PAST MASTERS 203

Francis Stevens
E. Phillips Oppenheim
Elinor Glyn
Beatrice Grimshaw
Miles J. Breuer
John Kendrick Bangs
H. de Vere Stacpoole
J. J. Bell

and more

PAST MASTERS 203

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

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Raymond S. Spears

1876-1950

Argosy All Story Weekly 22 Oct 1921

A MAN likes to be accommodating when it's reasonable and convenient. Away up and out in the edge of things, the way a trapper is, and all alone most of the time, he sort of grows into the habit of being wise and saying nothing. If there's any place in the world where a man learns to mind his own business, and keep his eyes open, it's along about the lower rim of the timber line, where the red and yellow desert swings down into the basin of what used to be the bed of a lake ten million years ago.

My line, laid out on scientific principles, reaches away up into marten and pekan country, down through the parks of the grazing bears and out into the plateaus and gulches where wolves and coyotes range. For my part, I like variety to living. One spell and I hanker to trap wolves, and then another spell and I set jaws for the confusion and predicament of black bears, or even a panther, which they call cougars out this way.

For nice, ladylike trapping, give me mink and muskrats along a pretty little creek, with aspens and cottonwoods, and maybe lodgepole pines higher up, and beaver and otter occasionally. I'm especially interested in these water weasels and rodents.

I was setting a trap under the old logpole bridge over Fretful Creek, just below the new government transcontinental trail bridge, when a big, long, two-ton automobile passenger-car came sqeaking down the divide grade and stopped. I rolled my eyes up, and there was just one person in the car.

She was wrapped in furs, and wore a little round fur cap, all martens, and on her little hands were fluffy big fur mitts. Her cheeks were rosy, her eyes were blue, and her chin was prominent, but beautiful. The smile she gave me at about six rods was like a sunburst against the side of the continental range. I didn't have much more to do with the trapgand so I sauntered up to the steel bridge, respectful, and passed the time of day. She sort of indicated that this was her wish.

"It's pretty late in the season to be following this trail," I remarked to her, for any day a blizzard might come along. Water furs were prime, even then.

"Oh, I don't mind!" she smiled. "I can swing down southwest of here, and beat the snow-storms to it!"

It lacked an hour of being noon. She asked some questions about trapping, and showed me her own rifle, which she carried in a saddle-holster beside her.

It was a dandy little carbine, and powerful enough to drop an elk at eighty rods, level sights. While I looked at the gun, she looked at me.

"You're a Westerner?" she inquired casually.

"Not exactly," I had to admit, "I was brought up in the Adirondacks, and came out here two, three years ago. My name's Tex Beatty—"

"Yes? The trapper— what a wonderful country you have to range!" And her gaze went wandering off from peak to slope and into the depths of a hundred miles of valley and plateau, red, yellow, and faraway blue.

"I like it," I admitted, "I'm using one of the government cabins down the valley for a little early spot trapping. You're probably the last tourist that 'll cross through this route."

"There's another party that'll likely be through in a day or two," she remarked, "I dropped them over the other side the range. I know the Sierras are closed— the northern passes. If necessary, I'll slip out of some station anywhere along the railroads. I want to hunt a little. I just love wandering in the wilderness."

"It sure is fine!" I remarked from experience.

"You're going down to the cabin?"

"I'm just spot trapping a little here; that was my last trap."

"Then jump in, and I'll run you down to your camp!"

Just that way. She came nearer being natural than any lady I ever did happen to meet. I stepped in, and she let the brakes go, so we rolled down the grade, around the brinks of cliffs, along the sliding slopes, and into the yard of the government log-cabin, about two miles away and three thousand feet below.

She shed her fur coats and stood forth as pretty as a picture, smiling and mighty helpful around the government fireplace, where we sat down to make dinner. Naturally, I kind of laid myself out to have a regular meal, venison steaks, broiled, hot bread, and one thing and another. To these she added a good many frills, catsup, and salad dressings, which went well with fried trout, and watercress. She was mighty fond of the wild honey I'd beat the bears to besides, and we sure did have a mighty nice meal. .

After dinner, and when she had sized me up pretty well, she went right down to business and said:

"Now, Mr. Beatty, I've seen game tracks all around here; there are deer and bear, and I saw fresh elk or moose tracks up on the mountain. I want to do a few days' shooting. The road west of here can be driven if it's two feet deep with snow, and I can get to the railroad. And what matter if the car is snowed in? It'd be only a few days' drive on horses—"

She headed off all those arguments I might have made. Then she followed up with statements to the effect that she wanted a guide, and if I would assent to it, she'd be very happy, indeed. What could I say?

Naturally, a lady is about the most inconvenient thing there is around a trapper's shanty, but this was government works, and she knew I couldn't drive her away, if she aimed to stay, and if I wanted to be polite, why all there was to it was truckle down. I did. I wasn't any too cheerful about guiding a lady, but she just laughed at me. She could make the proudest man in the world humble and grateful, laughing at him, Pll bet.

So we fixed things up. She had about a ton of outfit in her automobile. She had tents, for instance, but she wouldn't let me set up one for myself.

"There's two good bunks in the cabin," she said right off the reel. "And I sha'n't sleep out myself, nor run the risk of having to take care of a pneumonia patient by having you out there."

A man can't argue about some things with a lady, so come nightfall we had that bare, plain and ordinary government cabin as scrumptuous with Indian blankets, furs, and female ornaments as could be, and even an electric light on a wire run in from her big storage battery. She'd drained the radiator, and settled down to stay a while.

Guiding for anybody never was much in my line. I don't expect to feel more awkward or interested in my life. But she accepted my ignorance as a matter of course, and amused herself with a long and stirring series of my wilderness experience and trap line stories during the evening, and when I carried in some large chunks for the fireplace she crawled into her boudoir on the west side of the cabin.

I'm an early riser myself, and she beat me to it by a minute, appearing by the fireplace, stirring up the coals, and. we made breakfast before the light of day, and went up the mountain into a sort of a park to the north, looking for game. She carried that rifle of hers with care and skill. I didn't notice the muzzle pointing at me more than once or twice all that morning, which indicated considerable previous experience. And when about ten thirty o'clock we rounded a point, and jumped a little herd of blacktails, she lifted her little carbine and filled the echoes with thunder. She hit that buck four times out of six, and my respect for her increased, if that could be possible.

It was only about two miles from camp, so when I'd dressed the game, we went back there, took my pack horse, and jogged up to the kill to bring it down. This was hunting enough for one day, and she wrote two or three letters on a hand typewriter, which a native would mail for her— and she rode my horse down in the afternoon to the ranch, coming back that same night after supper. She could have stayed down there just as well as not, but she didn't,

and so rambled in around ten o'clock, just when Td settled down to. be comfortable.

I bet she talked for two hours that night. It was mighty entertaining, but it kept me awake. She was also mighty persuasive. Game laws are pretty strict out here as regards some kinds of game. The people and politicians have awakened to the fact that elk, moose, and mountain sheep add a heap to the glory of the shrinking wilderness, and even beaver and some of those small creatures are being protected here and there. I agree with the general public, even if I am a trapper. I don't aim to kill any more meat than I can use, and if I'm not as useful as some folks, at least Pm honorable and don't take what doesn't belong to me.

Now this lady, who said her name was Agnes Mayova Leandole, seemed somehow to be intolerable toward the living things. That deer she'd killed gave us lots of meat, but nothing would do, now, but she must kill a mountain sheep.

"It is my sporting ambition," she said, "to shoot one of those beautiful mountain rams, and have its head mounted and its hide preserved."

"Why— er— you know—" I sort of began.

"Oh, now, Tex Beatty!" she laughed at me. "Do you mean to say you haven't any sporting blood? Don't you dast to violate the game law?"

Now what's a man going to do when a woman taunts him like that? At the same time, I couldn't feel very frisky about it. I am sort of a stranger in these parts. It doesn't seem right for outsiders to come into a State, violating the game laws, killing animals that belong to the whole people. Of course, I am kind of particular that way for a trapper, but at the same time, I don't see any use of being a game thief, any more than being a chicken thief, or stealing some individual's pigs.

She knew what was aching me, too. She laughed at me, and she didn't have any mercy on me at all. She called me about all the soft and exasperating names she could lay tongue to, and all I could do was sit and grow red, and feel doubtful and pleased, the way a man has to be. She knew I had a conscience and that it was bothering me, and so she set out to bother me more.

The snow wasn't deep on the higher ranges yet. It had, however, begun to drive the wild life down, and I had already seen two small flocks of the mountain sheep a few miles south of us. Nothing would do but we must go look for them. That meant a night or two out, so I made up a camping outfit, put it on my packhorse, and we started.

We stopped that night on a nice level bench, with a lot of green timber all around us. A sifting of snow showed tracks, and here was a fine game pocket— deer, bear, and just before dark, the trail of a band of sheep. I was in hopes

we'd not find any, but she knew those tracks. She took charge, then, and we camped where she said.

We broiled our meat, and drank our coffee black. She had a pneumatic sleepingbag, and I had a cowboy's canvas and two army blankets. I pumped her mattress up with a big tire pump, too. I did what she said. What else could I do?

The next morning while the stars weré still shining bright, she popped out of bed, and had the fire started before I was awake: She fried some venison, and we had break- fast. Then, with her rucksack and my game-bag full of lunch, we went hunting among the peaks, I hadn't wasted much time hunting around the precipices. Now I had my fill of it.

We sneaked in our gray suits to look into gulches and valleys a mile deep; we studied the landscape through our binoculars; we saw bear, which she sniffed at; we saw a twenty-dollar fisher, which she wouldn't let me shoot; we crossed the trail of a legal elk, a buster, and she gave less than half a glance at it. Nothing would suit her mind but a mountain sheep!

Mountain sheep, with a two hundred fine on it, and the glory of the high peaks in its spring and bound, the scorn of safety and the fire of courage in its great eyes; She just set her pretty lips, and squinted fer keen and commanding eyes—so I tagged along after her, and held the rope, when we skirted along the brinks of doom, and the rims of wilderness paradise.

To see a lady like that so bloodthirsty sort of shocked me. Yet sometimes I could see in her face something else. She would pause on a shoulder:to gaze away off down into the pink and yellow deserts, the valleys of the arid lands a hundred miles away .in the hollows.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she would whisper to herself, and then she'd turn and ask me, "Did you ever see anything like it in your life?"

It was at such times I'd see tears filling her eyes. She splashed them out angrily, though. I know she wanted somebody who could just love that sort of scenery. She talked like a book. She asked me if I had ever heard of Ruskin, Thoreau, Seton, and so on. She couldn't see enough of the high places, and luck was with her.

We were walking along a slope where the trees are six inches high, and like a mat on the ground, when nine sheep came bounding down out of the mountain and stopped short, caught by surprise, not forty yards away. Usually, in such cases, the biggest and best head of all is around behind all the ewes or lambs, but not this time. The ram was nearest; he stood the highest, and I could see his chest wide and flat like that of a horse.

For a second she was frozen by her good fortune. Then I saw her rifle slip up and the top of her cap lean forward— she was ahead of me. Then she

pulled. The flock scattered, but the big ram just walked a few steps, and she put her eye into the sights again, fired, and her victim collapsed.

Better than two hundred and seventy-five pounds, with horns that more than made a circle, she had a trophy that must forever be her pride, and her shame, too. Yet she turned and with a snapshot, broke the back of a three-year-old at a hundred yards,

"Now, we've each a head!" she turned and said to me.

I thought she would be laughing and proud. She wasn't. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. Yet she was grim, and we dressed those victims, brought the packhorse to the foot of the steep, and dragged the meat to it. We were back at the government cabin the next morning, and the heads were with the meat out in the green timber, hidden. That was my idea, and she didn't seem: to object.

The next day I had my traps to look after, and so I made the round, about ten miles—a short loop spot-trapping line. I took up some nice little fur, and was back in the cabin about three o'clock. There she was, with both those sheep heads, working over them like a taxidermist. I nearly had heart failure—but she just laughed.

"Why, nobody will come!" she said. "What are you frightened of? The idea of a trapper being afraid of violating the game law!"

She laughed and made merry over it. She was a gale of fun that day.

"Now I've done what I came to do!" she said, and she stepped over the cabin floor like a dancer on the stage.

She took killing those sheep mighty easy, sometimes she would draw back and close her fist as she looked at the green skins and the heads. She was sorry, too, as well as satisfied. I tried to have her hide them out, but she wouldn't. When I came in from the line there was a great roast of mutton spitted before the fireplace, turning around and around, broiling. I never ate better meat.

Every once in a while she looked off down the trail toward the valley of the deserts. I thought she was wondering if any one would happen along. Somebody did, all right. An hour after dark, I heard horses coming, and grabbed up the two heads, and the hides, to run. She stopped me,

"Fool!" she said. "Wait!"

What can a man do? I waited. Jus as I expected, in walked three men, a forest ranger, a game warden, and another fellow, sort of a sport, I took him to be. The first thing they saw were the mountain sheep relics. They looked at one another. They looked at me, wild-eyed as I was, and then at the woman.

She was looking at the fire, turning her wedding-ring and diamonds around and around with her fingers. She was white.

"Well, we've got you!" the game warden said.

"Yes, sir," I replied. 'You have me. I'm a trapper, and I'm a hunter. She's a tourist— just came through."

"He lies!" she turned. "I shot one of those sheep—the big one."

"You confess to that, too?" the sport asked.

"I don't deny anything a woman says," I grumbled.

"How long have you been here?"

"A week or so," she spoke up. "We're old— old friends."

In the morning four of us went down in her car. It was about sixty miles to town, and the county seat. There was a lot of rigamarole to the business. They had us arrested on a warrant, one warrant for the two of us, and then they tried us together. We had a lawyer, and he made sort of a fuss, but there wasn't any escaping it.

We were fined two hundred dollars each and costs, which they made quite considerable. I thought my reputation was spoiled, and that now I'd have game wardens camping on my tracks all the while; not that I cared, but just that I was mixed up in a lady's violating. I cussed myself, inside a lot, for letting the woman be such a fool, and, naturally, I paid my own fine. I was going to pay hers, too. The look she gave me was wonderful!

Everybody around just beamed on me, the lawyers, and the judge, and the reporters. Then after the case was all settled and adjourned, she went out with me, into her car, and while they took our photographs, she turned her machine around, and we smoked back up into the mountains.

"Tex," she turned to me, "I've known you were one of the noblemen of the wilderness. You let me lead you into all this— all this violating, and you— you would have paid the price. You did pay your own fine— and I'm to blame. You offered to pay mine, too— I— I just couldn't let you."

"It would have been a favor to me," I answered, though I suppose two hundred and twenty-four dollars and thirty cents means as much to me as to anybody on top of the same amount.

"I believe you!" She shook her head. "Oh, I'm ashamed! I'm ashamed— taking advantage of your— your gallantry! You didn't want me to camp there— you didn't want me to kill illegal game— and you would have let me go free, when I— I had led you into it! How does it happen you never married?"

Just like that! It took me all of a heap. When you've guided a lady through the Western ranges of the Rockies, and when you've been arrested with her, and fined for violating the game laws, and you've heard her laugh, and seen her cry, you find her a heap more unexpected than even in the beginning. There wasn't much to tell.

"The other fellow took her," I said.

"Tex!" She turned to me. "She was a fool! And you'll hate women more now— I know you will!"

"No." I shook my head. "You don"t hate the mountains, or deserts, or blizzards. or—or women."

I felt pretty brash, talking so free and easy to a woman. I thought she would sort of be angry. She wasn't, though. She just sniffed and sobbed a little, crying as she took that roadway at thirty miles an hour!

She drove me home. After supper she settled with me. I didn't want to take a cent. Somehow, it didn't seem right. She was a friend. She had given me something to remember all my life. What I have missed, not having a wife, nor a sweetheart, is my own starvation. She put down the money for the fines, for my time— and the biggest scale I ever heard of, a tip. I fought against taking it, any of it, especially that extra.

But nobody can stand up against a woman like that. She was sorry for me, seeming to understand my feelings about being caught violating. She was, for her part, right well satisfied. Some people are that way— they like to be thought pretty bad, like a bully, or a smart Aleck. Only in her case, she was just lovely; that's the only way I can say it.

Tears rolled down her cheeks when she had killed those noble brutes of the high peaks! Only a strong and courageous woman could have won her way to that barren above the timber line. A woman, but probably no more complicated than lots of others of her sex, she rolled away down the mountain and left a mighty big sky overhead, and nothing much under it, for a long time after she was gone.

She left me a lot of things, an Indian blanket eight foot square and about half an inch thick, for one thing, and her rifle, with a lot of ammunition, and four or five books by those men she asked if I'd ever read anything they wrote; some cooking utensils and a vacuum bottle— about two horse-back loads all together. If only Td had the education, and the manners, and a lot of those frills a man needs, when such a stranger comes into his world!

"But she's married!" I kept telling myself, having seen her wedding-ring, and how she twisted it around, with the diamond rings, sitting in the light of the flames before the fireplace at night.

"I'm, oh, a thousand times more grateful and obliged to you than you'll ever know— you dear old stupid trapper!" she laughed at me, with a choke in her voice that I'll never forget— the words, or the choke, or the fluttering tears in her eyes.

This seemed to be all there was to it. Winter was coming on, so I took up my spot trapping line, and edged off across into my winter trapping country, south and southwest of the Pozums.

About six weeks afterward I had quite a surprise in the mail. It was a long, legal-looking letter, and the more I looked into it the legaler its contents became.

In a pink rubber-stamp on the first page was the statement:

SERVICE BY MAIL

Then along down for about two and a half square feet was a statement, to wit, that Tex Beatty was hereby served with a summons to appear, and be responsible for whatever, if he didn't, to be co-respondent in the hereinafter described "suit for absolute divorce" in the case of

Thomas Tupelo Leandole versus Agnes Mayova Leandole

Just like that! Gee, Christmas Hackensack! Then, in a nice pale-blue envelope, pages of pale-blue letter paper, written on first one side, then another, and sidewise across the back, and so on, about four square feet of apology and beseeching. It was trom the lady. I could see her writing that letter just as plain as though I had stood there, sort of laughing, sort of with tears in her eyes, awful sorry, but mighty well satisfied, too, the way she had been while we hunted down the mountain sheep— and she had just had to have mountain sheep! They were illegal and from a newspaper clipping that she enclosed, I sort of understood the gist of it:

It appears from affidavits submitted in the case by the plaintiff that Mrs. Leandole is accused of having spent a considerable time hunting with a well-known sportsman, Mr. Tex Beatty, on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. The plaintiff learned of the affair through the arrest of Mr. Beatty and Mrs. Leandole in a government cabin to which they had carried two beautiful mountain sheep heads, with the hides, the killing of these animals being against the law; the report of the arrest and the fining of the two, as printed in the newspapers, enabled Mr. Leandole to bring the divorce suit on statutory grounds.

Naturally I was for pulling up stakes and going back to New York. I could have told them something they didn't know. But her letter, same as usual, was right the other way.

"Please don't do anything about it," she wrote, "I know what you want to do. Just don't say a word. You will do this for me, i am sure. Just as it nearly broke my heart to murder those great, beautiful mountain sheep, as they stood there so proudly against their own homeland, so I do feel what an outrageous trick I have played on you. I am sorry! Oh, believe that I am! But they knew, down there in the little mountain court town, that you were

honorable. They just hated to have you stained with the reputation of being a law violator— but i just had to do it! And I have put that other stain on you, too, but you know. A clean man is so splendid— and he— you will not deny me this favor? You know, I cried, sacrificing those sheep— and now, my heart is sore for you. Please, Tex— say nothing, and have my eternal gratitude! I know you will for me."

What else could a man do?

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2: Unseen— Unfeared

Francis Stevens

Gertrude Barrows Bennett, 1883-1948

People's Favorite Magazine, February 10, 1919

I HAD BEEN dining with my ever-interesting friend, Mark Jenkins, at a little Italian restaurant near South Street. It was a chance meeting. Jenkins is too busy, usually, to make dinner engagements. Over our highly seasoned food and sour, thin, red wine, he spoke of little odd incidents and adventures of his profession. Nothing very vital or important, of course. Jenkins is not the sort of detective who first detects and then pours the egotistical and revealing details of achievement in the ears of every acquaintance, however appreciative.

But when I spoke of something I had seen in the morning papers, he laughed. "Poor old 'Doc' Holt! Fascinating old codger, to anyone who really knows him. I've had his friendship for years— since I was first on the city force and saved a young assistant of his from jail on a false charge. And they had to drag him into the poisoning of this young sport, Ralph Peeler!"

"Why are you so sure he couldn't have been implicated?" I asked.

But Jenkins only shook his head, with a quiet smile. "I have reasons for believing otherwise," was all I could get out of him on that score, "But," he added, "the only reason he was suspected at all is the superstitious dread of these ignorant people around him. Can't see why he lives in such a place. I know for a fact he doesn't have to. Doc's got money of his own. He's an amateur chemist and dabbler in different sorts of research work, and I suspect he's been guilty of 'showing off.' Result, they all swear he has the evil eye and holds forbidden communion with invisible powers. Smoke?"

Jenkins offered me one of his invariably good cigars, which I accepted, saying thoughtfully: "A man has no right to trifle with the superstitions of ignorant people. Sooner or later, it spells trouble."

"Did in his case. They swore up and down that he sold love charms openly and poisons secretly, and that, together with his living so near to— somebody else— got him temporarily suspected. But my tongue's running away with me, as usual!"

"As usual," I retorted impatiently, "you open up with all the frankness of a Chinese diplomat."

He beamed upon me engagingly and rose from the table, with a glance at his watch. "Sorry to leave you, Blaisdell, but I have to meet Jimmy Brennan in ten minutes."

He so clearly did not invite my further company that I remained seated for a little while after his departure; then took my own way homeward. Those streets always held for me a certain fascination, particularly at night. They are

so unlike the rest of the city, so foreign in appearance, with their little shabby stores, always open until late evening, their unbelievably cheap goods, displayed as much outside the shops as in them, hung on the fronts and laid out on tables by the curb and in the street itself. Tonight, however, neither people nor stores in any sense appealed to me. The mixture of Italians, Jews and a few Negroes, mostly bareheaded, unkempt and generally unhygienic in appearance, struck me as merely revolting. They were all humans, and I, too, was human. Some way I did not like the idea.

Puzzled a trifle, for I am more inclined to sympathize with poverty than accuse it, I watched the faces that I passed. Never before had I observed how bestial, how brutal were the countenances of the dwellers in this region. I actually shuddered when an old-clothes man, a gray-bearded Hebrew, brushed me as he toiled past with his barrow.

There was a sense of evil in the air, a warning of things which it is wise for a clean man to shun and keep clear of. The impression became so strong that before I had walked two squares I began to feel physically ill. Then it occurred to me that the one glass of cheap Chianti I had drunk might have something to do with the feeling. Who knew how that stuff had been manufactured, or whether the juice of the grape entered at all into its ill-flavored composition? Yet I doubted if that were the real cause of my discomfort.

By nature I am rather a sensitive, impressionable sort of chap. In some way tonight this neighborhood, with its sordid sights and smells, had struck me wrong.

My sense of impending evil was merging into actual fear. This would never do. There is only one way to deal with an imaginative temperament like mine— conquer its vagaries. If I left South Street with this nameless dread upon me, I could never pass down it again without a recurrence of the feeling. I should simply have to stay here until I got the better of it— that was all.

I paused on a corner before a shabby but brightly lighted little drug store. Its gleaming windows and the luminous green of its conventional glass show jars made the brightest spot on the block. I realized that I was tired, but hardly wanted to go in there and rest. I knew what the company would be like at its shabby, sticky soda fountain. As I stood there, my eyes fell on a long white canvas sign across from me, and its black-and-red lettering caught my attention.

SEE THE GREAT UNSEEN!
Come in! This Means You!
FREE TO ALL!

A museum of fakes, I thought, but also reflected that if it were a show of some kind I could sit down for a while, rest, and fight off this increasing obsession of nonexistent evil. That side of the street was almost deserted, and the place itself might well be nearly empty.

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I walked over, but with every step my sense of dread increased. Dread of I knew not what. Bodiless, inexplicable horror had me as in a net, whose strands, being intangible, without reason for existence, I could by no means throw off. It was not the people now. None of them were about me. There, in the open, lighted street, with no sight nor sound of terror to assail me, I was the shivering victim of such fear as I had never known was possible. Yet still I would not yield.

Setting my teeth, and fighting with myself as with some pet animal gone mad, I forced my steps to slowness and walked along the sidewalk, seeking entrance. Just here there were no shops, but several doors reached in each case by means of a few iron-railed stone steps. I chose the one in the middle beneath the sign. In that neighborhood there are museums, shops and other commercial enterprises conducted in many shabby old residences, such as were these. Behind the glazing of the door I had chosen I could see a dim, pinkish light, but on either side the windows were quite dark.

Trying the door, I found it unlocked. As I opened it a party of Italians passed on the pavement below and I looked back at them over my shoulder. They were gayly dressed, men, women and children, laughing and chattering to one another; probably on their way to some wedding or other festivity.

In passing, one of the men glanced up at me and involuntarily I shuddered back against the door. He was a young man, handsome after the swarthy manner of his race, but never in my life had I see a face so expressive of pure, malicious cruelty, naked and unashamed. Our eyes met and his seemed to light up with a vile gleaming, as if all the wickedness of his nature had come to a focus in the look of concentrated hate he gave me.

They went by, but for some distance I could see him watching me, chin on shoulder, till he and his party were swallowed up in the crowd of marketers farther down the street.

Sick and trembling from that encounter, merely of eyes though it had been, I threw aside my partly smoked cigar and entered. Within there was a small vestibule, whose ancient tesselated floor was grimy with the passing of many feet. I could feel the grit of dirt under my shoes, and it rasped on my rawly quivering nerves. The inner door stood partly open, and going on I found

myself in a bare, dirty hallway, and was greeted by the sour, musty, poverty-stricken smell common to dwellings of the very ill-to-do. Beyond there was a stairway, carpeted with ragged grass matting. A gas jet, turned low inside a very dusty pink globe, was the light I had seen from without.

Listening, the house seemed entirely silent. Surely, this was no place of public amusement of any kind whatever. More likely it was a rooming house, and I had, after all, mistaken the entrance.

To my intense relief, since coming inside, the worst agony of my unreasonable terror had passed away. If I could only get in some place where I could sit down and be quiet, probably I should be rid of it for good. Determining to try another entrance, I was about to leave the bare hallway when one of several doors along the side of it suddenly opened and a man stepped out into the hall.

"Well?" he said, looking at me keenly, but with not the least show of surprise at my presence.

"I beg your pardon," I replied. "The door was unlocked and I came in here, thinking it was the entrance to the exhibit— what do they call it? the 'Great Unseen.' The one that is mentioned on that long white sign. Can you tell me which door is the right one?"

"I can."

With that brief answer he stopped and stared at me again. He was a tall, lean man, somewhat stooped, but possessing considerable dignity of bearing. For that neighborhood, he appeared uncommonly well dressed, and his long, smooth-shaven face was noticeable because, while his complexion was dark and his eyes coal-black, above them the heavy brows and his hair were almost silvery-white. His age might have been anything over the threescore mark.

I grew tired of being stared at. "If you can and— won't, then never mind," I observed a trifle irritably, and turned to go. But his sharp exclamation halted me.

"No!" he said. "No— no! Forgive me for pausing— it was not hesitation, I assure you. To think that one— one, even, has come! All day they pass my sign up there— pass and fear to enter. But you are different. You are not of these timorous, ignorant foreign peasants. You ask me to tell you the right door? Here it is! Here!"

And he struck the panel of the door, which he had closed behind him, so that the sharp yet hollow sound of it echoed up through the silent house.

Now it may be thought that after all my senseless terror in the open street, so strange a welcome from so odd a showman would have brought the feeling back, full force. But there is an emotion stronger, to a certain point, than fear. This queer old fellow aroused my curiosity. What kind of museum could it be

that he accused the passing public of fearing to enter? Nothing really terrible, surely, or it would have been closed by the police. And normally I am not an unduly timorous person. "So it's in there, is it?" I asked, coming toward him. "And I'm to be sole audience? Come, that will be an interesting experience." I was half laughing now.

"The most interesting in the world," said the old man, with a solemnity which rebuked my lightness.

With that he opened the door, passed inward and closed it again— in my very face. I stood staring at it blankly. The panels, I remember, had been originally painted white, but now the paint was flaked and blistered, gray with dirt and dirty finger marks. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had no wish to enter there. Whatever was behind it could be scarcely worth seeing, or he would not choose such a place for its exhibition. With the old man's vanishing my curiosity had cooled, but just as I again turned to leave, the door opened and this singular showman stuck his white-eyebrowed face through the aperture. He was frowning impatiently. "Come in— come in!" he snapped, and promptly withdrawing his head, once more closed the door.

"He has something there he doesn't want should get out," was the very natural conclusion which I drew. "Well, since it can hardly be anything dangerous, and he's so anxious I should see it— here goes!"

With that I turned the soiled white porcelain handle, and entered.

The room I came into was neither very large nor very brightly lighted. In no way did it resemble a museum or lecture room. On the contrary, it seemed to have been fitted up as a quite well-appointed laboratory. The floor was linoleum-covered, there were glass cases along the walls whose shelves were filled with bottles, specimen jars, graduates, and the like. A large table in one corner bore what looked like some odd sort of camera, and a larger one in the middle of the room was fitted with a long rack filled with bottles and test tubes, and was besides littered with papers, glass slides, and various paraphernalia which my ignorance failed to identify. There were several cases of books, a few plain wooden chairs, and in the corner a large iron sink with running water.

My host of the white hair and black eyes was awaiting me, standing near the larger table. He indicated one of the wooden chairs with a thin forefinger that shook a little, either from age or eagerness. "Sit down— sit down! Have no fear but that you will be interested, my friend. Have no fear at all— of anything!"

As he said it he fixed his dark eyes upon me and stared harder than ever. But the effect of his words was the opposite of their meaning. I did sit down, because my knees gave under me, but if in the outer hall I had lost my terror, it

now returned twofold upon me. Out there the light had been faint, dingily roseate, indefinite. By it I had not perceived how this old man's face was a mask of living malice— of cruelty, hate and a certain masterful contempt. Now I knew the meaning of my fear, whose warning I would not heed. Now I knew that I had walked into the very trap from which my abnormal sensitiveness had striven in vain to save me.

iii

AGAIN I STRUGGLED within me, bit at my lip till I tasted blood, and presently the blind paroxysm passed. It must have been longer in going than I thought, and the old man must have all that time been speaking, for when I could once more control my attention, hear and see him, he had taken up a position near the sink, about ten feet away, and was addressing me with a sort of "platform" manner, as if I had been the large audience whose absence he had deplored.

"And so," he was saying, "I was forced to make these plates very carefully, to truly represent the characteristic hues of each separate organism. Now, in color work of every kind the film is necessarily extremely sensitive. Doubtless you are familiar in a general way with the exquisite transparencies produced by color photography of the single-plate type."

He paused, and trying to act like a normal human being, I observed: "I saw some nice landscapes done in that way— last week at an illustrated lecture in Franklin Hall."

He scowled, and made an impatient gesture at me with his hand. "I can proceed better without interruptions," he said. "My pause was purely oratorical."

I meekly subsided, and he went on in his original loud, clear voice. He would have made an excellent lecturer before a much larger audience— if only his voice could have lost that eerie, ringing note. Thinking of that I must have missed some more, and when I caught it again he was saying:

"As I have indicated, the original plate is the final picture. Now, many of these organisms are extremely hard to photograph, and microphotography in color is particularly difficult. In consequence, to spoil a plate tries the patience of the photographer. They are so sensitive that the ordinary darkroom ruby lamp would instantly ruin them, and they must therefore be developed either in darkness or by a special light produced by interposing thin sheets of tissue of a particular shade of green and of yellow between lamp and plate, and even that will often cause ruinous fog. Now I, finding it hard to handle them so, made numerous experiments with a view of discovering some glass or fabric of

a color which should add to the safety of the green, without robbing it of all efficiency. All proved equally useless, but intermittently I persevered— until last week."

His voice dropped to an almost confidential tone, and he leaned slightly toward me. I was cold from my neck to my feet, though my head was burning, but I tried to force an appreciative smile.

"Last week," he continued impressively, "I had a prescription filled at the corner drug store. The bottle was sent home to me wrapped in a piece of what I first took to be whitish, slightly opalescent paper. Later I decided that it was some kind of membrane. When I questioned the druggist, seeking its source, he said it was a sheet of 'paper' that was around a bundle of herbs from South America. That he had no more, and doubted if I could trace it. He had wrapped my bottle so, because he was in haste and the sheet was handy.

"I can hardly tell you what first inspired me to try that membrane in my photographic work. It was merely dull white with a faint hint of opalescence, except when held against the light. Then it became quite translucent and quite brightly prismatic. For some reason it occurred to me that this refractive effect might help in breaking up the actinic rays— the rays which affect the sensitive emulsion. So that night I inserted it behind the sheets of green and yellow tissue, next the lamp prepared my trays and chemicals laid my plate holders to hand, turned off the white light and— turned on the green!"

There was nothing in his words to inspire fear. It was a wearisomely detailed account of his struggles with photography. Yet, as he again paused impressively, I wished that he might never speak again. I was desperately, contemptibly in dread of the thing he might say next.

Suddenly, he drew himself erect, the stoop went out of his shoulders, he threw back his head and laughed. It was a hollow sound, as if he laughed into a trumpet. "I won't tell you what I saw! Why should I? Your own eyes shall bear witness. But this much I'll say, so that you may better understand— later. When our poor, faultily sensitive vision can perceive a thing, we say that it is visible. When the nerves of touch can feel it, we say that it is tangible. Yet I tell you there are beings intangible to our physical sense, yet whose presence is felt by the spirit, and invisible to our eyes merely because those organs are not attuned to the light as reflected from their bodies. But light passed through the screen, which we are about to use has a wave length novel to the scientific world, and by it you shall see with the eyes of the flesh that which has been invisible since life began. Have no fear!"

He stopped to laugh again, and his mirth was yellow-toothed— menacing.

"Have no fear!" he reiterated, and with that stretched his hand toward the wall, there came a click and we were in black, impenetrable darkness. I wanted

to spring up, to seek the door by which I had entered and rush out of it, but the paralysis of unreasoning terror held me fast.

I could hear him moving about in the darkness, and a moment later a faint green glimmer sprang up in the room. Its source was over the large sink, where I suppose he developed his precious "color plates."

Every instant, as my eyes became accustomed to the dimness, I could see more clearly. Green light is peculiar. It may be far fainter than red, and at the same time far more illuminating. The old man was standing beneath it, and his face by that ghastly radiance had the exact look of a dead man's. Besides this, however, I could observe nothing appalling.

"That," continued the man, "is the simple developing light of which I have spoken— now watch, for what you are about to behold no mortal man but myself has ever seen before."

For a moment he fussed with the green lamp over the sink. It was so constructed that all the direct rays struck downward. He opened a flap at the side, for a moment there was a streak of comforting white luminance from within, then he inserted something, slid it slowly in— and closed the flap.

The thing he put in— that South American "membrane" it must have been— instead of decreasing the light increased it— amazingly. The hue was changed from green to greenish-gray, and the whole room sprang into view, a livid, ghastly chamber, filled with— overcrawled by— what?

My eyes fixed themselves, fascinated, on something that moved by the old man's feet. It writhed there on the floor like a huge, repulsive starfish, an immense, armed, legged thing, that twisted convulsively. It was smooth, as if made of rubber, was whitish-green in color; and presently raised its great round blob of a body on tottering tentacles, crept toward my host and writhed upward— yes, climbed up his legs, his body. And he stood there, erect, arms folded, and stared sternly down at the thing which climbed.

But the room— the whole room was alive with other creatures than that. Everywhere I looked they were— centipedish things, with yard-long bodies, detestable, furry spiders that lurked in shadows, and sausage-shaped translucent horrors that moved— and floated through the air. They dived— here and there between me and the light, and I could see its bright greenness through their greenish bodies.

Worse, though; far worse than these were the things with human faces. Mask-like, monstrous, huge gaping mouths and slit-like eyes— I find I cannot write of them. There was that about them which makes their memory even now intolerable.

The old man was speaking again, and every word echoed in my brain like the ringing of a gong. "Fear nothing! Among such as these do you move every

hour of the day and night. Only you and I have seen, for God is merciful and has spared our race from sight. But I am not merciful! I loathe the race which gave these creatures birth— the race which might be so surrounded by invisible, unguessed but blessed beings— and chooses these for its companions! All the world shall see and know. One by one shall they come here, learn the truth, and perish. For who can survive the ultimate of terror? Then I, too, shall find peace, and leave the earth to its heritage of man-created horrors. Do you know what these are— whence they come?"

This voice boomed now like a cathedral bell. I could not answer, him, but he waited for no reply. "Out of the ether— out of the omnipresent ether from whose intangible substance the mind of God made the planets, all living things, and man— man has made these! By his evil thoughts, by his selfish panics, by his lusts and his interminable, never-ending hate he has made them, and they are everywhere! Fear nothing— but see where there comes to you, its creator, the shape and the body of your FEAR!"

And as he said it I perceived a great Thing coming toward me— a Thing— but consciousness could endure no more. The ringing, threatening voice merged in a roar within my ears, there came a merciful dimming of the terrible, lurid vision, and blank nothingness succeeded upon horror too great for bearing.

iv

THERE WAS a dull, heavy pain above my eyes. I knew that they were closed, that I was dreaming, and that the rack full of colored bottles which I seemed to see so clearly was no more than a part of the dream. There was some vague but imperative reason why I should rouse myself. I wanted to awaken, and thought that by staring very hard indeed I could dissolve this foolish vision of blue and yellow-brown bottles. But instead of dissolving they grew clearer, more solid and substantial of appearance, until suddenly the rest of my senses rushed to the support of sight, and I became aware that my eyes were open, the bottles were quite real, and that I was sitting in a chair, fallen sideways so that my cheek rested most uncomfortably on the table which held the rack.

I straightened up slowly and with difficulty, groping in my dulled brain for some clue to my presence in this unfamiliar place, this laboratory that was lighted only by the rays of an arc light in the street outside its three large windows. Here I sat, alone, and if the aching of cramped limbs meant anything, here I had sat for more than a little time.

Then, with the painful shock which accompanies awakening to the knowledge of some great catastrophe, came memory. It was this very room, shown by the street lamp's rays to be empty of life, which I had seen thronged with creatures too loathsome for description. I staggered to my feet, staring fearfully about. There were the glass-floored cases, the bookshelves, the two tables with their burdens, and the long iron sink above which, now only a dark blotch of shadow, hung the lamp from which had emanated that livid, terrifically revealing illumination. Then the experience had been no dream, but a frightful reality. I was alone here now.

With callous indifference my strange host had allowed me to remain for hours unconscious, with not the least effort to aid or revive me. Perhaps, hating me so, he had hoped that I would die there.

At first I made no effort to leave the place. Its appearance filled me with reminiscent loathing. I longed to go, but as yet felt too weak and ill for the effort. Both mentally and physically my condition was deplorable, and for the first time I realized that a shock to the mind may react upon the body as vilely as any debauch of self-indulgence.

Quivering in every nerve and muscle, dizzy with headache and nausea, I dropped back into the chair, hoping that before the old man returned I might recover sufficient self-control to escape him. I knew that he hated me, and why. As I waited, sick, miserable, I understood the man. Shuddering, I recalled the loathsome horrors he had shown me. If the mere desires and emotions of mankind were daily carnified in such forms as those, no wonder that he viewed his fellow beings with detestation and longed only to destroy them.

I thought, too, of the cruel, sensuous faces I had seen in the streets outside— seen for the first time, as if a veil had been withdrawn from eyes hitherto blinded by self-delusion. Fatuously trustful as a month-old puppy, I had lived in a grim, evil world, where goodness is a word and crude selfishness the only actuality. Drearily my thoughts drifted back through my own life, its futile purposes, mistakes and activities. All of evil that I knew returned to overwhelm me. Our gropings toward divinity were a sham, a writhing sunward of slime-covered beasts who claimed sunlight as their heritage, but in their hearts preferred the foul and easy depths.

