go out, a good noncom can always find something wrong with his rig. And you know how it goes: You're not told what is the matter; you're just turned back at the gate, told to 'get yourself dressed properly'. You go back to your room, look your outfit all over, polish the heel of your left boot which might look a little less black than the toe, and try again. You're sent back, and you change shirt and necktie. A third time and you tighten all your buttons. Then, when it's too late to leave, the charitable soul informs you that the leather lining of your kepi shows a millimeter in the back.

Jacques Verdier was treated to that comedy every time he tried to go out. He would grow white, and his lips would become just a faint, pinkish line across his face; but he preserved outward calm. He knew who had started the trouble, and sometimes you would catch him looking hard at Bruckner.

"Still smiling, Verdier?" the sergeant asked from time to time.

"Still smiling. Sergeant," Verdier would reply. And he would smile.

IT BECAME a game among the noncoms. They were not bad fellows, but life was dull and it gave them something to watch. All these vexations seem like nothing to one who is free to come and

go as he likes, but imagine what they mean to a Legionnaire, who has precious few liberties in any case.

What made it harder for Verdier was that he had to watch himself constantly— for a look, a word, or a gesture. He had been a soldier before, knew the military code, and the price to be paid for reacting to temper. There were days when Bruckner kidded him, and he almost dug his fingers into the walnut stock of his rifle. The worst of it was that everything was done perfectly according to rules; Bruckner's observations were within his duty.

"Still smiling, Verdier?"

"Still smiling, Sergeant."

Men wondered which of the two would break first. I am telling you that the silent feud told no less on the sergeant than on the private. Those who knew pitied Bruckner. His reputation was at stake; he had to break the other's will— and he felt foolish, helpless before Verdier's steely strength of mind. He wanted to give in, to let up, and could not— not without admitting that the private was the gamer. At times, when he asked his usual question, you would have sworn that it was he who was persecuted, who craved relief. He almost begged Verdier to give in, with his eyes.

One day he applied for transfer, for active service. All felt that his rivalry with Verdier was at the bottom of his application to get away.

He cursed for twenty minutes when he saw Jacques Verdier's name listed under his own as a member of the replacement draft for Tazza, in the Second Regiment. Bruckner was to be in charge, as no officer was scheduled to go. When his men lined up, he talked to them in a queer way. And all knew he was addressing one man only— Verdier.

"I'll have a chance to see how well I have trained you men. For many will probably remain under my orders out there. Let me inform you right now that easy and mild as Sergeant Bruckner may be in barracks, he is strict in the field. You see those medals? If you want some like them, follow where I lead. I am aware that I am not popular with all of you, so let me say in advance that if there is one who is saving a bullet for Bruckner, he shall have his chance. Nothing braces me so much when facing fire as to have somebody behind who wants my life. The danger in the rear balances the danger in front— and, death for death, slob for slob, what do I care who drops me?"

Every one looked at Verdier, who smiled.

Had he not been such a fine, handsome man, his smile would have been endurable. But an expression of sarcastic disdain, of conscious superiority, on that good looking face, from that tall, really powerful man, dug deep into a man's ego. He felt superior, was superior. Looking steadily at Bruckner, he shook his head slowly— twice— and his smile widened.

There was no time to say more, for the band started to play. Though the detachment was small, the colonel, a stickler for tradition, insisted on the whole business— music and flag to the station, and the "Legion's March" pounded out as the train started away. You know how it feels, even to an outsider— impressive-like, and your throat contracting so you couldn't swallow a grape seed.

The detachment joined a battalion of the Second Regiment south of Tazza, near the Jebel Tafrat. That battalion formed part of a mobile group three thousand strong, breaking its teeth on the Bahalam and Marmusha tribes. The enemy warriors were black skinned, bearded, and when they came at you in earnest they were nothing but bundles of muscles sprouting steel blades. Their women and kids followed their rushes, to take care of our wounded and hoot at the cowards who retreated. I have had some of them drop only when on top of my machine gun, riddled like sieves, and dead the last ten yards.

There was fighting— and Bruckner soon had another reason to dislike Verdier. The private turned out to be a madman in action. For five columns past Bruckner had been the first man to win a citation. Verdier nosed him out, and almost made the Military Medal the very first time. He was so crazy, yet so calm, that we who had seen the symptoms before knew what ailed him; he was trying to get killed off quickly. There was something dark and heavy resting

on his mind, and all that preliminary training had meant nothing to him. Fighting was what he had come to do in the Foreign Legion; death what he had hoped to find.

We had Old Man Choubel for a captain, who had more scars on his body than teeth left in his gums. He took a liking to Verdier at once, for he loved fine fighting men. Once, the private was the sole survivor of a group of eight caught in some ambush. He continued firing, and when his foes retreated— I am not exaggerating; it's down in black and white— he calmly fixed bayonet and pursued, a one man counter-attack.

When he returned he was a sight, with only his pants left whole, his kepi gone, his chest and arms covered with blood and bits of beef hanging from his sticker. The native troopers came from their lines to look at him. Choubel nominated him corporal then and there, and swore loudly that he'd get him the Medal.

TO TELL you all he did would take a week. You wouldn't believe nine-tenths of it, anyway. Others have tried to understand why a man who wants to die usually kills off four guys who want to live. Seems to be a fact, though. During all this, Bruckner was losing weight. He had managed to get himself a citation that would have pleased any ordinary sergeant, but he was a pale shadow beside Verdier. I think he thought the guy was doing all that to spite him.

The worse of it, from Bruckner's side, he was almost powerless. Choubel was proud of Verdier— he was as vain of his company as a middle aged matron of her milky skin— and a man who got cited after every show was an asset. Any captain likes to get hold of a fighting nut— what the reports name "the legendary Legionnaire."

"Verdier," he addressed the new corporal one day, before the whole company, "you're an intelligent man, and I grant you have courage. I shall recommend you for special school, and you shall be commissioned in six months."

"I beg you not to, Captain," Verdier replied.

His lips were tight, and I am saying that I saw sweat drip into his eyebrows— I was present at the time— and for a man who was never afraid, he acted oddly.

"Serious reasons?" Choubel asked.

"Serious, Captain."

Choubel nodded. He knew what that meant, as we all knew. To obtain a commission in the Foreign Legion a man must show papers, give his real name, reveal his past. There is no escaping that. The man is allowed to serve under

the name he picked out, but his chiefs must know all about him. Minor sins are glossed over casually, so "serious reasons" meant precisely what it said.

"That's all. Corporal," Choubel finished, and walked away after shaking hands.

Bruckner looked at Verdier and grinned. For the first time the man did not smile in answer. His hands closed hard and we thought there would be trouble immediately. But we did not yet know how strong he was. He calmed down in three seconds, shrugged, g

"If I live to be sergeant, Sergeant—"

"If you do?"

"I'll settle then, Sergeant."

You would not think that Bruckner could blush. But he was so pleased that his cheeks faded from brick to white, to turn a delicate pink, just like a soft light under a rose silk shade. Understand— this was the first time he could be sure that Verdier felt badly inside.

What puzzles me is that from that day Bruckner rather liked Verdier. And call me a fool if Verdier was far from liking the sergeant. Emotions run in a circle— something like light where the last color runs into the first. That explains how hatred can be so close to friendship.

We saw something of that revealed on another occasion. Bruckner was temporary adjutant, and he took his section to support my machine gun group. The combat was already well under way; our patrols had pushed up against the outposts of the tribesmen; rifles were popping.

