PAST MASTERS 202

Ambrose Bierce
Beatrice Grimshaw
Hume Nisbet
F A M Webster
Max Brand
Arthur Morrison
Gordon MacCreagh
W Pett Ridge
Baroness Orczy

and more

PAST MASTERS 202

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

13 Feb 2025

Contents

_____

1: The Ivory Killers

Gordon MacCreagh

1889-1953

Adventure June 1933

JAN RUYS was as bad a citizen as any at large in all of East Central Africa. He was not the worst, because there were also Mink McCarthy and Tino Corra.

But when men spoke of the nefarious three, they always mentioned Ruys first because of his bulk and belligerence, though these were deceptive. It was McCarthy who was the wicked one— small, sleek, sun tanned, neutral haired, khaki clothed— a creature of low visibility at all times. In effect, a mink; and equally hard, fast and ruthless. He had brains to offset Jan Ruys's overwhelming brawn.

Tino Corra had nothing especial to recommend him above such personalities as the other two. A small, dark, Latin type, he had his own reasons for keeping out of Portuguese Mozambique. But he was a good, hard working, tough egg, and he fitted in well with the combine— three as unsavory subjects as had ever come into the Uganda Protectorate to poach ivory.

It was this trio that the chief commissioner was discussing, as he sat in his office in Entebbe. He drummed his fingers on his desk and faced a tall, wide shouldered man who paced the room with silent restlessness. The tall one looked at him with hostility.

"And why are you telling me about your hard luck?" he asked defensively. "Tell some of your policemen, game wardens— somebody. That's why you collect a white hunter's license from me."

The commissioner continued evenly:

"The three would spot my men in a minute and would lay low, as good as white mice. Or they'd just lay up by some handy donga and neatly bushwhack them. Down in Rhodesia some witnesses just disappeared; but the police could never get anything on those three. They're poison. And now I have them on my hands."

"Sound like nice boys," said the tall man. "I guess you'd better do something about them."

"I am doing something," said the commissioner. "I am negotiating with a man who knows the bush inside out, who's got the nerve of a devil and no nerves."

"Plenty of men like that on your force," said the tall man. "They've been after me for some damned silly regulation or other plenty o' times."

"I must have a man," said the commissioner, "who isn't tied down by what you call silly regulations, and who has the effrontery, if need be, to play a high handed game all on his own."

The tall man looked coldly at him.

"And I must have, essentially, a sportsman."

"Huh? I'll fall for that one," said the tall man. "Why must you have a sportsman?"

"Because," said the commissioner, "these men are using sub-machine guns and water hole poison. They poach ivory as a business."

"Hell!" The tall man growled. "That's swinish— beastly! Gosh, I'd like to—" He paused, then shook his head. "Well, I hope you get your man. I've got to be running along."

The commissioner smiled.

"Oh, I'll get him all right. I'll be seeing you tomorrow, my difficult Kingi Bwana."

"The hell you will!" said the tall man.

But the commissioner continued to smile and absently drummed a broken rhythm on the desk.

BUT despite popular indignation and the efforts of the police, the three swaggered from Entebbe a week later with a safari of lusty porters, empty handed. That is to say, most of them were without head loads. The hard bitten trio knew their Africa. They were no tenderfeet who needed luxuries. They traveled with the minimum of impedimenta. Mobility— the ability to cover country faster than anybody else— was more precious to them than comfort. Those strong, empty handed porters were designed to carry loads that would be collected later in the dense elephant jungles of Bugoma and Semliki forests.

And until they had such contraband loads, no authority could interfere with the safari. They came, therefore, unhindered into the Semliki country; and it was there that a native approached the camp one morning and talked with the safari headman. The headman came and reported—

"That fellow he say one white man not so far."

The trio sat up and began to take notice. A white man in that corner of the wilds might interfere with stealthy plans.

"He say he sit without safari; plenty load in boma, no porter mans, only two servant boy mans."

Mink McCarthy swore sibilantly. With quick fingers he softly opened the breech of his gun to assure himself of what he knew to be so; then he jerked his head at Tino Corra.

"Better go quietly and look him over. If it's any blasted official—" His pause was more ominous than words. Through taut lips he added, "This is new country— hardly shot over. And it's rich. Nothing's goin' to stop us here."

In the next moment he changed his mind with characteristic high-strung abruptness.

"Wait a minute. Let's all go."

They found the white man just as the native had described him. A tall, rangy, big shouldered man, dressed in shining, new and eminently correct big game hunter's clothing, sitting marooned in a boma piled full of all the camping gadgets that outfitters sell to fools. As soon as he opened his mouth they knew him for one of those rich American sports.

"Howdy, strangers. Say, but I'm right glad you happened along. You see me 'way up a tall tree."

The tenderfoot's story brought grins of wearied amusement to the faces of the experienced three. He had come out from Nairobi with the usual unwieldy safari under the guidance of a licensed white hunter. A week ago the hunter had contracted something virulently African and had died. The tenderfoot, confident in his ignorance, characteristically impatient over the delay, had picked up some sort of native guide and had forged ahead.

"—hustled the outfit along. Fired some pep into those hookworm coons and kept on going."

But the simple African, it transpired, objected to being pepped up.

"—kicked like steers at a paltry twenty-five miles a day."

And when the tenderfoot— who had made his pile in railroad contracting and had run some pretty durned lazy construction gangs in his day— proceeded to inject some efficient driving methods, the untutored African safari had quite simply vanished into the bush overnight, leaving the gang driver marooned with all his expensive gear, his burly gunboy and scrawny little cook, who had remained faithful to their quite exorbitant pay.

The trio grinned sourly at the idea of anybody trying to drive safari porters at twenty-five miles a day. And what was this rich sport proposing to do now?

"Well, gee, now—" the sport was dubious— "I've got my license right here to shoot four elephant and two rhino and a raft of other stuff, and I'm not licked bad enough yet to figure on going back empty.

"And, say now—" looking the others over with calculation— "you gentlemen look like you know your way around. How about if you could see your way to signing up with me and seeing me out of the hole? The check of Cyrus P. Carmody is good in Nairobi for anything reasonable you'd like to say."

The eyelids of Mink McCarthy flickered and he spoke quickly before the others could get in a word.

"Well, now, Mr. Carmody, we don't like to see any white man bushed this way; but, you see, we're really a prospecting outfit and your idea would break up our plans to smithereens. Let me and my mates here step aside and talk it over awhile."

The three walked off together. Immediately Jan Ruys, the hasty, blurted:

"Ah, what 'cher need to talk it over? Le's leave 'im sit. He's stuck safe. Carn't foller us — no porters nor nothin'; else we'd mebbe have to put 'im away quiet. Him an' 'is blarsted checks; just 's if we was workers for lousy wages."

Tino Corra saw the scorn growing in McCarthy's eyes and hastened to put himself on what he knew would be the winning side.

"But you are fooleesh, amigo" he purred in his soft Latin voice. "Pairhaps he have monnaie cash, who is so reech. Wan license for wan elephant cost heem hundred pound. So then four license— ees eet not so? And he have gun, raifle, cartridge, everytheeng of best."

Mink's impatience with stupidity was savage. His lip quivered over his small, pointed eye-teeth.

"If either of you blighted fools had a half human head, I wouldn't have to worry about any game commissioner in all Africa. You look no further'n any other monkey can see with his silly eyes. Now, listen while I say it slow."

Slowly and impressively he proceeded to lay out the quick thought that had come to him.

"License for four elephant. Let that soak in awhile. Four tuskers to be shot all due and proper under the law. Does that mean anything to you? No, of course it don't. So I'll tell you. We sign on as guides. We take this silly blighter where we want to go. Four licenses—" the predatory teeth clicked in anticipation— "four little bits o' stamped paper can be stretched to cover up a hell of a lot of shooting if any trouble comes sneakin' along in a uniform. And we ditch him when we come to the Belgian border with a full load. Why, the thing's a Christmas present."

Tino Corra's flashing smile came first, and the heavier one of Jan Ruys followed it more slowly.

"Meenk, he 's got the haid," Tino conceded.

And Ruys, though the full possibilities of the gift would have to be assimilated later, grunted agreement.

They went back to the rich sport, all smiles. They were poor men, and prospecting was a precarious game. They would throw over their plans and would sign on with the gentleman as regular white hunters. And to show their worth they would even contrive to find porters for the gentleman's baggage—

or at all events for the valuable portion of it. And then the place for elephants, of course, was the great Semliki forest, not four days' trek distant.

TO THE three who had found Rhodesia too hot for l comfort this was new country.

But their safari headman was a Zanzibar Arab halfbreed whose father had been a doughty Rift Lakes slave raider in the good old days, and who himself, now that the profitable "black ivory" business was gone, had become a small scale poacher of the white. He knew his Budonga and his Semliki.

It was not long before the parched, flat, thorn scrub country began to give place to rolling grassland. Game was everywhere and foolishly tame. A splendid pair of rare roan antelopes, the hunter's prize, stood and looked at them from a little knoll, their magnificent horns curving back to their flanks. But the hurrying travelers were not interested in any such commercially valueless thing as sportsmen's prizes; and this rich sport did not even know the antelopes were rare.

He clamored buck-feverishly about all the minor items on his licenses. But Mink told him glibly:

"They'll be here when we come back. Elephants 'll be movin' up into the mountain valleys before the rains come. We'd never see a one. Now's the time for tusks."

The grass country began to give place to low hills covered with clumps of timber and patches of bamboo thicket— elephant country. The safari porters, instead of stringing out in front with all their noise and confusion, were ordered to the rear. The white men took the lead with the cunning old Zanzibar headman.

Extraordinary luck was with them. On the third day the American, ranging restlessly afar, fell into a hole that looked as if a small tub had been sunk there by some mysterious jungle gardener and as mysteriously removed. It seemed as if the gardener had been a lunatic and had sunk a whole row of tubs, removing them afterward.

Without a word among the three, Ruys gave Tino Corra a hoist up a not too leafy tree. Corra was down again in two minutes, nostrils twitching and eyes shining. He reported, whispering as if already within distance of great sensitive ears:

"Wan nice ravine that side look ver likelee. Wan sweet vallee, all euphorbia, an' bamboo, leetle bit left, look best place evair I see."

Mink was tersely efficient.

"All right, we'll take the ravine first. If they're not bottled there, we'll split and jockey 'em up and down the valley. Come ahead."

The three hired white hunters gave no thought to the disposition of their greenhorn employer who had spent his thousands to shoot an elephant. Though Mink, as an afterthought, told him curtly— almost ordered him:

"You stick with the safari and see no fool comes blunderin' an' crashin' behind us." And he threw over his shoulder as they departed, "We're just goin' scoutin' to see how they stand."

They disappeared up the ravine, the Zanzibari with them, treading like cats.

The greenhorn smiled thinly after them, nodding to himself. The smile went through the changing gradations from whimsicality to cold satisfaction. To his gunboy the greenhorn said in perfect Swahili—

"The safari stays here."

The gunboy replied simply:

"It is an order, bwana. They stay."

He threw his blanket from his enormous shoulders and soberly, unhurriedly, went to one of the packs from which he produced an immense spear blade— a long sword of a thing that fitted snugly to the end of the strong, beautifully polished stick that he carried. And with the putting together of that weapon, as if it were a symbol of domination, he was suddenly transformed into a formidable fighting man.

To the scrawny camp cook the greenhorn said—

"How do you read the signs, little wise one?"

The little man balanced on one leg and surveyed jungle and sky with the wisdom of a wizened ape.

"The wind blows from the valley over my left shoulder," he translated from the book of the jungle. "The vultures circle high against it. The toucans and the mik-mikki fly with it. What moves will be therefore in the valley."

"Good," said the greenhorn. "Come."

The two disappeared up the valley, treading like very wary cats.

ALMOST immediately they were in giant bamboo jungle, each knotted stem as thick as a man's leg, grouped in close clumps of twenty or thirty. Between the clumps lay open ground carpeted with the debris of long narrow leaves that had no crackle to them.

Good jungle, that. So softly could they proceed on that velvet pile that guinea fowl scratched contentedly all around them, and once two water-buck were surprised on the far side of a score of towering stiff stems. Safe jungle, because one could see anything that came; and a charging elephant, for instance, could easily be dodged among the palisaded stems.

That jungle gave place to junipers, witch-hazels, and giant yews of the Ruwenzori foothills, all interlaced with tangled scrub and vines— bad jungle,

for any quick movement, or fast getaway from danger, was impossible. The greenhorn ducked and twisted through the tangle like a ghost, and the little black man followed like his shadow.

The rain forest again gave place to a wide amphitheater of bamboo grass. Not in giant clumps here; more like a close sown field of exaggerated corn, twenty feet high, stiff, sword edged— impossible jungle. Only a steam roller, or an elephant, could penetrate this barrier. And one of the two was in it. Soft cracklings, muffled snappings, moist crunchings issued from within. A giant, trampled tunnel bored into it.

A foolhardy hunter or an ignorant novice might have plunged on into this close walled tunnel. The greenhorn climbed up into the high flung roots of a huge fallen yew that the slowly spreading bamboo grass had killed. The little black man leaped up after him like a monkey.

From the lofty perch just on a level with the grass tops the jungle amphitheater looked like an undulating green, lake; and, like a lake, the surface heaved and billowed with a heavy groundswell of monstrous motion beneath the surface.

Half an hour passed. The little black man touched his master's foot and pointed silently. Down the valley sides a cautious crackling was coming. Slowly it worked down to one edge of the amphitheater and stopped. It divided, and the careful crackling took different directions. One worked softly round in the direction of the fallen yew.

"Hmph! They know their business all right," the greenhorn muttered. "Ringing them round."

The nearest crackling came to a halt at the tunnel. A grunt of satisfaction followed. Faint shufflings indicated a man composing himself to wait.

Silence enveloped the jungle amphitheater. Even the ponderous sounds from within stilled. Suspicious, tense, the whole jungle waited. Breathless, the still air was heavy with enormous happenings.

The faintest cautious click of a breaking twig sounded from the farther side. From within the matted cane came a quick scuffle and a great, windy zooosh of expelled air.

The little black man raised his hands to the sides of his head, fingers fanned out, and then pointed an arm snakily from his nose. It was a silent picture of great ears flapping forward and a trunk breathing questingly for the least draft of wind.

There was no wind or sound. There was nothing— only wire edged waiting.

Into the tenseness a rifle spat viciously, thin and tenuous in the vast expectancy. Thunderous echoes rolled back from the wooded hills. And on that signal, as if it had been the first primal upheaval of worlds in the making, chaos

exploded into the still jungle amphitheater— siren screamings, throaty trumpetings, more fast rifle shots, shouts, vast roarings, confusion, earthquake.

On the undulating sea of grass tops the watching greenhorn saw a tidal wave rise and go hurtling across the glade to the side farthest from the rifle fire, leaving a swath of destruction behind it. Merciless rifle shots met its approach, and then a hell of machine gun fire.

The greenhorn's face grew grim with disgust; but he said nothing. The little black man spat into the air before him.

The tidal wave broke into a wild tossing of grassy billows. Enormous lurchings heaved under the surface. Terror trumpeted. Human voices screamed hysterically. Bamboo stems crackled like fireworks. Ponderous impacts thudded together. The air quivered with immense forces in confusion.

The tumbled junrle surface began to disintegrate, to melt away beneath huge trampling feet. A twisted trunk licked up into the air. A great gray back heaved itself out of the destruction. Milling, struggling forms bulked huge in the confusion. Bursts of machine gun fire crackled above the uproar.

The greenhorn on his perch sat white and silent. The little black man made a single comment which expressed more than abuse.

"Females and young with the herd."

Then, with the queer unanimity of wild things in terror, the herd hurled itself into the tossing greenery again. The tidal wave formed and went whirling and crashing off in another direction.

"Poor silly brutes. They follow their own tunnels," the greenhorn muttered. "And—" his teeth gritted— "those swine know it." A moment later, "And, by heaven, it's this tunnel."

It was true. The whole stampede came thundering down this familiar passageway, splitting it apart, smashing ruin upon devastation. The ground trembled under its rushing weight. The tidal wave resolved itself into an avalanche of hurtling flesh and elemental sound.

THE man hidden beneath the greenery at the tunnel's mouth coolly held his ground. He knew his own power. His rifle roared into the tunnel. Giant throats screamed. Vast momentums impacted and recoiled. The avalanche piled up on itself. Pressure from behind split its front. Huge shapes staggered aside into the thick grass wall. Shouts from the man. Again his rifle roared.

An immense head in which little eyes gleamed bloodshot appeared out of the grass fringe and crashed into the dead yew tree. The whole great stem lurched over. The watcher and the little black man were catapulted from its root. The watcher, dazed, had the wit to roll under the lee of the fallen bole.

Again a shouted curse and the rifle's roar. Muddy things moved close to the fallen greenhorn's face. They were the tunnel man's boots. The greenhorn raised himself and stood behind the other. It was big Jan Ruys.

Ruys gave only a startled look and then aimed into the wrecked tunnel again. A huge bulk filled it like a rushing projectile. The heavy rifle roared. The bulk staggered but hurtled on, enormous, screaming rage. Only a shot placed in a spot as big as the palm of a hand could stop it— the most difficult shot in all elephant hunting. It was a charging, head-on shot, requiring lightning quick allowance for height and angle of head and thickness of trunk, with time for only one shot.

Ruys tore his rifle bolt out and back and aimed with a steady hand. The firing pin clicked upon emptiness. Ruys shouted a curse and stood. There was nothing else to do. His time, as it comes to most elephant hunters, had come to him.

The greenhorn snapped up his rifle and fired. The charging bulk became an avalanche slide, pushing great furrows of earth before its immense feet. The slide stopped within reaching distance of the muddy boots. The huge bulk rolled slowly and crushed a crackling hollow into the cane wall.

Ruys breathed noisily.

"Phe-ew! Gaw strike me if that ain't the damnedest tusker ever I seen. Knocked 'im' endways harf a dozen times, an' he gets up an' keeps cornin'."

He was admirably self-possessed in the face of his near obliteration. Suddenly he looked queerly at the greenhorn who had made that clean, cool shot. Then he shouted and crammed fresh cartridges into his gun to fire at a gray shape that milled in the tangled confusion.

The confusion broke up at last. Silence settled over the trampled tangle of what had been fresh, softly billowing jungle less than ten minutes before— ten tremendous minutes.

Then came shouts from the farther side. Shouts answered from the left.

Ruys bellowed hoarsely. On the right remained silence. Ruys advanced slowly. He had to climb over the great carcass that blocked the tunnel. The greenhorn followed, wondering what lay beyond.

In a great niche in the tunnel wall formed by a falling mass lay an elephant. Beyond, in a flattened area of destruction lay another— a rounded heap that might have been a rock rising above the debris of greenery. Tusks gleamed white from a pile of twisted stems. Something bulked darkly beyond.

Ruys began to laugh, uncertainly at first, then in loud jubilation. His guffaw was a shout.

"Gawblime, but it's six ov 'em! An' I says to meself, 'Strike me if this ain't the toughest bull as ever I shot at.' Him keepin' a-comin' after I knocks 'im. Ee-yow! I'm a perisher if that ain't prize shootin'."

Joyous discovery shouts came from the other side of the slaughter pen. Ruys bellowed simian glee and tramped to meet them.

The greenhorn stood with tight pressed lips. He felt sick. Disgust swept over him in a hot wave. This was not shooting— it was a shambles. The little black man climbed upon a great rounded flank and squatted there upon his heels. Cynically he picked a snuff horn from his ear lobe and sniffed a pinch.

"It is a pity, bwana," he said, "that you did not hold your shot until after the charging elephant had taken that great ox. There would then have been only two to reckon with."

His master became aware of his presence and his eyes traveled then to where that human scream had been before the remainder of the herd had broken away. The little man clicked his tongue and his grimace was that of a pleased ape.

"That one was the Zanzibari," he said. "So screams a man when the elephant's foot is upon his belly."

The white man shivered. But his eyes were on the bodies of slaughtered elephants, not in the direction off the late Zanzibari ivory poacher.

"Pah!" He spat. "Let's get out of here."

THE greenhorn sat in his tent alone. The others had broached a bottle from the rich sport's luxurious supplies and were celebrating their successful morning.

"Best show we ever had," said Mink McCarthy. "The perfect spot to catch 'em in. Never been another like it. Sixteen all told, and nine of 'em tuskers. And if that blighted Zanzibari hadn't been a fool we'd ha' got more. But I reckon it's close on eight hundred pounds of ivory at that, an' that's pretty good these days."

There was cause for rejoicing. But Jan Ruys had a disquieting note to inject. As sometimes happens to a stupid man, a keen idea had come into his mind earlier that morning; and it had taken root and grown alarmingly.

"This 'ere American bloke—" he lowered his great bull voice and looked cautiously out of his little eyes— "he ain't no tenderfoot sport. I seen 'im shoot. Clean an' cool as you an' me. I been thinkin' on that; an' d'yer know what?"

The others looked at him, ready for any suspicion, as in their business they had to be.

"Yer wanter know what I think?" He whispered the ill thought. "I'll bet yer he's no one else but that blarsted King feller."

The others started. Tino Corra pulled at his little mustache and considered the possibility. Mink McCarthy's keen wits raced over the pros and cons, while a tight frown contracted his brows I under which his eyes glittered redly.

"Look at 'im," Ruys enlarged his accusation. "Tall an' big in the shoulder an' hard as nails. An' look at his niggers. The big feller — he's a Masai or I'm a bloody fool. An' the little un— he's the Hottentot. You've 'eard of Kingi Bwana an' his two men. We've all 'eard all about 'em. An' now I arsks yer: What's he doin' pretendin' he's a rich sport lost on a heap o' safari goods right in our road?"

Mink's narrow jaws set as if he were sinking sharp teeth into each item in turn and chewing upon it. And, as he digested each one, his face became harder and more deadly. Abstractedly, as he revolved the possibilities again, he reached for his rifle and began counting cartridges into the magazine. The vicious push of his thumb marked his decision on each separate point.

There was no more than suspicion that this man was the Kingi Bwana of camp-fire legend. But that did not matter. To those three in their ruthless game, it was sufficient that the man was not what he pretended to be.

Ruys swallowed a furious oath. He picked up his rifle with sudden resolve and made to stride for the stranger's tent. This thing would have to be finished then and there. Mink hissed throatily after him, his face bleak with rage. Quick as a small rodent, he rose and caught at Ruys's belt.

"You blasted fool!" he grated. "You'll be getting all of us lagged some day with your thick wit. Can't you see we'll have to take 'em all together— him and his niggers? If they're who you think, they're smart as monkeys. Let one of 'em escape as a witness, an' we'd be in the soup up to our necks."

Ruys stood, clumsily irresolute and half rebellious, till the blood-chilling common sense of his comrade soaked into his dull brain. Then he allowed himself to be dragged back. In a flat tone, conceding only a postponement, he said—

"When the big nigger comes to fix 'is tent an' the little devil is cookin'."

The three looked at one another, the eyes of all of them showing agreement. Slowly they nodded.

No fuss about this thing, no dramatics, without the necessity of speech.

Only a glance between men who understood one another.

The stranger kept to his tent. He could not bring himself to fraternize with those three under a pretense of amity. And the three— cold, unhurried, determined— watched for the appearance of the big tent boy.

Evening came. Unsuspiciously the stranger came out of his tent. Like a blanket-wrapped baboon the little Hottentot crouched over his cook pots. But the figure of the huge Masai was nowhere in sight.

Moodily the stranger sat down to eat. A gasoline pressure lantern flooded him and his Hottentot in clear white light. Each one of the waiting three was an expert rifle shot. But, inexplicably, no Masai came.

Night fell. The man who might be the redoutable Kingi Bwana retired to his tent. The three cursed in furious whispers and took turns to watch. Sooner or later the third witness would return to the camp— and then!

Dawn came. Mink, whose watch it was, kicked the others to snarling wakefulness.

It was just the tall stranger's luck and his inherent caution that had sent the big Masai with a message to Fort Portal, a long day's run distant.

THE three took council. If this were indeed the Kingi Bwana of camp-fire legend, they were up against wits as keen as all their own. Mink spat poisonous curses and fetched out a map. He pressed a pointed thumbnail upon it. His red eyes burned into the paper.

"We're too damned close to that blasted Fort Portal place. It's marked as a police outpost, curse it." The claw-like thumbnail cut a groove across the map. "There's the Semliki River. A day's fast trek beyond is the Belgian Congo border. If we can get to the river—"

Mink's fist slammed on to the map.

"By all hell, if we can get across I'll drop this fly cove at long range, I don't care who's with him or who isn't. Belgian Congo'll be safe country, all right."

Ruys gazed at the map, judging distances. He breathed heavily. He was satisfied it could be done.

"Why not burn the two of 'em now an' make a run for it? We kin get there, ivory an' all, before anybody'd ketch up."

Mink looked at him with hate. He sneered, coldly venomous.

"Don't you ever think? D'you even know what month it is? How about if the rains are breaking on the Ruwenzori, an' the river's flooded forty foot deep an' a mile wide? Then where'd we go?"

Tino Corra showed his even teeth.

"Yess, shure. Bettaire we see first the rivaire."

Ruys was forced to curb his bloodthirsty impatience once more. But he fretted. If only that Masai would show up. During the midday halt he approached the busy little Hottentot, and with immense unconcern inquired about the other man.

He might as well have hoped to pit his wits against a wise old chimpanzee. The little black man chattered as volubly as an ape and dissembled as smoothly. Oh, the big Kaffir boy? He was careful not to name him a Masai. The clumsy great oaf had stepped upon a black scorpion and his leg had swelled up like an elephant's. So he had gone to the nearest witch doctor to have the poison magic performed. He would catch up with the safari when he was well. And maliciously the wizened imp added—

"Surely will that great black one catch up; for he is a great runner and can travel distance as the antelope travels."

Later the wise little one, suspicious as a monkey, related the episode to his master over the solitary lunch at the folding canvas table; and he quoted a proverb of his own people.

"When the ox seeks for information, then must it indeed be a matter of great importance. King cogitated over this news, his eyes very narrow, squinting out under the corners to empty distance. He fired a short question or two at the Hottentot. He whistled a tuneless air through his teeth. Then he shrugged. His bleached brows met in a straight line over his eyes. He shrugged again. With his hands deep in his breeches pockets he sauntered over to where the three squatted, heads together.

Smiling a little grimly, King teetered on widespread legs and looked down on them.

"Well," he challenged, "it seems we know each other. Now what?"

Three sets of ferocious eyes glowered at him. The three were ready for fight on the drop of a hat. But King's thumbs were hooked into his belt; and a belt holster hung at the very heel of his hand. Like the grating hiss of a ferret came Mink's words:

"Get to hell outa here before we send you sudden, you blasted police spy! Yes, sure we know you. We've heard plenty about you, but nothing that low."

King's smile was like a knife blade. He shook his head.

"Not spy. But something nobody's ever heard about me yet— deputy warden."

His voice hardened to match the smile.

"I don't give a hoot what you crooks may have done down Rhodesia way— whom you've bumped off or why. That belongs to the police. It's none of my shauri. But this filthy thing that you've just done is right up my street. It's the personal affair of every decent white man in Africa."

Mink smiled grimly at King.

"All right. D'you think you're going to arrest the three of us, Mr. Holy Man Game Warden Deputy?"

King knew very well he could not. While he had the drop on them just now, he had far too much respect for their collective wit to think that he could divert his attention from the group and concentrate it upon the disarming of any one man. They were all three fast and expert shots.

Mink kept his grin.

"I'd advise you to get to hell away," he spat forth again. "And you're damned lucky the breaks came the way they did. Get away— before the breaks maybe take a turn."

Again King shook his head. The smile had gone from his face; only the steely hardness was left.

"Oh, no. We don't exactly part just yet. Of course, I don't like you civet cats well enough to safari along with you. But you're not fools enough to think I won't stick right on your trail; and I'm sure you're not fools enough to try and bushwhack me as long as one of my boys remains at large. So we understand one another. I'm going to take you boys in, if I can. And you're going to do me in, if you dare."

He stood awhile longer, surveying their rage with sardonic grimness. Then he turned and left them.

Mink's grin became the throaty growl of an animal nuzzling its meat. But at no time did he lose his alertness. With a quick look he satisfied himself that Jan Ruys was making no rash move. Then very meaningly, for his friends to hear:

"We daren't bushwhack you? You think you're going to take us in. You hope? You're damn right, you hellion Yankee! We dare do nothing, until we're sure we can cross the Semliki River."

King had no fear of turning his back upon the three. He understood fully the insurance of one of his men remaining alive as a witness. To the Hottentot he said:

"We move camp swiftly. And from now on we must be as wary as the gray jackal and as sleepless as the rock snake."

The Hottentot grimaced. White man's squeamishness was a permanent sore point with him.

"Did I not say, bwana, that it would have been better to have let the elephant take that one? So there would be now only two. Even as we—" he whispered hissingly through his teeth— "even as we are two."

King was inwardly pleased at the little man's loyal hint at cooperation. But he said gruffly:

"The Masai will be returning at the hour of dusk. He surely must be met and warned. For this is our insurance: that at no time shall the three of us be seen in one place at the same time."

Without requiring to be told, the astute little man understood the significance of that thought; and on the instant he had a thought to add.

"It is well. It is, therefore, in my head that this night bwana shall watch in the boma alone, as sleepless as the rock snake; and like the gray jackal, the Masai and I, we shall creep in and stab those three as they sleep."

"Out!" ordered King. "Out, little murderer! And make speed to move from these evil associations that corrupt the morals of an ape."

AND so that strangely divided safari trekked on its way— closely bound together, hating and helpless, hard bound by diametrically opposing restrictions. Either party was willing to do the other deadly hurt; yet each found its hands quite securely tied. Kingi Bwana could make no foolish play against those three experienced gunmen unless he could separate them. They dared not attack him unless they could get his trio all together. And somewhere in the bush, hurrying along to add the hazard of win or lose to the game, came the police from Fort Portal.

At last they reached the river. When the long line of wild fig trees that marked its course showed on the horizon, even the coldly calculating Mink was impelled to hurry. The game depended upon the river's condition. When they came near enough to look over the brim of its gully, Ruys capered uncouthly and shouted.

Down at the bottom of the great swath gouged by the monsoon into the plain a wide gray ribbon zigzagged— a good two hundred yards wide, but width mattered nothing. The water was at the bottom, not racing level with the top as it might have been.

"Here's where we settle that interferin' blighter's hash," Ruys rejoiced vindictively.

Mink McCarthy's expression was split in a lipless grin.

"Plenty of time yet," he purred. "Plenty time. We'll send the ivory over first. That son of a long legged snoop will come sticking his nose into the game sooner or later; an' then, when we're safe over—" He chuckled croakingly.

Presently a long line of black figures was stringing across the wide gray ribbon. Long white arcs gleamed on their shoulders, submerged in places. Neck deep it was and cold from the Ruwenzori heights, but easily fordable.

And presently, as prognosticated, King arrived to stick his nose into the game. Only he and the Hottentot were in sight.

Warily watching the men, his hand on his pistol butt, he surveyed the scene. It promised to be a very successful escape, unless the police should suddenly arrive like a cinema miracle. But the river seemed to offer an obstacle.

King spoke banteringly, but with a hard edge to his tone.

"Kinda like the riddle about the missionaries and the cannibals, no?"

"Meanin'?" Mink was quickly hostile.

King grinned amiably.

"Meaning the little matter of getting across. It's going to be difficult shooting for you gentlemen out in the deep spots."

Mink was suddenly affable.

"Don't you worry about that, you blasted Yank. We're not silly."

He drew his grinning friends away. Even the surly Ruys was good humored "Now listen," he told them. "I go first. You cover this smart Yank till I'm across. I'll hold a bead on him while Tino comes. And then the two of us covers you. And when we're all across—" he cackled harshly— "I'll lay you fifty pounds of tusk I drop him first." Suddenly he was savage. "Follow us, will he, the blasted swine! Only thing I'm sorry about is we don't get the big nigger too."

The plan was perfect. Mink waded in. He had to hold his rifle above his head out in the middle of the stream, but he had no difficulty in making it. On the far side he scrambled up the steep bank and settled himself with his back to the bush fringe, his elbows on his knees, his rifle held comfortably and steadily. He looked frail and insignificant nearly three hundred yards away; but nobody, least of all King, had any impression that the man was not deadly.

Tino Corra showed white teeth to King.

"Goodbai, senhor," he told him fondly. "Pairhaps I don' see you no more. Pairhaps nobody see you nevair no more."

He chuckled sweetly, scrambled down the bank and waded in.

King stood looking across the water. Big Jan Ruys, his back to the river, stood warily watching King, a heavy grin on his face about an impending joke that King did not know.

King scarcely looked at Ruys. His attention was all on the farther side of the river where Mink sat venomously waiting, blending with his protective coloring into the bush fringe behind him.

Hawk-like, King watched that distant figure, himself waiting for something to happen. The little Hottentot standing behind him balanced on one foot and writhed in excitement over imminent happenings. King's eyes, puckered hard and narrow in the sun, dropped for a moment to Tino Corra laboring in midstream. From him they flashed to Jan Ruys.

Ruys stiffened to alertness. He had a wholesome respect for King's wit. Had he stood alone, nervousness might have impelled him to draw a gun and precipitate a showdown. But there was comforting assurance in the steady rifle of the cold blooded Mink a scant three hundred yards across the river—

an assurance of deadly precision that King fully shared. So King only stood and waited.

Jan Ruys was reassured that King knew enough not to try any foolhardy tricks against the double hazard. He felt that he could indulge in a little heavy humor before his turn to cross over.

"Yer been pretty smart, Yank, ain't yer? Well, Mink over there—" he jerked his head backward— "he's pretty smart too. Me, I'll be across there in a couple minutes." He guffawed at the thought of the long range sport that was due to commence as soon as he should be safely across. "Then you'll see how smart Mink is. He's been a damn sight too smart for a whole lot o' damned copper spies. An' he's been too smart for you."

King, tensely watching, found it in himself to grin back at the confident Ruys. Ruys instantly confronted him again with pig-eyed suspicion. So it was that he hid not see the swift events that began to take place on the other side.

And Mink, too, all his concentration fixed upon this direction from the far side, did not see what was shaping behind him. Only Tino Corra, up to his neck in water, facing Mink, saw.

TWO stalwart black arms emerged from the bush fringe behind Mink McCarthy. Mink, intent upon the sights of his rifle lined up on King's broad chest, heard not a thing, never daring to relax his attention or look about him. He knew much better than did Ruys how suddenly capable King might be of outwitting the big dullard.

Tino Corra, watching catastrophe shape itself, shrieked warning. Gray water swirled about his neck. His eyes bulged; his mouth gaped to shout. One arm holding his rifle clear waved frantically. The other arm emerged and joined it.

"Behind! Guard you behind!" Tino gurgled in his sick frenzy.

King whooped his sudden satisfaction. The little Hottentot shrieked like a steam whistle and flung his arms aloft in a demoniac leap.

Mink trained his eyes over his front sight to see what all this fuss was about. He could make nothing of the bobbing head and splashing arms out in the river. They pointed behind him; but arms pointing out of nothing are indefinite as to direction. Some damned stupidity on the fool's part, Mink was savagely deciding. Then the strong black arms descended upon him from behind.

Tino Corra shrieked his final despair. Jan Ruys snatched a look behind, and at that instant King rushed him.

Jan's quick glance over his shoulder only half took in what was happening. He turned heavily to meet King's catlike onslaught. There was not time to get

his gun into play. King was at hand grips with him; and Ruys, burly, great brute that he was, felt a stab of apprehension at the expertness and power of those long, steel sinewed arms.

But Ruys was a tough barroom fighter. Though taken aback, he had the ingrained instinct to swing his hips away and to drive his knee hard for his opponent's groin.

King wilted with the numbing shock of it. He had been appraising this great bull of a man and all his instinct of competitive combat had been anticipating the inevitable tussle for the showdown. But here was no time for pretty fighting. With set teeth he clung to the cursing, shouting ox, and managed to get his pistol free. Grunting, he swung it upward. Its barrel collided with a sharp snap against the protruding bone behind the other's ear. Ruys went down without a struggle or a sound.

Tino Corra was floundering in shallower water, trying to get his rifle irito play. King dropped behind Ruys's bulk. The Hottentot flung his rifle to him. King lay panting, the rifle thrust out over Ruys's side, like a cavalryman behind his fallen horse.

"Drop that!" he shouted. "Drop it! Right into the river!"

Corra had heard as much about King's marksmanship as King had heard about Mink McCarthy's. Only for a glaring moment he hesitated. He could see King's head. His own head and chest were clear of the water, but the current whirled about his legs. Slowly he let his gun drop.

"So!" King shouted, and his tenseness relaxed. "Now come ashore. This side. And don't try anything with the pistol in your belt."

On the farther bank Mink McCarthy and the strong black arms had disappeared, swallowed up into the bush fringe that remained as peacefully blank as when Mink had disposed himself against it. But King had no apprehensions on that score.

Painfully he flexed his body while the Hottentot tied both men up with as many twists and knots as a monkey would use.

"Good," said King, and he smiled with pinched lips. "Sit on them while I go and help the Masai bring that other one across. Then the two of you can round up those ivory porters. The men from Fort Portal ought to be along any time now."

A blend of indignation and grim satisfaction chased the pain from his face, as he growled to himself—

"Go murdering elephants wholesale, will they?"

———————

2: A Son of the Gods

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner, 29 July 1888

A BREEZY DAY and a sunny landscape. An open country to right and left and forward; behind, a wood. In the edge of this wood, facing the open but not venturing into it, long lines of troops halted. The wood is alive with them, and full of confused noises: the occasional rattle of wheels as a battery of artillery goes into position to cover the advance; the hum and murmur of the soldiers talking; a sound of innumerable feet in the dry leaves that strew the interspaces among the trees; hoarse commands of officers. Detached groups of horsemen are well in front— not altogether exposed— many of them intently regarding the crest of a hill a mile away in the direction of the interrupted advance. For this powerful army, moving in battle order through a forest, has met with a formidable obstacle— the open country.

The crest of that gentle hill a mile away has a sinister look; it says, Beware! Along it runs a stone wall extending to left and right a great distance. Behind the wall is a hedge; behind the hedge are seen the tops of trees in rather straggling order. Among the trees— what? It is necessary to know.

Yesterday, and for many days and nights previously, we were fighting somewhere; always there was cannonading, with occasional keen rattlings of musketry, mingled with cheers, our own or the enemy's, we seldom knew, attesting some temporary advantage. This morning at daybreak the enemy was gone. We have moved forward across his earthworks, across which we have so often vainly attempted to move before, through the debris of his abandoned camps, among the graves of his fallen, into the woods beyond.

How curiously we regarded everything! How odd it all seemed! Nothing appeared quite familiar; the most commonplace objects— an old saddle, a splintered wheel, a forgotten canteen— everything related something of the mysterious personality of those strange men who had been killing us. The soldier never becomes wholly familiar with the conception of his foes as men like himself; he cannot divest himself of the feeling that they are another order of beings, differently conditioned, in an environment not altogether of the earth. The smallest vestiges of them rivet his attention and engage his interest. He thinks of them as inaccessible; and, catching an unexpected glimpse of them, they appear farther away, and therefore larger, than they really are like objects in a fog. He is somewhat in awe of them.

From the edge of the wood leading up the acclivity are the tracks of horses and wheels— the wheels of cannon. The yellow grass is beaten down by the feet of infantry. Clearly they have passed this way in thousands; they have not

withdrawn by the country roads. This is significant— it is the difference between retiring and retreating.

That group of horsemen is our commander, his staff, and escort. He is facing the distant crest, holding his field-glass against his eyes with both hands, his elbows needlessly elevated. It is a fashion; it seems to dignify the act; we are all addicted to it. Suddenly he lowers the glass and says a few words to those about him. Two or three aides detach themselves from the group and canter away into the woods, along the lines in each direction. We did not hear his words, but we knew them: "Tell General X. to send forward the skirmish line."

Those of us who have been out of place resume our positions; the men resting at ease straighten themselves, and the ranks are reformed without a command. Some of us staff officers dismount and look at our saddle-girths; those already on the ground remount.

Galloping rapidly along in the edge of the open ground comes a young officer on a snow-white horse. His saddle-blanket is scarlet. What a fool! No one who has ever been in battle but remembers how naturally every rifle turns toward the man on a white horse; no one but has observed how a bit of red enrages the bull of battle. That such colours are fashionable in military life must be accepted as the most astonishing of all the phenomena of human vanity. They would seem to have been devised to increase the death-rate.

This young officer is in full uniform, as if on parade. He is all agleam with bullion, a blue-and-gold edition of the Poetry of War. A wave of derisive laughter runs abreast of him all along the line. But how handsome he is! With what careless grace he sits his horse!

He reins up within a respectful distance of the corps commander and salutes. The old soldier nods familiarly; he evidently knows him. A brief colloquy between them is going on; the young man seems to be preferring some request which the elder one is indisposed to grant. Let us ride a little nearer. Ah! too late— it is ended. The young officer salutes again, wheels his horse, and rides straight toward the crest of the hill. He is deadly pale.

A thin line of skirmishers, the men deployed at six paces or so apart, now pushes from the wood into the open. The commander speaks to his bugler, who claps his instrument to his lips.

Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la!

The skirmishers halt in their tracks. Meantime the young horseman has advanced a hundred yards. He is riding at a walk, straight up the long slope, with never a turn, of the head. How glorious! Gods! what would we not give to be in his place— with his soul! He does not draw his sabre; his right hand hangs easily at his side. The breeze catches the plume in his hat and flutters it

smartly. The sunshine rests upon his shoulder-straps, lovingly, like a visible benediction. Straight on he rides. Ten thousand pairs of eyes are fixed upon him with an intensity that he can hardly fail to feel; ten thousand hearts keep quick time to the inaudible hoof-beats of his snowy steed. He is not alone— he draws all souls after him; we are but “djead men all.” But we remember that we laughed! On and on, straight for the hedge-lined wall, he rides. Not a look backward. Oh, if he would but turn— if he could but see the love, the adoration, the atonement!

Not a word is spoken; the populous depths of the forest still murmur with their unseen and unseeing swarm, but all along thr fringe there is silence absolute. The burly commander is an equestrian statue of himself. The mounted staff officers, their field-glasses up, are motionless all. The line of battle in the edge of the wood stands at a new kind of “attention,” each man in the attitude in which he was caught by the consciousness of what is going on. All these hardened and impenitent man-killers, to whom death in its awfulest forms is a fact familiar to their everyday observation; who sleep on hills trembling with the thunder of great guns, dine in the midst of streaming missiles, and play at cards among the dead faces of their dearest friends, —all are watching him with suspended breath and beating hearts the outcome of an act involving the life of one man, Such is the magnetism of courage and devotion.

If now you should turn your head you would see a simultaneous movement among the spectators—a start, as if they had re- ceived an electric shock—and looking forward again to the now distant horseman you would see that he has in that instant altered his direction and is riding at an angle to his former course.

Spectators suppose the sudden deflection to be caused by a shot, perhaps a wound; but take this field-glass and you will observe that he is riding toward a break in the wall and hedge. He means, if not killed, to ride through and overlook the country beyond.

You are not to forget the nature of this man’s act; it is not permitted to you to think of it as an instance of bravado, nor, on the other hand, a needless sacrifice of self. If the enemy has not rereated, he is in force on that ridge. The investigator will encounter nothing less than a line of battle; there is no need of pickets, videttes, skirmishers, to give warning of our approach; our attacking lines will be visible, conspicuous, exposed to an artillery fire that will shave the ground the moment they break from cover, and for half the distance to a sheet of rifle bullets in which nothing can live. In short, if the enemy is there, it would be madness to attack him in front; he must be manoeuvred out by the immemorial plan of threatening his line of communication, as necessary to his

existence as to the diver at the bottom of the sea his air-tube. But how ascertain if the enemy is there? There is but one way: somebody must go and see. The natural and customary thing to do is to send forward a line of skirmishers. But in this case they will answer in the affirmative with all their lives; the enemy, crouching in double ranks behind the stone wall and in cover of the hedge, will wait until it is possible to count each assailant's teeth. At the first volley a half of the questioning line will fall, the other half before it can accomplish the predestined retreat. What a price to pay for gratified curiosity! At what a dear rate an army must sometimes purchase knowledge! "Let me pay all," says this gallant man— this military Christ!

There is no hope except the hope against hope that the crest is clear. True, he might prefer capture to death. So long as he advances, the line will not fire— why should it? He can safely ride into the hostile ranks and become a prisoner of war. But this would defeat his object. It would not answer our question; it is necessary either that he return unharmed or be shot to death before our eyes. Only so shall we know how to act. If captured— why, that might have been done by a half-dozen stragglers.

Now begins an extraordinary contest of intellect between a man and an army. Our horseman, now within a quarter of a mile of the crest, suddenly wheels to the left and gallops in a direction parallel to it. He has caught sight of his antagonist; he knows all. Some slight advantage of ground has enabled him to overlook a part of the line. If he were here, he could tell us in words. But that is now hopeless; he must make the best use of the few minutes of life remaining to him, by compelling the enemy himself to tell us as much and as plainly as possible which, naturally, that discreet power is reluctant to do. Not a rifleman in those crouching ranks, not a cannoneer at those masked and shotted guns, but knows the needs of the situation, the imperative duty of forbearance. Besides, there has been time enough to forbid them all to fire. True, a single rifle-shot might drop him and be no great disclosure. But firing is infectious— and see how rapidly he moves, with never a pause except as he whirls his horse about to take a new direction, never directly backward toward us, never directly forward toward his executioners. All this is visible through the glass; it seems occurring within pistol-shot; we see all but the enemy, whose presence, whose thoughts, whose motives we infer. To the unaided eye there is nothing but a black figure on a white horse, tracing slow zigzags against the slope of a distant hill— so slowly they seem almost to creep.

Now— the glass again— he has tired of his failure, or sees his error, or has gone mad; he is dashing directly forward at the wall, as if to take it at a leap, hedge and all! One moment only and he wheels right about and is speeding like the wind straight down the slope— toward his friends, toward his death!

Instantly the wall is topped with a fierce roll of smoke for a distance of hundreds of yards to right and left. This is as instantly dissipated by the wind, and before the rattle of the rifles reaches us, he is down. No, he recovers his seat; he has but pulled his horse upon its haunches. They are up and away! A tremendous cheer bursts from our ranks, relieving the. insupportable tension of our feelings. And the horse and its rider? Yes, they are up and away. Away, indeed— they are making directly to our left, parallel to the now steadily blazing and smoking wall. The rattle of the musketry is continuous, and every bullet's target is that courageous heart.

Suddenly a great bank of what smoke pushes upward from behind the wall. Another and another— a dozen roll up before the thunder of the explosions and the humming of the missiles reach our ears, and the missiles themselves come bounding through clouds of dust into our covert, knocking over here and there a man and causing a temporary distraction, a passing thought of self.

The dust drifts away. Incredible!— that enchanted horse and rider have passed a ravine and are climbing another slope to unveil another conspiracy of silence, to thwart the will of another armed host. Another moment and that crest too is in eruption. The horse rears and strikes the air with its forefeet. They are down at last. But look again— the man has detached himself from the dead animal. He stands erect, motionless, holding his sabre in his right hand straight above his head. His face is toward us. Now he lowers his hand to a level with his face and moves it outward, the blade of the sabre describing a downward curve. It is a sign to us, to the world, to posterity.

It is a hero's salute to death and history.

Again the spell is broken; our men attempt to cheer; they are choking with emotion; they utter hoarse, discordant cries; they clutch their weapons and press tumultuously forward into the open. The skirmishers, without orders, against orders, are going forward at a keen run, like hounds unleashed. Our cannon speak and the enemy's now open in full chorus; to right and left as far as we can see, the distant crest, seeming now so near, erects its towers of cloud, and the great shot pitch roaring down among our moving masses. Flag after flag of ours emerges from the wood, line after line sweeps forth, catching the sunlight on its burnished arms. The rear battalions alone are in obedience; they preserve their proper distance from the insurgent front.

The commander has not moved. He now removes his field-glass from his eyes and glances to the right and left. He sees the human current flowing on either side of him and his huddled escort, like tide waves parted by a rock. Not a sign of feeling in his face; he is thinking. Again he directs his eyes forward; they slowly traverse that malign and awful crest. He addresses a calm word to his bugler. Tra-la-la! Tra-la-lal The injunction has an imperiousness which

enforces it. It is repeated by all the bugles of all the subordinate commanders; the sharp metallic notes assert themselves above the hum of the advance, and penetrate the sound of the cannon. To halt is to withdraw. The colours move slowly back, the lines face about and sullenly follow, bearing their wounded; the skirmishers return, gathering up the dead. Ah, those many, many needless dead! That great soul whose beautiful body is lying over yonder, so conspicuous against the sere hillside— could it not have been spared the bitter consciousness of a vain devotion? Would one excepion have marred too much the pitiless perfection of the divine, eternal plan?

_____

3: The Target

W. Pett Ridge

1859-1930

In: *Table d'Hôte*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1911

THE WOMAN stepped on so many toes in making her way to the far end that the passengers were only willing to give partial forgiveness when, as the motor-omnibus started, she gave a violent jerk.

"First time I've ever been in one of these new-fangled contrivances."

"It'll be the last, if you ain't careful," said the conductor, punching a penny ticket.

"But I made up my mind to do it," addressing the others. "Down in the country where I live, they've been throwing it up agenst me for some time past. And so I determined, next time I come up to see my sister, I'd take a trip by one of them, jest in order to see what happened, and—here I are."

A youth next to her, with a girl companion, mentioned that it was a pity they so often exploded, and blew up in the air; the girl jerked with her elbow and begged him not to make her laugh in public.

"You think there's any likelihood?" asked the country lady tremulously. "I don't want to get mixed up in no fatal accident, and see my name in the London papers. Shan't never hear the end of it if that happens. Do they make any warning before they go off pop?"

The passengers gave up all attempt to read, and offered her their complete attention. "So painful for friends," said a woman opposite, winking at the rest. "Understand what I mean. Having to come and sort out the bits, and say, 'That looks like Uncle James's ear; if I could only find the other one, I should be able to start piecing him together.' You see, they don't allow compensation unless you can produce the complete individual."

"That don't seem exactly fair."

"It isn't fair," agreed the humorous woman. "But there's lots of things like that here in London. For instance, if the inspector came in now, and found you sitting up in the first-class part of the car, he'd want to charge you excess."

"In that case," she said affrightedly, taking a grip of her parcel, "I'd better move down nearer towards the door."

They made room for her in the newly selected position; the folk there not disguising their satisfaction with the change. The string of the parcel came undone, and they assisted her in recovering the contents. "Giving everybody a lot of trouble," she remarked penitently; "and that ain't my usual plan, not by no manner of means. Can I temp' you with a apple, sir? I don't know you, and I hope you'll excuse what looks like a liberty, but if you're a judge of a Ribston pippin, you'll enjoy that one."

"I recollect," said the man, "what 'appened in the Garden of Eden."

"That were before my time," she said, putting it back into her pocket. "But I always like to reward kindness wherever I come across it. And I must say you London folk are partic'lar nice to strangers. Nothing you won't do for them. When I get back home, I shall tell my neighbours how pleasant you've been to me. What's that building supposed to be, may I ask?" Pointing through the window at Bayswater Road.

"That," answered the man, "is a monument put up to Julius Cæsar. The chap, you know, who was in the Battle of Trafalgar."

"I remember. At least, I say I remember; but that's a lie. I recollect reading about it when I was at school. And isn't this a nice open part here, too! Trees, and goodness knows what all!"

"Richmon' Park," explained her informant readily. "That's the proper name of it."

"Thought that was situated a long way out."

"It's been moved."

"Ah, well," she said resignedly, "I find the best plan in London is to take everything as it comes. What I've always been hoping— But there, it's no use talking about what isn't likely to happen." They pressed for details. "It would be too much like luck for it to occur to me. But what I've always wished for was that I might catch sight, just for once in my life, of the new King and Queen—"

Two passengers called her attention eagerly to a couple walking along by the railings, arm-in-arm; gave a fervid assurance.

"Well, well, well!" fanning herself with an ungloved hand. "To think of him strolling along with a pipe in his mouth, for all the world like an ordinary individual! And not over-dressed neither. That's something more for me to tell 'em when I get home. Wouldn't have missed the sight for anything. But I were always under the impression that he was a gentleman with a beard."

"Shaves it off, just about this time, every year."

"I see," she remarked contentedly. "More for the sake of change, I suppose, than anything. Talking of that, I suppose there's nobody here could oblige me with silver for a sovereign?"

Out of sheer gratitude to an admirable target, they found the coins she required, and in giving her thanks she mentioned that the sooner now that she reached Notting Hill the better she would be pleased. They seemed to have a desire to conceal the truth, but the conductor happened to overhear the statement; he rang the bell sharply and informed her she was going in the wrong direction. She asked him to explain, pointing out that his conveyance certainly bore the words Notting Hill, and suggesting that he was possibly making a mistake; the delay to the motor-omnibus induced her fellow-

travellers to declare that the conductor was telling the truth, and she bade them separately and collectively goodbye, expressing a hope that she might be so fortunate as to meet them again on some future visit to town.

"And which way do I go now, young man?"

"You get off the step," replied the irritated conductor. "You cross the roadway. You take a 'bus going West."

"Which do you call West?"

The motor-omnibus restarted. Passengers gazed amusedly at her, craning necks in the hope of witnessing one more diverting incident; as she vanished they became quite friendly, wondering whether she would ever reach her destination, and speaking of the simplicity and foolishness of country folk.

"What do you make of this sovereign, conductor?"

The conductor, testing it with the aid of his teeth, announced he was able to make nothing of it; he doubted whether the owner would succeed. Alarmed, the rest of the passengers searched muffs and pockets; three purses were missing, and some articles of less value. Frantic inquiries for the nearest police-station. A man who had lost nothing said he suspected the country lady all along.

"What we ought to be uncommon thankful for," said the conductor, stopping near Edgware Road, "is that she didn't pinch the blooming 'bus!"

4: Crazy Rhythm

Max Brand

Frederick Faust Schiller, 1892-1944

Argosy, 2 March 1935

1: Back from Prison

WHEN JIMMY GEARY came in sight of Yellow Creek again, he sat down on a pine log beside the road and stared at his hometown, from the old mill at one end to the house of the Bentons on the hill, with its thin wooden spires pointing up above the trees. Best of all, he could mark the roof of Graham's Tavern beyond the rest of the houses. It was still painted red, but the wave of climbing vines had thrown a spray of green across the shingles since he had last sat in the cool of the bar room and smelled the pungencies of whiskey and the pleasant sour of beer.

Behind him, following taller than the mountains, around him thicker than the trees, before him more obscuring than the morning mist, he felt his eight years of prison. Eight years out of twenty-six is a long time. Prison monotony had made everything about those years dim except their length; the distinct moments of his life, so clear that he felt he could mark them in every day of his past, continued to that moment when he had seen the card come out of Tony Spargo's sleeve. Of course, he knew that there were card cheats, but it had seemed impossible that big, beautiful Tony Spargo, so rich in eye and color and song, could actually be doing dirt for the sake of a fifteen-dollar pot. Gus Warren, at the same table, too magnificent of brow and manner, or the Mexican with the wide face of a Chinese idol, might have been suspected, but never Tony.

He had shouted in a voice that tore his throat and cast a redness over his eyes, then he had grabbed the Colt that Tony had flashed and pulled his own gun. The weight of two bullets jarred Tony Spargo in his chair like two blows of a fist. But they were all in cahoots, the three of them. Oñate came in with a knife; Gus Warren's gun had stuck and came out only with a sound of tearing cloth. He turned his shoulder to the knife thrust and got Warren right in the middle of the face. Afterward, he had to shift the gun to his left hand to settle with Oñate. But Oñate and Spargo didn't count very much; he got fifteen years for Gus Warren, and murder in the third degree. But the warden was a fine fellow, and for good behavior there is time off.

Thinking of the past cleared the mist from his mind so that he began to see what was around him and found that his hand was stroking the smooth of the log on which he sat. There were a lot of those barkless logs waiting to be dragged away, and they were still yellow-white with the blaze of axe strokes

glittering like metal here and there. He looked about at the standing trees—the lower trunks mossed over on the north side and spiked with the stubs of broken branches, then came ragged, down-hanging boughs, and finally the fresh green of the top. On the opposite slope all he could see was the ranged and compacted mass of the treetops.

Men were like that, for the daily crowds of them seemed strong and happy, and it was only when one got underneath the first impression that the mold of time and the scars and the breakings of the years could be seen.

Something disturbed Jimmy Geary. He found that it was the noise of wind in the trees and water in the creek, both exactly the same and both trying to hurry him away, as it seemed, into some unknown expectancy of action. He looked along the scattering line of logs that so many hand strokes of labor had laid there, and down the hills he stared again into the valley. There was plenty of open country with little rusty spots of color scattered over the green. Those were the cattle.