Even now, though I could neither see nor feel them, this room, the entire world, was acrawl with the beings created by our real natures. I recalled the cringing, contemptible fear to which my spirit had so readily yielded, and the faceless Thing to which the emotion had given birth.

Then abruptly, shockingly, I remembered that every moment I was adding to the horde. Since my mind could conceive only repulsive incubi, and since while I lived I must think, feel, and so continue to shape them, was there no

way to check so abominable a succession? My eyes fell on the long shelves with their many-colored bottles. In the chemistry of photography there are deadly poisons— I knew that. Now was the time to end it— now! Let him return and find his desire accomplished. One good thing I could do, if one only. I could abolish my monster-creating self.

v

MY FRIEND Mark Jenkins is an intelligent and usually a very careful man. When he took from "Smiler" Callahan a cigar which had every appearance of being excellent, innocent Havana, the act denoted both intelligence and caution. By very clever work he had traced the poisoning of young Ralph Peeler to Mr. Callahan's door, and he believed this particular cigar to be the mate of one smoked by Peeler just previous to his demise. And if, upon arresting Callahan, he had not confiscated this bit of evidence, it would have doubtless been destroyed by its regrettably unconscientious owner.

But when Jenkins shortly afterward gave me that cigar, as one of his own, he committed one of those almost inconceivable blunders which, I think, are occasionally forced upon clever men to keep them from overweening vanity. Discovering his slight mistake, my detective friend spent the night searching for his unintended victim, myself; and that his search was successful was due to Pietro Marini, a young Italian of Jenkins' acquaintance, whom he met about the hour of 2:00 A.M. returning from a dance.

Now, Marini had seen me standing on the steps of the house where Doctor Frederick Holt had his laboratory and living rooms, and he had stared at me, not with any ill intent, but because he thought I was the sickest-looking, most ghastly specimen of humanity that he had ever beheld. And, sharing the superstition of his South Street neighbors, he wondered if the worthy doctor had poisoned me as well as Peeler. This suspicion he imparted to Jenkins, who, however, had the best of reasons for believing otherwise. Moreover, as he informed Marini, Holt was dead, having drowned himself late the previous afternoon. An hour or so after our talk in the restaurant, news of his suicide reached Jenkins.

It seemed wise to search any place where a very sick-looking young man had been seen to enter, so Jenkins came straight to the laboratory. Across the fronts of those houses was the long sign with its mysterious inscription, "See the Great Unseen," not at all mysterious to the detective. He knew that next door to Doctor Holt's the second floor had been thrown together into a lecture room, where at certain hours a young man employed by settlement workers displayed upon a screen stereopticon views of various deadly bacilli, the germs

of diseases appropriate to dirt and indifference. He knew, too, that Doctor Holt himself had helped the educational effort along by providing some really wonderful lantern slides, done by microcolor photography.

On the pavement outside, Jenkins found the two-thirds remnant of a cigar, which he gathered in and came up the steps, a very miserable and self-reproachful detective. Neither outer nor inner door was locked, and in the laboratory he found me, alive, but on the verge of death by another means that he had feared.

In the extreme physical depression following my awakening from drugged sleep, and knowing nothing of its cause, I believed my adventure fact in its entirety. My mentality was at too low an ebb to resist its dreadful suggestion. I was searching among Holt's various bottles when Jenkins burst in. At first I was merely annoyed at the interruption of my purpose, but before the anticlimax of his explanation the mists of obsession drifted away and left me still sick in body, but in spirit happy as any man may well be who has suffered a delusion that the world is wholly bad— and learned that its badness springs from his own poisoned brain.

The malice which I had observed in every face, including young Marini's, existed only in my drug-affected vision. Last week's "popular-science" lecture had been recalled to my subconscious mind— the mind that rules dreams and delirium— by the photographic apparatus in Holt's workroom. "See the Great Unseen" assisted materially, and even the corner drug store before which I had paused, with its green-lit show vases, had doubtless played a part. But presently, following something Jenkins told me, I was driven to one protest. "If Holt was not here," I demanded, "if Holt is dead, as you say, how do you account for the fact that I, who have never seen the man, was able to give you an accurate description which you admit to be that of Doctor Frederick Holt?"

He pointed across the room. "See that?" It was a life-size bust portrait, in crayons, the picture of a white-haired man with bushy eyebrows and the most piercing black eyes I had ever seen— until the previous evening. It hung facing the door and near the windows, and the features stood out with a strangely lifelike appearance in the white rays of the arc lamp just outside. "Upon entering," continued Jenkins, "the first thing you saw was that portrait, and from it your delirium built a living, speaking man. So, there are your white-haired showman, your unnatural fear, your color photography and your pretty green golliwogs all nicely explained for you, Blaisdell, and thank God you're alive to hear the explanation. If you had smoked the whole of that cigar— well, never mind. You didn't. And now, my very dear friend, I think it's high time that you interviewed a real, flesh-and-blood doctor. I'll phone for a taxi."

"Don't," I said. "A walk in the fresh air will do me more good than fifty doctors."

"Fresh air! There's no fresh air on South Street in July," complained Jenkins, but reluctantly yielded.

I had a reason for my preference. I wished to see people, to meet face to face even such stray prowlers as might be about at this hour, nearer sunrise than midnight, and rejoice in the goodness and kindliness of the human countenance— particularly as found in the lower classes.

But even as we were leaving there occurred to me a curious inconsistency.

"Jenkins," I said, "you claim that the reason Holt, when I first met him in the hall, appeared to twice close the door in my face, was because the door never opened until I myself unlatched it."

"Yes," confirmed Jenkins, but he frowned, foreseeing my next question.

"Then why, if it was from that picture that I built so solid, so convincing a vision of the man, did I see Holt in the hall before the door was open?"

"You confuse your memories," retorted Jenkins rather shortly.

"Do I? Holt was dead at that hour, but— I tell you I saw Holt outside the door! And what was his reason for committing suicide?"

Before my friend could reply I was across the room, fumbling in the dusk there at the electric lamp above the sink. I got the tin flap open and pulled out the sliding screen, which consisted of two sheets of glass with fabric between, dark on one side, yellow on the other. With it came the very thing I dreaded— a sheet of whitish, parchment-like, slightly opalescent stuff.

Jenkins was beside me as I held it at arm's length toward the windows. Through it the light of the arc lamp fell— divided into the most astonishingly brilliant rainbow hues. And instead of diminishing the light, it was perceptibly increased in the oddest way. Almost one thought that the sheet itself was luminous, and yet when held in shadow it gave off no light at all.

"Shall we— put it in the lamp again— and try it?" asked Jenkins slowly, and in his voice there was no hint of mockery.

I looked him straight in the eyes. "No," I said, "we won't. I was drugged. Perhaps in that condition I received a merciless revelation of the discovery that caused Holt's suicide, but I don't believe it. Ghost or no ghost, I refuse to ever again believe in the depravity of the human race. If the air and the earth are teeming with invisible horrors, they are not of our making, and— the study of demonology is better let alone. Shall we burn this thing, or tear it up?"

"We have no right to do either," returned Jenkins thoughtfully, "but you know, Blaisdell, there's a little too darn much realism about some parts of your 'dream.' I haven't been smoking any doped cigars; but when you held that up

to the light, I'll swear I saw— well, never mind. Burn it— send it back to the place it came from."

"South America?" said I.

"A hotter place than that. Burn it."

So he struck a match and we did. It was gone in one great white flash.

A LARGE place was given by morning papers to the suicide of Doctor Frederick Holt, caused, it was surmised, by mental derangement brought about by his unjust implication in the Peeler murder. It seemed an inadequate reason, since he had never been arrested, but no other was ever discovered.

Of course, our action in destroying that "membrane" was illegal and rather precipitate, but, though he won't talk about it, I know that Jenkins agrees with me— doubt is sometimes better than certainty, and there are marvels better left unproved. Those, for instance, which concern the Powers of Evil.

———————————

3: The Madman at Corn Reef Lighthouse

Sapper

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

Pearson's Magazine Feb 1923

A Jim Maitland Story

IF you lie on the close-clipped turf that stretches between Beachy Head and Biding Gap, not too far from the edge of the white chalk cliffs, you will see below you the lighthouse. It stands out in the sea some two hundred yards from the base of the cliff, and every few seconds with monotonous regularity, once dusk has fallen, the beam from the revolving light will shine on you and then pass on, sweeping over the grey water below. A dangerous part of the coast, that one-time haunt of smugglers, till the lighthouse made it safe.

There are treacherous currents and shoals; but the worst is when the sea wrack comes gently drifting over the Downs and lies like a great grey blanket over the sea below. Then that sweeping light is useless, and every two or three minutes comes the sound of a maroon from the lighthouse— a sound which is answered by the mournful wailing of sirens out to sea, as vessels creep slowly through the fog. Like great monsters out of the depths they wail dismally at one another and pass unseen, their sirens growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

Only the roar of the maroons from the lighthouse goes on unchanged, while the grey fog eddies gently by, making fantastic figures as it drifts. Implacable and silent, it seems to mock such paltry man-made efforts to fight it, and yet there are amazingly few accidents, even in that crowded shipping area. The effort may be man-made, but it is successful.

It depends, however, for its success upon the man. Elaborate your mechanical devices as you will, introduce the most complicated automatic machinery to control the regular sweep of the light and the monotonous explosion of the maroons, it all comes back finally to the man who lives in that tall, slender building rising out of the water. A dreary life to which not many men are suited; a life where strange thoughts and fancies might come drifting into one's brain— drifting as gently and slowly as the grey wisps of fog outside. And after a while some might remain, even though outside the fog has gone, and the water shines blue again in the sunlight. It is that way that danger lies. In the crowded waterways where inspectors are many and inspections numerous, the risk is small. Moreover, in the crowded waterways the loneliness is not so great.

But there are others where from month's end to month's end a man will see no soul save the other fellow who lives with him; where save for the

occasional visit of a boat with supplies there is nothing to break the deadly monotony. Sometimes even there is no other fellow; the man is alone. And strange things may happen if then those drifting thoughts and fancies come and take root. When faces float past, pressing for a moment against the glass, and then are gone; when voices unheard by the other man come clearly out of the night; when strange shapes materialise and gibber mockingly— there is danger ahead. The step between sanity and madness is not a great one, and once it has been taken there is no safe return.

And Corn Reef was one of those others.

WE WERE drifting homewards, though we neither of us admitted it in so many words, but we were drifting in our own way. Not for Jim the conventional P. and O.; his tastes, as always, were for the small coasting boat which called at unknown islands and dealt in strange cargoes. One went as far as one liked in her and then stopped and waited for something else. Which takes time, but has its advantages undreamt of by the occupants of the millionaire suites in big liners.

And so it happened that one day in the following spring we came back to Tampico, that island where I had first met him— that island which held the grave of the husband of the only woman who mattered to Jim. We took rooms in the hotel, and almost as if the words had been spoken aloud I heard again her voice bitter with unmeasured contempt: "Oh! you cur!" I think Jim heard it too, for suddenly he smiled at me a little bitterly.

"Is it much use going home, Dick?"

He didn't wait for my answer, but turned away with a shrug of his shoulders and went upstairs while I strolled down the street towards the club. Nothing had changed; nothing ever will change at Tampico. Each drunken derelict who dies is replaced sooner or later by another, which can hardly be accounted as change. And as for the club, I might have left it the day before instead of two years previously.

It was unoccupied save for one man, who glanced up as I came in, and then continued reading the letter he held in his hand. Every now and then he gave a little frown, and I looked at him covertly as I ordered a drink. There was that nameless something about him which marked him instantly as one of those thousands of Britishers who spend their lives in God-forsaken quarters of the globe carrying on the little job of Empire. They generally die of some disease, unknown and unthanked, or else they return to England in the fullness of time and sink into utter obscurity in some suburb of that Empire's capital. But while they're in harness they live, and when the harness drops off they don't mind dying. So perhaps it doesn't matter very much.

The native waiter brought me my drink, and with a three-months-old illustrated paper in my hand, I sat down and forgot about him. He did not seem disposed for conversation, and, to tell the truth, no more was I. The club house at Tampico was the starting-point of many memories, and I was feeling lazy. Chiefly they centred round Jim, and it wasn't until I heard his voice behind me cheerfully greeting the stranger that I realised I was holding the paper upside down.

"Why, it's MacGregor," I heard him say. "The last time I saw you was in Singapore. How are you, my dear fellow?"

"Jim Maitland, by all that's wonderful!" The stranger got up and seized Jim's hand, and just then Jim caught sight of me.

"Come over here, Dick," he cried. "This is Jock MacGregor, and a partially-demented Government pays him a salary for cruising up and down outlandish waters and seeing that no one has walked off with a lighthouse or two. If they only knew what he did with his salary when he gets ashore they'd halve it in the interests of public morals."

"Salary!" snorted MacGregor. "Call my beggarly pittance a salary! And now the blighters have put a survey job on to my shoulders as well. Think I haven't enough work to do, I suppose."

"But what brings you here, Jock?" asked Jim. "Tampico is a bit out of your beaten track, isn't it?"

MacGregor nodded abruptly and the frown appeared once more.

"The supply-boat for the lighthouse at Corn Reef goes from here," he said. "It starts tomorrow, and I'm going with it."

"Visit of inspection?" said Jim.

"Yes and no," returned the other. "In all probability I shall stay there for a week or so."

Jim raised his eyebrows.

"Since when has the great Pooh Bah stayed at particular lighthouses?" he inquired. "I thought you merely looked in to see that the occupant hadn't been frying sausages on the lamps, and then passed gracefully on."

Jock MacGregor grinned, and then grew serious again.

"That's why I said yes and no. This isn't an ordinary inspection." He hesitated a moment, and then leant forward in his chair. "Care to hear the story, Jim?"

"Get it right off your chest, Jock," he said, beckoning to the waiter for drinks.

"WELL, if it won't bore you, I will," began MacGregor. "Only I'll have to go back a bit. When we last met, I had nothing to do with this area at all. Bill

Lambert had it, and mine was farther north. I don't know if you ever met Bill, but he took to seeing things that weren't there, from the usual cause, and has recently gone on permanent sick leave. They said they'd send a successor, as they always do say, but so far there's been no sign of him. And until his arrival Mr. MacGregor was to carry on with both areas— and no increase of pay. Bless their hearts! However, I didn't mind, and to do them justice, in normal circumstances it would have made no odds to me. If you've twice the area to cover, you do half the number of inspections, and it comes to the same thing in the end. It's just a matter of form and routine as you can guess— in normal circumstances."

He emphasised the last three words, and Jim glanced at him.

"One gathers that Corn Reef is not quite normal?" he remarked.

"I'm coming to that," said MacGregor, putting down his glass. "I don't know whether you know the part or not— personally, I only know it from the map. Corn Reef sticks out from a smallish island, called Taba Island, which I believe is inhabited by a few natives. It stretches about half way across a deep-water channel towards the next of the group, which is uninhabited. Beyond that again come other small islands and reefs, and in fact the only method of navigating the belt is through the other half of the deep-water channel I have told you about— one half of which is blocked by Corn Reef.

"The lighthouse stands on the end of the reef, midway across the channel. At low water it can be reached from the island on foot; at high water the reef is covered. So much for the locality; now for the personal details. Six months ago, as I said, I took over from Bill Lambert. It was an informal sort of taking over, as he had delirium tremens pretty badly, and I got no information out of him. But it didn't worry me much, as I'd no idea then that there was anything peculiar in his area. And it wasn't till a month ago, when I received a communication from the keeper at Corn Reef lighthouse, that I began to look into things. His name is David Temple, and the communication was brief and to the point. It stated that his assistant, when attending to the bell, had fallen into the sea and been drowned, and could another be sent."

"Bell?" interrupted Jim. "I don't quite follow."

"Sorry," said MacGregor. "I forgot that point. Apparently at certain times you get a thick belt of fog across the reef and the channel, and stretching right along the belt of islands. Probably it's some form of heavy ground mist. When that comes down they have as a warning for ships a huge bell, which is tolled mechanically. It is built out on a sort of platform below the level of the light, and as far as I can make out from the plans, it seems a pretty antiquated sort of arrangement. However, there it is, and as long as it functions you won't get them to spend any money in having it replaced by anything more up-to-date.

"Well, when I got Temple's letter I began looking up the files. And to my amazement I found that about three months before Bill Lambert had gone a precisely similar letter had reached *him*. At first I thought that the second was merely a reminder, and that Bill had forgotten all about it. So I made inquiries, only to discover the somewhat sinister fact that it was far from a reminder. Bill *had* sent a man, and I was therefore confronted with the situation that within some nine months two men, when attending to the bell at Corn Reef lighthouse, had fallen into the sea and been drowned. Which seemed to show that there was something radically wrong with the bell arrangements generally: something "— and MacGregor paused— "something, Jim, which I utterly failed to get at from the plans. I'm not denying that the whole idea is antiquated; but, granting the plans and sections are correct, it is perfectly safe. And I could see no reason whatever— short of a desire to commit suicide— why two men should fall into the sea."

"And even granting that, why of necessity they should be drowned?" said Jim quietly.

MacGregor shrugged his shoulders.

"The place is alive with sharks, of course," he remarked. "But I've not quite finished yet. Another unpleasant fact was brought to my notice shortly after I received this letter from Temple. I ran into the skipper of some craft or other in the club at Singapore, and he was looking for Bill Lambert's blood. And when he heard I was doing Bill's job he turned his wrath on me. And his accusation amounted to this: that on the morning of February 24th he was on the bridge of his ship nosing her gently through a thick mist. Suddenly there came a bellow from the look-out man, and to his horror he saw looming out of the mist on the star-hoard side— Corn Reef lighthouse.

"'My God, man!' he said to me. 'I could have spat an orange pip at it, and hit it; I could almost have touched it with my hand. In thirty years I've never had such an escape. Another foot— another six inches— and we'd have been on that reef.'

"But wasn't the bell ringing? I demanded.

"'Not a sound!' he roared. 'Not a sound. You can hear that bell for fifteen miles— and there wasn't a sound. Only as I passed by— damn it, why, the platform on which the bell is built nearly grazed my wireless— I looked up. Man! I tell you the bell was ringing right enough— I could see it through the fog— but no sound came. Only above the beat of the engine, I thought I heard a steady thud, thud, thud in time with the beat of the bell. But maybe it was my imagination.'"

JOCK MACGREGOR paused and drained his drink.

"So that is the rather peculiar situation I'm up against."

"And how do you propose to deal with it?" asked Jim.

"Temple asked for an assistant," said MacGregor briefly, "and he's going to have one. He's going to have me." He lit a cigarette, and leant back in his chair. "There's something wrong, Jim," he continued after a moment, "something very wrong out there. That merchant skipper was as hard-headed a customer as you could meet, and if he saw that bell moving— it was moving. Then why was there no sound? And then two men drowned in nine months! I guess I'm not going to send a third till I've, had a look round myself. This man, David Temple, doesn't know me, hasn't ever seen me, so there won't be any difficulty in passing myself off as his new assistant."

Jim was looking thoughtfully out of the window.

"How long has Temple been there?" he said at length.

"Years as far as I can make out," answered MacGregor. "There was one paper in the file— the usual routine paper with regard to an exchange— dated five years ago. He'd refused, or rather had requested to be allowed to stay on. And since I gather there is no vast rush for Corn Reef, I suppose Bill Lambert was only too glad to let him."

Jim shook his head.

"Five years is a long time, Jock," he said gravely. "A very long time. It's far too long for a man to spend in a place like that."

"You think I may find Temple a bit queer?" said MacGregor slowly.

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Jock," he said, "I've got a proposal to make to you. Temple doesn't know you, and he doesn't know me. You go as his assistant as you have already decided. I'll go as your new boss who has just taken Lambert's place. Dick can come as a pal of mine. If everything seems all right, well, we shall all have had a very pleasant little trip, and Temple will be none the worse. If, on the other hand, things are not all right— three heads are better than one, Jock."

"Do you mean it, Jim?" said MacGregor. "Will you both come?"

"I do," answered Jim. "And as for Dick— "

"Count me in," I said at once.

"Then I accept your suggestion with the greatest pleasure," said MacGregor. "And to tell you the strict truth, I might add with the greatest relief."

AT DAWN next morning we started in the supply boat, and of the run to Taba Island I shall say nothing. The first part of it was uninteresting, and the last few miles was so inconceivably beautiful as to defy description. In front of us stretched the belt of islands, with the lighthouse standing up slim and clear-

cut straight ahead. On our left lay Taba Island, a riot of tropical vegetation and glorious flowers which reached right down to the water's edge, broken here and there by stretches of golden sand almost dazzling in its brightness.

Between the lighthouse and the island was a line of surf marking Corn Reef; while to the right of the lighthouse lay the deep-water channel of unbroken blue. And as we got nearer we could see the strange structure which marked the position of the bell. It was built out from the side, and it reminded one of those mediaeval galleries which jut out from the walls of old castles into which the defenders used to go to pour burning oil on the gentlemen below. And this bell jutted out in just such a manner on the deep- water channel side of the lighthouse.

"Great Scott!" said Jim, who had been examining it through his field-glasses; "even allowing for pictorial effect, if that fellow passed close enough to see that bell in a fog, I don't wonder he wanted somebody's blood."

And now we were near enough to see the details with the naked eye. On a rough landing-stage at the foot of the lighthouse a man was standing gazing at us fixedly through a telescope, and as we came close he shut it up and awaited us with folded arms. He was dressed in white, and as the boat made fast he might have been carved out of stone: so motionless did he stand. Then he took a step forward, and spoke in a curiously harsh voice.

"Which is my new assistant?"

He was tall and gaunt, with a coarse, straggling beard, and as I looked at him I could conceive no more awful fate than being condemned to spend month after month alone with him.

It was Jim who answered as we had arranged.

"Here is your new assistant— MacGregor," he said, stepping ashore. "And I am your new inspector in place of Mr. Lambert."

"You will find everything in good order, sir," he said quietly, but it was at Jock MacGregor he was staring.

"How comes it that two men have been drowned within such a short time, Temple?" demanded Jim sternly. "There must have been gross carelessness somewhere."

"It is the bell, sir," answered the man, still in the same quiet voice. "When the mist comes down and presses round one's head with soft, clammy fingers it is sometimes difficult to see."

Jim grunted, and eyed the man narrowly.

"Then the bell must be removed," he said, and Temple started violently.

"It is only carelessness, sir, on their parts," he cried. "The bell has never hurt me."

"Well, I will inspect everything," said Jim curtly. "I shall stay here until the supply boat returns the day after tomorrow."

I saw Temple shoot a quick, suspicious glance at him, but he merely nodded and said, "Very good, sir."

Then he glanced towards Taba Island and nodded as if satisfied.

"There will be fog tonight, sir," he remarked. "When the Queen of the Island is crowned in mist at this time of day there is always fog. So you will hear the bell."

He went off to superintend the disposal of his stores, and Jim turned to MacGregor.

"What the devil is he talking about, Jock?" he muttered.

"The Queen of the Island is that hill, old man," answered MacGregor. "I remember seeing it marked on the map."

"He seems a strange sort of bird," said Jim thoughtfully, and MacGregor nodded.

"You're right, Jim," he said. "Though I'm bound to admit that at present he doesn't strike me as anything out of the way. You meet some queer morose customers on this game, you know."

And certainly during the next hour or so there seemed nothing peculiar about Temple. Jim, carefully primed by MacGregor, asked a few leading questions, but for the most part he said nothing and let the other man talk. We examined the mirrors and reflectors; we examined the lamps; but most of all we examined Temple himself. And then we came to the bell.

If it had looked big as we came towards the lighthouse it looked enormous from close to. Built out from the side, it was carried on a steel cantilever arm, while underneath it, about eight feet below, a narrow wooden platform jutted out over the water— a platform some eighteen inches wide. It was but little more than a single plank ten feet long, and as one walked out on it, though the railing on each side made it perfectly safe, it gave one almost a feeling of dizziness.

Above one's head the bell with its motionless clapper; below one's feet the water; and poised between the two the narrow platform— all too narrow for my liking.

"Now was it from here that the two men fell?" demanded Jim, still in his role of inspector.

"Yes, sir," said Temple quietly. "Though I did not see it happen myself. I was inside attending to the mechanism that works the bell."

"And did you make no effort to save them?"

For answer Temple peered over the side for a moment or two— then he pointed downwards without a word. And while I looked I counted three evil shapes glide by in the clear blue depths.

"And when did the last man fall over?" went on Jim. "On what date?"

"On February 24th, sir," said Temple, and MacGregor caught his breath. "In the early morning when the fog was thick. It is entered in my log book."

"Was the bell ringing at the time?" demanded Jim sharply.

"The bell always rings when there is a fog, sir," answered Temple, and Jim glanced at MacGregor, who shook his head imperceptibly. "Would you care to hear it now, and see how it works?"

"Yes," said Jim, "I should."

"There is a heavy weight inside, sir," said Temple, "inside the lighthouse I mean, which works the bell by means of cogged wheels. On the principle, sir, of the weights in a grandfather's clock." His tone was that of a man who is patiently explaining something to a child. "If you will come inside, I will start it."

We followed him in, and he pressed down a lever. Almost', at once the bell began to oscillate, slightly at first, but gradually and steadily increasing in swing, until at length the first deep note rang out as it struck the clapper. The notes came deeper and more resonant, though irregularly for a time, till' at last both clapper and bell settled down to a rhythmic swing. Like a huge pendulum the clapper passed backwards and forwards over the platform outside, while the bell swung down to meet it first on one side and then on the other. And the deep, booming note ringing out every two or three seconds seemed to fill the whole universe with one vast volume of sound. It deadened one's brain; it stunned one; it made one gasp for breath.

Suddenly I felt Jim grip my arm. Speech was impossible, but I followed the direction of his eyes. He was looking at David Temple, and so was Jock MacGregor. For the lighthouse keeper was staring at the Queen of the Island with blazing eyes. His hands were locked together, and he was muttering something, for we could see his lips moving, while the sweat glistened on his forehead. He seemed to have forgotten our existence, and when Jim touched him on the shoulder he swung round with a hideous snarl.

"Stop the bell," shouted Jim, and the snarl vanished. He was the disciplined subordinate again, though in his eyes there was a look of sly cunning.

He pressed another lever, and after what seemed an interminable time the bell gradually ceased. Not at once, for it went on swinging under its own momentum for a while, but at length the noise died away; beat after beat was missed till at last it swung in silence, save for a faint creaking.

"Is that satisfactory, sir?" asked Temple quietly. "Because I would like to stow away my stores as soon as possible. Afterwards I will go through my log with you."

Jim nodded. "All right, Temple. Go and attend to your stores."

The man went out, and we stared at one another thoughtfully.

"February 24th," said MacGregor. "Did you note that, Jim?"

"I noted it right enough," answered Jim. "Jock, the man's queer. Did you see his face while that infernal bell was ringing, and he was staring at the mountain yonder?"

MacGregor had strolled over to the window himself, and suddenly he beckoned to us with his hand.

"Come here," he muttered. "Look at him now."

Below, on the landing-stage, knelt David Temple with his arms flung out towards the mist-crowned mountain. For half a minute he stayed there motionless; then he rose and came inside the lighthouse.

"He's worse than queer," said MacGregor. "He's mad."

AND NOW I come to the final chapter, and the thing that happened when the mist came down on Corn Reef. Jim and I had spent the night— I cannot say we had slept very much— in the room normally used by the assistant, while Jock MacGregor had stopped in the other room to take his turn with the lamp. At the faintest sign of trouble he was to call us, and to make doubly sure, Jim and I had taken it in turns to lie down on the bed and sleep while the others remained awake. There was no good in letting Temple see that we suspected anything, since no steps could be taken till the return of the supply boat. Then Jock MacGregor had decided that Temple was to go back in it while he remained in the lighthouse till a relief was sent.

During the evening Temple had been quiet and perfectly rational, though I had caught him once or twice eyeing MacGregor with a curiously furtive expression. He had lit the light and explained the simple mechanism quite normally, and then had stood with us while we watched the beam sweep round the water below. It was a glorious night, such as can only be seen in the tropics, without a trace of fog, and for a time our suspicions were lulled. It seemed impossible that anything could happen in such an atmosphere of peace and beauty. Only once did a stray remark of Temple's bring back our doubts, and then it was more owing to our previous suspicions than to the remark itself.

"The Queen is angry tonight," he said, staring at the island. "She demands a sacrifice."

"What do you mean by such rot, Temple?" said Jim sternly.

"When she veils her head, sir," he answered quietly, "her subjects must appease her. Otherwise she will be revenged."

He left the room with a word of apology, and we heard him going downstairs.

"Native superstition," grunted MacGregor.

"Perhaps," said Jim. "But once native superstition gets hold of a white man, Jock, it's the devil."

And that is all that had happened before we turned in: little enough to prepare us for the thing that was to come later. It must have been about three o'clock when Jim roused me, and prepared to take my place on the bed. And as we were changing round we heard a ship's siren wail in the distance. And then we heard it a second time. For a moment or two it made no impression on our minds, and then the same thought struck us both simultaneously.

We dashed to the window and looked out— looked out into a thick mist that drifted slowly past, blotting out everything. No water could be seen, no star— just dense, clammy vapour. The fog had come down on Corn Reef, and the hell which had deafened us only that afternoon was silent.

Once again the siren wailed mournfully, and then, as we listened, we heard a steady creaking such as the bell had made as it had gradually come to rest the day before. And every now and then a strange, dull thudding noise— creak, thud! creak, thud!

Jim sprang to the door, and turned the handle; but the door refused to budge. We had been locked in, and outside Jock MacGregor was alone with a madman. And even as we realised it there came through the open window a faint shout of "Help!"

It took six shots to shatter that bolt, and by the mercy of heaven there wasn't a second. And then we dashed up the short flight of stairs into the room above, to halt somewhat abruptly as we entered. For confronting us was David Temple with an iron bar in his hands, and his face was the face of a maniac. But it wasn't at him we were looking— it was beyond him to the place where the platform stretched out into the mist. For the door was open, and we could see the great bell swinging to and fro. And lashed loosely to the end of the clapper and clinging to it desperately, was Jock MacGregor.

"The Queen demands a sacrifice," roared the madman. "Two she has had, and now she requires a third. Stand back!"

There was no time for half-measures. MacGregor's voice, breathless and gasping, came to us faintly: "For God's sake, hurry!" And out of the mist, much louder and nearer wailed the siren.

So Jim shot the poor devil through each arm, and the crowbar crashed to the floor. Even then he tried to stop us, till a blow on the point of the jaw put

him to sleep. And then it became a desperate race against time. Outside the siren was going continuously, seeming almost on top of us, while standing on the platform we tried to catch MacGregor as he swung past us. But the bell was heavy, and it seemed an age before we could check the clapper sufficiently to cut him down. And every moment we expected to hear the dreadful grinding crunch of a ship striking rock. But at last we had him down, and Jim darted to the lever to restart the bell.

The first deep boom rang out, and in the silence that followed before the swing became regular we heard a sudden agonised shout, and the thrashing of a propeller. Then the bell tolled again, and then again. All outside sound was obliterated; only the bell swung on, crashing out its message of warning. And so three sweating men sat and waited for the mist to lift off Corn Reef, while in a corner, David Temple, sometime lighthouse keeper, smiled happily to himself, nodding his head in time with the bell. He had put a drug, we discovered, in Jock MacGregor's coffee, and the next thing MacGregor knew was when he found himself swinging violently through space, to stop even more violently as he hit the side of the bell. How even a madman had had the strength to lift a full-grown man and lash him to the clapper was a mystery till we discovered some rough steps of the housemaid variety, and even with them the strength required was prodigious. But he'd done it right enough, and for ten minutes MacGregor had swung backwards and forwards, dazed and half- stunned, while the madman had crouched below him with his arms flung out towards the Queen of the Island.

At seven o'clock the mist lifted, and we stopped that accursed bell. Out to sea lay a steamer, and a boat was being lowered. Through glasses we saw an officer get in, and then the boat was pulled to the lighthouse.

I HAVE MET angry men in my life, but for sheer speechless fury the skipper of the good ship *Floriana*, one thousand five hundred tons and of mixed cargo, wins in a canter. I don't blame him; when the first clang of the bell rang out he was to all intents and purposes on the reef. He'd gone full speed astern with a second to spare, and his eyes still held the look of a badly-frightened man.

So we told him the story, and Temple smiled placidly in his corner. And after a while, when he'd grunted his amazement, he apologised handsomely. He went out to look at the bell, and for a while we stood on the platform. And then that skipper leant forward, peering at the inside of the bell. In silence he pointed to two dull stains— stains we had not noticed. They were just where the clapper hit the bell— one on each side, and they were a rusty red.

"Two assistants, you say?" he grunted. "God! What a death!"

I looked over, down into the blue water. Three more evil shapes were there, shapes which glided by and disappeared. And then I looked at Taba Island. Clear and beautiful in the morning sun the Queen of the Island rose to the sky. Her crown had disappeared.

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4: The Sun-Dog Trail

Jack London

1876-1916

Harper's Monthly Magazine Dec 1905

Jack London wrote several tales of Sitka Charley. This story was reprinted in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine in March 1954 as "A Piece of Life".

SITKA CHARLEY smoked his pipe and gazed thoughtfully at the Police *Gazette* illustration on the wall. For half an hour he had been steadily regarding it, and for half an hour I had been slyly watching him. Something was going on in that mind of his, and, whatever it was, I knew it was well worth knowing. He had lived life, and seen things, and performed that prodigy of prodigies, namely, the turning of his back upon his own people, and, in so far as it was possible for an Indian, becoming a white man even in his mental processes. As he phrased it himself, he had come into the warm, sat among us, by our fires, and become one of us. He had never learned to read nor write, but his vocabulary was remarkable, and more remarkable still was the completeness with which he had assumed the white man's point of view, the white man's attitude toward things.

We had struck this deserted cabin after a hard day on trail. The dogs had been fed, the supper dishes washed, the beds made, and we were now enjoying that most delicious hour that comes each day, and but once each day, on the Alaskan trail, the hour when nothing intervenes between the tired body and bed save the smoking of the evening pipe. Some former denizen of the cabin had decorated its walls with illustrations torn from magazines and newspapers, and it was these illustrations that had held Sitka Charley's attention from the moment of our arrival two hours before. He had studied them intently, ranging from one to another and back again, and I could see that there was uncertainty in his mind, and bepuzzlement.

"Well?" I finally broke the silence.

He took the pipe from his mouth and said simply, "I do not understand."

He smoked on again, and again removed the pipe, using it to point at the *Police Gazette* illustration.

"That picture— what does it mean? I do not understand."

I looked at the picture. A man, with a preposterously wicked face, his right hand pressed dramatically to his heart, was falling backward to the floor.

Confronting him, with a face that was a composite of destroying angel and Adonis, was a man holding a smoking revolver.

"One man is killing the other man," I said, aware of a distinct bepuzzlement of my own and of failure to explain.

"Why?" asked Sitka Charley.

"I do not know," I confessed.

"That picture is all end," he said. "It has no beginning."

"It is life," I said.

"Life has beginning," he objected.

I was silenced for the moment, while his eyes wandered on to an adjoining decoration, a photographic reproduction of somebody's "Leda and the Swan."

"That picture," he said, "has no beginning. It has no end. I do not understand pictures."

"Look at that picture," I commanded, pointing to a third decoration. "It means something. Tell me what it means to you."

He studied it for several minutes.

"The little girl is sick," he said finally. "That is the doctor looking at her. They have been up all night— see, the oil is low in the lamp, the first morning light is coming in at the window. It is a great sickness; maybe she will die, that is why the doctor looks so hard. That is the mother. It is a great sickness, because the mother's head is on the table and she is crying."

"How do you know she is crying?" I interrupted. "You cannot see her face. Perhaps she is asleep."

Sitka Charley looked at me in swift surprise, then back at the picture. It was evident that he had not reasoned the impression.

"Perhaps she is asleep," he repeated. He studied it closely. "No, she is not asleep. The shoulders show that she is not asleep. I have seen the shoulders of a woman who cried. The mother is crying. It is a very great sickness."

"And now you understand the picture," I cried.

He shook his head, and asked, "The little girl— does it die?"

It was my turn for silence.

"Does it die?" he reiterated. "You are a painter-man. Maybe you know."

"No, I do not know," I confessed.

"It is not life," he delivered himself dogmatically. "In life little girl die or get well. Something happen in life. In picture nothing happen. No, I do not understand pictures."

His disappointment was patent. It was his desire to understand all things that white men understand, and here, in this matter, he failed. I felt, also, that there was challenge in his attitude. He was bent upon compelling me to show him the wisdom of pictures. Besides, he had remarkable powers of

visualization. I had long since learned this. He visualized everything. He saw life in pictures, felt life in pictures, generalized life in pictures; and yet he did not understand pictures when seen through other men's eyes and expressed by those men with color and line upon canvas.

"Pictures are bits of life," I said. "We paint life as we see it. For instance, Charley, you are coming along the trail. It is night. You see a cabin. The window is lighted. You look through the window for one second, or for two seconds, you see something, and you go on your way. You saw maybe a man writing a letter. You saw something without beginning or end. Nothing happened. Yet it was a bit of life you saw. You remember it afterward. It is like a picture in your memory. The window is the frame of the picture."

I could see that he was interested, and I knew that as I spoke he had looked through the window and seen the man writing the letter.

"There is a picture you have painted that I understand," he said. "It is a true picture. It has much meaning. It is in your cabin at Dawson. It is a faro table. There are men playing. It is a large game. The limit is off."

"How do you know the limit is off?" I broke in excitedly, for here was where my work could be tried out on an unbiassed judge who knew life only, and not art, and who was a sheer master of reality. Also, I was very proud of that particular piece of work. I had named it "The Last Turn," and I believed it to be one of the best things I had ever done.

"There are no chips on the table," Sitka Charley explained. "The men are playing with markers. That means the roof is the limit. One man play yellow markers— maybe one yellow marker worth one thousand dollars, maybe two thousand dollars. One man play red markers. Maybe they are worth five hundred dollars, maybe one thousand dollars. It is a very big game. Everybody play very high, up to the roof. How do I know? You make the dealer with blood little bit warm in face." (I was delighted.) "The lookout, you make him lean forward in his chair. Why he lean forward? Why his face very much quiet? Why his eyes very much bright? Why dealer warm with blood a little bit in the face? Why all men very quiet?— the man with yellow markers? the man with white markers? the man with red markers? Why nobody talk? Because very much money. Because last turn."

"How do you know it is the last turn?" I asked.

"The king is coppered, the seven is played open," he answered. "Nobody bet on other cards. Other cards all gone. Everybody one mind. Everybody play king to lose, seven to win. Maybe bank lose twenty thousand dollars, maybe bank win. Yes, that picture I understand."

"Yet you do not know the end!" I cried triumphantly. "It is the last turn, but the cards are not yet turned. In the picture they will never be turned. Nobody will ever know who wins nor who loses."

"And the men will sit there and never talk," he said, wonder and awe growing in his face. "And the lookout will lean forward, and the blood will be warm in the face of the dealer. It is a strange thing. Always will they sit there, always; and the cards will never be turned."

"It is a picture," I said. "It is life. You have seen things like it yourself."

He looked at me and pondered, then said, very slowly: "No, as you say, there is no end to it. Nobody will ever know the end. Yet is it a true thing. I have seen it. It is life."

For a long time he smoked on in silence, weighing the pictorial wisdom of the white man and verifying it by the facts of life. He nodded his head several times, and grunted once or twice. Then he knocked the ashes from his pipe, carefully refilled it, and after a thoughtful pause, lighted it again.

"Then have I, too, seen many pictures of life," he began; "pictures not painted, but seen with the eyes. I have looked at them like through the window at the man writing the letter. I have seen many pieces of life, without beginning, without end, without understanding."

With a sudden change of position he turned his eyes full upon me and regarded me thoughtfully.

"Look you," he said; "you are a painter-man. How would you paint this which I saw, a picture without beginning, the ending of which I do not understand, a piece of life with the northern lights for a candle and Alaska for a frame."

"It is a large canvas," I murmured.

But he ignored me, for the picture he had in mind was before his eyes and he was seeing it.