With a map, I could show you what happened. I fear you can not understand. But here goes: A bunch of Marmushas slashed through our front, curled up around the place where we had been posted, almost surrounded us. We had nothing to worry about as long as we remained stationed in the shallow trench we had dug— but it was risky business to stand up. But we soon found out that we were not the game they sought, anyway, for they threw out a skirmish line to screen us, while the bulk made for a ridge six hundred yards ahead.

Those natives never attend school. But they know what to do and when to do it. That ridge commanded a trail through the hills, along which the supply echelon of the machine gun sections and trench mortar group had to pass. From there they could open fire at one hundred and fifty meters range, and cut the poor beggars to pieces in two minutes.

Bruckner has a lot of fighting sense. He saw what the echelon would get when it arrived, unless warned. At the same time that he turned to speak, Corporal Verdier approached and saluted.

"A suggestion, Sergeant?"

"Speak."

"The plane has landed. We can not signal— a man would be picked off before he got the message through from the crest, and our officers can not see through half a kilometer of earth—"

"To the point. Corporal."

"I request your permission to reach the captain."

"Refused!" Bruckner smiled affably. "He would never forgive me if you were harmed. Aside from that, the suggestion is excellent." He knelt and called for a volunteer; indicated the nearest man, "All right, my lad— " and he outlined the situation on a page torn from a worn notebook.

THE MAN took a deep breath and was off. Nice young fellow, a bit conceited. Could do the hundred in twelve seconds, as a rule. But he never fairly started. Five yards away he appeared to lose his balance, reeled and pitched nose first into the dirt. There was no use risking any one to bring him in; no further harm could come to him.

"Let me go," Verdier urged.

"No. You're a hog for distinction. Be patient."

Bruckner tore out another page, scribbled. He looked around. There were still plenty willing to go. Even a hardened man like the sergeant found it annoying to select from all those good guys the one who would not live thirty seconds longer.

"You—"

It was the turn of a baldish chap who I remember only as Rat Mug. He was cited posthumously, and you can dig up his name. A good, average soldier, with four years of service, no achievement to his credit, and a gnawing longing to become first class private. He took the note, saluted, bounded into the open.

The first bullet struck him as soon as he emerged. The majority of the natives were armed with old Chassepots, which fire a slug as big as the knuckle of your thumb. Caught him in the shoulder, spun him right around, but he didn't fall. Instead of dropping back with us, he started out gamely.

Hope you never see anything like it— they just could not kill him off! A second shot knocked him down, and he rose, staggering like a drunken man, forward. They hit him a third and a fourth time, and he looked all gone. But he propped himself on hands and knees, shook his head as if dizzy.

"Lie down," Bruckner yelled. "Lie down, you ass! We'll get you later— you can't make it!"

Everybody started to scream like a gang of women.

"Lie down, Rat Mug! Lie down!..."

For it was obvious that even if he were left alone he could not make the distance. Had lost too much blood. But the idiot pulled himself erect, literally climbed from the ground and shambled onward. You wanted to cry and you wanted to laugh, and you ended by doing both at one time. The corporals had some sense of responsibility left; they were yelling and giving the butt to the half hysterical fellows who wanted to go out and help Rat Mug.

When they did get him, they did a good job. Half of his head must have come off with his *kepi*.

Two lives gone; and Bruckner, to justify losing those two, had to risk others. He was sort of hesitant, now, looking about, and hating to give the word.

"Let's get it over with," Verdier snapped. "I'll go, and I don't need your little note. I know what is going on as well as you do, Bruckner."

"I'd like to save you until you're sergeant," Bruckner said. "I'm curious to know what you plan."

"I'll go, I'll live— then I'll beat you half to death," Verdier said, standing in full sight, with the bullets nosing around for his hide. He spread his arms wide, laughed loudly. "See, they can't kill me— they can't kill me! Nobody can kill me! I'm varnished with luck paint!"

Bruckner was a picture at that moment. You could tell that he did not know what to do, that he was afraid Verdier would be killed. And there was admiration in his face, understanding. That sort of stuff was what he liked to show when he had an excuse for showing it. He nodded permission, half extended his hand.

Verdier murmured a word of thanks for the consent. His hand twitched, then both smiled. Their fingers did not touch.

A split second later Verdier was out.

He dodged among the boulders and the bushes. You go to the cinematograph and to boxing bouts for the excitement. At that rate, what would you have paid for a place with us? There was one lone man with two hundred fellows, who had done nothing all their lives save sight rifles, popping at him.

You could see dirt spurt between his feet, lead splash on stones. Twice he dropped and rolled over and over, his arms thrashing loosely. The Marmushas yelled, and we grunted and groaned; while Bruckner, kneeling in full view on the parapet, twisting his big hands like a little lady— he was absolutely safe, no one was looking at him— swore or prayed, I am not sure which.

Each time Verdier got up, his black hair glinting like a metal helmet under the sun, and raced on stronger than ever. We must have pushed him forward with our shouts! He vanished suddenly and the firing dwindled— and we looked at each other and laughed. Bruckner was holding his forehead in one

hand, snapping the fingers of the other, muttering to himself. He came down quickly enough when the natives recovered from the excitement and saw him there, with his stem to their foresights.

THE COLONEL commanding the mobile group called Verdier to his tent that night. The orderly claimed that they drank red wine in tin cups at the same table, that Verdier appeared perfectly at ease. We said nothing to him when he came back. We were all a little sore at him for getting us so excited that morning.

Meanwhile, his citation for the Medal had been approved of in Rabat, and the official confirmation arrived. So there was a *prise d'armes* in the camp two days later, and he stood in line to receive the yellow and green ribbon. The band played the "Marseillaise", a lot of swords flashed, while the younger officers took snapshots.

The operations ended soon after. Somebody had found out that we were up against too much for an outfit our size, the rains were coming, and one thing and another. Our battalion went to rest in Oudjda, where Verdier was officially notified of his promotion to sergeant. He had been in the Legion nine short months, and there he was with five citations to his credit, the yellow and green ribbon, and a full fledged sergeant! But he seemed sort of disgruntled— sorry he was alive.

Quite how the fight with Buckner was fixed up, I can not tell you. I had to go to Fez and testify in a trial over tinned meats and casks of wine that turned out to hold water. In my whole military career that's the one thing I regret missing— that fight.

Bruckner and Verdier both obtained a week's leave, and some of their friends as well. Three-fourths of the noncoms in the battalion got leave— which is unusual. Probably, the officers knew what was scheduled and did not want to interfere with something good. Bad blood between noncoms had best be worked out in open fighting, they reasoned. The fight took place in a bam, in Algeria. A good friend told me about it.

Verdier seemed slender merely because he was tall. I was informed that he was muscled just like a feline— you know, all the different sets standing out separately, covered with fine, pink, satiny skin. And he evidently knew much about boxing, although that did not count for so much, as you'll see.

You know Bruckner; looks solid enough now, doesn't he? He was six or seven years younger. He never had drunk much. When he stripped, he looked as if he had been carved from white marble below the tan on his neck. He was by far the heavier in build, his chest almost as deep as it was wide— Look at him! An ordinary, well setup man he could break between his hands.

You have seen Legionnaires scrap once or twice. You know that everything comes into play, which is natural in men who don't fight for sport or amusement, but to preserve their hides. Verdier had some difficulty getting to that, you know, having a different code, and at first he tried to make bare fists go. But after being hurt once or twice, he learned better.

They pounded at each other, like sledges on anvils, and wrestled for minutes on end, each striving to keep the other's fists, elbows, knees from striking vital spots. Bruckner swung his clenched hands like rocks from a sling, and whenever he hit right, Verdier would be slammed to the floor— to writhe aside, clasp Bruckner's knees and bring him down.