"You've got a good, clean pair of eyes in your head," the warden had told him, "but the only way for a man to keep clean is to work. In the old days you worked with a gun. You'd better find different tools now." Well, he knew the feel of the tools he wanted to manage—the rough of a forty-foot rope and the braided handle of a quirt and the oily sleekness of bridle reins. He knew cows pretty well, and now he would work with them. Finally, he would have a herd of his own, and on the fat of this land the cattle would multiply.

"I'm going to punch cows," he had told the warden, who had answered: "That's good. Anything's good, but don't try it at home. You'd better not go back there. Hometowns are bad for bad boys, Jimmy. You know what I mean by that. It's bad to get a wheel into an old rut."

The warden was a wise man, and he meant that it was best for a man with a past to try a new deal at a new table. Now the eyes of Jimmy Geary were taking hold on the picture of Yellow Creek so confidently that he felt a sort of kind recognition shining back to him from the whole valley.

He got up and walked on with the loose and easy action of a very strong man whose weight has not yet become a burden. He could feel his strength pull up the calf of his leg and bulge along his thighs, and he kept partially gripping his hands to set his arm muscles in action. His eyes shone with the glory of his fitness. Fifteen years of hard labor had been his sentence, but eight years of daily companionship with a sledgehammer had been enough. He had been pretty soft in the old days, and now he felt that softness of the body was like poison in the belly or fool ideas in the head—a thing to be purged away. As he swung down into Yellow Creek, he realized that from his sixteenth to his

eighteenth year he had never dared to enter any town without at least the weight of one gun under his coat. Now his hands would have to do.

He went happily down the main street's windings. The roar of the creek was off to the left, the music for which he had wakened and harkened vainly through the dark of so many nights. Slater's barn was there near the road, the brown-red of the paint peeling off it in larger patches than ever. The building was a grim outline to him because he had had that half-hour fight with Jeff Wiley behind the barn till Mexican Charlie was frightened by the great splattering of blood and ran yelling to bring grown-ups to end the battle. From that great, crimson moment, Jeff and he had felt that they were set off from the rest of the boys in Yellow Creek with a greater destiny in promise for them. It was a sign and perhaps a prophecy, when Jeff was thrown by a bucking horse and broke his neck on a Monday; for on Friday there had occurred the triple killing in Graham's Tavern that sent Jimmy up the river for eight years.

Beyond the barn, the houses were closer together. He knew them all by their own faces and the faces, the voices, the characters of the people who passed through the front doors. Another twist of the way brought him in view of the central section of Yellow Creek, the irregular "square," the flagpole in the middle of it, the boardwalk that ran around the square in front of the buildings. Everything in Yellow Creek was here, from the newspaper office to the HAY, GRAIN, AND COAL sign of Thomas Masters, the old crook. Not very many people were moving about. There never were many people in Yellow Creek, except for holidays, and it was hardly strange that no one noticed young Jimmy Geary when he returned at last, not until after the sheriff had greeted him.

It was the same sheriff, on the same roan horse. The sheriff had been quite an old man of forty, those eight years ago, but by a strange chance he seemed younger than before to Jimmy Geary. He pulled up his mustang so hard that the water jounced and squeaked in the belly of the broncho. He waved a silent greeting; Jimmy's salute was just as still.

"Staying or passing through?" asked the sheriff, and all the calm virtue of Jimmy vanished at a stroke.

"Whichever I damn' please!" he replied. The sheriff said nothing. He simply took in Jimmy with a long look, then jogged on down the street.

Right after that a shrill sound approached Jimmy Geary. It was almost like the barking of a dog, but it came from the lips of a thirteen-year-old boy who was capering and yelling: "Hey, everybody! Hey, turn out and look sharp! Jimmy Geary's back! Jimmy Geary's back!"

Other boys heard the cry. They came in swirls of dust. As they gathered in numbers they got closer to Jimmy. They began to laugh because crowds of boys have to do something, and that laughter was acid under the skin of

Jimmy. The youngest of children can make the oldest of sages wince, if it keeps on laughing long enough.

Someone burst through the crowd. He was in such a hurry to get to Jimmy that he kept on sidling and prancing after he reached him. This fellow represented the *Morning Bugle*, he said. But he could not have represented it long, because he had been in the West only long enough for its sun to redden the end of his nose. He looked incomplete and wrinkled and uncomfortable like a man on a picnic. He wanted, he said, a few good bits from Jimmy Geary.

"I'm not talking," said Jimmy. He had learned at the penitentiary to say that.

"You're not talking?" cried the reporter. "But you've *got* to talk! Outside of the waterfalls and the lumber mill, you're the only thing in Yellow Creek that's worth writing up. If you don't talk for yourself, other people are going to talk for you."

"How do you know me?" asked Jimmy.

"Hey, look at the spread we gave you five days ago," said the reporter. He was so proud of that spread that he carried it around with him, and now unfolded the front sheet of the *Bugle*. It was not a very big paper, but the headline could be read easily right across the square.

JIMMY GEARY FREED

Underneath it ran the long article. Jimmy's eye picked out bits of it and put the bits away in his memory. He was the hero of the famous triple killing at Graham's Tavern. He was dangerous; he was a youthful and a smiling killer. But above all, the question was, what would his career be when he got free from the prison to his hometown? Or did he intend to return to it?

"What're you gonna do?" asked the reporter. "What's the career ahead of you?"

"Cattle," said Jimmy. Then he turned his eyes from the sunburned nose of the other and went off down the street. He had a vast desire to take the yipping boys, two at a time, and knock their heads together. He had been almost overcome by an intense need to punch out the red nose of the reporter.

People were hard to take, and that was perfectly certain. In a prison one's fellow humans are not so free to be annoying.

When he came to the HAY, GRAIN, AND COAL sign of Thomas Masters, he got away from the growing crowd by stepping into the office. Old Masters sat in his usual corner with the same white whiskers bulging out of the same red

face. It looked like a picture surrounded with the smoke of an explosion. He put out a fat hand, tentatively, for Jimmy Geary to grasp.

"Well, James," said Masters, "what can I do for you today?"

"Tell me where to find a job," said Jimmy.

"There are only a few good jobs, and there are a lot of good men," said Masters.

"Sure there are," admitted Jimmy. "I don't care what I get so long as there are horses and cows in it."

"And guns?" asked Masters.

"I'm traveling light," smiled Jimmy.

"You try the Yellow Creek air on yourself for a week, and then come in to see me," answered Masters, and raised his pen over a stack of bills.

Jimmy went out without a good-bye because a good-bye was not wanted. When he reached the sidewalk, Reuben Samuels got hold of him out of the increasing mob of boys and took him into the Best Chance saloon. He said: "I'm going to do something for you, Jimmy"— and sat him down at a small table in the back room. Samuels ordered two whiskies. Jimmy changed his to beer and then looked across the foam past the red length of Samuels's nose into the brightness of his little eyes.

"I've got a good break to offer you, and you're going to have it," said Samuels. "I've got a place up the line that used to make big business for me. Faro, roulette, or anything the boys want. But I had some trouble up there. Some of the roughs thought the faro layout was queer one night, and they started smashing things up. What I need is a headliner to draw the crowd, and a bouncer well enough known to throw a chill into the boys that go around packing hardware. Well, you're the man for both places, so I could pay you double. I mean something big, Jimmy. I mean fifty or sixty a week."

Jimmy Geary shook his head. "Not interested," he said.

"Or seventy," said Samuels.

"I'm not carrying any hardware myself," said Jimmy.

"Make it eighty, then, for your health."

"Not for me."

"Ninety dollars a week for an easy job, a sitting job, most of the time... and, when the work comes, it's the sort of thing that's play for you. Don't say no. I'm not pinching pennies. I'll call it a hundred flat!"

Jimmy looked hard into the little eyes. "Aw, to hell with you!" he said, and arose.

"Wait a minute," said Samuels hastily. "How did I know what you are taking in your coffee? Don't run away in a huff. I'm going to do you good, I said, and I

meant it. Sit here for five minutes. My cousin Abe is right here in town. One of the smartest men you ever met, Jimmy. He wants to see you."

Abe was like Reuben in the face, but his clothes were fitted to the sleek of his body more carefully. They seemed to be painted on him. His collar was so tight that his neck overflowed it and rubbed a dark spot of sweat or grease onto the knot of his tie. At the same time that his fat fingers took possession of Jimmy's hand, his eyes took brotherly possession of Jimmy's heart and soul.

"It's something big," he said to Jimmy. "I got the idea, when I heard that you were turned loose. I burned up the wires to New York. You see, I know Lew Gilbeck of Gilbeck and Slinger. They've put over some of the hottest shots that ever burned a hole in Broadway. They're reaching around for a big musical comedy spectacle to put out this fall, and I shoot them this idea over the wires. Jimmy Geary, hero of a three-man killing eight years ago, just out of prison. Big, handsome, loaded with it. Did his shooting eight years ago, when the phonograph record was playing 'Crazy Rhythm.' Give him a number where he does the thing over again. 'Crazy Rhythm' for a title. Booze. A girl or two. A real Western gunfight in the real Western way done by one who's done it before. I shoot this idea to Lew Gilbeck and he wires back... 'Yes, yes, yes... get him.' I wire back... 'How much? This baby won't be cheap.' He hands me back... 'Offer one fifty a week.' And there you are, Jimmy, with one foot already on Broadway and the other ready to step...."

Jimmy Geary went with lengthening strides out of the cool shadows of the Best Chance saloon. In the dazzling brightness of the outer sun, he fairly ran into the stalwart form of Lowell Gerry, the rancher.

"Mister Gerry," he said, blocking the way, "you've always got a place for a man out on your ranch. Let me go out there and try to earn my keep until I'm worth real pay, will you?"

The sun-lined and squinting face of Lowell Gerry did not alter a great deal; one expression had been cut into that brown steel long before and it could not change. "Step aside a minute, will you, Jimmy?" he asked quietly.

Jimmy stepped aside, and Gerry walked straight past him down the street with an unhurrying stride.

Time was needed before the fullness of that affront could be digested. Jimmy was still swallowing bitterness, when he got across Yellow Creek to Graham's Tavern. Even the trees around the tavern threw shadows ten degrees cooler than those that fell in any other part of Yellow Creek. Ivy grew around the watering troughs; ampelopsis bushed up around the wooden columns of the verandah, swept over the roof of it, almost obscured the windows of the second story, and so poured up in thinner streaks across the red shingles above. It was all just as pleasant as before, but there was more of

it. Therefore, it was rather a shock when he found in the saloon an unfamiliar face behind the bar, instead of the fat, pale, amiable hulk of Charlie Graham. This fellow was the red-copper that a man picks up on the open range. He looked as if he had exchanged chaps for a bar-apron hardly the day before. In the old days the hearty voice of Charlie was always booming, making the echoes laugh, but the new man had reduced his conversation with three or four patrons to a mere rumble.

"Where's Charlie?" asked Jimmy.

"He's in hell with Tony Spargo," said the lean bartender, and his eyes fixed as straight as a leveled gun on Geary's face.

"They don't have the same hell for men and rats," answered Geary. "Give me a beer, will you?"

The bartender paused as though about to take offense. Slowly he drew the beer and carved off the rising foam as he placed the glass on the perforated brass drain. Slowly he picked up Geary's money and made the change.

"Have one yourself," said Jimmy.

"Yeah?" queried the other, in doubt. But he saved the change and took a small beer.

"The Grahams are out of this, are they?" asked Jimmy.

"The girl's got it. Kate runs it," answered the bartender. He gave a somber nod of recognition and swallowed half of his drink. Jimmy rushed his down with a certain distaste. He wished it had been whiskey, because coming into this room had brought about him all the past and all its appetites.

"Where's Kate now?" he asked, thinking back to her. At eighteen, a lad cherishes his dignity. He had only a dim memory of red hair and spindling body, for Kate had been only about sixteen and, therefore, hardly worthy of a glance.

She was out back, said the bartender, so Jimmy went through to the rear. He stopped in the small card room. It was just the same. The little phonograph stood on the corner table where it had played "Crazy Rhythm" eight years before. The same pair of colored calendars decorated the walls. On a chair rose the pile of newspapers from which men helped themselves when they were tired of cards or growing a little world-conscious. Then he crossed to the table at which he had sat. It was even covered with the same green felt. He could remember the V-shaped cut on one edge of the cloth. Behind the chair where Tony Spargo had sat, there was a half-inch hole bore into the wall. Until he saw it, he had forgotten that the first bullet had drilled right through Tony's powerful body. It was strange that life could be knocked out by a flash of fire and a finger's end of lead.

Then he went out behind the house and saw a red-headed girl of twenty-three or four, peeling potatoes. She had three pans for the unpeeled, the peelings, and the peeled. She wore rubber gloves through which the flesh appeared duskily. She should have been very pretty, but there was no smile about her. What a man sees first is the light behind a picture; after that he sees the picture itself. Well, you had to look closely at this girl before you saw that she was pretty.

"You're Kate Graham?" he asked.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the girl. "Welcome home. I've got your old room fixed up. Want it?" She slid the pan of peelings onto a chair and stood up. She had plenty of jaw and plenty of shoulders, but her strength remained inside the sense of her femininity as in a frame. She had a smile, too, but it was no glare for heavy traffic— there were dimmers on it. It invited you close and promised to keep shining, for a long time. A door opened in Jimmy, and something like a sound moved through him.

"Yes, I want the room," he said, looking at her. "Tell me how about Charlie, if you don't mind?"

"A whiskey bat and pneumonia did the rest," she answered.

"Whiskey's hard on the eyes, all right," said Jimmy. "I was mighty fond of Charlie."

"Were you?" asked the girl.

"Yeah, I sure was."

He kept hesitating until it suddenly occurred to him that he had no words for what he wanted to say. He hardly knew what he wanted, either, except he wished to see that faint brightening about the eyes and mouth. He said he could find the way to the old room, so he left her and went off up the stairs that creaked in all the familiar places. It was wonderful that he should remember everything so well. From sixteen to eighteen he had written himself "man" and kept a room here and lived— well, without too much labor.

When he got up to the room, he heard snoring inside it. He backed off and looked at the number to make sure. It was Number Seventeen, all right, so he opened the door softly and looked in. A long man with a jag of beard on the chin and a sweep of mustaches across his mouth was lying on the bed with his mouth open. It was Doc Alton.

That sight brought up the past on galloping hoofs. He crossed the room. Doc opened his eyes and shut his mouth.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said quietly. Doc was always quiet. Perhaps that was why he had been able to open so many safes without bringing on the vengeance of the law. He had been one of those aging men of forty, eighty

years ago. Now he looked to the altered eye of Jimmy Geary even younger than in the other days, as the sheriff had. Doc sat up and shook hands.

"How's everything?" he asked.

"All right," said Jimmy. "Thanks for the letters and the cash."

"They wouldn't let me send much," answered Doc. "Feeling like work?"

"Listen to me!" said Jimmy fiercely. "Wake up and listen! When I brace people around here for an honest job, they give me the eye and walk straight past. But the thugs come and hunt me up... Samuels, and that sort, and a safe-cracker comes and waits in my room. I say... what the hell?"

Doc Alton yawned. "You feel that way about it? All right. I'll take a snooze here. I'm kind of tired. If you ain't changed your mind before you're ready to go to bed, I won't argue with you any, but I've got a sweet layout fixed up. It's a two-man job, and it's fat. There ought to be fifteen, twenty thousand in it."

"No, and be damned to you!" said Jimmy. "I'm going out to get an honest man's job."

"Take a gun along with you, then," said Doc Alton. "Let me tell you something. A lot of people around here remember Tony Spargo."

"A dirty louse of a cardsharper!" answered Jimmy Geary. "To hell with him, too, and the crooks that remember him." He strode from the room and had sight, from the door, of Doc Alton yawning again, his eyes already closing for more sleep. At the stable he hired a saddle horse and hit out over the rough trails to the ranches. He put in the rest of that day getting to eight ranch houses, and he collected eight refusals.

Two of them stood out. Old Will Chalmers said to him: "What sort of a plant are you aiming to fix on me out here? No, I don't want you or any three like you, either." At the Morgan place, the girl he had known as Ruth Willet opened the kitchen door for him. He had gone to school with Ruth, and he put out his hand in a pleased surprise. She simply slammed the door in his face, and screeched from behind it: "I've got men in this house, Jimmy Geary. You get out of here, or I'm gonna call 'em! I got men and guns here. You get off this place!"

That was his last try. He got off the place and went slowly back to Graham's Tavern, letting the cowpony dog-trot or walk, letting the evening gather off the hills and slide unheeded about him. Darkness, also, was rising out of his heart across his eyes.

He put up the horse in the barn and went into the saloon. There was no one in it except the bartender, although voices were stirring in the back room.

"Whiskey!" he said, looking down at his watery reflection in the bar varnish.

"How's things?" asked the bartender cheerfully.

Jimmy Geary lifted his eyes with deliberation across the shining white of the bar-apron and over the lean face of the other. There he rested his glance for a moment, drank the whiskey, and lowered the glass to the bar again without changing his gaze. "You take a run and a jump and a guess at how things are," said Jimmy Geary.

"Yeah?" said the bartender. But he worked a smile back onto his face. "Look here," he murmured, "there's somebody to see you. Right out there on the back verandah. Been waiting for you."

"With a gun, eh?" sneered Jimmy Geary.

2: The Ambush

BUT THE whiskey had hit through his blood, and the sour fume of it was in his nose and his brain. He had eaten nothing since morning. So the danger of guns meant little to the vastness of his gloom, with this red fire blowing up in it. He knocked the rear door of the bar open. Three men were playing poker at the table that was placed most clearly in his memory. A pair of them had dark faces.

"Take a hand, brother?" said this man cheerfully.

"I've got nothing but chicken feed," said Jimmy.

"Yeah? All we're spending is time."

"I'll be back, then."

He stepped onto the rear verandah, letting the screen door bang behind him. A woman got up from a chair and came slowly toward him. As she moved through the light that slanted out of a window, he recognized Juanita Allen. She was the half-breed daughter of Mac Allen.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said. "I heard you were here. I came on over. That all right? I wanted to see you."

"And knife me, too, eh?" said Jimmy. "You used to be Tony Spargo's girl, didn't you?"

"Tony Spargo? That's so long ago, I wouldn't remember!"

She put back her head a little and smiled at him with professional ease. True, he had been eight years out of the world, but he knew that gesture. She backed up into the light, and he saw what the years had done to her. Well, the Mexican blood fades fast.

"How do I look, Jimmy?" she said. "Like hell, eh? Come here and let me take a slant at you, too."

She pulled him forward into the light. That would be easy for an accomplice lodged in the dark of the brush.

"My God, the time's only made a man of you," said Juanita. "But look how it's socked me eight times in the face. You remember, Jimmy? I'm just your age. My birthday comes on Monday before yours. Take a look and tell me what I'm good for now, will you?"

There were some straight lines up and down on her lip. Her smile pulled her face all out of shape and let him see the blanched whiteness of some false teeth. And soap and water would never help her; there was grime in her soul.

"You don't have to tell me... I'll tell you... I'm done," said Juanita. "I don't mind about the men. To hell with them! But I can't even get a job slinging hash. You'd think I might get a finger in the soup, or something. I'm not good enough for the people around here. Listen to me, Jimmy."

"Yeah. All right. I'm listening," said Jimmy. "Quit crying, will you? I like you fine, Juanita. Please don't cry."

"Take hold of my arm," she said.

He could feel the two bones of the forearm.

"Look at," said Juanita. "I'm sunk... I'm done. I've gotta get a break or something, and pull out of here. Jimmy, you were always a good kid. Give me a break, will you?"

"I'll give you a break," he heard himself say. "Will you quit crying, Juanita, please? I'm going to give you a break. What d'you need?"

She stopped the crying and started gasping, which was worse. She held him by the wrists with shuddering hands. "I wouldn't need much. There's a little bill over at the boardinghouse. It's only forty dollars, Jimmy. They'd sock me in jail, if I didn't pay that. And then a little bit more. Car fare, some place. Jimmy, you were always kind. I was sorry, when they slammed you for those three crooks. I knew Tony was a crook. He was a dirty crook to me, too. You see how it is, Jimmy. I wouldn't need the money, if only..."

"You wait here," said Jimmy Geary. "I'm coming back."

She kept a grip on him all the way across the verandah. "I'm going to wait right out here for you," she kept saying. "I'll be expecting you back. I'll wait right here... if it takes you all night, I'll be waiting right here."

He got away through the outside door and up the stairs to Number Seventeen. When he got inside, he wanted a drink.

"Hey, Al!" he said to the snorer. He lighted a lamp. Electricity had not been brought out to Graham's Tavern.

"Yeah?" said Alton, turning on the bed. "What time is it?"

"Time for a drink. Where's your flask?"

"Under the pillow."

Jimmy put his hand under and found a gun. Then he found the flask and pulled it out. He unscrewed the top, poured a long shot down his throat. The

whiskey horrors choked him. He took another drink to kill them and put the flask down.

"Want some?" he panted.

"Not till I eat."

"Got any money?"

Doc sat up, suddenly. "Yeah, sure," he said. "Sure I've got some money. Help yourself."

He pulled out a wallet. Alton's wallet was always full. Now the bills were packed into a tight sheaf. He pulled out some fifties. There were seven of them. "Three hundred and fifty," he said.

"Sure, kid, sure," said Doc. "Take some more. Take all you want." He took two more.

"A lot of dirty bums is all I've been able to find since you stepped out of the picture," said Alton. "A lot of dirty, yellow-faced rats. You and me will burn up the highway, kid."

Jimmy looked down from the long mustaches of Doc and saw the face of the warden in the shadows at his feet. He saw the prison yard, and the pale eyes of Barney Vane, the lifer who was head trusty. Even the best warden in the world has to use trusties, and a trusty is, you know what. So Jimmy reached for the flask and unscrewed the top of it again.

"You sure you want that?" asked Doc.

"Aw, shut up," said Jimmy, and drank.

"Sure," said Doc Alton. "I'll get on my boots. I'll be waiting for you, while you spend that stuff. I suppose that's what you want to do?"

Jimmy said nothing. He got out of the room and down to the back verandah. He heard the girl rise— the whisper of her clothing and the sound of her drawn breath, but she kept back against the wall. He went to her and stood over her, looking down at her.

"Aw, Jimmy," she moaned suddenly. "Don't say you couldn't get anything. Don't turn me down flat. I swear to God, I haven't eaten. I'm hungry. Give me the price of a square meal, will you, Jimmy?"

"Here, here," said Jimmy Geary. "I've got enough for you. Where's that bag? Here, open it. There's three hundred and fifty in that bag, now. You pay the damned board bill and get out to a better part of the world. This is the rottenest part of creation. Nobody can go straight here."

Juanita caught her breath, started to laugh, choked, sobbed, and then uttered a queer screaming sound that was sob and laughter in one. She wobbled like a hopeless drunk, staggering with hysterics. Well, a man can't very well handle a thing like that. He took her down to the kitchen door and

threw it open. Kate was inside drying dishes that a big Negress was washing and putting out on the drain.

"Here, Kate," said Jimmy Geary. "Juanita's hysterical. Get her a drink or something. Quiet her down, will you?"

The face of Kate Graham smiled, as stone might smile. The Negress turned slowly and put her chin up into the air. "That thing!" she said.

Jimmy wanted to kill Kate Graham. Instead, he took Juanita across the room to her and caught her by the wrist and shook her arm.

"You... take this girl... and be good to her! Haven't you got any more heart than a toad? Take her... now... and let me see you!"

Kate, with a look of fear and wonder, took that weeping burden in her arms. Jimmy got out of the room onto the verandah. He leaned against a pillar there for a moment, and the stars wavered a little in the sky. Afterward, he went up to Seventeen and found Doc Alton pulling on his second boot.

"Ready, old son?" asked Doc, smiling till his mustaches spread out thin.

Jimmy lifted the pillow, took the gun, and passed it out of view under his coat. "Wait here a while," he said, and went down again. He would play a round or two of that poker, as he had promised to do, for that would show whether or not luck intended to favor him in the old ways.

The three were not impatient. Instead, they greeted him with three different sorts of smiling, so that he had a very odd and vivid feeling that he had known them before. They opened with a round of jackpots, the man with the lofty brow dealing. The Mexican had openers. Jimmy held up a pair of nines and drew another. He won that pot and six dollars, but it wasn't the money that made him feel better and better. He had a genuine kindness for these strangers.

"I haven't met you people before, have I?" he asked.

They had not had that luck, they said.

"I've taken on a little liquor," apologized Jimmy. "You know how it is."

They knew how it was, and it was all right. Two more hands went by before the dark-faced, handsome fellow opposite Jimmy got up, revealing the bullet hole in the wall. He said they ought to have a bit of music, so he wound up the squeaking phonograph and put on a disk. The very first bars of the tune poured the consciousness of Jimmy far into the past.

"You know," he said, when the fellow with the big black eyes sat down, "it seems as though I've been right here before, with all of you. It's a queer feeling."

The three exchanged glances quietly, and Jimmy made sure that he was quite drunk. If that were the case, he ought not to be sitting in at a poker game, but the music from the scratched and cracked old record on the

phonograph held him fascinated, not because it was pleasant but because it hurt like the ache of old wounds.

It was like air-hunger, the sickness of Jimmy. It was like wakening from a nightmare with the vision gone but the fear remaining. He could feel the eyes of the three on him. The game ought to go on, of course, but they seemed to understand a mystery that was closed to him, and they remained half smiling, watchful.

Jimmy looked up, not out of the past but deeper into it. Time closed like water over his head. He leaned a bit forward, and the three leaned the same trifle toward him. They were not smiling, now— not with their eyes, at least.

The music went on. It thrust a knife pain into his right shoulder, into his heart, although he was not following the words just then.

He pointed with his forefinger. "You're Oñate's brother!" he said to the Mexican.

The man nodded and smiled like a Chinese idol.

"You're the brother of Tony Spargo!" said Jimmy Geary to the man across the table.

"I'm his kid brother," sneered Spargo.

"And you're the brother of Gus Warren?"

"Sorry. I'm only his cousin. But maybe I'll do to fill out the hand?"

"Aye," said Jimmy Geary, "you make the three of a kind."

The needle was scratching with every whirl of the disk, and, yet, Jimmy wanted the record to continue endlessly, for he knew that he was to die before the song ended. Spargo had out a gun and laid it on the edge of the table, leaning so far forward that Jimmy could see, over his shoulder, the hole in the wall. He had an insane feeling that his own soul would be drawn through that same gap in the wall and whistled away into nothingness. There would be nothing in the way of an inquiry, even, for the gun of Doc Alton would be found on him. Perhaps that was Alton's part in the plot— to see that the victim went heeled to the fight. But there would be no fight. The music poured icy sleep over his hands.

They were going to get him on the down strain of that weary sing-song. He could see the murder tightening in the hand and the eyes of Spargo. Then Kate Graham spoke out of the doorway, deliberately, as though she did not realize that the song was running swiftly to its end: "The thing's off. He hasn't got a gun. It's murder, if you turn loose on him... and I'll give the testimony to hang you."

The Mexican uttered a little soft, musical cry of pain. Spargo's lips kept stretching thinner over his teeth. He said the words through Jimmy to the girl: "Are you gonna be the blonde rat? Are you gonna run out?"

"You fixed this job and got us here!" cried the cousin of Gus Warren. "Now what's the idea?"

"Look!" moaned Oñate. "I have the same knife for him. Look, *señorita*! It is the same!"

"What did I care about your brother, Oñate?" asked the girl calmly. "Or about four-flushing Gus Warren? And I've just been getting some news about Tony Spargo. It made me send for the sheriff. Are you three going to be here to shake hands with him?"

They were not going to be there. They stood up, with young Spargo running the tips of his fingers absently over the bullet hole in the wall. They all looked at Kate as they went out, but they said nothing to her.

That silence continued in the room until after the first pounding and then the departing ripple of the hoofbeats. Jimmy stood up.

"The sheriff's not coming, if that's what you mean," said the girl.

"Sit down here," said Jimmy. The whiskey was gone. Inside him there was only emptiness, with a throb in it.

"There's no good talking," said the girl, but she came to the table and slipped into the chair where Tony Spargo had once sat. She was only calm from a distance. At close hand he could see the tremor as he leaned across the table.

"You were only a kid," said Jimmy. "That's what I don't understand."

The song had ended; the needle was scratching steadily in the last groove. A nick in the disk struck the needle point at greater and still greater intervals.

"It was Tony Spargo, was it?" said Jimmy.

"I was nearly sixteen," she said. "He used to talk to me and look at me with his greasy eyes. I never saw the grease in them until this evening. I didn't know till after she'd talked to me." She folded her hands. The fingers were smooth and slender. She wore rubber gloves around the kitchen and that was why. But in spite of her double grip, the hands would not stop quivering.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Jimmy.

"You know what I'm afraid of. You're going to say something. Go on and say it and get it over with. I can take that, too."

"Hello," said the voice of Doc Alton from the doorway.

"Go on away, Doc," said Jimmy. "Wait a minute, though. Come and take this."

He kept holding the girl with his eyes as he held out the gun to the side. Doc Alton took it.

"I owe you some money," said Jimmy Geary, "and I'm going to keep on owing it for a while."

"That's all right," said Doc Alton. "Are you... are you staying around here, Jimmy?"

The mournful wistfulness of his voice left Jimmy untouched.

"I'm staying around here," he answered. "So long, Doc."

Doc Alton went out.

"I mean," said Jimmy, "I'm staying around unless you say no."

She drew in a breath and closed her eyes. "Wait a minute," she whispered. "In a minute... I'll be able to talk."

He knew that, if he put his hand over hers, he would stop their trembling, but he sat up straight and waited. The needle bumped for the last time on the disk and the scratching ended. Another sound rose and moved forward in Jimmy, a rushing and singing like wind or like mountain waters that go on forever.

_____

5: The Theft at the English Provident Bank

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

The Royal Magazine Aug 1901

In: *The Old Man in the Corner*, 1908

"THAT QUESTION of motive is a very difficult and complicated one at times," said the man in the corner, leisurely pulling off a huge pair of flaming dog-skin gloves from his meagre fingers. "I have known experienced criminal investigators declare, as an infallible axiom, that to find the person interested in the committal of the crime is to find the criminal.

"Well, that may be so in most cases, but my experience has proved to me that there is one factor in this world of ours which is the mainspring of human actions, and that factor is human passions. For good or evil passions rule this poor humanity of ours. Remember, there are the women! French detectives, who are acknowledged masters in their craft, never proceed till after they have discovered the feminine element in a crime; whether in theft, murder, or fraud, according to their theory, there is always a woman.

"Perhaps the reason why the Phillimore Terrace robbery was never brought home to its perpetrators is because there was no woman in any way connected with it, and I am quite sure, on the other hand, that the reason why the thief at the English Provident Bank is still unpunished is because a clever woman has escaped the eyes of our police force."

He had spoken at great length and very dictatorially. Miss Polly Burton did not venture to contradict him, knowing by now that whenever he was irritable he was invariably rude, and she then had the worst of it.

"When I am old," he resumed, "and have nothing more to do, I think I shall take professionally to the police force; they have much to learn."

Could anything be more ludicrous than the self-satisfaction, the abnormal conceit of this remark, made by that shrivelled piece of mankind, in a nervous, hesitating tone of voice? Polly made no comment, but drew from her pocket a beautiful piece of string, and knowing his custom of knotting such an article while unravelling his mysteries, she handed it across the table to him. She positively thought that he blushed.

"As an adjunct to thought," she said, moved by a conciliatory spirit.

He looked at the invaluable toy which the young girl had tantalisingly placed close to his hand: then he forced himself to look all round the coffee-room: at Polly, at the waitresses, at the piles of pallid buns upon the counter. But, involuntarily, his mild blue eyes wandered back lovingly to the long piece of string, on which his playful imagination no doubt already saw a series of knots which would be equally tantalising to tie and to untie.

"Tell me about the theft at the English Provident Bank," suggested Polly condescendingly.

He looked at her, as if she had proposed some mysterious complicity in an unheard-of crime. Finally his lean fingers sought the end of the piece of string, and drew it towards him. His face brightened up in a moment.

"There was an element of tragedy in that particular robbery," he began, after a few moments of beatified knotting, "altogether different to that connected with most crimes; a tragedy which, as far as I am concerned, would seal my lips for ever, and forbid them to utter a word, which might lead the police on the right track."

"Your lips," suggested Polly sarcastically, "are, as far as I can see, usually sealed before our long-suffering, incompetent police and—"

"And you should be the last to grumble at this," he quietly interrupted, "for you have spent some very pleasant half-hours already, listening to what you have termed my 'cock-and-bull' stories. You know the English Provident Bank, of course, in Oxford Street; there were plenty of sketches of it at the time in the illustrated papers. Here is a photo of the outside. I took it myself some time ago, and only wish I had been cheeky or lucky enough to get a snap-shot of the interior. But you see that the office has a separate entrance from the rest of the house, which was, and still is, as is usual in such cases, inhabited by the manager and his family.

"Mr. Ireland was the manager then; it was less than six months ago. He lived over the bank, with his wife and family, consisting of a son, who was clerk in the business, and two or three younger children. The house is really smaller than it looks on this photo, for it has no depth, and only one set of rooms on each floor looking out into the street, the back of the house being nothing but the staircase. Mr. Ireland and his family, therefore, occupied the whole of it.

"As for the business premises, they were, and, in fact, are, of the usual pattern; an office with its rows of desks, clerks, and cashiers, and beyond, through a glass door, the manager's private room, with the ponderous safe, and desk, and so on.

"The private room has a door into the hall of the house, so that the manager is not obliged to go out into the street in order to go to business. There are no living-rooms on the ground floor, and the house has no basement.

"I am obliged to put all these architectural details before you, though they may sound rather dry and uninteresting, but they are really necessary in order to make my argument clear.

"At night, of course, the bank premises are barred and bolted against the street, and as an additional precaution there is always a night watchman in the

office. As I mentioned before, there is only a glass door between the office and the manager's private room. This, of course, accounted for the fact that the night watchman heard all that he did hear, on that memorable night, and so helped further to entangle the thread of that impenetrable mystery.

"Mr. Ireland as a rule went into his office every morning a little before ten o'clock, but on that particular morning, for some reason which he never could or would explain, he went down before having his breakfast at about nine o'clock. Mrs. Ireland stated subsequently that, not hearing him return, she sent the servant down to tell the master that breakfast was getting cold. The girl's shrieks were the first intimation that something alarming had occurred.

"Mrs. Ireland hastened downstairs. On reaching the hall she found the door of her husband's room open, and it was from there that the girl's shrieks proceeded.

" 'The master, mum— the poor master— he is dead, mum— I am sure he is dead!'— accompanied by vigorous thumps against the glass partition, and not very measured language on the part of the watchman from the outer office, such as—'Why don't you open the door instead of making that row?'

"Mrs. Ireland is not the sort of woman who, under any circumstances, would lose her presence of mind. I think she proved that throughout the many trying circumstances connected with the investigation of the case. She gave only one glance at the room and realized the situation. On the arm-chair, with head thrown back and eyes closed, lay Mr. Ireland, apparently in a dead faint; some terrible shock must have very suddenly shattered his nervous system, and rendered him prostrate for the moment. What that shock had been it was pretty easy to guess.

"The door of the safe was wide open, and Mr. Ireland had evidently tottered and fainted before some awful fact which the open safe had revealed to him; he had caught himself against a chair which lay on the floor, and then finally sunk, unconscious, into the arm-chair.

"All this, which takes some time to describe," continued the man in the corner, "took, remember, only a second to pass like a flash through Mrs. Ireland's mind; she quickly turned the key of the glass door, which was on the inside, and with the help of James Fairbairn, the watchman, she carried her husband upstairs to his room, and immediately sent both for the police and for a doctor.

"As Mrs. Ireland had anticipated, her husband had received a severe mental shock which had completely prostrated him. The doctor prescribed absolute quiet, and forbade all worrying questions for the present. The patient was not a young man; the shock had been very severe— it was a case, a very slight one, of cerebral congestion— and Mr. Ireland's reason, if not his life,

might be gravely jeopardised by any attempt to recall before his enfeebled mind the circumstances which had preceded his collapse.

"The police therefore could proceed but slowly in their investigations. The detective who had charge of the case was necessarily handicapped, whilst one of the chief actors concerned in the drama was unable to help him in his work.

"To begin with, the robber or robbers had obviously not found their way into the manager's inner room through the bank premises. James Fairbairn had been on the watch all night, with the electric light full on, and obviously no one could have crossed the outer office or forced the heavily barred doors without his knowledge.

"There remained the other access to the room, that is, the one through the hall of the house. The hall door, it appears, was always barred and bolted by Mr. Ireland himself when he came home, whether from the theatre or his club. It was a duty he never allowed any one to perform but himself. During his annual holiday, with his wife and family, his son, who usually had the sub-manager to stay with him on those occasions, did the bolting and barring— but with the distinct understanding that this should be done by ten o'clock at night.

"As I have already explained to you, there is only a glass partition between the general office and the manager's private room, and, according to James Fairbairn's account, this was naturally always left wide open so that he, during his night watch, would of necessity hear the faintest sound. As a rule there was no light left in the manager's room, and the other door— that leading into the hall— was bolted from the inside by James Fairbairn the moment he had satisfied himself that the premises were safe, and he had begun his night-watch. An electric bell in both the offices communicated with Mr. Ireland's bedroom and that of his son, Mr. Robert Ireland, and there was a telephone installed to the nearest district messengers' office, with an understood signal which meant 'Police.'

"At nine o'clock in the morning it was the night watchman's duty, as soon as the first cashier had arrived, to dust and tidy the manager's room, and to undo the bolts; after that he was free to go home to his breakfast and rest.

"You will see, of course, that James Fairbairn's position in the English Provident Bank is one of great responsibility and trust; but then in every bank and business house there are men who hold similar positions. They are always men of well-known and tried characters, often old soldiers with good-conduct records behind them. James Fairbairn is a fine, powerful Scotchman; he had been night watchman to the English Provident Bank for fifteen years, and was then not more than forty-three or forty-four years old. He is an ex-guardsman, and stands six feet three inches in his socks.

"It was his evidence, of course, which was of such paramount importance, and which somehow or other managed, in spite of the utmost care exercised by the police, to become public property, and to cause the wildest excitement in banking and business circles.

"James Fairbairn stated that at eight o'clock in the evening of March 25th, having bolted and barred all the shutters and the door of the back premises, he was about to lock the manager's door as usual, when Mr. Ireland called to him from the floor above, telling him to leave that door open, as he might want to go into the office again for a minute when he came home at eleven o'clock. James Fairbairn asked if he should leave the light on, but Mr. Ireland said: 'No, turn it out. I can switch it on if I want it.'

"The night watchman at the English Provident Bank has permission to smoke, he also is allowed a nice fire, and a tray consisting of a plate of substantial sandwiches and one glass of ale, which he can take when he likes. James Fairbairn settled himself in front of the fire, lit his pipe, took out his newspaper, and began to read. He thought he had heard the street door open and shut at about a quarter to ten; he supposed that it was Mr. Ireland going out to his club, but at ten minutes to ten o'clock the watchman heard the door of the manager's room open, and some one enter, immediately closing the glass partition door and turning the key.

"He naturally concluded it was Mr. Ireland himself.

"From where he sat he could not see into the room, but he noticed that the electric light had not been switched on, and that the manager seemingly had no light but an occasional match.

" 'For the minute,' continued James Fairbairn, 'a thought did just cross my mind that something might perhaps be wrong, and I put my newspaper aside and went to the other end of the room towards the glass partition. The manager's room was still quite dark, and I could not clearly see into it, but the door into the hall was open, and there was, of course, a light through there. I had got quite close to the partition, when I saw Mrs. Ireland standing in the doorway, and heard her saying in a very astonished tone of voice: 'Why, Lewis, I thought you had gone to your club ages ago. What in the world are you doing here in the dark?'

" 'Lewis is Mr. Ireland's Christian name,' was James Fairbairn's further statement. 'I did not hear the manager's reply, but quite satisfied now that nothing was wrong, I went back to my pipe and my newspaper. Almost directly afterwards I heard the manager leave his room, cross the hall and go out by the street door. It was only after he had gone that I recollected that he must have forgotten to unlock the glass partition and that I could not therefore bolt

the door into the hall the same as usual, and I suppose that is how those confounded thieves got the better of me.'"

ii

"BY THE TIME the public had been able to think over James Fairbairn's evidence, a certain disquietude and unrest had begun to make itself felt both in the bank itself and among those of our detective force who had charge of the case. The newspapers spoke of the matter with very obvious caution, and warned all their readers to await the further development of this sad case.

"While the manager of the English Provident Bank lay in such a precarious condition of health, it was impossible to arrive at any definite knowledge as to what the thief had actually made away with. The chief cashier, however, estimated the loss at about £5000 in gold and notes of the bank money— that was, of course, on the assumption that Mr. Ireland had no private money or valuables of his own in the safe.

"Mind you, at this point public sympathy was much stirred in favour of the poor man who lay ill, perhaps dying, and yet whom, strangely enough, suspicion had already slightly touched with its poisoned wing.

"Suspicion is a strong word, perhaps, to use at this point in the story. No one suspected anybody at present. James Fairbairn had told his story, and had vowed that some thief with false keys must have sneaked through the house into the inner office.

"Public excitement, you will remember, lost nothing by waiting. Hardly had we all had time to wonder over the night watchman's singular evidence, and, pending further and fuller detail, to check our growing sympathy for the man who was ill, than the sensational side of this mysterious case culminated in one extraordinary, absolutely unexpected fact. Mrs. Ireland, after a twenty-four hours' untiring watch beside her husband's sick bed, had at last been approached by the detective, and been asked to reply to a few simple questions, and thus help to throw some light on the mystery which had caused Mr. Ireland's illness and her own consequent anxiety.

"She professed herself quite ready to reply to any questions put to her, and she literally astounded both inspector and detective when she firmly and emphatically declared that James Fairbairn must have been dreaming or asleep when he thought he saw her in the doorway at ten o'clock that night, and fancied he heard her voice.

"She may or may not have been down in the hall at that particular hour, for she usually ran down herself to see if the last post had brought any letters, but most certainly she had neither seen nor spoken to Mr. Ireland at that hour, for

Mr. Ireland had gone out an hour before, she herself having seen him to the front door. Never for a moment did she swerve from this extraordinary statement. She spoke to James Fairbairn in the presence of the detective, and told him he *must* absolutely have been mistaken, that she had *not* seen Mr. Ireland, and that she had *not* spoken to him.

"One other person was questioned by the police, and that was Mr. Robert Ireland, the manager's eldest son. It was presumed that he would know something of his father's affairs; the idea having now taken firm hold of the detective's mind that perhaps grave financial difficulties had tempted the unfortunate manager to appropriate some of the firm's money.

"Mr. Robert Ireland, however, could not say very much. His father did not confide in him to the extent of telling him all his private affairs, but money never seemed scarce at home certainly, and Mr. Ireland had, to his son's knowledge, not a single extravagant habit. He himself had been dining out with a friend on that memorable evening, and had gone on with him to the Oxford Music Hall. He met his father on the doorstep of the bank at about 11.30 p.m. and they went in together. There certainly was nothing remarkable about Mr. Ireland then, his son averred; he appeared in no way excited, and bade his son good night quite cheerfully.

"There was the extraordinary, the remarkable hitch," continued the man in the corner, waxing more and more excited every moment. "The public— who is at times very dense— saw it clearly nevertheless: of course, every one at once jumped to the natural conclusion that Mrs. Ireland was telling a lie— a noble lie, a self-sacrificing lie, a lie endowed with all the virtues if you like, but still a lie.

"She was trying to save her husband, and was going the wrong way to work. James Fairbairn, after all, could not have dreamt quite all that he declared he had seen and heard. No one suspected James Fairbairn; there was no occasion to do that; to begin with he was a great heavy Scotchman with obviously no powers of invention, such as Mrs. Ireland's strange assertion credited him with; moreover, the theft of the bank-notes could not have been of the slightest use to him.

"But, remember, there was the hitch; without it the public mind would already have condemned the sick man upstairs, without hope of rehabilitation. This fact struck every one.

"Granting that Mr. Ireland had gone into his office at ten minutes to ten o'clock at night for the purpose of extracting £5000 worth of notes and gold from the bank safe, whilst giving the theft the appearance of a night burglary; granting that he was disturbed in his nefarious project by his wife, who, failing to persuade him to make restitution, took his side boldly, and very clumsily

attempted to rescue him out of his difficult position— why should he, at nine o'clock the following morning, fall in a dead faint and get cerebral congestion at sight of a defalcation he knew had occurred? One might simulate a fainting fit, but no one can assume a high temperature and a congestion, which the most ordinary practitioner who happened to be called in would soon see were non-existent.

"Mr. Ireland, according to James Fairbairn's evidence, must have gone out soon after the theft, come in again with his son an hour and a half later, talked to him, gone quietly to bed, and waited for nine hours before he fell ill at sight of his own crime. It was not logical, you will admit. Unfortunately, the poor man himself was unable to give any explanation of the night's tragic adventures.

"He was still very weak, and though under strong suspicion, he was left, by the doctor's orders, in absolute ignorance of the heavy charges which were gradually accumulating against him. He had made many anxious inquiries from all those who had access to his bedside as to the result of the investigation, and the probable speedy capture of the burglars, but every one had strict orders to inform him merely that the police so far had no clue of any kind.

"You will admit, as every one did, that there was something very pathetic about the unfortunate man's position, so helpless to defend himself, if defence there was, against so much overwhelming evidence. That is why I think public sympathy remained with him. Still, it was terrible to think of his wife presumably knowing him to be guilty, and anxiously waiting whilst dreading the moment when, restored to health, he would have to face the doubts, the suspicions, probably the open accusations, which were fast rising up around him."

iii

"IT WAS CLOSE on six weeks before the doctor at last allowed his patient to attend to the grave business which had prostrated him for so long.

"In the meantime, among the many people who directly or indirectly were made to suffer in this mysterious affair, no one, I think, was more pitied, and more genuinely sympathised with, than Robert Ireland, the manager's eldest son.

"You remember that he had been clerk in the bank? Well, naturally, the moment suspicion began to fasten on his father his position in the business became untenable. I think every one was very kind to him. Mr. Sutherland French, who was made acting manager 'during Mr. Lewis Ireland's regrettable absence,' did everything in his power to show his goodwill and sympathy to the

young man, but I don't think that he or any one else was much astonished when, after Mrs. Ireland's extraordinary attitude in the case had become public property, he quietly intimated to the acting manager that he had determined to sever his connection with the bank.

"The best of recommendations was, of course, placed at his disposal, and it was finally understood that, as soon as his father was completely restored to health and would no longer require his presence in London, he would try to obtain employment somewhere abroad. He spoke of the new volunteer corps organized for the military policing of the new colonies, and, truth to tell, no one could blame him that he should wish to leave far behind him all London banking connections. The son's attitude certainly did not tend to ameliorate the father's position. It was pretty evident that his own family had ceased to hope in the poor manager's innocence.

"And yet he was absolutely innocent. You must remember how that fact was clearly demonstrated as soon as the poor man was able to say a word for himself. And he said it to some purpose, too.

"Mr. Ireland was, and is, very fond of music. On the evening in question, while sitting in his club, he saw in one of the daily papers the announcement of a peculiarly attractive programme at the Queen's Hall concert. He was not dressed, but nevertheless felt an irresistible desire to hear one or two of these attractive musical items, and he strolled down to the Hall. Now, this sort of alibi is usually very difficult to prove, but Dame Fortune, oddly enough, favoured Mr. Ireland on this occasion, probably to compensate him for the hard knocks she had been dealing him pretty freely of late.

"It appears that there was some difficulty about his seat, which was sold to him at the box office, and which he, nevertheless, found wrongfully occupied by a determined lady, who refused to move. The management had to be appealed to; the attendants also remembered not only the incident, but also the face and appearance of the gentleman who was the innocent cause of the altercation.

"As soon as Mr. Ireland could speak for himself he mentioned the incident and the persons who had been witness to it. He was identified by them, to the amazement, it must be confessed, of police and public alike, who had comfortably decided that no one *could* be guilty save the manager of the Provident Bank himself. Moreover, Mr. Ireland was a fairly wealthy man, with a good balance at the Union Bank, and plenty of private means, the result of years of provident living.

"He had but to prove that if he really had been in need of an immediate £5000— which was all the amount extracted from the bank safe that night— he had plenty of securities on which he could, at an hour's notice, have raised

twice that sum. His life insurances had been fully paid up; he had not a debt which a £5 note could not easily have covered.

"On the fatal night he certainly did remember asking the watchman not to bolt the door to his office, as he thought he might have one or two letters to write when he came home, but later on he had forgotten all about this. After the concert he met his son in Oxford Street, just outside the house, and thought no more about the office, the door of which was shut, and presented no unusual appearance.

"Mr. Ireland absolutely denied having been in his office at the hour when James Fairbairn positively asserted he heard Mrs. Ireland say in an astonished tone of voice: 'Why, Lewis, what in the world are you doing here?' It became pretty clear therefore that James Fairbairn's view of the manager's wife had been a mere vision.

"Mr. Ireland gave up his position as manager of the English Provident: both he and his wife felt no doubt that on the whole, perhaps, there had been too much talk, too much scandal connected with their name, to be altogether advantageous to the bank. Moreover, Mr. Ireland's health was not so good as it had been. He has a pretty house now at Sittingbourne, and amuses himself during his leisure hours with amateur horticulture, and I, who alone in London besides the persons directly connected with this mysterious affair, know the true solution of the enigma, often wonder how much of it is known to the ex-manager of the English Provident Bank."

The man in the corner had been silent for some time. Miss Polly Burton, in her presumption, had made up her mind, at the commencement of his tale, to listen attentively to every point of the evidence in connection with the case which he recapitulated before her, and to follow the point, in order to try and arrive at a conclusion of her own, and overwhelm the antediluvian scarecrow with her sagacity.

She said nothing, for she had arrived at no conclusion; the case puzzled every one, and had amazed the public in its various stages, from the moment when opinion began to cast doubt on Mr. Ireland's honesty to that when his integrity was proved beyond a doubt. One or two people had suspected Mrs. Ireland to have been the actual thief, but that idea had soon to be abandoned.

Mrs. Ireland had all the money she wanted; the theft occurred six months ago, and not a single bank-note was ever traced to her pocket; moreover, she must have had an accomplice, since some one else was in the manager's room that night; and if that some one else was her accomplice, why did she risk betraying him by speaking loudly in the presence of James Fairbairn, when it would have been so much simpler to turn out the light and plunge the hall into darkness?

"You are altogether on the wrong track," sounded a sharp voice in direct answer to Polly's thoughts—"altogether wrong. If you want to acquire my method of induction, and improve your reasoning power, you must follow my system. First think of the one absolutely undisputed, positive fact. You must have a starting-point, and not go wandering about in the realms of suppositions."

"But there are no positive facts," she said irritably.

"You don't say so?" he said quietly. "Do you not call it a positive fact that the bank safe was robbed of £5000 on the evening of March 25th before 11.30 p.m."

"Yes, that is all which is positive and—"

"Do you not call it a positive fact," he interrupted quietly, "that the lock of the safe not being picked, it must have been opened by its own key?"

"I know that," she rejoined crossly, "and that is why every one agreed that James Fairbairn could not possibly—"

"And do you not call it a positive fact, then, that James Fairbairn could not possibly, etc., etc., seeing that the glass partition door was locked from the inside; Mrs. Ireland herself let James Fairbairn into her husband's office when she saw him lying fainting before the open safe. Of course that was a positive fact, and so was the one that proved to any thinking mind that if that safe was opened with a key, it could only have been done by a person having access to that key."

"But the man in the private office—"

"Exactly! the man in the private office. Enumerate his points, if you please," said the funny creature, marking each point with one of his favourite knots. "He was a man who might that night have had access to the key of the safe, unsuspected by the manager or even his wife, and a man for whom Mrs. Ireland was willing to tell a downright lie. Are there many men for whom a woman of the better middle class, and an Englishwoman, would be ready to perjure herself? Surely not! She might do it for her husband. The public thought she had. It never struck them that she might have done it for her son!"

"Her son!" exclaimed Polly.

"Ah! she was a clever woman," he ejaculated enthusiastically, "one with courage and presence of mind, which I don't think I have ever seen equalled. She runs downstairs before going to bed in order to see whether the last post has brought any letters. She sees the door of her husband's office ajar, she pushes it open, and there, by the sudden flash of a hastily struck match she realizes in a moment that a thief stands before the open safe, and in that thief she has already recognized her son. At that very moment she hears the watchman's step approaching the partition. There is no time to warn her son;

she does not know the glass door is locked; James Fairbairn may switch on the electric light and see the young man in the very act of robbing his employers' safe.

"One thing alone can reassure the watchman. One person alone had the right to be there at that hour of the night, and without hesitation she pronounces her husband's name.

"Mind you, I firmly believe that at the time the poor woman only wished to gain time, that she had every hope that her son had not yet had the opportunity to lay so heavy a guilt upon his conscience.

"What passed between mother and son we shall never know, but this much we do know, that the young villain made off with his booty, and trusted that his mother would never betray him. Poor woman! what a night of it she must have spent; but she was clever and far-seeing. She knew that her husband's character could not suffer through her action. Accordingly, she took the only course open to her to save her son even from his father's wrath, and boldly denied James Fairbairn's statement.

"Of course, she was fully aware that her husband could easily clear himself, and the worst that could be said of her was that she had thought him guilty and had tried to save him. She trusted to the future to clear her of any charge of complicity in the theft.

"By now every one has forgotten most of the circumstances; the police are still watching the career of James Fairbairn and Mrs. Ireland's expenditure. As you know, not a single note, so far, has been traced to her. Against that, one or two of the notes have found their way back to England. No one realizes how easy it is to cash English bank-notes at the smaller *agents de change* abroad. The *changeurs* are only too glad to get them; what do they care where they come from as long as they are genuine? And a week or two later *M. le Changeur* could not swear who tendered him any one particular note.

"You see, young Robert Ireland went abroad, he will come back some day having made a fortune. There's his photo. And this is his mother— a clever woman, wasn't she?"

And before Polly had time to reply he was gone. She really had never seen any one move across a room so quickly. But he always left an interesting trail behind: a piece of string knotted from end to end and a few photos.

———————————

6: Foiled!

J. P. Bewick

fl. 1900s

The Grand Magazine of Fiction, Dec 1908.

Observer (Adelaide) 15 April 1916

Other than this single story, I can find nothing about this author.

IT WAS a very muggy afternoon, and I sat half-dozing at the writing desk in my office in Temple Chambers.

Suddenly I was aroused by hearing my name spoken.

Turning quickly round, I saw a tall man with a heavy moustache and the general bearing of one who had led a strenuous military career. He was an entire stranger to me, and his visit was quite unexpected. To say the truth, any visitor who came on business was, and as for a brief— well, that was stranger still. This will explain the fact that I devoted considerably mere attention to that hazardous and speculative source of income— journalism— than to my own profession.

As weekly contributor to a paper which poured sarcasm on the heads of practically every living public personage, I had obtained considerable notoriety under the pseudonym of "A. 8. Blake." In the security of my anonymity I had much to my own delight and to the ho little satisfaction of many juniors, even been bold enough to extract from the idiosyncrasies of certain officials in the High Court matter for much very trenchant criticism. My real name had never been divulged to the public. The "copy" was typewritten and sent direct to the printers without any indication of its source. With these precautions I always felt secure. It was with no little surprise, therefore, that I heard my visitor say:—

"Mr. Macfarlane, I have read with great pleasure and, of course, interest, your articles in "Notabilities and Nonsense," and I would like at once to assure you of the pleasure it is to me to meet 'Mr. A. S. Blake' face to face."

I must confess I was taken aback by this (abrupt statement. Noting my surprise, evidently, my visitor hastened to add:—

"Of course, my dear sir, I quite understand your annoyance that this should have leaked out, but I can assure you that the knowledge has not gone far, and I think I can promise you that it will go no farther."

"It is very kind of you to volunteer that statement," I stammered. I was considerably nettled at the man's somewhat arrogantly suave manner. "You are, I may: remind you, an entire stranger to me. If you have any business, please let ns proceed with it. If you have none, then please clear out and convey your assumed Knowledge of this Blake— 'whoever Blake may be— to some one else."

'Pardon me," he replied, keenly eyeing me meanwhile; "I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Rogers— Clifford Rogers— Private Secretary to Sir Edwin Lancelot "

"What! Sir Edwin Lancelot, of the Foreign Office, whom—"

"Precisely; whom you pilloried so delightfully as an arrant blunderer only last week."

"Confound you and your absurd notion as to the identity of a contributor to some gutter organ!" I answered, sharply. 'What, exactly, do you want here?"

"Sir Edwin," he continued, ignoring my interruption, "agreed with you entirely. He happens to have a very important commission to carry through, and he thinks your astuteness would be of service to him and useful to the State."

"I refuse to have anything to do with the business," said I, determinedly.

"Of course," he suggested, "you would be well paid for it."