"There are many names for this picture," he said. "But in the picture there are many sun-dogs, and it comes into my mind to call it 'The Sun-Dog Trail.' It was a long time ago, seven years ago, the fall of '97, when I saw the woman first time. At Lake Linderman I had one canoe, very good Peterborough canoe. I came over Chilcoot Pass with two thousand letters for Dawson. I was letter carrier. Everybody rush to Klondike at that time. Many people on trail. Many people chop down trees and make boats. Last water, snow in the air, snow on the ground, ice on the lake, on the river ice in the eddies. Every day more snow, more ice. Maybe one day, maybe three days, maybe six days, any day maybe freeze-up come, then no more water, all ice, everybody walk, Dawson six hundred miles, long time walk. Boat go very quick. Everybody want to go boat. Everybody say, 'Charley, two hundred dollars you take me in canoe,'

'Charley, three hundred dollars,' 'Charley, four hundred dollars.' I say no, all the time I say no. I am letter carrier.

"In morning I get to Lake Linderman. I walk all night and am much tired. I cook breakfast, I eat, then I sleep on the beach three hours. I wake up. It is ten o'clock. Snow is falling. There is wind, much wind that blows fair. Also, there is a woman who sits in the snow alongside. She is white woman, she is young, very pretty, maybe she is twenty years old, maybe twenty-five years old. She look at me. I look at her. She is very tired. She is no dance-woman. I see that right away. She is good woman, and she is very tired.

"'You are Sitka Charley,' she says. I get up quick and roll blankets so snow does not get inside. 'I go to Dawson,' she says. 'I go in your canoe—how much?'

"I do not want anybody in my canoe. I do not like to say no. So I say, 'One thousand dollars.' Just for fun I say it, so woman cannot come with me, much better than say no. She look at me very hard, then she says, 'When you start?' I say right away. Then she says all right, she will give me one thousand dollars.

"What can I say? I do not want the woman, yet have I given my word that for one thousand dollars she can come. I am surprised. Maybe she make fun, too, so I say, 'Let me see thousand dollars.' And that woman, that young woman, all alone on the trail, there in the snow, she take out one thousand dollars, in greenbacks, and she put them in my hand. I look at money, I look at her. What can I say? I say, 'No, my canoe very small. There is no room for outfit.' She laugh. She says, 'I am great traveller. This is my outfit.' She kick one small pack in the snow. It is two fur robes, canvas outside, some woman's clothes inside. I pick it up. Maybe thirty-five pounds. I am surprised. She take it away from me. She says, 'Come, let us start.' She carries pack into canoe. What can I say? I put my blankets into canoe. We start.

"And that is the way I saw the woman first time. The wind was fair. I put up small sail. The canoe went very fast, it flew like a bird over the high waves. The woman was much afraid. 'What for you come Klondike much afraid?' I ask. She laugh at me, a hard laugh, but she is still much afraid. Also is she very tired. I run canoe through rapids to Lake Bennett. Water very bad, and woman cry out because she is afraid. We go down Lake Bennett, snow, ice, wind like a gale, but woman is very tired and go to sleep.

"That night we make camp at Windy Arm. Woman sit by fire and eat supper. I look at her. She is pretty. She fix hair. There is much hair, and it is brown, also sometimes it is like gold in the firelight, when she turn her head, so, and flashes come from it like golden fire. The eyes are large and brown, sometimes warm like a candle behind a curtain, sometimes very hard and bright like broken ice when sun shines upon it. When she smile— how can I

say?—when she smile I know white man like to kiss her, just like that, when she smile. She never do hard work. Her hands are soft, like baby's hand. She is soft all over, like baby. She is not thin, but round like baby; her arm, her leg, her muscles, all soft and round like baby. Her waist is small, and when she stand up, when she walk, or move her head or arm, it is— I do not know the word— but it is nice to look at, like— maybe I say she is built on lines like the lines of a good canoe, just like that, and when she move she is like the movement of the good canoe sliding through still water or leaping through water when it is white and fast and angry. It is very good to see.

"Why does she come into Klondike, all alone, with plenty of money? I do not know. Next day I ask her. She laugh and says: 'Sitka Charley, that is none of your business. I give you one thousand dollars take me to Dawson. That only is your business.' Next day after that I ask her what is her name. She laugh, then she says, 'Mary Jones, that is my name.' I do not know her name, but I know all the time that Mary Jones is not her name.

"It is very cold in canoe, and because of cold sometimes she not feel good. Sometimes she feel good and she sing. Her voice is like a silver bell, and I feel good all over like when I go into church at Holy Cross Mission, and when she sing I feel strong and paddle like hell. Then she laugh and says, 'You think we get to Dawson before freeze-up, Charley?' Sometimes she sit in canoe and is thinking far away, her eyes like that, all empty. She does not see Sitka Charley, nor the ice, nor the snow. She is far away. Very often she is like that, thinking far away. Sometimes, when she is thinking far away, her face is not good to see. It looks like a face that is angry, like the face of one man when he want to kill another man.

"Last day to Dawson very bad. Shore-ice in all the eddies, mush-ice in the stream. I cannot paddle. The canoe freeze to ice. I cannot get to shore. There is much danger. All the time we go down Yukon in the ice. That night there is much noise of ice. Then ice stop, canoe stop, everything stop. 'Let us go to shore,' the woman says. I say no, better wait. By and by, everything start down-stream again. There is much snow. I cannot see. At eleven o'clock at night, everything stop. At one o'clock everything start again. At three o'clock everything stop. Canoe is smashed like eggshell, but is on top of ice and cannot sink. I hear dogs howling. We wait. We sleep. By and by morning come. There is no more snow. It is the freeze-up, and there is Dawson. Canoe smash and stop right at Dawson. Sitka Charley has come in with two thousand letters on very last water.

"The woman rent a cabin on the hill, and for one week I see her no more. Then, one day, she come to me. 'Charley,' she says, 'how do you like to work for me? You drive dogs, make camp, travel with me.' I say that I make too

much money carrying letters. She says, 'Charley, I will pay you more money.' I tell her that pick-and-shovel man get fifteen dollars a day in the mines. She says, 'That is four hundred and fifty dollars a month.' And I say, 'Sitka Charley is no pick-and-shovel man.' Then she says, 'I understand, Charley. I will give you seven hundred and fifty dollars each month.' It is a good price, and I go to work for her. I buy for her dogs and sled. We travel up Klondike, up Bonanza and Eldorado, over to Indian River, to Sulphur Creek, to Dominion, back across divide to Gold Bottom and to Too Much Gold, and back to Dawson. All the time she look for something, I do not know what. I am puzzled. 'What thing you look for?' I ask. She laugh. 'You look for gold?' I ask. She laugh. Then she says, 'That is none of your business, Charley.' And after that I never ask any more.

"She has a small revolver which she carries in her belt. Sometimes, on trail, she makes practice with revolver. I laugh. 'What for you laugh, Charley?' she ask. 'What for you play with that?' I say. 'It is no good. It is too small. It is for a child, a little plaything.' When we get back to Dawson she ask me to buy good revolver for her. I buy a Colt's 44. It is very heavy, but she carry it in her belt all the time.

"At Dawson comes the man. Which way he come I do not know. Only do I know he is *checha-quo*—what you call tenderfoot. His hands are soft, just like hers. He never do hard work. He is soft all over. At first I think maybe he is her husband. But he is too young. Also, they make two beds at night. He is maybe twenty years old. His eyes blue, his hair yellow, he has a little mustache which is yellow. His name is John Jones. Maybe he is her brother. I do not know. I ask questions no more. Only I think his name not John Jones. Other people call him Mr. Girvan. I do not think that is his name. I do not think her name is Miss Girvan, which other people call her. I think nobody know their names.

"One night I am asleep at Dawson. He wake me up. He says, 'Get the dogs ready; we start.' No more do I ask questions, so I get the dogs ready and we start. We go down the Yukon. It is night-time, it is November, and it is very cold— sixty-five below. She is soft. He is soft. The cold bites. They get tired. They cry under their breaths to themselves. By and by I say better we stop and make camp. But they say that they will go on. Three times I say better to make camp and rest, but each time they say they will go on. After that I say nothing. All the time, day after day, is it that way. They are very soft. They get stiff and sore. They do not understand moccasins, and their feet hurt very much. They limp, they stagger like drunken people, they cry under their breaths; and all the time they say, 'On! on! We will go on!'

"They are like crazy people. All the time do they go on, and on. Why do they go on? I do not know. Only do they go on. What are they after? I do not know. They are not after gold. There is no stampede. Besides, they spend

plenty of money. But I ask questions no more. I, too, go on and on, because I am strong on the trail and because I am greatly paid.

"We make Circle City. That for which they look is not there. I think now that we will rest, and rest the dogs. But we do not rest, not for one day do we rest. 'Come,' says the woman to the man, 'let us go on.' And we go on. We leave the Yukon. We cross the divide to the west and swing down into the Tanana Country. There are new diggings there. But that for which they look is not there, and we take the back trail to Circle City.

"It is a hard journey. December is most gone. The days are short. It is very cold. One morning it is seventy below zero. 'Better that we don't travel to-day,' I say, 'else will the frost be unwarmed in the breathing and bite all the edges of our lungs. After that we will have bad cough, and maybe next spring will come pneumonia.' But they are *checha-quo*. They do not understand the trail. They are like dead people they are so tired, but they say, 'Let us go on.' We go on. The frost bites their lungs, and they get the dry cough. They cough till the tears run down their cheeks. When bacon is frying they must run away from the fire and cough half an hour in the snow. They freeze their cheeks a little bit, so that the skin turns black and is very sore. Also, the man freezes his thumb till the end is like to come off, and he must wear a large thumb on his mitten to keep it warm. And sometimes, when the frost bites hard and the thumb is very cold, he must take off the mitten and put the hand between his legs next to the skin, so that the thumb may get warm again.

"We limp into Circle City, and even I, Sitka Charley, am tired. It is Christmas Eve. I dance, drink, make a good time, for to-morrow is Christmas Day and we will rest. But no. It is five o'clock in the morning— Christmas morning. I am two hours asleep. The man stand by my bed. 'Come, Charley,' he says, 'harness the dogs. We start.'

"Have I not said that I ask questions no more? They pay me seven hundred and fifty dollars each month. They are my masters. I am their man. If they say, 'Charley, come, let us start for hell,' I will harness the dogs, and snap the whip, and start for hell. So I harness the dogs, and we start down the Yukon. Where do we go? They do not say. Only do they say, 'On! on! We will go on!'

"They are very weary. They have travelled many hundreds of miles, and they do not understand the way of the trail. Besides, their cough is very bad— the dry cough that makes strong men swear and weak men cry. But they go on. Every day they go on. Never do they rest the dogs. Always do they buy new dogs. At every camp, at every post, at every Indian village, do they cut out the tired dogs and put in fresh dogs. They have much money, money without end, and like water they spend it. They are crazy? Sometimes I think so, for there is a devil in them that drives them on and on, always on. What is it that they try

to find? It is not gold. Never do they dig in the ground. I think a long time. Then I think it is a man they try to find. But what man? Never do we see the man. Yet are they like wolves on the trail of the kill. But they are funny wolves, soft wolves, baby wolves who do not understand the way of the trail. They cry aloud in their sleep at night. In their sleep they moan and groan with the pain of their weariness. And in the day, as they stagger along the trail, they cry under their breaths. They are funny wolves.

"We pass Fort Yukon. We pass Fort Hamilton. We pass Minook. January has come and nearly gone. The days are very short. At nine o'clock comes daylight. At three o'clock comes night. And it is cold. And even I, Sitka Charley, am tired. Will we go on forever this way without end? I do not know. But always do I look along the trail for that which they try to find. There are few people on the trail. Sometimes we travel one hundred miles and never see a sign of life. It is very quiet. There is no sound. Sometimes it snows, and we are like wandering ghosts. Sometimes it is clear, and at midday the sun looks at us for a moment over the hills to the south. The northern lights flame in the sky, and the sun-dogs dance, and the air is filled with frost-dust.

"I am Sitka Charley, a strong man. I was born on the trail, and all my days have I lived on the trail. And yet have these two baby wolves made me very tired. I am lean, like a starved cat, and I am glad of my bed at night, and in the morning am I greatly weary. Yet ever are we hitting the trail in the dark before daylight, and still on the trail does the dark after nightfall find us. These two baby wolves! If I am lean like a starved cat, they are lean like cats that have never eaten and have died. Their eyes are sunk deep in their heads, bright sometimes as with fever, dim and cloudy sometimes like the eyes of the dead. Their cheeks are hollow like caves in a cliff. Also are their cheeks black and raw from many freezings. Sometimes it is the woman in the morning who says, 'I cannot get up. I cannot move. Let me die.' And it is the man who stands beside her and says, 'Come, let us go on.' And they go on. And sometimes it is the man who cannot get up, and the woman says, 'Come, let us go on.' But the one thing they do, and always do, is to go on. Always do they go on.

"Sometimes, at the trading posts, the man and woman get letters. I do not know what is in the letters. But it is the scent that they follow, these letters themselves are the scent. One time an Indian gives them a letter. I talk with him privately. He says it is a man with one eye who gives him the letter, a man who travels fast down the Yukon. That is all. But I know that the baby wolves are after the man with the one eye.

"It is February, and we have travelled fifteen hundred miles. We are getting near Bering Sea, and there are storms and blizzards. The going is hard. We come to Anvig. I do not know, but I think sure they get a letter at Anvig, for

they are much excited, and they say, 'Come, hurry, let us go on.' But I say we must buy grub, and they say we must travel light and fast. Also, they say that we can get grub at Charley McKeon's cabin. Then do I know that they take the big cut-off, for it is there that Charley McKeon lives where the Black Rock stands by the trail.

"Before we start, I talk maybe two minutes with the priest at Anvig. Yes, there is a man with one eye who has gone by and who travels fast. And I know that for which they look is the man with the one eye. We leave Anvig with little grub, and travel light and fast. There are three fresh dogs bought in Anvig, and we travel very fast. The man and woman are like mad. We start earlier in the morning, we travel later at night. I look sometimes to see them die, these two baby wolves, but they will not die. They go on and on. When the dry cough take hold of them hard, they hold their hands against their stomach and double up in the snow, and cough, and cough, and cough. They cannot walk, they cannot talk. Maybe for ten minutes they cough, maybe for half an hour, and then they straighten up, the tears from the coughing frozen on their faces, and the words they say are, 'Come, let us go on.'

"Even I, Sitka Charley, am greatly weary, and I think seven hundred and fifty dollars is a cheap price for the labor I do. We take the big cut-off, and the trail is fresh. The baby wolves have their noses down to the trail, and they say, 'Hurry!' All the time do they say, 'Hurry! Faster! Faster!' It is hard on the dogs. We have not much food and we cannot give them enough to eat, and they grow weak. Also, they must work hard. The woman has true sorrow for them, and often, because of them, the tears are in her eyes. But the devil in her that drives her on will not let her stop and rest the dogs.

"And then we come upon the man with the one eye. He is in the snow by the trail, and his leg is broken. Because of the leg he has made a poor camp, and has been lying on his blankets for three days and keeping a fire going. When we find him he is swearing. He swears like hell. Never have I heard a man swear like that man. I am glad. Now that they have found that for which they look, we will have rest. But the woman says, 'Let us start. Hurry!'

"I am surprised. But the man with the one eye says, 'Never mind me. Give me your grub. You will get more grub at McKeon's cabin to-morrow. Send McKeon back for me. But do you go on.' Here is another wolf, an old wolf, and he, too, thinks but the one thought, to go on. So we give him our grub, which is not much, and we chop wood for his fire, and we take his strongest dogs and go on. We left the man with one eye there in the snow, and he died there in the snow, for McKeon never went back for him. And who that man was, and why he came to be there, I do not know. But I think he was greatly paid by the man and the woman, like me, to do their work for them.

"That day and that night we had nothing to eat, and all next day we travelled fast, and we were weak with hunger. Then we came to the Black Rock, which rose five hundred feet above the trail. It was at the end of the day. Darkness was coming, and we could not find the cabin of McKeon. We slept hungry, and in the morning looked for the cabin. It was not there, which was a strange thing, for everybody knew that McKeon lived in a cabin at Black Rock. We were near to the coast, where the wind blows hard and there is much snow. Everywhere there were small hills of snow where the wind had piled it up. I have a thought, and I dig in one and another of the hills of snow. Soon I find the walls of the cabin, and I dig down to the door. I go inside. McKeon is dead. Maybe two or three weeks he is dead. A sickness had come upon him so that he could not leave the cabin. The wind and the snow had covered the cabin. He had eaten his grub and died. I looked for his cache, but there was no grub in it.

"'Let us go on,' said the woman. Her eyes were hungry, and her hand was upon her heart, as with the hurt of something inside. She bent back and forth like a tree in the wind as she stood there. 'Yes, let us go on,' said the man. His voice was hollow, like the *klonk* of an old raven, and he was hunger-mad. His eyes were like live coals of fire, and as his body rocked to and fro, so rocked his soul inside. And I, too, said, 'Let us go on.' For that one thought, laid upon me like a lash for every mile of fifteen hundred miles, had burned itself into my soul, and I think that I, too, was mad. Besides, we could only go on, for there was no grub. And we went on, giving no thought to the man with the one eye in the snow.

"There is little travel on the big cut-off. Sometimes two or three months and nobody goes by. The snow had covered the trail, and there was no sign that men had ever come or gone that way. All day the wind blew and the snow fell, and all day we travelled, while our stomachs gnawed their desire and our bodies grew weaker with every step they took. Then the woman began to fall. Then the man. I did not fall, but my feet were heavy and I caught my toes and stumbled many times.

"That night is the end of February. I kill three ptarmigan with the woman's revolver, and we are made somewhat strong again. But the dogs have nothing to eat. They try to eat their harness, which is of leather and walrus-hide, and I must fight them off with a club and hang all the harness in a tree. And all night they howl and fight around that tree. But we do not mind. We sleep like dead people, and in the morning get up like dead people out of their graves and go on along the trail.

"That morning is the 1st of March, and on that morning I see the first sign of that after which the baby wolves are in search. It is clear weather, and cold.

The sun stay longer in the sky, and there are sun-dogs flashing on either side, and the air is bright with frost-dust. The snow falls no more upon the trail, and I see the fresh sign of dogs and sled. There is one man with that outfit, and I see in the snow that he is not strong. He, too, has not enough to eat. The young wolves see the fresh sign, too, and they are much excited. 'Hurry!' they say. All the time they say, 'Hurry! Faster, Charley, faster!'

"We make hurry very slow. All the time the man and the woman fall down. When they try to ride on sled the dogs are too weak, and the dogs fall down. Besides, it is so cold that if they ride on the sled they will freeze. It is very easy for a hungry man to freeze. When the woman fall down, the man help her up. Sometimes the woman help the man up. By and by both fall down and cannot get up, and I must help them up all the time, else they will not get up and will die there in the snow. This is very hard work, for I am greatly weary, and as well I must drive the dogs, and the man and woman are very heavy with no strength in their bodies. So, by and by, I, too, fall down in the snow, and there is no one to help me up. I must get up by myself. And always do I get up by myself, and help them up, and make the dogs go on.

"That night I get one ptarmigan, and we are very hungry. And that night the man says to me, 'What time start to-morrow, Charley?' It is like the voice of a ghost. I say, 'All the time you make start at five o'clock.' 'To-morrow,' he says, 'we will start at three o'clock.' I laugh in great bitterness, and I say, 'You are dead man.' And he says, 'To-morrow we will start at three o'clock.'

"And we start at three o'clock, for I am their man, and that which they say is to be done, I do. It is clear and cold, and there is no wind. When daylight comes we can see a long way off. And it is very quiet. We can hear no sound but the beat of our hearts, and in the silence that is a very loud sound. We are like sleep-walkers, and we walk in dreams until we fall down; and then we know we must get up, and we see the trail once more and bear the beating of our hearts. Sometimes, when I am walking in dreams this way, I have strange thoughts. Why does Sitka Charley live? I ask myself. Why does Sitka Charley work hard, and go hungry, and have all this pain? For seven hundred and fifty dollars a month, I make the answer, and I know it is a foolish answer. Also is it a true answer. And after that never again do I care for money. For that day a large wisdom came to me. There was a great light, and I saw clear, and I knew that it was not for money that a man must live, but for a happiness that no man can give, or buy, or sell, and that is beyond all value of all money in the world.

"In the morning we come upon the last-night camp of the man who is before us. It is a poor camp, the kind a man makes who is hungry and without strength. On the snow there are pieces of blanket and of canvas, and I know

what has happened. His dogs have eaten their harness, and he has made new harness out of his blankets. The man and woman stare hard at what is to be seen, and as I look at them my back feels the chill as of a cold wind against the skin. Their eyes are toil-mad and hunger-mad, and burn like fire deep in their heads. Their faces are like the faces of people who have died of hunger, and their cheeks are black with the dead flesh of many freezings. 'Let us go on,' says the man. But the woman coughs and falls in the snow. It is the dry cough where the frost has bitten the lungs. For a long time she coughs, then like a woman crawling out of her grave she crawls to her feet. The tears are ice upon her cheeks, and her breath makes a noise as it comes and goes, and she says, 'Let us go on.'

"We go on. And we walk in dreams through the silence. And every time we walk is a dream and we are without pain; and every time we fall down is an awakening, and we see the snow and the mountains and the fresh trail of the man who is before us, and we know all our pain again. We come to where we can see a long way over the snow, and that for which they look is before them. A mile away there are black spots upon the snow. The black spots move. My eyes are dim, and I must stiffen my soul to see. And I see one man with dogs and a sled. The baby wolves see, too. They can no longer talk, but they whisper, 'On, on. Let us hurry!'

"And they fall down, but they go on. The man who is before us, his blanket harness breaks often, and he must stop and mend it. Our harness is good, for I have hung it in trees each night. At eleven o'clock the man is half a mile away. At one o'clock he is a quarter of a mile away. He is very weak. We see him fall down many times in the snow. One of his dogs can no longer travel, and he cuts it out of the harness. But he does not kill it. I kill it with the axe as I go by, as I kill one of my dogs which loses its legs and can travel no more.

"Now we are three hundred yards away. We go very slow. Maybe in two, three hours we go one mile. We do not walk. All the time we fall down. We stand up and stagger two steps, maybe three steps, then we fall down again. And all the time I must help up the man and woman. Sometimes they rise to their knees and fall forward, maybe four or five times before they can get to their feet again and stagger two or three steps and fall. But always do they fall forward. Standing or kneeling, always do they fall forward, gaining on the trail each time by the length of their bodies.

"Sometimes they crawl on hands and knees like animals that live in the forest. We go like snails, like snails that are dying we go so slow. And yet we go faster than the man who is before us. For he, too, falls all the time, and there is no Sitka Charley to lift him up. Now he is two hundred yards away. After a long time he is one hundred yards away.

"It is a funny sight. I want to laugh out loud, Ha! ha! just like that, it is so funny. It is a race of dead men and dead dogs. It is like in a dream when you have a nightmare and run away very fast for your life and go very slow. The man who is with me is mad. The woman is mad. I am mad. All the world is mad, and I want to laugh, it is so funny.

"The stranger-man who is before us leaves his dogs behind and goes on alone across the snow. After a long time we come to the dogs. They lie helpless in the snow, their harness of blanket and canvas on them, the sled behind them, and as we pass them they whine to us and cry like babies that are hungry.

"Then we, too, leave our dogs and go on alone across the snow. The man and the woman are nearly gone, and they moan and groan and sob, but they go on. I, too, go on. I have but one thought. It is to come up to the stranger-man. Then it is that I shall rest, and not until then shall I rest, and it seems that I must lie down and sleep for a thousand years, I am so tired.

"The stranger-man is fifty yards away, all alone in the white snow. He falls and crawls, staggers, and falls and crawls again. He is like an animal that is sore wounded and trying to run from the hunter. By and by he crawls on hands and knees. He no longer stands up. And the man and woman no longer stand up. They, too, crawl after him on hands and knees. But I stand up. Sometimes I fall, but always do I stand up again.

"It is a strange thing to see. All about is the snow and the silence, and through it crawl the man and the woman, and the stranger-man who goes before. On either side the sun are sun-dogs, so that there are three suns in the sky. The frost-dust is like the dust of diamonds, and all the air is filled with it. Now the woman coughs, and lies still in the snow until the fit has passed, when she crawls on again. Now the man looks ahead, and he is blear-eyed as with old age and must rub his eyes so that he can see the stranger-man. And now the stranger-man looks back over his shoulder. And Sitka Charley, standing upright, maybe falls down and stands upright again.

"After a long time the stranger-man crawls no more. He stands slowly upon his feet and rocks back and forth. Also does he take off one mitten and wait with revolver in his hand, rocking back and forth as he waits. His face is skin and bones and frozen black. It is a hungry face. The eyes are deep-sunk in his head, and the lips are snarling. The man and woman, too, get upon their feet and they go toward him very slowly. And all about is the snow and the silence. And in the sky are three suns, and all the air is flashing with the dust of diamonds.

"And thus it was that I, Sitka Charley, saw the baby wolves make their kill. No word is spoken. Only does the stranger-man snarl with his hungry face. Also

does he rock to and fro, his shoulders drooping, his knees bent, and his legs wide apart so that he does not fall down. The man and the woman stop maybe fifty feet away. Their legs, too, are wide apart so that they do not fall down, and their bodies rock to and fro. The stranger-man is very weak. His arm shakes, so that when he shoots at the man his bullet strikes in the snow. The man cannot take off his mitten. The stranger-man shoots at him again, and this time the bullet goes by in the air. Then the man takes the mitten in his teeth and pulls it off. But his hand is frozen and he cannot hold the revolver, and it fails in the snow. I look at the woman. Her mitten is off, and the big Colt's revolver is in her hand. Three times she shoot, quick, just like that. The hungry face of the stranger-man is still snarling as he falls forward into the snow.

"They do not look at the dead man. 'Let us go on,' they say. And we go on. But now that they have found that for which they look, they are like dead. The last strength has gone out of them. They can stand no more upon their feet. They will not crawl, but desire only to close their eyes and sleep. I see not far away a place for camp. I kick them. I have my dog-whip, and I give them the lash of it. They cry aloud, but they must crawl. And they do crawl to the place for camp. I build fire so that they will not freeze. Then I go back for sled. Also, I kill the dogs of the stranger-man so that we may have food and not die. I put the man and woman in blankets and they sleep. Sometimes I wake them and give them little bit of food. They are not awake, but they take the food. The woman sleep one day and a half. Then she wake up and go to sleep again. The man sleep two days and wake up and go to sleep again. After that we go down to the coast at St. Michaels. And when the ice goes out of Bering Sea, the man and woman go away on a steamship. But first they pay me my seven hundred and fifty dollars a month. Also, they make me a present of one thousand dollars. And that was the year that Sitka Charley gave much money to the Mission at Holy Cross."

"But why did they kill the man?" I asked.

Sitka Charley delayed reply until he had lighted his pipe. He glanced at the *Police Gazette* illustration and nodded his head at it familiarly. Then he said, speaking slowly and ponderingly:

"I have thought much. I do not know. It is something that happened. It is a picture I remember. It is like looking in at the window and seeing the man writing a letter. They came into my life and they went out of my life, and the picture is as I have said, without beginning, the end without understanding."

"You have painted many pictures in the telling," I said.

"Ay," he nodded his head. "But they were without beginning and without end."

"The last picture of all had an end," I said.

"Ay," he answered. "But what end?"
"It was a piece of life," I said.
"Ay," he answered. "It was a piece of life."

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5: The Spirit of France

S. B. H. Hurst

1876-1937

Adventure Trails Feb 1929

"MERGUI is a dirty and most immoral town."

Father Murphy, the stout, kindly missionary paused dramatically. "But hitherto we have been spared this— a white girl dancing for Mohammedans and Chinamen! You must do something, Bailey!"

The youthful English magistrate, who, with ten Sikh policemen and one white clerk, was administrator of the affairs of the little town and the district adjoining it on the Tenasserim strip of the coast of Burma, looked through the window of his office at the mud of low tide in the harbor. A puff of wind brought the reek of it. He sniffed, then answered testily: "You know as well as I do, Padre, that I can do nothing. Until the girl commits a crime I cannot have her arrested. English law does not infringe on the rights of people to live where they wish. If she wants to live among the colored population, that's her business. Let her dance! I have received no complaints about her. If you are worried about her morals, well— that's in your department, not mine!"

The priest sighed.

"Yes," he answered. "But the girl won't listen to me. She politely avoids discussion. Admits being a Catholic, too! Orphan. Daughter of some Frenchman who died up Indo-China way. I don't know how she drifted down here."

"Well, I can't help you, Murphy. I detest having a white woman of her occupation in the town— liable to stir up any sort of trouble. But you can find 'em all over Burma. We must bear our burdens, Padre. Good morning!"

The priest left the magistrate's office. The heat weighed heavily upon his huge figure. He felt, both physically and spiritually, depressed. This pretty childfor she was little more— who politely refused to worry about her soul's welfare! Father Murphy clenched his fists.

"If I have to use force," he said firmly, "I'll do it! I will break the law if need be-the law that protects vice from the assaults of decency! I will break through that ring of Mohammedan and Chinese brutes who leer at her dancing. I may have to hit a few ugly faces, for which Bailey could have me arrested; but I will-for the good of that young woman's soul. It's my duty, and by the living God I'll do it! I'm Irish, and before I got so fat I could use my hands for other things than blessing people!"

He was spared this necessity. His walk had brought him to the tiny church he himself had designed and helped to build. In its quiet he would compose himself.

He took off his large solar hat and wiped his streaming forehead. Then he dropped the hat in joyful astonishment. For the girl he had thought apostate was kneeling there, praying! "Oh, Father, I thank Thee!" he murmured.

The girl looked up and saw him. She was vaguely disturbed. The priest, that massive man of intuitions, felt that she had timed her visit to the church to correspond with his absence. No doubt there were other visits.

"Daughter," he said, "I do not understand this!"

She smiled, mischievously.

"My Father, there is, ah, so veree mouch that ees hard to ounderstand!"

His voice became hard.

"I do not understand why you have refused to talk with me. I do not understand why you have come here when you knew I was away. And… I have known other women like you. But the others did not avoid the priest. Instead, they sought absolution!"

She shrugged her shoulders. The flash of her smile was of pearls. Her eyes were violet lakes in which dwelt mystery and delight.

"Perhaps they needed it!" she answered.

For a moment the priest was so angry at her pert reply that he could not answer her. She went on. But she no longer smiled, and the lids covered her provocative eyes.

"But I, what am so small, joost come 'ere because, maybe, God ees 'ere! Onnyways, if He is anywhere in Mergui, He will be 'ere! And you know, Father, that there is times when every woman feel lonelee for God. So I do not come when you are here. Becos' I do not want to talk about my sins. Eet would take too much time. And the time I come 'ere is the time I 'ave give to God!"

Her eyes met his defiantly.

Murphy mastered his anger.

"Do you realize that God sees you when you are not in His church-when you are dancing and— and living with those horrible heathen men?"

She raised her small head proudly.

"I do not 'live' with any man!" Her eyes blazed, her little hands clenched. "For what you 'ave said, but that you are a priest, I would strike you! I live with no man! I 'ave never lived with any man! And I have never even kissed any man but my father— what is died!"

The flash left her eyes. Her head drooped. She sank down upon the wooden bench and sobbed.

Father Murphy was deeply distressed. He could not believe her, but…

"My child! My poor child!" He laid a hand gently upon her shoulder. "But you must realize how your dancing for such creatures seems!"

"To dance is all I know," she sobbed. "I 'ave tried to dance for the white men, but they do not want me. They want women who will kees after dancing— who will kees and love for money. I must live! Mohamet Ali and his nasty bearded men 'ave never tried to kees me. Mohamet looks cruel, but he treats me square! And the Chinamen are afraid of him. The men for whom I dance know that if they try to kees me they will 'ave a long knife in their ribs. Mohamet is 'eathen, you say. Yes. But I would razzer dance for heem than for white men who do not want dancing as mouch as they want something else!"

"Some other way of making a living may be found," began the baffled priest.

She interrupted fiercely. "To scrub floors, eh! I 'ave a right to live my own life. I love to dance!"

"I know you are French, of course, and you said you were an orphan; but you have not told me your name," the priest conciliated.

She answered with proud mischievousness: "When I was leetle girl, my father called me 'Leetle Spirit of France,' because eet is the spirit of France to dance and sing— and to fight! So now I call my name, 'Spirit of France!' But you will say I am conceit— is it not?"

And she laughed and bowed and went out into the glaring morning.

Murphy sighed. A bit of human thistledown!

THE Mergui day dragged its festering way through the hours. Night came over the place with the stars peering dubiously through a velvet pall, with the bats and huge moths winging like evil souls visiting friends still incarnate, with phallic music throbbing feverishly.

Sikh policemen stalked here and there, daintily contemptuous of the filth of it all.

In a small, low-lit courtyard danced the Spirit of France. Avid eyes glowed at her beauty, wondering how long Mohamet Ali would continue to bestow upon her his quite unusual protection. There were no Burmese there; only Mohammedan traders, adventurers from Northern India, with their co-religionists of Mergui.

The music throbbed and the girl whirled to it, abandoned to a sheer ecstasy of physical rhythm, borne upon the swell of the poetry of herself.

But this night the mood of her audience was different. Its sensuous absorption of her was sporadic.

Piqued, she danced the more enticingly. The shadows of the place were gathered and twisted and festooned about her, but her audience was far from paying her its customary attention. Mohamet Ali and his nearest friends paid no attention at all. In vain she danced closer to him. If he looked at her at all it

was an abstracted look that did not see her. Matters of great moment seemingly engaged him. He talked in undertones to his friends.

They smoked and drank their coffee, but the sensuality of their faces was sublimated to a fierce interest in the affair of their conversation.

The Spirit of France danced on, puzzled, irritated, vastly curious. About what thing were they talking?

Their hairy faces were grouped together. They had even laid aside their pipes… The Spirit of France changed the rhythm of her dancing. She moved like a leaf before vagrant puffs of wind… slowly. Pausing, and bending, and moving again. In sleepy cadence she danced before Mohamet Ali and his lieutenants…

Fragments of words came to her straining ears. But she could not linger there. Burning with curiosity, she dared not wait for more. She whirled into allegro again, and the music caught her mood and ran with her.

But again and again she floated like a lazy leaf before Mohamet Ali, and the fragments of their words wove themselves into a baffling tapestry-a picture blurred, and without outline, yet vividly colored with significance. Significance of what?

They were laughing now, those bearded men from the North. Grimacing, rather, much as tigers grimace.

The Spirit of France shivered. But she fought the fear in her gallant heart and killed it before it could grow to terror. And she danced on.

But what were they planning? It did not seem to concern herself; they had hardly glanced at her for an hour. The Mohammedans of lesser parts had been beckoned into conference. The girl felt a premonition of death touch her soul heavily. Neither was it a new thing they planned. She felt intuitively that these fierce men were discussing something done before that was to be done again. Their minds were running in old, well-loved grooves.

Mohamet Ali was looking at her! The Spirit of France danced the more merrily. He beckoned her towards him.

"Little sparrow," he said, "dance no more this night. Go and sleep."

"And I will dance for you tomorrow night?"

The heavy lids of the man flickered. The eyes of his companions became blank-a blankness that seemed overdone.

"Yes, you will dance for me again," said Mohamet gravely, "because you are under my protection. Sleep now. I will send for you when I want you. Here is your money."

SHE was dismissed. And she was racked with a problem. There had been something terrible about those men. Never before had they been like that. But

Mohamet had not been lying-he really meant she should dance for him again. But what were they planning? Pirates, robbers, fierce men of the North.

What did they plan? The few words she had gleaned made darkness-darkness fraught with something terrible. It was three hours past midnight.

As she began to undress she heard footsteps along the narrow street. There were two men. One spoke to the other as they passed her window. His voice was like the hiss of a snake.

"Let them cry for help! We have cut their talking wire!"

"And the girl?" muttered the other.

"Nay, Mohamet Ali says that he himself will slay the man that so much as touches a hair of her head!"

They passed on. But the Spirit of France knew!

Crouched on her bed, shivering, hardly breathing, she knew.

The disconnected words. The cruel grimaces.

Religious fanaticism, like burning oil, was to be poured upon the Christians. Four white men and ten loyal Sikhs in Mergui— and the telegraph wire to Rangoon had been cut!

But she would not be harmed. She had no doubts about that. Her safety was assured. Mohamet would rather die than break his word. And the man who touched her would surely die. Mohamet and his men had treated her decently. To do so was a queer freak in their cruel natures. But they had done so, and would continue to do so. And the white people— had reviled her. They had tried to make a prostitute of her. And the fat priest— She writhed on her bed at the memory of it— at the memory of all her treatment at the hands of the Christians. She fought the problem. If she stayed in her room she was safe. If she warned the unsuspecting white men her doom was certain. It would be better, far better to kill herself than to fall into Mohamet's clutches again.

If she warned the white men!… And what would the white men do for her if she did warn them? Continue to revile her, to offer cheap pay for her lovely body? She smothered a bitter laugh. For there would be no white men left to revile her, and she would be worse than dead.

What chance had four Englishmen, with their ten fighting Sikhs, against five hundred Mohammedans, every one believing that Paradise waited the man who died fighting against an unbeliever?

She walked up and down the floor. This was agony.

It was horrible to think of those men being killed! But she was safe! And if she warned the Christians her fate would be more horrible than theirs! But-she might die!

The Spirit of France. Her little pet name of childhood. And the brave things her father had told her about the spirit of France-about the gallantry of that

distant homeland she had never seen! The history of a nation seemed to be watching her…

How would France face such a problem?… How would the glorious national spirit of France respond to such a situation?…

She was walking stealthily to the door, cursing herself. Valuable time was wasted while she dwelt upon her own safety.

"I am a disgrace," she muttered.

She crouched in the dark doorway. More men were coming along the street. She held her breath, her soul damning these men for detaining her from her duty.

They passed, and her light feet were flying as they had never flown before. Like a leaf still, but now like a leaf before a hurricane, the Spirit of France was running through the streets of Mergui.

A SCANDALIZED Father Murphy woke to her tearing away his mosquito curtains, to her fierce shaking of his arm.

"What! What are you doing here? Go away. George!"

He called for his servant-converted, and baptized with that familiar name.

The Spirit of France sneered. But she continued to pull fiercely at the furious priest.

"Your servant!" she laughed shrilly. "He weel 'ave run away— with all your other made-Christians!"

She pulled at the priest, swearing like a cat. And, somehow, she told her story.

"But such a thing cannot happen in Burma anymore!" the priest exclaimed.

"Come! Come and see, foolish man!" she stormed.

"They 'ave cut the telegram!"

"Go away while I put on some clothes!"

"There is not time!"

"Wait outside! I will not run through the streets in pajamas to save my life!"

She waited, feverishly biting her fingernails. Then, the hour before the dawn saw a heavily panting Father Murphy doing his utmost to run with the Spirit of France through the streets of Mergui towards the fairly stout jail and the magistrate's office.

"Hurree! Hurree!"

"The doctor!" panted the priest. "We must wake Doctor Pelham!"

They roused the doctor, a calm and cynical person.

"I'm safe," he drawled. "I'm an infidel, and these chaps, you say, are out to kill the Christians!"

"Don't jest at this terrible moment," said Murphy severely.

"Not jestin'. How many times have you called me an infidel, Murphy? But I'm accustomed to being woke up at ghastly hours to go on unpleasant business. I'll go with you."

"Hurree!" cried the girl. "I 'ear 'em!"

"So do I," replied the doctor. "But there is time to get my bag. Somebody will need surgical aid— most of us, probably."

They reached the jail. In the yard were all the Sikhs.

They had just wakened the magistrate, reporting "some sort of disturbance." The Spirit of France shrilled out the truth. The magistrate was skeptical. He could not know that this was the beginning of the riots of 1897.

"Telegraph Rangoon immediately," the magistrate told his white assistant.

The Spirit of France laughed wildly. Then she sat down weakly.

"Wire's down, sir!" reported the operator.

"Now you know I tell truth," the Spirit of France cried indignantly. "They are going to keel every Christian in Mergui. I 'ear them when I dance, but am not sure till they pass my window after cutting the telegram wire."