They fought on a plank flooring, and I was told that when the two rose you could see the wood darkened by the stains of sweat and blood.

Both were bleeding from nose and mouth before long, and Bruckner's cheeks were shifting colors around his squinted eyes. Seeking for better holds, their nails tore flesh. Round and round they went, smashing and clawing. Bruckner invented a system that worked well for a time: He would brace his feet solidly, shove, and follow up this advantage until he had Verdier against a wall. Then he battered at him with both hands and his head.

When they separated for a breathing spell they would stare at each other and laugh.

The finish came abruptly.

Bruckner had pulled free, swung one arm far back as if to launch one of his fierce punches. Instead, he sharply lowered his head and bounded forward like a ram.

Verdier was caught off guard, had not expected the onslaught. Fortunately for him, he was lightning fast on his feet, and the formidable impact struck neither stomach nor chest. His body twisted aside and he took the shock on his hip. Nevertheless, he was hurled across the floor and dropped with a heavy crash.

Bruckner was on him like a wild beast— to be met by one of his own tricks.

Verdier had rolled on his back, drawn up his legs until the knees almost touched his chin. Supported by his shoulders and elbows he struck out with both feet. Nothing human could withstand such a smash and remain upright. Bruckner staggered back, gasped. Then his knees folded like hinges under his weight; he crumpled to the floor.

There was an ambulance corps sergeant there who worked on him at once.

Verdier was not pretty himself, but he was strong enough to kneel by and be aware of what was going on. They say he cried a little. But he did not need to fret. Such men as Bruckner are too strong to be hurt severely by anything save steel or lead.

He awoke soon, looked at Verdier out of his one good eye.

"Something rotten about you," he stated thoughtfully. "It isn't your guts, and it isn't your fighting. I know that much."

"Friends?" Verdier asked eagerly.

"No. I'll get your goat yet."

How he did. I'll get to soon.

BOTH of them were sent back to Algeria soon after— Bruckner to Bel-Abbes, to resume his old job of training recruits. Verdier, they claimed, had been sent to Oran, no one could say exactly why. I had no time to find out because the battalion was sent into some piffling little mess, in which I was stupid enough to get hurt. The bullet hit me near the elbow, and after three days in Taza, I was sent to Oran, where they had a special bone doctor.

This is a nice town, and it was then. A broken elbow is not a great handicap. Once a day I reported for dressing and examination at the hospital, and the rest of the time was mine. Naturally, I called at the Legion depot to ask for Verdier.

What a fine story I heard! That explained why he wanted to die. Verdier was in the Civilian Prison, pending his being sent to France for trial. I looked up the case in the papers.

He was accused of killing a woman— some sort of music hall singer. He came of an old military family. His father was a retired colonel, and he had graduated from military school and been a lieutenant. He met the young woman and wanted to marry her against everybody's advice. She was not good enough for him or most any other man— but he was crazy in love with her, said she was slandered and misjudged. But he found out different...

The lieutenant had then sent in his resignation, written to his father, vanished. The next morning the woman had been found dead— shot. The lieutenant had been recognized on a photo showing a *prise d'armes* in the Taza sector.

I tried to see Verdier at the prison. Somehow, I could not see where he had done wrong. There are things a woman can do to you that sting too deep for forgiveness. You can't just laugh and forget it.

They would not let me see Verdier at the jail. They had heard about his resources and courage while in the Legion, and were afraid he would escape. So they suspected all Legionnaires of being apt to help him split the air and vanish once more. Which shows that they were intelligent jailers after all.

Here's how I came to see the rest of the affair: You recall that adjudant who died in Saida, and turned out to have a big title, a big family and a lot of money? His people asked for his body. The authorities could do no less than

the correct thing by his remains. Bruckner had gone up one notch, and was adjudant. He brought forty men from Bel-Abbes— in full parade uniforms— all dolled up. And they escorted the caisson bearing the bier down the Rue des Jardins and so on to the dock. There, the bugler blew, and the sailors hoisted the coffin aboard, while strong men bowed their heads and the section stood at present arms. You know, one of the usual ceremonies.

One of the nurses wanted to see the show. She was great on dead men and live cats, though sick or wounded men got treated rough, unless they weren't too sick. See what I mean? I escorted her down to the port, my arm in a silk sling, and we watched, admiringly. I decided to blow her to a trolley ride on the way back, for it's a long climb. But the trolley car did not move fast. It had caught up with the detachment, and the motorman and conductor were yelling at Bruckner to move his men off the tracks, and

Bruckner was sore and ordered his men to march where they were. He was finely set up, and his face was all healed by that time. He had shiny gold buttons, green epaulettes, all his medals and— I am not lying— a sword! Full parade kit, and he was an adjudant, remember.

The men were perspiring and stiff in their sashes and beltings. I heard them say that the next guy too good to be buried in Algeria should go and croak at home. Bruckner walked along mincingly, peeping at the angry motorman out of the comer of his eye.

We had reached the Prefecture Building when it happened.

Probably, they had taken Verdier there to fill out the final papers before he was taken to the dock to board the steamer for Marseilles. He came out of the side door, and I knew him at once, although he had no uniform, save the coarse, grayish clothing they had issued him in prison. His hair was cropped close to his skull, and he shambled between two big gendarmes— the kind that seem about to burst their riding pants.

There was a small mob of civilians to watch him go— lousy dock workers, hybrid Spaniards, Arab urchins from the streets above the hospital and tough kids from the Rue des Genes. All yelled at him, and he looked mighty hard hit, sheepish. He hunched up his shoulders to hide his face the best he could.

I went cold with rage when I saw what they had done to him, and was on the verge of getting off and making a kick. They had put handcuffs on him to march him through town! Two big guys with pistols, and handcuffs on an unarmed man! But my temper cooled when I noted that Verdier had seen the Legion.

He had had a mighty tough time with us, but he had grown to feel one of us. He tried to straighten up, but that's hard when your wrists are in irons. His lips tightened in the old way, his eyes blazed. Some pride came back to him, I

guess, when he thought of what he had accomplished. I wished the trolley would hurry and get me away from there. I did not like to watch the meeting between Verdier and Bruckner, after all that had happened, and I could not help thinking that no matter what crime a man may be guilty of, some things should atone— and the stunts Verdier had pulled in Morocco were among them.

I swore at the conductor, but he waved his hand to show me why the trolley could not proceed even at a creep. I saw the Legionnaires drawn up in two lines, right on the tracks, rifles grounded. Bruckner was in front of them, stiffer than ever, his face scarlet.

His sword rasped from the scabbard.

"Present— arms!"

His defiant shout filled the street, echoed against the walls. The gendarmes started as if they had been jabbed with needles. Forty rifles left the ground with one single creak of straps, forty bayonets glistened high, flaming tapers under the ardent sun. The men froze, heels together, chins high, saluting a worthy Legionnaire.

As Verdier marched past him Bruckner brought up his blade in salute, dropped it with a fuller, wider sweep than you have ever seen.

The prisoner tried to bring his poor, manacled hands in a careless gesture of farewell, but never finished the move. He tried to smile, but his eyes melted, his face went to pieces, tears came. Oh, Bruckner had broken him up that time, achieved what he had sought in vain with tormenting, irony, and fists. But it was a victory he had not planned. Simply, with the perfect and unreasoning candor of his warrior's code, Bruckner had done what he believed just. He had offered to the murderer, the outcast, to the man who was also the superb Legionnaire, the highest homage of forty of his kind, his comrades, his brothers.

Verdier was gone.