"I don't care if a king's ransom were attached to it. I won't undertake it."

"Do you remember," he continued, slowly and deliberately, "writing an article a few weeks ago about a certain gentleman who presides over the very Court in which you appear most? What would that person say, do you think, if he knew your identity?"

"I can't control his speeches."

"True; but I am sure you can easily form a pretty accurate notion of what the trend of his remarks would be. Of course, my dear sir, I don't profess to know your precise feelings, but I think I may assume that you would seek an occupation by fishing for eels on the banks of the Styx rather than conduct a case in his Court again. Now, come; be reasonable. I have absolute proofs that you are the author of that article. Sir Edwin has sent me for you. Your secret is ours alone, and there is no reason why it should go further, unless"— he paused, impressively— "unless you provoke Sir Edwin! Now, do you understand?"

There are moments in life when discretion is the better part of valour. This was such a moment, and I intimated to my visitor that I was ready to listen to him.

"I have no proposition to place before you," he informed me. "Sir Edwin will do that himself. It is sufficient to say now that your services will be required for some days, as you may have to make a journey. I am to instruct you to pack your portmanteau and present yourself at Sir Edwin's private residence within three hours from now—that is to say, at half past six this evening. One thing more; you're to give reasons for your absence to no one— to no one. Good day!"

Before I had quite realized it, my visitor had vanished as suddenly as he had come.

There was no getting away from the fact. The man knew that I and Blake were one and the same person. The idea was not very consoling to me, but, at the same time, I had his assurance that he would not use the information. There was no reason, moreover, why I should not accept the commission. I had no ties whatever; there was no business to detain me in town; anything which savoured of adventure was always welcome.

Accordingly, at the appointed time, I presented my card to the footman at Sir Edwin's house, and was immediately ushered into his presence. The greeting was

affable, although there was just a suspicion of the autocrat about his manner. He seemed, however, in no great hurry to come to the point, and before giving me any particulars insisted upon my having dinner with him. As I had not dined I welcomed the offer. Dinner over, he opened the subject abruptly.

"Now, sir," he said, as he offered me a cigar, "perhaps you are waiting for my explanation of this peremptory and, to you, I dare say, inexplicable summons. In the first place, then, I may tell you that you are not so entire a stranger either to me or to the Foreign Office as you appear to think. The task I wish you to undertake involves the utmost secrecy and dispatch, and not one of our regular staff is of the slightest use. All are too well known to our opponents. You, are not known to them at all.

"I don't suppose," he continued, "you are aware— in fact, I don't see how you possibly can be, since no hint of the affair has yet leaked out in the papers— that there is at the present moment a very grave crisis in the relations of this country with Blusterania. It is of the utmost importance that a certain message be delivered to Lord Breton, who is conducting negotiations in Wilhelmsberg, by tomorrow evening. On the safe delivery of that message depends the peace of Europe.

"I have chosen you as a person likely to deliver it in safety. You will need all your wits. In spite of every precaution you will probably be watched from the moment you leave this house. Now, before I go farther, I must ask whether you are willing to undertake the mission. In addition to a handsome fee from this Government your success may mean a great deal more than this to you, for I need hardly remind you my influence is by no means small. Should you fail— but there, you can probably guess the consequences."

I assented to the proposition immediately.

"Now," continued Sir Edwin, "as I said before, you will probably be watched. Here is a cigar— quite an ordinary cigar, to judge by external appearances. Carefully wrapped inside is the message. You will, of course, carry this in your case with the others. To distinguish it, I will pierce the end— so! There is the possible contingency that on the pretext of defrauding the Customs you will be searched by the officials at the Blusteranian frontier. In all probability, however, you will be allowed to smoke. In such an event you may smoke this down to the extent of an inch. Carefully done, that should be long enough to serve our purpose, after which it must be promptly extinguished. You will find it excellent smoking," he added, smiling.

Then, drawing close to me, and lowering his voice to a whisper, Sir Edwin said, impressively, "Should you by any chance be frustrated, you are to go straight on to His Lordship as though nothing had happened. Go just as though you were an ordinary visitor. Take your belongings and stay at least one night before returning. It is, of course, possible that you may have to bring back a message to me. Remember this, however, if the message be stolen before you reach the capital,

you will say to Lord Breton, 'Red predominates. Blue is only a necessity.' That is your message. Now I need not detain you any longer. You will find a taxi cab at the door. Your portmanteau is already labelled. You have just time to reach Liverpool street and catch your train. Good day, and success to you!"

My arrival at Harwich and embarkation were uneventful. The wind had been freshening since the afternoon, and was now blowing a stiff gale, and there was every prospect that the short crossing would he fairly rough. Fortunately, I was able to secure even at that late hour a private berth, and before leaving the quay I lay down.

But I was in no mood for sleep. Whether I really slept at all or not I do not know. Anyway, I was suddenly recalled to full consciousness by hearing the cabin door bang violently. Jumping out of the bunk, I rushed across the cabin, opened the door quickly, and peered out. There was no one in sight except a young steward half dozing on a stool.

"Here, boy," I called out; "who came out of this cabin a moment ago?"

"Which cabin?" he asked, sleepily.

"This one," I said, angrily. "You must have seen the person. Where did he go?

"No one came along here, sir. Leastways, not this last hour."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"But," I insisted; "I locked the door before turning in, and it was unlocked when I opened it just now."

"Begging your pardon, sir," he replied, "but you unlocked it yourself when I came in. to ask if you wanted anything last thing. Did you lock it again?"

I remembered. I had not. What a fool I had been! Hurriedly I returned to my berth. On the floor lay my coat, and near it the cigar case— closed. Hastily I opened it, and, there, reposing securely where I had put it, was the pierced cigar.

After all, I reflected, the coat could easily have been thrown on the floor by the rolling of the ship, and, just as easily, the cigar case could have fallen out of the coat pocket. I laughed at my fears. Some deck sound probably was the cause of my scare.

But I was in no mood for further sleep, so I dressed and went on deck. We were just nearing the Hook, and would be in good time to enable tine to reach the Blusteranian capital in the evening.

At the frontier the customs formalities seemed less careful than usual. I was congratulating myself on being free from further molestation when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning round, I saw an inferior officer, who, in an insolent tone, insisted on my returning to be searched. To have protested would only have increased suspicion. I followed the official, therefore, not into the ordinary searching room, but into a private apartment, where, seated at a writing desk, was a man who was evidently the chief.

He rose at my approach, and said, in perfect English:—

"I believe I have the honour to address Mr. Macfarlane?"

I bowed assent.

"On a visit to Wilhelmsberg?" he ventured.

"That is so."

"Purely personal?" he queried, eyeing me closely.

"Purely," I assured him.

"Very well," he remarked, returning to his writing, "I am sorry to trouble you. This is, as a matter of fact, merely a formal affair. Periodically we have to make a thorough search; we so treat one in every 50 passengers. You happen to be that one."

Turning to two men who had entered as he was speaking, he said:—

"Search this gentleman closely."

This the men proceeded to do with deliberation, a good deal more carefully than was demanded by a mere formality." They commenced with my hat. The lining was gently pulled aside so as to reveal the left, and, incidentally, any document that might have been lurking there. Next came my overcoat, which I had thrown over the back of a chair. The pockets were divested of their contents. My gloves were carefully laid on the table, and elaborately probed and prodded. The innocent looking travelling rug was subjected to all sorts of torture.

While they were thus occupied I took the cigar case out of my pocket, and, assuming an air of unconcern entirely foreign to my real feelings, I selected the cigar which had been given me the previous evening by Sir Edwin Lancelot.

Instantly the eyes of the chief were upon me. The next moment he resumed his writing, and appeared as disinterested as ever in what was happening to me. By this time the men, having finished the readily portable articles, turned their attention to me. Noting their movements, I lit the cigar with great care, so as to burn as little of its as possible. As I had anticipated, they were going to make a close search of the clothes I was wearing.

The examination was as exhaustive as it was disagreeable. Once I raised a protest, but the massive, uniformed official at the desk might have been a statue for all the notice my objection received. When they had done with me they continued their search in my portmanteau, and, as a preliminary, turned all its contents out on to the table.

During all this I had been noticing, not without considerable uneasiness, that the cigar already showed nearly an inch of ash. The men were proceeding in a most exasperatingly leisurely fashion, and something would nave to be done. I had been smoking as slowly as possible. I tried to smoke slower still, with the inevitable result— the cigar went out altogether.

"Something wrong with your cigar?" asked the chief, who had evidently noticed my embarrassment. "Try one of these."

"Thanks!" I replied, taking one from the box he handed across.

"There's no need for you to nurse the old one," he added, seeing that I had not let it out of my hand. "Throw it on the floor."

There was no help for it. I threw it down immediately in front of me. In a few minutes more the men had, finished and left the room. The chief told me I might go. Profuse apologies followed.

To leave the cigar lying on the floor was the very last thing I intended. At the same time I could not get it while the chief was there. To gain time I asked him a few general questions as to the limits of luggage, the most rapid means of transit, and so on.

He replied with the greatest courtesy, and relapsed into silence.

Nothing I could do or say seemed to stimulate conversation or to distract his attention for a moment. I dropped a matchbox near the cigar, hoping thus to be able to pick up both together. He stopped folding his papers in order to watch me narrowly. It was a tactical mistake on my part. Matters were becoming desperate. To make a dash for it would have been utter madness. The uniformed man was dearly as determined to gain possession of the stump of my old cigar as I was.

Had I seized it he would have had me overpowered in an instant.

Suddenly the door opened, and a gentleman entered. He walked straight across to the chief and whispered some thing in his ear. What he said I do not know, but both looked grave and left the room at once. In an instant I had picked up the cigar, leaving in its place the one he had offered me. To relight it was the work of a few seconds, but I had scarcely done so when the chief returned.

He found me leisurely adjusting the straps of my portmanteau.

"Do you require anything more of me?" I asked.

"No, thanks," he replied, making a profound bow. "I was just returning to inform you of the fact."

I caught up my belongings, and without further loss of time got into the train.

In due course I presented myself before Lord Breton. He was evidently expecting me, for as soon as my name was announced I was ushered into his study. After requesting me to be seated, he opened the conversation.

"Mr. Macfarlane, I believe? Entrusted with a message from Sir Edwin Lancelot; is it not so?"

I nodded.

"And your message?"

"The message is contained in this cigar," I replied, drawing it from my pocket.

"Ha!" he ejaculated, as he toyed with it between his fingers. "Rather an old dodge, isn't it? Used to be a very common practice at one time, you know. So common, in fact, that it became customary when searching a man for documents to pick his pocket— and the cigar case, of course— and let him go on his way.

"Why, bless my soul! Whatever possessed you to smoke it?" he continued, observing the charred end. "Had a scare, eh? Well, well, let us see what it contains."

Suiting the action to the word, he carefully removed the outer leaf. Then he proceeded with great caution to unroll the inner leaves. It was done with the dexterity and deliberation of one to whom the operation was by no means a novelty.

Suddenly he stopped...

"Come over here," he said, motioning me to the table, "and watch carefully as I go over the leaves."

He turned them aside one by one.

"Are you quite sure this is the cigar?" he asked.

"Absolutely sure," I answered; "why do you ask?" ,,

"Because." he said, speaking with emotion, which ne sought to restrain; "because —it contains no message."

AGAIN I was on the steamer. The lights of Holland were fast disappearing in the distance. It was after midnight, but the events of the past 24 hours kept rushing through my brain with a vividness that seemed to become intensified as the hours sped on. I recalled the utter incredulity with which I received the information that the message had been intercepted. The look of contempt on the Ambassador's face when I recounted the incidents of my journey, his satirical congratulations on the fact that I had reached Wilhelmsberg at all, the sarcastic words of thanks when I had sufficiently recovered my wits to deliver the message— "Red predominates; blue is only, a necessity." All this was not easily forgotten.

I had been awakened early that morning by Lord Breton's valet with a request to present myself at breakfast within 20 minutes. All expectancy, I waited throughout the meal for some indication that my failure had not been so utter as my overwrought nerves indicated to me; but none was forthcoming. After the customary "Good morning," Lord Breton relapsed into silence, and we ate our meal without another word breaking the silence between us.

It was only after he had finished that the Ambassador turned to me.

"You will leave Wilhelmsberg by the 11.32 this morning," he said, "and go straight to Sir Edwin. You will then have an opportunity of reporting to him all the pleasant incidents of your journey. No doubt he will be intensely amused."

Shortly afterwards I went upstairs to pack. To my dismay I found my portmanteau dripping wet. I called the servant.

"Here," I said, "what on earth's the meaning of this? How has my bag got wet like this?"

"Very sorry, sir," he replied, looking at it intently. "I know nothing at all about it. Give it to me, and I'll make enquiries, and see if I can have it dried."

As he was carrying the portmanteau downstairs he encountered Lord Breton, who at once noticed its condition.

"What the devil has happened now?" he exclaimed, for he was not in the best of humours. "Has some fool been trying to see if it was watertight?"

"Don't know at all, my lord," replied the servant, "but it seems as though it had received a thorough soaking. How I am going to get it dry for this gentleman to take away in time I don't know."'

"You can't," Lord Breton Retorted. '"Most extraordinary— most extraordinary!" he muttered; then aloud, to the man, "Go and bring a portmanteau of mine. Mr. Macfarlane will, perhaps, be kind enough to use that instead of his own on this occasion."

Lord Breton turned to me.

"I am extremely sorry this extraordinary accident should have occurred. I dare say, however, you will find my bag large enough, but, as you will observe, it looks as if it had travelled."

The portmanteau given to me certainly had seen *du pays*, as the French say. It was almost covered with labels in varying stages of wear and tear, and its whole appearance would have gladdened the heart of the most aggressive globe-trotter America has ever sent to the Old World. It would have immediately given a man entrance into a provincial travellers' club. But I was too eager to leave Wilhelmsberg to care; for such considerations. I hoped there would be something in my delivery of the return message which would enable me to retrieve the follies of my outward journey.

A moment before leaving Breton, in a few courteous words, wished me a safe and pleasant journey.

"What message am I to deliver to Sir Edwin?" I asked, for he had given me none.

"There is no message, thank you," he answered. "Present yourself to Sir Edwin, that is all I expect you to do."

Such were the thoughts which, as I have said, were crowding upon me as I watched the Dutch lights fade away. They were not altogether pleasant thoughts. What my reception would be from Sir Edwin I could not surmise.

ALL THINGS have an end, however, even crossing the North Sea, and a few minutes after 6 the following morning we were steaming into Harwich. Three hours later I presented myself before Sir Edwin Lancelot. Without waiting for any statement from me he led me to the breakfast room, where a meal was prepared for me. He apologised for having to leave me, and presently I heard him re-enter his study.

Half an hour later I was summoned to the study myself. I found Sir Edwin surrounded by a mass of correspondence. His Secretary was seated at his side.

"Is there no message from Wilhelmsberg?" he asked me.

"None whatever," I replied.

"Lord Breton says in his despatch," the Secretary interrupted, "that Mr. Macfarlane has a few very exciting incidents to relate."

"Just so, just so," remarked Sir Edwin; "but I don't think we will trouble him now." Then, picking up a letter, he handed it across to me with a request that I would read it. I recognised the letter at once. I had written it months ago. It was an application for the position of confidential messenger to the Foreign Office.

"Well," he said, "do you renew that application?"

"I am afraid, after what has happened, that you would hardly consider it if I did," I replied.

"Oh, I don't know— I don't know!" he retorted. "You haven't done so badly, considering the difficulties of the situation. At all events, you have safely carried the message to Wilhelmsberg and brought back a reply.

"Perhaps I had better explain," he added, seeing my look of amazement. * In the first place, the cigar I gave you did not contain the real message. In it was simply a jumble of letters and figures which, had it fallen into other hands, would at once have been mistaken for cipher. It was my intention that it should be stolen. You were barely outside the house before one of my agents allowed himself to be bribed into revealing the whereabouts of the message. It was stolen from you when you were embarking on the steamer. Your pocket was very cleverly picked, and the cigar case replaced with, of course, a cigar inside it precisely similar to yours. I dare say, by this time, all the principal officials in the Blusteranian Foreign Office have had severe headaches due to their efforts to decipher that apocryphal message."

"Then how do you account for my being searched so closely by the customs authorities?" I asked.

"There are two possible explanations," was the answer. "Either they were unaware that the precious document had already been secured, or they thought there might be a second message which, would provide the key to the one they already possessed."

"It may be so," I said, "but I still fail to understand how you can say I have carried messages to Wilhelmsberg and back."

"Oh, that is perfectly simple," he answered. "Since I hope to retain you on our permanent staff I will let you into the secret. On the backs of the luggage labels attached to your portmanteau, a message was written in invisible ink. Lord Breton was well aware of this. Your duty was to present yourself at all costs. You did so. I am sorry your own portmanteau suffered so badly in trying to remove the labels, although the one you brought back has suffered scarcely less.

"There are details, however. Make out your account for expenses, and include the cost of purchasing a new bag. My Secretary will attend to it. Good day!"

_____

7: A Set of Rogues

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1920s

World's News (Sydney) 27 June 1908

*Ralston, probaby a pseudonym, appears from 1907, almost exclusively in "*Yes or No*" and "*Weekly Tale-Teller*" magazines, both small slim digests selling for a penny.* (Tale-Teller *48 pages,* Yes or No *64 pages, were published by Harry Shurey, address 2 and 3 Hind Court, Fleet Street, no editors named.) Ralston was quite prolific until July 1917, after which there appeared just two more items, one in 1920, the last in 1934. My guess is that he was the anonymous editor of both magazines, as his stories suddenly ended around 1917, as did the magazines.*

MR. JOBSON stood on the platform at King's Cross and surveyed the hurrying crowds with a puzzled air. His leggings, his clothes of rustic cut, his ruddy face, all proclaimed him to be an excursionist just up from the country. The clerks, rushing off to catch their tube connections, smiled superior smiles as they beheld this obvious yokel.

"When Mr. Jobson had elbowed his way out of the station he cautiously went to the first policeman.

"Which way is t' Exhibition?" he asked.

"Take this tube to Shepherd's Bush," replied the constable promptly, pointing to the en-trance to the Piccadilly Tube. "You'll have to change."

Mr. Jobson had scarcely left the policeman when a gentlemanly-looking person stopped him.

"Surely it's Mr. Jones from Aylesbury?"

"Noa, my name's Jobson. I come fra' Yorkshire."

"I beg your pardon, but the likeness was so great," said the gentlemanly-looking person.

"There's no harm done," replied Mr. Jobson.

Mr. Jobson pursued his way towards the station. He had almost reached it when a bluff, clean-shaven man stopped hint.

"Hallo, Mr. Jobson, is it you?"

The countryman stared.

"Aye, but I can't reckon you up."

"Don't you remember meeting me at the Cattle Show two— or was it three?— years ago, and having a chat about shorthorns? My name's Foster; surely you remember now?"

"Aye, I may ha' done, hut a man meets a sight o' folk at t' show."

"Well, come and have a drink, old man."

Nothing loth, Mr. Jobson followed his newfound friend into a private bar.

"What's yours?" asked Mr. Foster.

"Half-pint o' ale in a pint tankard. Happen t' lass draws more than t' half-pint, then."

"You know your way about, you do," said Mr. Foster, digging him in the ribs. In five minutes they were deep in friendly chat about cattle and pigs. Two or three intimate friends of Mr. Foster's chanced to drop into the bar. Suddenly Mr. Foster left the engrossing subject of pig-breeding and began to talk about his private affairs. Since he last saw Mr. Jobson a bit of good luck had befallen him. His old uncle, a farmer in Canada, had died and left him £20,000— £10,000 for himself and £10,000 to be distributed amongst deserving British farmers.

"Perhaps you know some in your district, Mr. Jobson?"

"I knows one."

"Well, would you relieve me of part of my responsibility? If I gave you £500 to distribute amongst deserving Yorkshire farmers could I trust you to give it to the right people?"

Mr. Jobson looked him straight in the face. "Sam Jobson's word's 'is bond," he said. "Ask the folk at Ripon Market."

His friend shook him by the hand. "You've an honest face. I'd trust you with anything. Look, you fellows, I'll show my confidence in honest Sam Jobson. Here's my purse. See, there's £10 in it. Now take it out of the house, Mr. Jobson. I'll trust you to go into the road with it. "I bet drinks round he comes back in five minutes."

As this speech was being made one of the friends slid quietly from the room. Mr. Jobson took the purse, looked at the money, and said:—

"Reet, I'll show tha' I'm an honest man." He left the public-house, and before five minutes had elapsed was back again.

"There's t' purse; look at it now. Am I straight or am I not?"

Mr. Foster slapped him enthusiastically on the back and cried:—

"At last I've found a man I can trust." One of the friends interposed.

"It's all very well, Foster, you trusting Mr. Jobson. I'll bet you what you like be wouldn't trust you."

"He would," said Mr. Foster indignantly. "He wouldn't," replied the friend.

"Just try him and see," said another bystander.

"Look here, Mr. Jobson, I believe there's mutual confidence between us. We are true friends. To show these fellows that they are mistaken give me your purse and let me go out for five minutes."

Mr. Jobson looked round the crowd slowly and said:—

"Aye, there wur a man fra' our village 'oo met an old friend 'e couldn't call to mind in Lunnon. An' this feller showed confidence in 'im an' 'e showed

confidence in 'is friend? Soa Benjamin Pickles lost four-pun-ten an' a gold watch if it ain't the same lot tryin' to diddle me. Where's t' police?"

There was a sudden rush from the bar and Mr. Jobson was left almost alone. The only person left was a tall blue-spectacled gentleman who evidently had no connection with the confidence-trick gang.

He came across the bar and congratulated Mr. Jobson.

"Well done, indeed," he said. "I thought those rogues had got hold of some one from the country. I was just going to warn you to leave them alone when you spoke out. Ah, you needed no warning— you'd got your wits about you. What will you have to drink with me?"

"Nowt 'ere," said Mr. Jobson, shaking his head cautiously, " 'appen them thieves'll be sending someone in 'ere to bash me. Come along to another 'ouse."

They strolled down the road talking of the rogues who infest London, and finally the blue-spectacled gentleman led Mr. Jobson to a quiet public-house in a side street.

When they were comfortably seated in the bar, with their drinks before them, the stranger looked shrewdly at Mr. Jobson, and said:—

"I think you'd be a match for any rogues in London."

Mr. Jobson compressed his countenance convulsively in order to represent a wink of exceeding artfulness.

"If there were more like you these fellows would make a poor living."

Mr. Jobson gulped down a glass of beer and nodded assent.

"Be careful about all the people you meet in London. Don't trust any one with your money. Don't play cards with strangers. Don't buy bundles of pawn tickets from men who hang round railway stations."

"Trust me," said Mr. Jobson. "And now what's t' game?"

"What's the game?" said the stranger; "I'm merely giving you a friendly word of warning."

"When a man Ah doan't know in Yorkshire," replied Mr. Jobson, "taakes me an' stands me a drink Ah ask missen what's 'is game. 'Appen they stands drinks for nowt i' Lunnon— 'appen they doan't."

"You're too clever, far too clever for me," said the stranger. "Now I'm going to be absolutely straightforward with you. I'm a rogue."

"Soa Ah reckoned."

"But the question is this— do you object to working together with me in a safe bit of roguery. Now you were talking about cattle dealing in the other bar. I suppose you go to fairs and markets and buy and sell. You'll pay a good deal of money away to different people?"

"Aye."

"Well, do you know a £5 note when you see it?"

"Does I know a bullock when I sees it."

"Then that's all right. Look at this roll of notes, Mr. Jobson, and tell me if there is anything wrong with them."

Mr. Jobson took hold of the notes, scrutinised them closely, felt their texture, held them up to the light, and then grudgingly admitted that they seemed to be all right.

"And they are all right."

Once more Mr. Jobson gave an elaborate wink intended this time to express incredulity.

"Now listen to me for a moment or two. My brother-in-law is a clerk in the Bank of England. It is part of his duties to superintend the storage of the cancelled notes. You know that when a note is returned to the bank it is cancelled and never sent back again. Well, a little while since he came by chance across a large bundle of £5 notes which had never been cancelled. Not till they come back to the bank again could anybody discover that there was anything wrong with them. Then the bank staff, consulting their register, would find that these notes ought to have been cancelled, having been already paid in. Now my brother-in-law has trusted me with a quantity of these to sell to reliable people."

"Why doan't ye pass 'em yourselves?" asked Mr. Jobson.

"Because they'd instantly be traced to us. Then my brother-in-law would be detected at once. Otherwise the bank couldn't bring it home to him any more than they could to twenty other clerks. So we're selling these at a discount to strangers who can put them into circulation in the country districts. When they turn up from all over the land the bank authorities will be puzzled. Now you are the very man for us. Being a cattle-dealer you often do business with people you don't know and who don't know you. You'd work off any quantity of these notes easily. And the best of it all is that they are perfectly good notes. The back is bound to pay them."

"Let's 'ave another look at 'em," said Mr. Jobson. The roll of notes was displayed ones more. "Um! they seem good enow— what's t' price?"

"You can have the £50 worth I have here for £20."

"Twenty pun, an' me to run all t' risk!"

"There is no risk at all, my dear sir. You are quite an innocent party. The bank will never suspect that a Yorkshire farmer has burgled their strongrooms. If you should be questioned you can say that the notes were paid you at a fair. They couldn't prove they were not."

"I've nobbut ten pun an' a few shillin's with me."

The stranger's face brightened a little at this remark.

"Well, I don't know what my brother-in-law will say. But still, as I've let you into our secret I suppose you must have them. I can't afford to make an enemy of you now. Done for £10."

"Let's count the notes to see they're all reet," said Mr. Jobson. "Well, there's ten of 'em. Now 'ere t' brass."

He plunged his hand in his trousers pocket and pulled out some gold. As he was counting the gold he dropped a sovereign on the floor and bent to pick it up. Like a flash the stranger substituted for the notes another bundle he produced from his pocket. Mr. Job-son rose from his search after the missing sovereign and handed over the money.

"There's t' brass; give us t' notes."

The stranger pressed them into his hand and said:—

"Now, my dear sir, we mustn't for your sake be seen together any longer. By yourself you are absolutely safe. But for fear we have been watched by the bank detectives, who are the most artful of men, I shouldn't flaunt those notes about. Keep them dark till you get into Yorkshire. Good-morning. Perhaps we shall meet again and do some more business."

Shaking hands with exceeding warmth the stranger rushed out of the public-house. As he hastened round the corner and twisted and turned up and down side streets to avoid pursuit, he chuckled.

"The fat fool," he reflected; "a few compliments on his artfulness and I'd got him safely in tow. Didn't even have to palm the Bank of England notes and substitute the others. A child could have swindled that clever yokel. It was child's play to change the notes as he bent for the money. I've got 'em all right. Yes, in the inside vest pocket. May as well have a look to see they're all right. Heavens above!"

THAT NIGHT Mr. Jobson— a rather different-looking gentleman now, in evening dress, and with a good deal of the rural bloom removed from his countenance— was dining with two or three particular friends at a West-End restaurant.

"A good day," he said. "I started with a capital of a dozen Hanover Jacks, a few Bank of Engraving notes, and a good rustic disguise. The confidence-trick swindlers simply jumped at me. One trusted me with his purse with £10 in it, having previously given the wink to a pal to go out and keep an eye on me. I brought the purse back— oh, yes!— but there were ten Hanover Jacks in it instead of ten sovereigns, and the fool was so bent on swindling me that he never noticed it. Then I charged them with being confidence-trick men, and they promptly skedaddled. That was all I intended to do— to bluff the confidence men. But then an artful dodger took me in hand and tried to sell

me ten £5 notes— pinched from the Bank of England, he said. I saw they were all right, twigged his game at once, and offered him ten quid for them. He just leapt at it, and, of course, gave me a bundle of Bank of Engraving notes in place of them. I gave him every chance to make the substitution. It didn't matter much, as I had swapped his good notes for some Bank of Engraving notes I had a minute before. Really I'd give one of the fivers to have seen the rascal's face when he discovered he had sold me ten genuine fivers for £10, and in that £10 I contrived to pay him the two Hanover Jacks I had left. Well, on the whole, it has been a highly profitable day; from a capital of nothing I've made £52, and in addition, have done much to reform a sad set of rogues."

_____

8: The Secret of the Envelope

Headon Hill

Francis Edward Grainger, 1854-1927
Evening News (Sydney) 6 Sep 1895

A Sebastian Zambra Case. The author had several series characters, including George Tarleton, The Bow-Street Runner, Rev. Seebright, Zambra and others.

HUNSTON COURT is a fine old Elizabethan mansion, standing in the heart of the as yet rural pasture land that lies between Willesden and Harrow. It is one of the seats of the Tredennick family, and at the time of which I write was in the occupation of the widow of the thirteenth Baron Tredennick— a lady who had taken as her second husband one Captain Algernon Borradaile, late of the King's Royal Lancers.

Her only son, Herbert, Lord Tredennick, was within six months of attaining his majority, when he would in due course assume the responsibilities of his position. In the meantime Captain Borradaile was acting on behalf of his wife as master of the establishment, and it was in response to a summons from this gentleman that I found myself waiting one morning in the library of the Court, knowing neither more nor less than I have set down above about the family to whose counsels I had been called. No word had reached me through ordinary channels of any crime or disaster in the house, so I was quite in the dark as to the nature of the inquiry.

On approaching the front door I had, however, noticed a young lady and gentleman playing tennis on the lawn, apparently in the best of high spirits, and the sight led to the conclusion that nothing very serious had so far occurred. So it was that when Captain Borradaile entered the library, the communication he had to make took me somewhat by surprise. Lady Tredennick's second husband was a pale faced, well-groomed, unemotional-looking man, having some five-and-forty years of comfortable living behind him, and, if the evident care he took of himself had anything to do with it, as many more to look forward to.

Having chosen the most luxurious chair in the room, he plunged straight into the business in hand; but though the burden of his tale was sufficiently startling, it must not be thought that there was any excitement in his manner of telling it. On the contrary, Captain Borradaile was as cool and collected as though furnishing a report to his colonel in the orderly room.

'It is a case of burglary I wish you to undertake,' he began, fixing me with his rather staring eyes. 'Last night while we were at dinner some thieves obtained access to Lady Tredennick's bedroom by means of a ladder, and carried off the whole of the family jewels, except those she was wearing at the

time. It is the old story, I expect, of professional burglars aided by an unsuspected accomplice in the household— and as some of the jewels are of great value. Lady Tredennick and I—'

'Pardon me,' I interrupted, 'this seems to be essentially a police case. I very seldom interfere in such matters unless called in by the police themselves, or after their confessed failure. You have, I presume, given notice to the authorities?'

'I was coming to that,' said the captain, with a gleam of annoyance at the interruption. 'No; I have not communicated with the police, and till we see our way a little clearer I have no intention of doing so. I have also taken measures to prevent reports of the occurrence getting about, and in this course I may as well tell you at once I am acting under the advice of Messrs. Holt and Crowther, of Lincoln's Inn, who have been the solicitors to the Tredennicks for half a century. Mr. Crowther has already been here this morning. The fact is there are very important family interests at stake.'

'That alters the case entirely,' I said; 'so long as the inquiry is of a confidential nature, I shall be pleased to conduct it. Pray proceed with the particulars.'

Captain Borradaile took up the thread of his narrative: 'Last night, after dressing for dinner, Lady Tredennick left her jewels securely locked in an oak chest in her dressing-room. On her maid going to the room at 10 o'clock, ready to attend her mistress for the night, she found the window up and the chest prized open. A hasty glance showed that it had been robbed of its contents.

'The maid, at once raised an alarm, and on going to the outside of the house I found the usual traces of thieves who practise this particular branch. A ladder, that must have been brought from the tool house, was propped against the wall under the dressing-room window, and wires were pegged across the lawn to furnish obstacles in the event of pursuit. Returning to the dressing-room, I examined the window and found that it had been merely opened, not forced in any way; and this point I specially commend to your attention, because both my wife and her maid are prepared to swear that they left the window securely fastened with the patent catch when they left the room before dinner.'

'The presumption being that some one inside the house undid the catch after Lady Tredennick and the maid went downstairs.' I said.

'Exactly,' proceeded the captain; 'you take my point to a nicety. And now comes the embarrassing and unpleasant element in the affair, which has caused us to withhold it from the police. My own-dressing-room is separated from my wife's by the sleeping apartment, all three having doors opening on to thee principal corridor. I was a little late in changing for dinner last night, and

as I came out to I descend to the drawing-room, I saw, or am nearly, certain I saw, Miss Lucy Moreton, Lady Tredennick's hired reader and companion, slip out of my wife's dressing-room and follow me downstairs.

'I thought nothing of it at the time, supposing that Lady Tredennick had sent her for something; but on comparing notes after the robbery, my wife disavowed anything of the kind. Anyhow, it is a fact that my wife and my stepson, Lord Tredennick, were in the drawing-room when I entered, and that Miss Moreton, who has been received here on quite too ridiculous terms as an equal and dines with the family, came in immediately after me.'

'You suspect this young lady, I see, of having given access to the burglars by unfastening the window catch?'

'What else am I to suppose?' replied the captain with a touch of impatience. 'She had no possible business in the dressing-room.'

'And you wish to shield her, supposing she is guilty, from the consequences of her complicity in the crime ?' I said.

'That is very kind and lenient, of you.'

'H'm, ah, yes; I suppose it is,' said Captain Borradaile, looking rather perturbed at the charge of philanthropy, 'but there are other reasons as well. The fact is, my stepson Herbert— young Lord Tredennick, you know— who comes of age next March, has been and made an infernal ass of himself with this girl. We only discovered covered about a month back that he had proposed marriage to her, and his mother, who is not half strict enough with, him, has given some sort of tacit sanction to an engagement. This piece of folly has leaked out, with the result that if the young woman is publicly proved to be mixed up in this robbery, every fool in every club in London will be wagging his tongue over Lord Tredennick's engagement to a female burglar.

'Now, a scandal of that kind is out of the question: the interests of the whole family demand its suppression, and Lady Tredennick, who is sadly cut up by the whole affair, consented to my plan of hushing up the robbery. What we propose is to amass, with your aid, sufficient evidence to bring the crime indubitably home to Miss Moreton, as she calls herself. Then we can go and lay it before Tredennick with every hope of inducing him to break with the girl. That is our principal motive, though there is, of course, the secondary one that when she finds she is discovered she may, as the price of her liberty, get her friends to restore the jewellery.'

'But, surely, something is known of Miss Moreton's antecedents?' I said.

'Only what she tells us herself,' replied the captain. 'She was engaged through an advertisement about six months ago, and her story is that she is the orphan daughter of an Indian official who lost his life in Burmah. Of course these people have all sorts of facilities for giving false references.'

'It strikes me very forcibly,' I said, ' that if she is in the business, she will herself relieve you of all uneasiness on Lord Tredennick's behalf by vanishing, now that the purpose of her gaining a footing here has been effected. I had better lose no time in trying to trace her past history.'

'Ah! quite so,' mumbled Captain Borradaile, apparently not much captivated by my proposed mode of procedure; 'it would be as well, too, to pay a little attention to her surroundings here, wouldn't it— her own room, and all that sort of thing, I mean?'

I regarded him thoughtfully for a moment. Had this man, I wondered, some reason for guiding me into a particular course of action which he was loth to avow? More was to be gathered from his actual words and tone than from the impassive, owl-like countenance, in which the great eyes stared motionless. As the best means of solving the riddle, I decided to take him at his word, and overhaul Miss Moreton's room before taking further steps.

On receiving my assent, he rose from his chair with more alacrity than he had yet shown, and bade me follow him. In answer to further questions he told me, as we ascended the fine old staircase, that neither Lord Tredennick nor Miss Moreton had been informed of the robbery. He, Captain Borradaile, had happened to be in the hall when the maid came down with the alarm, and at once recognising the situation, had enjoined complete secrecy. No one but Lady Tredennick and two or three of the upper servants knew that anything was wrong.

At my suggestion I was first shown Lady Tredennick's dressing-room, and the oak case which had contained the jewellery. The latter I saw at once had been subjected to very rough treatment, the rim of the lid over the lock being much lacerated in a manner which did not tally with the possession by the burglars of very delicate tools. Turning to the window, I examined the catch, and found the captain's statement quite borne out by facts. The catch had not been tampered with violently; and had it been fastened it would have been quite impossible for any one to raise the window, or slip the catch from the outside. Miss Moreton's room was down a side passage at some little distance, and thither we now proceeded, Captain Borradaile remaining outside to give warning in case of approach.

The room bore traces of being occupied by a young lady of taste and refinement, who, however, I judged was not too well furnished with 'effects.' There were flowers in every vase in the room, and there were a few photographs on the mantelpiece and table, but there were no costly knickknacks or evidences of extravagance. In fact, there was very little to go upon, unless I decided to overhaul Miss Moreton's wardrobe and chest of drawers, and in going to that length I did not yet feel justified. Suddenly, as my

eyes roved round in search of further enlightenment, they fell upon a small brass rack over the fireplace, in which were three or four letters, that had presumably been received by the occupant of the chamber. Making to myself the detective's usual excuse that the end justifies the means, I took down the letters in the hopes that they would throw some light on the' young lady's character and connections, and possibly clear her from the as yet vague suspicions directed at her. The first envelope contained nothing more than a receipt for a small amount from a dressmaker in a not particularly fashionable locality. The second advised the dispatch of two pairs of gloves; but the, moment I opened the third letter I saw that, wherever it might lead, I had picked up the first thread of the mystery. The letter read as follows:—

London, October 4, 1891.

Dear Loo,

Wednesday, the 7th has been fixed upon for the job we have in hand. Your part is very simple, but it is important and must not miscarry. You must, without fail, before going down to dinner, find an opportunity of unfastening the window, so that we may not be delayed or have any trouble in entering. This should be done the very last thing after the old lady and the maid have gone downstairs: All the rest of the programme will be attended to by Yours truly,

Fred.

The envelope bore the London S.W. postmark of the day on which the letter was dated, and the handwriting was the clumsy and laborious effort of one not much used to calligraphy. Restoring the unimportant missives to the rack, I placed the compromising one in my pocket, and left the room.

Captain Borradaile was waiting in the passage. A shade of disappointment crossed his face as he saw that my hands were empty, and the impression already formed grew strongly upon me that he had had his own reasons for wishing me to search the room. I believed that he had been there himself, and had seen the letter, but that he wished to avoid the odium of having prowled and pried in a woman's bedchamber.

'Well?' he whispered, as eagerly as his imperturbability would allow him.

'I have found it,' I answered promptly. He fell into the trap, and gave himself away at once.

'That's good,' he said, 'I thought you—' but here he saw his mistake, and pulled himself up short, just too late.

'But what do you mean by it?' he added. 'You must remember that I have not been in the room, and know nothing of your operations.'

I allowed him to think that I had not noticed his slip. It was no part of my business to rouse his ire.

'I have found a letter.' I said, 'which bears out your suspicions; it will be for you, and, I suppose, for Lady Tredennick. to decide upon the next step.'

With every show of alacrity the captain led the way back to the library, and when the door was shut I put the letter into his hands. I watched him very closely while he was reading it, and again I was impressed with the idea that he had already mastered its contents. The expression of his face denoted rather a settled satisfaction at the fact of the discovery than, as would have been more natural, a growing indignation as he read from line to line.

'Thank you,' he said, handing the letter back to me. 'Whatever may be the ultimate consequences of this affair that letter will, at any rate, convince Lady Tredennick of the unworthiness of her protégé, and enable us to stop Herbert's folly. If you will wait here, I will fetch my wife. When she has heard the fullness of this woman's iniquity, we will make short work of the adventuress.'

He left the room, and I walked to the window, still holding the letter in my hand. On the face of it the case began to look very black against Miss Lucy Moreton, but somehow there were points about it here and there which seemed to clash with the most obvious conclusion. In the first place there was this sleek, luxurious captain's evident anxiety to bring the crime home to the girl, and to no one else; and then there was the position in which I had found the letter. Was it conceivable that any one implicated would have left such a piece of damning evidence hanging on a wall with ordinary correspondence, where the first servant that entered the room would as likely as not find and read it?

I examined the letter again, scrutinised the paper for a watermark, and inspected the envelope, in the hope, of finding on the flap the embossed stamp of the vendor. No information of the kind was forthcoming, and I was about returning the letter to its cover, when certain slight indentations on the inside of the envelope caught my eye. They ran in parallel lines on the reverse side of the address; but I saw at a glance that they were too broad and deep to have been caused by the pressure of the soft quill pen with which the address had evidently been written.

A hurried examination of the address side through a pocket lens caused me to open out the envelope entirely, taking care not to tear it, and there, on the inside, I obtained my real clue to the mystery. It differed somewhat from that which had so readily fallen into my hands. I had hardly restored the envelope to its original shape when Captain Borradaile re-entered, conducting a lady of middle-age and fine presence, but whose weak and vacillating expression suggested a temperament easily led. At the captain's request, I handed Lady Tredennick the letter to read, but I carefully retained the envelope. I did not mean to let that go out of my possession again.

Whatever doubts I may have had in the case of her husband, there was no question about it that Lady Tredennick had never seen the letter before. The moment she had perused it she burst into tears, and for some little time her emotion was so great that she was unable to speak. Her first question, when she found her voice, was to ask me what course I would advise— what I could do to help them out of the dreadful dilemma in which they found themselves.

'I understand that Miss Moreton has been a favourite of your ladyship's?' I said, 'and that you have given a sort of implied consent to the relations existing between her and Lord Tredennick?'

'That is so,' was her reply. 'Of course, it was very far from being the match we should have wished for him from a social point of view; but the girl seemed so good and sweet, and if her account of herself had been correct; she would at least have been a gentleman's daughter, so I gave in— much against my husband's will.'

'Of course, with this matter brought home to her, Lord Tredennick will give her up?' I said.

'Oh, yes, he must,' replied Lady Tredennick. 'With the evidence of that letter before his eyes, what else can he do? Nothing short of that, though, would have moved him, I think.'

'Well,' I said, 'these unpleasantnesses are best settled quickly. My advice to your ladyship, if your object is retribution and the recovery of your jewels; is to send for the police, and let them take up the case where I leave it.'

'There are reasons, I think I told you,' put in Captain Borradaile's harsh voice, 'why we should not take that course at present.'

'Very good,' I replied; 'then my next piece of advice is to send for Lord Tredennick and Miss Moreton, and in my presence tell them what happened last night, and what has since been discovered. Only Captain Borradaile must do the talking, for I wish to have no part in compounding a felony. Perhaps, in the presence of a detective the young people will be more easily persuaded into doing the right thing, and I can supplement the accusation with my own testimony if necessary.

The captain rang the bell and told the butler to ask Lord Tredennick and Miss Moreton to be good enough to step into the library. While we were waiting for their appearance, Lady Tredennick sat quietly sobbing, and Captain Borradaile walked up and down the room, evidently working himself into a proper condition to deliver the 'speech for the prosecution.' It was not long before the young couple entered— the same I had seen at the tennis net on my arrival— looking surprised at their sudden summons and Lady Tredennick's palpable agitation, but neither of them evincing the slightest trace of guilty knowledge. Lucy Moreton's quiet, ladylike demeanour was anything but that of

the bold adventuress she had been described. The captain briefly narrated the account of the robbery.

'By George!' exclaimed Lord Tredennick, a fresh-coloured young athlete more likely to do execution at the 'Lords' of St John's Wood than of Westminster— 'by George! don't I wish we had come upon them. I'd have made it hot for the rascals!'

'Perhaps,' said the captain, with a sneer at the youthful sally; 'but in that case you would have made it hot, as you call it, for the friends-very possibly the relations— of that young lady. Read that letter.' Taking the letter from Lady Tredennick, he thrust it into his stepson's hands. Lucy Moreton simply looked as if she did not understand.

'Well, what of this? What has this got to do with Miss Moreton?' blurted the young man, turning very pale, but going over and putting his arm round the girl's waist.

'Only that Mr. Zambra, who is a detective, discovered it just now, among other papers, in her bedroom. It was addressed to her doubtless by her friends, the burglars, on whose behalf she gained entrance here. Show them the envelope, Zambra, and tell them that we can prove this person to have been the recipient of the letter.'

'I can tell them more than that,' I said, waving back Tredennick, who seemed inclined to spring upon his stepfather; 'I can tell them who sent it to her, or rather, who placed it in her room ready for me to find it, for that the young lady has never seen it herself I am assured. Listen to me,' I added peremptorily, as the captain, very yellow about the gills, essayed to speak; 'it is a risky thing to try to make a detective an unconscious instrument for doing a foul wrong. It is playing with edged tools with a vengeance. It might be done perhaps by a very clever man; but you, sir, are not clever, and have bungled sadly. You yourself wrote the letter, and addressed this envelope in a feigned hand.' As I spoke I held up the envelope neatly folded together again, and showing no signs of having been turned inside out.

'Insolent scoundrel!' hissed the enraged man. 'I will make you pay dearly for this. What proof have you got of what you say? Absolutely none. This is too preposterous.'

'Pardon me,' I said, 'I have every proof that you were the person whom this letter reached through the post— not Miss Moreton. See here,' I added, quickly reversing the envelope, 'when this precious missive was posted, it was addressed to you in pencil; here are the indentations easily traceable on the wrong side; I make your name of it quite plainly. That was done in order to get the postmarks on it and the stamp obliterated. Then all you had to do was to rub out the pencilled address and fill in Miss Moreton's address in ink, thus

preparing a packet which had all the appearance of having been received by her, first hand, through the post. You were obliged to use a tolerably hard pencil in order to make the address dark enough to secure its reaching you, hence my discovery. If your object was robbery, as well as to injure this young lady, I should strongly advise you to restore the jewels at once, for I tell you frankly I am not going to compound a felony in your interests.'

'It is too true,' groaned poor Lady Tredennick. 'I noticed, Algernon, that two days ago you received a letter addressed to you in pencil in your own handwriting.'

A LITTLE LATER Lord Tredennick walked down to the lodge gates with me. His object was to beg me, for his mother's sake, to hush the whole thing up, for my condition had been observed, and by some mysterious juggling the jewels were put back again in the clumsily burgled chest.

'I'm not rightly clear in my mind,' said the young nobleman, 'whether he really meant to stick to the jewels. Very likely he did, for he's an awful scoundrel, but what he was chiefly after was to separate me and Lucy. You see, we shall be married when I come of age, and then he will have to clear out of this little clover field. I suppose he thought, if he could break it off, he would postpone his own exit indefinitely. There are two things you have not explained yet, though— the ladder and wires across the lawn.'

'Why, of course,' I smiled at his simplicity, 'he put them there himself.'

'Well,' said Tredennick, 'I expect this will be about the finish of Captain Algernon Borradaile. My mother must live with us when we are married, and he shall have a couple of hundred a year to go and kick his heels on the Continent.'

And, as a matter of fact, that was the arrangement eventually come to.

_____

The California gold rush conjures up images of prairie schooners, wagon trains across the grassy plains; the Western Australia gold rush of 1893 saw thousands travel by the only transport possible: on any old ship that would make it from Melbourne to the West, preferably without sinking... The author made the trip just this way in 1893. He didn't have much success at Coolgardie, but became a journalist, short story writer, and poet, and wrote a novel of the gold rush.

9: Ten Years After

Dryblower

Edwin Greenslade Murphy 1866-1939
Sun (Kalgoorlie) 28 June 1903

S.S. Kanowna*. Latitude : Smoke-room. Longitude: Three points to lar-board of a lager.*

TEN YEARS is a long time to go without seeing the land wherein you first sucked Nature's nourishment and subsequently plunged into the infantile excitement of mud-pies, tipcat and stickjaw.

Ten Years! Ten years is a heavy load of time to cram on a wanderer's shoulders and expect him to turn up in the village street, or its Australian equivalent, the corner pub, with none of the wrinkles and little of the staleness with which his boyhood's damsels are encumbered! Nothing like a saloon trip back home to set you pondering on the manner in which you lurched Westward in the early Coolgardie days. Nothing like a luxurious ship, attentive stewards, eight-course dinners and shilling cigars to jog your memory per contra concerning the rush and scramble of the pioneer times when you parted ten pounds for a trip in the leaky old scow which for 14 days tussled with Death between Melbourne and Fremantle.

Ring for another lager. Puts a feeling into you as if you owned a chip of the earth. Gaze along the magnificent stretch of decks. Picture the change from the rattle and dirty pokiness of the coffin coaster of by-gone days. It was Melbourne where you joined the S.S. *Dug-out*. Your mate had secured your bunk a month previously in Sydney. You were compelled to wait, all the cabins having been snapped up. Going aboard at the Yarra wharf, you noticed them bringing something ashore that stared upwards with sightless eyes. The something had been a passenger, who, sick at heart and stomach of the foul reek of the human piggeries, had crawled into an empty horse-box on deck. None noticed him, and when a sea smashed the adjoining stall they coaxed a draught horse from among the rubbish and yarded him in on top of the semi-conscious derelict in the deck stable.

The coroner's jury most likely added a rider censuring the corpse for getting in the way of the horse. You're not sure on this point, but as the

foreman of the jury was a shareholder in a similar shipping company the statement may be made with safety.

I daresay you remember groping your way through the wreckage and lumber of horse-boxes, galley-garbage and general foul-smelling offal to see your "cabin". Your mate, who humoursly wrote and told you he had reserved a stateroom for you, guffawed loudly as he piloted you to your particular piggery. Not in the saloon. That was reserved for the mining speculators and the Jackeroo sons of busted land boomsters. You looked inquiringly at your mate and suggested the fo'o'sle. He took you there to kind of lessen the shock.

This was clean, barring the lakes of stale beer and tobacco quids which bespattered the deck floor and general surroundings. In a berth near the forepeak an incoherent person was babbling in the horrors. To stave off sickness he had waded wildly into Kanaka rum for a week before leaving Queensland, and was now evicting imaginary mice from the bed-clothes.

By the light of a stinking lamp a group were playing cribbage.

The rum lunatic emitted a howl of joy as he violently ejected a large quantity of rodents from his arms and shoulders.

One of the group misplayed a card.

Bungling down he grabbed a heavy boot and flung it at the grog madman. It struck him square in the face, and the blood running down from a deep gash choked the poor wretch's gabblings.

By the time you have mustered up enough pluck to explore the gloomy hold wherein lies your "state-room", the verminous old ash-pan is heaving and staggering to the roll of the deep.

Your mate, who at the beer-baptism has been named "Tom the Tug," assisted you down the make-shift ladder which led down to where the passengers and the rats battled for supremacy. When your eyes triumphed over gloom yon got a grip of the peculiar geography of the stoke-hole saloon. Against the sides of the ship the temporary berths were piled four a side, six deep. In the centre is another warren for the scamper, a hundred and fifty human being stowed away like sardines in a tin, breathing over and over again the lung poison of the free man's prison, and wallowing in a choice selection of blasphemy and obscenity from the shanties and shearing sheds of the Austral continent. Everybody has a revolver; your mate has something better— solid pluck and ability to maul the toughest ruffian on board.

He proved this next day at "luncheon," said provender consisting of kennel meat and rotten spuds fought for at the make-shift galley and brought in buckets by the passengers to the hungry hordes that awaited it in the stench and gloom of the ship's hold. On the particular day on which Tom rebuked the up-till-then boss pug, a passenger appointed to scramble for tucker at the

galley slipped in descending the ladder and split half the hog-wash. He was promptly woodened out by the aforesaid rough, who was in turn tackled by Tom and knocked insensible among the slop of meat, sauce, and the general grime and gore of the savory *salle a manger*.

You remember all this, don't you? If not, make an effort to do so. It gives a relish to the toast and bovril that the neat liveried steward is serving to the sick and hearty invalids.

You will also recall the duff distributed under the alias of "roley-poley pudding," Tom, you recollect, had three rough-and-tumble tussles with the crowd that rushed that dubious delicacy; and I don't think he ever mentioned on the ship the fact that the said hog-like viand was usually boiled in the legs of a pair of cast-off dungaree trousers. He was afraid it would upset you, so he refrained.

Tom was a rough nugget. He had a coating of ironstone, but his inside avoirdupois went twenty solid weights to the ounce. Recall, also, how he tried to persuade the old farmer not to go to the fields but return to his crops and cows in the Mallee.

"Spare me days," he said in astonishment when the feeble old fellow told him he was bound for Coolgardie, "You'll perish on the track, Now," he said, not unkindly, " 'ave a b— bit of b— commonsense, and git back to the bullock punchin' and leave 'weight chasin' to blokes wot's a bit younger than Rip Van Winkle."

The old man shook his head.

"I'm as good as any of you," he wheezed, and so he turned out, for he and five others stumbled on the richest surface show yet found in W.A.— the Londonderry. The old man was Elliot!

S.S. KANOWNA. Longitude : Nor'- west of Poker School, Latitude: None allowed.

THERE WERE enough fire-arms on the S.S. *Dug-out* to arm a piratical Chinese junk. Fired with the fearsome yarns which came filtering from the West across the Bight, 80 per cent of the swampers predicted Coolgardie a wildnerness into which the dregs of the earth were being dumped. Those who knew the West smiled hugely at the general bloodthirstiness of the outfits, and worked off obscure scoffs anent Buffalo Bill, Jack Harkaway and Co., not to mention gloomy hints regarding Deadwood Dick and other celebrated heroes of pistol fiction.

The solemn joke of the show was the fact that almost every man aboard imagined himself to be the only armed person on the passenger list. An accident exposed the state of affairs. One day in the middle of a skylark scuffle

a revolver went off in the pocket of a callow youth who had left the whirl of excitement of a Gippsland grocer's shop for the prospective solitudes of the wild West.

Down came the captain.

"Look here," he said, "I want every fire-arm carried on board. If not," he threatened, "I'll make a search and throw the lot overboard."

A wisp of humanity, who had joined the boat as supernumerary steward, timidly produced an ancient horse pistol ready loaded and capped. Half a dozen modern "squirts" followed suit.

In ten minutes about three hundred-weight of pocket armanent lay on the hatchway. These were locked up in the lamp room and given out at Albany.

A day out from Adelaide the tired soul of a poor wretch who had been stoking his way to the West parted with its frail clay. Next day, they buried him, and those on board saw the saddest scene of all the sad scenes upon this all-too-melancholy earth.

The captain read the burial service. The body, sewn in a weighted canvas sack, and covered by the Union Jack, was lying on a grating near an opening in the bulwarks. Near by, abaft of the foc'sle, but out of the knowledge of the captain who was slightly deaf, a callous-hearted quartette were playing quoits.

"Man that is born of a woman," began the grey-haired old skipper.

"Five to tie; eight quoits to do it with," came faintly from the foc'sle.

The words of the cap-tain were scarcely audible.

"I am the resurrection and the life—"

An oath of disappointment came from a quoit-player, mingled with a jeer of joy.

"One off, two off, three off, one on, four off—! Beat yer, by God!"

The players trooped aft to the bar. The others, standing bareheaded, were straining to catch the captain's words:

"Whosoever believeth in me shall not perish—"

The half-drunken quoit players stopped with an amused oath. Then the solemnity of the spectacle gripped them by the hearts, and half ashamed, half reverently they paused beside the bier.

The ship slowed down to quarter speed, and lurched heavily; the grating tilted, and the body dipped from under the flag, plunged forward, and down. Down and down, and yet deeper down, where the light of day was not and where the blind fish swim. Down and down to the mile-deep ooze, where strange things crawl amid the immense pressure. Down to the perfect rest and awful silence of the ancient ocean bed. To the long sleep which no watch bell breaks and where no coffin-ship owner counts the gold wrung from the carcases of his slaves.

Four days out from Adelaide the ship ran into the tag-end of a hurricane. Then a wet and gory hell broke loose, In the dimly-lighted hold the sea-sick "swampers" groaned and wallowed in their misery. Amid the stewy half darkness a few of the better-hearted groped their way to help the half-dead press of humans who moaned in unutterable woe in the suffocating stench, the hatches having been closed to keep out the green sea which split themselves upon the foc'sle head and roared in foam among the horse-boxes.

Up— up— rose the nose of the staggering old stew-pan until the fore keel showed clear, and the stern sank until the propeller toiled around four fathoms below the boil of the surface. Poising an instant on the crest of a foamy ridge, the rusty hulk ran sheer down the green incline, burying her nose as the screw rose clear at the stern, and, whizzing wildly around, shook her very vitals. Deeper and deeper still she buried her foc'sle into the great green piles of water until even the steersman shut his eyes in pale-faced fright. Would she ever lift her head?

Deep down in her bowels a haggard-faced engineer clutched at the throttle lever to stop the racing of the propeller, which shivered the carcase of the old coffin ship from the wheel-house to the mussel-encrusted keel below the panting and striving engines.

As the bow rose from the bondage of the last sea she shipped, the great wave rushed aft, smashing into matchwood the first two horse-boxes, loosing a couple of maimed and fright-maddened animals to kick themselves to death among the awful raffle of the floating wreckage.