"So," said the young magistrate cheerfully. "Then we'll have to fight it out alone. Have to anyway, because it would be days before Rangoon could get help to us. But I would like to let the boss know who did this thing." He turned to the Spirit of France, and bowed.

"I— I'm much obliged to you for what you have done.

And now you had better go."

"Go!" She jumped to her feet. "M'sieu, many times 'ave I fired a gun. I fight joust so well as onybody!"

"Don't doubt it," responded the magistrate. "It isn't that. The point is that if you leave us now Mohamet Ali will not hurt you. He will just regard you as a frightened woman— liable to do anything. Run along, now. Cry, and say the noise has terrified you! Don't suppose Mohamet knows you roused Father Murphy and the doctor; so, goodbye-and thank you!"

He held out his hand.

"I stay 'ere and fight for you!" she answered firmly.

"Do you realize," he said gently, "that there is little chance of any of us seeing the sunset— that we'll do well to last until noon? Do you know that if you stay here and help us Mohamet will give orders to his men to take you alive? Do you realize what horrible things will be done to you then?"

She laughed.

"Do you realize that my father was a Frenchman? He call me for pet name 'Little Spirit of France!' Do you realize Spirit of France— what eet mean? Give me a gun, please!"

The magistrate beckoned to Sergeant Ruttan Singh.

"Give the memsahib a gun, Sergeant."

Then he turned to the Spirit of France. His voice shook somewhat. Trying to honor her, he spoke in such awful French that she was hard put to it not to laugh. But his words more than excused his accent.

He turned to the still heavily breathing priest.

"Padre, have you any scruples about pulling the trigger when the sight's on another human being?"

"Not a one— in this case!" responded Father Murphy cheerfully and with perfect conviction.

"Good! We will divide. You will take three Sikhs and defend the northwest corner."

"I was Irish before I was a priest. Give me a rifle!" answered Murphy.

"They are coming!" whispered the Spirit of France.

"We will be ready," replied the magistrate quietly.

"Take the southeast corner, will you, Doctor? It's liable to be hot there while it lasts, but you're a first-class shot."

"Very good, General," drawled the doctor. "But won't my friends laugh when they hear of this! Old Pelham, the infidel, killed in a religious war!"

The magistrate grinned.

"All right, then. I will command at the northeast, and Mason and Ruttan Singh shall have the southwest corner. Now we are ready. Good thing we have lots of ammunition. Here they come! Steady now! Don't waste a shot! If they get over the wall, shoot; and keep on shooting as long as any of 'em are in the yard! And if a head shows let it have it!" He walked across the room and whispered to the doctor, "If I go first, Pelham, and you see that we're done in, and the girl is still alive— keep a bullet for her."

The doctor nodded.

"And I'll tell Ruttan Singh to tell his men to do the same," the magistrate added. the magistrate added.

AS it grew light the raging hundreds beyond the circling wall began firing their first broadside-of verbal filth, that hymn of hate which has sounded down the years, that way of honoring God peculiar to religious enthusiasts. Some scattered shots were fired which did no damage, and Mohamet Ali could be heard shouting to his followers.

"We have days of time, oh men of the True God! Haste not! Let the infidels shudder a while as death stares them in the eye. Let them die slowly!"

A mocking voice answered him.

"That hellcat pet of thine was seen warning the fat mullah of the infidels, oh Mohamet Ali!"

"So, the woman, eh! A snake in my bosom!"

Mohamet foamed down his beard, but realizing the probable effect on his followers, controlled himself. "So it was written, then, that she should furnish amusement for the Faithful! See that she is not killed! Catch the cat alive and unhurt. She asked me if she should dance for me again! She shall! But it will be such a dance as she has never dreamed of!"

He followed with unprintable threats. He gesticulated and raved about the fun to follow the killing of the white men. But he showed a little too much of himself. The doctor took a snap shot at him, and Mohamet Ali lost the greater part of one of his ears.

"Damn rotten miss," muttered that sarcastic medico.

"Must have lost my temper at hearing such an awful creature call me an infidel. Can't shoot straight when my trigger hand itches to punch a chap's nose."

"Magistrate Sahib." Ruttan Singh saluted. "It is sunrise and the flag has not been hoisted. Will the sahib give the order?"

"Rutah Singh, you know it is certain death to venture out of here into the yard?"

The big Sikh grinned.

"Death is at our elbows, sahib!"

"Yes, and there's something about the old rag that makes it more enjoyable to fight when it's flying; but we can't afford to lose a man. Sorry, Ruttan Singh, but we must fight this fight with the flag lying on the table yonder."

"Very good, sahib," replied Ruttan Singh regretfully, saluting and returning to his post.

The sun rose, and the besieging horde became suddenly quiet. It turned as one man towards Mecca, and said its morning prayer.

"Can't we rush 'em?" muttered the priest to the magistrate.

"No! It's tempting, but we've got to hold the fort!

Never can tell what may turn up, you know; but if we rushed out on those praying people we'd all be killed in short order!"

"Religion is a fearful and wonderful thing!" remarked the doctor.

"I wish they'd hurry," whispered Mason.

"So do we all," answered the doctor. "But let's not show it."

The praying ended.

"Ready, everybody!" shouted the magistrate.

Forgetting, of course, Mohamet Ali's cautious suggestion that they let the Christians die slowly, and stimulated to paradisiacal ardor by their prayers, the

followers of the prophet leaped shrieking at the wall, and went over it like a brown wave.

THEN for some minutes there was very warm work.

Rapid firing did not stem the wave. It broke it, but those unhit dashed with a truly terrible bravery at the bars of the jail windows. Shrieks, groans and monstrous blasphemies made a frightful din as they charged. The defenders were for the most part grimly silent. Only the doctor muttered encouragingly.

"A little lower, young lady. These birds are flying low."

But the Spirit of France never heard him. Her mind was set on the fearful hairy faces against whom her soul raged, while a mockery of memory wondered why she had danced for them. She fought joyously. In her blood a long line of heroes surged. As she dashed the sweat from her eyes she saw with surprise that the yard was filled with dead men.

Such a stout defense was too much, even for such fanatics. The canny Mohamet saw that he was not getting value for his dead. He called his men.

"Lot of wounded out there," remarked the doctor casually. "But I have two minor casualties to attend to in here. Ruttan Singh has a bullet in his shoulder, although he won't admit it; and one of his men is hit. Ah! Hullo, General; close shave that!"

A bullet had grazed the magistrate's forehead, and he was bleeding freely.

"You attend to the men! Give me ze plaster for ees head!"

And the Spirit of France began deftly to bind the magistrate's wound.

"It may be inhuman," said the young man, "but those chaps out there will have to attend to their own wounded, Doctor. Do you think I should let them carry them off under a flag of truce?"

The doctor gave him a searching look. The magistrate's wound had shaken him badly.

"Take a big drink and don't be an ass," advised the doctor. "Good work, young lady. Now, before the charming enemy tries another charge, please help me bandage this fine sergeant of Sikhs."

But Mohamet Ali had thought of a better and more entertaining plan of campaign than charging across that death-strewn yard. And the one redeeming feature of a Mergui morning, the brief breeze from the sea, would aid the new plan. Mohamet disclosed his new and brilliant plan to his lieutenants behind the wall. It was hailed with shrieks of approbation, delighted yells. It gratified the lust for cruelty of a mob maddened by primitive emotion. Hence there was a pause in the conflict.

"What now?" said the doctor. "Are the brutes saying their prayers again?"

"Not at this hour!" answered the priest.

"Well, I don't pretend to be an authority," retorted the doctor. "But I wish we could see over the jail wall!

They are up to some deviltry! And they could bring up a dozen batteries along the side of the hill while we couldn't see them doing it!"

"There is no artillery they can get," said the distressed magistrate.

"That's right— there isn't," soothed the doctor.

The wait was nerve-racking— the wait and the impossibility of seeing what the enemy was doing. But the doctor had more than his suspicions. The yells of delight could mean only one thing. Yes, that would be it.

A whiff of sea breeze confirmed his deduction.

"But I won't tell the others," he muttered grimly.

"Bad enough when it comes, without having 'em suffer the dread of waiting for it."

The enemy had become silent. Then there was some chuckling borne on the breeze. It was followed by a great yell. The breeze became pungent.

"They are trying to smoke us out!" shouted the priest gamely.

"Yes," drawled the doctor. "Better tie wet towels over our faces!"

He turned away. He was very pale now. Should he tell his friends? What a mercy they didn't realize. But a short-lived mercy. Better let them know-they were brave men. He beckoned the priest and the magistrate.

"May as well tell you," he whispered. "They are rounding up cases of oil from the Chinese stores. They will pour the oil over the wall, and the fires will do the rest! The delay is caused by the Chinks. They don't want to supply oil for which they know they won't be paidand they don't want to be mixed up in their affair. The Mohamet Ali gang can run up country, having no property here to leave when our people get here— but the Chinks have stores they don't want to lose!"

He whispered this very gently: "Hadn't we better shoot the girl and then rush out on them and end it?" said the magistrate now, with full hold on himself, as calm as the doctor.

"But… who will… shoot her?" whispered the priest. No one answered.

"Oh, hell, let's stick it out!" said the doctor. "The oil isn't here yet!"

THE wounded Ruttan Singh reeled to the magistrate.

He saluted stiffly.

"Sahib, there is a steamer coming into the harbor!"

"Thank you, Sergeant!" the magistrate answered.

"Don't tell anyone! It's probably one of those native owned coast boats, Mohammedan crew. There is one due here today. And while they perhaps would not help the enemy, they certainly won't help us. They couldn't,

anyhow. When they see the row, they will run out of the harbor without discharging the cargo!"

The smoke became worse. The defenders peered through it as best they could, guns ready, but the Mohammedans kept their heads behind the wall.

Coughing, the doctor turned to the window.

"Hullo!" he muttered. "That isn't a native coast boat. Damn the smoke— I can't see!"

He wiped his eyes carefully, and looked again. The breeze blew more strongly. The doctor clenched his fists.

"No," he said, and his voice sounded far away to him, and like an excited girl's. "No." His voice rose so that all heard him. "No! It's a small cruiser— flying the American flag!"

The magistrate gasped. He clapped his hands excitedly.

"Of course!" he shouted. "I forgot. The *Florida*, going to Rangoon for the governor's big tomashe! I had word she would call here. But— she's two days ahead of time! Hurrah! We're saved!"

"No chance," snapped the doctor. "Look! The oil!"

"But the Americans will help us!" the magistrate screamed.

"How's her captain to know we need help? Until it's too late? He'll find our ashes when he comes ashore!

They are starting the oil! The captain will see the fire and hear the fuss, but how will he know what's going on? Unless he knows what's happening. It isn't his business to land on British territory to put out fires!"

"Oh, God," groaned the priest, "is there no way we can let that American captain know we need help?"

"Of course there is!"

IT was the Spirit of France who shouted. It was the Spirit of France who seized the flag lying on the table and dashed for the jail door. Understanding, the men tried to stop her— to do the work themselves. But she eluded them.

She dashed out into the yard— a Joan of Arc, undaunted among the flames and smoke. Mohamet Ali saw her.

"Don't shoot!" he screamed to his men. "Does she come to me for mercy? Don't shoot her— my mercy waits!"

The girl turned and dashed for the flagpole. Swiftly ran the Spirit of France. Her nimble fingers were at the flag halyards. The smoke beat about her. The red flame of the oil creeping across the yard struck at her like tongues of snakes. But-a long moment-and she was hoisting the flag! Half mast and Union down-a signal of distress everywhere! And Mohamet understood. Of the volley that broke around the girl he fired the first shot.

She was hit. She was hit again. But she managed to stagger into the doctor's arms, and he lifted her into the jail.

"Tear it down! Down with that signal!" screamed Mohamet Ali.

But his men could not obey! The flaming oil made a barrier of safety for the flag which even their fanaticism could not pass. And the flag stiffened in the morning breeze, and sent its message seaward.

The yelling besiegers redoubled their efforts. They were shooting the Chinese who wouldn't give them oil. Was there time? Surely, the American captain would understand! But was there time? If Mohamet Ali could get more oil quickly— A shell from the American cruiser shrieked over the jail. A messenger!

A messenger of comfort and hope to tell the defenders their signal had been seen— for of course a bombardment of the enemy would have been dangerous to the defenders of the jail.

"American bugles coming up the hill!"

"The girl?" asked the magistrate. "Is she dead?"

"No," said the doctor gruffly. "No. Badly wounded, but we'll pull her through!"

The Spirit of France opened her eyes.

"You won't die," said the doctor gently.

She smiled.

"The Spirit of France will never die!" she answered.

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6: The Sentimental Burglar

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Ideas, Mar 10, 1909

There are a number of stories of P.-C Lee, a cockney constable on the beat in the then working-class district of Notting Hill, now much gentrified.

I WAS wondering in my mind whether P.-C. Lee would say as policemen are popularly supposed to say, "I arrest you in the name of the law" or whether he would get very angry (as I should have done) and bang the annoying Mr. Jarvis on the head.

Police methods have always interested me, so I waited, and listened to the dialogue that ensued.

Mr. Jarvis (defiantly): 'I've et better men than you, Lee.'

P.-C. Lee (suavely); 'I dessay— but you'd better go home now an' eat something that'll agree with you.

Mr. Jarvis (more defiantly): 'I shall go home when I think.'

P.-C. Lee (coaxingly); 'Now be a sensible fellow an' go away.'

Mr. Jarvis (noisily): 'I'll see you—!'

P.-C. Lee, (to crowd): 'Pass away, please—now, Jarvis, off you go!'

Mr. Jarvis (striking a pugilistic attitude)...! ——!

P.-C. Lee (grabbing him by the scruff of his neck and his arm): 'All right— if you won't go home, I'll take you to my home!'

Mr. Jarvis (struggling): 'Leggo!' (Violently) 'Leggo, you perishin' slop!'

P.-C. Lee: 'Are you goin' quietly?'

Mr. Jarvis at this point aims a well-intentioned kick, which is skilfully avoided; the next minute there is the sound of a mighty 'smack!' and Mr. Jarvis goes down to the ground.

Voice in crowd: 'Shime! You ought to know better than hit a man, p'liceman!'

P.-C. Lee: 'Are you going to be sensible, Jarvis?'

Mr. Jarvis (feebly): 'You hit me unawares.'

P.-C. Lee: 'Are you comin' quietly?'

Mr. Jarvis (meekly): 'Certainly, sir.'

I followed the little crowd to the station, and stood by the inspector's desk whilst Mr. Jarvis was 'charged' in the conventional terminology of the force.

Later in the evening, I was to witness yet another violent assault by P.-C. Lee. The incident, commonplace as it was, is worth recording.

It began when a group of loudly-talking men and women assembled outside a little beer-shop in the Portobello-road. When hasty and bitter

recriminations followed, a loud, aggressive voice said, "Hit him, Bill!" several times, and then two men detaching themselves from the group took the middle of the road, striking wildly.

At an inopportune moment a woman forced her way between the two men, and was instantly knocked down by one of the combatants, who thoughtfully kicked her as she lay. I did not see P.-C. Lee arrive at a run, nor did the kicker. I saw a policeman come from nowhere in particular; I saw his leg of mutton fist dealing punishment discriminately, heard somebody yell "Copper!" as he fled, and heard a shrill whistle. Later, in a calmer moment, I came upon P.-C. Lee standing at the corner of Elgin Crescent, reflectively chewing a match stalk.

"Did you see that feller I clouted?" he asked me reflectively. "Name of Moker, commonly called 'Artful Mo', although he's not of that religious persuasion, or any other so far as I know."

He paused, as is his wont before beginning one of his interesting biologies, and stared blankly along the deserted length of Ladbroke Grove.

"Artful Mo," he began slowly, "is so called because of his great artfulness in gettin' out of trouble an' gettin' other fellows into it. This is the first time, in a manner of speakin'," said P.-C. Lee carefully, "that Mo has properly given himself away, because just at this very particular minute he's 'inside' wonderin' how it happened.

"Artful Mo's lay is very simple; he's an 'egger'; that is to say, he eggs people on to do things they wouldn't otherwise do. You heard someone say 'hit him, Bill'?— well, that was Mo.

"Mo isn't one of the criminal classes— that would be a bit too high class for him; the only charge you could put against him is the charge of 'being in suspected company', which is always an unsatisfactory charge to bring against a man, an' may mean anythin' or nothin'. Yet Mo has been in more big cases than you'd imagine, for he's a highly ingenious chap who reads the newspapers, an' is always in touch with all the big jobs goin'.

"I've seen him sittin' on his chair in front of his house on nice sunny mornings with his spectacles perched on his nose, a-readin' the *Mornin' Post* like a gentleman. He used to keep an old exercise book, an' paste little cuttin's in. His great line was weddin's, an' as soon as he saw 'A marriage has been arranged' he read day by day most careful until he found out what day the people were goin' to pull it off. Then, in a way, his work was done, an' he used to pass the information on. He never worried about the big West End weddin's where there would he lashin's of presents, an' special detectives to watch 'em day an' night, but what he liked best was the little country weddin's, such as: 'A marriage has been arranged between Muriel, eldest daughter of Major O.

Smitter (late Wagshires) and Henry Arthur Somper, youngest son of the late Gabriel Somper of Somper, Custer and Jones, wine merchants.'

"Nice little jobs where the presents would be worth say a couple of hundred pounds, an' they'd be all nicely laid out on a couple of tables, with little cards: 'Fish knives, with Mrs. Smith-Tanker's best wishes.' 'Cruet, with Miss Pipkin's hopes and fears of the future,' an' things like that.

"Every mornin' you'd see Mo goin' carefully through the paper— a penny a day it used to cost him, too— snippin' out a bit here, an' a bit there, an' pastin' it in his little copy book.

"Now you can't charge a man with readin' the *Mornin' Post*; it isn't sense, an' besides the *Mornin' Post* people might object an' have you up for libel, so although we very well knew what the little game was, we couldn't stop him doin' what he was doin'.

"That was his artfulness.

"I remember once he had the impudence to offer the book to me for my inspection.

" 'It's a nobby, Mr. Lee,' says he innocently. 'I get my pleasure in life out of doin' a little thing like this.'

" 'What did you cut this out for?' I asked, an' pointed to a bit about the Lady Augusta Sharloes, whose father had given her a tiara as a birthday present.

"I don't know how that crept in,' he says thoughtful. As a rule I'm only interested in the unitin' of young 'arts, bless 'em!'

"About a week after that the Lady Augusta's tiara was stolen, taken by means of a 'ladder larceny' whilst the family was at dinner at their country residence, 'High Meath'.

"When I read this, I thought it was an excellent chance of connectin' Mo with the robbery; but bless you, you might as well have tried to connect the Archbishop of Canterbury.

" 'If you think,' he says, 'that I'd demean myself by associatin' with low, pinchin' people, you're a bit out of focus, Mr. Lee.'

"Those were his very words, an' I put their classiness down to the fact that he was always readin' the fashionable newspapers.

"I could never be sure who was the man who worked on the information supplied by Mo, but I've got an idea that Nick Moss was one, an' of one thing I'm certain, an' that is that Mo got his full share of the swag without, as you might say, in any way sharin' the danger. Well, he did so well, so remarkably well, that he got a lot of people jealous of him, an' one of these was a feller named Len Cox— one of the most conceited criminals I've ever been brought into contact with. Len was a stoutish young feller with a big face an' a tiny

moustache, he always wore his hair parted in the middle, an' what completed his attractiveness, he wrote a beautiful fist. Like print, his writin' was, an' if his spellin' had only been up to sample, he might have made a fine lawyer's clerk.

"Len was always a great man with the ladies, an' he had a way of raisin' his hat to housemaids that always made a job— he was a housebreaker by trade— very easy. To carry the reference to ladies further, I might say that the only two laggin's Len ever got was through his perliteness to women.

"I believe that when the idea of runnin' an opposition show to Mo's occurred to Len, was when he was sharin' out the benefits of a little job at Croydon— a master builder's daughter had recently married, an' the weddin' had been rather lavish.

" 'You get your money easy,' says Len to Mo.

" 'Think so?' says Mo, clinkin' the gold.

" 'I do,' says Len, 'it's the snuggest an' easiest lay I've ever struck. I'm goin' to try it myself.'

" 'Do,' says Mo, who's a rare one for eggin' people on to destruction. 'I'll tell you how I do it.'

"But Len didn't want any advice. He'd got an idea of his own, an' I might say like a good many other people who take a lot for granted, he thought because he wrote a copperplate hand he'd got copper-plate brains, an' that was where he fell into all kinds of trouble. In the first place, after he established his education bureau, he decided that readin' the papers took too long, so he wrote off to a press cuttin' agency whose advertisement he'd read ('Cuttin's supplied on every conceivable subject') an' asked to he supplied— but I've got his letter. This is how it runs:

Respected Sir,
Having seen your bit in the paper about sending cuts from papers, please send about 100 cuts about jobs near London, where mostly silver.
—Yours respectfully, Len Cox.

"He sent along a post office order for five shillin's, an' by reply he got back about a hundred cuttin's an' a letter. It said:

Dear Sir,
We have your favour. Although we do not know what you mean by 'mostly silver', we do not doubt that employers would be willing to pay in silver if so desired. 100 jobs herewith.

"Len looked at the cuttin's.

"Some of 'em began 'Respectable man wanted— used to cows', an' others 'Man wanted for work on farm', an' it began to dawn on Len that his letter didn't quite express all that he had wanted.

"By the aid of a lady friend, Len wrote another letter in another name, an' managed to get the cuttin's he wanted, an' it really looked as though he was goin' to put Mo out of business, for some of the weddin's that Len got to know about Mo had never heard of. There was one about a weddin' that was to take place from the bride's house at Mowbray— 'Groot Haus' was the name of the house— an' it seemed snug. So Nick Moss an' a pal went down to Melton Mowbray an' spent two days lookin' for the place, without success. They had a narrow escape of gettin' pinched for bein' suspicious persons in possession of housebreakin' instruments, an' then came back to Len very wild.

" 'Hullo,' he says, when he saw 'em at his little house in Ransom-street. 'Got the stuff?'

" 'No,' says Nick shortly.

" 'Why?'

" 'There ain't no such house in Mowbray,' says Nick.

"Len smiled in a superior way an' dug out the cuttin'.

" 'Here you are,' he says; 'newspapers can't lie,' an' handed it over to Nick.

"Nick looked at it.

" 'Why, you fool!' he roars. 'This is cut from *The Cape Times*— it's Mowbray in South Africa!'

"An' so it was. It nearly broke up Len's business, an' would have too, only Len by a great stroke of luck managed to put the brothers Ely on to a rich crib down in Streatham— an' that sort of revived the industry, an' it wasn't long before Mo began to feel the pinch of competition.

"There was a young woman who was very much gone on Len. She was one of those big-built girls of the gipsy type, an it so happened that she met Mo one night near Latimer-road Station, an' began chippin' him about how Len was gettin' on.

"Mo was most polite, an' said he wished Len all the luck in the world.

" 'The only thing, Mrs. Cox,' says Mo, regretfully, 'the only thing about it is, I'm afraid bein' so interested in marriages won't do him any good.'

" 'What d'ye mean?' she says, quick.

" 'Well,' says Mo, carefully, 'so far as I'm concerned, it don't worry me, for I always was a woman hater, an' readin' about marriages don't put ideas into my head—'

" 'If you means to say,' she flames, 'you miserable little lob-crawler, that my Len—'

" 'I don't mean to say anythin',' says Mo.

" 'He's married to me already.' she says.

" 'I dessay,' says Mo politely. 'You know your own business best.'

"After that, Mo had a sort of horrible fascination for the girl, an' she used to go out of her way to meet him an' tell him what she thought of him, an' all the time Artful Mo was gettin' in a word here an' there about the danger of readin' too much about marriages. Mo knew women— especially women like her— and it began to leak out that Mr. and Mrs. Cox wasn't as happy as they might have been.

"One night Len was lookin' over his cuttin's an' saw an account that pleased him very much. A little weddin' in Guildford. Soon after that, he got his tools from the coal hole an' began pickin' out his kit.

" 'What's the game?' says Mrs. Cox.

" 'This one's too good to give away,' says Len. 'I'm goin' to do it myself.'

"She tried to persuade him, but he was a difficult man to persuade, an' off he started.

"Now the curious thing about Len was his sentimental character. He was a great chap for songs about angels, an' orphans, an' when he's been at a friendly-lead he's been so affected after a couple of drinks that he's had to be assisted home.

"Therefore this story of what happened to Len is quite understandable to me. Of course, at the time I knew nothin' whatever about his plans, you may be sure, but by all accounts he was back again in London the evenin' after he started, empty handed. He met Mo an' told him about it, an Mo, bein' a very artful feller, advised him to tell his missis.

"So home sailed Len, mightily pleased with himself, an' got into his house just as Mrs. Cox was sittin' down to tea.

" 'Hullo!' she says. 'Did you get the swag?'

" 'No,' says Len, with a beautiful smile.

" 'Didn't you get in?'

" 'I did,' says Len.

" 'Wasn't the stuff there?'

" 'It was,' says Len, 'it was in the bride's room, an' I nearly took it when,' he says, almost cryin', 'I saw her lyin' there, like an innercent snowdrop with her childlike face on the piller, more like a beautiful angel she was! I says to myself: What! rob that fair child, on what I might call the threshold of life! No, I says, Len Cox may be a burglar but he's got an 'art.'

" 'I see,' says Mrs. Cox quietly.

" 'When I thought,' Len went on dreamily, 'of the happiness of bein' properly married, when I thought of—'

"She left him thinkin', for she got up an' took her shawl an' came to me.

" 'Mr. Lee,' she says, 'do you want a cop?'

" 'I do,' says I.

" 'There's one at 64 Ransom-street,' she says, bitterly. 'It's time he had a laggin'— he's got some silly ideas in his head.' "

7: "Sorry!"

J. J. Bell

1871-1934

North Queensland Register (Townsville) 1 June 1903

IT WAS RARE June weather, but the big Beach Hotel at King's Cove was occupied by less than a score of visitors, for the season there does not commence till the beginning of August. To those of the visitors who had come to the Cove simply for test and change of air, the quiet state of the place was perfectly satisfactory. To any who anticipated some gaiety, indoor or out, it was naturally disappointing. The satisfied guests were, however easily in the majority. They were mostly elderly ladies and gentleman, who toddled about or sat reading and gossiping in the forenoon sunshine, who dozed after luncheon, and who were not tempted out after dinner but passed an hour or two in the drawing-room or billiard-room, and retired early to bed with the airs of people who had made the most of the day. Two young ladies who had recently failed in a medical professional examination, and one young gentleman recovering from his eleventh attack of influenza, were also pleased with the unexciting conditions.

Of the minority, Mrs. Bantam, whose husband enjoying a rest at home, was one who found King's Cove appallingly dull, as she expressed it to Mr. Nimmy, a youth of 52 or thereabouts, who was chiefly engaged in discovering draughts, and whose countenance might be described as distinguished owing to its being ornamented by two gold teeth and one eyebrow. Mrs. Bantam, in waiting to a friend, referred to Mr. Nimmy as "a dreadful flirt," which was really an exaggeration, seeing that he never talked to her on more sentimental subjects than Jaeger boots and the curse of hotel ventilation.

Among the remaining visitors were Mrs. and Miss Medley and Mr. Lambert, the latter an author whose last novel had been so successful that the royalties from its sale had almost paid his fare to King's Cove.

One glowing afternoon, just after luncheon, Lambert was enjoying his pipe on the verandah, waiting there in the hope that Miss Medley— or Dolly, as he was beginning to call her in his thoughts— would make her appearance. He had come to King's Cove three weeks before for the purpose of collecting "colour" for the next book, but somehow his work had not progressed with any degree of rapidity. At the moment, however, his conscience was not troubling him in that respect.

A step sounded in the tiled hall, and he glanced eagerly at the door. But it was only Mr. Nimmy who came out.

"Glorious day," remarked Lambert pleasantly.

"H'm!" said Mr. Nimmy. "It's not a day for being outside; one is apt. to get overheated. Did you feel that devilish draught at luncheon to-day? I tell you, I could hardly sit on my seat."

"I can't say I felt it," returned the young man politely.

Mr. Nimmy showed his gold teeth in a sarcastic grin and rubbed his eyebrow. "Some people call it fresh air. I call it—" He stopped abruptly, looked towards the door, groaned, and fled round the corner of the building.

"Oh, Mr. Lambert, have you seen Mr. Nimmy?" said Mrs. Bantam, tripping up to Lambert.

"He was here a moment ago," replied the author, lifting his hat end hastening down the steps leading to the garden.

"I wished to consult him on—" continued the lady, but Lambert was hurrying towards the gate, and did not appear to hear her. He could not endure Mrs. Bantam's ponderous coyness; moreover, he would rather miss Molly than meet her in the former's presence.

Leaving the hotel grounds, he crossed the golf links and proceeded along the shore. After tramping over the fine gravel for half-a-mile, he came to an easy narrow winding path leading up the side of the cliffs, and, following it, he reached at last a secluded grassy nook sheltered from every wind save that which blew in from the west. Scarcely three weeks had passed since he found this pleasant path, and resting place, but now they were very familiar to him. Indeed, they made the only bits of "colour" which, so far, he had collected.

As he lazily dropped to earth, his eye was caught by what looked like a small, neat parcel lying on the grass. On securing it, however, he found it to be a book with its binding carefully protected by brown paper.

"What idiot has found out our corner?" he murmured, aggrievedly. But on opening the book at the fly-leaf, he read "Dorothy Medley" scribbled thereon in pencil.

"I never thought of her coming here in the forenoon," was his next inward comment, "She has always gone with her mother in the mornings; and it's not likely that Mrs. Medley would climb up here.... I'm afraid I'm not going to see Dolly this afternoon.... Perhaps it's just as well…. But what has she been reading?"

He turned the fly-leaf; and then he blushed. "April Days"— it was his last book. Of course Dolly had never identified the "Malcolm Laurence" on the title-page with himself, Frank Lambert. The affair was rather amusing. He was not a conceited man, but he could not help feeling gratified. He looked at the pencilled name again, and sank into a delightful reverie.

"I see you've found my book, Mr. Lambert," said the voice of the lady of his dreams.

He started up. "Oh, Doll— Miss Medley, I'm— er— won't you sit down?"

"I don't think I ought to wait," she said, demurely, as she made herself comfortable. "I'm afraid you've been asleep," she added.

"Not exactly. I didn't know you came here in the mornings."

"Only this morning. Mother had a headache, and wanted to be alone. I didn't intend to come this afternoon, but you see I remembered I had left my book, and thought it might get spoiled lying there all night."

"I could have brought it back to you."

"How was I to know you would be here?" she asked, with the faintest blush.

They had met there almost every afternoon during the past fortnight, but Lambert had the delicacy to leave her question unanswered. "You take good care of your books. Miss Medley," he remarked, indicating the brown-paper covering.

"That's mother's doing. Father sent us the book, along with some others, from town. He mentioned that he had heard good reports of it, but I'm afraid someone has been taking advantage of him."

"D—don't you like it?" murmured Lambert, with a miserable attempt at carelessness.

"Well, I've only got half through it but it has been a bit of a struggle so far. The author doesn't seem to have any sense of humour."

"Hasn't he?"

"No, poor man. Perhaps he is some starving wretch, writing in a garret, with a crust of bread in one hand and a farthing candle stuck in a black bottle in the other. But even in such a case a man might have some humour— sardonic, maybe— but humour all the same."

Lambert was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Have you been wondering what the author is like?"

"Goodness me, no! I wasn't so Interested. I suppose the book is well enough written, but it's very, very dull. And some of it is quite impossible There's a girl who despises an artist's pictures, yet she loves the artist! Just imagine!"

"Is that so impossible?" Lambert had grown rather pale; his gaze was set seaward.

"Of course it is!"

"Does the artist love the girl?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't, know yet. But I'll lend you the book, and you can read it when you don't feel sleepy enough."

The author laughed so loudly, that she was startled.

"Excuse me," he said, "but you ought to be a reviewer. You have such a command of cruelty Miss Medley."

"Was I cruel?" she inquired, smiling.

"You don't know how cruel," he said. And he laughed again.

"I seem to be more amusing than cruel, after all, Mr. Lambert," she remarked. "But I must go," she said suddenly, and rose to her feet.

He took out his watch. "It's early yet," and though the phrase was familiar, the tone of his voice was new to her.

"I think I'd better go," she murmured.

"Then I must not try to keep you," he returned. He did not even offer to accompany her.

"I'm going back to town tonight," he said, speaking slowly, "and I may as well get the benefit of the sea breezes here until I leave."

"I thought you were—" she began.

"I did intend staying until the end of the month, Miss Medley, but circumstances have altered, and I— I must go."

She felt him looking at her, but she merely said, without meeting his eyes, "I suppose business men are not their own masters. However, you must be thankful for the glorious weather you have had. Well— shall we save out tears till after dinner?"

"I shan't wait for dinner," he replied, without joining her smile. "If you have any tears, let me have them now."

Her lips quivered, but she laughed.

"Good-bye, Miss Medley," he said rising and holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Lambert"

She went down the path without a backward glance, and the young man watched her till she turned a corner and was lost to view.

"I'll soon get over it," he muttered. "I'm glad I didn't give myself away. And perhaps she was right about my girl and my artist— the poor puppets! No sense of humour, too! She made me feel limp…. And I was so nearly in love with her…. But I'll soon get over it! Oh, Dolly! Dolly!"

"FANCY!" crowed Mrs. Bantam at dinner, addressing Mr. Nimmy in particular, "just fancy that young Mr. Lambert being a novelist!"

"Indeed?" said Mr. Nimmy. "He left an hour ago. Couldn't stand the confounded draughts, I suppose."

"I happened to be at the station when he left," gabbed the lady, "and a friend of mine who had just arrived gave me the information. His latest book is called 'April Days.' "

"I got a shocking chill one day last April while sitting in a tramcar— felt the draught going through me," said the gentleman.

"I'm sorry dear Mr. Lambert has gone," clucked Mrs. Bantam. "He and I were such friends! I wish I had got his autograph."

She looked across the table and addressed Miss Medley. "Did you know that our dear Mr. Lambert was an author?"

"No," said the girl.

"Perhaps," sniggered Mr. Nimmy, exhibiting his gold teeth and tweaking his eye-brow, "perhaps Mr. Lambert has no particular reason to be proud of his novel writing."

"I'm sure he writes splendidly…. I really must get his books from the Library…. He calls himself Malcolm Lawrence…. How charming.... I once knew a Thomas Lawrence, but he was a stock-broker." Thus Mrs. Bantam clucked on. As the guests rose from the table she beamed across at Miss Medley. "Perhaps you have read Mr. Lambert's last novel," she said questioningly.

"I— I don't know," was the somewhat extraordinary reply.

Mrs. Medley touched her daughter's arm and whispered, "You're not looking well, my dear."

Dolly flushed. "I'm afraid I've got your headache, mother," she whispered back. "You won't mind if I don't come into the drawing room tonight?"

ON HIS RETURN to town, Lambert found a note from his publishers informing him that a demand had suddenly sprung up, not only for his latest novel, but its predecessor. He was pleased, but not excited.

In the morning be settled himself down at his desk.

"I've been dreaming for the last three weeks," he said to himself, "but thank heaven for Miss Dolly's rude awakening. I believe she'd be sorry if she knew she had hurt me…. Hurt me? Well, rather! But she kept me from making a fool of myself. I'd like to meet her some day and have a good laugh over it all.... if she had cared— no, that's not…. if I had really cared. I wonder— well, there's no good In thinking about it…. And now to work."

The first day he covered a deal of paper, the second day not quite so much, the third day hardly any, and on the fourth day he consigned the bundles to "the Basket." Then, for a week, he sat at his desk, or paced up and down his room, without making the smallest contribution to the literature of the twentieth century.

Nearly a fortnight after his departure from King's Cove, a letter, originally addressed to the care of his publishers, reached him along with an apology from these gentlemen for an unfortunate delay in forwarding. The writing on

the envelope was unfamiliar, and at first he thought the enclosure was only a blank sheet of paper. But written inside he read:

"*Sorry. D.M*."

He rushed to the nearest post office, and despatched a telegram to King's Cove.

WHEN she saw him coming up the path to the nook where she awaited him, she did her face in her hands. Presently she heard his step; and then she knew that he was standing near and looking down on her.

"Well, Dolly," he said at last, and his voice shook.

She could not answer him, and after a moment he spoke again. "Dolly, I asked you to telegraph if you didn't want me to come. You didn't forbid me, but... Dolly— don't you understand? I'm still in the dark. I can't go on unless you let me see your face— unless I know whether it's friendship or—or—"

He paused, but she made no sign.

"Dolly," he asked abruptly, "why were you sorry?"

Then she stretched out a shaky little hand, while with the other she kept her eyes covered. But when Lambert felt her touch he knew why she had been sorry. He dropped on his knees, and she slipped into his arms just as if they had been made for her.

"I don't know how you can care for me after— after yon day," she whispered, about half-an-hour later.

"Neither do I, Dolly," he said, laughing.

———————

8: The Long, Long Day

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

The Red Book Magazine, March 1923

WHEN Winans was young, stray words, gleaned from one book or another, used to lay thrall upon his boyish mind. Trader was such a word. It seemed to him to be full of ocean breezes, the rustle of palms, beat of surf upon coral shores. He could see fierce faces, devil-may-care, showing under huge shade-hats; there would be a cigar in the teeth; the man's mustaches would sweep halfway to his shoulder.

One could hear orders shouted to a dusky crew.

Somewhere there would be a lonely island, a house with balconies, and long cane chairs, upon which the trader— still fiercely hatted, mustached and cigarred— would recline, gorgeous, defiant, drinking brandy.

It was clear that nobody could interfere with a trader; no one could give him orders, claim to know better than he did about every confounded little thing. Winans was quite sure— in those nineteenth-century days— that his people were wrong in keeping him at school, and marking him out, later on, for a profession. Who wanted to mend broken legs, or keep murderers from being hanged, when the Pacific Ocean covered— as one was credibly assured— one-third of the earth's whole surface (or maybe it was one-seventh), and was simply crying out for traders?

Be careful— always be careful— lest you wish for a thing too often and too long. It is possible you may get it.

In nineteen hundred and very little, I was wandering down the western beaches of Papua. On an evening I came to the trading-station of Kaluna, and as I knew that no white man other than the trader was to be found within fifty miles, I went to the store to ask for a night's lodging.

I had my boys and my outfit; I was not the roving beachcomber you (perhaps) have pictured me. But I will not tell you why I was there. We of the western Pacific do not tell our stories to everyone. Make no mistake about it, we have them— no white man (or woman) lives beyond the hundred and seventieth parallel in the red sunset land of the Solomons, New Hebrides and New Guinea, without a shadow in his heart for company. I do not speak of the passing folk, in stores, on plantations, who are here today, and gone next mosquito-season. I speak of Ourselves, the settlers, survivors of a ten-years "long ago"— if you will have it, of the pioneers. And no one was, or is, a pioneer in the cruelly beautiful, malarial, man-eating West of the island world, for any light reason.

Let that pass. I went down the coast from Maiwa, and I went alone with my boys. And I came, in the dusk, slack-green evening of a Gulf hot-season day, to Kaluna. It is a village, or a collection of villages, numbering many hundred natives, and no whites; it lies strung out along the shore for a couple of miles, showing, in its curious cannibal architecture like a collection of upended boats cut in two. You are here on the famous, infamous, black-sand beach of the West, which runs unbroken for more than a hundred miles— and traversing which, you may go mad, die, break your legs and neck, commit murder, raise the dead, without attracting any particular notice or interference. White men, marooned in far stations westward, have tried to reach the settlements, in emergency, by this same cursed black beach, and have fallen sick and died upon the way, or have turned back, just not too late. White women— but that story is too new, and too true to tell.