There remained in the middle of the avenue a section of Legion at present arms, and a raging, bellowing adjudant who flourished a naked sword in his big fist.

"A man like that— the pigs, the swine!"

MARKES motioned to the waiter to add more grenadine to his tall glass of beer, and I took my eyes from Bruckner reluctantly. The man appeared magnified, hallowed by his sublime gesture.

"I'm not much of a judge," I admitted.

"Nobody does judge us rightly— we are different."

In the tone used by Markes there was little modesty. The glow of his twelve years' share in the endless epic of the Foreign Regiments was strong on him.

"What happened then?" I urged.

"Nothing. Bruckner probably was told off by the colonel, who, in his own mind, undoubtedly approved him. As you see, he is a sub-lieutenant now, pretty rough on recruits, but they all get to know him and would fight for him in a showdown. Just his way, you have to understand."

"I mean— did you hear what became of Verdier?"

"Him? When he was tried, his lawyer evoked the principle that modern justice seeks to prevent rather than punish or avenge. He pointed out that his client had already resigned from his regiment, that his resignation was on the colonel's desk. He had sacrificed family and army for the woman. When he learned that she was false, he had come straight from duty, carried his service revolver as regulations willed. There was no premeditation; he fired as a drowning man clutches at a plank when she laughed at him for a fool, to stop her talking, her jeers. The jury had to admit that it was not likely he would do the same thing over again. He was acquitted."

"And then?"

"Then what?"

"Even though he had been an officer," I insisted, "he had resigned and contracted a five years' enlistment in the Legion. He had served less than a year. How was that fixed up? Did he go back to his regiment as an officer or—"

But Markes was not listening. Looking over my head, he had risen, and his hand sketched a salute before he recalled that he was a civilian— only a civilian. I shook hands with Farral.

"Say, both of you join us, eh?" he addressed Markes. "Long since we were with the old gang in the Second. Bruckner wants to see you." Then he turned to me. "Better come over and speak your piece. Bruckner was growing angry because you stared at him, and I reasoned with him. Has the wrong idea of you altogether— unless you are mixed up in a press campaign against the Legion." He ended with a laugh.

"Neither for nor against— impartial observer."

"Liar," Farral said calmly. "If you weren't so lazy, you would enlist. But Bruckner is a man you should know in your business. Likes to talk, and has lots to talk about."

"Must have. Say, if you were in the Middle Atlas together, you and Markes, you must have known Verdier?"

I was instantly aware that I had spoken rashly. Farral had stopped short, to look at Markes who seemed rather uneasy. Then Farral smiled.

"Of course, he would tell you. Come along!"

So Farral was Verdier, Verdier was Farral! True, allowing for seven years, a change in uniforms, the silhouettes matched with exceeding precision. Acquiring stripes, Farral had not lost courage. And it explained the military medal ribbon on a man I knew came from military school. For the rest, I needed no jury's verdict to guide my esteem.

Then for a space, I could think of nothing save that I was shaking hands with Bruckner— whose doubts had melted when Farral had greeted me. I was pressing the hand that had held a sword and saluted— a man.

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25: Giotto

William Caine

1873-1925

The Home 1 June 1926

Caine was a British author of stories and novels, often humorous, and a cartoonist. One series of his stories featured Mendoza, a Castilian artist in London. In Australia the stories appeared in The Home*, a quarterly magazine, under general heading of "The Methods of Mendoza."*

ABOUT ten o'clock one hot, sticky summer night, Mendoza laid down his pen to mop his forehead. At the same moment the power to draw any longer departed from him.

"Poof!" he said. "Poof, poof, poof! *Basta*! Enough! Heat is life to an Andalusian, but this is to be smothered under feather beds. Where to-night in all this town, I ask, is there a mouthful of wholesome air?"

He got up, went to his window and leaned far out. A great, golden moon was rising above the steam of London, and already the features of the prospect were vaguely defined, the desert of roofs and chimneys, the four shafts of the power station, the spire here and there of a church, the long black mass of the trees in Battersea Park. Lights, red and green, glowed, vanished, and were renewed, where to the east, the south, and the west the shining trains crawled in and out. Between two house-tops a spark of silver appeared, grew, became a trembling streak.

"Ah," said Mendoza, "the river. There, if anywhere."

He put on his jacket, filled his cigarette-case, and approached his lips to the chimney of his lamp. So his eyes fell upon his nearly finished drawing. In it was the work of two full days.

He picked it up and regarded it sourly. Then he tore it across. "At least," he said, "let my poor conscience go light."

He blew out the lamp and left the studio.

Down in the street there seemed to be no air at all, wholesome or unwholesome. It was like something else, something almost liquid— soup, for instance, greasy soup made of gutter refuse, stale vegetables, fish heads, old bones, crusts that a dog would despise. Whatever it was, its unwholesomeness could not be denied. Mendoza set out quickly in the direction of the river, handkerchief to nose. Now for the first time he regretted, a little, that he had deliberately chosen to live in a slum.

He, was in such immediate need of fresh air that he took a short cut to the Embankment through an alley which offered itself, almost at once, to his feet; an evil little place, a footway only, guarded at either end by a small

publichouse. Not for months had Mendoza used it, but to-night he did so. It could hardly be much worse than the street a hundred yards farther on, and it would bring him into tolerable air a minute or two earlier. He plunged in.

Half-way down, fastened to the blank wall which faced the dwellings of this horrid, silent den, a gas-lamp cast a feeble gleam upon the paving stones. In the circle of its light a small black figure was squatted. As Mendoza drew near he perceived that it was a little boy. With a bit of chalk; the child was drawing busily on the stones, so busily indeed that the light sound, upon his colossal slate, of Mendoza's slippers caused him not so much as to raise his head.

Mendoza's curiosity was greater. Here was a phenomenon which he might not neglect, not though he should die next minute of asphyxia. He halted under the gas-lamp to consider the performance. Then suddenly he put his hands on his knees and bent down eagerly. "*Sapristi*!" he muttered. "*Sa-pris-ti*!"

The child got on with his work. He seemed utterly unconscious of Mendoza's presence.

Hi s subject was nothing out of the way; only a woman drinking. Tens of thousands of artists have treated it, hundreds of thousands. The Etruscans painted it on their vases; the Greeks decorated their walls with it; the Venetians, the Dutch, the French, the English have exhausted its possibilities in every medium.

But even so, it is not the natural choice of a child draftsman. Houses, four-legged beasts, men in top-hats, women with unbrellas, railway-engines, these are the common inspirations of the very young. And so, even by his subject, this boy declared himself unusual.

By his treatment of it the claim was astonishingly supported.

Here was no lady in two dimensions, presented full-faced, with circular head, triangular body, triangular skirt, dots for eyes and gashes for mouth and nose. Here were no single straight lines that should suggest limbs, no spiral scrawl to indicate hair.

The woman was modelled; that is to say, she was round, not flat. Her face had character, and no very pleasant one, either. It was possible to believe that she might have a real original. She had not been leaned up against her chair like a board; she sat in it. Sat? She lounged at her ease. One leg was stretched out, heel to the floor; the other was doubled under her chair. Along the table which stood beside her one arm lay comfortably; the other raised the pot to her swollen lips. Her hair was in curl-papers. I say her hair was in curl-papers.

I do not ask you to believe that the drawing was faultless, or even very good. In a thousand ways it came short of excellence. But as the work of a little boy, it was nothing less than a prodigy. To draw in three dimensions is not a

primitive accomplishment; nor is the delineation of character; nor the suggestion of pose. And these things were all to be seen on the paving-stones at Mendoza's feet as plainly written, to his instructed eye, as if they had been inscribed in letters.