When the bulk of the water had gurgled from the scuppers a dozen horses were down, six will broken legs and a couple with scarcely enough life to warrant the use of the rifle.

By the time the maimed horses were shot and heaved overboard another sea was shipped and the same awful scene enacted. Amid all this the swampers groaned and gasped in the stifle of the hold. The temporary trapdoor in the hatch-way opened and an apparition projected a head therefrom.

"Give us air," it gasped; we're choking!"

The backwash of a recently-shipped wave surged round him. and stopping over the combing fell in a dirty torrent down into the black-hole of misery, carrying with it the manure and blood of the slaughtered horses.

Thus they came over in '93.

_____

10: Beautiful Death

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 12 April 1947

NUKUALOFA, they say, means "home of love." Well— much happens in the home. I was settled in the Tongas, after the war. I found the climate perfect, and I could put up with the natives, who are not the pleasantest in the Pacific. But Maiera, who was not pleasant, who was proud as a Scots piper, who treated white folks, when she could, like dogs— who was, in fact, a typical Tongan in all things save one— Maiera would have reconciled me to anything.

She was beautiful, and she was, they said, a witch. At all events, she was powerful, with a strain of Tongan royalty in her, and the blood of a British peer, who had neglected to wed her mother twenty years ago. The supernatural powers with which she was credited came, I think, more from a knowledge of native drugs than anything else. They said it was ill to offend her. As for me, I was the dust beneath her beautiful brown feet, and I knew it.

She had been in love with Wing-Commander Harry Wilmot, who paid a (literally) flying visit to Nukualofa in the last year of the war. It was 1946 now, and she was still waiting for him to return and marry her. With the Tongan royal blood in her veins, and the pride it brought, she expected nothing less. I didn't believe he would come back. I happened to know Harry, and his long rosary of love affairs. Maiera had been one of many— for him.

But he did return, on the cruise ship *Catamaran*, and he came ashore, and he met Maiera on the long beach that every Tongan knows. Maiera, tall, vivid, with those South Sea eyes, "like balls of water," and the shape of a sea-goddess, in her windblown robes of blue.

MAIERA, encountering, for the first time, the little fashionable creature in a crazy hat, who introduced herself as "Mrs. Henry Wilmot."

I was there, and I felt as you might feel, seeing a woman roughly struck in the face. Wilmot, I knew, had planned the meeting with the idea of freeing himself from any possible claim. You should have seen how the reputed witch, the princess, took it. She drew herself up to her full height, blasted Mrs. Wilmot with one look, and turned away.

I didn't feel easy. I knew Maiera. I watched her, walk deliberately into the shallow water, careless of her satins, and stand there, looking down.

Harry said to me uneasily, "What's she doing? Think she wants to get drowned?"

I shook my head. I had seen. But I found myself unable to speak. I think Maiera had hypnotised me.

She returned, with something in her hand. Something beautiful. A starfish, large, rose pink in color, covered with shell-like projections of pink and ivory. Smiling sweetly, she came up to where Wilmot stood, sheepish and embarrassed, beside the perky little bride.

"I give you a present," she cooed. "It is very pretty."

It was, but the bride held back. The thing was awkward to hold. Maiera, still smiling, tossed it suddenly into the woman's hands.

She cried out, "Oh—it's stung me!" and let it fall. Her hand was bleeding.

Wilmot exclaimed, and bent to pick up the lovely thing. Maiera swooped like a hawk, and took it away. I saw that she handled it cleverly, keeping the pink and white points away from her fingers. She looked at Wilmot, who was wiping his bride's hand with a handkerchief.

"Don't trouble," she said amiably. "She will be dead in half an hour."

At that the bride shrieked, and Wilmot swore. I don't think he believed Maiera, but I did. I had heard of the fatal, lovely starfish. I seized Maiera by her massive shoulders, and shook her.

"You know the cure— you must!" I cried. "Tell it at once!"

She laughed. "I never telling. Let her die."

At that I lost my head altogether. I seized the starfish, at infinite risk to myself, and turned the points on Maiera. Blood trickled from her arm.

"Now!" I said, "Tell the cure, or die yourself!"

She didn't wish to die— that lovely witch. She leaped into action. Took the starfish from, me, and clapped it hard upon her arm — upside down. I had already seen that the underside was armed with powerful suckers. I understood. It was hardly a minute before she dropped the creature on the sand; the little wound in her arm was bloodless and white

THE bride, who had gone into screaming hysterics, fought us while Harry and I took up the starfish cautiously and held the sucker side to her hand. In a little while the strong clutch loosened; the beautiful death dropped away.

"She all right," contemptuously said Maiera, taking the starfish and hurling it Into the sea. The bride had dropped down on the sand, and was sitting there crying. I consoled her as well as. I could. I could hear Harry, close at hand, talking to Maiera, who looked— well, like a red and golden cyclone sun, rising above the clouds.

He said: "Why, girl, if you love me as much as all that—"

"I not love you," she interrupted.

He went on. "If you do— why, you can have me— I— I'll marry you."

Maiera said, "Your wife, she sitting on the sand."

He stumbled a little in his speech.

"She's— she's *de facto*," he said.

Maiera turned to too, with a splendid sweep.

"What's that?"

I told her. The poor little *de facto* was crying now, and I was trying to soothe her. I could have killed Harry, for his cruelty to both. Maiera was, as always, equal to the occasion.

"Don't cry," she said quite kindly, to the woman she had just tried to kill. "You can keep him." And swift as a seabird, she went along the shore toward the lonely palmgroves and the end of Nukualofa.

11: A Psychological Shipwreck

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

The Argonaut, 24 May 1879 (as "My Shipwreck")
(subsequent reprints as "A Psychological Shipwreck")
Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 30 April 1938

IN the summer of 1874 I was in Liverpool, whither I had gone on business for the mercantile house of Bronson and Jarrett, New York. I am William Jarrett; my partner was Zenas Bronson. The firm failed last year, and, unable to endure the fall from affluence to poverty, he died.

Having finished my business, and feeling the lassitude and exhaustion incident to its despatch, I felt that a protracted sea voyage would be both agreeable and beneficial, so instead of embarking for my return on one of the many fine passenger steamers, I booked for New York on the sailing vessel *Morrow*, upon which I had shipped a large and valuable invoice of the goods I had bought.

THE *MORROW* was an English ship, with, of course, but little accommodation for passengers, of whom there were only myself, a young woman, and her servant, who was a middle-aged negress... I thought it singular that a travelling English girl should be so attended, but she afterward explained to me that the woman had been left with her family by a man and his wife from South Carolina, both of whom had died on the same day at the house of the young lady's father in Devonshire— a circumstance in itself sufficiently uncommon to remain rather distinctly in my memory, even had it not afterward transpired in conversation with the young lady that the name of the man was William Jarrett, the same as my own: I knew that a bunch of my family had settled in South Carolina, but of them and their history I was ignorant.

The *Morrow* sailed from the mouth of the Mersey on June 15, and for several weeks we had fair breezes and unclouded skies. The skipper, an admirable seaman, but nothing more, favored us with very little of his society, except at his table; and the young woman, Miss Janette Harford, and I became very well acquainted. We were, in truth, nearly always together, and being of an introspective turn of mind I often endeavored to analyse and define the novel feeling with which she inspired me— a secret, subtle, but powerful attraction which constantly impelled me to seek her; but the attempt was hopeless. I could only be sure that at least it was not love.

Having assured myself of this, being certain that she was quite as wholehearted, I ventured one evening (I remember it was on July 3) as we sat

on deck to ask her, laughingly, if she could assist me to resolve my psychological doubt.

FOR a moment she was silent, with averted face, and I began to fear I had been extremely rude and indelicate, then she fixed her eyes gravely on my own. Miss Harford had closed her eyes and was leaning back in her chair, apparently asleep, the book she had been reading open in her lap. Impelled by surely I cannot say what motive, I glanced at the top of the page; it was a copy of that rare and curious work, *Denneker's Meditations*, and the lady's index finger rested on this passage:

"To sundry it is given to be drawn away, and to be apart from the body for a season; for, as concerning rills which would flow across each other, the weaker is borne along by the stronger, so there he certain of kin whose paths intersecting, their souls do bear company, the while their bodies go fore-appointed ways, unknowing."

Miss Harford arose, shuddering; the sun had sunk below the horizon, but it was not cold. There was not a breath of wind; there were no clouds in the sky, yet not a star was visible. A hurried tramping sounded on the deck; the captain, summoned from below, joined the first officer, who stood looking at the barometer.

"Good God!" I heard him exclaim.

An hour later the form of Janette Harford, invisible in the darkness and spray, was torn from my grasp by the cruel vortex of the sinking ship, and I fainted in the cordage of the floating mast to which I had lashed myself.

IT was by lamplight that I awoke. I lay in a berth amid the familiar surroundings of the stateroom of a steamer. On a couch opposite sat a man, half undressed for bed, reading a book. I recognised the face of my friend, Gordon Doyle, whom I had met in Liverpool on the day of my embarkation, when he was himself about to sail on the steamer, *City of Prague*, on which he had urged me to accompany him.

After some moments I now spoke his name.

He simply said, "Well," and turned a leaf in his book without removing his eyes from the page.

"Doyle," I repeated, "did they save her?"

He now deigned to look at me, and smiled as if amused. He evidently thought me but half awake.

"Her? Whom do you mean?"

"Janette Harford."

His amusement turned to amazement; he stared at me fixedly, saying nothing.

"You will tell me after a while," I continued; "I suppose you will tell me after a while."

A moment later I asked: "What ship is this?"

Doyle stared again.

"The steamer *City of Prague*, bound from Liverpool to New York, three weeks out with a broken shaft. Principal passenger, Mr. Gordon Doyle; ditto lunatic, Mr. William Jarrett. These two distinguished travellers embarked together, but they are about to part, it being the resolute intention of the former to pitch the latter overboard."

I SAT bolt upright. "Do you mean to say that I have been for three weeks a passenger on this steamer?"

"Yes, pretty nearly; this is July—"

"Have I been ill?" "Right as a trivet all the time, and punctual at your meals."

"My God I Doyle, there is some mystery here; do have the goodness to be serious. Was I not rescued from the wreck of the ship *Morrow*?"

Doyle changed color, and, approaching me, laid his fingers on my wrist. A moment later,

"What do you know of Janette Harford?" he asked very calmly.

"First tell me what you know of her?"

Mr. Doyle gazed at me for some moments as if thinking what to do, then seating himself again on the couch, said: "Why should I not? I am engaged to marry Janette Harford, whom I met a year ago in London. Her family, one of the wealthiest in Devonshire, cut up rough about it, and we eloped— are eloping rather, for on the day that you and I walked to the landing stage to go aboard this steamer she and her faithful servant, a negress, passed us, driving to the ship *Morrow*.

"She would not consent to go in the same vessel with me, and it had been deemed best that she take a sailing vessel in order to avoid observation and lessen the risk of detection. I am now alarmed lest this cursed breaking of our machinery may detain us so long that the *Morrow* will get to New York before us, and the poor girl will not know where to go."

I LAY still in my berth— so still I hardly breathed. But the subject was evidently not displeasing to Doyle, and after a short pause he resumed: "By the way, she is only an adopted daughter of the Harfords. Her mother was killed at their place by being thrown from a horse while hunting, and her father, mad

with grief, made away with himself the same day. No one ever claimed the child, and after a reasonable time they adopted her. She has grown up in the belief that she is their daughter."

"Doyle, what book are you reading?"

"Oh it's called *Denneker's Meditations*."

"She had— she has— a singular taste in reading," I managed to say, mastering my agitation.

"Yes. And now, perhaps, you will have the kindness to explain how you knew her name and that of the ship she sailed in."

"You talked of her in your sleep," I said.

A week later we were towed into the port of New York. But the *Morrow* was never heard from.

_____

12: The Silkworms of Florence

Clifford Ashdown

R. Austin Freeman (1860-1943) and J. J. Pitcairn (1860-1936)
Cassell's Magazine, August 1903

"AND this is all that's left of Brede now." The old beadle withdrew his hand, and the skull, with a rattle as of an empty wooden box, fell in its iron cage again.

"How old do you say it is?" asked Mr. Pringle.

"Let me see," reflected the beadle, stroking his long grey beard. "He killed Mr. Grebble in 1742, I think it was— the date's on the tombstone over yonder in the church— and he hung in these irons a matter of sixty or seventy year. I don't rightly know the spot where the gibbet stood, but it was in a field they used to call in my young days 'Gibbet Marsh.' You'll find it round by the Tillingham, back of the windmill."

"And is this the gibbet? How dreadful!" chorused the two daughters of a clergyman, very summery, very gushing, and very inquisitive, who with their father completed the party.

"Lor, no, miss! Why, that's the Rye pillory. It's stood up here nigh a hundred year! And now I'll show you the town charters." And the beadle, with some senile hesitation of gait, led the way into a small attic.

Mr. Pringle's mythical literary agency being able to take care of itself, his chambers in Furnival's Inn had not seen him for a month past. To a man of his cultured and fastidious bent the Bank Holiday resort was especially odious; he affected regions unknown to the tripper, and his presence at Rye had been determined by Jeakes' quaint "Perambulation of the Cinque Ports," which he had lately picked up in Booksellers' Row. Wandering with his camera from one decayed city to another, he had left Rye only to hasten back when disgusted with the modernity of the other ports, and for the last fortnight his tall slim figure had haunted the town, his fair complexion swarthy and his port-wine mark almost lost in the tanning begotten of the marsh winds and the sun.

"The town's had a rare lot of charters and privileges granted to it," boasted the beadle, turning to a chest on which for all its cobwebs and mildew the lines of elaborate carving showed distinctly. Opening it, he began to dredge up parchments from the huddled mass inside, giving very free translations of the old Norman-French or Latin the while.

"Musty, dirty old things!" was the comment of the two ladies.

Pringle turned to a smaller chest standing neglected in a dark corner, whose lid, when he tried it, he found also unlocked, and which was nearly as full of papers as the larger one.

"Are these town records also?" inquired Pringle, as the beadle gathered up his robes preparatory to moving on.

"Not they," was the contemptuous reply. "That there chest was found in the attic of an old house that's just been pulled down to build the noo bank, and it's offered to the Corporation; but I don't think they'll spend money on rubbish like that!"

"Here's something with a big seal!" exclaimed the clergyman, pouncing on a discoloured parchment with the avid interest of an antiquary. The folds were glued with damp, and endeavouring to smooth them out the parchment slipped through his fingers; it dropped plumb by the weight of its heavy seal, and as he sprang to save it his glasses fell off and buried themselves among the papers. While he hunted for them Pringle picked up the document, and began to read.

"Not much account, I should say," commented the beadle, with a supercilious snort. "Ah! you should have seen our Jubilee Address, with the town seal to it, all in blue and red and gold— cost every penny of fifty pound! That's the noo bank what you're looking at from this window. How the town is improving, to be sure!" He indicated a nightmare in red brick and stucco which had displaced a Jacobean mansion.

And while the beadle prosed Pringle read:

"Cinque Ports to Wit:

"TO ALL and every the Barons Bailiffs Jurats and Commonalty of the Cinque Port of Rye and to Anthony Shipperbolt to Mayor thereof:

"WHEREAS it hath been adjudged by the Commission appointed under His Majesty's sign-manual of date March the twenty-third one thousand eight hundred and five that Anthony Shipperbolt Mayor of Rye hath been guilty of conduct unbefitting his office as a magistrate of the Cinque Ports and hath acted traitorously enviously and contrary to the love and affection his duty towards His Most Sacred Majesty and the good order of this Realm TO WIT that the said Anthony Shipperbolt hath accepted bribes from the enemies of His Majesty hath consorted with the same and did plot compass and go about to assist a certain prisoner of war the same being his proper ward and charge to escape from lawful custody. NOW I William Pitt Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports do order and command you the said Anthony Shipperbolt and you are hereby required to forfeit and pay the sum of ten thousand pounds sterling into His Majesty's Treasury AND as immediate officer of His Majesty and by virtue and authority of each and every the ancient charters of the Cinque Ports I order and command you the said Anthony Shipperbolt to forthwith determine and refrain and you are hereby inhibited from exercising the office and dignity of Mayor of the said Cinque Port of Rye Speaker of the Cinque Ports Summoner of Brotherhood and Guestling and all and singular the liberties freedoms licences exemptions and jurisdictions of Stallage Pontage Panage Keyage Murage Piccage Passage Groundage Scutage and all other powers franchises and authorities appertaining thereunto AND I further order and command you the said Anthony Shipperbolt to render to me within seven days of the date hereof a full and true account of all monies fines amercements redemptions issues forfeitures tallies seals records

lands messuages and hereditaments whatsoever and wheresoever that you hold have present custody of or have at any time received in trust for the said Cinque Port of Rye wherein fail not at your peril. AND I further order and command you the said Barons Bailiffs Jurats and Commonalty of the said Cinque Port of Rye that you straightway meet and choose some true and loyal subject of His Majesty the same being of your number as fitting to hold the said office of Mayor of the said Cinque Port whose name you shall submit to my pleasure as soon as may be FOR ALL which this shall be your sufficient authority. Given at Downing Street this sixteenth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five.

"God Save the King."

The last two or three inches of the parchment were folded down, and seemed to have firmly adhered to the back— probably through the accidental running of the seal in hot weather. But the fall had broken the wax, and Pringle was now able to open the sheet to the full, disclosing some lines of script, faded and tremulously scrawled, it is true, but yet easy to be read:

"To my son.— Seek for the silkworms of Florence in Gibbet Marsh Church Spire SE xS, Winchelsea Mill SW ½W. A.S."

Pringle read this curious endorsement more than once, but could make no sense of it. Concluding it was of the nature of a cypher, he made a note of it in his pocket-book with the idea of attempting a solution in the evening— a time which he found it difficult to get through, Rye chiefly depending for its attractions on its natural advantages.

By this time the clergyman had recovered his glasses, and, handing the document back to him, Pringle joined the party by the window. The banalities of the bank and other municipal improvements being exhausted, and the ladies openly yawning, the beadle proposed to show them what he evidently regarded as the chief glory of the Town Hall of Rye. The inquisitive clergyman was left studying the parchment, while the rest of the party adjourned to the council chamber. Here the guide proudly indicated the list of mayors, whose names were emblazoned on the chocolate-coloured walls to a length rivalling that of the dynasties of Egypt.

"What does this mean?" inquired Pringle. He pointed to the year 1805, where the name "Anthony Shipperbolt" appeared bracketed with another.

"That means he died during his year of office," promptly asserted the old man. He seemed never at a loss for an answer, although Pringle began to suspect that the prompter the reply the more inaccurate was it likely to be.

"Oh, what a smell of burning!" interrupted one of the ladies.

"And where's papa?" screamed the other. "He'll be burnt to death."

There was certainly a smell of burning, which, being of a strong and pungent nature, perhaps suggested to the excited imagination of the ladies the

idea of a clergyman on fire. Pringle gallantly raced up the stairs. The fumes issued from a smouldering mass upon the floor, and beside it lay something which burnt with pyrotechnic sputtering; but neither bore any relation to the divine. He, though well representing what Gibbon has styled "the fat slumbers of the Church," was hopping about the miniature bonfire, now sucking his fingers and anon shaking them in the air as one in great agony. Intuitively Pringle understood what had happened, and with a bound he stamped the smouldering parchment into unrecognisable tinder, and smothering the more viciously burning seal with his handkerchief he pocketed it as the beadle wheezed into the room behind the ladies, who were too concerned for their father's safety to notice the action.

"What's all this?" demanded the beadle, and glared through his spectacles.

"I've dr-r-r-r-opped some wa-wa-wa-wax— oh!— upon my hand!"

"Waxo?" echoed the beadle, sniffing suspiciously.

"He means a wax match, I think," Pringle interposed chivalrously. The parchment was completely done for, and he saw no wisdom in advertising the fact.

"I'll trouble you for your name and address," insisted the beadle in all the pride of office.

"What for?" the incendiary objected.

"To report the matter to the Fire Committee."

"Very well, then— Cornelius Hardgiblet, rector of Logdown," was the impressive reply; and tenderly escorted by his daughters the rector departed with such dignity as an occasional hop, when his fingers smarted a little more acutely, would allow him to assume.

It still wanted an hour or two to dinner-time as Pringle unlocked the little; studio he rented on the Winchelsea road. Originally an office, he had made it convertible into a very fair dark-room, and here he was accustomed to spend his afternoons in developing the morning's photographs. But photography had little interest for him to-day. Ever since Mr. Hardgiblet's destruction of the document— which, he felt certain, was no accident— Pringle had cast about for some motive for the act. What could it be but that the parchment contained a secret, which the rector, guessing, had wanted to keep to himself? He must look up the incident of the mayor's degradation. So sensational an event, even for such stirring days as those, would scarcely go unrecorded by local historians. Pringle had several guide-books at hand in the studio, but a careful search only disclosed that they were unanimously silent as to Mr. Shipperbolt and his affairs. Later on, when returning, he had reason to bless his choice of an hotel. The books in the smoking-room were not limited, as usual, to a few timetables and an ancient copy of Ruff's *Guide*. On the contrary,

Murray and Black were prominent, and above all Hillpath's monumental *History of Rye*, and in this last he found the information he sought. Said Hillpath:—

"In 1805 Anthony Shipperbolt, then Mayor of Rye, was degraded from office, his property confiscated, and himself condemned to stand in the pillory with his face to the French coast, for having assisted Jules Florentin, a French prisoner of war, to escape from the Ypres Tower Prison. He was suspected of having connived at the escape of several other prisoners of distinction, presumably for reward. He had been a shipowner trading with France, and his legitimate trade suffering as a result of the war he had undoubtedly resorted to smuggling, a form of trading which, to the principals engaged in it at least, carried little disgrace with it, being winked at by even the most law-abiding persons. Shipperbolt did not long survive his degradation, and, his only son being killed soon after while resisting a revenue cutter when in charge of his father's vessel, the family became extinct."

Here, thought Pringle, was sufficient corroboration of the parchment. The details of the story were clear, and the only mysterious thing about it was the endorsement. His original idea of its being a cypher hardly squared with the simple address, "To my son," and the "A. S." with which it concluded could only stand for the initials of the deposed mayor. There was no mystery either about "Gibbet Marsh," which, according to the beadle's testimony, must have been a well-known spot a century ago, while the string of capitals he easily recognised as compass-bearings. There only remained the curious expression, "The silkworms of Florence," and that was certainly a puzzle. Silkworms are a product of Florence, he knew; but they were unlikely to be exported in such troublous times. And why were they deposited in such a place as Gibbet Marsh? He turned for enlightenment to Hillpath, and pored over the passage again and again before he saw a glimmer of sense. Then suddenly he laughed, as the cypher resolved itself into a pun, and a feeble one at that. While Hillpath named the prisoner as Florentin and more than hinted at payment for services rendered, the cypher indicated where Florentine products were to be found. Shipperbolt ruined, his property confiscated, what more likely than that he should conceal the price of his treason in Gibbet Marsh— a spot almost as shunned in daylight as in darkness? Curious as the choice of the parchment for such a purpose might be, the endorsement was practically a will. He had nothing else to leave.

Pringle was early afoot the next day. Gibbet Marsh has long been drained and its very name forgotten, but the useful Murray indicated its site clearly enough for him to identify it; and it was in the middle of a wide and lonely field, embanked against the winter inundations, that Pringle commenced to work out the bearings approximately with a pocket-compass. He soon fixed his starting-point, the church tower dominating Rye from every point of view; but

of Winchelsea there was nothing to be seen for the trees. Suddenly, just where the green mass thinned away to the northward, something rose and caught the sunbeams for a moment, again and still again, and with a steady gaze he made out the revolving sails of a windmill. This was as far as he cared to go for the moment; without a good compass and a sounding-spud it would be a mere waste of time to attempt to fix the spot. He walked across the field, and was in the very act of mounting the stile when he noticed a dark object, which seemed to skim in jerky progression along the top of the embankment. While he looked the thing enlarged, and as the path behind the bank rose uplifted itself into the head, shoulders, and finally the entire person of the rector of Logdown. He had managed to locate Gibbet Marsh, it appeared; but as he stepped into the field and wandered aimlessly about, Pringle judged that he was still a long way from penetrating the retreat of the silkworms.

Among the passengers by the last train down from London that night was Pringle. He carried a cricketing-bag, and when safely inside the studio he unpacked first a sailor's jersey, peaked cap and trousers, then a small but powerful spade, a very neat portable pick, a few fathoms of manilla rope, several short lengths of steel rod (each having a screw-head, by which they united into a single long one), and finally a three-inch prismatic compass.

Before sunrise the next morning Pringle started out to commence operations in deadly earnest, carrying his jointed rods as a walking-stick, while his coat bulged with the prismatic compass. The town, a victim to the enervating influence of the visitors, still slumbered, and he had to unbar the door of the hotel himself. He did not propose to do more than locate the exact spot of the treasure; indeed, he felt that to do even that would be a good morning's work.

On the way down in the train he had taken a few experimental bearings from the carriage window, and felt satisfied with his own dexterity. Nevertheless, he had a constant dread lest the points given should prove inaccurate. He felt dissatisfied with the Winchelsea bearing. For aught he knew, not a single tree that now obscured the view might have been planted; the present mill, perhaps, had not existed; or even another might have been visible from the marsh. What might not happen in the course of nearly a century? He had already made a little calculation, for a prismatic compass being graduated in degrees (unlike the mariner's, which has but thirty-two points), it was necessary to reduce the bearings to degrees, and this had been the result:—

Rye Church Spire, SE xS = 146° I5'.
Winchelsea Mill SW ½W = 230° 37'.

When he reached the field not a soul was anywhere to be seen; a few sheep browsed here and there, and high overhead a lark was singing. At once he took a bearing from the church spire. He was a little time in getting the right pointing; he had to move step by step to the right, continuing to take observations, until at last the church weather-cock bore truly 146° through the sight-vane of the compass. Turning half round, he took an observation of the distant mill. He was a long way out this time; so carefully preserving his relative position to the church, he backed away, taking alternate observations of either object until both spire and mill bore in the right directions. The point where the two bearings intersected was some fifty yards from the brink of the Tillingham, and, marking the spot with his compass, Pringle began to probe the earth in a gradually widening circle, first with one section of his rod, then with another joint screwed to it, and finally with a length of three, so that the combination reached to a depth of eight feet. He had probed every square inch of a circle described perhaps twenty feet from the compass, when he suddenly stumbled upon a loose sod, nearly impaling himself upon the sounding-rod; and before he could rise his feet, sliding and slipping, had scraped up quite a large surface of turf, as did his hands, in each case disclosing the fat, brown alluvium beneath. A curious fact was that the turf had not been cut in regular strips, as if for removal to some garden; neatly as it was relaid, it had been lifted in shapeless patches, some large, some small, while the soil underneath was all soft and crumbling, as if that too had been recently disturbed. Someone had been before him! Cramped and crippled by his prolonged stooping, Pringle stretched himself at length upon the turf. As he lay and listened to the song that trilled from the tiny speck just visible against a woolly cloud, he felt that it was useless to search further. That a treasure had once been hidden thereabouts he felt convinced, for anything but specie would have been useless at such an unsettled time for commercial credit, and would doubtless have been declined by Shipperbolt; but whatever form the treasure had taken, clearly it was no longer present.

The sounds of toil increased around.

Already a barge was on its way up the muddy stream; at any moment he might be the subject of gaping curiosity. He carefully replaced the turfs, wondering the while who could have anticipated him, and what find, if any, had rewarded the searcher. Thinking it best not to return by the nearest path, he crossed the river some distance up, and taking a wide sweep halted on Cadborough Hill to enjoy for the hundredth time the sight of the glowing roofs, huddled tier after tier upon the rock, itself rising sheer from the plain; and far and beyond, and snowed all over with grazing flocks, the boundless green of

the seaward marsh. Inland, the view was only less extensive, and with some ill-humour he was eyeing the scene of his fruitless labour when he observed a figure moving over Gibbet Marsh. At such a distance it was hard to see exactly what was taking place, but the action of the figure was so eccentric that, with a quick suspicion as to its identity, Pringle laid his traps upon the ground and examined it through his pocket telescope. It was indeed Mr. Hardgiblet. But the new feature in the case was that the rector appeared to be taking a bearing with a compass, and although he resumed over and over again to a particular spot (which Pringle recognised as the same over which he himself had spent the early morning hours), Mr. Hardgiblet repeatedly shifted his ground to the right, to the left, and round about, as if dissatisfied with his observations. There was only one possible explanation of all this. Cleverer than Pringle had thought him, the rector must have hit upon the place indicated in the parchment, his hand must have removed the turf, and he it was who had examined the soil beneath. Not for the first time in his life, Pringle was disagreeably reminded of the folly of despising an antagonist, however contemptible he may appear. But at least he had one consolation: the rector's return and his continued observations showed that he had been no more successful in his quest than was Pringle himself. The silkworms were still unearthed.

The road down from Cadborough is long and dusty, and, what with the stiffness of his limbs and the thought of his wasted morning, Pringle, when he reached his studio and took the compass from his pocket, almost felt inclined to fling it through the open window into the "cut." But the spasm of irritability passed. He began to accuse himself of making some initial error in the calculations, and carefully went over them again— with an identical result. Now that Mr. Hardgiblet was clearly innocent of its removal, he even began to doubt the existence of the treasure. Was it not incredible, he asked himself, that for nearly a century it should have remained hidden? As to its secret (a punning endorsement on an old parchment), was it not just as open to any other investigator in all the long years that had elapsed? Besides, Shipperbolt might have removed the treasure himself in alarm for its safety. The thought of Shipperbolt suggested a new idea. Instruments of precision were unknown in those days— supposing Shipperbolt's compass had been inaccurate? He took down Norie's "Navigation," and ran through the chapter on the compass. There was a section headed "Variation and how to apply it," which he skimmed through, considering that the question did not arise, when, carelessly reading on, his attention was suddenly arrested by a table of "Changes in variation from year to year." Running his eye down this he made the startling discovery that, whereas the variation at that moment was about 16° 31' west, in 1805 it

was no less than 24°. Here was indeed a wide margin for error. All the time he was searching for the treasure it was probably lying right at the other side of the field!

At once he started to make a rough calculation, determined that it should be a correct one this time. As the variation of 1805 and that of the moment showed a difference of 7° 29', to obtain the true bearing it was necessary for him to subtract this difference from Shipperbolt's points, thus:

Rye Church spire SE xS = 146° 15', deduct 7° 29' = 138° 46'.
Winchelsea Mill SW ½W = 230° 37', deduct 7° 29' = 223° 8'.

The question of the moment concerned his next step. Up to the present Mr. Hardgiblet appeared unaware of the error. But how long, thought Pringle, would he remain so? Any work on navigation would set him right, and as he seemed keenly on the scent of the treasure he was unlikely to submit to a check of this nature. Like Pringle, too, he seemed to prefer the early morning hours for his researches. Clearly there was no time to lose. On his way up to lunch Pringle remarked that the whole town was agog. Crowds were pouring in from the railway station; at every corner strangers were inquiring their road; the shops were either closed or closing; a steam roundabout hooted in the cricket-field. The holiday aspect of things was marked by the display on all sides of uncomfortably best clothing, worn with a reckless and determined air of Pleasure Seeking. Even the artists, the backbone of the place, had shared the excitement, or else, resenting the invasion of their pitches by the unaccustomed crowd, were sulking indoors. Anyhow, they had disappeared. Not until he reached the hotel and read on a poster the programme of the annual regatta to be held that day, did Pringle realise the meaning of it all. In the course of lunch— which, owing to the general disorganisation of things, was a somewhat scrambled meal— it occurred to him that here was his opportunity. The regatta was evidently the great event of the year; every idler would be drawn to it, and no worker who could be spared would be absent. The treasure-field would be even lonelier than in the days of Brede's gibbet. He would be able to locate the treasure that afternoon once for all; then, having marked the spot, he could return at night with his tools and remove it.

When Pringle started out the streets were vacant and quiet as on a Sunday, and he arrived at the studio to find the quay an idle waste and the shipping in the "cut" deserted. As to the meadow, when he got there, it was forsaken even by the sheep. He was soon at work with his prismatic compass, and after half an hour's steady labour he struck a spot about an eighth of a mile distant from the scene of his morning's failure. Placing his compass as before at the point of

intersection, he began a systematic puncturing of the earth around it. It was a wearisome task, and, warned by his paralysis of the morning, he rose every now and then to stretch and watch for possible intruders. Hours seemed to have passed, when the rod encountered something hard. Leaving it in position, he probed all around with another joint, but there was no resistance even when he doubled its length, and his sense of touch assured him this hardness was merely a casual stone. Doggedly he resumed his task until the steel jammed again with a contact less harsh and unyielding. Once more he left the rod touching the buried mass, and probed about, still meeting an obstruction. And then with widening aim he stabbed and stabbed, striking this new thing until he had roughly mapped a space some twelve by eight inches. No stone was this, he felt assured; the margins were too abrupt, the corners too sharp, for aught but a chest. He rose exultingly. Here beneath his feet were the silkworms of Florence. The secret was his alone. But it was growing late; the afternoon had almost merged into evening, and far away across the field stretched his shadow. Leaving his sounding-rod buried with the cord attached, he walked towards a hurdle on the river-bank, paying out the cord as he went, and hunted for a large stone. This found, he tied a knot in the cord to mark where the hurdle stood, and following it back along the grass pulled up the rod and pressed the stone upon the loosened earth in its place. Last of all, he wound the cord upon the rod. His task would be an easy one again. All he need do was to find the knot, tie the cord at that point to the hurdle, start off with the rod in hand, and when all the cord had run off search for the stone to right or left of the spot he would find himself standing on.

As he re-entered the town groups of people were returning from the regatta— the sea-faring to end the day in the abounding taverns, the staider on their way to the open-air concert, the cinematograph, and the fireworks, which were to brim the cup of their dissipation. Pringle dined early, and then made his way to the concert-field, and spent a couple of hours in studying the natural history of the Ryer. The fireworks were announced for nine, and as the hour approached the excitement grew and the audience swelled. When a fairly accurate census of Rye might have been taken in the field, Pringle edged through the crowd and hurried along the deserted streets to the studio. To change his golf-suit for the sea-clothing he had brought from town was the work of a very few minutes, and his port-wine mark never resisted the smart application of a little spirit. Then, packing the sounding-rod and cord in the cricketing bag, along with the spade, pick, and rope, he locked the door, and stepped briskly out along the solitary road. From the little taverns clinging to the rock opposite came roars of discordant song, for while the losers in the regatta sought consolation, the winners paid the score, and all grew steadily

drunk together. He lingered a moment on the sluice to watch the tide as it poured impetuously up from the lower river. A rocket whizzed, and as it burst high over the town a roar of delight was faintly borne across the marsh.

Although the night was cloudy and the moon was only revealed at long intervals, Pringle, with body bent, crept cautiously from bush to bush along the bank; his progress was slow, and the hurdle had been long in sight before he made out a black mass in the water below. At first he took it for the shadow of a bush that stood by, but as he came nearer it took the unwelcome shape of a boat with its painter fast to the hurdle; and throwing himself flat in the grass he writhed into the opportune shade of the bush. It was several minutes before he ventured to raise his head and peer around, but the night was far too dark for him to see many yards in any direction— least of all towards the treasure. As he watched and waited he strove to imagine some reasonable explanation of the boat's appearance on the scene. At another part of the river he would have taken slight notice of it; but it was hard to see what anyone could want in the field at that hour, and the spot chosen for landing was suggestive. What folly to have located the treasure so carefully! He must have been watched that afternoon; round the field were scores of places where a spy might conceal himself. Then, too, who could have taken such deep interest in his movements? Who but Mr. Hardgiblet, indeed? This set him wondering how many had landed from the boat; but a glance showed that it carried only a single pair of sculls, and when he wriggled nearer he saw but three footprints upon the mud, as of one who had taken just so many steps across it.

The suspense was becoming intolerable. A crawl of fifty yards or so over damp grass was not to be lightly undertaken; but he was just on the point of coming out from the shadow of the bush, when a faint rhythmic sound arose, to be followed by a thud. He held his breath, but could hear nothing more. He counted up to a hundred— still silence. He rose to his knees, when the sound began again, and now it was louder. It ceased; again there was the thud, and then another interval of silence. Once more; it seemed quite close, grew louder, louder still, and resolved itself into the laboured breathing of a man who now came into view. He was bending under a burden which he suddenly dropped, as if exhausted, and then, after resting awhile, slowly raised it to his shoulders and panted onwards, until, staggering beneath his load, he lurched against the hurdle, his foot slipped, and he rolled with a crash down the muddy bank. In that moment Pringle recognised the more than usually unctuous figure of Mr. Hardgiblet, who embraced a small oblong chest. Spluttering and fuming, the rector scrambled to his feet, and after an unsuccessful hoist or two, dragged the chest into the boat. Then, taking a pause for breath, he climbed the bank again and tramped across the field.

Mr. Hardgiblet was scarcely beyond earshot when Pringle, seizing his bag, jumped down to the water-side. He untied the painter, and shoving off with his foot, scrambled into the boat as it slid out on the river. With a paddle of his hand alongside, he turned the head up stream, and then dropped his bag with all its contents overboard and crouched along the bottom. A sharp cry rang out behind, and, gently he peeped over the gunwale. There by the hurdle stood Mr. Hardgiblet, staring thunder-struck at the vacancy. The next moment he caught sight of the strayed boat, and started to run after it; and as he ran, with many a trip and stumble of wearied limbs, he gasped expressions which were not those of resignation to his mishap. Meantime, Pringle, his face within a few inches of the little chest, sought for some means of escape. He had calculated on the current bearing him out of sight long before the rector could return, but such activity as this discounted all his plans. All at once he lost the sounds of pursuit, and, raising his head, he saw that Mr. Hardgiblet had been forced to make a detour round a little plantation which grew to the water's edge. The next second Pringle had seized the sculls, and with a couple of long rapid strokes grounded the boat beneath a bush on the opposite bank. There he tumbled the chest on to the mud, and jumping after it shoved the boat off again. As it floated free and resumed its course up stream, Pringle shouldered the chest, climbed up the bank, and keeping in the shade of a hedge, plodded heavily across the field.

Day was dawning as Pringle extinguished the lamp in his studio, and setting the shutters ajar allowed the light to fall upon the splinters, bristling like a cactus-hedge, of what had been an oaken chest. The wood had proved hard as the iron which clamped and bound it, but scarcely darker or more begrimed than the heap of metal discs it had just disgorged. A few of these, fresh from a bath of weak acid, glowed golden as the sunlight, displaying indifferently a bust with "*Bonaparte Premier Consul*" surrounding it, or on the reverse "*République Française, anno XI. 20 francs*." Such were the silkworms of Florence.

13: The Curse of the Golden Cross

G. K. Chesterton

1874-1936

Pall Mall Magazine May 1925

In: *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, 1926

There are 5 volumes of the "Father Brown" detective short stories

SIX PEOPLE sat around a small table, seeming almost as incongruous and accidental as if they had been shipwrecked separately on the same small desert island. At least the sea surrounded them; for in one sense their island was enclosed in another island, a large and flying island like Laputa. For the little table was one of many little tables dotted about in the dining saloon of that monstrous ship the Moravia, speeding through the night and the everlasting emptiness of the Atlantic. The little company had nothing in common except that all were travelling from America to England. Two of them at least might be called celebrities; others might be called obscure, and in one or two cases even dubious.

The first was the famous Professor Smaill, an authority on certain archaeological studies touching the later Byzantine Empire. His lectures, delivered in an American University, were accepted as of the first authority even in the most authoritative seats of learning in Europe. His literary works were so steeped in a mellow and imaginative sympathy with the European past, that it often gave strangers a start to hear him speak with an American accent. Yet he was, in his way, very American; he had long fair hair brushed back from a big square forehead, long straight features and a curious mixture of preoccupation with a poise of potential swiftness, like a lion pondering absent-mindedly on his next leap.

There was only one lady in the group; and she was (as the journalists often said of her) a host in herself; being quite prepared to play hostess, not to say empress, at that or any other table. She was Lady Diana Wales, the celebrated lady traveller in tropical and other countries; but there was nothing rugged or masculine about her appearance at dinner. She was herself handsome in an almost tropical fashion, with a mass of hot and heavy red hair; she was dressed in what the journalists call a daring fashion, but her face was intelligent and her eyes had that bright and rather prominent appearance which belongs to the eyes of ladies who ask questions at political meetings.

The other four figures seemed at first like shadows in this shining presence; but they showed differences on a close view. One of them was a young man entered on the ship's register as Paul T. Tarrant. He was an American type which might be more truly called an American antitype. Every nation probably

has an antitype; a sort of extreme exception that proves the national rule. Americans really respect work, rather as Europeans respect war. There is a halo of heroism about it; and he who shrinks from it is less than a man. The antitype is evident through being exceedingly rare. He is the dandy or dude: the wealthy waster who makes a weak villain for so many American novels. Paul Tarrant seemed to have nothing whatever to do but change his clothes, which he did about six times a day; passing into paler or richer shades of his suit of exquisite light grey, like the delicate silver changes of the twilight. Unlike most Americans, he cultivated very carefully a short, curly beard; and unlike most dandies, even of his own type, he seemed rather sulky than showy. Perhaps there was something almost Byronic about his silence and his gloom.

The next two travellers were naturally classed together; merely because they were both English lecturers returning from an American tour. One of them was described as Leonard Smyth, apparently a minor poet, but something of a major journalist; long-headed, light-haired, perfectly dressed, and perfectly capable of looking after himself. The other was a rather comic contrast, being short and broad, with a black, walrus moustache, and as taciturn as the other was talkative. But as he had been both charged with robbing and praised for rescuing a Roumanian Princess threatened by a jaguar in his travelling menagerie, and had thus figured in a fashionable case, it was naturally felt that his views on God, progress, his own early life, and the future of Anglo-American relations would be of great interest and value to the inhabitants of Minneapolis and Omaha. The sixth and most insignificant figure was that of a little English priest going by the name of Brown. He listened to the conversation with respectful attention, and he was at that moment forming the impression that there was one rather curious thing about it.

'I suppose those Byzantine studies of yours, Professor,' Leonard Smyth was saying, 'would throw some light on this story of a tomb found somewhere on the south coast; near Brighton, isn't it? Brighton's a long way from Byzantium, of course. But I read something about the style of burying or embalming or something being supposed to be Byzantine.'

'Byzantine studies certainly have to reach a long way,' replied the Professor dryly. 'They talk about specialists; but I think the hardest thing on earth is to specialize. In this case, for instance: how can a man know anything about Byzantium till he knows everything about Rome before it and about Islam after it? Most Arab arts were old Byzantine arts. Why, take algebra— '

'But I won't take algebra,' cried the lady decisively. 'I never did, and I never do. But I'm awfully interested in embalming. I was with Gatton, you know, when he opened the Babylonian tombs. Ever since then I found mummies and preserved bodies and all that perfectly thrilling. Do tell us about this one.'

'Gatton was an interesting man,' said the Professor. 'They were an interesting family. That brother of his who went into Parliament was much more than an ordinary politician. I never understood the Fascisti till he made that speech about Italy.'

'Well, we're not going to Italy on this trip,' said Lady Diana persistently, 'and I believe you're going to that little place where they've found the tomb. In Sussex, isn't it?'

'Sussex is pretty large, as these little English sections go,' replied the Professor. 'One might wander about in it for a goodish time; and it's a good place to wander in. It's wonderful how large those low hills seem when you're on them.'

There was an abrupt accidental silence; and then the lady said, 'Oh, I'm going on deck,' and rose, the men rising with her. But the Professor lingered and the little priest was the last to leave the table, carefully folding up his napkin. And as they were thus left alone together the Professor said suddenly to his companion:

'What would you say was the point of that little talk?'

'Well,' said Father Brown, smiling, 'since you ask me, there was something that amused me a little. I may be wrong; but it seemed to me that the company made three attempts to get you to talk about an embalmed body said to be found in Sussex. And you, on your side, very courteously offered to talk— first about algebra, and then about the Fascisti, and then about the landscape of the Downs.'

'In short,' replied the Professor, 'you thought I was ready to talk about any subject but that one. You were quite right.'

The Professor was silent for a little time, looking down at the tablecloth; then he looked up and spoke with that swift impulsiveness that suggested the lion's leap.

'See here. Father Brown,' he said, 'I consider you about wisest and whitest man I ever met.'

Father Brown was very English. He had all the normal nation helplessness about what to do with a serious and sincere compliment suddenly handed to him to his face in the American manner. His reply was a meaningless murmur; and it was the Professor who proceeded, with the same staccato earnestness: 'You see, up to a point it's all simple enough. A Christian tomb of the Dark Ages, apparently that of a bishop, has been found under a little church at Dulham on the Sussex coast. The Vicar happens to be a good bit of an archaeologist himself and has been able to find a good deal more than I know yet. There was a rumour of the corpse being embalmed in a way peculiar to Greeks and Egyptians but unknown in the West, especially at that date. So Mr

Walters (that is the Vicar) naturally wonders about Byzantine influences. But he also mentions something else, that is of even more personal interest to me.'

His long grave face seemed to grow even longer and graver as he frowned down at the tablecloth. His long finger seemed to be tracing patterns on it like the plans of dead cities and their temples and tombs.

'So I'm going to tell you, and nobody else, why it is I have to be careful about mentioning that matter in mixed company; and why, the more eager they are to talk about it, the more cautious I have to be. It is also stated that in the coffin is a chain with a cross, common enough to look at, but with a certain secret symbol on the back found on only one other cross in the world. It is from the arcana of the very earliest Church, and is supposed to indicate St Peter setting up his See at Antioch before he came to Rome. Anyhow, I believe there is but one other like it, and it belongs to me. I hear there is some story about a curse on it; but I take no notice of that. But whether or no there is a curse, there really is, in one sense, a conspiracy; though the conspiracy should only consist of one man.'

'Of one man?' repeated Father Brown almost mechanically.

'Of one madman, for all I know,' said Professor Smaill. 'It's a long story and in some ways a silly one.'

He paused again, tracing plans like architectural drawings with his finger on the cloth, and then resumed: 'Perhaps I had better tell you about it from the beginning, in case you see some little point in the story that is meaningless to me. It began years and years ago, when I was conducting some investigations on my own account in the antiquities of Crete and the Greek islands. I did a great deal of it practically single-handed; sometimes with the most rude and temporary help from the inhabitants of the place, and sometimes literally alone. It was under the latter circumstances that I found a maze of subterranean passages which led at last to a heap of rich refuse, broken ornaments and scattered gems which I took to be the ruins of some sunken altar, and in which I found the curious gold cross. I turned it over, and on the back of it I saw the Ichthus or fish, which was an early Christian symbol, but of a shape and pattern rather different from that commonly found; and, as it seemed to me, more realistic— more as if the archaic designer had meant it to be not merely a conventional enclosure or nimbus, but to look a little more like a real fish. It seemed to me that there was a flattening towards one end of it that was not like mere mathematical decoration, but rather like a sort of rude or even savage zoology.

'In order to explain very briefly why I thought this find important, I must tell you the point of the excavation. For one thing, it had something of the nature of an excavation of an excavation. We were on the track not only of

antiquities, but of the antiquarians of antiquity. We had reason to believe, or some of us thought we had reason to believe, that these underground passages, mostly of the Minoan period, like that famous one which is actually identified with the labyrinth of the Minotaur, had not really been lost and left undisturbed for all the ages between the Minotaur and the modern explorer. We believed that these underground places, I might almost say these underground towns and villages, had already been penetrated during the intervening period by some persons prompted by some motive. About the motive there were different schools of thought: some holding that the Emperors had ordered an official exploration out of mere scientific curiosity; others that the furious fashion in the later Roman Empire for all sorts of lurid Asiatic superstitions had started some nameless Manichaean sect or other rioting in the caverns in orgies that had to be hidden from the face of the sun. I belong to the group which believed that these caverns had been used in the same way as the catacombs. That is, we believed that, during some of the persecutions which spread like a fire over the whole Empire, the Christians had concealed themselves in these ancient pagan labyrinths of stone. It was therefore with a thrill as sharp I as a thunderclap that I found and picked up the fallen golden cross and saw the design upon it; and it was with still more of a shock of felicity that, on turning to make my way once more outwards and upwards into the light of day, I looked up at the walls of bare rock that extended endlessly along the low passages, and saw scratched in yet ruder outline, but if possible more unmistakable, the shape of the Fish.

'Something about it made it seem as if it might be a fossil fish or some rudimentary organism fixed for ever in a frozen sea. I could not analyse this analogy, otherwise unconnected with a mere drawing scratched upon the stone, till I realized that I was saying in my sub-conscious mind that the first Christians must have seemed something like fish, dumb and dwelling in a fallen world of twilight and silence, dropped far below the feet of men and moving in dark and twilight and a soundless world.

'Everyone walking along stone passages knows what it is to be followed by phantom feet. The echo follows flapping or clapping behind or in front, so that it is almost impossible for the man who is really lonely to believe in his loneliness. I had got used to the effects of this echo and had not noticed it much for some time past, when I caught sight of the symbolical shape scrawled on the wall of rock. I stopped, and at the same instant it seemed as if my heart stopped, too; for my own feet had halted, but the echo went marching on.

'I ran forward, and it seemed as if the ghostly footsteps ran also, but not with that exact imitation which marks the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again, and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they

stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

'It came round the corner of a rock just in front of me; and throughout that uncanny chase I noticed that it was always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way to the first white gleam of daylight, and even there I could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the purity of the rock, like the Oriental invasion that has spread sporadically over the fall of classic Hellas. I looked out on a sea of stainless blue, and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of a shadow of man.

'It had been a terrible conversation; so intimate and so individual and in a sense so casual. This being, bodiless, faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had told me also that he would unquestionably kill me or any other man who came into the possession of the cross with the mark of the fish. He told me frankly he was not fool enough to attack me there in the labyrinth, knowing I had a loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me, equally calmly, that he would plan my murder with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a life-time. Yet he was no Oriental; I am certain be was a white man. I suspect that he was a countryman of my own.

'Since then I have received from time to time signs and symbols and queer impersonal messages that have made me certain, at least, that if the man is a maniac he is a monomaniac. He is always telling me, in this airy and detached way, that the preparations for my death and burial are proceeding satisfactorily; and that the only way in which I can prevent their being crowned with a comfortable success is to give up the relic in my possession— the unique cross that I found in the cavern. He does not seem to have any religious sentiment or fanaticism on the point; he seems to have no passion but the

passion of a collector of curiosities. That is one of the things that makes me feel sure he is a man of the West and not of the East. But this particular curiosity seems to have driven him quite crazy.

'And then came this report, as yet unsubstantiated, about the duplicate relic found on an embalmed body in a Sussex tomb. If he had been a maniac before, this news turned him into a demoniac possessed of seven devils. That there should be one of them belonging to another man was bad enough, but that there should be two of them and neither belonging to him was a torture not to be borne. His mad messages began to come thick and fast like showers of poisoned arrows, and each cried out more confidently than the last that death would strike me at the moment when I stretched out my unworthy hand towards the cross in the tomb.

'"You will never know me,' he wrote, 'you will never say my name; you will never see my face; you will die, and never know who has killed you. I may be in any form among those about you; but I shall be in that alone at which you have forgotten to look."

'From those threats I deduce that he is quite likely to shadow me on this expedition; and try to steal the relic or do me some mischief for possessing it. But as I never saw the man in my life, he may be almost any man I meet. Logically speaking, he may be any of the waiters who wait on me at table. He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table.'

'He may be me,' said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar.

'He may be anybody else,' answered Smaill seriously. 'That is what I meant by what I said just now. You are the only man I feel sure is not the enemy.'

Father Brown again looked embarrassed; then he smiled and said: 'Well, oddly enough, I'm not. What we have to consider is any chance of finding out if he really is here before he— before he makes himself unpleasant.'

'There is one chance of finding out, I think,' remarked the Professor rather grimly. 'When we get to Southampton I shall take a car at once along the coast; I should be glad if you would come with me, but in the ordinary sense, of course, our little party will break up. If any one of them turns up again in that little churchyard on the Sussex coast, we shall know who he really is.'

The Professor's programme was duly carried out, at least to the extent of the car and its cargo in the form of Father Brown. They coasted along the road with the sea on one side and the hills of Hampshire and Sussex on the other; nor was there visible to the eye any shadow of pursuit. As they approached the village of Dulham only one man crossed their path who had any connexion with the matter in hand; a journalist who had just visited the church and been courteously escorted by the vicar through the new excavated chapel; but his remarks and notes seemed to be of the ordinary newspaper sort. But Professor

Smaill was perhaps a little fanciful, and could not dismiss the sense of something odd and discouraging in the attitude and appearance of the man, who was tall and shabby, hook-nosed and hollow-eyed, with moustaches that drooped with depression. He seemed anything but enlivened by his late experiment as a sightseer; indeed, he seemed to be striding as fast as possible from the sight, when they stopped him with a question.

'It's all about a curse,' he said; 'a curse on the place, according to the guide-book or the parson, or the oldest inhabitant or whoever is the authority; and really, it feels jolly like it. Curse or curse, I'm glad to have got out of it.'

'Do you believe in curses?' asked Smaill curiously.

'I don't believe in anything; I'm a journalist,' answered the melancholy being— 'Boon, of the Daily Wire. But there's a some-thing creepy about that crypt; and I'll never deny I felt a chill.' And he strode on towards the railway station with a further accelerated pace.

'Looks like a raven or a crow, that fellow,' observed Smaill as they turned towards the churchyard. 'What is it they say about a bird of ill omen?'

They entered the churchyard slowly, the eyes of the American antiquary lingering luxuriantly over the isolated roof of the lych-gate and the large unfathomable black growth of the yew looking like night itself defying the broad daylight. The path climbed up amid heaving levels of turf in which the gravestones were tilted at all angles like stone rafts tossed on a green sea, till it came to the ridge beyond which the great sea itself ran like an iron bar, with pale lights in it like steel. Almost at their feet the tough rank grass turned into a tuft of sea-holly and ended in grey and yellow sand; and a foot or two from the holly, and outlined darkly against the steely sea, stood a motionless figure. But for its dark-grey clothing it might almost have been the statue on some sepulchral monument. But Father Brown instantly recognized something in the elegant stoop of the shoulders and the rather sullen outward thrust of the short beard.

'Gee!' exclaimed the professor of archaeology; 'it's that man Tarrant, if you call him a man. Did you think, when I spoke on the boat, that I should ever get so quick an answer to my question?'

'I thought you might get too many answers to it,' answered Father Brown.

'Why, how do you mean?' inquired the Professor, darting a look at him over his shoulder.

'I mean,' answered the other mildly, 'that I thought I heard voices behind the yew-tree. I don't think Mr Tarrant is so solitary as he looks; I might even venture to say, so solitary as he likes to look.'

Even as Tarrant turned slowly round in his moody manner, the confirmation came. Another voice, high and rather hard, but none the less

feminine, was saying with experienced raillery: 'And how was I to know he would be here?' It was borne in upon Professor Smaill that this gay observation was not addressed to him; so he was forced to conclude in some bewilderment, that yet a third person was present. As Lady Diana Wales came out, radiant and resolute as ever, from the shadow of the yew, he noted grimly that she had a living shadow of her own. The lean dapper figure of Leonard Smyth, that insinuating man of letters, appeared immediately behind her own flamboyant form, smiling, his head a little on one side like a dog's.

'Snakes!' muttered Smaill; 'why, they're all here! Or all except that little showman with the walrus whiskers.'

He heard Father Brown laughing softly beside him; and indeed the situation was becoming something more than laughable. It seemed to be turning topsy-turvy and tumbling about their ears like a pantomime trick; for even while the Professor had been speaking, his words had received the most comical contradiction. The round head with the grotesque black crescent of moustache had appeared suddenly and seemingly out of a hole in the ground. An instant afterwards they realized that the hole was in fact a very large hole, leading to a ladder which descended into the bowels of the earth; that it was in fact the entrance to the subterranean scene they had come to visit. The little man had been the first to find the entrance and had already descended a rung or two of the ladder before he put his head out again to address his fellow-travellers. He looked like some particularly preposterous Grave-digger in a burlesque of Hamlet. He only said thickly behind his thick moustaches, 'It is down here.' But it came to the rest of the company with a start of realization that, though they had sat opposite him at meal-times for a week, they had hardly ever heard him speak before; and that though he was supposed to be an English lecturer, he spoke with a rather occult foreign accent.

'You see, my dear Professor,' cried Lady Diana with trenchant cheerfulness, 'your Byzantine mummy was simply too exciting to be missed. I simply had to come along and see it; and I'm sure the gentlemen felt just the same. Now you must tell us all about it.'

'I do not know all about it,' said the Professor gravely, not to say grimly, 'In some respects I don't even know what it's all about. It certainly seems odd that we should have all met again so soon, but I suppose there are no limits to the modern thirst for information. But if we are all to visit the place it must be done in a responsible way and, if you will forgive me, under responsible leadership. We must notify whoever is in charge of the excavations; we shall probably at least have to put our names in a book.'