The store of Kaluna stands perched upon high piles, like a squat heron fishing on the beach. Black sand blows about its steps; underneath, where the fierce sun strikes lightly or not at all, beach creepers, succulent, of a deadly green, twist themselves about like snakes. Before it the short, wicked waves of the Gulf of Papua break in dirty foam; behind, a belt of ruffling palm trees hides marshes and lowlands. There is the wind, and the crashing of hot seas on a hotter beach; there is the whimpering of the grasses, and the fitful hand-beating of the palms; there is the I smell of mud and fish, and the reek, twice daily, of native cooking-fires; there is the empty, paint-gray sea to look at, and the brown, naked Western men, with their gauds of shells and seeds, and the grass-crinolined women, ugly, sullen, tramping under burdens of yams and fuel. There is not, there never has been and never will be, anything else.

Yet because of the palm trees and the copra that is made from I them, it pays to trade at Kaluna. There was a trader, and his name was Winans.

I suppose he would not have told me how he came to be buried alive in Kaluna, had we met when he was on holiday, in Port Moresby, or Thursday Island. But it was Kaluna, and we were alone. And that evening, when we had eaten the inevitable tinned curry and yam, and drunk the inevitable beer; when we were sitting on the shore veranda, watching, through the dusk, the gray sea battering the black sloping shore; when, farther down, the bucks of Kaluna were beginning to lift up a hideous singsong from their pointed temple-house, and the pig that was to make the evening's feast was joining his voice of dismay to all the clotted noise— then Winans spoke out.

I may say I liked him. He was the sort of man that men do like, even to look at, which is not to say that he was handsome— he had a long-nosed, currant-eyed, plain-enough face. But he was a strong fellow, with a big reach, and he didn't slump in his chair. And he kept his nails as an old public-school boy

should keep them. (Yes, I was, but it is no business of yours.) Also he had a good laugh, a very good laugh. You can tell a lot about a man from his laugh.

I have been too long in the Gulf; I talk too much, and do not keep to the point. You must pardon me. We all do it. Why, when one does meet another white man, one may speak without a pause all afternoon— one often does— without hitting on the thing which It was about Winans, was it not?

Winans told me of his boyish dreams, and how his people, thinking he ought at least to have an outdoor occupation, made him a civil engineer. And he did well. And so some one— I cannot remember who; we have no memory, in the Gulf— gave him the Loch Gordon bridge to build.

"Oh!" you say. You remember that. You know that it will never be forgotten— even when every relation of the two hundred and fifteen souls who were dashed to death through the failure of the bridge, is as dead and gone as they.

So you will understand why Winans — who really was not much to blame, though nobody could be got to understand that— ran away. Ran away from his profession, from his country and his home, and also from his wedding, which was to have taken place a week after the day of the bridge disaster!

At this point he got up, went into the house and returned with a photograph in a frame. Out of his bedroom, it must have been; I had not seen it when we were in the hot little iron parlor, eating our curry.

I turned up the lamp, and stared at the little picture. "Lord!" I said. "She is what the Americans call a 'looker.' "

SHE was. The lips were the most beautiful I had ever seen, not excepting those of any picture or statue in the world. You could hardly see beyond that perfect mouth at first, but presently you noticed the depth and the shine of the eyes, and the crop of naturally curling hair that waved over forehead and ears— like the hair of Reynolds' bodiless little angels, whom everybody knows. The picture showed head and neck only, but the noble round of the throat could have gone with none but a perfect figure. I liked the expression; it had nothing of the pretty-girl grin, and she did not seem to be thinking of herself and her pose; she looked simply and naturally out of the picture, apparently watching and thinking of you. And there was something curiously noble— I can find no other word— in the face. A good woman, one said, at once.

In answer to my comment, Winans said, without glancing at the photograph: "She was very lovely."

"Is she—" I hesitated— it is-strange how one does hesitate— at the word, though not at the meaning.

"She's dead," answered Winans. He reached for my glas*s, and poured me some more beer. Away down the beach, the natives were singing louder; a horrid brassy sound had crept into their song. "They're going to spear the pig now," said Winans. "Some years ago, it used to be a man, but the Government got at them, so they had to use something else. They're all cannibals, and they have the richest brand of sorcery there is in Papua."

"Did she die suddenly?" I asked him.

"She died in hospital, from the effects of a dock accident."

"Dock? How—"

"Fell off the gangway as she was going aboard. She was going to follow me— to South Africa."

"And you never saw her again?"

Winans opened a pouch, and filled his pipe. "I did," he said. "I came back from the Cape at once, and she lived six days after my return. She died on the morning of the eighth of May, at two in the morning. Our wedding day had been fixed for the seventh of May. I was with her."

I sat unable to say anything. I was not surprised— I knew the hideous turns that Fate can play a man. If you don't know, you could not believe. Why, in Apemama, in eighteen— I beg your pardon; it is the effect of living here. I will go on.

"So I came out to the Islands, and by and by struck here," concluded Winans, selecting a match. "South Africa seemed too crowded— public, you know. One met people there, or one thought one might. It isn't crowded here."

"No," I said, listening to the crash of the black waves on the black shore. "No." Then it occurred to me to ask— God knows why: "Did you go to the funeral?"

"I left the damned place five minutes after she died," answered Winans unemotionally. "I sailed that night."

Neither of us said anything for a minute, and then Winans asked me: "Seen any of the Gulf dances?"

I said I hadn't.

The screams of the pig, which had punctuated everything Winans said during some minutes, had now sunk into snorts, and choked themselves out. Winans told me there might be a chance of seeing a dance at the dubu — a sort of clubhouse; and, more to escape from the emotional tension of the moment than anything else,— so it seemed,— he proposed to walk down the beach.

THERE was no moon, and the stars looked thick and dull, but we had plenty of light for our walk; native cooking-fires were going everywhere, and bucks

were running up and down the beach, yelling, and waving great torches of coconut that threw showers of sparks about. I hadn't been long in the Gulf and the West, at that time; it amused me to see the brown, shaven-head married women bending double, like huge mushrooms in figure, over the round clay pots that held a bubbling puree of sweet-potato, which they were thickening with handfuls of crumbled forest sago— to watch a girl, full-figured, painted oily red to her bare waist, swiftly shelling prawns into a bowl, and pouring thick white coconut cream upon them.

They fed well, these folk. They lodged well— their cool thatched homes were far more healthy and comfortable than the ugly, stifling houses of corrugated iron in Port Moresby. They had any amount of sport, fishing, pig-hunting, canoeing; they had social amusements— no white folk get a chance to sleep down West, when the native dancing-season is under way. They did some work, but not very much; and no one, on the whole, worked longer than he wanted to, or went without a holiday when he felt like having one. Life, for them, one felt, must be very long and full. Is not even a single day incredibly long, when you find time in it for everything that you want to do? It seemed to me that, in leaving the world of the white man, Winans and I had come into a place that one best might name the Land of the Long, Long Day.

And yet, you know, one dreads to let that world take hold of one. One feels the drag of it— like an undertow. One resists; why?

"They haven't any souls," I said to myself as we plodded through the sand. "They haven't any art, and life without art— "

I wonder were you, by any chance, at Barbizon in the latter years of last century? You'd have met me there, working hard. I didn't get into the Salon; I said I didn't want to, but all the same— The Gulf habit again; I ask your pardon.

WINANS went to the first and biggest of the *dubus*; I think it was about eighty feet high, to the top of its extraordinary upended-boat-shaped frontage, and maybe three hundred feet long, right back to where it tapered down to a mere ten feet or so of height. We climbed up the ladder, and went in. There were a couple of score men there, sitting each in his proper place on his own side of the *dubu*, and there was a good deal of light from torches, and from fires outside. And hanging to the roof, dangling all over the walls, projecting from long pegs, set upon the floor in heaps and rows, was— Art.

You may leave it to me; I know. Plenty of people see nothing in the dancing masks and shields of the West, but sheer comicality; they look at the amazing beast-faces modeled on them, at the grinning snouts that stick out, and the goggling eyes and the queer, half-fishy, half-human expressions that these odd devils of natives contrive to get into the things; and they roar with laughter.

But there's more in the stuff than that. There's color— pinks and reds and grays and yellows, and the divine right touch of black, cut and painted in designs of interwoven curves that I'd give an eye to have invented. Line? These half-cannibals could teach it to all Paris. Color? They take the sunset— the strange, secondary-color sunset of the black-sand country— and spin it into their skeins of twisted pattern, hue for hue. I saw in about ten seconds that I had been very far wrong indeed, when I told myself they didn't have art.

"Well, they haven't any real intellect," I thought. (Artists may pardon me; or not, as they like; but I'm one, and I know.) "It's the intellectual pleasures that are wanting.— Who is the bigbug in the corner, Winans?"

I was looking at an oldish man, not clothed at all, you might say, but very much painted, and heavily jeweled with shells and long dogs'-teeth.

"Most important sorcerer along the Coast," said Winans. To my surprise, the undressed gentleman nodded gravely, and answered:

"Yes, all right, I very big sorterer, sir. I was once Government interpreter in Daru; I have had salary two poun' a mont'. I have been mission teacher; damme, I very good teacher, sir, but they have frown me out because I have three wive'. Now I am sorterer, I have eleven wive', I think, or maybe ten, and I have fourteen big pig."

There was a certain grave courtesy about the man; he had the way that one notices in what is known as good society. I suppose it comes from being the biggest person about, and is much the same thing whether you are Lord Lieutenant of an English county, or the sorcerer par excellence of the Black-sand Coast.

"Koki, this gentleman doesn't know the dances. Can you show him one?" asked Winans, handing the sorcerer a stick of tobacco.

"There not be any dance tonight, sir. The people, they eat pig by and by, and then they sleep, sir. But I dance a dance for you myself, suppose you like."

"Yes, we'd like it very much."

Koki got up from the floor, and took his stand in the narrow aisle that ran down the middle of the *dubu*. The whole place had a curiously churchlike effect; its brown, old coloring, high nave, long aisle, and pendant garments of tappa, like captured battleflags, made one think vaguely of old cathedrals visited on Continental wanderings. And the immobile dusky figures seated each in his own place, and the smell, musty and mildewy, was just like ,he smell of old churches.

Koki began to dance.

I noticed at first how wonderfully light-footed he was. A biggish man, and well muscled, he yet touched the floor as lightly as a frolicking kitten. I will swear you could not even hear his bare feet. I don't know what the steps were,

but there was advancing and retreating in them, stalking too, swift stalking like that of a panther nearly on its prey, and once a sudden, velvet spring that almost made me jump backward. All the time he danced— still perfectly without sound— a sinister, poisonous-sweet smile was steadily growing on his face; and his body kept sinking into itself and lowering down ; soon he was dancing with the upper part from the waist so completely foreshortened that the horrible saccharine smile grinned up at you from a face apparently set on the top of a pair of twinkling legs and a couple of swaying arms. Then the arms began to winnow back and forth, gathering, catching! The grinning face sank lower; the soundless feet flew like shadows; the arms were drawing in things, invisible things, as the clutching fingers of the deep-sea polypus draws in the little fish that swim within its reach. I heard the nearest man of the sitting rows fall back against his neighbor, and catch his breath with a grunt of fear.

"That's enough," said Winans rather quickly. And he added to me, aside: "He's scared them; this dance has a business tang to it, though it's only a private show. What the devil is the matter with you?"

"I'm giddy," I said. I had to sit down. Koki, not looking at me at all, slid to the floor in his own particular corner. I do not know how I became aware that he was somehow, covertly, watching.

I put my hands before my eyes; there seemed to be things— thoughts, visions— that I wanted to brush away. Hypnotism? No, not that. I haven't the word. There isn't one in English, I tell you. The black West is full of things that have no names in European languages.

I turned my back on Koki, and looked at the dancing torches on the shore, at the stars, seen palely through drifts of smoke, at the gray glimmer of foam a long way off, where the tide was coming in. I tried to think of Gulf geography— of the day of the month, of anything commonplace, anything rooted to the ordinary earth. But all through, I felt Koki's steady, sly eyes; they were looking straight through my shoulder-blades and my spine. And I remembered. I dreamed.

"Like to go home?" It was Winans' voice, beside me. I did not make any answer, but I got up, heavily, as if something were holding me— perhaps something was— and went down the steps of the dubn in the milk-warm wind of night, without looking back.

WHEN we had reached the store, and turned up the lamp, Winans, looking at me squarely, with his long legs stretched out in front of his chair, asked: "What did he do to you?"

I wanted to say that Koki had done nothing at all, but instead— my mind being not quite out of the queer, gelatinous state into which it had fallen— I answered truthfully:

"He made me see people who are dead."

Winans fell to twisting his dark mustache, till you would have thought he would pull it out by the roots. He did not ask me what people. He was not a bit more interested in me than you are; and yet, if I told you my story— if I could make you understand it and realize it—

I have one bit of wisdom left. I never try.

I stayed a day or two at Kaluna, and it struck me that Winans, too,— although I had thought him different from others,— was falling little by little under the spell of the Long, Long Day. He had got the habit of staring— staring for half an hour at a time, silent, out across the gray unlovely sea, where no ships rode. He used to wait quite a long while, sometimes, before he answered what you asked— and he never knew that he had done so. He read less, I thought; he smoked all the time. Drink had not got him yet. It would come.

A good deal of time, for no reason that I could find, he used to spend in the native *dubu*. I thought he talked to Koki. Just about then, Koki began to decorate himself with expensive gauds out of the store— red shell-money belts, curved boar-tusks, which cost a lot, and even a couple of those thick white armlets carved by native ingenuity out of the inner side of the giant clam, which are just the same as jewelry to a Papuan. Every store keeps them; they pass as coin— and a good deal of coin, too— among the natives.

I didn't know of any equivalent that Koki had given, and I could not have missed seeing it, if ordinary trade had been done, for there was the value of a ton of copra at least in the stuff that he had got. I never went near the dubu again myself. Some people may like— may even seek out— the sort of experience that had been thrown at me. I am not one of them.

But I rather thought, one day when I met Winans coming back to his house with a small, cornery photograph-frame visibly distending his trouser pocket, that I had secured the key of the mystery.

I had not. I had only touched the fringes of it— no more.

Next day Winans, who was looking extraordinarily well— bright-eyed, erect and almost with a color— told me that his health seemed to be breaking, and that he wanted to get away to Sydney by the Thursday Island boat, which would be due a score or two miles down the coast, in a day or so.

"I can pick her up in the whaleboat, and the boys will bring it back," he said. "I want to know if you'll take on the store while I'm away."

We had become rather friendly, I might say. Winans was a little bored with me— most people are; but he seemed to like me all the same. I liked him very

well, and I liked the job better. Things were not going prosperously with me just then. I took it on without much discussion. I may say the terms were all right. Winans left next morning at daylight; he told me he might be away three months, and might be six. "If anything should happen to me," he said, "look up the papers in the small tin box. But I don't think anything will. I think my run of bad luck has ended."

I could not think why he should say that, with his professional name still in the gutter; his home still on a black-sand beach, among cannibal natives; and his girl, who must have been far too good for him, dead. But the only thing that concerned me just then was the fact that I had struck on something that suited me very well. I unpacked my stuff in Winans' room, from which the photograph had disappeared; and I set to work to take proper stock of everything in the store, and make out a system of my own for keeping things in order.

And though I say it who shouldn't, Kaluna trading-store was no loser by the change. In a week I had worked the business up to a point beyond any ever reached by Winans. I had a method of cumulative payments, intended to encourage the bringing in of copra on a larger scale; I had a system of credit with all the influence of the dubu behind it to hurry up defaulters, that would be worth your own while to learn, if ever you thought of going trading down the coasts of Papua, which of course you will not.

Only two things troubled me. One was Koki. He could not get over Winans' abrupt departure, which I may say, he had done his best to prevent, by dismal prophecies as to loss of good will and lessened or vanished trade. And he never ceased worrying me about the matter, and begging from me. He would want a string of beads today, tomorrow a couple of new tomahawks, then six sticks of tobacco and a packet of matches; after that he would have the cheek to loaf in, painted black, white and red up to the eyes, and want to take a new three-legged iron cooking-pot away with him to his house. I had to put a stop to the thing. I knew that Winans had given him unlimited credit, and in his way he was valuable to trade, but a fair thing's a fair thing, in my.opinion, and Koki had gone beyond what was fair. I told him flat out he would have to pay cash— that is, copra— for every bead or match he got from the store, in future. He looked at me out of his sullen, black-fiery eyes, and went away, humming the cannibal death-song. I knew what he meant, but I did not care two pins, because the Government steamer was overdue along the coast, and I had made up my mind that Koki should get what was coming to him, as soon as the Southern Cross flag should flutter in the roadstead. It was a matter of nine murders, two more or less ritual, four concerned with jealousy of his numerous wives, and the rest spite, revenge and cruelty, or maybe desire of power.

The Government authorities wanted to know why he hadn't been given up before. I said that so far as I could make out, it was because he was good for trade; but I dare say, if I had tried very hard, which I did not, I could have made out a little farther, and perhaps a little differently.

Anyhow, Koki was taken off in irons, and I knew he would be hanged. They don't hang a native in Papua for a stray (native) murder or so, but when it comes to slaughter by wholesale, the Government loses patience. So that was one trouble removed.

The other, it seemed, nothing would remove. I had not felt any bad effects from Koki's games with me on the evening of my arrival— because, I suppose, I was not looking for that sort of thing, or wanting it; but after Winans left, from the very first, queer things began happening to me, and the annoying part of it was, that they were not my things— if I make myself clear— but his. Whatever subjects for remorse my past may hold,— whatever sorrows have gone plowsharing through my heart,— they are not concerned with the building and the breaking of bridges, or with faces of people tumbling down in a smash of broken railway carriages into a foaming stream. I do not think I ought to have been bothered with these things, especially when I was wide awake and trying to read a novel in Winans' long planter chair, with the work of the day behind me, and a. pleasant air creeping up from the breeze-cooled sands, in the quiet hour before one goes to bed.

But there it was, and the going-away of Koki made no difference at all, as I had rather hoped it might. On the contrary, things got worse. It was not only drowning, smashed people, and engines plunging horribly down through the air (you cannot think how sinister, how alive and dying at the same time, a railway engine can look, unless you have seen a thing like that); it was things a great deal more unpleasant.

One does not mind the ghosts— the spirits, the— it would be no good giving you the native word, but that is what I really mean— of people, all together; at least, one does not mind very much. But when it is one person, alone, and all the time, one does mind.

FOR it came to be one person, and as I have said, not anyone connected with my history— nothing so remarkable! It was simply Winans' girl, the dead one. Rosemarie (he had told me that was her name, Rosemarie Ibister) kept showing me her face, of nights, between my book and my eyes, and I did not want her to do anything of the kind. She was pretty, but she wasn't my girl, and dead or alive, a man does not take much interest in a woman who is crazily in love with some one else. One could not mistake the face; it was so distinctive in style, and the hair was so unusually lovely. But I cannot

remember that I liked it as well as I had liked the photograph. I thought it was because the thing bothered me so. I may be of another opinion now.

Well, the face kept coming, as I have said, and now and again the suiciding railway engine, that looked so horridly alive, came too. And once— it was a curious thing— I was looking through some of Winans' books— picture books they were, and very good ones, reproductions of famous paintings, scenes on the Continent, and so on. And I came across one picture, among others, that seemed to me extraordinarily lifelike. It was in a set of photographic reproductions: somebody's great picture, "The Death of Mary Queen of Scots;" somebody else's "Spirit of the Summit" — a girl wrapped in a sort of sheet, very well done, but not cheerful; and another picture after, just a woman with lovely curling hair cut short on her forehead, and a sort of white scarf wound round her face, lying dead on a bed. Rather morbid, I thought it, and then I looked for the painter's name, and it was not there, and then I saw the picture was not there either, and I was looking at a clean blank sheet of paper, the sort they put in between those good photoreproductions, to keep them from sticking to one another. There hadn't been any picture at all; it was just that Rosemarie again, lying dead with her head tied up, this time.

I threw the book down on the floor, and I believe I got rather angry. I know I said to myself that for two pins I would call in a parson— if there had been one handy, and if I had known enough of their patter to know what to ask for. I believe there is, or was, some game or other which they play, to stop that sort of thing. There certainly ought to be.

But it was the Land of the Long, Long Day; and while there is time for everything, in that day, there is not always everything that there is time for. So I had not any remedy for the things that most unjustifiably continued to bother me.

AFTER the call of the Government launch, nobody, for quite a long time, came near Kaluna trading-station. I don't know that I minded; I had been going through the various stages of mind that out-back men know well: the first, brief stage when you think it the fun of the world to be all alone, when you sit after breakfast, and smoke, and damn the rest of humanity, and wonder why you ever lived in a city; the second stage, a longer one, when you begin to look down empty tracks, and over empty seas, counting on the chances of some one— anyone — coming along, when you know you are wasting in spirit, as a starved creature wastes in body, for contact with your kind. Then comes the third stage, when you begin not to care; you find you can get along very comfortably without people— but unlike the first stage, this one has no fun in it; nor has the fourth stage, when one begins to fear the coming of any human

creature; nor the fifth, when one hates the very thought! Further, I will not go, but there are those who can fill in what is wanting.

I think I was somewhere between the third stage and the fourth, when something did come along— a stray cutter on its way to Thursday Island. It called to bring me stores ordered sometime previously by Winans, and to deliver a letter from him, posted on his arrival in Sydney.

The letter told me what I had never yet known— the true reason for his going away.

Koki, it seemed, had been at his tricks with a vengeance; he had given good value— from Winans' point of view— for the boar-tusks and clam-shell bracelets he had received. He had shown Winans picture after picture of Rosemarie; he had promised him that he should see her again, an actual living woman. I don't quite know what he meant to do, or exactly how he meant to draw fresh profit from Winans' mad generosity; be sure the old devil had some cunning plan or other— but Winans upset it. As soon as there was the slightest hint to go on, he remembered that he had not, after all, seen Rosemarie buried— that, mad with grief, he had run away from her dead body, which, after all, might not have been dead. Injuries to the head were deceptive; trances had been heard of; doctors had made mistakes. Anyhow, Winans had bolted for London, with all the profits of his trading in his pockets, and his heart on fire within.

I thought a lot about all this, but I came no nearer to a conclusion— except, I remember, that I felt myself quite uncommonly glad to know that Koki was going to be hanged.

THAT evening, as I was sitting on the side veranda, which is the quiet one, enjoying a last pipe before turning in, I heard steps coming up- the front veranda ladder. They were shod steps. You cannot imagine what that means, when you see one white man in six months— maybe not so many. I stopped smoking, and sat dead still in my chair, listening; and I could hear my heart beat in the stillness.

I thought it was the captain of the cutter, possibly; he was a Malay halfcaste, and he wore boots. He might have come back about something or other. But I did not really think so, if you understand; I was trying to prepare myself for disappointment.

The steps came on; they paused at the entrance to a room— Winans' room. The doorway of this room was in my sight, if I turned the least bit in my chair. Will you believe me, when I tell you that I could not make up my mind— or maybe it was my body— to do so?

Winans used to shave every day, which I don't do, myself. There was a little trade mirror hanging on one of the veranda posts, where you could get a good shaving light. It hung opposite to me as I sat; the light from the lamp near my chair was strong enough to throw reflections. In it, I saw the person who had come into the house. And it was a girl— a girl with a mass of short, waving and curling hair, and two large, deep eyes set under reed-straight brows, and a mouth like that of an antique statue.

I did not move.

The girl may have seen me, or may not. She began walking about, turning her head this way and that, and seemingly looking for somebody or something. She did not speak, but I had a strong impression that she wanted to. I felt, or knew, that she was so shy she literally could not speak, unless some one addressed her first. And yet, you know, she did not look shy. She was just like the photograph, line for line; yet she was almost brazen-looking.

That seemed strange, when one came to think of it. The photograph was like a lily!

I do not know why I spoke. I only know I did.

"Can I do anything for you?" I said. It was rather silly, but what would you have said yourself?

She seemed delighted.

"This is Mr. Winans' store, iSn't it?" she said. "Is he here now?"

"No!" I said, talking to her in the mirror. "He has gone away on holiday."

She seemed perplexed at this, and (I thought) angry. But she said nothing at all, just came a little farther in, and sat down, in Winans' room. I could see her.

"How did you come here?" I asked, perhaps a little sharply.

I will swear she began a native word in reply, but it seemed to fade away into air, and she answered composedly: "By the *Kiami*."

Now, that was strange; for the *Kiami*, though undoubtedly she was— would have been— due to call at a native village some three or four miles away, about this time, was, as a matter of fact, lying wrecked on a river bar a hundred miles off. It seemed almost as if the girl did not know that, whoever she might be. I should not have known it myself, had not a canoe come along the coast with the news, some hours earlier in the day.

I said nothing, and when I looked into the glass again, she was not there. She was not in the house at all. I lighted a liurricane-lamp, and went out to stare at the sand below the veranda steps— I don't know why. But I got nothing out of that— it was a mere porridge of native footprints and dog-pawings. The hour was very late— getting near one; so I went to my stretcher and turned in. Something within me said, "So she really was not dead at all—

like the people in the stories," and something else, deeper down, in my mind laughed for all reply.

In the *dubu* there was drumming that night, low, threatening drumming that went on hour after hour. It kept me from sleeping for a good while, but I went off at last, with the sinister murmuring still in my ears. I knew what it meant; I knew the news had come down the coast by "native telegraph" that Koki was to die.

SOME days later I saw the woman again. It was in broad sun; she did not actually come or appear; she just was, on the veranda, outside Winans' room. I did not speak to her this time. She stood there, staring at me for I do not know how long, and I never saw a lovelier, nor a more evil face. Now, you are to recollect that Rosemarie, by her pictures, and by what I had been told of her, was hardly lower than the angels.

I thought— not then, but afterward— that I understood.

While I was looking at her, determined that on this occasion nothing should tempt me to speak, a sudden burst of sound came from the great *dubu*, where the fish and crocodile devil-figures were, and where Koki had made his home. It was a loud, brazen cry, a concerted shriek from all the men (I think) of the village, and it was followed by such a burst of thunder-drumming that the very walls of the store seemed to shake. Then there was a sudden silence, and in the silence I heard the black waves breaking on the beach, and my little traveling clock, that I never parted with, in my room striking a tiny, silvery Two.

When I looked where the woman had been, she was gone. She never came back. Nor did the plunging engines, nor the pale faces of people falling into gulfs of foam. It was as if a clock had stopped, as if a door had shut. Something was ended.

I went on keeping store. I got the copra-house well filled; and it pleased me, when a stray copy of the Papuan Rag came down the coast, to note that prices were soaring. I read the paper all through, even the advertisements. It seemed shorter than usual. When I had done, however, I noticed that an extra slip had fallen on the floor. I picked it up; it was printed on one side only, and contained late news. Among other items was the loss, with all hands, of the ship in which Winans had sailed for home.

I felt rather sorry, on the whole. Winans had been good to me.

I went to the tin box, and looked for his paper of instructions. It was a will, of sorts— not legal, since it was unwitnessed, but the Intestate Estates people were very decent about it. It left the store and goods to me, with the proviso that I must first of all cable to a certain doctor in a certain London hospital, and

ask for particulars of Rosemarie Ibister's end. If living, she was to have all there was.

I cabled when I got in to Port Moresby, and I had the answer to show when I went up to the office to claim my legacy. The doctor said that she had died on a certain date, and had been buried in Kensal Green; he gave the number and place of the grave.

I heard, later, all about Koki's execution. They hanged him near the town, and thousands of natives and hundreds of white men came to see it.

"What day was it?" I asked. He told me, and I did a little counting in my head. "It was about two o'clock, was it not?" I asked.

"No," he said, "it wasn't; it was half past one." But somehow, that did not satisfy me, and I asked the jailer.

"Was to have been one-thirty," he said, "but the old beggar said he wanted time to say his prayers, or something, and with one thing and another, it didn't come off till the stroke of two."

I KEPT the store of Kaluna, and I live there now. You had better not call on me; I have gone on to the fifth stage, and I do not welcome visitors. I don't expect to go any farther. If there had been any possibility of that, what happened to Winans would prevent it.

You want to know what I think? I think that Koki played too high, and succeeded in loosing things he couldn't control. I also think that it— she— was not the girl— neither alive, nor dead.

———————

9: The Ill-Laid Scheme of Mr. Ambrose Weare

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

The Strand Magazine, Apr 1909

Rescued by *Roy Glashan's Library* in 2013; it does not appear to have been collected or reprinted since 1909. RGL (*https.freeread.de*) has two volumes of these waifs and strays from Oppenheim's early years.

MR. PHILIP LETHERINGCOURT, as he stepped out of his electric brougham and entered the premises of the London and Westminster Banking Company in Lombard Street, had certainly more the air of a man of fashion than of one interested in the everyday affairs of City life. He was immaculately dressed, handsome, debonair, from the tips of his patent boots to the bunch of violets which adorned his button-hole. He entered the bank with the air of one a little unaccustomed to his surroundings, and, approaching a vacant spot at the counter, drew a cheque from his waistcoat-pocket and carelessly filled it in for five hundred pounds.

"I'd like plenty of ten-pound notes, please," he said, holding it out to one of the clerks, "and one fifty."

The clerk accepted the cheque with a little bow, glanced at the amount, and then palpably hesitated.

"One moment, if you please, Mr. Letheringcourt," he said, turning away. "You want this in notes, I understand?"

Mr. Philip Letheringcourt raised his eyebrows.

"I certainly don't want gold, if that is what you mean," he replied.

The clerk hastened to a desk at the farther end of the bank and talked for a moment to a grey-headed man who sat there apparently entering up a ceaseless stream of amounts into a grand ledger. It was clear, even to Philip Letheringcourt— who felt only fairly interested— that the cheque which the clerk held in his hand was the subject of their conversation. The elder gentleman took up a telephone which stood by his side and spoke into it. When he replaced the receiver he nodded curtly to the clerk, who returned to his former place at the desk.

"One fifty, you said, and plenty of tens, I believe, Mr. Letheringcourt?" the latter remarked, beginning to count out the notes.

"That's right," Letheringcourt answered. "Why did you take the cheque up to the old gentleman? You didn't doubt my signature, I suppose?"

"Not in the least, sir," the man answered, civilly. "By the by, Mr. Jarndyse would like to speak to you, if you can spare half a moment."

"I haven't much time," Letheringcourt remarked, doubtfully. "If it's a matter of business, hadn't he better send for Weare? I don't interfere, you know, in the financial part of our affairs."

"I think Mr. Jarndyse would like to see you, sir," the clerk answered, "if you can spare half a minute. He is disengaged now, if you will come this way." Letheringcourt stuffed the notes into his pocket and followed his guide into the private office of the bank manager. Mr. Jarndyse rose to his feet as they entered, and motioned the clerk to leave them.

"Some time since we met, Mr. Letheringcourt," the banker remarked, pleasantly. "You do not often favour us with a visit."

Letheringcourt smiled.

"Why should I?" he answered. "I leave everything connected with the financial conduct of our business to Weare. Your young man said that you would like to have a word with me."

"Just so, Mr. Letheringcourt," the bank manager said. "Sit down for a moment, will you?"

Letheringcourt sat down a little unwillingly.

"I'm afraid I can only spare you a moment," he said.

"I shall not detain you," the bank manager answered. "The fact of it is, Mr. Letheringcourt, I was looking into the figures connected with your firm this morning. You have, as doubtless you are aware, an authorized overdraft with us of twenty-five thousand pounds, against which we hold various securities. I find that you are overdrawn at the moment rather more than thirty thousand pounds, and that there is a draft of fifty-five thousand pounds to Cunliffe and Peabody due to-morrow."

Letheringcourt looked across at the manager in blank amazement.

"Really, Mr. Jarndyse," he said, "these are matters in which I never interfere at all. I presume that whatever obligations the firm has entered into will be duly met."

"I trust so, Mr. Letheringcourt," the bank manager answered. "At the same time I do not think that you should allow matters to be run quite so close. If you will pardon my saying so, I think that you ought to keep a stricter personal control over the financial side of your business."

Letheringcourt was a little taken aback.

"You don't mean to imply, Mr. Jarndyse," he said, "that Ambrose Weare is not so careful as he ought to be? He has been in our employ for over fifteen years, and for the last ten years, at least, he has absolutely controlled our finances."

"I wish to imply nothing," the bank manger answered; "but I do not think it is good financing to leave so large a sum as nearly sixty thousand pounds to be provided on the very day when the draft is due."

Letheringcourt took up his hat.

"I agree with you," he answered. "It doesn't sound exactly the thing. I'll speak to Weare about it. Very likely he has a number of bills of exchange which he did not wish to discount until the last moment. Bank rate's pretty stiff just now, isn't it?"

"There are, no doubt, explanations," the bank manager remarked. "At the same time, Mr. Letheringcourt, if you will pardon my saying so, I think that you will be well advised to take a little more personal interest in your business."

"Thanks!" Letheringcourt answered, a little curtly. "I'll remember what you say."

He was thoughtful during the drive home; he was thoughtful during the one rubber he had time for at the club; and he was even thoughtful over the *tête-à-tête* dinner alone with his wife, for which a series of mischances was responsible. Mrs. Letheringcourt, at the conclusion of the meal, rose to her feet with a little yawn and strolled to the mantle-piece.

"Philip," she remarked, lighting a cigarette, "a dinner *à deux* doesn't seem to amuse you."

He sat up with a little start; he had been gazing fixedly at the tablecloth, speechless, for the last five minutes.

"I am awfully sorry, Joan," he said. "I am afraid that you must have thought me a perfect bear."

"Your conversation certainly hasn't been brilliant," she remarked, quietly. "Please tell me what it is that you have been thinking about." He shook his head.

"The affairs of Holt and Letheringcourt!" he answered.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Business?" she repeated. "Well, it isn't very often you allow that to trouble you."

"You are quite right," he admitted. "It is very seldom that I think about it at all. And yet this afternoon something happened— just a trifle— which gave me a most unpleasant quarter of an hour."

"Go on," she said. "Tell me about it."

They were sitting in one of the smaller rooms of their house in Berkeley Square, half study, half morning-room. It was an evening on which they had planned to dine out and to go to the theatre, but some friends had disappointed them, and at the last moment Letheringcourt himself had begged for a quiet evening. His wife, always good-natured, had acceded readily

enough— it was not often that their social engagements permitted them to spend an evening together. A small dinner had been served to them in an impromptu fashion.

"Tell me, Philip," she said, "exactly what it is that is bothering you."

Letheringcourt threw away the cigar which had burned out between his fingers and lit a cigarette. In a few words he told his wife of his visit to the bank that afternoon. When he had finished she looked across at him with wide-open eyes.

"It certainly seems most odd!" she exclaimed. "What did you say to Mr. Jarndyse, Philip?"

"I told him, of course," Letheringcourt continued, "that for a great many years Ambrose Weare had had the sole control of the finances of my firm, that during all that time no complaint had been made, and that the business generally had been exceedingly prosperous. Yet I don't fancy that he was satisfied. I didn't like the way he twice advised me to take a more personal interest in my own affairs."

"Do you think that he mistrusts Ambrose Weare?" she asked.

"Such an idea is preposterous," Letheringcourt declared.

"You believe in him implicitly yourself, then?" she demanded.

"Implicitly!" Letheringcourt answered. "The man is as honest as the day. I am sure of it."

"I don't know much about business," his wife said, hesitatingly, "but to be thirty thousand pounds overdrawn at your bank and have nearly sixty thousand pounds to find the next day doesn't sound exactly comfortable to me."

"I agree with you," her husband answered. "I didn't like it at all."

"What have you done?" she asked.

"I rang Weare up from the club," Letheringcourt answered, "and asked him to come here to-night."

His wife nodded.

"He didn't make any difficulties, I suppose?" she asked. "He was willing enough to come?"

"Curiously enough, he wasn't," her husband replied. "He reminded me that never during the whole of our association had we transacted any business, or spoken of it, after office hours. He added that he personally, during all that time, had never set foot west of Temple Bar. He asked me to wait until the morning."

"You insisted upon his coming, I hope?" she exclaimed.

"I did," he answered. "He evidently did not like it, but he agreed to be here at half-past nine."

"What a curious sort of person he must be!" Mrs. Letheringcourt remarked. "Tell me, what is he like?"

Letheringcourt smiled faintly.

"He might have stepped out from some book of Dickens's or Anthony Trollope's," he answered. "Trim, grey-headed, old-fashioned, with formal manners; always dressed in black, never been known to be sixpence wrong in any account in his life. Everyone at the office swears by him."

"Ambrose Weare!" she remarked. "It's a singular name."

"He's a singular person," Letheringcourt answered. "I have never heard of his having a friend or a relative; no one even knows where he came from! By the by, there is someone in the hall now. He is coming up, I believe."

Joan Letheringcourt picked up her novel.

"I am going to my room for a little time," she said. "I shall be down again— perhaps before your man has gone. I am rather curious to see him."

She swept out of the room with a little farewell nod— graceful, good-natured, beautiful— a delightful wife and hostess. Outside, she passed with a pleasant smile a little man following a tall footman. The little old man started, but she had already gone by. The footman threw open the door. "Mr. Ambrose Weare, sir, from the office," he announced.

Letheringcourt turned in his chair and welcomed his visitor.

"Come and sit down, Weare," he said. "Will you have a glass of port or some coffee? It is your first visit here and I shall expect you to take something." The clerk bowed a little stiffly.

"Thank you, sir," he answered. "I am afraid that I must ask you to excuse me."

"As you will," Letheringcourt answered, carelessly. "Sit down there by the table, please. There are just one or two questions I wanted to ask you. I am sorry to have fetched you up after office hours, but the fact is that I have been a little uneasy."

The footman had left them; the two men were alone. Ambrose Weare was certainly a somewhat curious character. His face was white, and dry as parchment. His eyes were very bright, although he wore spectacles, and he had still an abundance of grey hair neatly parted in the middle. His clothes were old-fashioned, considering his position as head cashier of a well-known City firm. He wore a frock-coat, pepper-and-salt trousers, a black satin tie which resembled a stock, and a collar of ancient shape. He folded his gloves deliberately and placed them inside his silk hat. Then he turned towards his employer.

"I have come to answer any questions, sir," he said, "which you may care to ask."

"Oh, I am not going to put you through a catechism!" Letheringcourt declared. "You know much more about the conduct of the business than I do, of course. I will tell you exactly what it is that made me send for you. I happened to go into the bank this afternoon, and Jarndyse called me into his office. He pointed out that our account was thirty thousand pounds overdrawn, and that we had a draft due to-morrow for fifty-five thousand pounds. Of course, he didn't doubt but that it would be all right, for a moment, but he simply thought that it would be a great deal better not to run things so close. I must say that I agreed with him. It didn't seem to me to be exactly in accord with your methods, Weare, to leave so large a sum to be covered on the actual day."

Ambrose Weare inclined his head slowly. His fingers were interlocked. He was leaning a little across the table.

"There is not the slightest chance, sir," he said, "of its being covered!"

Letheringcourt looked at him for a moment as a man might look at a visitant from another world. It was impossible that Ambrose Weare should have said this. His hearing must have played him some strange trick.

"Do you mind repeating that, Weare?" he said.

"Certainly, sir," the clerk answered. "I regret to say that there is not the faintest chance of Messrs. Cunliffe and Peabody's draft for fifty-five thousand pounds being honoured to-morrow morning."

Letheringcourt sat like a man only half conscious of his surroundings.

"I don't understand," he said. "Do you mean to tell me that we are short of money, Weare?— that there is any real difficulty about meeting our engagements?"

"We are very short indeed, sir," the clerk answered. "We have been very short for a long time. The financing of your business has been an exceedingly difficult operation during the last few years. I must admit that the task has now grown beyond me."

Letheringcourt grasped the sides of his chair and looked around him wildly. For a moment he thought that he had fallen asleep and been visited by a nightmare. Everything else about him was as usual. There were all the evidences on every side of his luxurious home. And in the midst of it sat this strange, still figure— the Ambrose Weare whom he had known all these years, and yet— another man!

"If this is a joke," Letheringcourt exclaimed, hoarsely, "it's a— a bad one! Do you know what you're saying, Weare? You should know your place better— "

"I know it far too well," the man interrupted, "to joke upon such a subject. Your firm, sir— the firm of Holt, Letheringcourt, and Company— has been

losing money for something like twelve years. Chiefly owning to my efforts, your credit has remained unimpaired. It is impossible, however, to preserve it any longer. To-morrow the crisis comes!"