THE boy, ignorant or careless of his spectator, went on drawing steadily, reflectively, but definitely. He rubbed out nothing. What he decided to put down remained. It was evident that his work was all thoroughly visualized. And it was economical; he expressed himself quite simply, and quite sufficiently.

As he drew he hummed a dirge-like little tune, a hymn tune, to be precise, the air of ''From Greenland's Icy Mountains."

One arm supported and balanced his body; he sat on one thigh, his knees doubled under him. His head was cocked sideways, pensively. Every now and then he paused to consider what he had next to do; then his hand would return to its unhesitating sweep.

Mendoza bent down lower and lower. So excited he had become that he forgot the existence of the gas-lamp above him. And so at last the advancing shadow of his head caught the eye of the boy. At once he stopped drawing and looked up quickly oyer his shoulder. Mendoza's face was within two feet of his own.

With a little cry of fear he wriggled his body away, sadly smutching his picture. Then he sprang to his feet and fell back against the wall of a house, where he stood, panting, one arm across his body, the other doubled defiantly.

"Sorry, old man," said Mendoza. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I draw, too, you see, and I was just looking on. Don t let me stop you. Come on back and finish it, won't you, Giotto? That's your name, isn't it?"

"No, said the boy, "it ain't. My name ain't Jotter. Edward William Parker, that s my name. But they mostly calls me 'Young Ted.' "

"Well," said Mendoza, "I don't like Young Ted as a name at all. I shall call you Giotto. I've been looking for you a long time, Giotto, and now I've found you I'm not going to call you Young Ted. That's a pugilist's name, not an artist's."

"I dunno wot you're talkin' about, governor," said the boy. "My name ain't Jotter, I tell yer."

"Well, never mind," said Mendoza. "Come and finish your picture, won't you? Who is it?"

"That's my mother, drinking beer," said Giotto— I am with Mendoza in his preference for the name. He made the statement quite simply, as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world for boys to have disreputable mothers who habitually swilled beer out of pint pots. "I thought you was 'er at first," he went

on. "Crimey! I wouldn't care about 'er ketchin' me doin' 'er out on the stones that way. But I reckon she's blind to all the world by this time. She was 'arf way there w'en I come out to draw. I can't stick it upstairs w'en she's on the booze. There ain't no doin' nothin' wiv 'er, pore dear, an' a bloke can't sleep nor nothink. So I always come out 'ere. It's quieter-like, see ?"

"Yes," said Mendoza. "I see. But come and finish the picture."

"Not me," said Giotto. "I done enough as it is. If my mother was to see that— my word ! It's got to come out, *now*."

He fell on his knees by the side of his drawing, and with half a dozen sweeps of his jacket sleeve, reduced it to a meaningless maze of chalky streaks.

"Well," said Mendoza, "do me something else."

Giotto thought a moment.

"No," he said at last, "I reckon not. You've put me orf. I ain't feelin' like it now. I can't do nothing if I don't feel like it. But didn't you say as you c'n draw? I'll lend yer the chalk a bit if yer want. Do us somefink, guv'nor. I never seen no one draw, not wot I call drorin'. Some of the boys think as they c'n do it; but they can't. Not wot I call drorin'. Nor teacher neither. Not wot I call drorin'."

Mendoza accepted the chalk and knelt down. "What's it to be?" he asked.

"Oh, anything."

"Anything's nothing. *You* know that."

"Then," said Giotto, "drore a motor bus turnin' over, with all the blokes and girls dingin' to the top and screamin', and the people wot's inside tumblin' all over one anuvver. And do a kid flyin' through the air wiv its mouf open. An' mike a copper doin' a bunk from under. An' 'ave all the parssers-by shoutin' and pointin' and wavin' their arms. An drore me lookin' on in the King's Road las' Wednesday afternoon. I tried it three or four times, but I can't mike nothin' of it. It's a bit above my clarss, a thing like that is. I gets all mixed up when I try to drore it, though I c'n see it just as plain as as I seen it las' Wednesday arfternoon. An' a thing like that tikes a norful lot o' chalk, too. W'en a bloke 'as to sneak 'is chalk from the teacher's desk, 'e learns to be a bit careful of it, see?"

"I see," said Mendoza. "So in that case I don't think I'll try the motor-bus. Besides, that's your subject. At present, suppose I draw a bull-fight in Spain? It'll be rather exciting."

"A bull-fight?" Giotto asked. "Wot's that?"

"You'll see," said Mendoza, and with that he began to draw.

As the Spaniard drew he talked, expounding the glorious, if barbaric, science of the bull-ring with an enthusiasm that no Englishman can ever know, and that perfect knowledge which was his peculiar birthright. Here, the *banderillas* fast in his neck, stood the bull, a miracle of strength and beauty,

facing, undismayed, the jaunty *espada*, who stepped lightly in his dancing shoes towards him, sword in one hand, flag in the other. Another moment and he would hurl himself between those two long needle-pointed horns, which in a few seconds can turn a strong, living man into a shredded bundle of tinsel and bleeding flesh. And here, ready for any emergency, were placed the other members of the glittering *cuadrilla*.

LONG before he had done Mendoza was talking Spanish, but the boy never heeded. Enough had been said to tell him what was being drawn, and his whole soul was soon absorbed in the drawing of it.

"My eyes!" he said when at last Mendoza threw down the crumb of chalk which remained. "That's droring, that is, an' no error. Teacher says there ain't no money in droring; but if I could drore like you does, I wouldn't care. You think I could ever do as good as that, governor?"

"Why, Giotto," said Mendoza, "I shouldn't wonder if you could do a great deal better. But you'll have to work for it."

"Work!" cried Giotto. "I'd work my fingers to the bone; I'd work 'em to stumps."

"Then," said Mendoza, "you shall, old man. I had my chance given me when I was a boy. You shall have yours. I'll come and talk to your mother to-morrow. What time's best to see her?"

"Evenin', guv'nor. She's out charin' all day. Mikin' good money, too. Then she comes 'ome and boozes it, mostly. You come in about seven o'clock before she's started on the beer."

"Right!" said Mendoza. "Then I'll be off now. You'd better go to bed, my son."

The boy yawned. "Yus," he said. "I think she'll 'ave about gone orf now, pore love."

With a few more words they parted. Giotto vanished into a doorway; Mendoza continued his course down the alley and walked the Embankment in the moonlight for an hour or more, planning a golden future for Edward William Parker.

He was close to Chelsea Bridge when his amiable dreams were disturbed by the distant clanging of a bell, mingled with the heart-shaking "Hi-yi-yi!" of firemen on the way to their work. He was about to resume his meditations when he perceived that the sounds were drawing nearer. The engine was coming towards him along the Embankment. He halted to see it go by, but when it had gone a sudden uneasiness laid hold of him. Next moment he was running after the engine.

Half an hour later he stood by the side of the bed in which Giotto lay, propped among many pillows, dying. The hospital had done all it could for the boy, but that amounted to very little.

HE was in horrid pain but fully conscious, and his courage was in no way diminished. He spoke to Mendoza, slowly and with many pauses, out of the bandages that swathed his head and neck.