Something rather like a wrangle followed on this collision between the impatience of the lady and the suspicions of the archaeologist; but the latter's

insistence on the official rights of the Vicar and the local investigation ultimately prevailed; the little man with the moustaches came reluctantly out of his grave again and silently acquiesced in a less impetuous descent. Fortunately, the clergyman himself appeared at this stage— a grey-haired, good-looking gentleman with a droop accentuated by doublet eyeglasses; and while rapidly establishing sympathetic relations with the Professor as a fellow-antiquarian, he did not seem to regard his rather motley group of companions with anything more hostile than amusement.

'I hope you are none of you superstitious,' he said pleasantly. 'I ought to tell you, to start with, that there are supposed to be all sorts of bad omens and curses hanging over our devoted heads in this business. I have just been deciphering a Latin inscription which was found over the entrance to the chapel; and it would seem that there are no less than three curses involved; a curse for entering the sealed chamber, a double curse for opening the coffin, and a triple and most terrible curse for touching the gold relic found inside it. The two first maledictions I have already incurred myself,' he added with a smile; 'but I fear that even you will have to incur the first and mildest of them if you are to see anything at all. According to the story, the curses descend in a rather lingering fashion, at long intervals and on later occasions. I don't know whether that is any comfort to you.' And the Reverend Mr Walters smiled once more in his drooping and benevolent manner.

'Story,' repeated Professor Smaill, 'why, what story is that?'

'It is rather a long story and varies, like other local legends,' answered the Vicar. 'But it is undoubtedly contemporary with the time of the tomb; and the substance of it is embodied in the inscription and is roughly this: Guy de Gisors, a lord of the manor here early in the thirteenth century, had set his heart on a beautiful black horse in the possession of an envoy from Genoa, which that practical merchant prince would not sell except for a huge price. Guy was driven by avarice to the crime of pillaging the shrine and, according to one story, even killing the bishop, who was then resident there. Anyhow, the bishop uttered a curse which was to fall on anybody who should continue to withhold the gold cross from its resting-place in his tomb, or should take steps to disturb it when it had returned there. The feudal lord raised the money for the horse by selling the gold relic to a goldsmith in the town; but on the first day he mounted the horse the animal reared and threw him in front of the church porch, breaking his neck. Meanwhile the goldsmith, hitherto wealthy and prosperous, was ruined by a series of inexplicable accidents, and fell into the power of a Jew money-lender living in the manor. Eventually the unfortunate goldsmith, faced with nothing but starvation, hanged himself on an apple-tree. The gold cross with all his other goods, his house, shop, and

tools, had long ago passed into the possession of the money-lender. Meanwhile, the son and heir of the feudal lord, shocked by the judgement on his blasphemous sire, had become a religious devotee in the dark and stern spirit of those times, and conceived it his duty to persecute all heresy and unbelief among his vassals. Thus the Jew, in his turn, who had been cynically tolerated by the father, was ruthlessly burnt by order of the son; so that he, in his turn, suffered for the possession of the relic; and after these three judgements, it was returned to the bishop's tomb; since when no eye has seen and no hand has touched it.'

Lady Diana Wales seemed to be more impressed than might have been expected. 'It really gives one rather a shiver,' she said, 'to think that we are going to be the first, except the vicar.'

The pioneer with the big moustaches and the broken English did not descend after all by his favourite ladder, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody's breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion, and it was in an unknown tongue.

They came out in a circular chamber like a basilica in a ring of round arches; for that chapel had been built before the first pointed arch of the Gothic had pierced our civilization like a spear. A glimmer of greenish light between some of the pillars marked the place of the other opening into the world above, and gave a vague sense of being under the sea, which was intensified by one or two other incidental and perhaps fanciful resemblances. For the dog-tooth pattern of the Norman was faintly traceable round all the arches, giving them, above the cavernous darkness, something of the look of the mouths of monstrous sharks. And in the centre the dark bulk of the tomb itself, with its lifted lid of stone, might almost have been the jaws of some such leviathan.

Whether out of the sense of fitness or from the lack of more modern appliances, the clerical antiquary had arranged for the illumination of the chapel only by four tall candles in big wooden candlesticks standing on the floor. Of these only one was alight when they entered, casting a faint glimmer over the mighty architectural forms. When they had all assembled, the clergyman proceeded to light the three others, and the appearance and contents of the great sarcophagus came more clearly into view.

All eyes went first to the face of the dead, preserved across all those ages in the lines of life by some secret Eastern process, it was said, inherited from heathen antiquity and unknown to the simple graveyards of our own island. The Professor could hardly repress an exclamation of wonder; for, though the face was as pale as a mask of wax, it looked otherwise like a sleeping man, who had but that moment closed his eyes. The face was of the ascetic, perhaps even the fanatical type, with a high framework of bones; the figure was clad in a golden cope and gorgeous vestments, and high up on the breast, at the base of the throat, glittered the famous gold cross upon a short gold chain, or rather necklace. The stone coffin had been opened by lifting the lid of it at the head and propping it aloft upon two strong wooden shafts or poles, hitched above under the edge of the upper slab and wedged below into the corners of the coffin behind the head of the corpse. Less could therefore be seen of the feet or the lower part of the figure, but the candle-light shone full on the face; and in contrast with its tones of dead ivory the cross of gold seemed to stir and sparkle like a fire.

Professor Smaill's big forehead had carried a big furrow of reflection, or possibly of worry, ever since the clergyman had told the story of the curse. But feminine intuition, not untouched by feminine hysteria, understood the meaning of his brooding immobility better than did the men around him. In the silence of that candle-lit cavern Lady Diana cried out suddenly: 'Don't touch it, I tell you!'

But the man had already made one of his swift leonine movements, leaning forward over the body. The next instant they all darted, some forward and some backward, but all with a dreadful ducking motion as if the sky were falling.

As the Professor laid a finger on the gold cross, the wooden props, that bent very slightly in supporting the lifted lid of stone, seemed to jump and straighten themselves with a jerk. The lip of the stone slab slipped from its wooden perch; and in all their souls and stomachs came a sickening sense of down-rushing ruin, as if they had all been flung off a precipice. Smaill had withdrawn his head swiftly, but not in time; and he lay senseless beside the coffin, in a red puddle of blood from scalp or skull. And the old stone coffin was once more closed as it had been for centuries; save that one or two sticks or splinters stuck in the crevice, horribly suggestive of bones crunched by an ogre. The leviathan had snapped its jaws of stone.

Lady Diana was looking at the wreck with eyes that had an electric glare as of lunacy; her red hair looked scarlet against the pallor of her face in the greenish twilight. Smyth was looking at her, still with something dog-like in the turn of his head; but it was the expression of a god who looks at a master

whose catastrophe he can only partly understand. Tarrant and the foreigner had stiffened in their usual sullen attitudes, but their faces had turned the colour of clay. The Vicar seemed to have fainted. Father Brown was kneeling beside the fallen figure, trying to test its condition.

Rather to the general surprise, the Byronic lounger, Paul Tarrant, came forward to help him.

'He'd better be carried up into the air,' he said. 'I suppose there's just a chance for him.'

'He isn't dead,' said Father Brown in a low voice, 'but I think it's pretty bad; you aren't a doctor by any chance?'

'No; but I've had to pick up a good many things in my time,' said the other. 'But never mind about me just now. My real profession would probably surprise you.'

'I don't think so,' replied Father Brown, with a slight smile. 'I thought of it about halfway through the voyage. You are a detective shadowing somebody. Well, the cross is safe from thieves now, anyhow.'

While they were speaking Tarrant had lifted the frail figure of the fallen man with easy strength and dexterity, and was carefully carrying him towards the exit. He answered over his shoulder:

'Yes, the cross is safe enough.'

'You mean that nobody else is,' replied Brown. 'Are you thinking of the curse, too?'

Father Brown went about for the next hour or two under a burden of frowning perplexity that was something beyond the shock of the tragic accident. He assisted in carrying the victim to the little inn opposite the church, interviewed the doctor, who reported the injury as serious and threatening, though not certainly fatal, and carried the news to the little group of travellers who had gathered round the table in the inn parlour. But whereever he went the cloud of mystification rested on him and seemed to grow darker the more deeply he pondered. For the central mystery was growing more and more mysterious, actually in proportion as many of the minor mysteries began to clear themselves up in his mind. Exactly in proportion as the meaning of individual figures in that motley group began to explain itself, the thing that had happened grew more and more difficult to explain. Leonard Smyth had come merely because Lady Diana had come; and Lady Diana had come merely because she chose. They were engaged in one of those floating Society flirtations that are all the more silly for being semi-intellectual. But the lady's romanticism had a superstitious side to it; and she was pretty well prostrated by the terrible end of her adventure. Paul Tarrant was a private detective, possibly watching the flirtation, for some wife or husband; possibly shadowing

the foreign lecturer with the moustaches, who had much the air of an undesirable alien. But if he or anybody else had intended to steal the relic, the intention had been finally frustrated. And to all mortal appearance, what had frustrated it was either an incredible coincidence or the intervention of the ancient curse.

As he stood in unusual perplexity in the middle of the village street, between the inn and the church, he felt a mild shock of surprise at seeing a recently familiar but rather unexpected figure advancing up the street. Mr Boon, the journalist, looking very haggard in the sunshine, which showed up his shabby raiment like that of a scarecrow, had his dark and deep-set eyes (rather close together on either side of the long drooping nose) fixed on the priest. The latter looked twice before he realized that the heavy dark moustache hid something like a grin or at least a grim smile.

'I thought you were going away,' said Father Brown a little sharply. 'I thought you left by that train two hours ago.'

'Well, you see I didn't,' said Boon.

'Why have you come back?' asked the priest almost sternly.

'This is not the sort of little rural paradise for a journalist to leave in a hurry,' replied the other. 'Things happen too fast here to make it worth while to go back to a dull place like London. Besides, they can't keep me out of the affair— I mean this second affair. It was I that found the body, or at any rate the clothes. Quite suspicious conduct on my part, wasn't it? Perhaps you; think I wanted to dress up in his clothes. Shouldn't I make a lovely parson?'

And the lean and long-nosed mountebank suddenly made an extravagant gesture in the middle of the market-place, stretching out his arms and spreading out his dark-gloved hands in a sort of burlesque benediction and saying: 'Oh, my dear brethren and sisters, for I would embrace you all....'

'What on earth are you talking about?' cried Father Brown, and rapped the stones slightly with his stumpy umbrella, for he was a little less patient than usual.

'Oh, you'll find out all about it if you ask that picnic party of yours at the inn,' replied Boon scornfully. 'That man Tarrant seems to suspect me merely because I found the clothes; though he only came up a minute too late to find them himself. But there are all sorts of mysteries in this business. The little man with the big moustaches may have more in him than meets the eye. For that matter I don't see why you shouldn't have killed the poor fellow yourself.'

Father Brown did not seem in the least annoyed at the suggestion, but he seemed exceedingly bothered and bewildered by the remark. 'Do you mean,' he asked with simplicity, 'that it was I who tried to kill Professor Smaill?'

'Not at all,' said the other, waving his hand with the air of one making a handsome concession. 'Plenty of dead people for you to choose among. Not limited to Professor Smaill. Why, didn't you know somebody else had turned up, a good deal deader than Professor Smaill? And I don't see why you shouldn't have done him in, in a quiet way. Religious differences, you know... lamentable disunion of Christendom. ... I suppose you've always wanted to get the English parishes back.'

'I'm going back to the inn,' said the priest quietly; 'you say the people there know what you mean, and perhaps they may be able to say it.'

In truth, just afterwards his private perplexities suffered a momentary dispersal at the news of a new calamity. The moment he entered the little parlour where the rest of the company were collected, something in their pale faces told him they were shaken by something yet more recent than the accident at the tomb. Even as he entered, Leonard Smyth was saying:' Where is all this going to end?'

'It will never end, I tell you,' repeated Lady Diana, gazing into vacancy with glassy eyes; 'it will never end till we all end. One after another the curse will take us; perhaps slowly, as the poor vicar said; but it will take us all as it has taken him.'

'What in the world has happened now?' asked Father Brown.

There was a silence, and then Tarrant said in a voice that sounded a little hollow: 'Mr Walters, the Vicar, has committed suicide. I suppose it was the shock unhinged him. But I fear there can be no doubt about it. We've just found his black hat and clothes on a rock jutting out from the shore. He seems to have jumped into the sea. I thought he looked as if it had knocked him half-witted, and perhaps we ought to have looked after him; but there was so much to look after.'

'You could have done nothing,' said the lady. 'Don't you see the thing is dealing doom in a sort of dreadful order? The Professor touched the cross, and he went first; the Vicar had opened the tomb, and he went second; we only entered the chapel, and we— '

'Hold on,' said Father Brown, in a sharp voice he very seldom used; 'this has got to stop.'

He still wore a heavy though unconscious frown, but in his eyes was no longer the cloud of mystification, but a light of almost terrible understanding. 'What a fool I am!' he muttered. 'I ought to have seen it long ago. The tale of the curse ought to have told me.'

'Do you mean to say,' demanded Tarrant, 'that we can really be killed now by something that happened in the thirteenth century?'

Father Brown shook his head and answered with quiet emphasis: 'I won't discuss whether we can be killed by something that happened in the thirteenth century; but I'm jolly certain that we can't be killed by something that never happened in the thirteenth century, something that never happened at all.'

'Well,' said Tarrant, 'it's refreshing to find a priest so sceptical of the supernatural as all that.'

'Not at all,' replied the priest calmly; 'it's not the supernatural part I doubt. It's the natural part. I'm exactly in the position of the man who said, 'I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable.''

'That's what you call a paradox, isn't it?' asked the other.

'It's what I call common sense, properly understood,' replied Father Brown. 'It really is more natural to believe a preternatural story, that deals with things we don't understand, than a natural story that contradicts things we do understand. Tell me that the great Mr Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it's only incredible. But I'm much more certain it didn't happen than that Parnell's ghost didn't appear; because it violates the laws of the world I do understand. So it is with that tale of the curse. It isn't the legend that I disbelieve— it's the history.'

Lady Diana had recovered a little from her trance of Cassandra, and her perennial curiosity about new things began to peer once more out of her bright and prominent eyes.

'What a curious man you are!' she said. 'Why should you disbelieve the history?'

'I disbelieve the history because it isn't history,' answered Father Brown. 'To anybody who happens to know a little about the Middle Ages, the whole story was about as probable as Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar. But does anybody know anything about the Middle Ages? Do you know what a Guild was? Have you ever heard of salvo managio suo? Do you know what sort of people were Servi Regis?

'No, of course I don't,' said the lady, rather crossly. 'What a lot of Latin words!'

'No, of course,' said Father Brown. 'If it had been Tutankhamen and a set of dried-up Africans preserved, Heaven knows why, at the other end of the world; if it had been Babylonia or China; if it had been some race as remote and mysterious as the Man in the Moon, your newspapers would have told you all about it, down to the last discovery of a tooth-brush or a collar-stud. But the men who built your own parish churches, and gave the names to your own

towns and trades, and the very roads you walk on— it has never occurred to you to know anything about them. I don't claim to know a lot myself; but I know enough to see that story is stuff and nonsense from beginning to end. It was illegal for a money-lender to distrain on a man's shop and tools. It's exceedingly unlikely that the Guild would not have saved a man from such utter ruin, especially if he were ruined by a Jew. Those people had vices and tragedies of their own; they sometimes tortured and burned people. But that idea of a man, without God or hope in the world, crawling away to die because nobody cared whether he lived— that isn't a medieval idea. That's a product of our economic science and progress. The Jew wouldn't have been a vassal of the feudal lord. The Jews normally had a special position as servants of the King. Above all, the Jew couldn't possibly have been burned for his religion.'

'The paradoxes are multiplying,' observed Tarrant; 'but surely , you won't deny that Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages?'

'It would be nearer the truth,' said Father Brown, 'to say they were the only people who weren't persecuted in the Middle Ages. If you want to satirize medievalism, you could make a good case by saying that some poor Christian might be burned alive for 'making a mistake about the Homoousion, while a rich Jew might walk down the street openly sneering at Christ and the Mother of God. Well, that's what the story is like. It was never a story of the Middle Ages; it was never even a legend about the Middle Ages. It was made up by somebody whose notions came from novels and newspapers, and probably made up on the spur of the moment.'

The others seemed a little dazed by the historical digression, and seemed to wonder vaguely why the priest emphasized it and made it so important a part of the puzzle. But Tarrant, whose trade it was to pick the practical detail out of many tangles of digression, had suddenly become alert. His bearded chin was thrust forward farther than ever, out his sullen eyes were wide awake. 'Ah,' he said; 'made up on the spur of the moment!'

'Perhaps that is an exaggeration,' admitted Father Brown calmly. 'I should rather say made up more casually and carelessly than the rest of an uncommonly careful plot. But the plotter did not think the details of medieval history would matter much to anybody. And his calculation in a general way was pretty nearly right, like most of his other calculations.'

'Whose calculations? Who was right?' demanded the lady with a sudden passion of impatience. 'Who is this person you are talking about? Haven't we gone through enough, without your making our flesh creep with your he's and him's?'

'I am talking about the murderer,' said Father Brown.

'What murderer?' she asked sharply. 'Do you mean that the poor Professor was murdered?'

'Well,' said the staring Tarrant gruffly into his beard, 'we can't say 'murdered', for we don't know he's killed.'

'The murderer killed somebody else, who was not Professor Smaill,' said the priest gravely.

'Why, whom else could he kill?' asked the other.

'He killed the Reverend John Walters, the Vicar of Dulham,' replied Father Brown with precision. 'He only wanted to kill those two, because they both had got hold of relics of one rare pattern. The murderer was a sort of monomaniac on the point.'

'It all sounds very strange,' muttered Tarrant. 'Of course we can't swear that the Vicar's really dead either. We haven't seen his body.'

'Oh yes, you have,' said Father Brown.

There was a silence as sudden as the stroke of a gong; a silence in which that sub— conscious guesswork that was so active and accurate in the woman moved her almost to a shriek.

'That is exactly what you have seen,' went on the priest. 'You have seen his body. You haven't seen him— the real living man; but you have seen his body all right. You have stared at it hard by the light of four great candles; and it was not tossing suicidally in the sea but lying in state like a Prince of the Church in a shrine built before the Crusade.'

'In plain words,' said Tarrant, 'you actually ask us to believe that the embalmed body was really the corpse of a murdered man.'

Father Brown was silent for a moment; then he said almost with an air of irrelevance: 'The first thing I noticed about it was the cross; or rather the string suspending the cross. Naturally, for most of you, it was only a string of beads and nothing else in particular; but, naturally also, it was rather more in my line than yours. You remember it lay close up to the chin, with only a few beads showing, as if the whole necklet were quite short. But the beads that showed were arranged in a special way, first one and then three, and so on; in fact, I knew at a glance that it was a rosary, an ordinary rosary with a cross at the end of it. But a rosary has at least five decades and additional beads as well; and I naturally wondered where all the rest of it was. It would go much more than once round the old man's neck. I couldn't understand it at the time; and it was only afterwards I guessed where the extra length had gone to. It was coiled round and round the foot of the wooden prop that was fixed in the corner of the coffin, holding up the lid. So that when poor Smaill merely plucked at the cross it jerked the prop out of its place and the lid fell on his skull like a club of stone.'

'By George!' said Tarrant; 'I'm beginning to think there's something in what you say. This is a queer story if it's true.'

'When I realized that,' went on Father Brown, 'I could manage more or less to guess the rest. Remember, first of all, that there never was any responsible archaeological authority for anything more than investigation. Poor old Walters was an honest antiquary, who was engaged in opening the tomb to find out if there was any truth in the legend about embalmed bodies. The rest was all rumour, of the sort that often anticipates or exaggerates such finds. As a fact, he found the body had not been embalmed, but had fallen into dust long ago. Only while he was working there by the light of his lonely candle in that sunken chapel, the candlelight threw another shadow that was not his own.'

'Ah!' cried Lady Diana with a catch in her breath; 'and I know what you mean now. You mean to tell us we have met the murderer, talked and joked with the murderer, let him tell us a romantic tale, and let him depart untouched.'

'Leaving his clerical disguise on a rock,' assented Brown. 'It is all dreadfully simple. This man got ahead of the Professor in the race to the churchyard and chapel, possibly while the Professor was talking to that lugubrious journalist. He came on the old clergyman beside the empty coffin and killed him. Then he dressed himself in the black clothes from the corpse, wrapped it in an old cope which had been among the real finds of the exploration, and put it in the coffin, arranging the rosary and the wooden support as I have described. Then, having thus set the trap for his second enemy, he went up into the daylight and greeted us all with the most amiable politeness of a country clergyman.'

'He ran a considerable risk,' objected Tarrant, 'of somebody knowing Walters by sight.'

'I admit he was half-mad,' agreed Father Brown; 'and I think you will admit that the risk was worth taking, for he has got off, after all.'

'I'll admit he was very lucky,' growled Tarrant. 'And who the devil was he?'

'As you say, he was very lucky,' answered Father Brown, 'and not least in that respect. For that is the one thing we may never know.' He frowned at the table for a moment and then went on: 'This fellow has been hovering round and threatening for years, but the one thing he was careful of was to keep the secret of who he was; and he has kept it still. But if poor Smaill recovers, as I think he will, it is pretty safe to say that you will hear more of it.'

'Why, what will Professor Smaill do, do you think?' asked Lady Diana.

'I should think the first thing he would do,' said Tarrant, 'would be to put the detectives on like dogs after this murdering devil. I should like to have a go at him myself.'

'Well,' said Father Brown, smiling suddenly after his long fit of frowning perplexity, 'I think I know the very first thing he ought to do.'

'And what is that?' asked Lady Diana with graceful eagerness.

'He ought to apologize to all of you,' said Father Brown.

It was not upon this point, however, that Father Brown found himself talking to Professor Smaill as he sat by the bedside during the slow convalescence of that eminent archaeologist. Nor, indeed, was it chiefly Father Brown who did the talking; for though the Professor was limited to small doses of the stimulant of conversation, he concentrated most of it upon these interviews with his clerical friend. Father Brown had a talent for being silent in an encouraging way and Smaill was encouraged by it to talk about many strange things not always easy to talk about; such as the morbid phases of recovery and the monstrous dreams that often accompany delirium. It is often rather an unbalancing business to recover slowly from a bad knock on the head; and when the head is as interesting a head as that of Professor Smaill even its disturbances and distortions are apt to be original and curious. His dreams were like bold and big designs rather out of drawing, as they can be seen in the strong but stiff archaic arts that he had studied; they were full of strange saints with square and triangular haloes, of golden out-standing crowns and glories round dark and flattened faces, of eagles out of the east and the high headdresses of bearded men with their hair bound like women. Only, as he told his friend, there was one much simpler and less entangled type, that continually recurred to his imaginative memory. Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once looked up and saw, in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.

'And at last,' he said, 'I think I have seen a meaning in the picture and the voice; and one that I never understood before. Why should I worry because one madman among a million of sane men, leagued in a great society against him, chooses to brag of persecuting me or pursuing me to death? The man who drew in the dark catacomb the secret symbol of Christ was persecuted in a very different fashion. He was the solitary madman; the whole sane society was leagued together not to save but to slay him. I have sometimes fussed and fidgeted and wondered whether this or that man was my persecutor; whether it was Tarrant; whether it was Leonard Smyth; whether it was any one of them. Suppose it had been all of them? Suppose it had been all the men on the boat and the men on the train and the men in the village. Suppose, so far as I was

concerned, they were all murderers. I thought I had a right to be alarmed because I was creeping through the bowels of the earth in the dark and there was a man who would destroy me. What would it have been like, if the destroyer had been up in the daylight and had owned all the earth and commanded all the armies and the crowds? How if he had been able to stop all the earths or smoke me out of my hole, or kill me the moment I put my nose out in the daylight? What was it like to deal with murder on that scale? The world has forgotten these things, as until a little while ago it had forgotten war.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'but the war came. The fish may be driven underground again, but it will come up into the daylight once more. As St Antony of Padua humorously remarked, 'It is only fishes who survive the Deluge.''

_____

14: Across The Way

Robert Grant

1852-1940

Two Tales, 21 May 1892

THE NEWS that the late Mr. Cherrington's house on Saville Street had been let for a school, within a few months after his death, could not have been a surprise to any one in the neighborhood. Ten years before, when Mr. Cherrington and those prominent in his generation were in their heyday, Saville Street had been sacred to private residences from one end to the other, but the tide of fashion had been drifting latterly. There was already another school in the same block, and there were scattered all along on either side of the street a sprinkling of throat, eye, and ear doctors, a very fashionable dressmaker or two, an up-town bank, and numerous apartments for bachelors.

The news could not have been a surprise even to Mr. Homer Ramsay, but that crusty old bachelor in the seventies brought down his walking-stick with a vicious thump when he heard it, and remarked that he would live to be ninety "if only to spite 'em." This threat, however, had reference, not to Mr. Cherrington's residence, but his own, which was exactly opposite, and which he had occupied for more than forty years. It was a conviction of Mr. Ramsay's that there was a conspiracy on foot to purchase his house, and accordingly he took every opportunity to declare that he would never part with an inch of his land while he was in the flesh. A wag in the neighborhood had expressed the opinion that the old gentleman waxed hale and hearty on his own bile. He was certainly a churlish individual in his general bearing toward his fellow-beings, and violent in his prejudices. For the last ten years his favorite prophecy had been that the country was going to the devil.

Besides the house on Saville Street, Mr. Ramsay had some bonds and stock— fifty or sixty thousand dollars in all— which tidy little property would, in the natural course of events, descend to his next of kin; in this case, however, only a first cousin once removed. In the eye of the law a living person has no heir; but blood is thicker than water, and it was generally taken for granted that Mr. Horace Barker, whose grandmother had been the sister of Mr. Ramsay's father, would some day be the owner of the house on Saville Street. At least, confident expectation that this would come to pass had long restrained Mr. Barker from letting any one but his better half know that he regarded his Cousin Homer as an irascible old curmudgeon; and perhaps, on the other hand, had justified Mr. Ramsay in his own mind for referring in common parlance to his first cousin once removed as a stiff nincompoop who had married a sickly doll. Not that Mr. Horace Barker needed the money, by any means. He was well-to-do already, and lived in a more fashionable street

than Saville Street, where he occupied a dignified-looking brown-stone house, from the windows of which his three little people— all girls— peeped and nodded at the organ-grinder and the street-band.

The name of the person to whom Mr. Cherrington's house had been leased was Miss Elizabeth Whyte. She was twenty-five, and she was starting a school because it was necessary for her to earn her own living. She considered that life, from the point of view of happiness, was over for her; and yet, though she had made up her mind that she could never be really happy again, she was resolved neither to mope nor to be a burden on any one. Mr. Mills, the executor of Mr. Cherrington's estate, who believed himself to be a judge of human nature withal, had observed that she seemed a little overwrought, as though she had lived on her nerves; but, on the other hand, he had been impressed by her direct, business-like manner, which argued that she was very much in earnest. Besides, she was vouched for by the best people, and Mrs.

Cyrus Bangs was moving heaven and earth to procure pupils for her. It was clearly his duty as a business man to let her have the house.

Until within a few months Elizabeth Whyte had lived in a neighboring town— the seat of a college, where the minds of young men for successive generations have been cultivated, but sometimes at the expense of a long-suffering local community. Her father, who at the time of her birth was a clergyman with a parish, had subsequently evolved into an agnostic and an invalid without one, and she had been used to plain living and high thinking from her girlhood. Even parents who find it difficult to keep the wolf at a respectful distance by untiring economy will devise some means to make an only daughter look presentable on her first appearance in society. Fine feathers do not make fine birds, and yet the consciousness of a becoming gown will irradiate the cheek of beauty. Elizabeth at eighteen would have been fetching in any dress, but in each of her three new evening frocks she looked bewitching. She was a gay, trig little person, with snapping, dark eyes and an arch expression; a tireless dancer, quick and audacious at repartee; the very ideal of a college belle. The student world had fallen prostrate at her feet, and Tom Whittemore most conspicuously and devotedly of all.

Tom was, perhaps, the most popular man of his day; a Philadelphian of reputedly superfine stock, fresh-faced and athletic, with a jaunty walk. There was no one at the college assemblies who whispered so entrancingly in her ear when she was all alone with him in a corner, and no one who placed her new fleecy wrap about her shoulders with such an air of devotion when it was time to go home. She liked him from the very first; and all her girl friends babbled, "Wouldn't it be a lovely match?" But Tom's classmates from Philadelphia, when they became confidential in the small hours of the morning, asked each

other what Tom's mother would say. Tom was a senior, and it was generally assumed that matters would culminate on Class-day evening, that evening of all evenings in the collegiate world sacred to explanation and vows. Elizabeth lay awake all that night, remembering that she had let Tom have his impetuous say, and that at the end he had folded her in his arms and kissed her. Not until the next morning, and then merely as an unimportant fact, did it occur to her that, though Tom had told her she was dearer to him than all the world besides, there was no definite engagement between them. It was only when whispers reached her that Tom, who had gone to Philadelphia to attend the wedding of a relation, was not coming back to his Commencement, that she began to think a little. But she never really doubted until the news came that Tom had been packed off by his mother on a two years' journey round the world.

What mother in a distant city would be particularly pleased to have her only son, on whom rested the hopes of an illustrious stock, lose his heart to a college belle? But Elizabeth can scarcely be blamed for not having taken the illustrious stock into consideration. She kept saying to herself, that, if he had only written, she could have forgiven him; and it was not surprising that the partners with whom she danced at the college assemblies during the next five years described her to each other as steely. Indeed, she danced and prattled with such vivacious energy, and her black eyes shone so like beads, that college tradition twisted her story until it ran that she had thrown over Tom Whittemore, the most popular man of his day, and that she had no more heart than a nether millstone. And all the time, just to prove to herself that she had not cared for him, she kept the roses that he had given her on that Class-day evening in the secret drawer of her work-box. It had been all sheer nonsense, a boy and girl flirtation. So she had taught herself to argue, knowing that it was untrue, and knowing that she knew it to be so.

Then had come the deaths of her father and mother within three months of each other, and she had awakened one morning to the consciousness that she was alone in the world, and face to face with the necessity of earning her daily bread. The gentleman who had charge of the few thousand dollars belonging to her father's estate, in announcing that her bonds had ceased to pay interest, had added that she was in the same boat with many of the best people; which ought to have been a consolation, had she needed any. But this loss of the means of living had seemed a mere trifle beside her other griefs; indeed, it acted as a spur rather than a bludgeon. The same pride which had prompted her to continue to dance bade her bestir herself to make a living. Upon reflection, the plan of starting a school struck her as the most practicable. But it should be a school for girls; she had done with the world of

men. She had loved with all her heart, and her heart was broken; it was withered, like the handful of dried roses in the secret drawer of her work-box.

ELIZABETH was fortunate enough to obtain at the outset the patronage of some of those same "best people" in the adjacent city, who happened to know her story. Fashionable favor grows apace. It was only after hearing that Mrs. Cyrus Bangs had intrusted her little girl to the tender mercies of Miss Whyte that Mrs. Horace Barker subdued the visions of scarlet-fever, bad air, and evil communications which haunted her, sufficiently to be willing to send her own darlings to the new kindergarten. People intimate with Mrs. Barker were apt to say that worry over her three little girls, who were exceptionally healthy children, kept her a nervous invalid.

"I consider Mrs. Cyrus Bangs a very particular woman," she said, with plaintive impressiveness to her husband. "If she is willing to send her Gwendolen to Miss Whyte, I am disposed to let Margery, Gladys, and Dorothy go. Only you must have a very clear understanding with Miss Whyte, at the outset, as to hours and ventilation and Gladys's hot milk. We cannot move from the seaside until a fortnight after her term begins, and it will be utterly impossible for me to get the children to school in the mornings before half-past nine."

It never occurred to Horace Barker, when one morning about ten o'clock, some six weeks later, he called at the kindergarten with his precious trio, that there was any impropriety in breaking in upon Miss Whyte's occupations an hour after school had begun. What school-mistress could fail to be proud of the distinction of obtaining his three daughters as pupils at any hour of the twenty-four when he saw fit to proffer them? He expected to find a cringing, deferential young person, who would, in the interest of her own bread and butter, accede without a murmur to any stipulations which so important a patroness as Mrs. Horace Barker might see fit to impose. He became conscious, in the first place, that the school-mistress was a much more attractive-looking young person than he had anticipated, and secondly, that she seemed rather amused than otherwise at his conditions. No man, and least of all a man so consummate as Mr.

Barker— for he was a dapper little person with a closely cropped beard and irreproachable kid gloves— likes to be laughed at by a woman, especially by one who is young and moderately good-looking; and he instinctively drew himself up by way of protest before Elizabeth spoke.

"Really, Mr. Barker," she replied, after a few moments of reflection,

"I don't see how it is possible for me to carry out Mrs. Barker's wishes. To let the children come half an hour later and go home half an hour earlier than

the rest would interfere with the proper conduct of the school. I will do my best to have the ventilation satisfactory, and perhaps I can manage to provide some hot milk for the second one, as her mother desires; but in the matter of the hours, I do not see how I can accommodate Mrs. Barker. To make such an exception would be entirely contrary to my principles."

Horace Barker smiled inwardly at the suggestion that a school-mistress could have principles which an influential parent might not violate.

"When I say to you that it is Mrs. Barker's particular desire that her preferences regarding hours should be observed, I am sure that you will interpose no further objection."

Elizabeth gave a strange little laugh, and her eyes, which were still her most salient feature, snapped noticeably. "It is quite out of the question, Mr. Barker," she said with decision. "Much as I should like to have your little girls, I cannot consent to break my rules on their account."

"Mrs. Barker would be very sorry to be compelled to send her children elsewhere," he said solemnly, with the air of one who utters a dire threat.

"I should be glad to teach your little girls upon the same terms as I do my other pupils," said Elizabeth, quietly. "But if my regulations are unsatisfactory, you had better send them elsewhere."

Horace Barker was a man who prided himself on his deportment. He would no more have condescended to express himself with irate impetuosity than he would have permitted his closely cropped beard to exceed the limits which he imposed upon it. He simply bowed stiffly, and turning to the Misses Barker, who, under the supervision of a nurse, whom they had been taught to address by her patronymic Thompson instead of by her Christian name Bridget, had been open-mouthed listeners to the dialogue, said, "Come, children."

It so happened that as Mr. Horace Barker and the Misses Barker descended the steps of the late Mr. Cherrington's house, they came plump upon Mr. Homer Ramsay, who was taking his morning stroll. The old gentleman was standing leaning on his cane, glaring across the street; and, by way of acknowledging that he perceived his first cousin once removed, he raised the cane, and, pointing in the line of his scowling gaze, ejaculated:

"This street is going to perdition. As though it weren't enough to have a school opposite me, a fellow has had the impudence to put his doctor's sign right next door to my house— an oculist, he calls himself. In my day, a man who was fit to call himself a doctor could set a leg, or examine your eyes, or tell what was the matter with your throat, and not leave you so very much the wiser even then; but now there's a different kind of quack for every ache and pain in our bodies."

"We live in a progressive world, Cousin Homer," said Mr. Barker, placing his eyeglass astride his nose to examine the obnoxious sign across the way. "Dr. James Clay, Oculist," he read aloud, indifferently.

"Progressive fiddlesticks, Cousin Horace. A fig for your oculists and your dermatologists and all the rest of your specialists! I have managed to live to be seventy-five, and I never had anybody prescribe for me but a good old-fashioned doctor, thank Heaven! And I'm not dead yet, as the speculators who have their eyes on my house and are waiting for me to die will find out." Mr. Ramsay scowled ferociously; then casting a sweeping glance from under his eyebrows at the little girls, he said, "Cousin Horace, if your children don't have better health than their mother, they might as well be dead. Do they go there?" he asked, indicating the school-house with his cane.

"I am removing them this morning. Anabel had concluded to send them there, but I find that the young woman who is the teacher has such hoity-toity notions that I cannot consent to let my daughters remain with her. In my opinion, so arbitrary a young person should be checked; and my belief is that before many days she will find herself without pupils." Whereupon Mr. Barker proceeded on his way, muttering to himself, when at a safe distance, "Irrational old idiot!"

Mr. Ramsay stood for some moments mulling over his cousin's answer; by degrees his countenance brightened and he began to chuckle; and every now and then, in the course of his progress along Saville Street, he would stand and look back at the late Mr. Cherrington's house, as though it had acquired a new interest in his eyes. His daily promenade was six times up and six times down Saville Street; and he happened to complete the last lap, so to speak, of his sixth time down at the very moment when Miss Whyte's little girls came running out on the sidewalk for recess. Behind them appeared the school-mistress, who stood looking at her flock from the top of the stone flight.

Elizabeth knew the old gentleman by sight but not by name, and she was therefore considerably astonished to see him suddenly veer from his ordinary course, and come slowly up the steps.

"You're the school-mistress?" he asked, with the directness of an old man who feels that he need not mince his words.

"Yes, sir. I'm Miss Whyte."

"My name's Ramsay; Homer Ramsay. I live opposite, and I've come to tell you I admire your pluck in not letting my cousin, Hortace Barker, put you down. I'll stand by you, too; you can tell him that. Break up your school? I should like to see him do it. Had to take his three little girls away, did he? Ho, ho! A grand good joke that; a grand good joke. What was it he asked you to do?"

"Mr. Barker wished me to change some of my rules about hours, and I was not able to accommodate him, that was all," answered Elizabeth, who found herself eminently puzzled by the interest in her affairs displayed by this strange visitor.

"I'll warrant he did. And you wouldn't make the change. A grand good joke that. I know him; he's my first cousin once removed, and the only relation I've left. And he is going to try and break up your school. I'd like to see him do it."

"I don't believe that Mr. Barker would do anything so unjust," said Elizabeth, flushing.

"Yes, he would. I had it from his own lips. But he shan't; not while I'm in the flesh. What did you say your name was?"

"Whyte— Elizabeth Whyte."

"And what made you become a school-teacher, I should like to know?"

"I had to earn my living."

"Humph! In my day, girls as pretty as you got married; but now the rich ones are those who get husbands, and those who are poor have to tend shop instead of baby."

"I know a number of girls who were poor, who have excellent husbands," said Elizabeth quietly, spurred into coming to the rescue of the sex she despised. "But," she added, "there are many girls nowadays who are poor who prefer to remain single." She was amused at having been led into so unusual a discussion with this queer old gentleman.

"Bah! That caps the climax. When pretty girls pretend that they don't wish to be married, the world is certainly turned upside down. Well, I like your spirit, though I don't approve of your methods. I just dropped in to say that if Horace Barker does cause you any trouble, you've a friend across the way. Good-morning."

And before Elizabeth could bethink herself to say that she was very much obliged to him, Mr. Ramsay was gone.

That very day after school, while Elizabeth was on her way across the park which lay between Saville Street and the section of the city where her rooms were, she dodged the wrong way in a narrow path, so that she ran plump into the arms of a young man who was walking in the opposite direction. Most women expect men to look out for them when they dodge, but Elizabeth's code did not allow her to put herself under obligations to any man. To tell the truth, she was in such a brown study over the events of the morning that she had become practically oblivious of her surroundings. When she recovered sufficiently from her confusion at her clumsiness to take in the details of the situation, she realized that the individual in question was a young man whom she was in the habit of passing daily at this same hour. Only the day before he

had rescued her veil which had been swept away by a high wind; and here she was again, within twenty-four hours, forcing herself upon his attention. She, too, of all women, who had done with men forever!

But Elizabeth's confusion was slight compared with that manifested by her victim, who, notwithstanding that his hat had been jammed in by her school-bag (which she had raised as a shield), was so profuse in the utterance of his apologies and so willing to shoulder all responsibility, that her own sensibilities were speedily comforted.

She found herself, after they had separated, much more engrossed by the fact that he had addressed her by name. Although they had been passing each other daily for over two months, it had never occurred to her to wonder who he might be. But it was evident that she was not unknown to him. She remembered now merely that he was a gentleman, and that he had intelligent eyes and a pleasant, deferential smile. The recollection of his blushing diffidence made her laugh.

On the following day, when they were about to pass as usual, she was suddenly confronted in her mind by the alternative whether to recognize him or not. A glance at him as he approached told her that he himself was evidently uncertain if she would choose to consider their experience of the previous day as equivalent to an introduction, and yet she noticed a certain wistfulness of expression which suggested the desire to be permitted to doff his hat to her. To acknowledge by a simple inclination of her head the existence of a man whom she was likely to pass every day seemed the natural thing to do, however unconventional; so she bowed.

"Good afternoon, Miss Whyte," he said, lifting his hat with a glad smile.

How completely our lives are often appropriated by incidents which seem at the time of but slight importance! For the next few months Elizabeth was buffeted as it were between the persistent persecution of Mr. Horace Barker and the persistent devotion of Mr. Homer Ramsay.

With Mr. Barker she had no further interview, but not many weeks elapsed before the influence of malicious strictures and insinuations circulated by him concerning the hygienic arrangements of her school began to bear their natural fruit. Parents became querulous and suspicious; and when calumny was at its height, a case of scarlet-fever among her pupils threw consternation even into the soul of Mrs. Cyrus Bangs, her chief patroness. But, on the other hand, she soon realized that she possessed an ardent, if not altogether discreet, champion in her enemy's septuagenarian first cousin once removed, who sang her praises and fought her battles from one end of Saville Street to the other. Mr. Ramsay no longer railed against electric cars and specialists; all his fulminations were uttered against the malicious warfare which his Cousin

Horace and that blood relative's sickly wife were waging against the charming little Miss Whyte, who had hired Mr. Cherrington's house across the way. What is more, he paid Elizabeth almost daily visits, during which, after he had discussed ways and means for confounding his vindictive kinsman, he was apt to declare that she ought to be married, and that it was a downright shame so pretty a girl should be condemned to drudgery because she lacked a dowry. This was a point on which the old gentleman never ceased to harp; and Elizabeth labored vainly to make him understand that teaching was a delight to her instead of a drudgery, and that she had not the remotest desire for a husband. And by way of proving how indifferent she was to the whole race of men, she continued to bow to the unknown stranger of her daily walk without making the slightest effort to discover his name.

Pneumonia, that deadly foe of hale and hearty septuagenarians, carried Mr. Homer Ramsay off within forty-eight hours in the first week of May. And very shortly after, Elizabeth received a letter from Mr.

Mills, the lawyer, requesting her to call on a matter of importance.

She supposed that it concerned her lease. Perhaps her enemy had bought the roof over her head.

Mr. Mills ushered her into his private office. Then opening a parchment envelope on his desk, he turned to her, and said: "I have the pleasure to inform you, Miss Whyte, that my client, the late Mr.

Homer Ramsay, has left you the residuary legatee of his entire property—some fifty or sixty thousand dollars. Perhaps," he added, observing Elizabeth's bewildered expression, "you would like to read the will while I attend to a little matter in the other office. It is quite short, and straight as a string. I drew the instrument, and the testator knew what he was about just as well as you or I."

Mr. Mills, who, as you may remember, was a student of human nature, believed that Miss Whyte lived on her nerves, and he had therefore planned to leave her alone for a few moments to allow any hysterical tendency to exhaust itself. When he returned, he found her looking straight before her with the document in her lap.

"Is it all plain?" he asked kindly.

"Yes. But I don't understand exactly why he left it to me."

"Because he liked you, my dear. He had become very fond of you. And if you will excuse my saying so," he added, with a knowing smile, "he was very anxious to see you well married. He said that he wished to provide you with a suitable dowry."

"I see," said Elizabeth, coloring. She reflected for a moment, then looked up and said, "But I am free to use it as I see fit?"

"Absolutely. I may as well tell you now as any time, however," Mr.

Mills added smoothly, "that Mr. Ramsay's cousin, Mr. Horace Barker, has expressed an intention to contest the will. He is the next of kin, though only a first cousin once removed."

Elizabeth started at the name, and drew herself up slightly.

"You need not give yourself the smallest concern in the matter," the lawyer continued. "If Mr. Barker were in needy circumstances or were a nearer relative, he might be able to make out a case, but no jury will hesitate between a first cousin once removed, amply rich in this world's goods, and a— a— pretty woman. I myself am ready to testify that Mr. Ramsay was completely in his right mind," he added, with professional dignity; "and as for the claim of undue influence, it is rubbish— sheer rubbish."

Elizabeth sat for a few moments without speaking. She seemed to pay no heed to several further reassuring remarks which Mr. Mills, who judged that she was appalled by the idea of a legal contest, hastened to let fall. At last she looked straight at him, and said with firmness, "I suppose that I am at liberty not to take this money, if I don't wish to?"

"At liberty? Bless my stars, Miss Whyte, anybody is at liberty to refuse a gift of fifty thousand dollars. But when you call to see me again, you will be laughing at the very notion of such a thing. Go home, my dear young lady, and leave the matter in my hands. Naturally you are overwrought at the prospect of going into court."

"It isn't that, Mr. Mills. I cannot take this money; I have no right to it. I am no relation to Mr. Ramsay, and the only reason he left it to me was— was because he thought it would help me to be married.

Otherwise he would have left it to Mr. Barker. I have no intention of marrying, and I should not be willing to take a fortune under such circumstances."

"The will is perfectly legal, my dear. And as to marrying, you are free to remain single all your days, if you wish to," said Mr. Mills, with another knowing smile. "Indeed, you are overwrought."

Elizabeth shook her head. "I am sure that I shall never change my mind," she answered. "I could never take it."

Elizabeth slept little that night; but when she arose in the morning, she felt doubly certain that she had acted to her own satisfaction.

What real right had she to this money? It was coming to her as the result of the fancy of an eccentric old man, who, in a moment of needless pity and passing interest, had made a will in her favor to the prejudice of his natural heir. Of what odds was it that that heir had ample means already, or even that he was her bitter enemy? Did not the very fact that he was her enemy and that she despised him make it impossible for her to take advantage of an old man's

whim so as to rob him? She would have no lawsuit; he might keep the fifty thousand dollars, and she would go her way as though Mr. Homer Ramsay and Mr.

Horace Barker had never existed. Mr. Ramsay had left her his money on the assumption that she would be able to marry. To have taken it knowing that she intended never to marry would have been to take it under false pretences.

Mr. Mills consoled himself after much additional expostulation with the reflection that if a woman is bent on making a fool of herself, the wisest man in the world is helpless to prevent her. He set himself at last to prepare the necessary papers which would put Mr. Horace Barker in possession of his cousin's property; and very shortly the act of signal folly, as he termed it, was completed. Tongues in the neighborhood wagged energetically for a few days; but presently the birth of twins in the next block distracted the public mind, and Elizabeth was allowed to resume the vocation of an inconspicuous schoolmistress. From the object of her bounty, Mr. Horace Barker, she heard nothing directly; but at least he had the grace to discontinue his persecutions. And parental confidence, which, in spite of scarlet-fever, had never been wholly lost, was manifested in the form of numerous applications to take pupils for the coming year. For the first time for many weeks Elizabeth was in excellent spirits and was looking forward to the summer vacation, now close at hand; during which she hoped to be able to fit herself more thoroughly for her duties after a few weeks of necessary rest.

One evening, about a fortnight before the date when the school was to close, she noticed that the print of her book seemed blurred; she turned the page and, perceiving the same effect, realized that her vision was impaired. On the following morning at school she noticed the same peculiarity whenever she looked at a book. She concluded that it was but a passing weakness, the result of having studied too assiduously at night. Still, recognizing that her eyes were all-important to her, she decided to consult an oculist at once. It would be a simple matter to do, for was there not one directly opposite in the house next to Mr. Ramsay's? The sign, Dr. James Clay, Oculist, had daily stared her in the face. She resolved to consult him that very day after school. To be sure she knew nothing about him individually, but she was aware that only doctors of the best class were to be found in Saville Street.

She was obliged to wait in an anteroom, as there were three or four patients ahead of her. When her turn came to be ushered into the doctor's office, she found herself suddenly in the presence of the unknown young man whom she was accustomed to meet daily on her way from school. Her impulse at recognizing him, though she could not have told why, was to slip away; but

before she could move, he looked up from the table over which he was bent making a memorandum.

"Miss Whyte!" he exclaimed with pleased astonishment and some confusion, advancing to meet her. "In what way can I be of service to you?"

"Dr. Clay? I should like you to look at my eyes; they have been troubling me lately."

Elizabeth briefly detailed her symptoms. He listened with gravity, and then after requesting her to change her seat, he examined her eyes with absorbed attention. This took some minutes, and when he had finished there was something in his manner which prompted her to say:

"Of course you will tell me, Dr. Clay, exactly what is the matter."

"I am bound to do so," he said, slowly. "I wished to make perfectly sure, before saying that your eyes are quite seriously affected— not that there is danger of a loss of sight, if proper precautions are taken— but— but it will be absolutely necessary for you to abstain from using them in order to check the progress of the disease."

"I see," she said, quietly, after a brief silence. "Do you mean that I cannot teach school? I am a school-teacher."

"I knew that; and knowing it, I thought it best to tell you the whole truth. No, Miss Whyte; you must not use your eyes for at least a year, if you do not wish to lose your sight."

"I see," said Elizabeth again, with the hopeless air of one from whom the impossible is demanded. "I thank you, Dr. Clay, for telling me the truth," she added, simply. "Have I strained my eyes?"

"You have evidently overtaxed them a little; but the disease is primarily a disease of the nerves. Will you excuse me for asking if at any time within the last few years you have suffered a severe shock?"

"A shock?" Elizabeth hesitated an instant, and replied gently: "Yes; but it was a number of years ago."

"That would account for the case, nevertheless."

A few minutes later Elizabeth was walking along the street, face to face with despair. She had not been able to obtain permission from the doctor to use her eyes even during the ten days which remained before vacation. He had said that every moment of delay would make the cure more difficult. She must absolutely cease to look at a book for one whole year. It would be necessary at first for her to visit him for treatment two or three times a week. He had said— she remembered his exact words— "I cannot do a very great deal for you; we can rely only on time for that; but believe me, I shall endeavor to help you so far as it lies in human power. I hope that you will trust me— and— and come to me freely." Kind words these, but of what avail were they to answer the

embarrassing question how she was to live? She must give up her school at least for a year; that seemed inevitable. How was she to earn her daily bread if she obeyed the doctor's orders? Would it not be better to use her eyes to the end, and trust to charity to send her to an infirmary when she became blind? Why had she been foolish enough to refuse Mr. Ramsay's property? But for a quixotic theory, she would not now have been at the world's mercy.

It was the sting of shame which this last thought aroused, following in the train of her bitter reasoning, that caused her to quicken her pace and clinch her hands. That same pride, which had been her ally hitherto, had come to her rescue once more. She said to herself that she had done what she knew was right, and that no force of cruel circumstances should induce her to regret that she had not acted differently. She would prove still that she was able to make her own way without assistance, even though she were obliged to scrub floors.

A shock? The shock of a betrayed faith which had arrayed her soul in bitterness against mankind. Must she own that she was crushed? Not while she had an arm to toil and a heart to strive.

The next ten days were bitter ones. Elizabeth, after disbanding her school, began to plan and contrive for the future. Schemes bright with prospect suggested themselves, and faded into smoke at the touch of practicability. She had a few hundred dollars, which would enable her to live until she had been able to devise a plan, and she determined that the world should not think that she was discouraged. The world, and chiefly at the moment Dr. Clay, whose kindness and earnest attention during the visits which she paid him suggested that he felt great pity for her. Pity? She wished the pity of no man.

One evening while she was alone in her parlor, wrestling with her schemes, the maid entered and said that a gentleman wished to see her.

A gentleman? She could think of none who would be likely to call upon her, but she bade the girl show him in; and a moment later she was greeting Dr. Clay. Presently, while she was wondering why he had come, she found herself listening to these words: "I am a stranger to you to all intents and purposes, but you are none to me. For months I have dogged your footsteps unknown to you, and haunted this house in my walks because I knew that you lived here. The memory of your face has sweetened my dreams, and those brief moments when we have passed each other daily have been sweeter than any paradise. I know the story of your struggle with that coward and of your noble act of renunciation.

It cut into my heart like a knife to speak to you those necessary words the other day, and I have been miserable ever since. I said to myself at last that I would go to you and tell you that I could not be happy apart from you; and that your happiness was mine. This seems presumptuous, intrusive: I wish to

be neither. I have merely come to ask that I may be free to call upon you and to try to make you love me. I am not rich, but my practice is such that I am able to offer you a home. Will you allow me to come to see you, at least to be your friend?"

The silence which followed this eager question seemed to demand an answer. Elizabeth, who had been sitting with bent head, looked up presently and answered with a sweet smile:

"I have no friends, Dr. Clay. I think it would be very pleasant to have one."

A few minutes later when he was gone, Elizabeth sat for some time without moving, with the same happy smile on her lips. He had asked nothing more and she had given him no greater assurance. Why was it that at last she buried her face in her hands and sobbed as though her bosom would break? Why was it, too, that before she went to bed that night she took a handful of withered flowers, mere dust and ashes, from the secret drawer of her work-box, and, wrapping them in the paper which had enclosed them, held them in the flame of the lamp until they were consumed? Why? Because love, unwatched for, unbidden had entered her heart, which she thought sere as the rose-leaves, and restored light to the sunshine and joy to the world.

_____

15: The Phantom Model

A Wapping Romance

Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

In: *The Haunted Station*, 1894

1: The Studio

"RHODA IS a very nice girl in her way, Algy, my boy, and poses wonderfully, considering the hundreds of times she has had to do it; but she isn't the model for that Beatrice of yours, and if you want to make a hit of it, you must go further afield, and hook a face not quite so familiar to the British Public."

It was a large apartment, one of a set of studios in the artistic barrack off the Fulham Road, which the landlord, himself a theatrical Bohemian of the first class, has rushed up for the accommodation of youthful luminaries who are yet in the nebulous stage of their Art-course. Each of these hazy specks hopes to shine out a full-lustred star in good time; they have all a proper contempt also for those servile daubsters who consent to the indignity of having RA added to their own proper, or assumed, names. Most of them belong to the advanced school of Impressionists, and allow, with reservations, that Jimmy Whitetuft has genius, as they know that he is the most generous, as well as the most epigrammatical, of painters, while Rhoda, the model, also knows that he is the kindest and most chivalrous of patrons, who stands more of her caprices than most of her other masters do, allows her more frequent as well as longer rests in the two hours' sitting, and can always be depended upon for a half-crown on an emergency; good-natured, sardonic Jimmy Whitetuft, who can well appreciate the caprices of any woman, or butterfly of the hour, seeing that he has so many of them himself.

Rhoda Prettyman is occupied at the present moment in what she likes best, warming her young, lithe, Greek-like figure at the stove, while she puffs out vigorous wreaths of smoke from the cigarette she has picked up at the table, in the passing from the dais to the stove. She is perfect in face, hair, figure, and colour, not yet sixteen, and greatly in demand by artists and sculptors; a good girl and a merry one, who prefers bitter beer to champagne, a night in the pit to the ceremony of a private box, with a dozen or so of oysters afterwards at a little shop, rather than run her entertainer into the awful expense of a supper at the Criterion or Gatti's. Her father and mother having served as models before her, she has been accustomed to the disporting of her charms *d la vue* on raised daises from her tenderest years, and to the patois of the studios since she could lisp, so that she is as unconscious as a Solomon Island young

lady in the bosom of her own family, and can patter "Art" as fluently as any picture dealer in the land.

They are all smoking hard, while they criticize the unfinished Exhibition picture of their host, Algar Gray, during this rest time of the model; Rhoda has not been posing for that picture now, for at the present time the studio is devoted to a life-club, and Rhoda has been hired for this purpose by those hard-working students, who form the young school. Jimmy Whitetuft is the visitor who drops in to cut them up; a marvellous eye for colour and effect Jimmy has, and they are happy in his friendly censorship.

All round the room the easels are set up, with their canvases, in a half-moon range, and on these canvases Rhoda can see herself as in half-a-dozen mirrors, reflected in the same number of different styles as well as postures, for these students aim at originality. But the picture which now occupies their attention is a bishop, half-length, in the second working upon which the well-known features and figure of Rhoda are depicted in thirteenth-century costume as the Beatrice of Dante, and while the young painter looks at his stale design with discontented eyes, his friends act the part of Job's comforters.

"There isn't a professional model in London who can stand for Beatrice, if you want to make her live. They have all been in too many characters already. You must have something fresh."

"Yes, I know," muttered Algar Gray "But where the deuce shall I find her?"

"Go to the country. You may see something there," suggested Jack Brunton, the landscapist. "I always manage to pick up something fresh in the country."

"The country be blowed for character," growled Will Murray. "Go to the East End of London, if you want a proper Beatrice; to the half-starved crew, with their big eyes and thin cheeks. That's the sort of thing to produce the spiritual longing, wistful look you want. I saw one the other day, near the Thames Tunnel, while I was on the prowl, who would have done exactly."