"You must be mad!" Letheringcourt exclaimed, rising unsteadily to his feet. "Why, no one has ever breathed a word of this to me! You yourself have said nothing! Year by year you have brought me into my private office balance-sheets showing large profits. Last year you told me that we had made seventeen thousand pounds. I have been extravagant, but I have not spent money like this. What has become of it? Where is all this money? Our capital stood at one hundred and seventy thousand pounds seven years ago."

"It is all gone," Ambrose Weare said, calmly. "Perhaps it was never as much as that."

"But the balance-sheets!" Letheringcourt exclaimed— "the balance-sheets! You have brought them to me year by year. Not one has ever shown a loss."

"They were made out, alas," Ambrose Weare answered, "from the ledger of my imagination."

"In plain words, then," Letheringcourt cried, "we are ruined!— we have to fail! Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely!" Ambrose Weare declared. "I have not the figures with me, but I believe that we could not, at the moment, pay a fraction more than two shillings in the pound."

Letheringcourt swayed upon his feet. Then he leaned forward and struck the table before which the other man was sitting.

"Look here!" he said, fiercely, "if you are in earnest, answer me this. Why have you deceived me, year by year, with false balance-sheets? Why have you let me believe that the business was making large profits? Why have you even urged me to spend money— placed sums to my private account, time after time, which I scarcely needed? Tell me why you have done these things, Ambrose Weare?"

"It is a long story," the clerk answered, calmly.

Letheringcourt broke loose. Nothing but the sense of his own great strength and the other man's fail physique prevented his taking him by the throat and shaking the words from his lips.

"Long or short," he cried, "I must have it! Do you know what you have done? For the last ten years I have spent something like fifteen or sixteen thousand pounds a year, believing honestly that I was living within my income. I saved not a penny. Why should I? I knew nothing of the business myself. I have no idea how to do even a clerk's work. What am I to do? What am I to say to my wife?"

Ambrose Weare rose slowly to his feet. There was something almost spectral-like about his long, grey figure as he stood there, leaning slightly forward, his manner unruffled, his tone still calm and even.

"You have no wife!" he said.

Letheringcourt stared at him for a moment and then burst out laughing. After all, perhaps this was the explanation.

"You're mad!" he exclaimed— "mad or drunk, Weare! What is the matter with you, man? Has your mind given way?"

"I am sane enough," Ambrose Weare answered. "Better pray that you remain so. I repeat— you have no wife."

There was the sound of a trailing skirt. The door was softly opened. Joan Letheringcourt, humming a light tune, came in.

"Philip," she said, "have you nearly finished your talk? Shall I be in the way? I am tired of being alone."

"Yes, come in!" Letheringcourt answered. "Come here, Joan. Now tell me, Ambrose Weare," he added, pointing to his wife, who was crossing the room toward the two men, "who is that lady if she is not my wife?"

"She is mine!" Ambrose Weare answered, calmly.

Letheringcourt took him by the shoulders, lifted him up, and finding him as helpless as a baby flung him back into his chair. His wife ran forward with a little scream.

"Philip!" she cried. "Philip! What is the meaning of this? Who is this person? Why does he say these things?"

"God knows!" Letheringcourt answered. "For fifteen years he has called himself Ambrose Weare. If all that he has told me is true, I should say that he is the very Devil himself! Look at him, Joan. Have you seen him before?"

She bent forward, scanning his features eagerly. Ambrose Weare was pale and breathless, but he had strength enough left to rise to his feet. There was still no colour in his cheeks, no sign of emotion save the breath which came in little pants through his clenched teeth.

"Let her look!" he said. "Let her look! Perhaps she will understand."

There was an instant's breathless silence. Then her eyes seemed to be lit with a sudden, strange fear. She staggered back, holding her hands in front of her face as though to shut out some awful sight. She, too, was pale now. She, too, had the air of one who looks upon terrible things.

"No!" she cried. "No; it can't— it couldn't be!"

"Madam," Ambrose Weare said, "The impossible has happened. You have believed what you wished to believe— that the Nicholas Seton who died at St. Thomas's Hospital sixteen years ago was the man to whom you had been

married. It was not so. I am Nicholas Seton, and, whatever you may call yourself, you are still my wife."

She shrank away to a corner of the sofa and sat there, sobbing quietly, pale, stricken, absolutely dazed. All the time she was muttering to herself. All the time she kept her back to the man who had told her this terrible thing.

Letheringcourt staggered toward the side-board and poured himself out some brandy. Then he came back and stood by the table, looking down upon the other man.

"Come," he said, "let us understand this matter. You are the Ambrose Weare who came to my firm as a cashier fifteen years ago whilst I was at college. My father trusted you implicitly; my uncle trusted you. When they were dead and I came into the business I found you all-powerful. There wasn't a clerk or a manager in the place who didn't speak of you with respect. I have believed in you— I have believed in the figures you have shown me; I have thought myself always a rich man. Now you sit there and tell me that your connection from the first with the firm has been one long tissue of lies and deceit. Why? What is the meaning of it all? Why has it pleased you to keep silent— to drive me on towards ruin?"

The man turned half round and pointed towards the woman who sat still upon the sofa. He pointed with long, trembling forefinger; but he said nothing.

"I have done you no harm," Letheringcourt cried.

"She was my wife," Ambrose Weare answered.

Letheringcourt was a strong man, and he kept sane.

"Even if this horrible thing were true," he said, "why should you seek to revenge yourself upon me? You deserted her. She had every reason to believe that you were dead. When I first knew her she told me of her former marriage. She honestly believed you dead."

"It is a lie!" Ambrose Weare said, slowly. "She saw luxury, and she stretched out her hand to grasp it. She took her risks. Things have gone her way for a good many years. I wrote to her. I told her that I would return when I had earned enough to keep her and the child in comfort. Her father hated me because I was poor. He allowed them enough to live on so long as I was out of the way."

"I had no letter," she sobbed. "If it came, my father destroyed it. He swore always that you had ruined my life— you knew that."

"So it is for these fancied wrongs that you have set yourself to ruin me!" Letheringcourt said, bitterly. "Well, there shall be a reckoning yet. If my money has gone as you say, where is it?"

"Safe," Ambrose Weare muttered, "in Paris, in Frankfort, in New York— a thousand or so here, a thousand or so there. For twelve years I have stripped

the business. There is little enough now left for anyone except the bones. She left me once because I was poor," he cried, pointing to the woman who sat shivering upon the sofa. "To-day I am rich, if I choose, and you are a beggar!"

Letheringcourt laughed harshly. He touched the telephone which stood on the table by his side.

"Do you imagine," he said, "that I shall let you go scot-free? Do you imagine that I shall ever let you leave this room?"

"It makes no difference," the clerk answered. "I tell you to your face that I have robbed you, but I am the only one who knows. There are no books, no papers to prove it. On the contrary, there are bundles of accounts in the safe which I shall swear have been submitted to you year by year, and which show a steady loss. Those which it has been necessary to destroy I shall swear that you destroyed. You know you told me not long ago that I was the Napoleon of figures. It is true. I have used them like soldiers, and they have won my battle!"

Some new thing seemed to have come into Letheringcourt's face. Those of his friends who had known him for the last ten years might almost have failed to have recognised him now. At heart he was a man. He stood looking down at the thin, frail figure at the table with a curiosity almost impersonal.

"I wonder," he said, grimly, "that I can stand here and listen to you. I wonder I don't shake the life from your miserable bones. In all the world there cannot breathe a creature so despicable as you! You deserted your wife— you let her believe that you were dead," he added, pointing to the figure upon the sofa. "What kind of a creature can you be to bear an eternal grudge against me because I have tried to make her happy?"

"There was the child," Ambrose Weare said, and for the first time his thin, precise tone seemed to shake. "She deserted him."

The hands fell away from before her face. She looked across the room with blazing eyes.

"It is a lie!" she answered. "My husband has been as good a father to him as ever man could be. He is at Rugby now, captain of the school. Look!"

She sprang to her feet, and taking a photograph from the mantelpiece, she laid it on the table before him. Ambrose Weare staggered to his feet. He was like a man who has received a blow, but still withholds belief in the thing which he has heard.

"Look!" she cried again. "There is Nicholas! Don't you recognize him? Won't you believe now? He was going into the Army, and now, and now—" She sobbed.

Ambrose Weare took the photograph and turned his back upon them both. For a few moments there was nothing to be heard in the room but the ticking of the clock. Then there was another sound— the sound of a dry, hard sob.

Ambrose Weare laid down the photograph and took up his carefully-brushed silk hat and gloves. There was no sign of emotion in his face. It seemed impossible that the sob could have come from him. He turned as though in farewell to Letheringcourt. His manner was once more the manner of the confidential clerk of fifteen years' service.

"There has been a mistake," he said. "You will be so kind, sir, as to overlook my rash statements. I have thought it better for the interests of the firm to invest large sums of money abroad. You will find the particulars here," he added, laying a roll of papers upon the table. "There are one hundred and forty thousand pounds invested in European banks, and nearly sixty thousand in New York. You can obtain credit to-morrow by cabling. You will excuse me, sir, if I hurry away? There is a little matter— a little matter left."

He was at the door before they could stop him. Husband and wife looked at one another in fear and wonder. The shadow of this terrible thing was still between them— the man who had left the room— Ambrose Weare, her husband!

"In God's name," she cried, "what can we do?"

From outside came the answer to her question. They heard the shot, the sound of a fall, the hurrying of servants. They did not need to be told! A white-faced footman threw open the door.

"The gentleman who has just left, sir!" he exclaimed, breathlessly.

"Well?" Letheringcourt asked.

"He has shot himself in the hall, sir," the man answered. "He is dead!"

10: The Second Degree

Ole Luk-Oie

Major-General Sir Ernest Dunlop Swinton (1868-1951)

The Grand Magazine May 1913
The Triad (NSW) 10 Dec 1919

It is to be ignorant and blind in the science of commanding armies to think that a general has anything more important to do than to apply himself to learn the inclinations and character of his adversary. — Polybius.

THE MESSAGE ended; there was a "stop," and the sweating operator took his hand from the key. The sleeve of his shirt had slipped down over his wrist and had been balking him for some time; but so slack did he feel that he had waited to signal the final meaningless group of letters and receive the acknowledgment before stopping to push it back.

It was the last of that series of messages. He jabbed the form from which he had been reading on to the sharpened piece of telegraph wire which, already crowded with a sheaf of similar flimsies, stuck out from the table edge. These were the messages despatched and done with. On the table, weighted down by a clip of cartridges, and now much decreased, there still remained the pile which had to be sent.

The halt was welcome to the telegraphist's cramped and aching hand. The sun had gone down, yet the atmosphere was still stuffy and it pulsated with the hateful irregularity of the Morse code and its maddening dot-dot-dash, dot-dash-dot. To the tired soldier everything seemed to move to its measure; his very head throbbed in a dance of longs and shorts. The day had been sweltering, and he had been on duty for many hours of great pressure, for headquarters were shorthanded owing to sickness. He felt stale and dizzy and almost apathetic, having long been denied the stimulus of any interest in his task. He knew, of course, of the huge concentration and great movement of troops that was going on, but most of his work this day had consisted in the transmission of cipher messages, which conveyed no more to him than to the key he pressed, and the strain of accurately signalling endless streams of mere groups of letters was deadening to the intellect. He could not understand, and he did not care. He was now incapable of feeling anything except anxiety to avoid errors and a desire to reach the bottom of the now small pile of flimsies on the table. They represented, save for unexpected contingencies, the end of his particular job for that night. After them would be rest— perhaps sleep.

He yawned and stretched again, the bumping of his head against the dew-tautened wall of the tent sounding like a tap on a bass drum and disturbing the clusters of flies higher up. The canvas was moist and pleasantly cool; he rubbed

the back of his head against it, unconsciously following the jerky rhythm which in that enclosed space was all-pervading. He continued with closed eyes, his thoughts far away— perhaps of home, of wile and children, or possibly only of equally distant beer— until a half-smoked cigarette falling from behind his ear recalled him to duty.

It was getting dark. He rose, picked up the cigarette, and from a pocket of the jacket lying on the floor, where he had placed them for shelter from the sun's rays, he drew out two candles. But, in spite of his forethought, the midday heat had been too much, and it was a sorry couple of dips that he prouced. He lit them. took up the next message, and seized the key. Click-click click-click, click-click." The jerky, restless noise recommenced, drowning all other sounds.

The candles grew dim for want of snuffing, the flames flickered as some spluttering moth singed with horrid smell, but the man paid no heed. He was nearing his rest. From two other tents close by, which also had wires leading to them, similar sounds were proceeding, and from one of the first-floor windows of the inn behind there issued the comparatively soothing rattle of a typewriter. Beyond, in the copse a gentle breeze rustled. Suddenly the night air was split— "Brrrp-Brrp-Brrrp" — by a loud ripping sound. Startling in its clearcut intensity, it continued in monstrous parody of the same cadence tapped out so daintily, if irritatingly, by the key in the tent.

Was there no escape from the cursed code?

These gashes of sound without reticence were from the spark of the Wireless as it sent its waves cleaving their way through the night to many miles' distance— the noise of their departure a vague measure of their impetus. Though purposely placed at some distance from the house, the installation was scarcely far enough away for the comfort of any of its occupants, certainly not far enough for the exasperated staff trying to work.

Presently the noise in the telegraphist's tent stopped, and the light inside ceased to glow through the canvas. The man came out of the tent, and curling himself up in a blanket, lay down in the opening with his head outside, to get the benefit of the mere breath of air— scarcely more than a sigh in the tree-tops.

His bad time was done, for, as far as he was concerned, the great concentration was over. Without even a curse at the grinding rattle of the Wireless, he turned over and fell dead asleep, the cigarette still behind his ear.

Not fifty yards from where the telegraphist lay sleeping, another man was experiencing a feeling of relief far deeper than anything felt by that tired soldier. This was the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, now sitting in the porch of the little inn— his present headquarters, as was shown by the three red lamps in front. He was a middle-sized, thick-set man; but beyond this and the expression of utter abandonment of body and mind conveyed by his attitude, it was too dark to distinguish much of his personal appearance. As he sat alone in the gloom, the slow and regular glow of his cigar-end showed that the smoker was very much at ease. After a few moments he rose from his chair to ring a hand-bell on the table, and the slight stiffness, or rather a lack of elasticity in his movements, suggested that he was well over middle age, possibly a trifle old for the strenuous life demanded by field service. A young staff-officer came out.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got the 'move complete' reports in from the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Divisions yet?"

"The Fifteenth is in, but not the Sixteenth."

"When do you expect that?"

"In about two hours, if there is no hitch."

"What's the time now?"

"Nine-thirty, sir."

Well, tell the chief staff-officer, please, that I wish to see him. No— don't disturb him now; tell him that I should like the 'future' map completed up to time, to be in my room at midnight. The Chief of Staff returns to-night, and I wish to show it to him."

The young officer turned to go, too well-trained to show any surprise; but he had shared the common belief that the Chief of Staff had died in hospital a week ago.

"Stop. If any fresh move reports of importance should come in while I have the map, let me know."

"Very good, sir."

Again alone, the Field-Marshall went on smoking. How fit he felt! He had but recently shaved and tubbed, and that delicious feeling ol comfort, which a more or less precarious attainment of such luxuries makes so grateful, pervaded his being; his chin was smooth and smelt of soap. How well his cigar drew! Yet during the last few days he had tried smoke after smoke from the same box, only to throw them away in disgust. His dinner also had been quite good, and now the breeze, faint as it was, felt most refreshing after the long hot day. In fact, all things seemed to have entered into a conspiracy to please, and all was going well.

In some ways the Commander was as direct as his bull neck implied, and as simple as he was direct. But, with the defects ot his qualities, he sadly lacked finesse and imagination, and consequently did not at all realize that the taste of the inferior dinner, the aroma of his usual cigar, even the caress of the feeble breeze— the whole rosy outlook at this moment— were the outward physical signs of a mental and moral reaction He had just come through a very bad time, and though it would be hardly correct to say that he felt like the master of a vessel entering port after a stormy voyage, for he was by no means near port, yet the fog had lifted, he could take his bearings, and knew where port lay.

The responsibilities of supreme command, and the imminence of a great battle— he was commanding an army in the presence of the enemy— usually had no terrors for his stolid mind; but on this occasion there had been the element of entire novelty in the situation, and in facing it he had been deprived of his chief source of inspiration.

He was placed in the position which, of all others, had most terrors for him— that of inactively awaiting the action of others. Against his will, against his principles, and against the whole bias of his mind, he had been forced, to act on the defensive. Up till now he had always been able to assume the offensive. The contrary role, with its loss of initiative, its mystery and its suspense, was consequently all the more dreadful. Though, by all the canons of the military art, his present force was too weak for the attack, it was fairly strong in defence; quite enough so, could only the point of the enemy's intended assault be discovered in time, for the delivery of a crushing counter-stroke. But it was not strong enough for an onslaught in an unforeseen direction to be resisted. To retain equal strength in every part was to court certain defeat: to keep a large central reserve ready to be moved to any threatened spot was out of the question: the only course was to mass beforehand where the attack would fall.

This needed no imagination: it was obvious, and without hesitation the Commander had decided upon the third course, for it appealed to his instincts, besides being correct in principle. His mind was set upon crushing the enemy, and this gave the only chance. If he could only discover where the enemy were going to press— he was not able to offer a bait, or indeed any inducement towards any special spot— he could spin his web in the right corner, nurse the attack, lead it on until it was well within the meshes of his web, and then— even his appetite for the offensive might be glutted. But where to spin the web? To the north lay the enemy, about to advance. The position which the Field-Marshal held extended for some fifty miles from east to west. Naturally strong, it had been further strengthened during the period of occupation by

every resource of fortification. The west, owing to its topographical features, was absolutely secure: elsewhere, except in two places, the position was safe enough. The only danger-posts were in the centre and on the east, but they were only dangerous in the event of the unforeseen advance of the enemy. So far this was all absolutely plain, but unluckily there was, in a tactical sense, absolutely no difference between these two points. There was no intrinsic reason why the centre should be attacked more than the east, or vice versa, and therefore no hint for guidance, no basis lor a scheme of defence.

For some days now the Commander-in-Chief and his staff had been at the old game of collecting intelligence— official reports, spies' reports, rumours— and endeavouring to sift out the improbable from the impossible, the possible from the improbable, and the probable from the possible, in order to obtain some foundation on which to build. This was nothing new; but what was novel and disquieting was that, having formed a basis of probabilities and erected thereupon an edifice of future action, he could not proceed or force the pace— he still had to await the lead. From day to day the burden of information varied. Now it was pointed to the centre being threatened, now it veered round and gave the impression that the east was the crucial spot.

The Field-Marshal was a capable man and a strong man, but, as his movements showed, he was getting old. Veteran though he was, his brain, always more solid than subtle or brilliant, was not now what it had been. Of a virile and masterful nature, he had won success and the confidence of his nation by systematically following up one definite line where smaller men might have hesitated between alternatives: whatever course he followed he followed with his might. In political language, he wag a "whole-hogger." So far, all the courses he had adopted had proved well chosen. In past years his had been the responsibility for execution, his would have been the responsibility for failure, and his, consequently, had been the reward for success.

But this had not always been the mind which had conceived the plan adopted. As often happens, the Thinker— the master mind— had not been the recognized leader. The man who had for long inspired the Field-Marshal was possessed of far more subtlety and imagination than the stolid, dogged individual now smoking in the hotel porch. This man was the general— his Chief of Staff— who had now been absent three weeks, wounded. Friends for years, the two had together achieved success in other campaigns— success which, though placed entirely to the credit of the senior, was almost entirely in conception and partly in execution due to the junior, than whom there could not have been a more loyal subordinate. Now that he had been absent during this time of perplexity, the senior realized how much he had relied upon him.

He was not of an ungenerous nature, but this fact had never before been so driven home. The other had hitherto never been absent.

Within the last four days the signs had crystallized, and all pointed in one direction. Nearly every report corroborated the fact that there was a great massing of hostile troops just opposite the centre: it seemed an established fact. There were also other reports that hinted at a probable concentration of the foe on the east, farther away from the front, and therefore not so easy to locate. This news had now received so much confirmation that the Commander had decided it to be true, and had made up his plan of action accordingly. Once he had settled what to accept as fact, it had not taken himi long to make his deductions, for he knew the general against whom he was fighting. Indeed it was his estimate of his opponent's character that had almost entirely guided his calculations. In spite of his natural preference for the concrete as opposed to the abstract, and of his repugnance to the metaphysical, he had learnt to attach value to the personal factor. Psychology was a hobby, almost a mania, with the absent Chief of Staff, and so great was his personal magnetism that the senior had to a certain extent become saturated with his subordinate's theory. Moreover, he had nothing else to go upon.

The enemy's great force in front must be a feint. No one but a fool would show strength where the real effort was to be made. His opponent was no fool— he knew him to be a hard-headed, straightforward, sound fighter. Yes— the threat in the centre was not to be feared— the danger lay in the vague, impalpable force hovering opposite his right, on the east.

Having worked this out to his satisfaction, all his energy and all the efforts of his staff had, during the last two days, been devoted to the dispositions necessary in order to meet— to annihilate— this main attack of the foe. The redistribution had been going on for two days and was now almost complete. Not only had he discovered his opponent's intentions, but he had almost woven his web in the proper corner: next morning would see it complete to the last thread. True, he was deeply committed by his dispositions, for he could not now have met a sudden assault on his centre, in spite of superior communications and interior lines; but he was so certain of his premises that this did not worry him. The great suspense was over. He had made up his mind, all measures had been taken, as far as was humanly possible, and last, but not least, his trusty lieutenant, the Chief of Staff, was returning to duty this evening: would soon be beside him to confer and to confirm. Yes— it could not be disguised— to confirm.

The cigar did indeed smoke well. So satisfied was the smoker, and withal so comfortably weary, that, like the telegraph operator, he too might have fallen

asleep had not the faint hoot of a motor horn aroused him. The horn again sounded, closer: he heard the whirr of a motor rapidly approaching, and the road was lit in the glare of acetylene as a large car drew up suddenly. Out of it stepped a tall man in goggles, wearing a military greatcoat perfectly white with dust. It was the Chief of Staff.

HALF AN HOUR later the two were still sitting in the room.

"First-class, sir; I quite see. Couldn't be more clear. We know our opponent, I think, and the east is certainly where he'll attack. Moves going all right?"

"Yes; the whole should be in position to-morrow morning We've nothing to do here now, the last of my orders went out this evening. I have been actually loafing."

"Splendid, splendid," said the other almost gushingly, at last recollecting to take off the goggles, which he had merely pushed up upon entering. As he did so the extreme plainness of the face was revealed. A diagonal purple streak across the angle of the forehead did not improve its appearance.

"I'm quite fit again and up to any amount of work— dying for it." As he spoke and moved in a nervous, jerky way, his face worked. He was an ugly man.

"Glad to hear it, but there is nothing— absolutely nothing— to do at present. Everything is nearly ready."

"Almost *archiprêt*, in fact?" said the Chief of Staff.

But the other did not quite follow: he was not very quick.

He said "Eh?"

"Ready, sir, quite ready?"

"Yes, I said so. In half an hour we shall have a 'future' map in here, and you can see the final position of the troops. In the meantime have a wash and get some food; I'll run through these despatches." He looked at his assistant almost sentimentally— "It's good to see you again. That obituary notice startled me a bit, though."

"Oh, that? Yes, it may sound conceited, but I had that put in myself, on the off-chance of its getting round to them. It won't do much harm if the old man opposite"— he waved his hand vaguely round the room— "thinks that I am— gone. Eh?"

The Field-Marshal really chuckled. He was literally purring with content. His conception had been indirectly and tactfully, but none the less actually, approved: for the execution he needed no approval.

Both were smiling— the Commander because his scheme had been accepted by his subordinate, the subordinate because he was sympathetic and

liked his Chief, and because he had insight and knew why the old man was smiling.

There was a step at the door, and a senior officer of the General Staff entered quickly. "You must see this at once, sir," he said to the Field-Marshal, as he handed him a paper. The business must have been very pressing, for the last-comer was too perturbed to be startled by the ressurection of the defunct Chief of Staff now looking at him so pleasantly across the table. The Commander-in-Chief read the following message deliberately, then re-read it. When he handed the slip of paper to the Chief of Staff all the complacency had faded from his face. There was no deliberation about the latter's perusal. When he returned the paper he too had ceased to smile.

iii

THE TWO were again alone, the Field-Marshal glum and silent, the Chief of Staff striding up and down the room, and whistling under his breath in that dreary way which may betoken consternation, astonishment, but not joy.

The little paper which had so upset them did not bear a long message. On the top was the despatch from headquarters at home typed out in cipher. The message was not from anywhere in the theatre of war— it had come all the way from the capital, presumably originating in the enemy's. Underneath was the transcription. The purport of it was that the commander against whom they were fighting had been dead for two days, and had been succeeded by a junior— practically unknown— officer, whose name was given. The wire concluded: "This is absolutely authentic. We know nothing of new men."

For some minutes neither spoke, for both felt the blow: the one more keenly from a naturally more personal point of view, because of all his efforts and scheming of the last few days; the other, untouched by such considerations, could look at the matter in better perspective. Nevertheless, he seemed now far the more excited of the two.

The blow was too cruel for even the Field-Marshal to bear quite unmoved— it was absolute upheaval. The mind he had gauged, whose workings he thought he knew so well, had for two days ceased to exist! For more than forty-eight hours he had been pitting himself against a fresh brain, a strange will— an unknown quantity! His plans might be good or they might be worth nothing, for nothing did he know of the new personality.

In his Intelligence Bureau were pigeon-holes for all the likely seniors on the other side, and in them dossiers full of information. For this unknown man there was not only no dossier— there was not even a pigeon-hole! Such an

appointment seemed unthink- able, and yet the wire was explicit— fatally so— and the information beyond doubt correct. It was a facer; his mind was blank.

Two things only did he at once realize, that this news probably nullified all his efforts, and that he was hopelessly at sea again, more so than ever. He sat there sullen. As in the case with some stolid natures, a reverse only made him sulky and obstinate. The expression on his face was now almost mulish.

The other, with the more resilient mind, was the first to speak.

"What was this man's name, sir?"

"What does that matter? We don't know him." The tone of irritation betrayed age.

"I think I know something."

"Very well, read it again yourself," grunted the senior, almost throwing the slip over to him. "I am not sure I know how to pronounce his outlandish name."

The General snatched up the paper, re-read it greedily, and then muttered: "There is one letter more, but it must be the same."

Turning, he continued: "Have you ever met him, sir?"

"Yes, I believe I have. I once met a man in their Service with a name very like that, but it was ages ago—when I was attache in—"

"By ——! Have you? What was he like?" broke in the General in a shout, excitement conquering his manners. "Good heavens, man, what are you shouting for? What do his looks matter? I never knew him."

"I apologize, sir; I'm afraid I was rather excited," responded the other, suddenly calm as his Chief became the reverse, "but I do believe he is a man I once knew, and I want to fix it."

The Field-Marshal's childishness died away: he knew the other's worth.

"Well, well, if that's it. Let me see—it was so long ago, I only recollect the general impression he gave was unpleasing. Oh, yes—I remember now, he had red hair— bushy red hair."

"Yes?'' in a suppressed voice.

"Do you want more?"

The other nodded.

"He had, I think, a sort of foxy look— long pointed nose."

"Yes?"

"I can tell no more. He was an inferior sort of fellow. I did not know him well, and didn't want to."

The Chief of Staff now seemed suddenly and unaccountably pleased with himself. "That is enough: three corroborative details would fix it sufficiently for a bookmaker: it is a certainty. That's my man. Can you spare half an hour, sir? I

mean, can you wait half an hour before taking any steps, and let things run on as they are?" His eye twinkled, he knew the answer before it came.

"Wait half an hour? Wait half a year. We don't know what to do now, and I don't see how we shall know in twenty half-hours!"

"Yes, I hope we shall, sir. Give me half an hour with a smoke in the porch and I'll give you that man s nature, and we shall know which way he is going to jump—centre or east. Eh?

"Very well," was the querulous assent. "I only hope you succeed. A nice mess this personal equation business has landed us in now!" But the General had disappeared.

Half an hour is not much time in which to recall the events of nearly forty years ago.

iv

THE CHIEF OF STAFF sat deep in thought, trying to recall a now far-distant epoch of his past life— his schoolboy days. Slowly it came back to him, bit by bit, each reminiscence of the old life drawing another in its train. He recollected the house, the masters, and many of those utterly unimportant details which cling to the memory— the shape of the cracks in the dormitory ceiling at which he used to stare on the late Sunday mornings, the hot stuffy smell of the schoolroom on a summer afternoon, even the taste of the pale and watered ink with which he used to cover his fingers. He recalled many of his schoolfellows, amongst them one rather older than himself— a foreigner. There were a good many foreigners at that school. Partly owing to his nationality, but more to his disposition, this boy was heartily disliked. He was called the "Ferret."

Yes, yes, he now well remembered the Ferret— his thick crop of stiff red hair, his pale face, pale eyes, and, above all, his pointed nose, with a dividing line down its tip, which was always pink and quivering like a young rat's. Yes, he remembered him. What a curious beast he was: a bit of a sportsman too in his own way, but it was not the way of others. Reserved. untruthful, and conceited— a disconcerting element and a perpetual mystery to the boys as well as to the masters. There were other sneaks, other liars, other queer youths at the school, which was mixed enough, but their characters were transparent in comparison with the Ferret's. His chief peculiarity was that though he sometimes lied, he often told the truth. It was also his success, for no one knew which way to take him, and he always attained his object when he wished to deceive.

The General had arrived so far step by step, but it was not enough. There was something more he wished to recall, some special incident which would give the complete clue to his school-fellow's character. Strive as he would, and though he felt it at the back of his mind, he could not entice this special reminiscence from its cell in his brain. It was exasperating. As he fidgeted he felt for the first time the attacks of the midges hovering about his head: he lit a cigar in self-defence, in the hope also that perhaps it might soothe his nerves and make his memory work. But no. He could not recall this thing. He looked at his watch. Time was going, and here he was within an ace of the clue to the situation, the key to victory and perhaps to the fate of a nation for generations.

Always excitable and impatient, he now made no effort to keep calm even in the hope of beguiling his memory The wound in his head began to throb. Swearing softly, he got up from his chair, strode out across the road and started to walk into a little plantation on the other side, but had not gone ten paces before his head struck the branch of a tree with a force that made him reel. He stopped muttering, and heard some heavy object fall into the long grass at his feet. He was dizzy, and without any reason stooped and picked up the thing. It was an unripe apple. Absently placing it to his nose, he sniffed.

Like a flash the scent took him back across the space of years—back, back to the dusty class-room. It was afternoon, and the room smelt strong of apples.

He stood petrified, apple to nostril, eyes closed, for now he was getting near it. Yes, the schoolroom reeked of apple; there were apple-cores lying all about and numerous boys munching. One— the Ferret— approached him and jeeringly offered him a core; he could remember the nasty expression— the twitching nose. Now he had it!

As he stood there in the dark in that orchard the smell of the apple projected a series of pictures upon his mental retina as clear as those of a cinematograph, and now they came in logical, chronological sequence.

He well remembered that autumn afternoon when his boyish heart had been torn between two desires— either to go to a certain orchard to get the last of some special apples, or else to pay a visit to an old lady who gave teas that were celebrated. He could not do both things. He wanted the tea; but of the whole school he and the Ferret alone knew of this special apple-tree, and he dared not pay the visit in case the other should clear off the fruit. If the Ferret would wait, he could have his good tea; if not, it would have! to be postponed. He met the Ferret and asked him point-blank if he was going for the fruit. He could recall the very words of the puzzling answer, given with a disconcerting smile—

"Of course I am, youngster. Yes, get every one of them, and sell what I can't eat. What d'you think?"

This was so obviously chaff that he went off to pay the visit and eat his tea with a light heart.

The old dame was not at home. He got no tea, and returned cold, tired, and hungry— to be offered a gnawed apple-core in the schoolroom. He could see the cores now lying about the room and almost feel the hail of shiny pips with which he was bombarded.

His subsequent onslaught on the Ferret had only resulted in his own discomfiture. But the explanation?

Ah, yes! It was when he got his hamper. He had been very keen to learn the Ferret's system of misleading people better by truth than by lies, and had finally extracted a promise of revelation in exchange for a cake, a cake on top of which the almonds simply jostled, and a two-bladed pocket-knife with a shiny black handle. Having taken payment in kind beforehand and eaten one-half of the price, the Ferret had one night— the last night but one of the term— come and sat on the edge of his bed and told him his Theory of Scoring, as he called it. How unpleasant his pale face had looked in the moonlight, all checkered by the shadows of the bars of the diamond-paned window, and how glibly he had talked as he ran his hands through his fiery hair.

He did not mind giving his theory away, he had said, for it was his last term. To get on it was necessary to be ahead of every one else, to anticipate what they would think or would do, to know their natures, and he added a good deal more stuff which then appeared to be sheer nonsense. He concluded by saying that lying— good lying— was useful in moderation, and his last words were:

"To a stranger I never lie till I am forced — then I lie well; the other man thinks I am telling the truth— and is misled— the Second Degree. If I wish to '' But his listener had had enough of the Ferret's rubbish and cut him short. How angry he had been, for he did not understand this rigmarole, and thought it nonsense! How he had vainly demanded his knife back— the cake eaten— and how he had received another thrashing in his endeavour to get it! It all came back now so clearly. The Ferret had departed next day but one, and he had never seen him again or heard of him since; but the way in which he had been, as he considered, cheated out of his knife had long rankled. It was not for some years afterwards that he had seen any sense in his philosophy.

That was the Ferret with his "First and Second Degree." If this man now against them were the Ferret, and there could be no doubt of it, his nature would, at bottom, at; the crises of life, be the same. Given the occasion, he would act in the same way.

The General looked at his watch, for he was going to take his full time in considering the matter, relit his cigar, and paced up and down the dusty road, again running the Ferret's philosophy over in his mind to make absolutely

certain. As he did this the humour of the situation gradually struck him—the incongruity between the immense issues at stake and the things he was trying to recall appeared ghastly, then ludicrous. He smiled. His appreciation of the gravity of affairs and his vindictive feelings were struggling against his strong sense of humour. It was only after some effort that he calmed himself sufficiently to go in and see his Chief. The task before him of explaining this thing to his unimaginative senior was sufficiently hard without prejudicing himself in the other's eyes by any misplaced levity.

Throwing away his cigar, he went towards the house with a firm step, and as he crossed the beams of the headquarter lanterns it was not a pleasant face that flashed out three times crimson against the darkness.

In his hand was the apple.

v

IT WAS PAST midnight, and the Field-Marshal was sadly studying the fully-flagged map now hung up on the wall of his private room.

From a short distance the sheet of paper gave a very good pictorial representation of what the positions of the two forces would be next day. One might have supposed that a pattern had been traced upon it in some sweet and sticky substance upon which large coloured flies had settled and stuck. Running about due east and west in a curve with its convexity northwards, were two lines of these flies, blue and yellow, facing each other. In the yellow were two conspicuous clusters or knots, one right up on the line towards the centre, and the other towards the eastern end and some way back from the front. These were the enemy's concentrations: that on the centre, ascertained and visible— the sham attack; the other, conjectured only—the real attack. The blue flies were slightly crowded at each end of the line where it curled back, and, to meet the real attack, there was a dense cloud on the east retired from the front. The position of this concentration was such that, should the opposite crowd of yellows press forward and penetrate the blue line, they would in their turn be fallen upon and overwhelmed.

This gaudy picture was the result of deep calculation and immense work on the part of its artists— the General Staff at headquarters, and of superhuman efforts on the part of the troops— the blue flies.

The old man gazed steadily at it. Though its colour scheme was perhaps a trifle crude, yet till a short half-hour ago its composition and values had seemed so excellent— and now, possibly all this labour had been in vain, or even worse than in vain.

A quick step outside and the Chief of Staff entered with an impetuosity strange in a tired and convalescent man at this time of night.

"Well?"

"Now, sir, I can tell you something definite. I said I knew him of the red hair. I have now placed him exactly, and can give you the *man*."

"What's the use? Tell me what he's going to do, not what he is like."

"Quite so. I will give you the boy, his nature, and the way his mind worked. This will give us his personal equation; from that—"

"Yes, I see; but I am afraid, my dear fellow, you are still as madly keen as ever on the 'personal equation.' I am a bit shaken in my belief. But go on, please."

The two sat down facing each other across the table, a candle on either hand, while the General as clearly and as briefly as possible and without details laid bare to Chief the Ferret's soul —as he estimated it.

During his bald statement he laboured under the effort of intense restraint, for however natural the different steps by which his memory worked had appeared to him when trying to recall his school-days, they did not well lend themselves to words. Now he was talking to another man— an especially stolid man— the contrast between his boyish escapades— apples, pocket-knives, and cakes— and the supreme gravity of the present situation struck him with increased force. It was all he could do to keep from laughing, for his self-control, through the present and past tension on his nerves, was no longer what it had been. He already saw something more than interested wonder in the eyes of his matter-of-fact Chief, and this look warned him off any picturesque details. With an effort he at last logically worked up to his end, and finished almost calmly—

"That was the boy, sir, and that must be a good deal of the man!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"Yes, knowledge like that has been used in war, certainly—"

"Since the days of Hannibal, at the very least."

"I have also heard something of that theory of cunning before," mused the senior.

"Probably. One Bacon wrote on the subject. That's what made me think that there was more in it than I had first imagined, and that perhaps after all I had not let that knife go so cheap—"

He stopped with a jerk and a suppressed snigger which made him cough.

"Knife? What knife?"

"Nothing, sir; that's quite another matter, which does not at all concern the question," was the hasty reply. Fortunately the Field-Marshal had no petty

curiosity, and did not press the point; but he eyed his friend keenly before he continued—

"Now, are we quite sure that this man is the Ferret— your Ferret?"

"It must be— same name, same red hair, same foxy nose, these corroborative facts— independent details— make a mathematical certainty. In fact, all works out so pat that it smacks of the strawberry-mark and the long-lost br-r-r-other of the play!"

"Yes, so I was thinking."

"However, that does not vitiate facts. You have seen the man yourself— indeed you gave me the details, so they have not been imagined by a visionary faddist to fit in with some preconceived theory."

"Yes, the appearance is certainly correct. I knew the man well by sight."

"And I knew the boy by sight, and all through."

"Well, well. It may be— it may be. Anyway, we have nothing else." He sighed. "Supposing this is the Ferret, and that he is unchanged— to come to actualities—what then? It means, of course, that —that—"

The quicker nature here broke in— "That as he has not fought against you before, and as you do not know him, he will deceive you in the simplest way; in other words, he will use the First Degree. lor two days now he has carried on his predecessor's dispositions and is visibly, nay blatantly, massing against our centre—" he waved his hand in an excited gesture at the map; as he did so his senior noticed, to his bewilderment, that he was clutching a green apple, "— therefore he will not attack there. He will attack our right!!!"

The Field-Marshal pondered. This was going quick with a vengeance, and his mind worked more slowly than that of his friend. As he thought over it, half carried away by the other's personality and fervour, his eyes were fixed on the apple.

"M' yes, so it appears to work out. But how about you? Won't he know you are here —you, his old schoolfellow?"

''You forget that I am deadl That idea of mine may be our trump-card."

"Yes, I forgot that. It turns out luckily though, for our present arrangements stand good, and we can carry on as we are doing. It is more than lucky, it is providential; I doubt if we should now have time to alter. I don't see how we can do better than work on your theory— wild though it seems. Right or wrong, we must choose a course and follow it through unreservedly. We may be wrong, which will mean failure, if not defeat; but if we simply wait, equally strong all along the line, for a further sign of the enemy's intentions, we are certain of failure." He paused. "Yes, I'll do it. We will carry on as we are against a real attack on our right." He sighed again— more from relief than from anything else.

"It's the obvious course, I think, sir."

"We can do no more at present —everything is in train. Thank God it works out this way! Of course it pans out as I thought all along, but that despatch certainly did upset me for a bit. I was like a ship without a compass." His tone had again become cheerful, almost smug, for he had something tangible to fight against, and having again come to a conclusion he again ceased to fear. He continued: "But it certainly does seem far-fetched. The tactical scheme of an army based on what a schoolboy once said many years ago!" He chuckled.