"Yus, guv'nor," he whispered in Mendoza's ear. "it was the parang lamp as done it. The pore old girl didn' ought to have tried light it, and she wouldn't, neither, if I'd a bin awake. I thought she was good till mornin'; she looked it; but it seems she woke up thirsty and couldnt find the jug— there was nothin' in it if she had— and so she struck a match and tried to light up. I woke jus' in time to see 'er drop it and go on fire; then the bed caught, and so the 'ole show started. I copped it fust go orf, tryin' to put mother out, pore ole dear. The smoke was somethin' cruel, and it choked me so's I couldn't do nothin'. They tell me as somebody bust the door in an' got us out. but they was too late. Pore old mother. She was all right, too. I say, guv'nor—"

"Yes," said Mendoza. "Yes, old man?"

"That was a rare picture you drored, that bull-fight. I'd a liked to have learned to drore as good as that. But I won't now. Me 'ands is—"

"I know," said Mendoza, "I know."

"Wot I wanted to say was, would yer drore me somethink now? You can drore proper."

Mendoza looked at the nurse.

"Yes " she said, "do anything he asks. I'll get you something to draw on."

Soon she returned with a great square of soft yellow cardboard

Mendoza stood, put one foot on the bedstead and drew on his knee.

Giotto could thus follow the movements of his pencil.

"I say, guv'nor," said the boy, "do that omnibus, will yer? I wanted to drore it meself, but if you'll do it, it'll be just as good."

And so Mendoza bent himself to his task.

HIS pencil flew. Never had he worked with such speed and sureness, and the design grew under his hand magically. Another man might have tried to treat the subject humorously, but Mendoza was better inspired. Into his drawing he threw every particle of that grim and terrible realism which underlay and gave power to this great caricaturist's art. Deliberately he suppressed all exaggeration of treatment, and the result was simply terrific. Only a hair divided the sheer horror of his picture from the broadest farce, but the line was never crossed. Even his scrambling policeman, with the bowed

neck and the hunted eye— a typically comic figure, this— screamed of the the hideous death which impended; as for the clutching, swaying figures on the roof of the falling omnibus, each one was beyond all expression despairing.

At first the boy had his comments to make. "That's the way it was." And again, "Oh, crikey! See them blokes inside! They aren't 'alf scared!" And so on, as other details were added. But the pauses between his murmurs of satisfaction grew longer and longer until he lay quite speechless, only showing by the movement of his eyes that he knew what Mendoza was doing.

He lived to see the picture finished. He lived to read the words "Mendoza, to his friend Giotto" written across the top left hand corner.

Then, "Wot's that last word?" he asked.

"Giotto," said Mendoza, "that's you."

"Rum way ter spell Jotter," the boy sighed

Mendoza propped the drawing against the foot of the bed.

"There you are," he said. "Is it all right?"

"It's prime," said Giotto. Then, with his eyes on the thing, he died.

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26: The Bromley Gibberts Story

Robert Barr

1850-1912

In: *Revenge! and other stories*, 1896

THE ROOM in which John Shorely edited the *Weekly Sponge* was not luxuriously furnished, but it was comfortable. A few pictures decorated the walls, mostly black and white drawings by artists who were so unfortunate as to be compelled to work for the *Sponge* on the cheap. Magazines and papers were littered all about, chiefly American in their origin, for Shorely had been brought up in the editorial school which teaches that it is cheaper to steal from a foreign publication than waste good money on original contributions. You clipped out the story; changed New York to London; Boston or Philadelphia to Manchester or Liverpool, and there you were.

Shorely's theory was that the public was a fool, and didn't know the difference. Some of the greatest journalistic successes in London proved the fact, he claimed, yet the *Sponge* frequently bought stories from well-known authors, and bragged greatly about it.

Shorely's table was littered with manuscripts, but the attention of the great editor was not upon them. He sat in his wooden armchair, with his gaze on the fire and a frown on his brow. The *Sponge* was not going well, and he feared he would have to adopt some of the many prize schemes that were such a help to pure literature elsewhere, or offer a thousand pounds insurance, tied up in such a way that it would look lavishly generous to the constant reader, and yet be impossible to collect if a disaster really occurred.

In the midst of his meditations a clerk entered and announced— "Mr. Bromley Gibberts."

"Tell him I'm busy just now— tell him I'm engaged," said the editor, while the perplexed frown deepened on his brow.

The clerk's conscience; however, was never burdened with that message, for Gibberts entered, with a long ulster coat flapping about his heels.

"That's all right," said Gibberts, waving his hand at the boy, who stood with open mouth, appalled at the intrusion. "You heard what Mr. Shorely said. He's engaged. Therefore let no one enter. Get out."

The boy departed, closing the door after him. Gibberts turned the key in the lock, and then sat down.

"There," he said; "now we can talk unmolested, Shorely. I should think you would be pestered to death by all manner of idiots who come in and interrupt you."

"I am," said the editor, shortly.

"Then take my plan, and lock your door. Communicate with the outer office through a speaking-tube. I see you are down-hearted, so I have come to cheer you up. I've brought you a story, my boy."

Shorely groaned.

"My dear Gibberts," he said, "we have now—"

"Oh yes, I know all about that. You have matter enough on hand to run the paper for the next fifteen years. If this is a comic story, you are buying only serious stuff. If this be tragic, humour is what you need. Of course, the up-and-down truth is that you are short of money, and can't pay my price. The *Sponge* is failing— everybody knows that. Why can't you speak the truth, Shorely, to me, at least? If you practiced an hour a day, and took lessons— from me, for instance— you would be able in a month to speak several truthful sentences one after the other."

The editor laughed bitterly.

"You are complimentary," he said.

"I'm not. Try again, Shorely. Say I'm a boorish ass."

"Well, you are."

"There, you see how easy it is! Practice is everything. Now, about this story, will you—"

"I will not. As you are not an advertiser, I don't mind admitting to you that the paper is going down. You see it comes to the same thing. We haven't the money as you say, so what's the use of talking?"

Gibberts hitched his chair closer to the editor, and placed his hand on the other's knee. He went on earnestly—

"Now is the time to talk, Shorely. In a little while it will be too late. You will have thrown up the *Sponge*. Your great mistake is trying to ride two horses, each facing a different direction. It can't be done, my boy. Make up your mind whether you are going to be a thief or an honest man. That's the first step."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Go in for a paper that will be entirely stolen property, or for one made up of purely original matter."

"We have a great deal of original matter in the *Sponge*."

"Yes, and that's what I object to. Have it all original, or have it all stolen. Be fish or fowl. At least one hundred men a week see a stolen article in the *Sponge* which they have read elsewhere. They then believe it is all stolen, and you lose them. That isn't business, so I want to sell you one original tale, which will prove to be the most remarkable story written in England this year."

"Oh, they all are," said Shorely, wearily. "Every story sent to me is a most remarkable story, in the author's opinion."

"Look here, Shorely," cried Gibberts, angrily, "you mustn't talk to me like that. I'm no unknown author, a fact of which you are very well aware. I don't need to peddle my goods."

"Then why do you come here lecturing me?"

"For your own good, Shorely, my boy," said Gibberts, calming down as rapidly as he had flared up. He was a most uncertain man. "For your own good, and if you don't take this story, some one else will. It will make the fortune of the paper that secures it. Now, you read it while I wait. Here it is, typewritten, at one-and-three a thousand words, all to save your blessed eyesight."

Shorely took the manuscript and lit the gas, for it was getting dark. Gibberts sat down awhile, but soon began to pace the room, much to Shorely's manifest annoyance. Not content with this, he picked up the poker and noisily stirred the fire. "For Heaven's sake, sit down, Gibberts, and be quiet!" cried Shorely, at last.

Gibberts seized the poker as if it had been a weapon, and glared at the editor.

"I won't sit down, and I will make just as much noise as I want to," he roared. As he stood there defiantly, Shorely saw a gleam of insanity in his eyes.