"What was she?" asked Algar eagerly

"A Ratcliff Highway stroller, I should say. At any rate, I met her in one of the lowest pubs, pouring down Irish whiskey by the tumbler, with never a wink, and using the homespun in a most delectable fashion. Her mate might have served for Semiramis, and she took four ale from the quart pot, but the other, the Beatrice, swallowed her dose neat, and as if it had been cold water from one of the springs of Paradise where, in olden times, she was wont to gather flowers."

"Good Heavens! Will, you are atrocious. The sentiment of Dante would be killed by such a woman."

"Realistic, dear boy, that's all. You will find very exquisite flowers sometimes even on a dust-heap, as well as where humanity grows thickest and rankest. We have all to go through the different stages of earthly experience, according to Blavatsky. This Beatrice may have been the original of Dante in the thirteenth century, now going through her Wapping experience. It seems nasty, yet it may be necessary"

"What like was she?"

"What sort of an ideal had you when you first dreamt of that picture, Algy?"

"A tall, slender woman, of about twenty or twenty-two, graceful and refined, with pale face blue-veined and clear, with dark hair and eyes indifferent as to shade, yet out-looking— a soulful gaze from a classical, passive and passionless face."

"That is exactly the Beatrice of the East End shanty and the Irish whiskey, the sort of holy after-death calm pervading her, the alabaster-lamp-like complexion lit up by pure spirits undiluted, the general dreamy, indifferent pose— it was all there when I first saw her, only a battle royal afterwards occurred between her and the Amazon over a sailor, during which the alabaster lamp flamed up and Semiramis came off second best; for commend me to your spiritual demons when claws and teeth are wanted. No matter, I have found your model for you; take a turn with me this evening and I'll perhaps be able to point her out to you, the after negotiations I leave in your own romantic hands."

2: Dante in the Inferno

IT IS a considerable distance from the Fulham Road to Wapping even going by bus, but as the two artist friends went, it was still further and decidedly more picturesque.

They were both young men under thirty. Art is not so precocious as literature, and does not send quite so many early potatoes into the market, so that the age of thirty is considered young enough for a painter to have learned his business sufficiently to be marketable from the picture-dealing point of view.

Will Murray was the younger of the two by a couple of years, but as he had been sent early to fish in the troubled waters of illustration, and forced to provide for himself while studying, he looked much the elder; of a more realistic and energetic turn, he did not indulge in dreams of painting any single magnum opus, with which he would burst upon an astonished and enthusiastic world, he could not afford to dream, for he had to work hard or go fasting, and

so the height of his aspirations was to paint well enough to win a note of approval from his own particular school, and keep the pot boiling with black and white work.

Algar Gray was a dreamer on five hundred per year, the income beneficent Fortune had endowed him with by reason of his lucky birth; he did not require to work for his daily bread, and as he had about as much prospect of selling his paint-creations, or imitations, as the other members of this new school, he spent the time he was not painting in dreaming about a possible future.

It wasn't a higher ideal, this brooding over fame, than the circumscribed ideal of Will Murray; each member of that young school was too staunch to his principles, and idealized his art as represented by canvas and paints too highly to care one jot about the pecuniary side of it; they painted their pictures as the true poet writes his poems, because it was right in their eyes; they held exhibitions, and preached their canons to a blinded public; the blinded public did not purchase, or even admire; but all that did not matter to the exhibitors so long as they had enough left to pay for more canvases and frames.

Will Murray was keen sighted and blue-eyed, robust in body and forever on the alert for fresh material to fill his sketch-book. Algar Gray was dark to swarthiness, with long, thin face, rich-toned, melancholy eyes, and slender figure; he did not jot down trifles as did his friend, he absorbed the general effect and seldom produced his sketching-block.

Having time on their hands and a glorious October evening before them, they walked to Fulham Wharf and, hiring a wherry there, resolved to go by the old water way to the Tower, and after that begin their search for the Spiritual, through the Inferno of the East.

There is no river in the world to be compared for majesty and the witchery of association, to the Thames; it impresses even the unreading and unimaginative watcher with a solemnity which he cannot account for, as it rolls under his feet and swirls past the buttresses of its many bridges; he may think, as he experiences the unusual effect, that it is the multiplicity of buildings which line its banks, or the crowd of sea-craft which floats upon its surface, or its own extensive spread. In reality he feels, although he cannot explain it, the countless memories which hang forever like a spiritual fog over its rushing current.

This unseen fog closes in upon the two friends as they take up their oars and pull out into midstream; it is a human fog which depresses and prepares them for the scenes into which they must shortly add their humanity; there is no breaking away from it, for it reaches up to Oxford and down to Sheppey, the voiceless thrilling of past voices, the haunting chill of dead tragedies, the momentous hush of acted history.

It wafts towards them on the brown sails of the gliding barges where the solitary figures stand upright at the stem like so many Charons steering their hopeless freights; it shapes the fantastic clouds of dying day overhead, from the fumes of countless fires, and the breaths from countless lips, it is the overpowering absorption of a single soul composed of many parts; the soul of a great city, past and present, of a mighty nation with its crowded events, crushing down upon the heart of a responsive stream, and this is the mystic power of the pulsating, eternal Thames.

They bear down upon Westminster, the ghost-consecrated Abbey, and the history-crammed Hall, through the arches of the bridge with a rush as the tide swelters round them; the city is buried in a dusky gloom save where the lights begin to gleam and trail with lurid reflections past black velvety-looking hulls—a dusky city of golden gleams. St Paul's looms up like an immense bowl reversed, squat, un-English, and undignified in spite of its great size; they dart within the sombre shadows of the Bridge of Sighs, and pass the Tower of London, with the rising moon making the sky behind it luminous, and the crowd of shipping in front appear like a dense forest of withered pines, and then mooring their boat at the steps beyond, with a shuddering farewell look at the eel-like shadows and the glittering lights of that writhing river, with its burthen seen and invisible, they plunge into the purlieus of Wapping.

Through silent alleys where dark shadows fleeted past them like forest beasts on the prowl; through bustling marketplaces where bloaters predominated, into crammed gin-palaces where the gas flashed over faces whereon was stamped the indelible impression of a protest against creation; brushing tatters which were in gruesome harmony with the haggard or bloated features.

Will Murray was used to this medley and pushed on with a definite purpose, treating as burlesque what made the dreamer groan with impotent fury that so dire a poverty, so unspeakable a degradation, could laugh and seem hilarious even under the fugitive influence of Old Tom. They were not human beings these breathing and roaring masses, they were an appalling army of spectres grinning at an abashed Maker.

"Here we are at last, Algy," observed Will, cheerily, as the pair pushed through the swinging doors of a crammed bar and approached the counter, "and there is your Beatrice."

3: The Picture

THE IMPRESSIONISTS of Fulham Road knew Algy Gray no more, after that first glimpse which he had of Beatrice. His studio was once again to let, for he

had removed his baggage and tent eastward, so as to be near the woman who would not and could not come West.

His first impressions of her might have cured many a man less refined or sensitive— a tall young woman with pallid face leaning against the bar and standing treat to some others of her kind; drinking furiously, while from her lips flowed a husky torrent of foulness, unrepeatable; she was in luck when he met her, and enjoying a holiday with some of her own sex, and therefore wanted no male interference for that night, so she repulsed his advances with frank brutality, and forced him to retire from her side baffled.

Yet, if she offended his refined ears, there was nothing about her to offend his artistic eyes; she had no ostrich feathers in her hat, and no discordancy about the colours of her shabby costume; it was plain and easy-fitting, showing the grace of her willowy shape; her features were statuesque, and as Will had said, alabaster-like in their pure pallor.

That night Algar Gray followed her about, from place to place, watching her beauty hungrily even while he wondered at the unholy thirst that possessed her, and which seemed to be sateless, a quenchless desire which gave her no rest, but drove her from bar to bar, while her money lasted; she appeared to him like a soulless being, on whom neither fatigue nor debauchery could take effect.

At length, as midnight neared, she turned to him with a half smile and beckoned him towards her; she had ignored him hitherto, although she knew he was hunting her down.

"I say, matey, I'm stumped up, so you can stand me some drink if you like."

She laughed scornfully when she saw him take soda water for his share, it was a weakness which she could neither understand nor appreciate.

"You ain't Jacky the Terror, are you?" she enquired carelessly as she asked him for another drink.

"Certainly not, why do you ask?*

"Cos you stick so close to me. I thought perhaps you had spotted me out for the next one, not that I care much whether you are or not, now that my money is done."

His heart thrilled at the passivity of her loneliness as he looked at her; she had accepted his companionship with indifference, unconscious of her own perfection, utterly apathetic to everything; she a woman that nothing could warm up.

She led him to the home which she rented, a single attic devoid of furniture, with the exception of a broken chair and dilapidated table, and a mattress which was spread out in the corner, a wretched nest for such a matchless Beatrice.

And as she reclined on the mattress and drank herself to sleep from the bottle which she had made him buy for her, he sat at the table, and while the tallow candle lasted, he watched her, and sketched her in his notebook, after which, when the candle had dropped to the bottom of the bottle which served as a candle stick, and the white moonlight fell through the broken window upon that pure white slumbering face, so still and death-like, he crept softly down the stairs, thralled with but one idea.

Next day when he came again she greeted him almost affectionately, for she remembered his lavishness the night before and was grateful for the refreshment which he sent out for her. Yes, she had no objections to let him paint her if he paid well for it, and came to her, but she wasn't going out of her beat for any man; so finding that there was another attic in the same house to let, he hired it, got the window altered to suit him and set to work on his picture.

The model, although untrained, was a patient enough sitter to Algar Gray when the mood took her, but she was very variable in her moods, and uncertain in her temper, as spirit-drunkards mostly are. Sometimes she was reticent and sullen, and would not be coaxed or bribed into obedience to his wishes, at other times she was lazy and would not stir from her own mattress, where she lay like a lovely savage, letting him admire her transparent skin, with the blue veins intersecting it, and a luminous glow pervading it, until his spirit melted within him, and he grew almost as purposeless as she was.

Under these conditions the picture did not advance very fast, for now November was upon them with its fogs. Very often on the days when she felt amiable enough to sit, he had no light to take advantage of her mood, while at other times she was either away drinking with her own kind or else sulking in her bleak den.

If he wondered at first how she could keep the purity of her complexion with the life she led or how she never appeared overcome with the quantity of spirits she consumed, he no longer did so since she had given him her confidence.

She was a child of the slums in spite of her refinement of face, figure and nearness of attire; who, six years before had been given up by the doctors for consumption, and informed that she had not four months of life left. Previous to this medical verdict she had worked at a match factory, and been fairly well conducted, but with the recklessness of her kind, who resemble sailors closely, she had pitched aside caution, resolved to make the most of her four months left, and so abandoned herself to the life she was still leading.

She had existed almost entirely upon raw spirits for the past six years, surprised herself that she had lived so long past her time, yet expecting death

constantly; she was as one set apart by Death, and no power could reclaim her from that doom, a reckless, condemned prisoner, living under a very uncertain reprieve, and without an emotion or a desire left except the vain craving to deaden thought, and be able to die game, a craving which would not be satisfied.

Algar Gray, for the sake of an ideal, had linked himself to a soul already damned, which still held on to its fragile casement, a soul which was dragging him down to her own hell; her very cold indifference to him drew him after her, and enslaved him, her unholy transparent loveliness bewitched him, and the foulness of her lips and language no longer caused him a shudder, since it could not alter her exquisite lines or those pearly tints which defied his palette; and yet he did not love the woman; his whole desire was to transfer her perfection to his canvas before grim Death came to snatch her clay from the vileness of its surroundings.

4: A Lost Soul

DECEMBER and January had passed with clear, frosty skies, and the picture of Beatrice was at length ready for the Exhibition.

When a man devotes himself body and spirit to a single object, if he has training and aptitude, no matter how mediocre he may be in ordinary affairs, he will produce something so nearly akin to a work of genius as to deceive half the judges who think themselves competent to decide between genius and talent.

Algar Gray had studied drawing at a good training-school, and was acknowledged by competent critics to be a true colourist, and for the last three months he had lived for the picture which he had just completed, therefore the result was satisfactory even to him. Beatrice, the ideal love of Dante, looked out from his canvas in the one attic of this Wapping slum, while Beatrice, the model, lay dead on her old mattress in the other.

He had attempted to make her home more homelike and comfortable for her, but without success; what he ordered from the upholsterer she disposed of promptly to the brokers, laughing scornfully at his efforts to redeem her, and mocking coarsely at his remonstrances, as she always had done at his temperate habits. He was not of her kind, and she had no sympathy with him, or in any of his ways; she had tolerated him only for the money he was able to give her and so had burnt herself out of life without a kindly word or thought about him.

She had died as she wished to do, that is, she had passed away silently and in the darkness leaving him to discover what was left of her, in the chill of a

winter morning, a corpse not whiter or less luminous than she had been in life, with the transparent neck and delicate arms, blue-veined and beautiful, and the face composed with the immortal air of quiet which it had always possessed.

She had lasted just long enough to enable him to put the finishing touches upon her replica, and now that the undertakers had taken away the matchless original, he thought that he might return to his own people, and take with him the object which he had coveted and won. The woman herself seemed nothing to him while she lay waiting upon her last removal in the room next to his, but now that it was empty, and only her image remained before him, he was strangely dissatisfied and restless.

He had caught the false appearance of purity which was about her, but all unaware to himself, this constant communication of the more natural part had been absorbed into his being, until now the picture looked like a body waiting for the return of its own mocking spirit, and for the first time, regretful wishes began to tug at his heartstrings; it was no longer the Beatrice of Dante that he wanted, but the Beatrice who had mockingly enslaved him with her vileness, and whom he had permitted to escape from him for an ideal, she who had never tempted him in life, was now tormenting him past endurance with hopeless longings.

He had gone out that afternoon with the intention of returning to his studio in the West End, and making arrangements for bringing his picture there, but after wandering aimlessly about the evil haunts where he had so often followed his late model, he found that he could not tear himself from that dismal round. A shadowy form seemed to glide before him from one gin-palace to another as she had done in life; the places where she had leaned against the bars seemed still to be occupied by her cold and mocking presence, no longer passive, but repulsing him as she had done in the early part of the first night, while he grew hungry and eager for her friendship.

She was before him on the pavement as he turned towards his attic; her husky oath-clogged voice sounded in his ears as he passed an alley, and when he rushed forward to seize her, two other women fled from him out of the gloom with shrieks of fear. All the voices of these unfortunates are alike, and he had made a mistake.

The ice had given way on the morning of her death, and the streets were now slushy and wet, with a drizzling fog obscuring objects, so that only an instinct led him back to his temporary studio; he would draw down his blind and light his lamp, and spend the last evening of the slums in looking at his work.

It appeared almost a perfect piece of painting, and likely to attract much notice when it was exhibited. The dress which Beatrice had worn still lay over the back of the chair near the door, where she had carelessly flung it when last she took it off. He turned his back to the dress-covered chair and looked at the picture. Yes, it was the Beatrice whom Dante yearned over all his life— as she appeared to him at the bridge, with the same pure face and pathetic eyes, but not the Beatrice whom he, Algar Gray, passed over while she lived, and now longed for with such unutterable longing when it was too late.

He flung himself down before his magnum opus, and buried his face in his hands with passionate and hopeless regret.

Was that a husky laugh down in the court below, on the stairs, or in the room beside him?— her devil's laugh when she would go her own way in spite of his remonstrances.

He raised his head and looked behind him to where the dress had been lying crumpled and away from his picture. God of Heaven! his dead model had returned and now stood at the open door beckoning upon him to come to her, with her lovely transparent arm bare to the elbow, and once more dressed in the costume which she had cast aside.

He looked no more at his replica, but followed the mocking spirit down the stairs, into the fog-wrapped alley, and onwards where she led him.

Down towards Wapping Old Stairs, where the shapeless hulks of the ships and barges loomed out from the swirling, rushing black river like ghosts, as she was, who floated towards them, luring him downwards, amongst the slime, to the abyss from which her lost soul had been recalled by his evil longings.

_____

16: The Mythical Third

Alice C. Tomholt

1887-1949

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 1 Jan 1910

THE SUN blazed down through the tall, sweet-smelling gums as Jim M'Gregor, big and brown and bearded, hitched up his horse at the gate of Meg Barnum's cottage. He strode up the narrow, weedy path, winding in and out among a wild blaze of flowers, and the appetising, spicy aroma of newly-made ginger bread came temptingly through the kitchen window, where neat, white curtains billowed out and coquetted with the flaring nasturtium clambering near. Peering in, he caught a glimpse of a brown head stooping over the open fireplace and stepped across the creeper-shaded verandah as noiselessly as could a pair of big feet encased in heavy boots. His great shadow darkened the shining linoleum with the blue flowers sprawling over it.

Meg, in her spot less apron, the sleeves of her pink gown rolled up well above her sun-browned elbows, looked up quietly, a piece of wood she had been in the act of putting upon the glowing flames clattering noisily to the red-bricked hearth.

"Good laud!" she gasped, staring at him with wide, saucer eyes. "Jim M'Gregor!"

"The same." He held out his hand with a big laugh. She extended her own, too amazed as yet to notice the dab of soot upon it.

"Well," she said, "if anyone'd told me five minutes ago as you weren't in Queensland I'd have most likely told 'em to go an' spin their yarns to some other body."

"I was till about a month ago. Bein' around this way, thought I'd come an' hev a look at ye."

He looked down upon her thin, bronze face with admiration in his honest eyes.

"Why, girl, 'tisn't bit older ye look, through 'tis four year come next August since I saw ye!"

"Tush!" She frowned, though not displeased, and dusted an already speckless chair with the end of her apron. "If you're goin' to stay a while ye'd better be takin' a seat. It's busy I am. School treat to-morrow. Makin' a few cakes an' things f'r it."

"You always were adoin somethin' for somebody ever since I knew ye," he remarked, dropping his great weight upon the chair.

"An' you always were one f'r sayin' nice things to people ever since I knew ye!" she retorted, with a smile that deepened a hollow in her chin and touched

her face with something like prettiness as she turned again to her cooking. "What put it into y'r head to come back?"

She broke a couple of eggs into a basin and beat them vigorously. "I heard as ye were doin' well up yonder."

He lit his pipe with the air of a man well satisfied with himself and his surroundings.

"Got a sorter homesickness I suppose ye'd call it... Hot as fire up in the Never Never; but managed to make a little pile, an' it's come back I have to spend it. Had enough o' Queensland f'r the rest o' me natural. Reckon I'll settle out this way. Came as rather a shock when I got to Carnoo an' found y'r old father 'd died an' ye'd had to sell the old place.... Guess ye didn't like partin' with it, Meg, girl?"

"Guess I didn't !" she returned curtly, beating the eggs with added vigor. He had clumsily touched a sore point that time was proving powerless to heal, and he was not too dense to realise it.

"Aren't ye kinder lonesome here?" he ventured, after an awkward pause.

"What's the good o' feelin' lonesome?" she retorted, shutting her lips tightly as she tipped the frothy yellow eggs into a larger basin with brown raisins bobbing about in it. He seemed to be rubbing her up the wrong way, so wisely watched her for a while in silence as she stirred up the mixture and put spoonsful of it into tiny crinkly tins. When he did speak it was in an off-hand manner.

"I'm thinkin o' getting married."

"Are ye?" She filled the last tin with a mighty pretence of unconcern, even though the news came as a thunderclap to her.

"She hasn't said 'Yes' yet," he rejoined frankly, "but it's hopin' I am she will. I've bought the house an' gat it all ready for her."

"Ye must be pretty sure of her!" came the quick retort. Then with all a woman's inherent curiosity, "What's she like ?"

"Waal," he drawled, taking his pipe from his mouth and looking at all he could see of her averted face, " she isn't exactly, what ye'd call a beauty, but to me she's jest about the best crittur in petticoats I've ever come across!"

She did not answer. He blew a few puffs of smoke and tentatively watched it soar in white clouds to the low-raftered ceiling.

"Times I thought you'd 'a' married me, Meg, if it hadn't been that the old man wanted so much lookin' after, since he was struck with the paralysis."

"Mebbe— mebbe not!" she snapped, kneeling down and pushing the tray full of tins, into the hot oven. "At any rate"— shutting the door with a vicious : snap— "it wasn't f'r the want of askin'!"

She could have bitten her own tongue out for the bit of malice that had-prompted the last remark.

"No," he returned, unperturbed. "I wouldn't care' to reckon up how many; times I did ask ye... It was afeared, I was, though, that ye'd be snapped up before I got back."

"You needn't 'a' been afeared." She put her hands on the table and looked at him with a bit of defiance in her dark eyes. "Men don't want to be takin' f'r wives women who're gettin' on f'r thirty with wrinkles an'— "

"You've got no wrinkles!" was the stout disclaimer, "at least only those two little furrows on y'r forehead, an' I they kinder give y'r face an interestin' look."

She made an impatient gesture; but a soft flush showed through the sunburn on her thin cheeks.

The water in a little black kettle on the fire sizzled over into the dancing flames beneath. She made a pot of tea, and clearing the well scrubbed table of her cooking utensils, laid a snowy cloth. He watched with covetous eyes the good things she placed there on— well browned, crisp looking cakes and scones, a pat of home-made butter, a glass jar of golden honey, a dish of fat, rosy-cheeked apples that had fallen that morning from the heavily-laden tree he could see from the window, and a pie with a crust light as thistle down.

"Suppose you are still as mad as ever over cherry pie?" she remarked nonchalantly, as she laid it down.

"Ye hevn't forgotten?" he exclaimed, well pleased. "Why, lass, I hevn't tasted one since the last I had at' your place, the day before I left Carnoo. But many's the time me mouth's watered f'r it!"

He drew his chair to the table in response to her invitation. "An' as f'r these cakes o' yours," he added, "in all me wanderin's I've never come across one who could make 'em like you."

"You're forgettin' her!" She flushed, and could have boxed her own ears the minute it had passed her lips.

"Well, yes," he returned thoughtfully, piling cream with a lavish hand upon his big helping of cherry pie; "her cakes are almost as good— quite as good, in fact."

She bit her lip as she poured out the tea and flashed a defiant look at him when she happened to look up and catch the fleeting twinkle in his eye as he reminded her quietly that she was pouring it into the milk jug. An awkward silence prevailed after that, but it did not affect his appetite. He attacked the cakes and scones with the ardor of a hungry man.

"It's pretty busy I've been since I came back," he remarked at length, paring his third apple. "Bought a house over Carnoo way an' fitted it up as well as I could think of. It's taken me about a month to do it; but when I looked at it

before I left to-day it seemed to me to want the touch of a woman here an' there— with the curtains an things, ye know. I managed the furniture an' all that, but with easy things I'm no more good 'n a log o' wood. If she comes to it as it is now she might think it looks stiff or somethin'."

"Daresay," she responded shortly, gathering the plates and saucers into a methodical heap.

"I hev no women folk to help me in a case like this," he said, and looked at her expectantly. She knew he was asking for her help, but made a pretence of density.

"I've been thinkin'," he blurted out at last with a desperate effort, "that p'r'aps ye'd be good enough to come along an' hev a look at things f'r me."

She clattered the spoons and forks into the wash-up dish, and seemed to have grown suddenly deaf.

"I've been thinking, Meg," he repeated more loudly, "that p'r'aps ye'd come along an' hev a look at things f'r me."

"What's that?" She turned her head sharply. "Me look at things? Why don't ye wait an' let her fix up things to her own likin'?"

"Well, ye know, women are queer critturs: a good first impression goes a long way with 'em, an I want her to fall dead in love with the place directly she claps eyes on it. Say, Meg"— he leaned across the table and grabbed her hand— "ye will come, lass?"

When a man looks up to a woman as Jim did then, she finds it hard to resist. Meg withdrew her hand almost fiercely.

"All right," she said, "I'll come," but, judging by the expression on her face, it seemed that there would be little pleasure for her in the task. He beamed then, and with big, clumsy hands dried the dishes for her; but when a plate slipped through those hands in an unaccountable manner, and fell clattering to the floor in a hundred pieces, she informed him crossly that if he didn't want to hinder he'd go out into the garden and smoke until she was ready.

And he went.

In a while she came put, her faces glowing with a recent vigorous application of soap and water, her healthy-looking hair brushed up neatly beneath her shady straw hat, and her thin, straight figure spic and span in a well-starched, blue cotton dress. He looked at her as she approached him as though she were something very pleasant to look upon.

"I'm ready," she said with an unsmiling, almost severe, face, and went out through the gate to where the tethered horse was browsing contentedly on the long, green grass by the roadside It raised its head as Jim swung open the gate, and, with a low, delighted whinny at sight of Meg, came towards her. She stared at it for a moment, then turned sharply to the man.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it's Dick— our Dick!"

"Yes" — untying the reins from the gate-post— "I bought him back from Farmer Dobson when I heard ye'd sold him. Always had a kind o' likin' f'r the old horse. Guess ye hev no objection to me hevin him instead?"

But she vouchsafed no response. She was caressing with gentle hands the brown head of the faithful-eyed old horse, speaking to him softly as to some loved thing the while he rubbed his black nose against her shoulder. Jim fussed around the trap for a while; then: "It's time we were off, lass," he said, and helped her up.

It was almost in silence that they drove along the hard, sunbaked, gum-fringed road toward Carnoo, with its undulating hills, its misty valleys, and musk-scented, fern-filled gullies. He drove down into a hollow, where a house nestled, half-hidden among a maze of blackwood trees and fragrant clumps of briar roses.

He averted his face from the gaze of her dark, bewildered eyes as he sprang down and held' out a hand to help her.

"Is this is this the place you mean the place you bought for her?" she demanded, with spasmodic little jerks in her voice.

He nodded his head, something in her face driving speech from him.

"Why were ye so deep about it?" she said, her voice ringing out sharp and clear. "Why didn't ye tell me it was our— our house ye had bought? Wild horses wouldn't 'a' dragged me here if I'd known it!" she ended fiercely, ignoring his proffered hand as she sprang lightly down and faced him.

"I knew it," he said frankly; "but"— almost humbly— "I did want ye to have a look at things, Meg. I bought it from the agent so soon as I heard o' the sale. He was willin' to sell— at a profit."

"But why did ye want this? There were others f'r sale— Shrimpton's, for instance— a much better house in every way. What put it into y'r head to buy this— our old home— f'r her?"

"I'd always rather fancied it. Thought maybe she'd like it, too Why should ye hev any objection to me hevin' it, Meg?"

"Who said any thin' about objection?" she turned to him with a stamp of her foot, and her eyes flaming. Then they softened, as with tears that were welling up behind them, and her voice wavered a little; there was something like a sob in it as she passel thro' the gate with but little of her usual briskness in her walk.

"It's no right I have of objectin," she said quietly, almost apologetically, "seein' as how it is no longer a place of ours!"

A white-breasted pee-wit sent down a low sweet call from a blackwood above her head, and the light breeze rustled whisperingly thro the thick, dark

foliage. She turned to Jim again with a sudden return of fierceness that startled him as he was following thoughtfully in her wake.

"Do you know what it meant to me to sell this place?" she cried. "It was like partin' with my heart's blood. I've kept away from it ever since— not darin' to come near. An' now!" She turned away, the flash of anger gone, her head drooping forward a little.

He was thoroughly uncomfortable. He had not reckoned that this return to her old home could rouse such a passionate storm of varied emotions within her.

"I am sorry, lass," he said awkwardly and caught hold of her arm with a gentle hand. "If you'd rather—"

"I'll not turn back now," she interrupted, shaking his hand off, and walking ahead through the shade of the trees to the house, an old-fashioned, rambling dwelling with sweet tangled sprays of honeysuckle clambering about it. The casement windows were opened wide; near the porch a great oak, its trunk smothered in ivy, spread out lettering arms over a rustic seat that Jim, long ago, had helped Meg to fashion out of plum tree boughs. She remembered how they had laughed over it; what a time it had taken to make, and with what pride they had looked down upon it when it was last completed, and demanded payment for his help. He had taken payment— from her lips; and she had not spoken to him for exactly a day and a half after that.

It was an unexpected happening that broke the barrier. His horse had slipped and thrown him. She saw it all and rushed forward. His eyes were closed; she was frightened— terribly frightened, and, for the moment, forgot everything and kissed him— kissed him full on the lips. She remembered— with a shadow of a smile now— her horror as she had heard him laugh, and looking down into his face, saw his eyes sparkling up at her and knew he had been pretending.

"You are a beast!" she had said, and tried to scamper away; but he had held her tightly.

"I wanted to make ye speak again," he. said. "We're quits now, Meg, so—"

But that was years ago— years and years. For some reason her eyes were glittering with unshed tears.

"D'ye remember, Meg," his voice broke in upon her musing and seemed part of the dream. "I asked ye here, the night before I left. Ye had on a white dress with some violets I'd brought f'r ye turned in at your waist. An' it was sweet ye looked with the moon shinin down on ye thro' the branches. But ye said 'No.' It was always No. I began to think I could never make ye care."

She seemed suddenly to awaken from the dream that had held her in thralldom for a time.

"Why talk about such bygones?" she demanded crossly. " 'Tis nigh on sundown. Is it forgettin' ye are that I have to get back to-night? 'Tis precious little time I'll have f'r lookin around at things!"

He opened the door. She followed him into the short, wide hall, noticing with a slight start that everything, even to the few pictures on the wall, was arranged exactly as it had been when she had reigned there as mistress. It was the same with each room as she went on her tour of inspection.

In the little parlor the chairs were put perhaps too stiffly against the wall, but a turn of her hand altered that. The white curtain had been tied back tightly as one ties a sheaf of new-mown hay. She untied the knot and made the muslin things fall more softly about the window. The light summer breeze, laden with the sweetness of the briar rose in the garden beyond, caught them and billowed them far into the room which was fast being filled with flickering shadows as the sun sank slowly down behind the hills.

"You think she will like it?"

He puffed at his pipe, watching her as, with swift, deft fingers she rearranged the numerous vases on the mantelpiece.

"Like it!" She turned her head quickly. "She'll be mighty hard to please if she don't like this home ye've got f'r her. What more could any woman wish for than this?"— almost defiantly.

"Well," he said, going out again into the hall, "guess you know more about women; than me. It's been mighty hard work fixin' up, ah'll be kinder disappointed if she don't appreciate it, like. But, Meg!" he called to her as she stood watching the sun flooding the sky with crimson glory, "Ye hevn't seen what I've done to me verandah at the back here."

She came reluctantly, and the shadows hid from him the glistening tears that trickled slowly down her thin cheek. She brushed it away impatiently, and followed him out into the cool fragrance of the verandah, where, blooming in a great pot near the door, a healthy cluster of African Nile lilies made the air heavy and intoxicating with the piercing sweetness of their breath. The whole length of the verandah had been recently covered in with a neat lattice-work, painted white. She stood within the doorway and looked at it, and a little brightness came to her eyes for a moment as she flashed a quick look at him.

"I've often heard, you say as ye'd like that put up," he said simply. "An' I've planted some sweet peas on the other side. You always were kinder fond of the things. Thought p'r'aps she'd like 'em, too."

But Meg did not answer. With something like a smothered sob, she turned back and went into that which was to her the most important room in the house— the kitchen. It was a big, low-ceilinged room. Everything there was bright and shining; the painted daisies on the plate of the new tea set seemed

to have tiny faces in their hearts, looking down at her from the shelves of the dresser; she could see her own face in the rows of pot lids on the wall— a white, wistful, tired-looking face. Beside the open fireplace was a low rocking-chair with a vivid crimson cushion at its back— a double to the one her father had been wont to sit in. Almost unconsciously she bent and shook the crimson cushions, an obstinate lump, which refused to move, rose in her throat as she stood looking down at it. It seemed she could see him sitting there, puffing at his pipe, and scanning the papers which she had placed within his reach.

From the moment they carried him in from the paddock, a helpless, stricken thing, with use of his legs gone for all time, she had given her life to him, until a greater power ended his suffering. But now she seemed to hear again his cheery voice, and see the bright smile which many a time had brought hot tears to her eyes at the pity of it.

She held out her two hands with a quick, sobbing breath, then dropped them suddenly, as Jim's big figure blocked the doorway, and his deep voice scattered the reverie which had enveloped her.

"Ye've seen everything now, lass?"

"Yes— everything"— with her face turned from him. "An' ye think it's all right an' ready f'r her?"

"Don't see what else she could want," she said, shortly, as she went toward the window, and stood half leaning-out, plucking with restless fingers at the green and gold of the Banksia roses clambering about the sill.

"Supposing she won't come?" she added, abruptly, after a pause. "Well," he returned soberly, "guess I'll hev ter live here on me lonesome. But, lass," he came very close to her and gripped her two hands. "I've waited such a mighty long time. Ye will come now?" She stared at him as though she feared he were suddenly bereft of his senses.

"Girl! Girl, how blind you are!" he laughed unsteadily. "Don't ye know— can't ye see that it just wants you now— you, potterin' around as ye did in the old days, to make this the grandest spot on earth f'r me?"

"Did ye mean me. ... all the time? Was I her... the other one?" she said slowly.

"Of course! Who else could there be for me, Meg lass?"

His grey eyes looked very true, and his gruff voice softened.

"I've loved ye for Lord only knows how many years— ever since ye were a bit of a girl, tearin' over the hills on y'r pony with yr hair fly to in the wind an' the sun brownin' y'r bonny cheeks. In all the heat an graft up in the Never Never I've seen ahead the hope of winnin' ye some day. P'r'aps I deceived ye a bit, girl; but I thought y'r old home would soften ye more'n any words o' mine could do..... Every stick, of furniture, every flower, every tree, every clump o

roses that ye loved is clamoring to welcome ye back. Meg, girl," as she turned away and sat down beside the table, "don't!— don't make me plead like a needle of a chap in a book!"

Then she did what he least expected she should do— dropped her head for ward upon the table and burst into a storm of passionate sobs. He- looked down upon her for a moment, stupidly; put out his arm as if to place it around her shoulders; then did what was wisest and best— went from the room and left her to fight it out alone.

When he returned she was standing at the window again. He hesitated for a moment, then hurried forward, for there was a softness in her eyes which chased away the plainness of her face as she came to meet him with hands outstretched.

"I've been fearful jealous... of myself," she said.

_____

17: A Perverted Punishment

Ambrose Pratt

1874-1944

The Bulletin (Sydney) 2 Apr 1898

"I CONTEND that any woman can deceive any man, if she has an ounce of brains, and get off scot free, too— no matter how clever the man may be. Why, Samson was a baby in Delilah's hands!"

The first woman delivered this speech insinuatingly, with a world of suggestion in her look and tones.

"But, Mrs. Norton, there's nothing to show that Samson was a giant intellectually. Now, my husband is a genius."

The second woman, who was thirty, and looked twenty-five, leaned back among her cushions with the air of a person who has said something peculiarly convincing. Mrs. Norton shrugged her shoulders, and prepared to depart.

"A man may have musical talent and yet be an arrant fool, for all that," was her Parthian shaft.

"I loathe that woman," murmured the other, cordially, to herself, as she heard the outside door shut. Her husband, entering just then, caught her words. He was a small, thin man with brilliant eyes, and long hair pushed back from his forehead and falling to his collar.

"Eh! you loathe her, my dear?" he said, enquiringly. "Then why the deuce do you see her? Just the way with you women, though. Loathe her, eh? and dose her with tea! Well, that's logical, I can't deny— though once your sex used somewhat swifter poisons for the friends they 'loathed.' "

The woman glanced up, annoyed. "I wish you could contrive to exempt me from the fire of your sarcasm!" she said, icily.

The man smiled, and, sitting down beside her, slipped an arm round her waist. "What is the matter, dear? Surely you know I was jesting!"

His voice was anxious, but his eyes were cold and abstracted.

The woman looked into his eyes a second and seemed to have made up her mind to something.

"Listen!" she said, imperiously. "Do you know what Mrs. Norton wanted me to do?"

"No," replied the man.

"She wanted me to deceive you." She looked at him as if she expected an outburst.

"Ah!" said the man, with a bewildered air ; "deceive me? But what for— what about?"

The woman seemed disappointed. "How and when do wives usually deceive their husbands?" she asked, meaningly.

The man laughed easily. "Why, in a hundred different ways, and every day of their lives, dear!"

The woman's face flushed, and her eyes grew bright and hard.

"You are very sure of me, George!"

"Yes, you are my wife!"

"Yes, I am your wife—but I am a woman, too, George." She was silent a moment, then suddenly burst into a passion of sobbing, hiding her face in her hands and throwing herself sideways among the cushions on the lounge.

The man looked annoyed, perplexed: he glanced first at his wife, then round the room till his eyes rested on a grand piano at the further corner, and the thought to calm his wife's nerves came to his musician's soul. He crossed the room on tip-toe, and, opening the instrument, touched the keys silently and lovingly for a moment with caressing finger-tips; then slowly and dreamily the music woke and whispered through the room.

But the woman started up and gazed at her husband as if she could not believe her eyes. She interpreted his action into the cruellest indifference to her tears. Suddenly she sprang up and crossed the room. "Stop!" she almost screamed.

The musician started and looked up at her, dazed; his soul was lost in the music; he had forgotten her presence completely. "What is it?" he asked, absently.

"You ask me what is it!" she cried in a tempest. "You don't want to know. You'd be better pleased if I left you to your cursed music."

The man started and cowered— she had always said she loved music.

"But I'll not! —do you hear—I won't! Do you
think I'm going to put up with your indifference?
I am not a stick or a stone. lam a woman. I
want—oh, if you are a man, you know what I
want!"

She stood before him splendid in her florid beauty, her eyes filled with passion and pride, her breast heaving, her red lips panting with the sobs she was struggling to restrain. The man stared stupidly at her. He was utterly unable to cope with the situation. Women were passionless beings to him; angels with soft voices that suggested perfect melodies. His wife's voice now was harsh and strident with anger, and it irritated him. He could not understand that she or any woman could be. swayed by a passion that demanded response in kind. He felt disturbed and vexed by the whole occurrence, but put it down to his wife's "nerves"!

"My dear," he said, kindly, and quite sincerely, "I am afraid you are not well."

"I am well enough, thank you," said the woman. "Mrs. Norton was quite right— you are a fool."

The man was just a little nettled. "Did she say that?"

The woman leaned forward— "Yes, she gave that as a reason why I should be unfaithful to you."

"Well?" he asked, his face paling a little.

"And I told, her that your indifference was freezing me, killing my love for you; that I was commencing to hate you. I told her you were wrapped up in your music and utterly neglected your wife."

"Go on!" said the man, with a queer, strained voice.

The woman saw she had made him feel at last, and her mood urged her further. She told me she knew a man who worshipped me, and asked me why I didn't seek consolation from others."

"What reply did you give her!"

"I said you were too clever to be deceived. She said you were a fool. I was the one in the wrong." She tapped the floor with her foot and watched the man covertly from the corners of her eyes. The man was roused. He paced about nervously, with clenched hands. Suddenly he turned and faced her. "Having discovered l am a fool, what do you intend to do?"

"I am not going to put up with your treatment of me any more!"

"Which means?"

"Anything you like— I shall take my revenge."

"Good!" said the man quietly; "that leaves me free to return to the mistress I should never have deserted."

"Your wretched music!" sneered the woman as she swept from the room.

THE MAN locked the door after his wife had left, and sat down to think. All his life was disturbed, disarranged. Hours passed, and still he remained gazing into vacancy. By-and-bye the dark came, and servants tapped at the door, but he did not answer them. For hours he sat brooding over he knew not what. When midnight chimed he roused himself and went to the piano. Then, while his cheeks were still wet with tears of self-pity, the musical inspiration of his life came to him.

Days passed, and the room became littered with scores. The man seldom left the piano for an hour, and his meals were taken irregularly and at long intervals. He grew thinner and even paler; but his eyes shone brilliantly, and he was filled with the ecstasy of creation.

Meanwhile, his wife attributed his pre-occupation and seclusion to grief at the loss of her. As the days passed she grew sad and lonely, and commenced to relent. One evening at twilight she slipped in with the servant as her husband

unlocked the door. "George!" she whispered, her eyes full of love and entreaty. But the musician looked at her as if he could not understand— he thought she had returned to him from her lover— from the dead.

"George— dear George!" said the woman tremulously. "I have come to tell you that I love you still, dear, and I forgive you. I want you to forgive me, too, dear, for making you suffer." She moved towards him, but he waved her off.

"You have come back!" was all he could say.

The woman commenced to protest. "I have never been away since I left you. I have never been out of the house or seen anyone. I'll cut Mrs. Norton if you like, dear. All I said the other day was just to punish you, George. You know you neglected me, George, and I wanted to punish you, but I didn't think you'd suffer so much, dear. I thought you cared more for your stupid old music than you did for me!"

The man shivered. "Stupid old music!" he repeated, but the woman thought he agreed with her.

"Yes, dear," she said. "I can see now how foolish I have been, and I want you to forgive me for being so cruel to you." She went close to he shivered again as she touched him, but permitted her to kiss him, and even returned her caresses.

Presently she glanced round at the untidy room, with its litter of papers. "What are all these papers— music scores? How tremendously you must have been writing, George!" She picked up a loose sheet nearest her; by chance it was numbered "One," and across the top was scrawled an Italian phrase. The woman deciphered it with difficulty, then looked up and met her husband's eyes.

"Is this the name of your opera?" she asked, pointing to the writing on the score.

"Yes," he answered, miserably.

"I am not a linguist— will you tell me what it means?" she asked, with a terrible calmness.

The man stammered evasively, "It is just a name."

"Yes; but what does it mean?"

"*The Unfaithful Wife*," he answered desperately.

———————

18: The Tinsmith

Margaret Busbee Shipp

1871-1936

Cosmopolitan, Aug 1910

Queenslander, 29 Oct 1910

HIS PARTNER, returning from a vacation, found Overman bent over some papers late one afternoon.

"Riggsbee v. Universal Traction Company?"

Overman nodded. "Yes, it comes up for trial to-morrow. The Traction Company has three witnesses, and I have but one child, who is the party most interested. It will be another case of the defendant enthroned in a temple of innocence built by the eloquence of its attorneys."

"Are you going to build a rival temple?" his partner questioned lightly.

"No, l am going to find the leak in the roof," Overman grimly replied.

It was Overman's ability to find the "leak in the roof" that had gained him the nickname of "The Tinsmith."

When the case was called the following day the Traction Company denied any liability, alleging that Riggsbee had stepped from a moving car of his own accord, thus bringing on the accident by his own carelessness.

Riggsbee's story was that he was standing on the platform waiting for the car to come to a full stop, as he had broken his glasses and was using particular caution, when the conductor's "Step lively there," followed by a quick push, had sent him down the steps, causing him to lose his balance and fall beneath the wheel of a motor truck. His foot had been crushed, gangrene had set in, and the leg had been amputated.

His little daughter, terrified almost inarticulate, stammered her corroborative statement.

Overman had his pet theory of the function of a cross-examination. He never discredited a witness whom he believed to be lying— he gently led the witness to discredit himself. Any direct attack upon the witness's veracity enlists the sympathy of the jury for the browbeaten man. A direct question along the line of testimony will be answered by the witness according to the theory of the case which he holds, and will strengthen his cause. It is, therefore, necessary to distract the attention of the witness from the main story, to get him to make some statement of which the premise will be at variance with his original premise, and to show the jury the discrepancy.

The first witness for the defence was scrupulously dressed. Overman keenly regarded his clothes, his shining shoes.

"Everything new," was his inward comment. "Nobody but a bridegroom is new from hat to shoe at this hour of the morning. Clothes must have been bought for the occasion."

The man told a direct, straightforward story. He had boarded the car ahout 9 o'clock the morning of the accident and stood near the door, he had seen the incident plainly, and described it with convincing detail. He waited confidently for the cross-examination.

Overman began, "What is your profession?"

"Nothing."

"How long have you supported your family by that profession?"

"I have been married about six years."

"You were coming from home about 9 o'clock on the morning of the 22nd of May, boarded the street car, stood on the platform because it was crowded, noticed the plaintiff and his daughter, and hears the former say that they must get off at the next corner and hurry, because he was late to his work?"

The witness assented. Every word of that had been in his testimony except two that did not strike his attention as the pleasant voice summed it up.

"From home, you say? Then your home is above —— street?"

"Yes." But the furtive eyes shifted. For a moment the man struggled with the unexpected question, whether it were better to declare his real abode, so at variance with his present gentlemanly pose, or to pretend to belong to the better quarter, with which he had been familiar in the past.

"Apartment or hotel?"

There were numberless of the former, and it seemed safer to reply, "Apartment."

"Will you tell me the janitor's name ?"

"I do not remember."

"The elevator boy's?"

"I do not know."

"The name of the owner of the apartment ?"

"I have forgotten."

"The name of the agent to whom you make out. cheques for rent?"

"I do not recall."

He had been confident enough in his conned story, but wandering in the realm of pure inventiveness he was afraid, not knowing where pitfalls might lie.

"You have an uneven memory for details," said Overman. "That is all. Stand aside."

The witness sat down, relieved that it was so quickly over, and that his testimony had not been attacked. He was not clever enough to realise that he had been proved a sorry liar.

The policeman's account was substantially the same as that of the gentleman of leisure, but added the details of a conversation with the plaintiff. He swore that he had picked up Riggsbee, and, thinking him a dying man, had asked if he had any statement to make: that Riggsbee had declared the accident was not the fault of the conductor or motorman, but the result of his own carelessness.

"Did Riggsbee give you any message for his sister?"

"No."

"Mother?"

"No."

"Daughter?"

"No."

The velvet voice was at its softest. "No last message for sister or mother or child, only for the Universal Traction Company?"

"Yes," surlily.

Overman saw, cheering as a ray of sunlight in winter, that two jurors were smiling broadly.

"As this accident occurred on —— street, you must have been a block out of your beat?"

The policeman assented warily.

"You reported it to headquarters?"

"No."

"Your oath makes it necessary for you to report it if you go out of your beat?"

"Yes," a growl.

"Then why not report this occasion?"

To this question the man had no ready answer, but Overman was Satisfied with his perplexed silence.

"How did the Traction Company know that you had witnessed the accident?"

"I went to their office."

"How long after the accident occurred?"

"Two days."

"Was that the day after a brief account of the accident was in the newspapers ?"

"It might have been."

"How many times have you been to the office of the Traction Company since ?"

"About five."

"Ten?"

The light and mocking tone indescribably carried the inference of the ten dollars which the witness might have received on each of those visits.

The policeman, stung into anger, lost his head, and denied a question that had not been put.

"No, they didn't give me a cent," he shouted. Another juror chuckled.

"So you felt that the accident was not of sufficient importance to make mention of it in your report, explaining why you had been out of your beat, but yet of sufficient importance for five visits to the Traction Company's office?"

The witness was silent.

"That is all," said Overman. "You may stand aside."

The brick mason proved to be the Star witness for the defendant company. He stated that he was standing on the sidewalk, engaged in conversation, when he saw Riggsbee of his own volition jump from the moving car, lose his balance, and fall under the moving truck. Then the car stopped, and the little girl ran sobbing toward the fallen man. He told the story simply and clearly.

Overman left his testimony untouched.

"Did you speak to the child?"

"Or offer to help her in. any way?"

"No."

"What did you do after the accident occurred?"

"Went on talking to the man on the corner."

"As you stated that you have forgotten to whom you were speaking, am I right in concluding that it was a conversation of no importance?"

"It was not of any importance."

"Are you married ?"

"Yes."

"Any children?"

"Five."

"Any of them near the age of this little girl?"

"My daughter Nelly is about her size."

"Did you tell Nelly of this accident when you went home and of the child's distress over her father?"

"No."

"You say you did not offer to help this little girl nor speak a kind word to her ?"

"No."

"You merely watched her crying and went on. with the conversation of no importance ?"

The attorney had brought the question imperceptibly to the oldest point of attack— the instinct of self-preservation, whether it be to preserve one's life, one's self-respect, or the good opinion of one's fellows. The witness, by far the cleverest of the three, saw that he appeared cold-hearted and callous.

"I— I didn't take it in at first how badly the man was hurt or I'd have helped the kid," he explained.

"You were, then, near enough to see that Mr. Riggsbee was not pushed from the crowded platform by the conductor, but not near enough to realise that the man who had fallen under the wheels of a heavy truck, who was bleeding profusely from cuts on his face and unable to move, was seriously hurt? You may stand aside."

The little girl was recalled, and the defendant's attorneys tried to shake her testimony. But she could only repeat the same story; she knew only the few facts impressed so painfully and indelibly upon her memory.

"Whom did you tell first that you saw the conductor give your father a push?"

She was silent, plucking shamefacedly at her skirt. The lawyer repeated the question.

"Have I got to tell that?" she asked the judge.

At his word of assent, she lifted innocent eyes to his and answered.

"God. When I said my prayers that night I asked him to please forgive me because I said I hated the conductor and wished he was dead, but I got so mad when he shoved papa."

Reluctantly unveiling her childish prayers, the truth of her testimony shone white by the tarnished metal of the paid "touter," the bribed policeman, the callous passer-by.

One of the jurors looked at the child with a sudden kindling gentleness in his eyes. It was the man Overman had sensed as the one of the twelve with qualities of leadership.

"He's a married man, too, thank Heaven!"

When the jury found for the plaintiff, and awarded damages beyond Overman's most sanguine expectations, the newspaper which never lost an opportunity of attacking mm, had a scathing editorial on the way in which "the human bludgeon" was allowed to intimidate witnesses. But The Tinsmith laughed softly as he read it, for his reward lay in the fact that he has made substantial the roof over the heads of a lame man and a little child.

_____

19: Behind The Portieres

Edward W. Townsend

1855-1942

In: *Chimmie Fadden, Major Max, and other Stories*, 1895

AT Pierre's they were talking about Johnny's Party. He was not to give the party in the sense of inviting the guests. Col. Bob Billings had made up a studio party, secured a chaperon for the buds, and Johnny— John Ascott— was of course delighted to offer his studio and his services for the occasion.

"What do they do, anyway?" inquired the model, Miss Hennessy. "They don't smoke nor drink; they have no shop to talk. What do they do?"

"No shop to talk!" exclaimed Tommy Paget, who was looked upon as an authority in matters pertaining to the upper world, having an aunt residing therein. "They talk shop more than we do— their shop. Mrs. Jack Daring, the chaperon Col. Billings has been lucky enough to secure, is the most interesting and original woman in town. I've met her at my aunt's. She can just knock you over with her *bel air* or be as jolly and simple as— as— well, as one of the girls here. You know they say that she sometimes joins her husband's stag dinners for black coffee, and takes a cigarette with the men. You never can tell how much truth there is in such stories. But although she has the reputation of being eccentric in that way, she is the one woman in town careful mothers prefer to have chaperon their daughters. She knows what the buds must avoid to escape being wilted, I suppose."

"I should like to hear a real swell woman talk," Mary said, meditatively, holding out her glass for more claret. "I've seen them at the theatres, don't you know, and always wondered what they were talking about— they are always so beautifully groomed."

"Just in what way do you fancy their grooming affects their conversation?" inquired Tommy Paget.

"Don't be funny, Tommy. I spoke of their groomed appearance because it is the most attractive thing about a swell to the eye of the artist."

"Will the eye of the artist kindly cast itself over Sarah, here, and state wherein she, for instance, lacks grooming?"

Mary did look over at Sarah thoughtfully a moment, and then said: " Sarah is the sweetest thing alive, and with her slightly surprised eyes looking at me through the cloud of smoke escaping from her warm and generous mouth, I am smitten with her dearly; but Sarah is— is— ah! is coming around here to assault me."

Mary and Sarah whispered together, and then Mary said:

"Johnny, why can't Sarah and I make a sneak into the dressing-room to-morrow before the party get there? We can peep through the portieres and not be seen."

"Yes, and hear what they say," added Sarah, who had an ambition to write a society novel, and saw a chance to get the only material she thought she lacked.

"You'll do some blooming thing to cause a discovery," objected Ascott, who was specially anxious for the success and propriety of his party, some of his artist friends having secured buyers through parties at their studios.

But one man's objections cannot stand before two pretty women's insistence, and it was arranged as Mary suggested.

The girls were in the studio early the next afternoon. "And it's well we're here!" exclaimed Mary, casting a look of horror about the room.

"A paper bag of lemons, another of sugar, a black bottle of gin, and a siphon of soda are good enough accessories for our gang, Johnny; but they must not be in sight when the swells arrive."

The gin-fizz outfit, as well as several unornamental pipes, glasses, spoons, decks of cards and poker-chips, were hidden in the dressing-room. The banjos, guitars, copper kettles, vases, bits of fabrics, casts, weapons, rugs, furs, and other ornamental accessories were arranged in attractive carelessness; the pictures that it was hoped might find buyers were placed in the best light, and Johnny admitted that the shop looked better as a result of the girls' "fussing."

"Now, sneak!" said the artist, when the guests were heard at the foot of the stairs.

The girls ran into the dressing-room, an alcove separated from the main room of the studio by a portiere extending only up to the spring of the arch. They were seated on a trunk awaiting a safe moment to look out, and making their enforced silence endurable with cigarettes, when an arm was thrust through the portiere parting. A fist shook at them violently, then waved frantically toward the arch. Sarah saw first. Their smoke was lazily winding in gray banners over the portiere pole out into the studio. After a few moments' frightened silence, Mary placed her mouth close to Sarah's ear and whispered.

"Fizz?"

Sarah nodded.

Mary began operations on a lemon with a dull palette-knife and it slipped with a jingle, the glasses clinked, the siphon hissed uncommonly, and the sugar-spoon dropped to the floor with a rattle.

Then Ascott's voice was heard, louder than usual, with a note of hysteria in it:

"Pardon me one moment, Mrs. Daring. I will step into my dressing-room; there is a little sketch there I should like to have your opinion of. Just a moment."

Johnny appeared before the girls, wrapping the portieres about him as he passed through them, so as to leave no opening for observation. He tore his hair, rolled his eyes, and showed every sign of approaching frenzy as he whispered:

"The chaperon suspects. Please don't make such noises! If she discovers you, I am ruined!"

The girls looked humbly apologetic, crossed their hearts, and Johnny withdrew with a sketch he picked up.

Soon the conversation became livelier; groups walked from picture to picture, lounged about the little ante-room where the lunch Col. Billings had ordered was served, and talked art as it is known to the amateur. Mrs. Daring, the chaperon, a splendid Junoesque woman, with beautiful, frank eyes and almost girlish mouth, called to Ascott:

"It is a bore to have your shop talked to you, but I want to ask you to have that Portia— you call it Portia, do you not?— sent to the framer's for me. You have Mr. Daring's office address; kindly let him know the price."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Daring, to care for it."

She was gradually drawing the artist toward the portieres, and did not pause until her dress touched it.

"I like the face exceedingly" she said. Then, suddenly, "You are to be congratulated on your model."

"Have you seen her?" gasped Johnny.

"Seen her! Her face is on twenty canvases in this room. If she were on the stage, her face would be her fortune. Could she act? Is she clever?"

"She is extremely stupid," Johnny said in a slow, distinct voice.

He thought he discovered a smile come and go quickly over Mrs. Daring's face.

"She does not look it," she remarked. "I should really like to see her. One reads such piquant stories about studio models. If I could only see her and not have it known!"

Johnny was in a cold tremble. Mrs. Daring was looking at him with such knowing eyes.

"I dare say," she continued, "she would like to see me as much as I should her."

Johnny almost fainted. "Of course, we would not speak if it would be indiscreet to do so," the chaperon added.

"Well, then," gasped Johnny, who saw that

Mrs. Daring had grasped the situation. "Now! While all the people are over by the lunch!"

With a quick movement, the chaperon was absorbed within the fulness of the portieres. Sarah was hiding her face out of a window, but the model, extremely flushed and defiant, faced the chaperon. The latter regarded Mary through her lorgnette calmly but good-naturedly.

"You are really a very handsome girl, as I supposed," she said in a low voice.

Mary started.

"Oh, they won't hear now; they are making such a noise over the lunch. I was convinced you were here when Mr. Ascott looked so miserable at the cigarette smoke, and started so at the little sound of a spoon and glasses. I'm rather clever about finding out such things. By the way, you did have some glasses, did you not?"

Mary, now quite as self-possessed as Mrs. Jack Daring, turned toward the siphon.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Daring, following Mary's glance. "Can you— a— mix them?"

Mary deftly and rapidly compounded two mixtures in long, thin glasses, and gave one to the chaperon.

After one sip Mrs. Daring whispered:

"Excellent! You see there are several quite young girls in the party, so I told Col. Billings to provide only lemonade and chocolate to drink, but a chaperon requires something more— a— sustaining. Really, this is quite the best I ever drank, and Mr. Daring makes a capital one."

She finished her glass. "Yes, you are quite as handsome as I hoped, and I fancy not at all stupid."

At dinner that night at Pierre's the girls sturdily refused to tell what had happened behind the portieres when Mrs. Daring made her unexpected call there.

"No," said Mary decidedly, "she didn't give us away to her gang, and we won't give her away to ours; but she is a thoroughbred."

20: Great Faithful Heart

F. A. M. Webster

1886-1949

Australian Women's Weekly 5 Dec 1936

"SHE will live, my son, for the fever has passed. But, if you want her to go on living, you must send her home to England to make the grand recovery. She is very weak, and so wasted with fever."