The other did not reply; the older man's last remarks reawakened his sense of the ludicrous, so far successfully repressed; he could not speak. He felt his self-control slipping away.

The Field-Marshal, still chuckling, carefully chose a cigar from his case, and drew from his pocket a knife— a two-bladed knife with a black horn handle, just like— This was too much.

The General began to giggle.

"Eh?" said the other without looking up.

"Hee-hee-hee," was the reply.

The Field-Marshal dropped his cigar and stood up. His first mingled with misgiving, for this giggling, coupled to the reasonless clutch on an unripe apple, seemed to denote some lack of balance— perhaps his wound?

"Ha-ha-ha"— and like an upheaval of nature the reaction took place. The General roared. He lay back in his chair and roared louder. He walked up and down the room, holding the apple at arm's-length, and shrieked in idiotic tones—

"A pocket-knife! A two-bladed pocket-knife, apples and a cake?"

The Field-Marshal dropped his cigar and stood up. His first feeling was one of extreme anger, for it certainly looked as if his old friend was presuming on their mutual affection in order to play the fool at a most inopportune moment; but.he had never known him to be a practical joker. A second 'glance showed him that there was no fooling here, and his look changed to one of sympathy for his subordinate. Men often get unstrung on active service, and he was not surprised at this case, for before being wounded the strain on the Chief of Staff had been terrible, and for such a highly-strung man to start work again so soon after recovery was most unwise: those quick nervous men will always wear themselves to bits. The shrieks of the hysterical General were now ringing through the night, and one or two officers came running in to ascertain the cause of the uproar. Laying the panting man on the floor, they tore open his collar and threw water over him, and he recovered as quickly as he had collapsed. As he began a string of fervent but unnecessary apologies— for a nervous breakdown is common enough— the other officers quietly withdrew.

The two sat on for some minutes, while the Chief of Staff collected himself. The Field-Marshal's qualms as to the other's sanity had now vanished, and he cordially assented when the General got up, saying—

"If you have done with me, sir, I think I will try and snatch some sleep."

"Yes, certainly," and he added as the other reached the door, "get a sleep while you can: you may have no chance to-morrow. Dream of how we shall defeat the Ferret— lying brute!"

Something in the tone of the last words made the hearer stop. From the phlegmatic Field-Marshal, even though he were worked up, they seemed unusually spiteful.

He turned his head. "Why do you call him a lying brute, sir?"

"Good Lord, man, haven't you been spending the best part of half an hour trying to convince me of his lying character?"

"Yes, certainly. I know him to be a lying brute, but you do not. You spoke bitterly, as if you had some personal reason for calling him that. Have you?"

"Why, yes, I have. All this talk about the fellow has reminded me of a good deal that I had forgotten. The man did lie to me badly once when I was attache— about something or other, I don't—"

The other whipped round. "Has lied to you?"

"Yes, yes, I tell you. He—" but the Field-Marshal did not finish, for the General, glaring fiercely, stalked slowly up to the table and hit it such a blow with his clenched fist that a candle jumped out of its socket and fell over still burning. He then thrust his face across the table to within a few inches of his astonished senior's, and said in the crescendo whisper of forced calm—

"Do— you— know— sir— what— that —means?"

The elder man's fears for his friend's reason returned in tenfold force. Certainly, as he stood there in the gloom leaning across the table, his face covered with a slime composed of dust and water, and his clenched fist—still holding the apple—in a pool of rapidly congealing candle-grease—he looked almost dangerous.

The Field-Marshal held on to his chair. He was momentarily at a loss. The other answered his own question.

"That was his first bout with you!"

"Oh! Now I see what you are driving at; but he will never remember."

"Won't he? He remembers everything, and will think you do, too."

"Then?"

"He will play his Second Degree— and— will— attack— the— Centre.

"Ah!"

THERE WAS no more sleep for the tired telegraphist or for any one else at headquarters that night. War is a Juggernaut that recks not of the weariness of individuals, and it was high noon next day before the click of the typewriters, the tap of telegraph keys, and the smacki of the Wireless had abated. By that time, too, many of the pretty blue flies on the map might have been seen in the sunlight to have danced round to a fresh pattern —nearer the centre of the picture.

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THREE MORNINGS later. In response to the clamour of the guns the weather has broken. Though the rain, has tailed off into a drizzle, the ground is still sopping and the bushes drip sadly as the damp breeze shakes them.

Behind the wayside railway station in the centre of the valley, rises a semicircle of purple hills, and above and beyond them again heavy clouds are hanging. A thread of blue smoke, bullied by the rain, quivers up from the station buildings, and the sodden flag hanging limp from its staff close by gives an occasional flap as a puff of air galvanizes it into momentary life. Though sodden with rain, its colours can be recognized as those of the Field-Marshal's headquarters, now moved on far from the village inn. A cavalcade winds slowly over the hills to the left, and approaches. As they come nearer it can be seen that nearly all the bedraggled men composing it are officers, though not all their horses are officers' mounts. They must indeed have been scratched together anyhow. Some are troop horses, others are most palpably "hairies" which have long-known the drag of gun or waggon, but all are alike in their weary dejection as they stumble over rocks and slither down the slippery clay of the hillside. In spite of their evident fatigue and discomfort an air of smothered satisfaction sits on the faces of all but a few of the party. The dejected ones are riding in the centre, and as far as the universal coating of mud allows of comparison they appear to be wearing a different uniform. At their head rides a slight man, hatless, and as he turns his head his bushy crop of red hair presents the only spot of colour in the sombre picture.

Though his eyes are cast down and the whole of his sharp-featured face is expressive of hopeless perplexity, yet he supplies also the only touch of briskness, for in spite of the damp his moustache retains its stiff upward curl. This man is the captured commander of the defeated army, who, with a few survivors from his staff, is on his way to surrender to his vanquisher.

As the cavalcade approaches the flagstaff the challenging neigh of a horse suddenly rings out from behind the house, and the air is filled with the shrill noise of the chorus in reply. Ears are pricked, nostrils quiver, bits jingle, and as

regards horse-flesh the appearance of the dismal party is transformed. A small knot of mounted men appears from behind the house. It is the Field-Marshal coming out to accept the surrender of his foe. A few moments and the parties halt as the leaders alone ride forward. Courteously they salute in silence, and then as the vanquished commander faces his victor, perplexity is still stronger on his face than any other emotion. Then his glance passes the Field-Marshal and falls upon a tall man with a scarred face riding behind. It turns to a stare. A gleam of recognition, of comprehension— almost of relief— comes slowly into his tired eyes.

He recognizes his real conqueror!

11: The Christmas Lobster

Edouard A. Aujard

1885-1936

Chronicle (Adelaide) 7 Dec 1933

Former trader and planter in the South Seas, journalist, school teacher, engineer in the merchant navy, and artificer in the Royal Australian Navy. He wrote a namber of short stories and one novel.

DIVER BILL JONES felt exasperated with the world of men slowly sliding above him.

'It ain't right,' he murmured, as the water gurgled past his diving helmet. 'I've never bin below before on Christmas Day— no, never. It ain't right.'

He paused on the edge of a cliff a hundred feet above the shattered wreck of the S.S. *Elsinore*, and shuddered at the mere thought of completing the journey in that spooky atmosphere of drifting seaweed and bleached skeletons. He experienced a fit of what he termed the 'jumps,' and repeated, 'It ain't right— jumps— nerves. No one oughter work on Christmas Day.'

Up above, Old Joe and Nobby Clarke were working the air-pump. Let 'em work it. Fat Old Joe blowing like a whale as he worked. Let him blow. Do him good. Damn 'im.

A squid emitted an inky cloud to outwit a pursuing shark. For a few seconds Bill was in total darkness. When the cloud thinned away his eyes nearly popped out of his head. Coming over the ledge of rock was a giant lobster as big as a man.

'It's the jumps,' he argued, trying to fortify his courage. 'I've got 'em agin.'

The lobster stood up on its tail and waggled a claw at him. A green phosphorescent fire shone from its eyes. Bill didn't like it.

'It's one uv them there mirages,' he mumbled. 'A mirage— mag-ni-fied! *Magnified*!'

That was it. A mirage magnified. A simple thing when you worked it out. Nothing simpler. A little bit of a cray was creeping over a rock somewhere else, and here was the reflection. Pooh! Nothing! But he wished the thing wouldn't stare at him so. He turned away to put the pesty sight out of his mind. Yet there it was again, staring at him, smiling and contemptuous.

Smiling? Was it smiling? It had a *face*. Did it have a *face*? It did. It was too much for Bill. He reached for the signal cord.

'Not on your life,' ripped out the Magnified Lobster. 'I've been waiting for you.'

'M— me!' stammered Bill. 'Not me.'

'Yes, you.'

'Blime! Oo an' th' Hell are yer?'

'I'm it.' The Magnified Lobster laughed. The echoes of that laugh ran down into the deep sea caves and then came back again.

Bill shuddered. 'Yer not—?' he began in sudden fear.

Then he saw the *face*, and stammered, 'Yer not—?'

'But I am.'

'You are?'

'Yes.'

'Holy Moses!'

'No.' The Magnified Lobster sent his laugh down into the deeps again. Bill cocked a furtive eye at the signal cord.

'No, you don't.'

Bill didn't. But his courage was coming back. 'You're only a cray,' he said. 'A cray! That's what yer are. A red boiled cray.'

But even as he spoke the Magnified Lobster seemed to swell and his red shell flowed out into an ermine robe, the seaweed around his head became a white beard, and the *face* came out again.

'Father Ch-r-i-s-mus,' spluttered Bill.

'The same,' agreed the King of Gifts. 'What would you like?'

Bill took a long breath and thought quickly. 'You're honest?' he ventured doubtfully.

'I'm Christmas,' was the simple answer.

'But wot're yer doin' down 'ere?' queried Bill, wondering why he had never noticed the resemblance between Father Christmas and a boiled lobster.

'Last night I climbed 197,067,021 chimneys, and I came down to wash the. soot off.'

'Oh, I see,' said Bill. Then he thought for a moment. 'An' yer can do anythink?'

'Absolutely!'

A thousand suggestions raced round Bill's helmet. At last he said, 'It's like this. I'm workin' fer a syndercate o' mugs.'

'Mugs?'

'Yes. They don't know they're mugs, but they are. See?'

'Yes.'

'They think there's a hundred bars o' gold in that wreck down there.'

'They do?'

'It's their way,' explained Bill. 'They can't help it. I know there's no gold.' He paused for a moment. 'If you could put a hundred bars o' gold in that wreck. I'd be right fer life— fer life. It's only a little thing fer you.'

'A mere wave o' the hand,' replied the Lobster.

Without another word the Ermine Figure dived over the ledge into the shadowy deep. Bill watched him go and return. Each journey brought a bar of gold up to the ledge.

Up above in the small launch, Nobby Clarke and Old Joe toiled at the pump under a broiling tropic sun.

'Bill's a long time,' complained Old Joe, wiping the sweat from his face.

'It's like 'im,' observed Nobby, in the same tone of complaint.

'Jist like 'im,' repeated Joe, blowing a little.

But below Bill didn't give them a thought. He was too engrossed watching the Christmas Lobster diving up and down.

'He flicks that there rope like a lobster's tail,' he mused. 'He dives like a lobster. He is a lobster.'

'That's the lot,' said the Figure, as he placed the hundredth bar of gold on the ledge.

Bill looked at his queer benefactor. He was once again the Magnified Lobster. The beard, robe, and *face* had disappeared.

'It's a blinking miracle. A miracle.'

'It is,' replied the Lobster. 'I'm really the miracle man of the world— the only one left.'

'It's not a gag,' countered Bill, 'is it?"

'I filled your stocking when you were a kid,' replied the Lobster. 'You believed in me then, didn't you?'

'I did,' confessed Bill, 'till that year you missed me when the old man was out o' work.'

But the Magnified Lobster had begun to slip back over the edge down a hole that looked like a chimney.

Bill reached for the signal cord, and went sailing up to the toiling Nobby Clarke and Old Joe at the pump.

'The wreck's full o' gold,' he was shouting when he got to the surface. 'She's full or gold— full o' gold— full o' gold!'

'Pull him in. Nob,' yelled Joe. 'Catch holder one of his fins.'

Nobby caught a 'fin' and hauled on it. 'He's heavy,' he protested. Like a bit o' lead.'

Bill seemed limp, and did not hold on as usual. The pumpers became alarmed.

'Somethink's the matter, Joe. Quick!'

In three seconds they had the faceplate unscrewed. In mute astonishment they gazed at the simple face of Bill.

'He's not dead,' stuttered Nobby, in relief.

'No,' groaned Joe. 'Sound asleep.'

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12: A Million to One

Edouard A. Aujard

*Australasian (*Melbourne) 6 Aug 1932

ALL THOSE little clouds of plum blossom looked painfully sweet to the young German officer awaiting the death order. He had been found guilty of espionage at a formal court-martial a few hours before, and he stood little apart from the firing squad lounging near their stacked rifles.

There was no quieter section on the Western front. The old chateau looked like a pencil drawing against the sky line. Its walls were battered and pocked with shell holes. The afternoon sun was warm, and the air was fresh with the tang of spring.

Captain Billy Wilson hated the job. When he gazed into the fresh young face of the boyish-looking German officer, with his short, cropped, blonde hair, Wilson would have done anything to escape the unpleasant task.

"Any last request? he snapped out brusquely, in an effort to hide the jumpy state of his nerves. Then he added, "A message to any relative?"

"There is no one," replied the German coolly, in excellent English. For the first time he noticed the agitation of the Australian. "Perhaps we could dine together," he said.

Wilson bit his lips and scanned the western horizon. "The sun is sinking." be said, as if he were talking to himself.

"For the last time," added the German, with a look in the direction of the firing squad among the plum blossoms.

Wilson agreed to the dinner with a show of unconcern.

"And would you mind—?" ventured the German.

"Yes?"

"If I dug my own grave?'

They eyed each other as across a game of cards. Wilson plunged with a nod of consent, and then whistled.

"That's funny," he said. "I call that funny."

But the German knew they were mere words to cover a dark thought. In ten minutes he had dug a foot-deep trench.

Some French rolls, a bottle of claret, and some cold roast pork provided the rather extraordinary meal.

For the first few moments neither spoke.

The German eventually broke the strained silence with, "A shallow grave, eh?"

Wilson nodded, and wondered why the German made the remark.

"I want to sleep near the top," mused the German, pausing to look over his raised glass. "Near the top."

Wilson thought for a moment. "Any other reason?" he asked, pushing a cigarette across the table,

"Yes. Do you believe in luck?"

"No," said Wilson. "I do not. This morning I gambled with six others to try and evade this job and lost."

"When I dug that grave I was thinking of a million-to-one chance."

"What?"

"A million to one."

Wilson paused bewildered. "Go on, he said.

"Supposing every shot were to miss, suggested the German.

Captain Billy Wilson lit a cigarette and extended a light to the condemned man.

Then he consulted his watch. "Ten minutes," he said. "You're as game as—"

"A million to one." repeated the German, and laughed outright.

"By Jove," ejaculated Wilson. He got up from the table and walked over to a form near the wall where a young officer was sleeping.

Satisfied that the man was asleep he returned to the table.

"If every shot missed? he whispered. "You could not run away."

"I could drop dead."

"You would drop dead," exclaimed Wilson thoughtfully.

"And be buried dead," added the German.

"Alive," murmured Wilson, blowing a cloud of smoke.

The officer on the form turned over in his sleep.

"Who is he?" asked the German.

"The doctor," answered Wilson with a shrug.

"And he will—?" For the first time the

German's lips tightened ever so slightly.

"He will," said Wilson, with a nod.

"Feel my pulse when I am dead?" And again he was the carefree devil-may-care of a boy who knew how to die like a man. "There goes the million-to-one chance."

Wilson wondered how a doctor could feel the pulse of a dead man, and then wondered again that such a thought should arise from the German's remark. He looked at his watch again and winced.

The German leaned across the table and murmured. "I would rather it were you than anyone else in the British Army."

"I would rather it were anyone in the German army than you," retorted Wilson, in a tone that made the German officer stare.

"Oh, yes, I know you. I knew you as soon as we met. But I can't understand how you fought on the other side, and—"

"Not spied," protested the German. "They found me guilty— that's all. You know what a court-martial is? Question and answer— question and answer— a machine."

"A machine gun," agreed Wilson quietly. "No escape. But you did fight on the other side."

The German shrugged and said, "I was in Germany with a German name when the row started."

Another silence, and the officer on the form moved again. Before the two arose a quiet little street in a suburb a little out of Melbourne, where both had romped together not no very long ago— perhaps eight or ten years ago.

"My brothers?" asked the German.

"Don't ask me," said Wilson.

"I know," replied the German. "I read their names in the list. But I wanted to be sure. One never knows."

Wilson murmured reminiscently, "Not in this war.''

"I thought you might know something how they died?" The German paused and motioned towards the enemy line. "Over there it is hard to get the truth."

"Here, too," agreed the captain.

"Tell me," pleaded the German eagerly.

"They were killed before I left Australia," answered Wilson with a searching glance.

The German lieutenant pressed his lips tight and muttered, "And my mother?"

"She is waiting "

"For her fourth son to come back?

"Time," Wilson clicked his watch shut. "Is there any message?"

"Tell her I will come home some day," replied the German.

"I will if I dare," said the Australian, as a man speaking a thought half grasped, but not quite understood.

"See what I mean?" probed the German.

"Only too well," muttered the Australian. "I see myself in front of a firing squad. Not this one— another one."

The German was silent. They walked out together. The medical officer woke up and followed them.

Wilson examined the rifles, and the men drew up in a line. The German loosened his tunic and stood upright," straight as an arrow.

For a moment the two officers faced each other. Each peered deep into the eyes of the other.

"Anything else?" stammered Wilson, and his hands were shaking. . "

"I would like you to fill in the grave," replied the German, saluting with a crisp, clean cut.

Wilson could not speak. He stepped back quickly, looked away to the setting sun, and jerked out the order: "Heady! Present! Fire!" ...

The German crumpled forward on his face and lay still, and the puff of smoke drifted away on the light breeze.

"Steady up, Wilson, old man, said Saunders, the medical officer.

"He asked me to bury him," answered Wilson, shaking.

"I heard him," said Saunders, in a matter of-fact way. "I have to make out the death certificate."

"I know, said Wilson, staring at the prostrate form.

The doctor bent down and felt the German's wrist for a score of seconds. When he stood up he studied Wilson's shaking hands.

"A rotten job "he said.

"Yes," stammered Wilson. "You'll let me have the death certificate?"

"Gee!" exclaimed Saunders, adding as an afterthought. "Oh, yes, yes," and he seemed to speak as if lie were thinking of something Wilson walked over and dismissed the firing squad....

"Do you need a hand with the burial service?" asked Saunders. "Or would you prefer to act alone."

"Alone," said Wilson. He was visibly excited.

And there, as the sun was setting, he filled in the grave of the boyish-looking German officer. For half an hour afterwards he stood in the shadows of the old chateau watching the little mound of loosely flung dirt.

Darkness was sweeping over the earth as he witnessed a form rise from the grave and stagger over towards the German line.

Then he went straight to Saunders s room at the back of the chateau.

He was outwardly calm, but his voice was trembling as he asked, ''Have you fixed up the certificate?"

"You need a tonic, old man," said Saunders. "That job got on your nerves.'

"The certificate—"

"Here, drink this "

Wilson gulped down a double tot of army rum.

"What sort of doctor do you think I am?" asked Saunders.

"God knows," stammered Wilson.

"Of course!"

"Don't laugh at me," Wilson rapped out.

"Look here?" Saunders stood up.

"You're in it too with me. You can't draw out now?"

"I'm not so sure of that. What if they find out?"

"Afraid? Eh?" Wilson's face was white.

"A little," said Saunders. "It's infernally risky."

"War's all risks."

"Yes, I know. You're all unstrung. Here, have another."

Wilson gulped another double tot.

"Now," said Wilson, wiping his lips. "Now."

There was a glint of steel in his eyes as his right hand dived into his pocket.

"I'm desperate, Saunders, and you've got to sign."

The medical officer half rose in his seat and then sat down again. In that moment he knew Wilson had him covered from his pocket with that deadly little French automatic he always carried.

"This is the second time you've jabbed that gun on me to-day," protested Saunders. "I felt you meant to let fly this afternoon.

"I think I would if you'd let on about Frits being alive." said Wilson meaningly. "I wanted you to be quiet till we could talk "

"It's your nerves," said Saunders. "By George, turn the infernal thing away.

"But I mean it."

"I know you do."

"Eh?"

"You're a case,

"A case?"

"Nerve case."

But Wilson's eyes had become fixed on something moving just beyond the shadows behind Saunders's chair. The automatic came from his pocket, and then three sharp staccato reports.

Saunders bounded forward and gripped the automatic. Wilson let him take it without a word of protest.

"Got the blighter. Clean bit o' work. Saunders, eh?"

The doctor glanced at the huge rat quivering in the dust.

"We've got something dead at last," Wilson jerked out.

"Yes," said Saunders. "I'm glad that rat came along just then— exceedingly glad."

"You were afraid—" Wilson began.

"I don't know, but I was thinking—"

"What?" Wilson became impatient again.

"I am a doctor. I've been watching you."

"I like that," said Wilson. "You quacks are all mysterious stuff. There's only one thing now, and that's the death certificate," he gasped. "I must have it."

There was a more serious ring in the voice of Saunders as he said, "How do I know why you let that Fritz off like that?"

Wilson clenched his fists and paused as the doctor leaned forward.

"Tell me," said Saunders. "Tell me why you did it."

"There was nothing else to do," replied Wilson. "Nothing, nothing, nothing!" He struck the table with his fists, and the tremulous plea of a moment before vanished. As he spoke a picture of the German's Australian mother arose before the eyes of Saunders. The German's name was Carl, but he had been nicknamed Clive because he climbed up the church steeple one day. "We were kids together, that's all."

"All?" muttered Saunders pensively.

"Three sons she will never see again. The fourth—" Wilson's voice was full of pleading. "The fourth, I— no, we— Saunders saved to-day. We did save him, didn't we, both of us, Saunders." He was watching the medical man's face for a sign. "Can't you see that woman waiting, Saunders! It was up to us. We couldn't do anything else."

Saunders sat down and began to write.

The pen scratched away for a score of seconds. Without another word he handed over an official-looking blue form, Wilson scanned it feverishly. The death certificate.

"And now I'm going to tell you the conditions attached to the certificate," said Saunders. "I am a doctor and you are my patient. That is where we stand if this little job ever leaks out. On the verge of a nervous breakdown that patient to-day covered me twice with a gun. I humoured the patient and he got some relief out of potting a rat. To make doubly sure I'm sending the patient behind the lines for a rest— see." Saunders nodded his determination.

"You mean that?"

"Every word of it."

"Thank you, Saunders, thank you. It's jolly decent of you," Wilson began to read the details of the death certificate and asked, "What did you think when you felt his pulse?"

"I didn't feel it," replied Saunders, lighting a cigarette. "The blighter pressed my hand as if I were in the joke."

Wilson stared. "You were mighty cool about it.''

"I knew before that,'' grinned Saunders.

"Eh?"

"You dropped these on the ground," said the doctor, emptying a fistful of ball cartridges into the hand of Wilson. "Why did you leave such evidence lying around?"

"God knows," nodded Wilson, rather unsteadily.

"And He won't tell," chuckled the medical officer.

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13: The Damsel and The Sage

Elinor Glyn

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AND THE Damsel said to the Sage:

"Now, what is life? And why does the fruit taste bitter in the mouth?"

And the Sage answered, as he stepped from his cave:

"My child, there was once a man who had two ears like other people. They were naturally necessary for his enjoyment of the day. But one of these ears offended his head. It behaved with stupidity, thinking thereby to enhance its value to him— it heard too much. Oh, it conducted itself with a gross stupidity. 'Out upon you,' cried the man; 'since you have overstepped the limit of the functions of an ear, I shall cut you from my head!' And so, without hesitation, he took a sword and accomplished the deed. The poor ear then lay upon the ground bleeding, and the man went about with a mutilated head."

"And what was the good of all that?" said the Damsel.

"There was no good in it," replied the Sage. "But he was a man, and he had punished the too-fond-and-foolish ear— also he hoped a new and more suitable one would grow in its place. 'Change,' he said, 'was a thing to be welcomed.'"

"And tell me, Sage, what became of the ear?" asked the Damsel.

"The ear fared better. Another man of greater shrewdness came along, and, although he had two ears of his own, he said, 'A third will not come amiss,' and he picked up the ear and heard with three ears instead of two. So he became knowing and clever because of the information he acquired in this way. The grafted ear grew and flourished, and, in spite of its remaining abnormal, it obtained a certain enjoyment out of existence."

"But who really benefited by all this?" inquired the Damsel.

"No one," said the Sage; "the first man went about with only one ear; the second man made himself remarkable with three— and the cut-off ear, although alive and successful, felt itself an excrescence."

"Then what could be the pleasure of it all?" demanded the Damsel.

"Out upon you!" exclaimed the Sage, in a passion. "You asked me what was life— and why the fruit tasted bitter in the mouth? I have answered you."

And he went back into his cave and barred the door.

The Damsel sat down upon a stone outside.

"It seems to me that men are fools," she said, and she clapped her hands to her two ears. "When I am angry and offended with one of you, I will cut the ear from off the head of some one else."

And she picked up an apple and ate it. And it tasted sweet.

A man will often fling away a woman who has wronged him although in doing so he is deeply hurting himself. A woman will forgive a man who has wronged her because her own personal pleasure in him is greater than her outraged pride. Hence women are more unconscious philosophers than men.

The Damsel returned again to the cave of the Sage. There were other questions she wished to ask about life. The door was hard to push ajar, but at last she obtained entrance.

"What do you want now?" he demanded, with a voice of grumbling. "Were you not content with my last utterances?"

"Yes— and no," said the Damsel. "I came to quite other conclusions myself. I would have kept the ear on my head, since cutting one off, however it had angered me, would have upset my own comfort."

"We have finished with that matter now," said the Sage, showing signs of impatience— he was still a man. "What next?"

"I want to know," said the Damsel, "why a woman who has Diamonds and Pearls and Emeralds and Rubies in her possession should set such store upon a Topaz— a yellow Topaz— the color she dislikes— and a Topaz of uneven temper and peculiar properties. She never wears this stone that it does not bruise her, now her neck, now her arm. It is restless and slips from its chain. It will not remain in the case with the other jewels. And at last she has lost it— she fears for good and all. And so now all the other stones, which seemed very well in their way, have grown of even less value in her eyes, and she can only lament the loss of her Topaz. 'I am brilliant,' cries the Diamond. 'I set off your eyes, and I love you.' 'I am soft and caressing,' whispers the Pearl. 'I lie close to your white skin and keep it cool, and I love you.' 'I am witty,' laughs the Emerald. 'I make your thoughts flash, and I love you.' 'I am the color of blood, and I would die for you,' chants the Ruby, 'and I love you.' And all these things the stones say all the day to her, and yet the woman only listens with half an ear, and their words have no effect upon her because of the charm of this tiresome Topaz. What does it all mean, Sage?"

"It means, first of all," said the Sage, "that the woman is a fool, as what is the value of a Topaz in comparison with a Diamond or a Ruby? It means, secondly, that the Topaz is a greater fool, because it would be more agreeable surely to lie close to the woman's soft neck than to be picked up by any stranger or lie neglected in the dust. But, above and beyond everything, it

means that cherries are ripest when out of reach, and that the whole world is full of fools of either opinion, who do not know when they are well off."

Upon which the Sage, with his usual lack of manners, retired into his cave and slammed his door.

The Damsel sat down upon the rock and came again to her own conclusions. The stone that apparently was a Topaz was in reality a yellow Diamond of great rarity and worth, and that was why the woman valued it so highly. Her instincts were stronger than her reason. But if she had not made herself so cheap by adoring the stone, it would not have become restless and she would not have lost it. Even stones cannot stand too much honey. If ever the woman should find this yellow Diamond again she must be told to keep it in a cool box and not caress it or place it above the others.

The Damsel thought aloud and the Sage heard her— he strode forth in a rage.

"Why do you come here demanding my advice if you moralize yourself? Out upon you again!" he thundered. "The woman will not find her Topaz, which is now revelling in the sun of freedom and will soon go down into nothingness and be forgotten. And after lamenting until her eyes look gaunt, the woman will begin to see some beauty in a Sapphire and become consoled, and so all will be well."

"I do not care what you say,"I do not care what you say," said the Damsel. "It is better to have what one wants one's self than to try and learn to like anything else that other people think better."

And she refastened a bracelet with great care— which contained two cat's-eyes of no value— as she went on her way.

Seize the occasion lest it pass thee by and fall into the lap of another.

No man likes shooting tame rabbits.

Most men like the hunt more than the quarry— therefore the wise woman is elusive.

It is a good hostess who never inclines her guests unconsciously to look at the clock.

Some things cause pride, some pleasure. There is only one thing which causes infinite bliss and oblivion of time, and this one thing, unless bound with chains, is called immoral.

It is a wise man who knows when he is happy and can appreciate the divine bliss of the tangible now. Most of us retrospect or anticipate and so lose the present.

Seize Love at whatever age he comes to you— if you can avoid being ridiculous.

More questions?" exclaimed the Sage, as the Damsel tapped gently upon the door of his cave.

"Women are never satisfied; they are as restless as the sea, and when they have received all the best advice they invariably follow their own inclinations."

"It was not to discuss women," replied the Damsel, timidly; "this time it is of a man I wish to ask."

"Begin, then, and have done quickly," growled the Sage, averting his head. The Damsel had an outline against the sky which caused ideas not tranquillizing for Hermits.

"I wish to know why a man who possessed the most beautiful and noble Bird of Paradise— a bird of rare plumage and wonderful qualities— should suddenly see more beauty in an ordinary Cockatoo, whose only attraction was its yellow feathers— a Cockatoo that screamed monotonously as it swung backward and forward on its perch, and would eat sugar out of the hand of any stranger while it cried 'Pretty Poll.' The man could not afford to buy this creature also, so he deliberately sold his exquisite Bird of Paradise to a person called Circumstance and with the money became the possessor of the Cockatoo, who pierced the drums of his ears with its eternal 'Pretty Poll' and wearied his sight with its yellow feathers. Why did the man do this?"

The Sage laughed at so simple a question.

"Because he was a man, and even a screaming Cockatoo belonging to some one else has more charm at times than the most divine Bird of Paradise belonging to himself."

"But was it worth while to sell this rare thing for a very ordinary one?" demanded the Damsel.

"Certainly not," said the Sage, impatiently. "What childish questions you ask! The thing was a folly on the face of it; but, as I said before, he was a man— and the Cockatoo belonged to some one else!"

"Then what will happen now?" asked the Damsel, placing herself in the direction in which the Sage had turned his head.

"The Bird of Paradise will still be the most beautiful and glorious and desirable bird in the world; and when the man realizes he has lost it forever he will begin to value its every feather, and will spend his days in comparing all its remembered perfections and advantages with the screams and the yellow feathers of the Cockatoo."

"And what will the Cockatoo do?" inquired the Damsel.

"It will probably continue to shriek 'Pretty Poll,' and eat sugar out of the hand of any stranger," replied the Sage, plucking his heard.

"And the man?"

"The man will go on telling every one he has bought the most divine bird in the world, in the hope that some one will offer him a large sum of money for it. The only person who gains in the affair is the Bird of Paradise, who, instead of being caged as when in the possession of the man, is absolutely free to fly with its new master, Circumstance, who only seeks to please and soothe this glorious bird and make life fair for it."

"But what will be the very end?" persisted the Damsel.

The Sage turned and looked full at her. He was angry with her importunity and would have answered sternly.

Then he saw that the ripples of her hair were golden and his voice softened.

"That will depend— upon Circumstance," he replied, and he closed his door softly in her face.

A man wishes and a woman wishes, but Circumstance frequently wins the game.

Life is short— avoid causing yawns.

It is possible for a woman to retain the amorous affection of a man for many years— if he only sees her for the two best hours out of each twenty-four.

Please open the door, Sage," entreated the Damsel, "and I will tell you a story."

The Sage pushed it ajar with his foot, but he did not come out.

"There was once upon a time a man," she said, "who unexpectedly and for no apparent reason became the possessor of a Tiger. It had been coveted by numbers of people and was of a certain value and beauty. It had an infinite variety of tricks. It was learned in caresses. It was fierce, and gentle, and it could love passionately. Altogether a large price would have been offered the man for it by many others if he had wished to sell it. In the beginning he had greatly valued the possession of this strange beast, and had fed it with his own hand. The little anxiety as to whether it would eat him or not, or rush away, had kept him interested. But gradually, as he became certain the Tiger adored him, and would show none but velvet claws and make only purring sounds, his keenness waned. He still loved it, but certainty is monotonous, and his eyes wandered to other objects. 'The Tiger is nothing but a domestic cat,' he said; 'I will pet and caress it when the mood takes me, and for the rest of the time it can purr to itself by the fire.' At last one day, after the Tiger was especially gracious and had purred with all essence of love, the man yawned. 'It is really a charming beast,' he said, 'but it is always the same; and then he went away and forgot even to feed it. The Tiger felt hungry and restless. Its quietness and

gentleness became less apparent. The man on his travels chanced to think of it and sent it a biscuit. So the Tiger waited, and when the man returned and expected the usual docile caresses, it bit his hand. 'Vile beast!' said the man. 'Have I not fed and kept you for weeks, and now you bite my hand!' Now tell me, Sage, which was right— the man or the Tiger?"

"Both, and neither," said the Sage, decidedly. "The man was only obeying the eternal law in finding what he was sure of monotonous; but he mistook the nature of the beast he had to deal with. Tigers are not of the species that can ever be really monotonous, if he had known. The Tiger was foolish to allow its true nature to be so disguised by its love for the man that he was deceived into looking upon it as a domestic cat. It thought to please him thereby and so lost its hold."

"And what will be the end?" asked the Damsel.

"The man's hand will smart to the end of his life, and he will never secure another Tiger. And the Tiger will go elsewhere and console itself by letting its natural instincts have full play. It will not be foolish a second time."

But the Damsel's conclusion was different.

"No," she said. "The man's hand will heal up, and the Tiger will caress him and make him forget the bite, and they will love each other to eternity because they have both realized their own stupidity."

And without speaking further she allowed the Sage to close the door.

It is wiser to know the species one is playing with: do not offer Tigers hay— or Antelopes joints of meat.

Next day, in a pouring shower of rain, the Damsel knocked at the Sage's door. It was for shelter, she said, this time, until the storm should pass.

The Sage was fairly gracious, and to while away the time the Damsel began a story.

"A man once owned a brown Sparrow. It had no attractions, and it made a continuous and wearying noise as it chattered under the eaves. It did the same thing every day, and had monotonous domestic habits that often greatly irritated the man, but— he was accustomed to it, and did not complain. After several years a travelling Showman came along; he had a large aviary of birds of all sorts, some for sale, some not. Among them was a glorious Humming Bird of wonderful brilliancy and plumage, a creature full of beauty and grace and charm and elegance. The man became passionately attached to it; he was ready to perpetrate any folly for the sake of obtaining possession of it, and indeed he did commit numbers of regrettable actions, and at last stole the bird from the Showman and carried it away. Then, in a foreign palace, for a short while he revelled in its beauty and the joy of owning it. The Humming Bird did

its best to be continually charming, but it felt its false position. And the worry and annoyance of concealing the theft from the Showman, and the different food the Humming Bird required, and the care that had to be taken of it, at last began to weary the man. He chafed and was often disagreeable to it, although he realized its glory and beauty and the feather it was in his cap. Finally, one day, in a fit of desperation, the man let the Humming Bird fly, and crept back home to the homely brown Sparrow, with its irritating noises and utter want of beauty. Why was this, Sage?"

The Sage had not to think long.

"Custom, my child," he said. "Custom forges stronger chains than the finest plumage of a Humming Bird. The man had to put himself out and exert himself to retain the Humming Bird in a way that was not agreeable to his self-love, whereas the brown Sparrow lived on always the same, causing him no trouble, and custom had deadened the sense of its want of charm."

"Then it seems to me it was rather hard upon the poor Humming Bird!" said the Damsel.

"It is always hard upon the Humming Birds," replied the Sage, and his voice was quite sad.

The rain did not cease for a long time. It was more than an hour before the Damsel left the cave

If you are a Humming Bird it is wiser for you to remain in the possession of the Travelling Showman.

A LONG period elapsed after this before the Damsel again tapped at the Sage's door. He looked out morning and evening, and attributed his lack of enthusiasm for his devotions to an attack of rheumatism from the damp of his cave. At last, one morning he spied her sauntering slowly up the hill, and he retired into the back of his cell, and the Damsel had to knock twice before he opened the window shutter. She was in a gay mood, and demanded a story, so the Sage began:

"There was once upon a time a Fish with glittering scales who swam about in a deep river. It had been tempted by the flies of many Fishermen, but had laughed at them all and swam away, just under the surface of the water, so that the sun might shine on its glittering scales to please the eyes of the Fishermen and to excite their desire to secure it. It was a Fish who laughed a good deal at life. But one fine day a new Angler came along; he was young and beautiful, and seemed lazy and happy, and not particularly anxious to throw the line. The Fish peeped at him from the sheltering shadow of a rock. 'This is the most perfect specimen of a Fisherman I have ever seen,' it said to itself. 'I could almost believe it would be agreeable to swallow the fly and let him land

me and put me in his basket.' The young Fisherman threw the line, and the sun caught the glittering scales of the Fish at that moment. The laziness vanished from the Fisherman, and he began to have a strong desire to secure the Fish.

"He fished for some time, and the Fish swam backward and forward, making up its mind. It saw the hook under the fly, but the attraction of the Angler growing stronger and stronger, at last it deliberately decided to come up and bite. 'I know all the emotions of swimming on the surface and letting my scales shine in the sun,' it mused, 'but I know nothing about the bank and the basket, and perhaps the tales that are drilled into the heads of us Fish from infancy about suffocation and exhaustion are not true.' And it mused again: 'He is a perfectly beautiful Fisherman and looks kind, and I want to be closer to him and let him touch my glittering scales. After all, one ought to know everything before one dies.'

"So, its heart beating and its eyes melting, the Fish deliberately rose to the surface and swallowed the fly. The hook caught in a gristly place and did not hurt much, and the novel experience of being pulled onto the green meadow delighted the Fish. It saw the Fisherman close, and felt his hands as he tenderly disengaged the hook. He was full of joy and pride at securing the difficult Fish and admired its scales. He talked aloud and told it how bright he found it, and he was altogether charming and delightful, and the Fish adored him and was glad it had been caught.

"Then after some time of this admiration and dalliance, the Fisherman put it in the basket among the cool rushes. The Fish lay quiet, still content. It had not yet begun to pant. For an hour almost the Fisherman gloried in his catch. He opened the lid frequently and smiled at the Fish.

"Then he lay down on the bank beside the basket and let his rod float idly in the stream. The sun was warm and pleasant.

"'I wish,' he said to himself, 'after all, I had not secured the Fish yet; the throwing of the fly and the excitement of trying to catch the creature are better fun than having it safely landed and lying in the basket,' and he yawned, and his eyes gradually closed and he slept.

"Now the Fish heard very plainly what he had said. Tell me, Damsel— you who ask questions and answer them finally yourself— tell me, What did the Fish do?"

The Damsel mused a moment. She stirred with her white fingers the water in the basin of the fountain that sprang from the rock close by. Then she looked at the Sage from under the shadow of her brows and answered, thoughtfully:

"The Fish was stunned at first by this truth being uttered so near it. It suddenly realized what it had done and what it had lost. 'I, who swam about

freely and showed my glittering scales in the sun, am now caught and in a basket, with no prospect but suffocation and death in front of me,' it said to itself. 'I could have even supported that, and the knowledge that my scales will become dull and unattractive in the near future, if the Fisherman had only continued to lift the lid and admire me a little longer.' And it sighed and began to feel the sense of suffocation. But it was a Fish of great determination and resources. 'I have learned my lesson,' it gasped; 'the Fisherman has taught it to me himself. Now I will make a great jump and try to get out of the basket.'