"Oh, very well, then," said Shorely, continuing to read the story.

For a moment Gibberts stood grasping the poker by the middle, then he flung it with a clatter on the fender, and, sitting down, gazed moodily into the fire, without moving, until Shorely had turned the last page.

"Well," said Gibberts, rousing from his reverie, "what do you think of it?"

"It's a good story, Gibberts. All your stories are good," said the editor, carelessly.

Gibberts started to his feet, and swore.

"Do you mean to say," he thundered, "that you see nothing in that story different from any I or any one else ever wrote? Hang it, Shorely, you wouldn't know a good story if you met it coming up Fleet Street! Can't you see that story is written with a man's heart's blood?"

Shorely stretched out his legs and thrust his hands far down in his trousers' pockets.

"It may have been written as you say, although I thought you called my attention a moment ago to its type-written character."

"Don't be flippant, Shorely," said Gibberts, relapsing again into melancholy. "You don't like the story, then? You didn't see anything unusual in it—purpose, force, passion, life, death, nothing?"

"There is death enough at the end. My objection is that there is too much blood and thunder in it. Such a tragedy could never happen. No man could go to a country house and slaughter every one in it. It's absurd."

Gibberts sprang from his seat and began to pace the room excitedly. Suddenly he stopped before his friend, towering over him, his long ulster making him look taller than he really was.

"Did I ever tell you the tragedy of my life? How the property that would have kept me from want has—"

"Of course you have, Gibberts. Sit down. You've told it to everybody. To me several times."

"How my cousin cheated me out of—"

"Certainly. Out of land and the woman you loved."

"Oh! I told you that, did I?" said Gibberts, apparently abashed at the other's familiarity with the circumstances. He sat down, and rested his head in his hands. There was a long silence between the two, which was finally broken by Gibberts saying—

"So you don't care about the story?"

"Oh, I don't say that. I can see it is the story of your own life, with an imaginary and sanguinary ending."

"Oh, you saw that, did you?"

"Yes. How much do you want for it?"

"£50."

"What?"

"£50, I tell you. Are you deaf? And I want the money now."

"Bless your innocent heart, I can buy a longer story than that from the greatest author living for less than £50. Gibberts, you're crazy."

Gibberts looked up suddenly and inquiringly, as if that thought had never occurred to him before. He seemed rather taken with the idea. It would explain many things which had puzzled both himself and his friends. He meditated upon the matter for a few moments, but at last shook his head.

"No, Shorely," he said, with a sigh. "I'm not insane, though, goodness knows, I've had enough to drive me mad. I don't seem to have the luck of some people. I haven't the talent for going crazy. But to return to the story. You think £50 too much for it. It will make the fortune of the paper that publishes it. Let me see. I had it a moment ago, but the point has escaped my memory. What was it you objected to as unnatural?"

"The tragedy. There is too much wholesale murder at the end."

"Ah! now I have it! Now I recollect!"

Gibberts began energetically to pace the room again, smiting his hands together. His face was in a glow of excitement.

"Yes, I have it now. The tragedy. Granting a murder like that, one man a dead shot, killing all the people in a country house; imagine it actually taking place. Wouldn't all England ring with it?"

"Naturally."

"Of course it would. Now, you listen to me. I'm going to commit that so-called crime. One week after you publish the story, I'm going down to that country house, Channor Chase. It is my house, if there was justice and right in England, and I'm going to slaughter every one in it. I will leave a letter, saying the story in the *Sponge* is the true story of what led to the tragedy. Your paper in a week will be the most-talked-of journal in England— in the world. It will leap instantaneously into a circulation such as no weekly on earth ever before attained. Look here, Shorely, that story is worth £50,000 rather than £50, and if you don't buy it at once, some one else will. Now, what do you say?"

"I say you are joking, or else, as I said just now, you are as mad as a hatter."

"Admitting I am mad, will you take the story?"

"No, but I'll prevent you committing the crime."

"How?"

"By giving you in charge. By informing on you."

"You can't do it. Until such a crime is committed, no one would believe it could be committed. You have no witnesses to our conversation here, and I will deny every assertion you make. My word, at present, is as good as yours. All you can do is to ruin your chance of fortune, which knocks at every man's door. When I came in, you were wondering what you could do to put the *Sponge* on its feet. I saw it in your attitude. Now, what do you say?"

"I'll give you £25 for the story on its own merits, although it is a big price, and you need not commit the crime."

"Done! That is the sum I wanted, but I knew if I asked it, you would offer me £12 10s. Will you publish it within the month?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Write out the cheque. Don't cross it. I've no bank account."

When the cheque was handed to him, Gibberts thrust it into the ticket-pocket of his ulster, turned abruptly, and unlocked the door. "Goodbye," he said.

As he disappeared, Shorely noticed how long his ulster was, and how it flapped about his heels. The next time he saw the novelist was under circumstances that could never be effaced from his memory.

The *Sponge* was a sixteen-page paper, with a blue cover, and the week Gibberts' story appeared, it occupied the first seven pages. As Shorely ran it over in the paper, it impressed him more than it had done in manuscript. A story always seems more convincing in type.

Shorely met several men at the Club, who spoke highly of the story, and at last he began to believe it was a good one himself. Johnson was particularly enthusiastic, and every one in the Club knew Johnson's opinion was infallible.

"How did *you* come to get hold of it?" he said to Shorely, with unnecessary emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Don't you think I know a good story when I see it?" asked the editor, indignantly.

"It isn't the general belief of the Club," replied Johnson, airily; "but then, all the members have sent you contributions, so perhaps that accounts for it. By the way, have you seen Gibberts lately?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Well, it strikes me he is acting rather queerly. If you asked me, I don't think he is quite sane. He has something on his mind."

"He told me," said the new member, with some hesitation— "but really I don't think I'm justified in mentioning it, although he did not tell it in confidence— that he was the rightful heir to a property in—"

"Oh, we all know that story!" cried the Club, unanimously.

"I think it's the Club whiskey," said one of the oldest members. "I say, it's the worst in London."

"Verbal complaints not received. Write to the Committee," put in Johnson. "If Gibberts has a friend in the Club, which I doubt, that friend should look after him. I believe he will commit suicide yet."

These sayings troubled Shorely as he walked back to his office. He sat down to write a note, asking Gibberts to call. As he was writing, McCabe, the business manager of the *Sponge*, came in.

"What's the matter with the old sheet this week?" he asked.

"Matter? I don't understand you."

"Well, I have just sent an order to the printer to run off an extra ten thousand, and here comes a demand from Smith's for the whole lot. The extra ten thousand were to go to different newsagents all over the country who have sent repeat orders, so I have told the printer now to run off at least twenty-five thousand, and to keep the plates on the press. I never read the *Sponge* myself, so I thought I would drop in and ask you what the attraction was. This rush is unnatural.

"Better read the paper and find out," said Shorely.

"I would, if there wasn't so much of your stuff in it," retorted McCabe.

Next day McCabe reported an almost bewildering increase in orders. He had a jubilant "we've-done-it-at-last" air that exasperated Shorely, who felt that he alone should have the credit. There had come no answer to the note he had sent Gibberts, so he went to the Club, in the hope of meeting him. He found Johnson, whom he asked if Gibberts were there.

"He's not been here to-day," said Johnson; "but I saw him yesterday, and what do you think he was doing? He was in a gun-shop in the Strand, buying

cartridges for that villainous-looking seven-shooter of his. I asked him what he was going to do with a revolver in London, and he told me, shortly, that it was none of my business, which struck me as so accurate a summing-up of the situation, that I came away without making further remark. If you want any more stories by Gibberts, you should look after him."