Father La Touche, of the French Medical Mission, patted Dick Hilton reassuringly upon the shoulder and left the sick room.

For a while longer the big Englishman sat quite still as he searched the drawn and haggard features of his once lovely Lalage. She was sleeping peacefully enough now. but the white transparency of her skin was such that the very soul of her seemed to shine through the encumbering flesh.

Presently, his head fell forward upon his arms and his shoulders shook. It was all very well for Father La Touche to talk about sending Lalage home to England, but how was he to And the money to do it? Two years ago, when he had brought Lalage as a bride to his East African home, he was a rich man; but the last year had altered all their fortunes A swarm of locusts had destroyed his crops, an epidemic of rinderpest had devastated his herds, and a recent native rising had ruined his trade. He had been forced to borrow to keep things going, but he fancied that he was now pretty near to the end of his tether.

First, the bank had refused to increase his overdraft, then he had gone to the Mahindi money-lenders; but recently, even the Hindoos had been pressing him to pay off the arrears of the last half-year's interest.

He sat up clasping and unclasping his hands in a silent agony. Wasn't there anyone in the whole colony to whom he could turn for help in his hour of bitter need? He might try Da Souza or Ram Gupta, but he was certain that neither half caste nor Hindoo would agree to increase his debt. There was also de Vere Tracey, amateur big-game hunter in Africa and dilettante man-about-town in England. Rich, handsome, blasé de Vere Tracey could help if he would, but would he want to help?

Richard wondered. He had never liked the fellow; but Tracey had always proved himself mighty attentive to Lalage; perhaps he would agree to foot the bill, as it was for her sake. Dick got up and pitched on his pith helmet. He would go across to Tracey's bungalow and put the business before him right away.

He found the man stretched at full length in a chair, cheroot glowing beneath his moustache, and a long drink at his elbow.

" 'Noon. Hilton," he said languidly, "how's Lalage?"

"Better, thank you. Tracey. She's sleeping now, but it's about Lalage that I've come to talk to you."

The man's eyes narrowed and his lips set themselves in a firmer line. He wondered if this muddle-headed East African farmer-trader had, after all, understood the hidden intentions which lay behind the many little services he had rendered to the charming Lalage, before she fell sick.

"Well?" he queried. "I'm listening."

For a moment longer Dick Hilton hesitated and stammered. At last he burst out:

"Look here. Tracey, it's this way: Father La Touche says that Lalage will never get really fit again until she goes home to England for a long holiday. It is, in fact, a matter of life and death, but I'm so utterly broke that I can't even raise the passage money, let alone the fees that will be required if she is to go to a proper nursing home, until she is fully convalescent."

Tracey did not raise his eyes, as he flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Well?'' he drawled.

"Well," Dick repeated desperately. "I was wondering if you could see your way to putting up the amount that's needed?"

"Why should I? What's to be the quid pro quo?"

"Make it a matter of business," Hilton mumbled, "things are on the mend now. If we don't get another pest of locusts, or more rinderpest, the farm will pay all right. I'd be able to pay you back in a couple of years, and meantime you can charge me any interest you like to name "

"Any interest I like to name, eh? I wonder if you mean that?"

"Mean it? Of course. I do!" Dick answered eagerly.

Tracey's heels hit the floor with a crash, as he swung his long limbs out of the chair. He rose to his feet and stood staring straight into the eyes of his visitor.

"All right." he said evenly. "Lalage isn't well enough to travel alone. I'll take her home for you. I'll give her every comfort and every luxury that money can buy; but, later on, when she's well and strong again, you mustn't prove difficult, if it turns out that we've got fond of each other. It might happen, you know. Anyway those are my terms, and it's up to you whether you take them or leave them. It's a sporting chance, whichever way you look at it, and I'm prepared to make the gamble."

NOT a muscle of the man's face moved, as he made his amazing proposal, but he stood nicely balanced on his feet, and his muscles were half-tensed, as he saw the blazing fury flame up in the blue eyes that stared back at him.

Dick's hard, heavy fists clenched and unclenched themselves, a slight shudder ran through him and he swallowed convulsively, but he mastered his rising passion by a superhuman effort of will. Twice he strove to speak, but finally swung round on his heel and walked away without a word.

As a bachelor, Dick Hilton would have faced his difficulties with a grim smile, and have been free of them long before this. But he had won lovely Lalage, whom a hundred men had courted and a hundred more desired, and he had brought her out here to African loneliness. For her he had worked, for her borrowed, and for her he was prepared to sin, aye, even to the selling of his immortal soul. For the insurance of her happiness and well-being he knew that there could be no sacrifice too great.

And so, when he reached home and found her waking, he went straight to the point, as is ever the way of such blunt natures, although in his own mind he deemed himself most wondrous diplomatic.

"Lalage, darling," he began, as he seated himself at the bedside and took her frail, ivory-white fingers between his great, mahogany-red hands, "how do you feel about Hubert Tracey? I mean to say, is he the type of man you could like tremendously?"

To his amazement she withdrew her hand as quickly as her strength would allow, and then, as she turned her face to the wall, he saw. with an ever-growing, horrified wonder, that a deep blush was stealing up from the white ivory of her bosom to the pure curve of throat and cheek.

"GO away," she whispered feebly. "Oh, why must you worry me when I am so ill? Why must you plague me with such stupid questions?"

The words she spoke should have reassured him, but he was worried nearly to death already; that tell-tale flush of crimson had set him thinking, and a devil was slowly awakening in his heart.

With a sign to a native woman to take his place, he rose and left the room.

Dinner was waiting, but he waved away the native who would have served him, and left his food un-tasted. He did, however, help himself to a liberal allowance of whisky and splashed but the barest modicum of soda-water into the glass.

He was beginning to remember many things and believed that, at last, he was seeing them in their true perspective.

De Vere Tracey was a handsome, devil-may-care sort of fellow and a great raconteur, but he had an evil reputation for his taking way with women. Dick told himself bitterly that he, himself, was too dull and prosaic a sort of beggar to ever hope to hold the affections of a sunshine-lady like Lalage, in competition with Tracey, amidst the utter boredom of the African wilderness.

Then the black mood lifted for a moment. They had been so tremendously happy together, Lalage and he, until her illness had come.

Dick groaned aloud, as his spirit labored and he strove to solve his problem. Out of the darkness, to crouch at his master's feet, came stealing Karamanga, the old Nandi hunter who had served him through twelve hard years when he was building up the lost fortune which had enabled him to marry Lalage.

The native was like some faithful dog, which senses that his master is troubled and, without understanding the nature of the ill, offers the comfort of its silent sympathy.

"*Ugonjwa*, *bwana*?" he suggested.

"No, I'm not ill, Karamanga, only most desperately worried," Dick answered.

The minutes ticked away and neither man nor master moved, save from time to time when Dick recharged his pipe and starred the darkness with the match that lit it.

Dick stretched his weary limbs, and was about to rise and relieve the black woman of her vigil in the sick-room. Then, suddenly, from very far away, a shrill, trumpeting scream rang through the night. Simultaneously Karamanga's hand closed upon his master's knee in a vice-like grip, a native drum began to throb madly and, far and farther off, others took up the message and passed it on.

"Elephants!" breathed the native. "Yes, I know it's an elephant, Karamanga," came the answer, "but what's all the drumming about?"

"*Bwana*, it is the elephant, the great monster of the mountain forests, who is so savage that even the Wandorobo dare not hunt him. and whose tusks are so long that he is said to rest their points upon the ground."

Dick's breath escaped from between his teeth in a slow hiss.

"Ivory! I hadn't thought of that. Are you afraid to hunt this father of all elephants with me, Karamanga?"

"Bwana, I am afraid," confessed the native, "but, nonetheless, I will go with you."

In the darkness Dick's eyes glistened. He had known that old Karamanga would not fail him.

He had heard many times of the lone elephant of the mountain forest; the value of his fabulous tusks would be enormous. If he had those "ivories" all problems would be solved, because, even if he was dead, Lalage would still have the money to take her home, or to leave her independent of Tracey, should she choose to marry the man and come afterwards to regret it.

"And the drums, Karamanga, why are they being beaten?"

"*Bwana*, the message the drums are sending says that the big *tembo* has come down from the mountain and is destroying villages and crops."

"Then that means that he won't be hard to find," said Dick, joyfully. "Go to your hut now, Karamanga, for we start at dawn."

BEFORE the dawn broke, however, Dick Hilton had despatched a runner to the French Mission station with a note asking Father La Touche to come over and take charge of Lalage during his absence upon important business the nature of which he did not specify. Nor, for that matter, did he give his wife even a hint of what he contemplated when he bade her good-bye. Upon the other hand, he left a sealed letter for Father La Touche, giving full instructions as to what was to be done in the event of his death. For some reason he was strangely uneasy about the forthcoming adventure.

Nor was the peculiar apprehension he experienced in any way abated later in the morning when he and Karamanga came to the cave of the local witch-doctor. Old Katawa was squatted at the side of a small, smokeless fire in the opening to his underground habitation.

"I see you, white man," he called "I see you, Katawa," Dick responded, but when he would have passed on the witch-doctor raised a cackling, eerie laugh and beckoned with a skinny hand. At the same moment Karamanga touched his master's arm.

"Ask him to tell us the luck of our fareing, Bwana," he urged.

As Dick approached him, the witch-doctor gathered up the bones and sat nursing them in the palm of his hand.

"You seek riches, white man, and you shall win them."

Again he cast the bones, and now the frown returned.

"A life for a life," he muttered. "You will take a life and must pay with a life in return."

Dick shifted his feet uncomfortably, for he had lived too long in Africa to laugh at the potency of the power of native prophecy.

"And for me?"

Karamanga held out a coin as he asked the question.

Katawa waved the coin aside.

"*Imekwisha Kabissa*. It is finished entirely," he pronounced with an air of grave finality.

After a while, Dick turned to Karamanga as they trudged along.

"If we find the big elephant and he finishes me," he said grimly, "use the second rifle you are carrying, but get him at all costs, and see that the tusks are taken to the Good-man-doctor from the French mission."

Karamanga snapped his fingers uncomfortably.

"I am afraid of that big *tembo*, *Bwana*, but I will try to be faithful," he murmured.

"You've never been anything else in all your life, Karamanga," Dick answered warmly, and the native's dark features were moved to a smile of proud happiness by his master's words of praise.

Soon they were passing through the ravaged village fields which the rogue elephant had raided. The natives greeted the coming of the white hunter with every sign of joy, but not one of them would agree to accompany him to the forest, whither the marauder had recently retired.

Apart from the presence in it of a fabulously big rogue elephant, that forest had an evil reputation, and an evil place the hunters proved it to be. Save for the sudden crashing rush of some beast in hurried flight, absolute silence reigned.

The heat was terrific, and Dick was soon sweating freely, while poor Karamanga sweated with fear. But still the spoor led them on and still Dick followed it, with his jaws set in lines of iron determination.

At last they heard the sounds for which they had been listening— the deep rumble and the sharp flapping of huge ears, which so often betray the whereabouts of a feeding elephant.

Dick stopped dead in his tracks and looked at Karamanga, whose limbs trembled and whose teeth were chattering audibly.

"Pull yourself together," he whispered fiercely; "we've got to go forward."

Karamanga controlled himself, with a great effort, and again they went on. By the mercy of heaven they came almost at once to an open glade.

Then, suddenly, Dick saw him as the leafy screen of foliage at the far side of the glade parted silently and a huge head, adorned with two vast ears aprick, came pushing into view. The ivory the monster carried was all, and more than all, that it had been said to be, both in size and weight and quality, and Dick's heart sang within him at the sight of those great tusks.

It was obvious that the brute was coming back to continue feeding, and the hunters strove to fade back into the fringe of trees. Their very first movement, however, was spotted, and the rogue dashed out into the open, with one ear-splitting scream of rage.

Dick fronted him head on and the situation was desperate, since the tiny, angry red eye presented the only possible target. Cool as a cucumber in face of the emergency, the experienced hunter dwelt on his aim, before he squeezed the trigger. It was a fine shot, but the bullet missed its mark by a hair's breadth and glanced harmlessly off the low, receding skull. The sting of the slight wound served only to enrage the monster still further, and before Dick could

fire again the elephant's foreleg struck his shoulder, and he was bowled clean over. Karamanga, meanwhile, had fled incontinently.

Now while Dick lay upon the ground, with all the wind knocked out of him and quite un-able to rise, the elephant, which had overrun its charge, turned and came back. It stood for a moment regarding its vanquished foe, then lifted up one huge foot as If it was about to stamp him flat into the earth. But that method of finishing the affair evidently did not altogether appeal to it, for suddenly it thrust at Dick with the point of one long, tremendous task. He saw the stroke coming from the right and rolled to the left. When the beast struck with its left tusk he rolled back to the right.

The grim game, however, could not be kept up. At any moment the elephant might kneel and crush him, or it might set one foot upon him, wrap its trunk around any other part of his body, and tear him clean in half.

Luckily, Karamanga was beginning to recover his wits. But still he was very awkwardly placed. From the spot in which he had checked his headlong flight, it was not possible for him to aim for the fatal brain shot between the eye and ear, or the heart shot.

In the end Karamanga begged the question by firing at the elephant's hindquarters, in the hope of distracting his attention. In that respect he succeeded admirably, for the animal left its first victim, and, whirling round, with a scream of rage, made straight for the native hunter.

Karamanga cast the empty rifle from him and bolted for the shelter of the trees, but, just as he reached them, a trailing loop of monkey rope trapped his feet, and he was hurled headlong to the ground. Before he could pick himself up again, he felt the snaky roughness of the elephant's trunk go licking round his legs in a paralysing constriction as close as that of any python's

DICK, although badly shaken and scarcely able to breathe, was on his feet now, had recovered his rifle, and was struggling desperately to reload the weapon, with hands that Shook beyond his power to control them. At last it was done, but even as the rifle-bolt snicked home, driving the cartridge into the chamber, the elephant whirled up the unfortunate Karamanga and dashed him against a tree-trunk, killing him instantaneously.

Dick, turned physically sick by the sight and in agony when he strove to hold his breath, steadied himself for a second, and shot the elephant cleanly through the brain. After that he collapsed and lay unconscious for perhaps half-an hour.

AT LAST he recovered consciousness, hoping against hope that he had been the victim of some horrid dream, but there were the evidences of the tragedy still all too plainly in sight.

He paused only for one last look at the remains of the native hunter, who had served him so well and who had saved his life— and that of Lalage, too— at the last. Then, battered and bruised, he made his way slowly back to the village among the foothills.

There the local chief agreed, to exchange for the elephant meat and in gratitude for the deliverance of his people from the depredations of the monster, to give Karamanga a decent burial and to send the tusks on to Dick Hilton's *shamba*.

Of the long, weary march which followed, Dick remembered afterwards nothing at all. The next thing he knew was that the voice he hated most in all the world was speaking to him.

For a moment the mists cleared from his brain, as he turned aside and tramped up the steps and on to the verandah of his bungalow. De Vere Tracey was there, and behind him Lalage, but his fevered brain did not see her. Tracey regarded his white, drawn face and deep-set, black-encircled eyes curiously. He had the feeling that he was looking into the soul of one who had been down into the nether-most depths of hell.

"Listen," said Tracey, "it was about Lalage I wanted to speak to you. The offer I made the other day holds good, of course; but I'm willing to supplement it if you can see your way to accepting my suggestion, then I'm prepared to see you through your present financial difficulties after Lalage and I have landed in England."

"In other words, you're trying to buy my wife? Well, here's my answer, you swine!"

His fist shot out with all the momentarily regained and concentrated strength of his lean, work-hardened frame behind it, and de Vere Tracey measured his length on the floor boards of the verandah. At the same moment Dick felt a sharp stab of agony shoot through his chest, and then a great darkness seemed to surge up to receive him.

IT was nearly a week later when he opened his eyes, to find Lalage propped up in a long chair at his bedside.

"Dick, my darling," she cried, "you've come back to me. I was so terrified that I should lose you."

"Why, what's happened? I thought you were in bed?"

"I was, but that was weeks ago. You went out and got those wonderful elephant's tusks, you know, Dick; but Karamanga was killed and you came back

with three ribs broken, and one of them had pierced your lung. Father La Touche cant make out how you managed to walk all that way with your lung injured."

A faint smile moved the invalid's lips.

"I didn't," he answered. "The elephant broke my ribs all right, but the lung-piercing business must have happened when I settled accounts with Tracey. You don't care for the fellow, do you, Lalage?"

"Don't," Lalage answered. "He's gone now, and I hope we shall never see him again. Oh, Dick, he was horrid before I was ill, and I didn't dare tell you; I was afraid you might kill him. That was why I was so cross and nasty when you spoke about him just before you went off to shoot that elephant."

Dick stretched out his free hand and drew her to him.

"Let's forget him, Lalage," he whispered; "we're going home to England soon, for a long holiday. But, first, I want to see where they have buried Karamanga; great, faithful-hearted old hunter, he saved both our lives at the last, you know."

21: The Wounded God

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

Cosmopolitan July 1927, as "Little Sweetheart"

In: *Dilemmas*, 1934

THERE were only two really young people in Mrs. Maine's drawing-room that evening and naturally enough they sat apart talking to each other. At least that is how Cynthia Maine would have put it. The young man in fact was dutifully listening and Cynthia was in full flight. The eager thrill of her voice, her face a-quiver, the sparkling intensity of her charming and charmingly dressed person, all suggested that she was satisfactorily solving one of the world's great problems. But she was not. She was debating with her beau— as Cynthia understood debate— where they should go and dance the night away as soon as these tiresome elders had trailed off to their beds. Should it be the Fifty-Fifty, or the Embassy, or the Cafe de Paris? But before the momentous decision was reached, Cynthia suddenly gave up. She leaned back in her chair and her hands dropped over the arms.

"I have been fighting against it all the evening, but I'm beaten," she said moodily. Then she rose abruptly and slipped out between the curtains on to the balcony.

Her bewildered companion found her there. She was leaning, her elbows propped upon the red cushion which stretched along the top of the balcony's parapet, and her hands pressed tightly over her eyes in a vain endeavour to shut out some vision which obsessed her.

"Cynthia, what in the world have I done to hurt you?" the youth asked remorsefully.

Cynthia lifted her face up and stared at him. She found his quite natural question utterly inexplicable.

"You, Jim? Why, nothing of course."

She looked out over the Green Park, and threw up her head as though she was bathing her forehead and her throat in its cool fresh darkness; and drew from it some balm for her agitation.

"This is one of Mummy's parties," she said. "There are people here whom I don't know. People she met this spring when I wasn't with her, at Cairo, or Tunis, or Algiers, or somewhere. So I can't tell which of them is doing it. Can I?"

"No, you certainly can't," Jim asserted stoutly.

Cynthia swerved like a filly when a sheet of paper blows across the road in front of her, and with a frown wrinkling her pretty forehead, surveyed through the gaps between the curtains her mother's guests. Jim looked over her shoulder, frowning still more portentously, and forgot his manners.

"They look as commonplace a crowd as I ever saw gathered together in my life. Not one of them has got anything on you," he said.

"Yes, but there is one of them who isn't commonplace at all," returned Cynthia with conviction. "One of them is doing it."

Jim was half inclined to jest and sing, "Everybody's doing it." But tact was his strong suit on this summer night.

"Doing what, Cynthia?" he asked gently.

"Hush!"

An appealing hand was thrust under his arm and pressed into his coat-sleeve. Cynthia wanted companionship, not conversation.

"I shall have an awful night, Jim, unless we put up a barrage."

Cynthia was very miserable. Jim turned back his hand and got hold of Cynthia's.

"I know. We'll slip out now and get away. I have got my little car at the door."

Cynthia, however, shook her head.

"It wouldn't be fair on Mummy. We must wait. They'll all go very soon. Besides, it is important to me to find out which of them it is who's doing it. Then I can make sure that whoever it is never comes to this house again."

It was an appalling threat, but Jim recognized that it was just. People had no right to do things to Cynthia which would give her an awful night, even across a drawing-room. They must be black-balled thoroughly. Then a dreadful explanation of Cynthia's misery smote him.

"My dear, you are not a natural medium, are you?" he asked in a voice of awe. He turned her towards him and contemplated her with pleasure. He looked her up and down from her neatly shingled fair brown hair to her shining feet. She was a slim, long-legged, slinky creature. All that he had ever heard about mediums led him to believe that as a rule they ran to breadth and flesh. He drew a breath of relief, but Cynthia looked at him very curiously.

"No," she answered after a moment's reflection. "It's just this one thing. I am not odd in any other way. And this one thing isn't my fault either. And there's a very good real reason for it too." She broke off to ask anxiously, "I don't seem to you to be incoherent at all, do I, Jim?"

Jim firmly reassured her.

"No one could be more lucid."

Cynthia breathed her relief.

"Thank you. You are a comfort, Jim. I'll tell you something more now. This thing— somebody in that drawing-room knows about it— has been thinking about it all the evening— has been making me think about it— has come here to-night to make me think about it. And it's a horror!"

And she suddenly swept her arm out across the expanse of the Green Park, from Piccadilly on the north to Buckingham Palace on the south.

"Yes, it's a horror," she repeated in a low voice.

She was watching a dreadful procession go by, endlessly and always from north to south. It moved not in the darkness, but along a straight white riband of road under a hot sun, between pleasant and sunny fields, but in a choking mist of yellow dust. There was a herd of white oxen at one point of the procession, and here a troop of goats and there a flock of bleating sheep. But the bulk of it was made up of old clumsy heavy carts, drawn by old, old horses, and accompanied by old, old men, and piled up with mattresses and stores and utensils, on the top of which lurched and clung old, old women and very young children. It was the age of all, men and beasts, who were taking part in this stupendous migration which gave to it its horror. These were no pioneers. It was a flight. There was one particularly dreadful spectacle, an old man without cart or horse who carried upon his bent back like a sack a still older woman. All through the day, dipping down from the northern horizon and rising to the edge of the southern, the procession streamed slowly by. At nightfall it just stopped; at daybreak it resumed. There would come a moment, Cynthia knew well— it always did come— but after she was asleep— when the procession would begin to race, when the old men and the old horses would begin to leap and jump, grotesquely with stiff limbs, like marionettes—and that was much more horrible. For some of them would fall and be trampled under foot, and no one would mind. But that moment was not yet.

There was a stir in the drawing-room behind her.

"They are going," she said.

Both of these young people turned to the window, and Cynthia laid her hand again on Jim's arm and detained him.

"Wait! Wait!" she whispered eagerly. "I believe we shall find out which of them it is."

They watched through the gap between the curtains all the preliminary movements of a general and on the whole eagerly welcomed retreat, the guests rising as one person, the hostess with just a little less but not much less alacrity and murmurs about a delightful evening coming as if from the mouths of a succession of polite automata. They saw Mrs. Maine turn her head towards a picture on the wall. They heard her say:

"That? Yes, it is quite lovely, isn't it? Let us look at it."

Both Cynthia and Jim fixed their eyes upon the particular guest who had called Mrs. Maine's attention to the picture and now crossed the room with her. A woman, if anything a little below the average height, of an indeterminate age somewhere between thirty-six and fifty, she had no

distinctive personality. She was dark, neither ugly nor beautiful. There was even something ungraceful in her walk.

"She is as commonplace as a sheep," said Jim, meaning that it could not possibly be she who had so disturbed and controlled the shining young creature just in front of him.

"Wait!" Cynthia advised. "Were you introduced to her, Jim?"

"No."

"I suppose that Mummy introduced me to her. But I don't remember anything about her. She was at the other end of the dinner table too."

"It can't be her," said Jim.

Mrs. Maine led her visitor to the picture, a sketch of an old French chateau glowing in a blaze of sunlight. A great lawn, smooth and green as an emerald and set in a wide border of flowers, spread in front of a building at once elegant and solid; and a wide stream with a glint of silver, bathed the edge of the lawn in front. At the sides of the chateau, tall chestnut trees made an avenue and behind the chateau rose a high bare hill.

"Many years ago, my husband and I saw that house when we were touring in France," Mrs. Maine explained. "I fell in love with it and he bought it for me. We spent four months a year there. After my husband died, I still went back to it, but five years ago Cynthia—"

"Your daughter?" interrupted the stranger.

"Yes, my daughter took a distaste for it. So I sold it to a Monsieur Franchard. He made a great fortune out of the War and is very fond of it, I am told."

"That's the woman, Jim," said Cynthia with a little shake in her voice.

But the woman in question showed no further interest in the picture. Jim had a fear lest the very intensity of Cynthia's regard, the concentration of all her senses, should draw that strange woman's eyes to the curtain behind which the pair of them stood concealed. But not a bit of it! The strange woman smiled, thanked her hostess for her evening, shook her hand and waddled—the word was in Jim's thoughts— waddled out of the room. Nothing could have been more banal than her exit.

As soon as she had gone Cynthia slipped back between the curtains and took her place by her mother's side.

"Who was it who was talking to you about the Chateau Dore, Mummy?" she asked in an interval between shaking hands with departing guests.

"A Madame D'Estourie," replied her mother. "She was kind to me in Algiers. She came to London a week ago and called upon me. So I asked her to dinner."

"Algiers!" Cynthia repeated with a start, and to herself she said: "I was right. She must never come to the house any more. I'll speak to Mummy to-morrow."

The room was now empty except for her mother, herself and Jim.

"We are going off now to dance," she said.

Cynthia's mother smiled.

"You have got your latchkey?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Maine turned to the young man.

"And, Jim, don't let her stay up too late. She's going to dance again to-morrow. Good night, my dear."

At the door of the drawing-room Cynthia said:

"Jim, I am going to run up for a cloak and you can start your old car and wait for me in the hall."

She ran upstairs, through her little sitting-room and into her bedroom beyond it. Whilst she was getting her cloak out of the cupboard, it seemed to her that she heard a slight movement in her sitting-room. When she reentered that room she saw that the door on to the staircase was closed; and that Madame D'Estourie was sitting in a chair, waiting for her.

But Madame D'Estourie was no longer insignificant.

"I THOUGHT that you had gone," Cynthia stammered.

Madame D'Estourie smiled at so childish a notion and by her smile made Cynthia feel a child and rather a helpless child— a sensation which she very much disliked.

"I knew of course that you were behind the curtains on the balcony," Madame D'Estourie explained quite calmly. "I slipped into the dark room at the side of the drawing-room and watched for you. I saw you run upstairs. I followed you."

Cynthia was troubled and exasperated. She did something she hated herself for even whilst she was doing it. She became impudent.

"Do you think it's decent manners to come to Mummy's dinner-party in order to spy and intrude on me?" she asked, haughtily lifting her pretty face above the ermine collar of her coat and stamping her foot.

"I didn't give my manners a thought," Madame D'Estourie replied calmly. "I have been searching for you for years. I got this spring the first hint that it was you I was searching for. I became certain to-night. I couldn't let you go for the sake of my good manners."

Cynthia did not pretend any bewilderment as to the object of Madame D'Estourie's persistence.

"I have never spoken about it to anyone, not even to Mummy," she said, yielding a little in spite of herself.

"In that you are to blame," Madame D'Estourie returned relentlessly.

Cynthia's face had lost its resentment. She was on weak ground here. She had no sharp words of rejoinder.

"I hate thinking about it at all," she said in excuse.

"Yet you do think about it."

"At times. I can't help it;" and Cynthia shivered and clasped her cloak about her.

"When you have talked about it, you won't have to think about it. You will be freed from the tyranny of your memories."

Cynthia looked curiously, almost hopefully, at Madame D'Estourie.

"I wonder," she said.

It might be possible that all these recurring nightmares, these obsessions by day were warnings that she should speak, and punishments because she did not. She tried one final evasion.

"I'll come and talk to you one day, Madame D'Estourie, and quite, quite soon. I have to go out to-night."

Madame D'Estourie shook her head, and for the first time in that interview a smile of humour softened the set of her lips.

"It will take you five minutes to tell your story, and the young gentleman in the hall has before now no doubt waited for ten."

Cynthia was no match for her unwelcome visitor. Madame D'Estourie was as undistinguished as Jim had declared. But she had the tremendous power conferred by a single purpose never forgotten for an hour during ten long years. The young girl, gracious, independent, exquisite and finished from the points of her toes to the top of her head, in spite of her belief that the world belonged exclusively to the young, sat obediently down in face of her commonplace and rather dowdy companion and recited her story. Recited is the only suitable word: her recollections were so continuous and so clear.

"I WAS NINE YEARS old that July. On the fifteenth of the month I crossed from England with my governess, passed through Paris and out by the Eastern Railway to Neuilly-sur-Morin, which was the station for the Chateau Dore. Mummy was in London and meant to join me in August. So, you see, my governess and I were caught at the Chateau Dore. Even in Paris, on the Friday nothing definite was known and then at midday on Saturday the Eastern Railway was taken over by the Army. There we were, fifty miles from Paris. Our two motors, every horse under twenty years old, and the farm carts were commandeered the next day. No one could get to us, we could not get away

and no letters or telegrams arrived— not even a newspaper. You can understand that a little girl of nine thoroughly enjoyed it. I was reading with my governess Jules Verne's Career of a Comet, and I used to play at imagining that we had been carried away into space like the soldiers in the garrison. We were indeed just as isolated— except for the noise of the great trains which thundered by to the East at the back of the hill all day and all night.

"Thrilling things too happened in our little village. One morning I found the old schoolmaster and Polydore Cromecq, the Mayor who kept the little estaminet, driving two great posts into the road and closing it with a heavy chain.

" 'Now let the spies come!' cried Polydore Cromecq. 'Ah, les salauds! We shall be ready for them.'

"He took a great pull at a bock of beer and explained to the little Miss as he called me that night and day there was to be a guard upon the chain and no one was to pass without papers.

"Polydore fascinated me at that time tremendously. He was short and squat and swarthy; he had a great rumbling laugh and great hands and feet to match the laugh; and he had an enormous walrusy black moustache, which I adored. For it used to get all covered with the froth of the beer and then there would be little bubbles winking and breaking all over it, until after a time he would put a huge tongue out and lick it all off. He knew how I adored this and used to make quite a performance of it. I watched him now and clapped my hands when he had finished. Polydore burst out laughing.

" 'Good little Miss! Sleep in your bed without fear! No one shall pass. Courage! Courage!'

"Polydore in those days was always shouting 'Courage!' though why I could not imagine. We knew of course that leagues and leagues away soldiers were fighting, but it wasn't real to any of us—yet. Our village was not even on the main road which ran east and west at the back of the hill close to the railway. It was tucked into its own little corner at a bend of the Morin and the by-road which led to it led to nowhere else.

"For three weeks then our village slept in the sunlight, and Polydore shouted, 'Courage! Courage! We shall get them.' Then Polydore shouted no more, and he went about heavy and sour and if he saw me he shrugged his shoulders and said bitterly, 'Of course, it's only France'; as if, because I wasn't French, I had scored some mean advantage over France. For the carts of the refugees began to rumble all day on the road on the other side of the hill, and we heard each day a little nearer the boom and reverberation of the heavy guns, and my governess set to work to install the chateau as a hospital. Then one night, the last night I slept in the Chateau Dore, I heard suddenly in the

middle of a deadly stillness a quite new strange sound. It was as though a boy was running along a path and drawing, as he ran, a stick across a paling of iron rails. It was the first time I had ever heard a machine-gun.

"The next morning, immediately after breakfast, I ran down to the village. The whole of the village council was assembled in the Mayor's office, and the remaining inhabitants were standing silent and crowded together outside watching through the windows the progress of the debate. A rumour had spread that we were surrounded by Uhlans. Everybody believed it. Uhlans! There were peasants who remembered 1870. The mere name carried with it panic and despair. So overwhelming was the dread that when a party of four men in uniform came out from a little wood, at the end of the village, the women and even some of the men began to scream, 'The Uhlans! The Uhlans!'

"The village council broke up in a hurry and rushed into the street, Polydore wiping his forehead with a great coloured handkerchief, and cursing under his breath. The old schoolmaster was the first to recall everybody to reason.

" 'These are French uniforms,' he cried. 'They are Zouaves'; and everybody began to pelt along the streets towards them, cheering at the tops of their voices in their relief. But the cheers dropped as we got nearer. For we saw that three of the Zouaves were supporting and almost carrying the fourth. He was a young lieutenant, almost a boy, and very handsome. He was as white as a sheet of paper, and there was a dreadful look of pain in his eyes, though his lips smiled at us. The blood was bubbling out of his coat at the breast. He seemed to me a young wounded god.

"I forced my way through the crowd and said:

" 'He must be taken to the chateau. There we will look after him.'

"But one of the soldiers shook his head and smiled gratefully.

" 'No, Miss. We must leave him here at the first house. If the bleeding is stopped and he can lie quiet, he may recover. Many do. Besides, we have to find our own company.'

"The first house in the village was a small general store and sweet-shop kept by a Mademoiselle Cromecq, a withered old spinster and a sister of the Mayor.

" 'But he will spoil my furniture,' she cried, standing in her shop door and barring the way.

"A storm of protests rose from the throats of all the other villagers who didn't have to have their furniture spoiled. On all sides I heard:

" 'Did you ever hear anything like it?'

" 'There's a Frenchwoman for you!'

" 'A dirty vixen!'

"Fists were shaken, mouths spat. The only good-humoured people were the soldiers.

" 'Come, Mother,' said the one who had smiled at me. 'Imagine for a moment that this fine lad's your son.'

"They pushed her good-humouredly out of the way and carried the boy into a room at the side of the shop and laid him very gently on a couch. Then the leader of them— he wore a sergeant's stripes— came out again and, walking straight up to me, saluted.

" 'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'at your chateau you have bandages and someone who can nurse. He is a good boy, our young officer. I leave him to you. For us, we have been separated from our battalion— a glass of wine in a hurry— what?— and we go back.'

"Somehow, in the presence of this cheerful— what shall I say?— adequate soldier who knew exactly what he wanted, we all felt emboldened. Polydore ran to his estaminet half-way down the small village street for a jug of wine and some glasses. Meanwhile I— you must remember that I was a child of nine— I ran home as fast as my legs would carry me, my heart swelling with pride. The smiling soldier had singled me out, had confided the young wounded god to my care. Fast as I ran, however, I had not reached the house before I heard a great sound of cheering and looking down from the slope leading up to the chateau, I saw the three remaining soldiers waving their kepis as they hurried back into the wood. I burst into the house with my story and in a minute, my governess with Honorine, one of the servants, and myself at her heels, all of us laden with lint and cotton-wool and bottles of disinfectant, and a suit of pyjamas, were racing back to the little general store.

"The village was still massed outside the shop, still on fire with loyalty. We were welcomed with a torrent of cheers.

" 'Ah, the English women! The English women!' some of them cried—we were popular in France in those days except with Polydore. And an old man of eighty looked at me with a chuckle.

" 'The little one! I wish I had her legs— that's all!'

" 'Yes, she has the legs, the little foreigner,' Polydore added sourly. 'She will be able to run.'

"My governess would not allow me to follow them into the house. So I remained outside, hopping from one foot on to the other in my anxiety, wondering what they were doing to my young wounded god, and praying with all my heart that they would not hurt him. Meanwhile the villagers drifted away. It was summer. The crops had to be got in, the vines to be tended, and there were no young men to help. I was glad when they went. I didn't want them to hear a groan or even a sign of pain from my young god, lest they

should remember it and thereafter think the less of him. But not a sound came through the open window. And all my pride in him was changed into a dreadful fear lest he should have died.

"I remember shutting my eyes and clenching my fists in a refusal to believe it, when I heard Polydore Cromecq grumbling behind me.

" 'It is true, you know. The old one will have her furniture spoilt. All that blood! And who will pay for it? The Government? I don't think!'

"It was the grocer who replied, a little ferrety man:

" 'Yes, they should have taken him to the chateau. What does it matter to the rich ones at the chateau if some of their fine sheets are ruined? They can afford it. He will die? But this is war and he is a soldier.'

" 'It is worse than war,' cried Polydore Cromecq with an oath. 'This is 1870 over again.'

"Suddenly they became silent and I had a conviction that one of them was nudging the other in the ribs and pointing towards me.

"The silence was broken by a new-comer to that group— my old friend, the schoolmaster.

" 'Monsieur le Maire,' he said, addressing Polydore Cromecq in the formal tones which he kept for authority, 'I think that if a wounded officer is brought into this village the enemy must be very near. We hear no good accounts of them from the refugees. I put it to you, Monsieur le Maire, that the women should be ordered to leave.'

"The old schoolmaster was the only man in the village with a cool head upon his shoulders. Polydore Cromecq and the little grocer Gavroche had been occupied by their own little grievances and meannesses. We had lost our hearts and our senses in our enthusiasm over our wounded hero. The proximity of the enemy had been overlooked. Even the Uhlans had been forgotten during the last hour.

"Polydore ran off to make out an order for the evacuation of the village and at the same time my governess called to me from the window of the cottage.

" 'He wants to thank you.'

"I went into the room on tiptoe. The young Zouave was lying in a bed made up on a great couch. His wound had been staunched, he had been washed and dressed in the pyjamas we had brought from the chateau.

" 'You need not speak, Monsieur Henri,' said my governess. He was already 'Monsieur Henri' to them— in his full title the Lieutenant Henri Flavelle of the 6th Regiment of Zouaves.

" 'He has been shot through the lung, but the wound is clean and, if he is sensible, he will get well.'

"The Zouave smiled at me. He was easier now. The look of pain had gone from his eyes. He beckoned me with a little movement of his fingers and I sat down— oh, so gently!— on the side of his bed so as not to shake him.

"'You wanted to take me into your chateau,' he whispered. 'I thank you, little friend. No, you mustn't cry. You heard what Mademoiselle said. I am going to get well.' Then he laughed a little, in spite of a warning shake of the fingers from my governess. 'When I am well and you are grown up, will you marry me, little friend?'

"I clasped my hands together with a gasp. Oh, wouldn't I just!

" 'Good! Then that's settled,' he said, his eyes twinkling with fun, and then he became serious. 'Now listen, all of you! You must leave this village to-night. You have bicycles? Good! Take what money you have and leave secretly after dark. Countries at war are not very safe for young women with no men to protect them. Travel by the by-roads as fast as you can, and not towards Paris. Go south.'

" 'But we can't leave you here like this,' I cried, and he shook his head reproachfully.

" 'What sort of dog's life shall we lead when we are married, if you refuse my first prayer. Promise!'

"Before I could promise, a boy covered with dust and panting for breath burst into the room.

" 'I was sent here from the chateau. It is Mees Lovetear.'

"We were all accustomed to hearing Miss Lowther addressed in that way. My governess held out her hand, and the boy put his hand into his blouse and drew forth a letter. It was from Mummy.

" 'I have got to Barbizon, but cannot get nearer. Come at once on your bicycles. The boy will show you the way.'

" 'You see,' said the Zouave. 'To-night you will go?'

"We promised. The boy had come on a bicycle from Barbizon, and had been two days upon the journey. We sent him off to the chateau to get some food. My governess put a jug of water by the Zouave's bed, gave him some opium tablets, and paid some money to Mademoiselle Cromecq for his nourishment. Then we left him.

"It was a day of events. Opposite the little 'Mairie' I saw our old bearded forest-guardian, Papa Francois, talking to Polydore Cromecq and Gavroche, and the tears were rolling down his face. He was blubbering like a child as he talked...It was horrible to see...And it frightened me. But the moment we got near, Polydore cried 'Chut! Chut!' in a savage undertone and the old forester stopped at once. That frightened me still more. I had a feeling that something horrible was growing and growing in the village, some idea which was

monstrous. I returned to the chateau and whilst we ate a meal and waited for darkness my uneasiness grew until I burst out sobbing as if my heart would break. My governess put my outburst down to terror at our position, to fear for myself. But I wasn't afraid for myself. I hadn't realized that we were in any danger.

" 'It's getting dark already, Cynthia,' she said to comfort me. 'We'll be off in a few minutes'; and she went upstairs to put a few things together.

"I was left alone in the great dining-room. The shadows were deepening in every corner every second. I ran into the kitchen. All the servants had gone already. Only the boy who was to guide us was there finishing his meal.

" 'Gilbert,' I asked, 'which way do we go?'

" 'Over the little bridge at the back of the village, across the Morin, then by the cart-track through Jouy-le-Chatel, Mademoiselle.'

" 'Good! You must take my bicycle with you, Gilbert. I will meet you and Mademoiselle at the gate where the cart-track begins. Tell Mademoiselle and wait for me there.'

"I gave him no time to answer me. I left him gaping at me with his mouth open. I was terrified lest my governess should come down whilst I was still in the house. I ran out by the kitchen and down the avenue of trees. In the village there was only one light burning and that came through the open door of Cromecq's estaminet and lay like a broad yellow blade across the street. I crept to the edge of it and then raced across. But no one had seen me. No one called. I ran on to the cottage at the end of the village. That was in darkness too. I stopped under the window where the Zouave lay and listened. I couldn't even hear him breathing. I raised my hand to tap upon the window-pane. But the window was open. I stood upon tiptoe with my fingers on the sill and could just look in. It was all black— yes, even where the white sheets of his bed should have glimmered.

" 'Henri,' I whispered. 'Monsieur Henri!' But not even a sigh answered me.

"I felt sure that he was dead. I heard myself sobbing. But I had got to make sure. I tried the door. It was locked. I knocked upon it gently at first, then in a fury. There wasn't a sound. The house was empty— empty of all perhaps but the young Zouave. I found a pail, by chance. I turned it upside down and standing on it climbed into the room through the open window.

" 'Monsieur Henri,' I whispered. I was terribly afraid, but I had got to make sure. There was no one on the couch at all. The very sheets had been taken away. I crept over to the corner where I had seen his uniform folded. That too had disappeared. So had his sword which had been leaning against the corner of the wall. There was no longer a trace of him at all. I was seized with a panic as I stood in that dark empty room. I ran to the window and tumbled out of

it—somehow. As I reached the ground I upset the pail. The clattering of it sounded to me like a peal of thunder. I turned to run and someone grasped and held my arm. I gave a gasp and should have fainted, but a rough friendly voice spoke to me.

" 'You, Mademoiselle! What are you doing here? You should have gone with the rest. All the women have gone. There is an order. Don't you know that?' and he shook my arm chidingly. 'My word, how you frightened me! It is not right to frighten an old man like that!'

" 'We are going to-night. Papa Francois,' I answered. 'We are going to Barbizon. But I wanted to say goodbye to the Zouave and make sure that he was comfortable. And he has gone, Papa Francois.'

" 'But of course he has gone. Don't you know? Haven't you heard? They will occupy the village tomorrow morning.' I did not have to ask whom he meant by 'they.' 'They caught me in the forest and sent me back with a message for the Mayor. If a French soldier, a French weapon, even a French uniform is found in Neuilly-sur-Morin, they will burn every house to the ground. We could not leave an officer at the very first house they will come to— the house of Mademoiselle Cromecq too. You see that, little Miss?' Poor Papa Francois was torn between terror for his village and pity for the young officer. Remorsefully he pleaded his necessity. 'The house of the sister of the Mayor. No, then, for sure, everything would be destroyed. So we moved him— but very tenderly. There is a stretcher, you know. We did not hurt him— oh, no.'

"'And where is he now, Papa Frangois?' I broke in.

"The old man hesitated and blundered. Oh, it took ages to get the truth out of him, as he grumbled and quavered and whispered in that dark street.

" 'It is the only place...He is safe there...The village too. And after all it is not so bad. Bah! He is a soldier. He has slept in many worse places this last month...'

" 'Where? Where?' I insisted.

" 'It is in the Fire-shed. But it is only for an hour or two. To-night Monsieur le Maire and Gavroche will carry him across the Morin and hide him safely in a farm—'

"But I did not wait to hear more excuses. I tore my arm free from Papa Francois and darted across the street. Yes, we had a Fire-shed at the back of the estaminet, on the river bank— a miserable little hut filled up with our little hand-drawn fire-engine, and with a mud floor. Oh, I was not afraid any longer. I was mad with passion, the passion of a little girl nine years old for a young god, in a uniform too, dropped out of the clouds, wounded— a young god who had asked her to marry him. And they treated him like that! Once more I

hadn't a doubt who 'they' were— Polydore Cromecq, and his sister whose furniture would be spoilt by a bleeding man, and little Gavroche, the grocer!

"Skimming along in the darkness, with my heart all upside down, I nearly ran headlong into the vine-covered trellis work which stretched out into the road on each side of the estaminet and made a shelter for the little tables. I pulled up in time, however, and the next moment I was crouching against the vine-leaves, holding my breath, listening—that is, listening as well as the beating of my heart would allow me.

"For just on the other side of the trellis, seated at a little table in the corner where the light from the open door could not reach, there were Polydore and Gavroche, drinking. They must have heard me, I was convinced, but they had not, and immediately I learnt why.

"The neck of a bottle rattled on the rim of a glass and Polydore in a thick wheedling voice said:

"'Another glass, old comrade! I do not bring out such brandy as this for every client. No!'

" 'It is good,' answered Gavroche. 'We need such drink for our work. To save this little corner of France, eh, my friend.'

"They were both of them half drunk. I did not trouble my head about what they were saying. They talked of France, they thought of themselves. But they had not yet carried my wounded god across the river. I slipped by the side of the house through the grass to the little Fire-shed. It was very dark that night, but I had the eyes of a cat and I could see the triangle of the roof against the sky. The door was unlocked. I pulled it open.

"'Monsieur Henri,' I said in a low voice, and he answered from my feet. There was just room for him to lie across the shed between the engine and the door, and they had laid his stretcher there on the mud floor.

" 'You little angel!' he whispered in a startled tone. 'What are you doing here? You should have gone hours ago.'

"I dropped down on my knees beside him. He was shivering with cold.

" 'The brutes! The brutes!'

"He lifted a hand and laid it over my lips.

" 'Listen, little one! Before you go. You must never mention to anyone, not even to your mother, one word about what has happened to-night. Promise me? For the honour of France!'

" 'I don't understand,' I sobbed.

" 'But you will, dear. Kiss me once! Thank you! Remember! For the honour of France! Now go!' and since I did not move, his voice strengthened suddenly. 'Then I shall sit up and that will kill me.'

" 'No, no!' I prayed, and I sprang to my feet— and through the open door we both heard the Mayor and Gavroche encouraging one another drunkenly as they stumbled through the grass.

" 'Look quickly! Do they carry a lantern?' Henri asked. He was frightened now— since the morning of that day I have never been able to mistake the sound of fear in a man's voice— but frightened for me.

" 'No, they have no lantern.'

"The Zouave drew a breath of relief.

" 'Then run! Run, little betrothed one, as fast as you can, as silently as you can. Oh, whilst there's time, my dear.' His head fell back upon the pillow. 'You see I can do nothing!'

"There was such an agony of appeal in his voice that I slipped round the side of the shed at once. I hid behind a bush on the river bank and I heard Polydore utter a startled oath as his hand knocked against the open door of the shed.

"'So you have had a visitor, my Lieutenant,' he said, and I never heard geniality ring with so false a note.

" 'I?' replied Henri, and he spoke as loudly, as warningly as he could. 'I was stifled in here. I pushed the door open with the one hand I could use.'

" 'Yes, it is bad,' Gavroche agreed. 'But all that are left in the village are asleep now. We can carry you, my Lieutenant, to a place where no one can betray you. Gently! Gently! So!'

"The two men moved away from the shed with the stretcher between them. Yes, but they didn't carry it eastwards towards the bridge but westwards where there was no bridge at all. They were drunk— that was what I thought— they had mistaken their way. I ran out from the hedge— I was on the point of calling to them— when I heard an oath and one of them stumbled—or seemed to stumble. I heard a loud splash, I saw in the darkness a sudden swirl of white as the river broke into foam, and above the sound of the splash a cry rose in a clear young vibrating voice:

"'Run! Run!'

"A cry to me! But I was paralysed by the horror of the accident. For a moment I couldn't run. Then I did— towards the spot where the accident had happened. I was close to them when a dreadful thing happened. The wounded Zouave's head rose above the water, his hands clutched at the bank, and I saw Polydore Cromecq raise a great stick and beat with all his strength upon the knuckles. A groan answered the blows, and the Zouave with a groan sank again beneath the water.

"The two men remained kneeling upon the bank, peering into the darkness, listening. Polydore said:

" 'It is over now.'

"And Gavroche replied:

" 'Yes, it is over. We had to think of our village, hadn't we? Yes, yes, we had to think of France.'

"Then they stood up and saw me just behind them. Now, indeed, I ran, with both of them at my heels, in and out amongst the bushes along the river bank, towards the bridge. Polydore Cromecq had grudged me my young legs that afternoon. He grudged me them still more during these minutes. I heard the two men crushing through the grass after me, panting, swaying, but I gained on them. Then Polydore raised his voice:

" 'Little Miss, wait for me! Come back to the estaminet and wish us good-bye! You shall see me drink a bock and the little bubbles wink on my big moustache. That will be amusing— what? For the last time, eh? It is good to part with a laugh.'

"But I ran the faster. I crossed the bridge. My governess and the boy were waiting with the bicycles at the gate.

" 'Quick, please, quick,' I cried. 'I will tell you afterwards.'

"My governess was the woman for an emergency. We were off down the cart-track on our bicycles when Polydore and Gavroche crossed the bridge.

" 'Little Miss! Little Miss!'

"The cry rang out, once, twice, and each time fainter. Then we heard it no more. I never did tell my governess afterwards of the crime which was committed that night— no, nor anyone, since my Zouave had forbidden me. But I have broken my promise to him to-night. The cruel thing is that 'they' never did enter the village. For they began their retreat the next morning."

CYNTHIA ENDED her story. For a minute the middle-aged woman and the girl stared into the unlit grate. Then Madame D'Estourie said slowly:

"For the honour of France, he said."

"Yes. I didn't understand what he meant. I do now, of course. It's better that nothing should be said. War makes some men monsters."

Madame D'Estourie stood up.

"And many women, childless," she added.

Cynthia looked quickly at her.

"But Madame D'Estourie," she began, and her visitor interrupted her.

"I was Madame Flavelle, before I was Madame D'Estourie. Your wounded Zouave was my boy. For six years I have been searching why he died and meaning to exact justice to the uttermost farthing. But— for the honour of France— he said," and she let her arms drop against her sides in resignation. She turned her eyes to Cynthia. They were wells of pain. "I may kiss you?" she

asked. She held the girl tight to her breast. "Thank you! Thank you!" she whispered in a breaking voice. She let her go and wrapped her cloak about her throat.

"Now," she said in a cheerful voice. "We shall go downstairs together."

But Cynthia drew back. Madame D'Estourie, however, would have none of it.

"No, no, that won't do," she cried. "That poor young man has been waiting in the hall more than his ten minutes. Let us go to him. And I think that old misery, now that you have told it to me, will not haunt you any more."

She put her arm tenderly about Cynthia's waist and they went down the stairs. But half-way down Madame D'Estourie ran forward with a little sob, as though her self-restraint at last was failing her. When Cynthia reached the floor, she found Jim seated patiently on a hall-chair, exchanging consolatory phrases with a no less patient butler.

It did not occur to Jim to complain, nor on the other hand did it occur to Cynthia to apologize. She said:

"Oh, Jim, I don't want to dance to-night. Be an angel, will you? Drive me down the Portsmouth road as far as Ripley and back, will you?"

Jim's face lit up with a smile.

"Cynthia," he said, "there are bright moments in your young life which give me hopes for your future;" and he went outside and cranked up his car.

22: Scaffolding

Isabel Ecclestone Mackay

1875-1928

Macleans Magazine, 1925

Canadian author and poet. This text is from Faded Page. I can't establish the specific issue of Macleans in which it first appeared.

HE WAS one of those men who, in a natural environment, are as unnoticeable as a twig upon a tree. Outside of such environment one notices them. And, for the man I speak of, the Placid Club seemed to be outside. Curiosity stirred to the question "How does he happen to be here?"— a small speculation, but small speculations seem to attract some people, myself among others— a fact which accounts for my acquaintance with Horace G. Benwell.

He used to sit in that corner over there and, from behind a newspaper, contemplate his fellow members. If he wished to speak with them he was accorded satisfying attention and sometimes his company was deliberately sought, but he never seemed to know any of them well. The reason for this I knew as soon as I heard his name. Even I, who observe politics from afar, knew that "Horace G." was Douglas Fenton's chief of staff and Douglas Fenton was (with capitals) the Coming Man.

I haven't used the real names of either of them, for it is the human aspect of the story which interests me, not its political significance. One doesn't often catch a glimpse of Satan being naive.

Mr. Benwell, I found, was an easy man to know. That is, all that one ever did know of him was readily accessible. Also he was always willing to chat about his increasingly important chief. It wasn't until afterwards that one realized how little he had said. He was a discreet man. Outside of his "heel of Achilles," he was an invulnerably discreet man. Unfortunately, his vulnerability was of the expanding kind. It began after the third cocktail. He made it a point to stop at three. Except sometimes.

One day I happened to be handy when he ventured upon a fourth. Douglas Fenton had been in, and, after a brief but animated conference with Benwell, had gone out again. They both looked pleased. Benwell beckoned a waiter, was quickly served, and, as he set down his empty glass, looked at me and smiled. There was a subtle quality in that smile which made me feel that the hour was propitious.

"I made that man," said Benwell, sinking complacently back into his padded chair.

I managed just the right note of interest— and incredulity.

"I guess it's no secret to anyone who knew us in the old days," a touch of pique was evident. "But there's not so many of them around as there used to be. Kind of new about here yourself, aren't you?"

I said I had been out of the country for several years and that the exigencies of travel made it impossible for me to follow things at home as closely as I would have liked. "But I have heard," I added, "that Fenton's success has been phenomenal. I suppose you knew him as quite a young man?"

"Before that," said Benwell. "I knew Doug when he was just a boy." (He looked at his empty glass and a waiter brought him a full one.) " 'Twouldn't be saying too much to say I was the first man who ever did know Doug. He was delivery man for a dry cleaning works, Scanlon's Renovatory, when I first took notice of him. He used to come and fetch my spare pair of pants. Only had two pair in those days, used to wear one pair while the other was getting pressed, so Doug was a regular visitor. He didn't believe in letting customers get slack. You've heard them talking about Doug's 'personality'? Well, he had it then just like he has now. I had a feeling from the first that he was a lad who had something waiting around the corner. Mebby it was that queer blue in his eyes. I watched him sort of close and it struck me he had all the makings— if he could get away from his one big fault."

"He had one big fault?" I insinuated idly.

"Sentiment," said Horace G. "Sentiment. Couldn't have had a worse one. Wouldn't ever run light enough. Always wanting to drag along deadweights— *you* know."

I didn't know. In fact, I repressed a shrug. For if there was one thing which Douglas Fenton was famed for not doing—

"I'll give you an instance," said Benwell argumentatively. "There were two of them doing the delivery for Scanlon. Doug was the under man, taking care of the casual fetch and take. Jim— forget his other name— was on the delivery rig and had a regular route. One day Doug came around looking sort of worried. 'What's doing?' I asked.

" 'Oh, nothing,' says he, 'only I'm in a kind of fix. Old Scanlon wants me to take over Jim's route.' 'What's the matter with that?' says I. And he just looked sullen and kicked his feet on the doorstep.

" 'You come in here, son,' I said, and right there I put it to him how he was going to scrap his chances if he didn't pull up. In business, I told him, a man has got to grab and grab quick and devil take the other fellow. 'You've got it in you to get on,' I says. 'And I guess you know it. But you've got a weak spot. You're sentimental. Big business isn't laid out for sentimental men.'

" 'Jim's a friend of mine,' says he.

"He looked so stubborn I saw I'd made the first pill a bit too strong.

" 'What good'll you be doing Jim if you refuse to take his place?' I asked, reasonable enough. 'Scanlon's going to fire Jim anyway. He's not liked on the route. They'll put a new man over you and you'll have lost your first step up— for what? For nothing at all,' says I.

"He went away with his head down... But the next time my spare pants went it was a new boy that fetched them. Doug was driving Jim's route.

After that he steered kind of wide of me for a time but presently we were seeing each other as usual. There was quite a bit of space in the shed behind my place and I used to let Doug have it for what he called his 'tryings out.' He was always trying out something. He never had any intentions of staying with a delivery route long. And, with what he'd picked up at Scanlon's and what he kept learning of chemistry and things, he had some ideas in the cleaning and dyeing line that he thought a whole lot of. I never pretended to know what he was getting at but I'd have backed him any time to get it. And he did. It was about six months after he'd been taken off the delivery and put into the business itself that he came to me with that blue in his eyes so bright it would make you blink. 'Ben,' says he (always called me 'Ben,' short for Benwell) 'Ben, I've got something— come on out into the shack.'

"What he'd got was 'Fenton's Ready Renovator.' You've heard of it, of course. It's a back number now, but in its time it was a winner. I can see our first 'ads' now: 'Fenton's Ready Renovator— It's a Surprise!' And it was. It surprised half the money out of all the renovatories in the country and put it into our pants' pockets."

Benwell supped his cocktail with a reminiscent smile.

"It was over that that I read the riot act to Doug the second time," he said, with relish. "Scanlon got after him and put it to him how, if this new 'home treatment' caught on, it was going to eat into the renovating business— said it would ruin him— offered to make Doug manager— offered him a partnership if he'd only forget it and stick to the ship... trotted in his wife and kids, all that sort of bunk. And Doug almost fell for it. Almost, but not quite. I put it to him plain enough that if he couldn't stand out against old Scanlon he'd better cut his business throat at once. 'Let Scanlon sell his fusty old business,' says I, 'and put his money in our new company. Let him take the risks if he wants the profits.' But I knew the old feller wouldn't do it— too old and all tied down with an expensive family. So it jest came to cutting loose and leaving him to sink or swim.

"I won't deny that I had some trouble over it. But I just sat tight and used reason like I had before. 'A business man's success,' says I to Doug, 'is like that building going up over on Main Street. It's got to have scaffolding— at first. But what kind of building would it be if the builder kept on cherishing the scaffold

after the bricks got fitted in? No,' I says, 'the scaffolding has got to come down. And that's how you've got to learn to look at people, son. The men you use while you're building up can't be kept hanging around after you've done with them. That's business and you might as well face it soon as last.' Well, purty soon Doug was running his own factory and turning out the 'Ready Renovator' so fast you couldn't see it go."

"And Scanlon?" I asked (for, as I said before, these little curiosities interest me).

My companion was plainly surprised. "Blamed if I know," said he. "We didn't stay in that burg once we got going." He looked at his emptying glass doubtfully.

"What did you do next?" I asked hastily. The inclusive "you" was an inspiration. The little man cocked his sparrow-like eye appreciatively.

"Well, we could see that there was lots of room at the top in the dye business. Time was coming when we'd want our own dyes in this country and want them bad. Doug said he didn't know enough chemistry (or whatever it is) to handle that, so he set out looking for somebody who did. And almost at once we run across old Otwell Sells. Otwell Sells, according to Doug, was a genius. Anyway, he was just about as useless as that sort usually are. Not a business bone in his body— and his body was all bones. As for his brain, he kept it up to working pitch by keeping it in soak. Given the proper brand and lots of it, he was capable of turning out some surprising stunts in the line Doug wanted.

"He liked Doug too. Most people did— and do. That's where that 'personality' gets its innings— the thing I'd banked on from the first. Doug took old Otwell and his daughter out of a third class lodging house and set them up in a new little place with an experiment room in the back, all complete. He saw to it that the old man had enough of his special fancy and of a quality that wouldn't poison him quite so quick and says he: 'You know what I'm after Sells. Go to it.'

IT worked well from the start until the daughter, Martha, her name was, tried to throw a monkey-wrench in to the machinery. She was a pretty girl, Martha Sells, not the fluffy kind, neat and trig, with black hair so soft and fine it fitted her little head like it belonged there and her eyes were kind of wide, quiet grey eyes and her face had every line clear like it was carved. She knew a thing or two, too— educated and all that. But business was one foreign language she'd never learned. And didn't want to. That girl hadn't a scrap of the go-get-it, not a scrap!

"Well, she came to Doug and says she: 'Mr. Fenton, you've done a great deal for my father. You've picked us up out of squalor and worse, but—' and then she hit right out and wanted to know how it was that in spite of all her care, the old gent kept getting all the business-fluid he needed right in his own work-room so to speak. All the time she was speaking, she kept looking at me. I suppose she thought I looked nearer like the right party than Doug.

"Doug's eyes began to seem thoughtful before she'd done and I knew that look well enough to hurry her out of there quick until I could edge in a word myself. I told her to wait in the next room and then I did some quick thinking before I went back to Doug.

He didn't wait for me to begin.

" 'If it's true what she says and the old man's killing himself with the very best liquor'— says he, 'we've got to stop it, that's all.'

" 'Do you think,' says I, 'that he'd die more comfortable if he went back to eighty per cent. poison— like he had before we got him?'

" 'She thinks he might be brought to break off— gradually,' says he.

" 'But we know better, don't we?' I asked him, reasonable as always. 'And we also know that if the stuff's cut off, his work's no good to us, nor ever will be. That thing you call his genius won't splutter even unless its wick's kept soaked.'

" 'We can't kill him, for all that,' says he, stubborn.

"In the end I had to give in part way. We agreed to let the young lady try her hand and, if the results were as good, or pretty near as good, as we'd been getting, we'd be content and the arrangement could stand.

"Of course the whole works went to pot, just like I knew they would. Weeks went by and nothing was done. And finally the girl's pride brought her back to Doug.

" 'We're not earning a cent,' says she. 'We'll have to go back where we came from. I can get a place in a department store.'

" 'Yes, you could, but if your father is left alone—' said Doug in that thoughtful way of his.

" 'I know,' says the girl, and she kind of broke down.

"That was where Doug's personality began to work. I can't tell you just how he put it to her. But the way he put it, it seemed all right. He sort of made it seem as if her father and her father's work were one and the same and, if she cut him off from the working part of him, she was robbing him of himself. Also he pointed out that a certain amount of stimulant was a necessity he couldn't now break away from. It was as necessary to life as air. And personally, he, Doug, would undertake that there would be a minimum— just enough for him to live and work on, no more. On the other hand, if she took the old man back

into poverty and left him alone to poison himself on the streets— he'd die a good deal sooner and less decently, didn't she see that?

" 'Isn't there any *other* way?' says she, looking at him straight.

"I was afraid for a minute then. But Doug had had a few weeks to taste possible failure in and it had stiffened him. He came through like I'd hoped.

" 'There is no other way,' he said.

"So old Otwell went to work again and he and me had a little private understanding that when the 'minimum' was getting on the short side he was to give me the high sign. I took mighty good care that the girl never could prove anything and, for what she suspected, I let her put all the blame on me. We hadn't had the old man working for us, under these conditions, more than six months when he got us something that hit the trade right in the eye— yes, sir, it was a bullseye, right enough. Our arrangement was that anything he got while we were staking his experiments went to us but Doug; weakened a bit, insisted on giving them a per cent. I pointed out that, beside being against our principles, this was dangerous because it would make them independent. And if Miss Sells wanted to ship her dad off to a sanatorium—? Doug just kind of smiled at me and I stopped, sensing that he'd got something up his sleeve.

" 'I'm about through with the dye business anyway, Ben,' he says. 'It's not the best background for a public man—'

"Well, he was right in that. He always had an eye ahead.

" 'You see,' he went on, with that queer smile, 'I've got enough money out of it now to make a change. The dye business was scaffolding, Ben. That part of the building is finished. It's time to take the scaffold down.'

" 'Good,' says I. 'Then they can have their per cent. and Miss Martha can shut the old gent up and cure him all she wants to.'

"He looked at me and I never saw his eyes so blue.

" 'I am thinking,' says he, 'of asking Miss Sells to marry me.'

"That was a bomb! I can never be thankful enough, that I had sense to be quiet— until I got my breath. For, of course, I saw that if he did it, that would be the end of him. Martha Sells was a nice little woman, but there were all kinds of limits in those eyes of hers and she had no more go-get-it— well, she hadn't any at all!

"I managed to get away without saying much and, I thought hard. There was a loop hole— only one. Something I knew about and he didn't. Something the old man had let out one night when I was supplementing his 'minimum.' Martha Sells had been married before.

"Oh, she was free enough— as far as that goes. She had no call to name herself by her husband's name. The divorce was there all o.k. But, from

something the old man let drop, I had my doubts as to which of the two had done the divorcing.— See?"

I saw. And I saw also that the narrator's glass was empty. Would he realize how many times it had been that way? I fancied he stared at me in a puzzled manner as if asking himself whom he was talking to anyway. If the old habit of discretion should close the story now! An almost overpowering impulse urged me to play tempter in my turn. Easy enough to say "Have another?" But somehow the business of tempting seemed suddenly horrifying. That story to which I was listening.— Fortunately, he beckoned the waiter himself, and went on.

"I knew Doug hadn't spoken to Martha yet. And I guessed he wouldn't be in too much of a hurry, as he was pretty well rushed with other things. It was at the time he was expecting the nomination for— well, the nomination he was out for. I guessed he'd wait till he had that off his mind before he took on anything extra.

"Meantime I got busy. I didn't employ any agents. They might be awkward later on. But I nosed around myself. It wasn't hard. There hadn't been any attempt made to hide the facts. Martha Sells, I found, had been married when she was just nineteen years old to Joseph Eagles of Cleveland. Mebby you've heard of the Eagles Art Stores there? A wealthy high-stepper, just twice her age. Within a year he'd divorced her. Perfectly plain case. She'd walked out of his house one day with another man. After that, what happened didn't seem so clear. The second venture must have been even worse than the first. She went back almost at once to her father and she's been living with him, hand to mouth, ever since. Of course, a sentimental party could guess a whole lot if they liked, especially after they'd looked up the private record of Mr. Joseph Eagles. But it wasn't my business to do any guessing. I wanted a few cold facts and I got them.

"Doug got the nomination, too. We had a quiet celebration on that. And it was then that I decided to say something.

" 'I know you don't like remarks about your private business, Doug,' I says, 'but I'm glad you changed your mind about— er— Miss Sells in time.'

" 'What do you mean?' says he, cold as ice instanter. 'I have not changed my mind in any way regarding Miss Sells.'

"I did my little best to look sort of puzzled. 'But,' says I, 'you've got the nomination.'

" 'What's that got to do with it?'

"I jest stared at him for a minute. He'd got my point and I could afford to pull back.

" 'Oh, well— ' I said, like one who wants to drop the subject. I made as if to go home.

" 'No, you don't!' says he. 'I don't know what you're getting at. But I'm going to know within the next five minutes. What has my acceptance of the nomination got to do with my possible engagement to Miss Sells?'

I didn't tell him all at once. Let him pull it out gradually that she was a divorced woman. He was kind of grim about the mouth but, after taking it in, he said, 'I think we can face that. Public opinion isn't what it used to be on the divorce question. A woman who has had to divorce her husband— '

" 'Oh— if it was *that*!' says I, surprised like. 'Yes. We could risk that. But, you see, she didn't. He divorced her.'

"I thought he was going to knock me down. And I guess he did call me a liar.

" 'I'll see her in the morning,' says he. 'And you'll come with me.'

"Mebby he didn't sleep much that night. I don't know.

"He didn't tell her we were coming. But she was the kind that don't need to be told. She had a way of looking jest as nice in the morning as in the afternoon. Not a hair out of place and the right kind of dress and all just so. She was excited, too, about the nomination and it made her— well, pretty good to look at.

" 'Martha,' says he, without any preliminaries, 'there's an ugly report going around about your former marriage. I don't know why you never mentioned to me that you had been married— except that it really has been no business of mine, up to date. You'd have told me all right when the time came. I know that. Someone has got the thing twisted. They say that Eagles— that's the name, isn't it?— was the petitioner. That he— in fact that he divorced you.'

"I wasn't looking at her when he said that. I felt I'd just as soon not. I hadn't anything against Martha Sells. If she'd have left Fenton alone, I'd have left her alone. I don't believe in throwing folks out of the way unless they happen to be in it. And Martha was a pretty girl.

"Presently I heard her say in that nice voice of hers, only sort of breathless—

" 'Well, so he did.'

I wanted to get out then and I was moving to the door, sidewise, when she stopped me. Says she, in a polite way, 'Mr. Benwell had better stay. You say he knows the facts. Probably he would enjoy telling them better than I should.' She was perfectly cool. Kind of thoroughbred, she was. 'Go on!' says she, with a sort of whip in her voice.

"I did. She'd asked for it. And she got it. When I'd finished:

" 'Well?' says she, looking at Fenton.

"He'd wheeled around and was staring out of the window. Right opposite him was an empty lot hidden by a hoarding. And on the hoarding was his own name in big letters. 'Fenton and Clean Government!'

"When he didn't answer, I thought she was going right out of the room without another word. But— well, I guess her pride wasn't quite up to it. She cared a lot— and she couldn't go without one more try. She began kind of slow.

" 'Your— friend— hasn't got quite all the facts, after all,' says she. 'I've never told them. But I'll tell them to you, Douglas, if you care to hear!' He didn't give any sign but she went on. 'You've heard that I was married at nineteen but you haven't heard that I was fresh from a convent school in Montreal. I had been taught there that in the matter of marriage a decent girl accepts her father's choice. I don't blame father. He simply didn't know. You can understand that, since you know father. He had a vague idea that the proper thing to do with a young girl is to get her married as quickly as possible. He called it 'happily settled'." She smiled the queerest kind of smile. 'He felt that his own Bohemian atmosphere was not suitable for a daughter.

" 'As for me, all that I saw in Mr. Eagles was a pleasant, courteous man, much older than myself but inclined to be more kindly on that account. I did not know, could not have dreamed, that a man like the real Joseph Eagles existed. If anyone had attempted to tell me the first letter of the truth about him I should simply not have understood the language.

I do not intend to indulge in that language now. If you wish to know what the man I married was like, there are ways of finding out. But not obvious ways. Mr. Eagles has a fetish and his fetish is respectability. It seems incredible, but it is true. Doubtless he is a little mad.

" 'This fetish of his was the one thing which saved me. I tried other ways. I ran away. I was found and brought back. Two private detectives located me, and one evening "escorted" me right back to my own door— and inside it. There was no place on earth where I could have gone, so long as I remained respectable, where I would not have been found and brought back. But I had reached a point where means meant nothing to me. And my brain, when it wasn't half mad with disgust and horror, was clear enough. One day I walked out of Mr. Eagles'— er— establishment with another man. We went openly to a down town hotel. I cannot even now pretend to altogether understand the motives of the man who helped me except that he was a decent sort with some sense of pity for my youth and perhaps not without a private willingness to do Mr. Eagles a disservice. At any rate, he took no advantage of my need. He knew what I wanted and helped me loyally. In a few days I disappeared. I went home to my father and might have gone to Timbuctoo unmolested. Mr. Eagles

did the only thing possible to a man of high respectability under such circumstances. He divorced me. The man who showed me how to get away I never saw again. But I can give you his address.'

There was a rather horrid silence.

" 'It— isn't necessary,' stammered Fenton. I knew that little stammer of his and I was glad I'd stayed.

"As for his nomination, I wasn't worrying any more about that. He'd seen clear enough that he was up against a straight choice. He could no more have stood for election with that story dragged out about his promised wife than remake Public Ideals. No, he couldn't. And he knew it."

I stared at him, fascinated. The walls of the little suburban parlor which held Douglas Fenton and Martha Sells and— Satan fell from around me slowly. Its nameless atmosphere dissolved in bitterness against my lips. I shook myself and rose.

Benwell was getting to the drowsy stage. He yawned.

"That was the last real trouble I had with Doug," he murmured. "He wasn't ever as difficult after that. Kind of more shell to him— harder. Jest what he needed. Don't believe he ever felt really grateful to me though. Don't *feel* to me jest like he used to. But he's got on. It just shows that the public likes a straight man. Doug's straight. Always does what he promises. But he don't promise much. He'd laugh if you tried to 'fix' him. Isn't the little side things he's out for. And he's building up, building up. But where'd he been if it hadn't been for me?"

"I wonder," said I.

THAT SAME WEEK I was off again to the end of nowhere. And meantime the world marched as usual. When I next visited the Placid Club, it seemed the only thing that had stood still. Douglas Fenton certainly hadn't. He had moved— a long way. I saw him, not at the Placid, but at the Placid's brother club in a larger city. He towered there as he had towered here. He was building up— very near the top now! But although he had moved he hadn't changed. He had "set," I fancied, years ago a face and figure which might become historic. One sees faces like his on old coins.

I had been back a week when, strolling into the Club one night, I saw Horace G. Benwell in his old place behind a newspaper. But it wasn't Benwell as I remembered him. This man was no longer like a million other men. He had fallen in, withered. He was a man whom some blighting Finger had touched.

"Why!" said I, when we had greeted each other. "What are you doing here? Why aren't you with the big chief? I saw him as I came through. He— "

Something in his lost look broke me off.

"I'm not with Doug now," said the withered little man. "Haven't been since, well, since almost the last time I saw you here. Remember?"

I nodded, and sat down.

"You've heard about Doug and me?" He asked the question listlessly as if the answer were a foregone conclusion.

I shook my head. "I haven't heard much of anything. Just got back from Outside. What was the row?"

"Oh, there wasn't any rough stuff. Nothing like that. One day Doug sent for me. He said he thought we'd better get things straight. 'If we've got to part,' says he, 'we'd better part before there's any unpleasantness. I had to turn you down in public yesterday, Ben,' he says, 'and that's the second time in a fortnight. I don't want to have to do it again. It reflects on us both. Better shake hands and end it.'

"When I saw how blue his eyes were I knew he'd ended it already."

"Do you mean to say he did it— just like that?" My tone was indignant. Somehow, Satan, fallen, seemed only pitiable.

He shuffled his paper nervously.

"Well, you see, Doug has gone a long way since I first took notice of him. He's pretty well on to the finishing touches now. He don't need me."

"Didn't he give any reason? Didn't he say why?"

The small sparrow-like eyes grew vague.

"Well, he did say something about scaffolding," said the withered little man.

———————

23: The Case of the Ward Lane Tabernacle

Arthur Morrison

1863-1945

The Windsor Magazine, June 1896

Among the rivals of Sherlock Holmes was Martin Hewitt, who, in contrast to Holmes, was very ordinary in appearance and manner. He appeared in numerous short stories, later republished in books.

AMONG THE FEW personal friendships that Martin Hewitt has allowed himself to make there is one for an eccentric but very excellent old lady named Mrs. Mallett. She must be more than seventy now, but she is of robust and active, not to say masculine, habits, and her relations with Hewitt are irregular and curious. He may not see her for many weeks, perhaps for months, until one day she will appear in the office, push Kerrett (who knows better than to attempt to stop her) into the inner room, and salute Hewitt with a shake of the hand and a savage glare of the eye which would appall a stranger, but which is quite amiably meant. As for myself, it was long ere I could find any resource but instant retreat before her gaze, though we are on terms of moderate toleration now.

After her first glare she sits in the chair by the window and directs her glance at Hewitt's small gas grill and kettle in the fireplace— a glance which Hewitt, with all expedition, translates into tea. Slightly mollified by the tea, Mrs. Mallett condescends to remark in tones of tragic truculence, on passing matters of conventional interest— the weather, the influenza, her own health, Hewitt's health, and so forth, any reply of Hewitt's being commonly received with either disregard or contempt.

In half an hour's time or so she leaves the office with a stern command to Hewitt to attend at her house and drink tea on a day and at a time named— a command which Hewitt obediently fulfills, when he passes through a similarly exhilarating experience in Mrs. Mallett's back drawing-room at her little freehold house in Fulham. Altogether Mrs. Mallett, to a stranger, is a singularly uninviting personality, and indeed, except Hewitt, who has learnt to appreciate her hidden good qualities, I doubt if she has a friend in the world. Her studiously concealed charities are a matter of as much amusement as gratification to Hewitt, who naturally, in the course of his peculiar profession, comes across many sad examples of poverty and suffering, commonly among the decent sort, who hide their troubles from strangers' eyes and suffer in secret. When such a case is in his mind it is Hewitt's practice to inform Mrs. Mallett of it at one of the tea ceremonies. Mrs. Mallett receives the story with snorts of incredulity and scorn but takes care, while expressing the most

callous disregard and contempt of the troubles of the sufferers, to ascertain casually their names and addresses; twenty-four hours after which Hewitt need only make a visit to find their difficulties in some mysterious way alleviated.

Mrs. Mallett never had any children, and was early left a widow. Her appearance, for some reason or another, commonly leads strangers to believe her an old maid. She lives in her little detached house with its square piece of ground, attended by a house-keeper older than herself and one maid-servant. She lost her only sister by death soon after the events I am about to set down, and now has, I believe, no relations in the world. It was also soon after these events that her present housekeeper first came to her in place of an older and very deaf woman, quite useless, who had been with her before. I believe she is moderately rich, and that one or two charities will benefit considerably at her death; also I should be far from astonished to find Hewitt's own name in her will, though this is no more than idle conjecture. The one possession to which she clings with all her soul— her one pride and treasure— is her great-uncle Joseph's snuff-box, the lid of which she steadfastly believes to be made of a piece of Noah's original ark discovered on the top of Mount Ararat by some intrepid explorer of vague identity about a hundred years ago. This is her one weakness, and woe to the unhappy creature who dares hint a suggestion that possibly the wood of the ark rotted away to nothing a few thousand years before her great-uncle Joseph ever took snuff. I believe he would be bodily assaulted. The box is brought for Hewitt's admiration at every tea ceremony at Fulham, when Hewitt handles it reverently and expresses as much astonishment and interest as if he had never seen or heard of it before. It is on these occasions only that Mrs. Mallett's customary stiffness relaxes. The sides of the box are of cedar of Lebanon, she explains (which very possibly they are), and the gold mountings were worked up from spade guineas (which one can believe without undue strain on the reason). And it is usually these times, when the old lady softens under the combined influence of tea and uncle Joseph's snuff-box, that Hewitt seizes to lead up to his hint of some starving governess or distressed clerk, with the full confidence that the more savagely the story is received the better will the poor people be treated as soon as he turns his back.

It was her jealous care of uncle Joseph's snuff-box that first brought Mrs. Mallett into contact with Martin Hewitt, and the occasion, though not perhaps testing his acuteness to the extent that some did, was nevertheless one of the most curious and fantastic on which he has ever been engaged She was then some ten or twelve years younger than she is now, but Hewitt assures me she looked exactly the same; that is to say, she was harsh, angular, and seemed

little more than fifty years of age. It was before the time of Kerrett, and another youth occupied the outer office. Hewitt sat late one afternoon with his door ajar when he heard a stranger enter the outer office, and a voice, which he afterwards knew well as Mrs. Mallett's, ask "Is Mr. Martin Hewitt in?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think so. If you will write your name and— —"

"Is he in there?" And with three strides Mrs. Mallett was at the inner door and stood before Hewitt himself, while the routed office-lad stared helplessly in the rear.

"Mr. Hewitt," Mrs. Mallet said, "I have come to put an affair into your hands, which I shall require to be attended to at once."

Hewitt was surprised, but he bowed politely, and said, with some suspicion of a hint in his tone, "Yes— I rather supposed you were in a hurry."

She glanced quickly in Hewitt's face and went on: "I am not accustomed to needless ceremony, Mr. Hewitt. My name is Mallett— Mrs. Mallett— and here is my card. I have come to consult you on a matter of great annoyance and some danger to myself. The fact is I am being watched and followed by a number of persons."

Hewitt's gaze was steadfast, but he reflected that possibly this curious woman was a lunatic, the delusion of being watched and followed by unknown people being perhaps the most common of all; also it was no unusual thing to have a lunatic visit the office with just such a complaint. So he only said soothingly, "Indeed? That must be very annoying."

"Yes, yes, the annoyance is bad enough perhaps," she answered shortly, "but I am chiefly concerned about my great-uncle Joseph's snuff-box."

This utterance sounded a trifle more insane than the other, so Hewitt answered, a little more soothingly still: "Ah, of course. A very important thing, the snuff-box, no doubt."

"It is, Mr. Hewitt— it is important, as I think you will admit when you have seen it. Here it is," and she produced from a small handbag the article that Hewitt was destined so often again to see and affect an interest in. "You may be incredulous, Mr. Hewitt, but it is nevertheless a fact that the lid of this snuff-box is made of the wood of the original ark that rested on Mount Ararat."

She handed the box to Hewitt, who murmured, "Indeed! Very interesting— very wonderful, really," and returned it to the lady immediately.

"That, Mr. Hewitt, was the property of my great-uncle, Joseph Simpson, who once had the honour of shaking hands with his late Majesty King George the Fourth. The box was presented to my uncle by— — ," and then Mrs. Mallett plunged into the whole history and adventures of the box, in the formula wherewith Hewitt subsequently became so well acquainted, and

which need not be here set out in detail. When the box had been properly honoured Mrs. Mallett proceeded with her business.

"I am convinced, Mr. Hewitt," she said, "that systematic attempts are being made to rob me of this snuff-box. I am not a nervous or weak-minded woman, or perhaps I might have sought your assistance before. The watching and following of myself I might have disregarded, but when it comes to burglary I think it is time to do something."

"Certainly," Hewitt agreed.

"Well, I have been pestered with demands for the box for some time past. I have here some of the letters which I have received, and I am sure I know at whose instigation they were sent." She placed on the table a handful of papers of various sizes, which Hewitt examined one after another. They were mostly in the same handwriting, and all were unsigned. Every one was couched in a fanatically toned imitation of scriptural diction, and all sorts of threats were expressed with many emphatic underlinings. The spelling was not of the best, the writing was mostly uncouth, and the grammar was in ill shape in many places, the "thous" and "thees" and their accompanying verbs falling over each other disastrously. The purport of the messages was rather vaguely expressed, but all seemed to make a demand for the restoration of some article held in extreme veneration. This was alluded to in many figurative ways as the "token of life," the "seal of the woman," and so forth, and sometimes Mrs. Mallett was requested to restore it to the "ark of the covenant." One of the least vague of these singular documents ran thus:—"*Thou of no faith put the bond of the woman clothed with the sun on the stoan sete in thy back garden this night or thy blood beest on your own hed. Give it back to us the five righteous only in this citty, give us that what saves the faithful when the erth is swalloed up."* Hewitt read over these fantastic missives one by one till he began to suspect that his client, mad or not, certainly corresponded with mad Quakers. Then he said, "Yes, Mrs. Mallett, these are most extraordinary letters. Are there any more of them?"

"Bless the man, yes, there were a lot that I burnt. All the same crack-brained sort of thing."

"They are mostly in one handwriting," Hewitt said, "though some are in another. But I confess I don't see any very direct reference to the snuff-box."

"Oh, but it's the only thing they can mean," Mrs. Mallett replied with great positiveness. "Why, he wanted me to sell it him; and last night my house was broken into in my absence and everything ransacked and turned over, but not a thing was taken. Why? Because I had the box with me at my sister's; and this is the only sacred relic in my possession. And what saved the faithful when the world was swallowed up? Why, the ark of course." The old lady's manner was

odd, but notwithstanding the bizarre and disjointed character of her complaint Hewitt had now had time to observe that she had none of the unmistakable signs of the lunatic. Her eye was steady and clear, and she had none of the restless habits of the mentally deranged. Even at that time Hewitt had met with curious adventures enough to teach him not to be astonished at a new one, and now he set himself seriously to get at his client's case in full order and completeness.

"Come, Mrs. Mallett," he said, "I am a stranger, and I can never understand your case till I have it, not as it presents itself to your mind, in the order of importance of events, but in the exact order in which they happened. You had a great-uncle, I understand, living in the early part of the century, who left you at his death the snuff-box which you value so highly. Now you suspect that somebody is attempting to extort or steal it from you. Tell me as clearly and simply as you can whom you suspect and the whole story of the attempts."

"That's just what I'm coming to," the old lady answered, rather pettishly. "My uncle Joseph had an old housekeeper, who of course knew all about the snuff-box, and it is her son Reuben Penner who is trying to get it from me. The old woman was half crazy with one extraordinary religious superstition and another, and her son seems to be just the same. My great-uncle was a man of strong common-sense and a churchman (though he did think he could write plays), and if it hadn't been for his restraint I believe— that is I have been told— Mrs. Penner would have gone clean demented with religious mania. Well, she died in course of time, and my great-uncle died some time after, leaving me the most important thing in his possession (I allude to the snuff-box of course), a good bit of property, and a tin box full of his worthless manuscript. I became a widow at twenty-six, and since then I have lived very quietly in my present house in Fulham.

"A couple of years ago I received a visit from Reuben Penner. I didn't recognise him, which wasn't wonderful, since I hadn't seen him for thirty years or more. He is well over fifty now, a large heavy-faced man with uncommonly wild eyes for a greengrocer— which is what he is, though he dresses very well, considering. He was quite respectful at first, and very awkward in his manner. He took a little time to get his courage, and then he began questioning me about my religious feelings. Well, Mr. Hewitt, I am not the sort of person to stand a lecture from a junior and an inferior, whatever my religious opinions may be, and I pretty soon made him realise it. But somehow he persevered. He wanted to know if I would go to some place of worship that he called his 'Tabernacle.' I asked him who was the pastor. He said himself. I asked him how many members of the congregation there were, and (the man was as solemn as an owl. I assure you, Mr. Hewitt) he actually said five! I kept my

countenance and asked why such a small number couldn't attend church, or at any rate attach itself to some decent Dissenting chapel. And then the man burst out; mad— mad as a hatter. He was as incoherent as such people usually are, but as far as I could make out he talked, among a lot of other things, of some imaginary woman— a woman standing on the moon and driven into a wilderness on the wings of an eagle. The man was so madly possessed of his fancies that I assure you for a while he almost ceased to look ridiculous. He was so earnest in his rant. But I soon cut him short. It's best to be severe with these people— it's the only chance of bringing them to their senses. 'Reuben Penner,' I said, 'shut up! Your mother was a very decent person in her way, I believe, but she was half a lunatic with her superstitious notions, and you're a bigger fool than she was. Imagine a grown man, and of your age, coming and asking me, of all people in the world, to leave my church and make another fool in a congregation of five, with you to rave at me about women in the moon! Go away and look after your greengrocery, and go to church or chapel like a sensible man. Go away and don't play the fool any longer; I won't hear another word!'

"When I talk like this I am usually attended to, and in this case Penner went away with scarcely another word. I saw nothing of him for about a month or six weeks and then he came and spoke to me as I was cutting roses in my front garden. This time he talked— to begin with, at least— more sensibly. 'Mrs. Mallett,' he said, 'you have in your keeping a very sacred relic.'

"'I have,' I said, 'left me by my great-uncle Joseph. And what then?'

"'Well'— he hummed and hawed a little— 'I wanted to ask if you might be disposed to part with it.'

"'What?' I said, dropping my scissors— 'sell it?'

"'Well, yes,' he answered, putting on as bold a face as he could.

"The notion of selling my uncle Joseph's snuff-box in any possible circumstances almost made me speechless. 'What!' I repeated. 'Sell it?— sell it? It would be a sinful sacrilege!'

"His face quite brightened when I said this, and he replied, 'Yes, of course it would; I think so myself, ma'am; but I fancied you thought otherwise. In that case, ma'am, not being a believer yourself, I'm sure you would consider it a graceful and a pious act to present it to my little Tabernacle, where it would be properly valued. And it having been my mother's property— — '

"He got no further. I am not a woman to be trifled with, Mr. Hewitt, and I believe I beat him out of the garden with my basket. I was so infuriated I can scarcely remember what I did. The suggestion that I should sell my uncle Joseph's snuff-box to a greengrocer was bad enough; the request that I should actually give it to his 'Tabernacle' was infinitely worse. But to claim that it had

belonged to his mother— well I don't know how it strikes you, Mr. Hewitt, but to me it seemed the last insult possible."

"Shocking, shocking, of course," Hewitt said, since she seemed to expect a reply. "And he called you an unbeliever, too. But what happened after that?"

"After that he took care not to bother me personally again; but these wretched anonymous demands came in, with all sorts of darkly hinted threats as to the sin I was committing in keeping my own property. They didn't trouble me much. I put 'em in the fire as fast as they came, until I began to find I was being watched and followed, and then I kept them."

"Very sensible," Hewitt observed, "very sensible indeed to do that. But tell me as to these papers. Those you have here are nearly all in one handwriting, but some, as I have already said, are in another. Now before all this business, did you ever see Reuben Penner's handwriting?"

"No, never."

"Then you are not by any means sure that he has written any of these things?"

"But then who else could?"

"That of course is a thing to be found out. At present, at any rate, we know this: that if Penner has anything to do with these letters he is not alone, because of the second handwriting. Also we must not bind ourselves past other conviction that he wrote any one of them. By the way, I am assuming that they all arrived by post?"

"Yes, they did."

"But the envelopes are not here. Have you kept any of them?"

"I hardly know; there may be some at home. Is it important?"

"It may be; but those I can see at another time. Please go on."

"These things continued to arrive, as I have said, and I continued to burn them till I began to find myself watched and followed, and then I kept them. That was two or three months ago. It is a most unpleasant sensation, that of feeling that some unknown person is dogging your footsteps from corner to corner and observing all your movements for a purpose you are doubtful of. Once or twice I turned suddenly back, but I never could catch the creatures, of whom I am sure Penner was one."

"You saw these people, of course?"

"Well, yes, in a way— with the corner of my eye, you know. But it was mostly in the evening. It was a woman once, but several times I feel certain it was Penner. And once I saw a man come into my garden at the back in the night, and I feel quite sure that was Penner."

"Was that after you had this request to put the article demanded on the stone seat in the garden?"

"The same night. I sat up and watched from the bath-room window, expecting someone would come. It was a dark night, and the trees made it darker, but I could plainly see someone come quietly over the wall and go up to the seat."

"Could you distinguish his face?"

"No, it was too dark. But I feel sure it was Penner."

"Has Penner any decided peculiarity of form or gait?"

"No, he's just a big common sort of man. But I tell you I feel certain it was Penner."

"For any particular reason?"

"No, perhaps not. But who else could it have been? No, I'm very sure it must have been Penner."

Hewitt repressed a smile and went on. "Just so," he said. "And what happened then?"

"He went up to the seat, as I said, and looked at it, passing his hand over the top. Then I called out to him. I said if I found him on my premises again by day or night I'd give him in charge of the police. I assure you he got over the wall the second time a good deal quicker than the first. And then I went to bed, though I got a shocking cold in the head sitting at that open bath-room window. Nobody came about the place after that till last night. A few days ago my only sister was taken ill. I saw her each day, and she got worse. Yesterday she was so bad that I wouldn't leave her. I sent home for some things and stopped in her house for the night. To-day I got an urgent message to come home, and when I went I found that an entrance had been made by a kitchen window and the whole house had been ransacked, but not a thing was missing."

"Were drawers and boxes opened?"

"Everywhere. Most seemed to have been opened with keys, but some were broken. The place was turned upside down, but, as I said before, not a thing was missing. A very old woman, very deaf, who used to be my housekeeper, but who does nothing now, was in the house, and so was my general servant. They slept in rooms at the top and were not disturbed. Of course the old woman is too deaf to have heard anything, and the maid is a very heavy sleeper. The girl was very frightened, but I pacified her before I came away. As it happened, I took the snuff-box with me. I had got very suspicious of late, of course, and something seemed to suggest that I had better so I took it. It's pretty strong evidence that they have been watching me closely, isn't it, that they should break in the very first night I left the place?"

"And are you quite sure that nothing has been taken?"

"Quite certain. I have spent a long time in a very careful search."

"And you want me, I presume, to find out definitely who these people are, and get such evidence as may ensure their being punished?"

"That is the case. Of course I know Reuben Penner is the moving spirit— I'm quite certain of that. But still I can see plainly enough that as yet there's no legal evidence of it. Mind, I'm not afraid of him— not a bit. That is not my character. I'm not afraid of all the madmen in England; but I'm not going to have them steal my property— this snuff-box especially."

"Precisely. I hope you have left the disturbance in your house exactly as you found it?"

"Oh, of course, and I have given strict orders that nothing is to be touched. To-morrow morning I should like you to come and look at it."

"I must look at it, certainly," Hewitt said, "but I would rather go at once."

"Pooh— nonsense!" Mrs. Mallett answered, with the airy obstinacy that Hewitt afterwards knew so well. "I'm not going home again now to spend an hour or two more. My sister will want to know what has become of me, and she mustn't suspect that anything is wrong, or it may do all sorts of harm. The place will keep till the morning, and I have the snuff-box safe with me. You have my card, Mr. Hewitt, haven't you? Very well. Can you be at my house to-morrow morning at half-past ten? I will be there, and you can see all you want by daylight. We'll consider that settled. Good-day." Hewitt saw her to his office door and waited till she had half descended the stairs. Then he made for a staircase window which gave a view of the street. The evening was coming on murky and foggy, and the street lights were blotchy and vague. Outside a four-wheeled cab stood, and the driver eagerly watched the front door. When Mrs. Mallett emerged he instantly began to descend from the box with the quick invitation, "Cab, mum, cab?"

He seemed very eager for his fare, and though Mrs. Mallett hesitated a second she eventually entered the cab. He drove off, and Hewitt tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the number of the cab behind. It was always a habit of his to note all such identifying marks throughout a case, whether they seemed important at the time or not, and he has often had occasion to be pleased with the outcome. Now, however, the light was too bad. No sooner had the cab started than a man emerged from a narrow passage opposite, and followed. He was a large, rather awkward, heavy-faced man of middle age, and had the appearance of a respectable artisan or small tradesman in his best clothes. Hewitt hurried downstairs and followed the direction the cab and the man had taken, toward the Strand. But the cab by this time was swallowed up in the Strand traffic, and the heavy-faced man had also disappeared. Hewitt returned to his office a little disappointed, for the man seemed rather closely to answer Mrs. Mallett's description of Reuben Penner.

2

PUNCTUALLY at half-past ten the next morning Hewitt was at Mrs. Mallett's house at Fulham. It was a pretty little house, standing back from the road in a generous patch of garden, and had evidently stood there when Fulham was an outlying village. Hewitt entered the gate, and made his way to the front door, where two young females, evidently servants, stood. They were in a very disturbed state, and when he asked for Mrs. Mallett, assured him that nobody knew where she was, and that she had not been seen since the previous afternoon.

"But," said Hewitt, "she was to stay at her sister's last night, I believe."

"Yes, sir," answered the more distressed of the two girls— she in a cap— "but she hasn't been seen there. This is her sister's servant, and she's been sent over to know where she is, and why she hasn't been there." This the other girl— in bonnet and shawl— corroborated. Nothing had been seen of Mrs. Mallett at her sister's since she had received the message the day before to the effect that the house had been broken into.

"And I'm so frightened," the other girl said, whimperingly. "They've been in the place again last night."

"Who have?"

"The robbers. When I came in this morning— —"

"But didn't you sleep here?"

"I— I ought to ha' done sir, but— but after Mrs. Mallett went yesterday I got so frightened I went home at ten." And the girl showed signs of tears, which she had apparently been already indulging in.

"And what about the old woman— the deaf woman; where was she?"

"She was in the house, sir. There was nowhere else for her to go, and she was deaf and didn't know anything about what happened the night before, and confined to her room, and— and so I didn't tell her."

"I see," Hewitt said with a slight smile. "You left her here. She didn't see or hear anything, did she?"

"No sir; she can't hear, and she didn't see nothing."

"And how do you know thieves have been in the house?"

"Everythink's tumbled about worse than ever, sir, and all different from what it was yesterday; and there's a box o' papers in the attic broke open, and all sorts o' things."

"Have you spoken to the police?"

"No, sir; I'm that frightened I don't know what to do. And missis was going to see a gentleman about it yesterday, and— —"

"Very well, I am that gentleman— Mr. Martin Hewitt. I have come down now to meet her by appointment. Did she say she was going anywhere else as well as to my office and to her sister's?"

"No, sir. And she— she's got the snuff-box with her and all." This latter circumstance seemed largely to augment the girl's terrors for her mistress's safety.

"Very well," Hewitt said, "I think I'd better just look over the house now, and then consider what has become of Mrs. Mallett— if she isn't heard of in the meantime." The girl found a great relief in Hewitt's presence in the house, the deaf old house-keeper, who seldom spoke and never heard, being, as she said, "worse than nobody."

"Have you been in all the rooms?" Hewitt asked.

"No, sir; I was afraid. When I came in I went straight upstairs to my room, and as I was coming away I see the things upset in the other attic. I went into Mrs. Perks' room, next to mine (she's the deaf old woman), and she was there all right, but couldn't hear anything. Then I came down and only just peeped into two of the rooms and saw the state they were in, and then I came out into the garden, and presently this young woman came with the message from Mrs. Rudd."

"Very well, we'll look at the rooms now," Hewitt said, and they proceeded to do so. All were in a state of intense confusion. Drawers, taken from chests and bureaux, littered about the floor, with their contents scattered about them. Carpets and rugs had been turned up and flung into corners, even pictures on the walls had been disturbed, and while some hung awry others rested on the floor and on chairs. The things, however, appeared to have been fairly carefully handled, for nothing was damaged except one or two framed engravings, the brown paper on the backs of which had been cut round with a knife and the wooden slats shifted so as to leave the backs of the engravings bare. This, the girl told Hewitt, had not been done on the night of the first burglary; the other articles also had not on that occasion been so much disturbed as they now were.

Mrs. Mallett's bedroom was the first floor front. Here the confusion was, if possible, greater than in the other rooms. The bed had been completely unmade and the clothes thrown separately on the floor, and everything else was displaced. It was here indeed that the most noticeable features of the disturbance were observed, for on the side of the looking-glass hung a very long old-fashioned gold chain untouched, and on the dressing-table lay a purse with the money still in it. And on the looking-glass, stuck into the crack of the frame, was a half sheet of notepaper with this inscription scrawled in pencil:—

To Mr. Martin Hewitt.

Mrs. Mallett is alright and in frends hands. She will return soon alright, if you keep quiet. But if you folloe her or take any steps the conseqinses will be very serious.

This paper was not only curious in itself, and curious as being addressed to Hewitt, but it was plainly in the same handwriting as were the most of the anonymous letters which Mrs. Mallett had produced the day before in Hewitt's office. Hewitt studied it attentively for a few moments and then thrust it in his pocket and proceeded to inspect the rest of the rooms. All were the same— simply well-furnished rooms turned upside down. The top floor consisted of three comfortable attics, one used as a lumber-room and the others used respectively as bedrooms for the servant and the deaf old woman. None of these rooms appeared to have been entered, the girl said, on the first night, but now the lumber-room was almost as confused as the rooms downstairs. Two or three boxes were opened and their contents turned out. One of these was what is called a steel trunk— a small one— which had held old papers, the others were filled chiefly with old clothes.

The servant's room next this was quite undisturbed and untouched; and then Hewitt was admitted to the room of Mrs. Mallett's deaf old pensioner. The old woman sat propped up in her bed and looked with half-blind eyes at the peak in the bedclothes made by her bent knees. The servant screamed in her ear, but she neither moved nor spoke.

Hewitt laid his hand on her shoulder and said, in the slow and distinct tones he had found best for reaching the senses of deaf people, "I hope you are well. Did anything disturb you in the night?" But she only turned her head half toward him and mumbled peevishly, "I wish you'd bring my tea. You're late enough this morning." Nothing seemed likely to be got from her, and Hewitt asked the servant, "Is she altogether bedridden?"

"No," the girl answered; "leastways she needn't be. She stops in bed most of the time, but she can get up when she likes— I've seen her. But missis humours her and lets her do as she likes— and she gives plenty of trouble. I don't believe she's as deaf as she makes out."

"Indeed!" Hewitt answered. "Deafness is convenient sometimes, I know. Now I want you to stay here while I make some inquiries. Perhaps you'd better keep Mrs. Rudd's servant with you if you want company. I don't expect to be very long gone, and in any case it wouldn't do for her to go to her mistress and say that Mrs. Mallett is missing, or it might upset her seriously." Hewitt left the house and walked till he found a public-house where a post-office directory was kept. He took a glass of whisky and water, most of which he left on the

counter, and borrowed the directory. He found "Greengrocers" in the "Trade" section and ran his finger down the column till he came on this address:— "Penner, Reuben, 8, Little Marsh Row, Hammersmith, W." Then he returned the directory and found the best cab he could to take him to Hammersmith.

Little Marsh Row was not a vastly prosperous sort of place, and the only shops were three— all small. Two were chandlers', and the third was a sort of semi-shed of the greengrocery and coal persuasion, with the name "Penner" on a board over the door.

The shutters were all up, though the door was open, and the only person visible was a very smudgy boy who was in the act of wheeling out a sack of coals. To the smudgy boy Hewitt applied himself. "I don't see Mr. Penner about," he said; "will he be back soon?"

The boy stared hard at Hewitt. "No," he said, "he won't. 'E's guv' up the shop. 'E paid 'is next week's rent this mornin' and retired."

"Oh!" Hewitt answered sharply. "Retired, has he? And what's become of the stock, eh! Where are the cabbages and potatoes?"

"'E told me to give 'em to the pore, an' I did. There's lots o' pore lives round 'ere. My mother's one, an' these 'ere coals is for 'er, an' I'm goin' to 'ave the trolley for myself."

"Dear me!" Hewitt answered, regarding the boy with amused interest. "You're a very business-like almoner. And what will the Tabernacle do without Mr. Penner?"

"I dunno," the boy answered, closing the door behind him. "I dunno nothin' about the Tabernacle— only where it is."

"Ah, and where is it? I might find him there, perhaps."

"Ward Lane— fust on left, second on right. It's a shop wot's bin shut up; next door to a stable-yard." And the smudgy boy started off with his trolley.

The Tabernacle was soon found. At some very remote period it had been an unlucky small shop, but now it was permanently shuttered, and the interior was lighted by holes cut in the upper panels of the shutters. Hewitt took a good look at the shuttered window and the door beside it and then entered the stable-yard at the side. To the left of the passage giving entrance to the yard there was a door, which plainly was another entrance to the house, and a still damp mud-mark on the step proved it to have been lately used. Hewitt rapped sharply at the door with his knuckles.

Presently a female voice from within could be heard speaking through the keyhole in a very loud whisper. "Who is it?" asked the voice.

Hewitt stooped to the keyhole and whispered back, "Is Mr. Penner here now?"

"No."

"Then I must come in and wait for him. Open the door." A bolt was pulled back and the door cautiously opened a few inches. Hewitt's foot was instantly in the jamb, and he forced the door back and entered. "Come," he said in a loud voice, "I've come to find out where Mr. Penner is, and to see whoever is in here." Immediately there was an assault of fists on the inside of a door at the end of the passage, and a loud voice said, "Do you hear? Whoever you are I'll give you five pounds if you'll bring Mr. Martin Hewitt here. His office is 25 Portsmouth Street, Strand. Or the same if you'll bring the police." And the voice was that of Mrs. Mallett.

Hewitt turned to the woman who had opened the door, and who now stood, much frightened, in the corner beside him. "Come," he said, "your keys, quick, and don't offer to stir, or I'll have you brought back and taken to the station." The woman gave him a bunch of keys without a word. Hewitt opened the door at the end of the passage, and once more Mrs. Mallett stood before him, prim and rigid as ever, except that her bonnet was sadly out of shape and her mantle was torn.

"Thank you, Mr. Hewitt," she said. "I thought you'd come, though where I am I know no more than Adam. Somebody shall smart severely for this. Why, and that woman— that woman," she pointed contemptuously at the woman in the corner, who was about two-thirds her height, "was going to search me— me! Why— —" Mrs. Mallett, blazing with suddenly revived indignation, took a step forward and the woman vanished through the outer door.

"Come," Hewitt said, "no doubt you've been shamefully treated; but we must be quiet for a little. First I will make quite sure that nobody else is here, and then we'll get to your house." Nobody was there. The rooms were dreary and mostly empty. The front room, which was lighted by the holes in the shutters, had a rough reading-desk and a table, with half a dozen wooden chairs. "This," said Hewitt, "is no doubt the Tabernacle proper, and there is very little to see in it. Come back now, Mrs. Mallett, to your house, and we'll see if some explanation of these things is not possible. I hope your snuff-box is quite safe?"

Mrs. Mallett drew it from her pocket and exhibited it triumphantly. "I told them they should never get it," she said, "and they saw I meant it, and left off trying." As they emerged in the street she said: "The first thing, of course, is to bring the police into this place."

"No, I think we won't do that yet," Hewitt said. "In the first place the case is one of assault and detention, and your remedy is by summons or action; and then there are other things to speak of. We shall get a cab in the High Street, and you shall tell me what has happened to you."

Mrs. Mallett's story was simple. The cab in which she left Hewitt's office had travelled west, and was apparently making for the locality of her sister's house; but the evening was dark, the fog increased greatly, and she shut the windows and took no particular notice of the streets through which she was passing. Indeed with such a fog that would have been impossible. She had a sort of undefined notion that some of the streets were rather narrow and dirty, but she thought nothing of it, since all cabmen are given to selecting unexpected routes. After a time, however, the cab slowed, made a sharp turn, and pulled up. The door was opened, and "Here you are mum," said the cabby. She did not understand the sharp turn, and had a general feeling that the place could not be her sister's, but as she alighted she found she had stepped directly upon the threshold of a narrow door into which she was immediately pulled by two persons inside. This, she was sure, must have been the side-door in the stable-yard, through which Hewitt himself had lately obtained entrance to the Tabernacle.

Before she had recovered from her surprise the door was shut behind her. She struggled stoutly and screamed, but the place she was in was absolutely dark; she was taken by surprise, and she found resistance useless. They were men who held her, and the voice of the only one who spoke she did not know. He demanded in firm and distinct tones that the "sacred thing" should be given up, and that Mrs. Mallett should sign a paper agreeing to prosecute nobody before she was allowed to go. She however, as she asserted with her customary emphasis, was not the sort of woman to give in to that. She resolutely declined to do anything of the sort, and promised her captors, whoever they were, a full and legal return for their behaviour. Then she became conscious that a woman was somewhere present, and the man threatened that this woman should search her. This threat Mrs. Mallett met as boldly as the others. She should like to meet the woman who would dare attempt to search her, she said. She defied anybody to attempt it. As for her uncle Joseph's snuff-box, no matter where it was, it was where they would not be able to get it. That they should never have, but sooner or later they should have something very unpleasant for their attempts to steal it. This declaration had an immediate effect. They importuned her no more, and she was left in an inner room and the key was turned on her. There she sat, dozing occasionally, the whole night, her indomitable spirit remaining proof through all those doubtful hours of darkness. Once or twice she heard people enter and move about, and each time she called aloud to offer, as Hewitt had heard, a reward to anybody who should bring the police or communicate her situation to Hewitt. Day broke and still she waited, sleepless and unfed, till Hewitt at last arrived and released her.

On Mrs. Mallett's arrival at her house Mrs. Rudd's servant was at once despatched with reassuring news and Hewitt once more addressed himself to the question of the burglars. "First, Mrs. Mallett," he said, "did you ever conceal anything— anything at all mind— in the frame of an engraving?"

"No, never."

"Were any of your engravings framed before you had them?"

"Not one that I can remember. They were mostly uncle Joseph's, and he kept them with a lot of others in drawers. He was rather a collector, you know."

"Very well. Now come up to the attic. Something has been opened there that was not touched at the first attempt."

"See now," said Hewitt, when the attic was reached, "here is a box full of papers. Do you know everything that was in it?"

"No, I don't," Mrs. Mallett replied. "There were a lot of my uncle's manuscript plays. Here you see 'The Dead Bridegroom, or the Drum of Fortune,' and so on; and there were a lot of autographs. I took no interest in them, although some were rather valuable, I believe."

"Now bring your recollection to bear as strongly as you can," Hewitt said. "Do you ever remember seeing in this box a paper bearing nothing whatever upon it but a wax seal?"

"Oh yes, I remember that well enough. I've noticed it each time I've turned the box over— which is very seldom. It was a plain slip of vellum paper with a red seal, cracked and rather worn— some celebrated person's seal, I suppose. What about it?" Hewitt was turning the papers over one at a time. "It doesn't seem to be here now," he said. "Do you see it?"

"No," Mrs. Mallett returned, examining the papers herself, "it isn't. It appears to be the only thing missing. But why should they take it?"

"I think we are at the bottom of all this mystery now," Hewitt answered quietly. "It is the Seal of the Woman."

"The what? I don't understand. The fact is, Mrs. Mallett, that these people have never wanted your uncle Joseph's snuff-box at all, but that seal."

"Not wanted the snuff-box? Nonsense! Why, didn't I tell you Penner asked for it— wanted to buy it?"

"Yes, you did, but so far as I can remember you never spoke of a single instance of Penner mentioning the snuff-box by name. He spoke of a sacred relic, and you, of course, very naturally assumed he spoke of the box. None of the anonymous letters mentioned the box, you know, and once or twice they actually did mention a seal, though usually the thing was spoken of in a roundabout and figurative way. All along, these people— Reuben Penner and

the others— have been after the seal, and you have been defending the snuff-box."

"But why the seal?"

"Did you never hear of Joanna Southcott?"

"Oh yes, of course; she was an ignorant visionary who set up as prophetess eighty or ninety years ago or more."

"Joanna Southcott gave herself out as a prophetess in 1790. She was to be the mother of the Messiah, she said, and she was the woman driven into the wilderness, as foretold in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation. She died at the end of 1814, when her followers numbered more than 100,000, all fanatic believers. She had made rather a good thing in her lifetime by the sale of seals, each of which was to secure the eternal salvation of the holder. At her death, of course, many of the believers fell away, but others held on as faithfully as ever, asserting that 'the holy Joanna' would rise again and fulfil all the prophecies. These poor people dwindled in numbers gradually, and although they attempted to bring up their children in their own faith, the whole belief has been practically extinct for years now. You will remember that you told me of Penner's mother being a superstitious fanatic of some sort, and that your uncle Joseph possessed her extravagances. The thing seems pretty plain now. Your uncle Joseph possessed himself of Joanna Southcott's seal by way of removing from poor old Mrs. Penner an object of a sort of idolatry, and kept it as a curiosity. Reuben Penner grew up strong in his mother's delusions, and to him and the few believers he had gathered round him at his Tabernacle, the seal was an object worth risking anything to get.

"First he tried to convert you to his belief. Then he tried to buy it; after that, he and his friends tried anonymous letters, and at last, grown desperate, they resorted to watching you, burglary and kidnapping. Their first night's raid was unsuccessful, so last night they tried kidnapping you by the aid of a cabman. When they had got you, and you had at last given them to understand that it was your uncle Joseph's snuff-box you were defending, they tried the house again, and this time were successful. I guessed they had succeeded then, from a simple circumstance. They had begun to cut out the backs of framed engravings for purposes of search, but only some of the engravings were so treated. That meant either that the article wanted was found behind one of them, or that the intruders broke off in their picture-examination to search somewhere else, and were then successful, and so under no necessity of opening the other engravings. You assured me that nothing could have been concealed in any of the engravings, so I at once assumed that they had found what they were after in the only place wherein they had not searched the night before— the attic— and probably among the papers in the trunk."

"But then if they found it there why didn't they return and let me go?"

"Because you would have found where they had brought you. They probably intended to keep you there till the dark of the next evening, and then take you away in a cab again and leave you some distance off. To prevent my following and possibly finding you they left here on your looking-glass this note" (Hewitt produced it) "threatening all sorts of vague consequences if you were not left to them. They knew you had come to me, of course, having followed you to my office. And now Penner feels himself anything but safe. He has relinquished his greengrocery and dispensed his stock in charity, and probably, having got the seal he has taken himself off. Not so much perhaps from fear of punishment as for fear the seal may be taken from him, and with it the salvation his odd belief teaches him it will confer."

Mrs. Mallett sat silently for a little while and then said in a rather softened voice, "Mr. Hewitt, I am not what is called a woman of sentiment, as you may have observed, and I have been most shamefully treated over this wretched seal. But if all you tell me has been actually what has happened I have a sort of perverse inclination to forgive the man in spite of myself. The thing probably had been his mother's— or at any rate he believed so— and his giving up his little all to attain the object of his ridiculous faith, and distributing his goods among the poor people and all that— really it's worthy of an old martyr, if only it were done in the cause of a faith a little less stupid— though of course he thinks his is the only religion, as others do of theirs. But then"— Mrs. Mallett stiffened again—"there's not much to prove your theories, is there?"

Hewitt smiled. "Perhaps not," he said, "except that, to my mind at any rate, everything points to my explanation being the only possible one. The thing presented itself to you, from the beginning, as an attempt on the snuff-box you value so highly, and the possibility of the seal being the object aimed at never entered your mind. I saw it whole from the outside, and on thinking the thing over after our first interview I remembered Joanna Southcott. I think I am right."

"Well, if you are, as I said, I half believe I shall forgive the man. We will advertise if you like, telling him he has nothing to fear if he can give an explanation of his conduct consistent with what he calls his religious belief, absurd as it may be."

THAT NIGHT FELL darker and foggier than the last. The advertisement went into the daily papers, but Reuben Penner nevers saw it. Late the next day a bargeman passing Old Swan Pier struck some large object with his boat-hook and brought it to the surface. It was the body of a drowned man, and it was afterwards identified as that of Reuben Penner, late greengrocer, of

Hammersmith. How he came into the water there was nothing to show. There was no money nor any valuables found on the body, and there was a story of a large, heavy-faced man who had given a poor woman— a perfect stranger— a watch and chain and a handful of money down near Tower Hill on that foggy evening. But this again was only a story, not definitely authenticated. What was certain was that, tied securely round the dead man's neck with a cord, and gripped and crumpled tightly in his right hand, was a soddened piece of vellum paper, blank, but carrying an old red seal, of which the device was almost entirely rubbed and cracked away. Nobody at the inquest quite understood this.

End