Shorely found himself rapidly verging into a state of nervousness regarding Gibberts. He was actually beginning to believe the novelist meditated some wild action, which might involve others in a disagreeable complication. Shorely had no desire to be accessory either before or after the fact. He hurried back to the office, and there found Gibberts' belated reply to his note. He hastily tore it open, and the reading of it completely banished what little self-control he had left.

Dear Shorely,

I know why you want to see me, but I have so many affairs to settle, that it is impossible for me to call upon you. However, have no fears; I shall stand to my bargain, without any goading from you. Only a few days have elapsed since the publication of the story, and I did not promise the tragedy before the week was out. I leave for Channor Chase this afternoon. You shall have your pound of flesh, and more.

Yours,

Bromley Gibberts."

Shorely was somewhat pale about the lips when he had finished this scrawl. He flung on his coat, and rushed into the street. Calling a hansom, he said—

"Drive to Kidner's Inn as quickly as you can. No. 15."

Once there, he sprang up the steps two at a time, and knocked at Gibberts' door. The novelist allowed himself the luxury of a "man," and it was the "man" who answered Shorely's imperious knock.

"Where's Gibberts?"

"He's just gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"To Euston Station, I believe, sir; and he took a hansom. He's going into the country for a week, sir, and I wasn't to forward his letters, so I haven't his address."

"Have you an 'ABC'?"

"Yes, sir; step inside, sir. Mr. Gibberts was just looking up trains in it, sir, before he left."

Shorely saw it was open at C, and, looking down the column to Channor, he found that a train left in about twenty minutes. Without a word, he dashed down the stairs again. The "man" did not seem astonished. Queer fish sometimes came to see his master.

"Can you get me to Euston Station in twenty minutes?"

The cabman shook his head, as he said—

"I'll do my best, sir, but we ought to have a good half-hour."

The driver did his best, and landed Shorely on the departure platform two minutes after the train had gone.

"When is the next train to Channor?" demanded Shorely of a porter.

"Just left, sir."

"The next train hasn't just left, you fool. Answer my question."

"Two hours and twenty minutes, sir," replied the porter, in a huff.

Shorely thought of engaging a special, but realised he hadn't money enough. Perhaps he could telegraph and warn the people of Channor Chase, but he did not know to whom to telegraph. Or, again, he thought he might have Gibberts arrested on some charge or other at Channor Station. That, he concluded, was the way out— dangerous, but feasible.

By this time, however, the porter had recovered his equanimity. Porters cannot afford to cherish resentment, and this particular porter saw half a crown in the air.

"Did you wish to reach Channor before the train that's just gone, sir?"

"Yes. Can it be done?"

"It might be done, sir," said the porter, hesitatingly, as if he were on the verge of divulging a State secret which would cost him his situation. He wanted the half-crown to become visible before he committed himself further.

"Here's half a sovereign, if you tell me how it can be done, short of hiring a special."

"Well, sir, you could take the express that leaves at the half-hour. It will carry you fifteen miles beyond Channor, to Buley Junction, then in seventeen minutes you can get a local back to Channor, which is due three minutes before the down train reaches there— if the local is in time," he added, when the gold piece was safe stowed in his pocket.

While waiting for the express, Shorely bought a copy of the *Sponge*, and once more he read Gibberts' story on the way down. The third reading appalled him. He was amazed he had not noticed before the deadly earnestness of its tone. We are apt to underrate or overrate the work of a man with whom we are personally familiar.

Now, for the first time, Shorely seemed to get the proper perspective. The reading left him in a state of nervous collapse. He tried to remember whether

or not he had burned Gibberts' letter. If he had left it on his table, anything might happen. It was incriminating evidence.

The local was five minutes late at the Junction, and it crawled over the fifteen miles back to Channor in the most exasperating way, losing time with every mile. At Channor he found the London train had come and gone.

"Did a man in a long ulster get off, and—"

"For Channor Chase, sir?"

"Yes. Has he gone?"

"Oh yes, sir! The dog-cart from the Chase was here to meet him, sir."

"How far is it?"

"About five miles by road, if you mean the Chase, sir."

"Can I get a conveyance?"

"I don't think so, sir. They didn't know you were coming, I suppose, or they would have waited; but if you take the road down by the church, you can get there before the cart, sir. It isn't more than two miles from the church. You'll find the path a bit dirty, I'm afraid, sir, but not worse than the road. You can't miss the way, and you can send for your luggage."

It had been raining, and was still drizzling. A strange path is sometimes difficult to follow, even in broad daylight, but a wet, dark evening adds tremendously to the problem. Shorely was a city man, and quite unused to the eccentricities of country lanes and paths.

He first mistook the gleaming surface of a ditch for the footpath, and only found his mistake when he was up to his waist in water. The rain came on heavily again, and added to his troubles. After wandering through muddy fields for some time, he came to a cottage, where he succeeded in securing a guide to Channor Chase.

The time he had lost wandering in the fields would, Shorely thought, allow the dog-cart to arrive before him, and such he found to be the case. The man who answered Shorely's imperious summons to the door was surprised to find a wild-eyed, unkempt, bedraggled individual, who looked like a lunatic or a tramp.

"Has Mr. Bromley Gibberts arrived yet?" he asked, without preliminary talk.

"Yes, sir," answered the man.

"Is he in his room?"

"No, sir. He has just come down, after dressing, and is in the drawing-room.

"I must see him at once," gasped Shorely. "It is a matter of life and death. Take me to the drawing-room."

The man, in some bewilderment, led him to the door of the drawing-room, and Shorely heard the sound of laughter from within. Thus ever are comedy and tragedy mingled. The man threw the door open, and Shorely entered. The sight he beheld at first dazzled him, for the room was brilliantly lighted. He saw a number of people, ladies and gentlemen, all in evening dress, and all looking towards the door, with astonishment in their eyes. Several of them, he noticed, had copies of the *Sponge* in their hands. Bromley Gibberts stood before the fire, and was very evidently interrupted in the middle of a narration.

"I assure you," he was saying, "that is the only way by which a story of the highest class can be sold to a London editor."

He stopped as he said this, and turned to look at the intruder. It was a moment or two before he recognised the dapper editor in the bedraggled individual who stood, abashed, at the door.

"By the gods!" he exclaimed, waving his hands. "Speak of the editor, and he appears. In the name of all that's wonderful, Shorely, how did you come here? Have your deeds at last found you out? Have they ducked you in a horse-pond? I have just been telling my friends here how I sold you that story, which is making the fortune of the *Sponge*. Come forward, and show yourself, Shorely, my boy."

"I would like a word with you," stammered Shorely.

"Then, have it here," said the novelist. "They all understand the circumstances. Come and tell them your side of the story."

"I warn you," said Shorely, pulling himself together, and addressing the company, "that this man contemplates a dreadful crime, and I have come here to prevent it."

Gibberts threw back his head, and laughed loudly.

"Search me," he cried. "I am entirely unarmed, and, as every one here knows, among my best friends."

"Goodness!" said one old lady. "You don't mean to say that Channor Chase is the scene of your story, and where the tragedy was to take place?"

"Of course it is," cried Gibberts, gleefully. "Didn't you recognise the local colour? I thought I described Channor Chase down to the ground, and did I not tell you you were all my victims? I always forget some important detail when telling a story. Don't go yet," he said, as Shorely turned away; "but tell your story, then we will have each man's narrative, after the style of Wilkie Collins."

But Shorely had had enough, and, in spite of pressing invitations to remain, he departed out into the night, cursing the eccentricities of literary men.

End