"So it jumped and opened the lid. The Fisherman stirred in his sleep and put out his hand vaguely to close it again, but he was too sleepy to fasten the catch, and with less noise the Fish bounced up again and succeeded in floundering upon the grass. It lay panting and in great distress, but it looked at the beautiful Angler with regret. He was so beautiful and so desirable. 'I could almost stay now,' the Fish sighed. Then it braced itself up and gave one more bound, and this time reached the rock at the edge of the stream.

"Again the Fisherman awoke, and now casually, with his eyes still closed, fastened up the basket before he slept again; but the Fish with its third bound reached the river, and darted out into the middle of the stream.

"'Good-bye, Beautiful Angler!' it said, sadly. 'You were sweet, but you have taught me a lesson, and freedom is sweeter.'

"The splash of its reaching the water fully awakened the Fisherman, but he saw the basket with the lid shut, and had no anxieties until his eye caught the pink of the water where the Fish sheltered under the rock. Its gill was still bleeding from the hook wound, and colored a circle round it. Then he opened the lid and found the basket empty.

"'Good-bye,' said the Fish. 'Your wish has been granted, and your pleasure can begin all over again!'

"But the Fisherman suddenly realized that his rod, while he slept, had fallen into the river, and was floating away down the stream.

"'Good-bye again,' said the Fish; 'I have suffered, but I have now experience, and I am grateful to you, and my gill will heal up, and I will smile at you sometimes from just under the surface of the water, and so all is well!' And it flashed its glittering scales in the sun before it darted away out of sight in the strong current."

And the Damsel folded her hands and looked into distance.

"Thank you, Damsel," said the Sage, gently for him; "but the Fisherman could procure another rod— rods are not rarities. What then?"

"That would be for another day," said the Damsel; "and— for another Fish!" And she tripped away down the hill, and was deaf to the Sage, who gruffly called after her.

When you have caught your Fish, it may be wiser to cook it and eat it.

The sun was setting when the Damsel next came to the Cave. She had a pet falcon with her, and kept caressing it as she propounded her question.

"There lived a woman in a Castle who had three Knights devoted to her. She loved one, and her vanity was pleased with the other two. While she continued to play with them all, they all loved her to distraction; but presently her preference for the one Knight became evident, and the two others, after doing their utmost to supplant the third without success, at last left the Castle and rode away. They were no sooner gone, and things had become quiet, and no combats occurred to interrupt the lovers' intercourse, when the chosen Knight began to weary, and he, too, at last rode away, although before he had been the most ardent of all. Why was this, Sage? And what should the woman do?"

"It was because the Knight had won the prize and the woman gave him no trouble to keep it," replied the Sage. "He was bound to weary. When a man's profession is fighting and he has fought hard and succeeded, after sufficient rest he wishes to fight again. So if the woman wants her lover back, she had better first summon the other two."

For once the Damsel had nothing to say, and had no excuse to remain longer in the cave.

The Sage, however, was not in the mind to let her go so soon, so he began a question:

"Why do you caress that bird so much? It appears completely indifferent to you. Surely that is waste of time?"

"It is agreeable to waste time," replied the Damsel.

"Upon an insensible object?"

"Yes."

"More so than if it returned your caresses?"

"Probably— there is the speculation. It might one day respond, while certainly if it repaid warmly my love now, one day it would not. Nothing lasts in this world. You have told me so yourself."

The Sage was nettled.

"Yes, there is one thing that lasts, that is friendship," he said.

"Friendship!" exclaimed the Damsel; "but that is not made up of caresses. It does not make the heart beat."

"We were not talking of beating hearts," said the Sage, sententiously.

"Very well. Good-bye, then, Sage." laughed the Damsel. "You must think of more stories for me before I come again."

And, continuing to caress the falcon, she walked away, stately and fair, into the setting sun.

When she had gone the Sage wondered why there was no twilight that evening, and why it had suddenly become night.

Most men prefer to possess something that the other men want.

It would be a peaceful world if we could only realize that the fever of love is like other fevers. It comes to a crisis, and the patient either dies or is cured. It cannot last at the same point forever.

The Damsel came back again next day. She had remarked, the day she spent with him in the rain, that the Sage was not so old or so uncomely as she had at first supposed. "If he were to shave off his beard and wear a velvet doublet, he would look as well as many a cavalier of the Court," she mused. And she called out before she reached the door:

"Sage, I have come back because I want to ask you just another question. Will you not come out and sit in the sun while you answer?"

So the Sage advanced in a recalcitrant manner, but he would not sit down beside her.

Then the Damsel began:

"A woman once possessed a ball of silk. It was of so fine and rare a kind that, although of many thousand yards, it took up no space, and she unwound it daily for her pleasure without any appreciable difference in the size of the ball. At last she suddenly fancied she perceived some alteration. It came upon her as a shock, but still she continued to use the silk with the casual idea that a thing she had employed so long must go on forever. Then again, in about a week, there came another shock. The ball was certainly smaller, and felt cold and hard and firm. The thought came to her, 'What if it should not be silk all through and I have come to the end of matters? What shall I do?' Now tell me, Sage, should the woman go on to the end and find perhaps a stone? Or should she try to rewind the silk? Which is the best course?"

The Damsel took up the Sage's staff, which he had dropped for the moment, and with its point she drew geometrical figures in the sand. But the sun made shadows with her eyelashes, and the Sage felt his voice tremble, so he answered, tartly:

"That would depend upon the nature of the woman. If she continues to unwind the silk she will certainly find a piece of adamant, which has been cunningly covered with this rare, soft substance. If she tries to rewind, she will discover the thread has become tangled, and the ball can never again look

smooth and even as before. She must choose which she would prefer, a clean piece of adamant or an uneven ball of silk."

"But that is no answer to my question," said the Damsel, pouting. "I asked which must she do for the best."

"Neither is better nor worse!" replied the Sage with asperity. "And there is no best."

"You are quite wrong, Sage," returned the Damsel. "There is a third course. She can cut the thread and leave the ball as it is, a coating of smooth silk still— and an undiscovered possibility inside."

"You are too much for me!" exclaimed the Sage in a fury. "Answer your own questions, to begin with, in future! I will have no more of you!" and he went into his cave and ostentatiously fastened the door.

The Damsel smiled to herself and continued to draw geometrical figures with the point of the Sage's staff in the sand.

There are always three courses in life: the good, the bad, and the— indifferent. The good gives you calm, and makes you sleep; the bad gives you emotions, and makes you weep; and the indifferent gives you no satisfaction, and makes you yawn, so— choose wisely.

One can swear to be faithful eternally, but how can one swear to love eternally? The one is a question of will, the other a sentiment beyond all human control. One might as sensibly swear to keep the wind in the south, or the sun from setting!

And yet we swear both vows— and break both vows.

A woman is always hardest upon her own sins, committed by others.
A man is sometimes lenient to them.
A fool can win the love of a man, but it requires a woman of resources to keep it.

The Damsel did not go away from the cave, as was her custom. She continued to draw geometrical figures in the sand. Presently she called to the Sage once more.

"Come out again, dear Sage! Listen, I have something more to say."

He unfastened the window and stood leaning on the sill.

"Well?" he said, sternly. "Well?"

"A Ring Dove once was owned by a man. It was the sweetest and most gentle of birds, besides being extremely beautiful. It adored the man and lived contentedly in its cage. The perches, which the man had had prepared especially for it, were endeared to it from association with the happy hours when it had been caressed by the man. Altogether to it the cage appeared a palace, and it lived content.

"The man was a brutal creature, more or less, and at last he cruelly ill-treated the Ring Dove, and exalted a Cuckoo in its place. This conduct greatly saddened the sweet Dove, but it over and over again forgave its tormentor, so great was its love, and even saw the Cuckoo advanced to the highest honors without anger, only a bleeding heart. How long things would have continued in this way no one knows; but the man suddenly gave the Cuckoo the Ring Dove's cage, and let the Cuckoo sleep on the perches which the Dove was accustomed to consider its very own. This overcame the gentle Dove. Its broken heart mended, and it flew away. Tell me, Sage, why did this action cure the Dove of its great love for the man, when it had borne all the blows and cruelty without resentment?"

"That is an easy question to answer," replied the Sage. "The Dove was really growing tired and seized this as a good opportunity to be off."

"Oh, how little you know of the female sex, even of Doves!" laughed the Damsel. "I can give you the true reason myself. It was the bad taste of the man in giving the Cuckoo the cage and perches of the Ring Dove, which he had consecrated to her. That cured her, and enabled her to fly away."

And the Damsel curtsied to the Sage and sauntered off, laughing and looking back over her shoulder.

An action committed in bad taste is more curing and disillusionizing to Love than the cruelest blows of rage and hate.

A man would often be the lover of his wife— if he were married to some one else.

There come moments in life when we regret the old gods.

Time and place— temperature and temperament— and after the sunset the night— and then to-morrow.

All the winter passed and the Damsel remained at the Court and the Sage in his cave. Both found the days long and their occupation insufficient.

At last, when spring came, the Damsel again mounted the hill one morning before dawn and tapped at the Sage's door.

His heart gave a bound, and he flew to open it without more ado.

"So you have come back?" he said; and his voice was eager, though it was a gray light and he could not see her plainly.

"Yes," said she; "I want you to tell me one more story of life before I go on a long voyage."

So the Sage began:

"There was once upon a time a man of half-measures, whose brain was filled with dreams for his own glory, and he possessed a woman of flesh and

blood, who loved him, and would have turned the dreams into realities. But because he was happy with her, and because her hair was black and her eyes were green, and her flesh like alabaster, he said to himself, 'This is a fiend and a vampire. Nothing human can be so delectable.' So he ran a stake through her body, and buried her at the cross-roads. Then he found life an emptiness, and went down into nothingness and was forgotten— "

"Oh, hush, Sage!" said the Damsel, trembling; "I wish to hear no more. Come, shave off your beard, and put on a velvet doublet, and return with me to the Court. See, life is short, and I am fair."

And the Sage suddenly felt he had found the philosopher's stone, and knew the secret he had come into the wilds to find.

So he went back to his cave, and shaved his beard, and donned a velvet doublet, long since lain by in lavender. And he took the Damsel by the hand, and they gladly ran down the hill.

And the zephyrs whispered, and the day dawned, and all the world smiled young— and gay.

Remember the tangible now.
"Sic transit gloria mundi!"

———————

14: The Pensioner

William Caine

1873-1925

The Graphic 2 July 1921

MISS CREWE was born in the year 1821. She received a sort of education, and at the age of twenty became the governess of a little girl, eight years old, called Martha Bond. She was Martha's governess for the next ten years. Then Martha came out and Miss Crewe went to be the governess of somebody else. Martha married Mr. William Harper. A year later she gave birth to a son, who was named Edward. This brings us to the year 1853.

When Edward was six, Miss Crewe came back, to be his governess. Four years later he went to school and Miss Crewe went away to be the governess of somebody else. She was now forty-two years old.

Twelve years passed and Mrs. Harper died, recommending Miss Crewe to her husband's care, for Miss Crewe had recently been smitten by an incurable disease which made it impossible for her to be a governess any longer.

Mr. Harper, who had passionately loved his wife, gave instructions to his solicitor to pay Miss Crewe the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds annually. He had some thoughts of buying her an annuity, but she seemed so ill that he didn't. Edward was now twenty-two.

In the year 1888, Mr. Harper died after a very short illness. He had expected Miss Crewe to die any day during the past thirteen years, but since she hadn't he thought it proper now to recommend her to Edward's care. This is how he did it.

"That confounded old Crewe, Eddie. You'll have to see to her. Let her have her money as before, but for the Lord's sake don't go and buy her an annuity now. If you do, she'll die on your hands in a week!" Shortly afterwards the old gentleman passed away.

Edward was now thirty-five. Miss Crewe was sixty-seven and reported to be in an almost desperate state. Edward followed his father's advice. He bought no annuity for Miss Crewe. Her one hundred and fifty pounds continued to be paid each year into her bank; but by Edward, not by his late father's solicitors.

Edward had his own ideas of managing the considerable fortune which he had inherited. These ideas were unsound. The first of them was that he should assume the entire direction of his own affairs. Accordingly he instructed his solicitors to realise all the mortgages and railway-stock and other admirable securities in which his money was invested and hand over the cash to him. He then went in for the highest rate of interest which anyone would promise him. The consequence was that, within twelve years, he was almost a poor man, his

annual income having dwindled from about three thousand to about four hundred pounds.

Though he was a fool he was an honourable man, and so he continued to pay Miss Crewe her one hundred and fifty pounds each year. This left him about two hundred and fifty for himself. The capital which his so reduced income represented was invested in a Mexican brewery in which he had implicit faith. Nevertheless, he began to think that he might do well were he to try to earn a little extra money.

The only thing he could do was to paint, not at all well, in water-colours. He became the pupil, quite seriously, of a young artist whom he knew. He was now forty-seven years old, while Miss Crewe was seventy-nine. The year was 1900.

To everybody's amazement Edward soon began to make quite good progress in his painting. Yes, his pictures were not at all unpleasant little things. He sent one of them to the Academy. It was accepted. It was, as I live, sold for ten pounds. Edward was an artist.

Soon he was making between thirty and forty pounds a year. Then he was making over a hundred. Then two hundred. Then the Mexican brewery failed, General Malefico having burned it to the ground for a lark.

This happened in the spring of 1914 when Edward was sixty-one and Miss Crewe was ninety-three. Edward, after paying her money to Miss Crewe, might flatter himself on the possibility of having some fifty pounds a year for himself, that is to say, if his picture sales did not decline. A single man can, however, get along, more or less, on fifty pounds more or less.

Then the Great War broke out.

It has been said that in the autumn of 1914 the Old Men came into their kingdom. As the fields of Britain were gradually stripped bare of their valid toilers, the Fathers of each village assumed, at good wages, the burden of agriculture. From their offices the juniors departed or were torn; the senior clerks carried on desperately until the Girls were introduced. No man was any longer too old at forty. Octogenarians could command a salary. The very cinemas were glad to dress up ancient fellows in uniform and post them on their doorsteps.

Edward could do nothing but paint rather agreeable water-colours, and that was all. The market for his kind of work was shut. A patriotic nation was economising in order to get five per cent on the War Loans. People were not giving inexpensive little water-colours away to one another as wedding gifts any longer. Only the painters of high reputation, whose work was regarded as a real investment, could dispose of their wares.

Starvation stared Edward in the face, not only his own starvation, you understand, but Miss Crewe's. And Edward was a man of honour.

He hated Miss Crewe intensely, but he had undertaken to provide for her, and provide for her he must— even if he failed to provide for himself.

He wrapped some samples of his paintings in brown paper, and began to seek for a job among the wholesale stationers. He offered himself as one who was prepared to design Christmas-cards and calendars, and things of the kind.

Adversity had sharpened his wits. Even the wholesale stationers were not turning white-headed men from their portals. To Edward was accorded the privilege of displaying the rather agreeable contents of his parcel. After he had unpacked it and packed it up again some thirty times he was offered work. His pictures were really rather agreeable. It was piecework, and he was to do it off the premises, no matter where. By toiling day and night he might be able to earn as much as £4 a week. He went away and toiled. His employers were pleased with what, each Monday, he brought them. They did not offer to increase his remuneration, but they encouraged him to produce, and took practically everything he offered. Edward was very fortunate.

During the first year of the war he lived like a beast, worked like a slave, and earned exactly enough to keep his soul in his body and pay Miss Crewe her one hundred and fifty pounds. During the second year of the war he did it again. The fourth year of the war found him still alive and still punctual to his obligations towards Miss Crewe.

Miss Crewe, however, found one hundred and fifty pounds no longer what it had been. Prices were rising in every direction. She wrote to Edward pointing this out, and asking him if he couldn't see his way to increasing her allowance. She invoked the memory of his dear mother and father, added something about the happy hours that he and she had spent together in the dear old school-room, and signed herself his affectionately.

Edward petitioned for an increase of pay. He pointed out to his firm of wholesale stationers that prices were rising in every direction. The firm, who knew when they had a marketable thing cheap, granted his petition. Henceforth Edward was able to earn five pounds a week. He increased Miss Crewe's allowance by fifty pounds, and continued to live more like a beast than ever, for the price of paper and paints was soaring. He worked practically without ceasing, save to sleep (which he could not do) and to eat (which he could not afford). He was now sixty-four, while Miss Crewe was rising ninety-seven.

Edward had been ailing for a long time. On Armistice Day he struck work for an hour in order to walk about in the streets and share in the general rejoicing. He caught a severe cold, and the next day, instead of staying

between his blankets (he had no sheets), he went up to the City with some designs which he had just completed. That night he was feverish. The next night he was delirious. The third night he was dead, and there was an end of him.

He had, however, managed, before he died (two days before), to send to Miss Crewe a money order for her quarter's allowance of fifty pounds. This had left him with precisely four shillings and twopence in the Post Office Savings Bank.

He was, consequently, buried by the parish.

Miss Crewe received her money. She was delighted to have it, and at once wrote to Edward her customary letter of grateful and affectionate thanks. She added in a post-script that if he *could* find it in his generous heart to let her have a still little more next quarter it would be most acceptable, because every day seemed to make it harder and harder for her to get along.

Edward was dead when this letter was delivered.

Miss Crewe sent her money order to her bank, asking that it might be placed to her deposit account. This she reminded the bank, would bring up the amount of her deposit to exactly two thousand pounds.

15: Forgotten Soul

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

The Red Book Magazine Feb 1923

THE SEA is almost always silver in those parts— silver, with blue iris shadows, and thumbs and horns of islands, blue, blue-green, blue-purple, pricking up on the edges of the world. The liners go over the silver like sledges gliding on snow; you do not know, or think, how hull meets water. You are aware of decks pale, shaded from the sun; of winds that run blood-warm from the proud bow; of a life eventless, dreamy, slipping by with scarce more ripple than the ship leaves on the waveless plain of these far Malayan seas.

Yet the ships make history, tragedy; build empires, tear them down. And the ship-life molds lives.

Bell— Frank Austin Bell; you remember him, perhaps? A youngish fellow with gingerish hair and a good figure; good face, too; hard face, man's face; brown eyes with some voltage to the back of them; mouth that shut the right way— the Bell (there are so many Bells) who knew all about tin, and went out to the Straits Settlements for a company; that Bell— remember now? Bell, then, was on board a Dutch-Indian liner, not so many years ago, going to Australia. He had done with the tin that wasn't in the Straits Settlements, and his company was sending him to Darwin. I cannot tell you why.

It was at Singapore that the girl got on. I find it hard to tell about her, because, frankly, I hate her, partly because of what she is herself, partly on account of what she did. But I recognize that you, and a great many others, would not agree with me. Bell did not — worse luck!

I was on the boat that trip. This story is not about me, but I have to bring myself in. I ought not be in any story; I am one of the men (there are many) who remain deliberately and joyfully unmarried, with no "history" at the back of it. You women will never understand.

I saw her before we were clear of the islands. She was on the promenade-deck, sitting in a cheap canvas chair. Her sister was with her, in a cane chair of the most expensive kind. The sister suggest doves and roses and angels, without prejudice to the streak of cat which seemed, somehow, to run alongside. I have sometimes wondered— of a night when the bow stands black among the stars, and the sea is making that double heartbeat against the ship's unseen sides that one only hears in very quiet weather— I have wondered, alone on deck when the lights had been put out, and the last flirtation dissolved into its constituent parts, whether Avice, given other circumstances, might not have been a very different woman.

But that sort of speculation is of all things on earth, or sea, the most foolish and most fruitless.

They were engaged before Batavia. I do not think the married sister took it very kindly; she had a fine flair for the going-to-be-successful man; but for his opposite! Still, she made no open trouble. And she took Avice away. And the boat went on.

Bell, I have always said, ought to have been a poet rather than a mining engineer. He used to say there was poetry in his work — which proves my contention. A man who can see poetry in miping oughtn't to have anything to do with it — mining, I mean.

And people like you and myself know, without arguing, that such views are a prophecy of ill-success. They are idealist. Who, at the word idealist, does not see cracked, ill-blackened boots, cuffs trimmed with scissors, the wrinkled smile of the man who sits on the edge of chairs and talks too earnestly to bankers?

Yet, you remember, all of us liked Bell, and expected him to succeed, though we knew he wouldn't. When he disappeared, I, for one, spent more time and money than I shall ever pick up again, making inquiries of Dutch and native officials, hunting the jungles, scouring native towns, Chinese quarters. But I did not find him. I did not find a trace of him. He had returned from Australia; I ran across him, I remember, in the Javanese port of Sourabaya, and we had a few weeks together. After that I left, but when I heard of his disappearance, I came back. Nothing was any good. From the day he disappeared— and that was about a year after his affair with Miss Ferrers— to the present year, no one in Java, in Dutch or English Malaya, in England, or any place between, heard anything of Bell.

I did not give the matter up. Bell was my friend. It became impossible, for various reasons, to go on with the useless search; but I kept my ears open, and eyes at work, while traveling about.

There was a night in the Java Sea— a thundery, black-purple night, with sword-play of lightning off away on the rim of nowhere— when I was sitting, for coolness, close to the smoke-room door. A fellow was next to me whom I knew— no matter how— to be a Secret Service man. Some of you know him too. He is like a bit of the eighteenth century; I won't say more.

Well, this French-Revolution, Sidney Carton chap, when he had done with the cigar he was smoking leaned forward across me to reach an ash-tray. And he saw the lightning busy at its tierce and quartre, lunging, parrying something. It was amazingly bright and wicked that night. Sidney Carton— to give him a name that was not his— leaned out into the doorway, and said half to himself: "I never saw it like that since the night I was at Forgotten Soul."

That was a name to fling at you, was it not, in the Java Sea, was married to a wealthy Batavia merchant with a touch of the tar-brush, Javanese variety. Women will do these things— nice women, too. The girl Avice— affected name, rather— had been staying with another married sister in Singapore. I judged that she meant to spend her time between Singapore and Batavia until something— or some one— turned up. Now, understand that I do not blame her, or any number of Avices. They follow their natural, and on the whole, not blamable instincts, just as your cat does when she watches at mouse-holes for mice, and tries to look as if she weren't doing anything of the kind. Cats, and women, must live.

But Bell— my Bell, your Bell, our Frank Austin Bell— ought not to have been her meat. Weren't there army men, and civilians, and planters— Lord, weren't there bagmen, anything, anybody, rather than Bell?

It began after dinner the first night, when she had that difficulty with the hind legs of her chair that every self-respecting young woman has when a mouse— I mean a marriageable man— peeps out of its— I mean, comes along the deck. Bell, of course, stopped and said "Allow me," and she was surprised.

She had her English complexion still; she'd the prettiest little slip of a figure; her hair— beautiful browny-brown, and very thick — was drawn down in those curtains that girls affect. It made her face look smaller, and her eyes bigger. They were blue; I suppose they are still. She wore a plain black evening frock, rather high cut; there was a conventual air about her. Avice, one understands, had been very well brought up. I believe the girl— in those days— had a sort of soul about her.

Before we had sighted Sumatra, Bell was destroying my afternoon's sleep with information, many times repeated, to the effect that Avice Ferrers was an angel, a white rose, a dove, and several other things one thinks one has heard of before in a similar connection. The odd thing about it was that Avice really did with thunder creeping up, and a man's mind tingling pins and needles, with the things he wanted to forget? I did not know where or what Forgotten Soul might be; but the sound of it did not suit me. I said nothing at all; I may have looked unpleasant. You never know how much Carton sees, how much he knows, or guesses. To this day, I am not sure whether his next words were accidental or not.

"You're getting off at Sourabaya? Yes? That's where it is, in the suburbs."

"What is it?" I asked him.

Carton (to call him by the name that is not at all like his) chose another cigar out of his case, and cut the end, while he answered. He did not look at me— you have to look at a cigar, when you are nipping the end off.

"It's a bungalow," he said. "Deserted."

"Deserted? Why?"

"I don't know. Are you going to have a game of bridge?"

"God forbid."

"Oh, yes— you don't play."

"Neither do you— having no vacancies to fill up."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," he laughed.

Carton never lays claim to intelligence. He got up by and by, and strolled away, and I, getting my things together to land at Sourabaya, decided— I did not know why— that I'd like to know something more about the place with the curious name. I did not fancy it, but it drew me.

When I had landed, sent my things up by carrier, and taken a motor for myself; when, behind a mad Malay chauffeur I was being made to run amuck through the clotted traffic of that red-hot port; when I saw the endless, black, burnipg road lying out ahead of me, with the telegraph-posts and lines dwindling to a fine point far away; when I saw all the life of Java, clad in coal-lumpers' rags, in silk sarongs of cerise and buttercup, in jade-green coats and turbans of returned Mecca pilgrims, in spangled Indian saris, boiling past me— when I saw all this again, as I had seen it in the years passed by, I could think of nothing but my lost mate Bell.

Last time I had gone ashore in the seven-times-hateful port of Sourabaya, Bell had been with me. We had been younger then— not many years, but it tells. We had laughed and ragged one another about this and that; we had thought the heat great fun— why, a man could have fried an egg by breaking it on the Sourabaya roadway, black and hot as the top of a stove! We made a joke of that. Bell said we'd get off and try. The road was lined for a mile, at the least, with stalls and markets and bazaars of food. On one side were covered booths with superior stuff, aniline-colored cakes and sweets kept fresh in jars, tinned foods from Holland, sweet drinks served on trays; on the other, open stalls were loaded with washbasins of curry mixture and of rice, piles of fritters, bundles of vegetables curiously colored, leaves full of spicy relishes, pink drinks that must have been mostly essence of cholera, cakes that suggested rats and plague. Bell and I hunted for eggs, but we didn't get any.

I remember that he bought some of the plague-andcholera food, despite my remonstrances, and ate it on the spot. "It's quite good," he said, "—better than the greasy truck in the hotel. They know a thing or two."

"You'll be dead, kicking, by tomorrow night," I told him. And he said he wouldn't!

Trifles, rubbish! But it came back to me— how clearly!— that afternoon, years later, when I and the Malay ran amuck, in defiance of Javanese police, along the burning Sourabaya road.

Everything ends, even roads that seem to have no ending. It is not really many miles from the port to the town. I found my hotel by and by, and settled into it. I had archeological studies to make before long, and no one to hinder me in making them. If I had married you, dear lady who reads this, you would have seen to it that I did something better with my money and my time!

The hotel is like most Javanese hotels, a paradise for the human body, a poison-gas for the mind. You cannot work in a Javanese hotel. You cannot study. If you can think, it is not for long. These enchanted marble palaces, shadowed, deep-arcaded, set in the midst of palms that never stir a sleepy finger against the sun-bleached sky, filled with quiet and with the sound of dropping waters, are places for the sensuous life alone. You awake in the dawn, to eat strange, luscious fruits cooled on ice; you bathe in marble tanks, are served with endless variety of rich, spiced foods, in dining-halls like churches, by barefoot servants dressed in ghostly white. You sleep, the whole long afternoon, behind closed blinds, on your enormous bed. At dusk you eat, drink,— something fierce and drugging,— bathe, dress, go forth to drive. You return to drink more meady, treacherous Holland drinks, and eat and eat yet again, native bands playing music that intoxicates as much as do the drinks, and Javanese girls, fair though dark, with roses and white jasmine in their hair, looking softly at you from the star-sparkled arches of the terrace.

No, you need not talk scandal about me. I am good, hard Scots, and I do not waste valuable money on that which profits not. You do not find me in Dutch-Indian hotels, beyond the day or two necessary for engaging servants, making out routes and putting up my traveling kit.

But there are others.

I have seen the men, out from home— at first slim, springy, energetic, clear of eye— sink, in a year or two, down to the level of a mere fatted beast. I have seen women—

That brings me to it; I had near forgotten.

It was growing toward dusk, and Sourabaya was awaking. Down the main street of the town, with its strange mixture of old, pillared, tiled Dutch houses, and new glittering shops, came the nightly flood of splendid motorcars, filled with wax-faced Chinese merchants and diamonded Chinese wives, with Javanese chiefs and princesses, with Dutch officials, huge, gross, pink, and their fat, gorgeous womenkind. It was half-dusk; a greenish light, melting into bands of orange, filled the sky. Against the almond-white of towering trade-palaces you could see the thin, tired palms beginning to shake their leaves. There was no breeze to speak of; but the palms, and the people, made the most of It.

I was not in a motor; I was walking. People have said— apropos of a lot of very ordinary happenings in my life— that I am a brave man. I believe it, when I

think of walking in Sourabaya at the hour of the evening drive. Few white, or half-white human beings ever set boot or shoe to ground in this, the laziest, proudest city under the Line. I walked; I am primarily an archeologist, but also in some degree, a student of ethnology, and you cannot study shapes of heads and facial angles from a flying Rolls-Royce.

A motorcar, a huge, splendid one, slipping by as swiftly as a gannet goes to the deep, went past me at a corner. It nearly ran me down; I sprang aside, under an electric-light standard, and saw, as the car spun round and disappeared— Avice.

I do not know how I recognized her with such certainty, unless my recent studies helped me out. I had been teaching myself to look for the essential, the unchanging, in human faces, and to neglect mere accretions of time and circumstance. I saw, in the woman who lolled back on the brocaded cushions of that car— the squat woman shaped like two balloons, lobster-eyed with sensuous, satisfied greed— in her I saw Avice, who had been, some short years before, the dove, the rose, the angel of Frank Bell.

The woman's mind was dead— if she had ever had one, and if her delicate nymph-body had not lied, as Bell maintained furiously it did not, and as 1 held fast that it did. She was handsome, in spite of fat; she called to you. She knew it. She garnered up, gloatingly, even the stray look that I gave her as the car went round the corner. I could see her garnering such looks, living on them; using them as bait and line by which to draw her prey to her. Did she, when the line was reeled in, pull her fish to the bank and land it, or did she reel out and let it go again? I did not know or care. It matters very little, when a woman's soul has died, what becomes of the rest of her. But I thought her husband— yes, she owned one, a little dry old fellow, hunched into his coat— had the beaten look about him that one knows.

They went by; and the world and the flesh and the devil, but most of all the flesh, went by too, in an endless stream of cars, for hours longer. But I went back to the hotel, and all the way, thoughts were beating about in my brain like birds in a cave, unable to find light. I let them alone. They find the light for themselves, if you leave them.

I reached the hotel; and there, seated on the great marble veranda where the white electrics are mirrored in the pavement like moons in showy water, I found the man whom I call Carton. The ship had sailed, and he had been going on. But nothing Carton does surprises me. He was drinking lemonade; he has a childish love for sweet things. When he saw me coming, he finished quickly, and began to scrape up the sugar with a spoon. He looked so innocent and simple that I was sure he had been up to something. But this tale is not about Carton.

"Tell me," I said without preliminary, "who is the little old walnut that Avice married, and why did she, and when?"

Carton ate his sugar quickly; he had been anxious, I think, lest I should interrupt him before he had had time to enjoy it all.

"I wish you'd let me alone," he said.

"I know; you're probably busy. But I'll not speak to you again, if I meet you fifty times, provided you'll tell me."

Another man would have asked me how I knew he could tell, but Carton doesn't say things that everyone knows. That perhaps accounts for his being called a silent man, when he really is not.

He looked round him first of all, so that he could lick his spoon without being observed. You can't finish the sugar by sucking.

"Well," he said, putting down the spoon with apparent regret, "what did you expect? She married Hagen, the richest old bird in Batavia."

"How long ago?"

"About two years."

"Then she — it was—"

"Oh, the country got her first. You don't think old Hagen would have looked at that moonlight slip of a thing we came out with from Singapore? Why, I believe she was actually pious— see her at church in the dining-saloon on Sundays? No? Well, I did, and she looked like something out of a stained-glass window."

"Mere pose."

"You're shallow. It was not mere pose — quite half of it was real. Oh, I grant you, the religiosity of a young girl on her promotion, so to speak; but there was something. And she was almost anemically refined — see her picking books out of the library? You never see anything; you read too much. Well, she'd purse up her lips over any author who had an ounce of blood in him, and take something by one of those popular women who write stuff like treacle crawling out of a jug. I tried to squeeze her hand, just as an experiment, and she drew it away with a look that had all the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne in it— just ten thousand and nine hundred and ninety-nine too many, by the way; I wonder how Bell liked them! That was Avice Ferrers.

"I saw her after she'd been with her sister in Weltevreden for about a year. It had just about got her then—"

"What?"

"The country. If you weren't a scientific man, you wouldn't be so stupid. She was pounds heavier, and her cheeks had that buttery smoothness; and she'd learned to do things with her eyes. And, man, her little soul— it wasn't ever a very big one— was just shriveling away under your gaze."

"One would think you'd been in love with her yourself," I said sourly. I did not care to hear all this semi-praise of the creature.

CARTON smiled. I don't know what his "history" is; very likely he never had one. You do not like that, dear lady? I cannot help it. If you ever meet Carton, you can tell him what you think about it, and him. But whatever his days may or may not have held, I know very well, nowadays, that pastry-hearted women like Avice have no hold upon him. I knew that I was lying when I accused him of being in love, and he knew that I knew. He just went on.

"You pick up little dry facts like an ant picking up grains of corn, and you store them away. Can't you get away from your anthill once in a while, and see— see? Doesn't it mean anything to you that Java was the place they got the monkey-man's bones—"

"Or didn't."

"I know as much about the evidence as you. I choose to assume they did. Because anyhow, it's here they would get monkey-men. There's something in Java— something that throws back. Look at that."

I looked, but I saw only a Malay *serang* directing some laborers.

"Look at his physical type," said Carton. "I have to teach you your own business."

"Oh," I said. "His facial angle— "

"Confound his facial angle! Look at his expression; look at his feet— they're holding on to the ground. Look at the curve of his back and the hang of his arms. He's half monkey, as he stands, and there are millions like him."

"I don't quite follow you," I said in some confusion. For indeed, he seemed to me to be jumping about from subject to subject ratheCoddly. And I wanted to know about Miss Ferrers' marriage.

"You asked for it, and I'm giving it to you. It's all one. The force that turns out that Malay *serang*, that made the monkey-man— "

"Pithecanthropos."

"I talk English when I'm talking English. That same force— no one can say what it is, but it's rampant in Java— it gets the European, and does things to him."

"It's the idle, sensual lives they lead," I objected briskly. "It's the way they— "

"Man, don't you see that that's an effect, not a cause? The thing gets them, as I tell you; among its effects are the lives that white people lead here. It got Avice Ferrers. And Hagen liked her because of it. And she was tired waiting for Bell; you see, he had suddenly cooled —"

"Now, there you're entirely wrong," I cut in. "Bell would never have changed to her. He was a dead goner."

"What I tell you is true. Bell hung round after her as much as ever, but he didn't press the marriage. He saw she was dying!"

"What?"

Carton looked at me with a God-giveus-patience sort of expression.

"Some of her, most of her," he chose to explain. "And I judge it made him rather sick. So by and by, when he disappeared—"

"Where did he go?" I asked suddenly and violently. It came upon me that this man, who knew so much too much, knew also the one thing I desired to know. And my heart was feeling sore for my "mate" Bell.

"When he disappeared," went on Carton maddeningly, "Hagen came forward. And what was left of Avice married him. I believe she's very happy. Now, if you don't mind excusing me, I have rather a lot to do."

"What are you doing?" I asked, as he got up from his table.

"Buying curios before the shops shut for the night," explained Carton easily. I do not think he ever bought a curio in his life. Carton lies sometimes. The strange thing is that his lies do not seem to matter, much. I should not call him an untruthful man. That seems odd, does it not? It would take Carton himself to disentangle it!

HE was gone, in his quiet, strolling way, before I had had time to remember that my question about Bell was still unanswered.

It was getting late by now, near nine o'clock, and the monstrous, gorging dinner of the hotel was in full progress. I left the marble lounge, and passed through a forest of pillars— marble likewise carved and gilded and set with tall look ing-glasses— into the dining-hall. Here in spite of the heat, one could feel almost cool. Punkahs, immense and innumerable, whirled above one's head, with a droning, hypnotizing sound. The roof, thirty feet away, had all its colored windows thrown open to the stars. The floor shone white as water under shielded moons of powerful arc-lamps. I took my table, choose a plain dish out of the scores of spiced, greasy compounds, ordered straight soda, as usual, and as usual endured the contempt of the proudly stepping winewaiters in their white sarongs and jackets and gold-red sashes. No reason but that of poverty could, in the opinion of the wine-waiters, account for such mean-spirited ways.

Beside me, before me, fatted, groomed, exquisitely clean, the white men and women gorged and drank and drank. I thought I saw the back of Avice, a long way off at the other side of the hall. A procession of twenty-seven waiters wound past their chairs, carrying twenty-seven dishes of spice and relishes for

the rice. They helped themselves to all. They buried themselves in mounds of rice, and afterward dined and drank. I saw them walking to their rooms, both flushed, though not overcome, with drink.

Avice laughed. She was walking as a native woman walks; she undulated from the ankles up. I thought of the moonlight girl on the Singapore steamer, years ago. And in a moment, something in my brain fitted sharply into something else, with a click. And I went to hunt for Carton.

"Mynheer Carton?" said the clerk in the magnificient office. "Mynheer Carton has paid his bill, and he have gone away."

"Where to?"

"Mynheer Carton have taken a motor to drive him quickly down to Tandjong Prick."

"The port? But the steamer has gone."

"One steamer have gone. There is another sail now."

"What time?"

The clerk looked at the clock.

"She have sailed five minutes ago."

IN the morning I went to look for the bungalow that Carton had spoken of. I was sure now— though I could not for the life of me have told how I was sure— that something of the mystery surrounding Bell's disappearance clung to, was connected with, the place they strangely called Forgotten Soul.

I can speak Malay. By that I do not mean the pigeon Malay that every tourist manages to pick up. I mean the real language, the copious, expressive, even literary tongue that carries from Singapore to New Guinea. I have found it useful in my work, but not quite so useful, somehow, as I should have expected. Carton, I remembered, used to talk odd nonsense about Malay to me.

"I don't know half what you do," he mocked at me once, "but it's about seven times as useful to me."

"Why?" I asked him, a little piqued— for his Malay is of the kind that actually jars on a sensitive, trained ear.

"Try once in a way not knowing any, when you go studying about the kampongs, and see how it works;" he said.

That sounded simple nonsense to me. But somehow, today, as I went out into the soaking eleven o'clock sun, I remembered it. It followed me.

I went into the Chinese quarter— which was on my way to the suburb I was aiming for— and stood looking about me. There were as many Malays as Chinese. One of the miniature street-restaurants that one knows so well had made its stand beside a shop where they sold tin lamps and blue vases and

Brummagem stuff generally— you can't find Chinese goods in a Chinese quarter of Sourabaya. There were some Javanese "hunkered - ' down beside the tiny stove and the swinging baskets; they were eating crackling fried stuff and seedy cakes. I had intended to address them in well-chosen phrases (for it is not every man who can put Malay together as I can), asking them just where the house that was named Forgotten Soul might be, and why it had acquired such a name. But some queer reminiscence of Carton and his many madnesses came over me, and instead I said haltingly, "Forgotten Soul— where? - ' and made signs as a man does who cannot speak any language but his own.

Then I got a shock.

"Old fool with the turtle back, why are you bothering me?" said the Javanese, with an accent of the most perfect courtesy, with an entirely gracious smile. Before this they had always answered my questions in set phrases of Malay, very polite, and their address was the proper one— "Tuan," which means, mostly, "Chief."

I saw that he did not suppose I understood. My feelings were hurt, for I am not really old, and if my serious studies have given me a little of the typical scholar's stoop, no one has ever been sufficiently struck by it to speak about it.

But I contained myself, and merely repeated my query, at the same time holding up a silver guilder. The eyes of the Javanese looked sharp and covetous. He turned to a friend, and said— I could hardly believe my ears: "Is it worth while telling the old turtle anything?"

"Certainly not," replied the man whom he had addressed. "At least, not for a silver guilder."

I looked at the man; he was really interesting— a strong Mongolian strain, allied to Bengali, and to pure Javanese, the latter nearly half, I should say. He signaled to the first man, and then said sharply, "Wang mas!" This means "gold money"— a rude way of expressing it; I should have put it much better.

NOW, of course, since the war, nobody has gold coin. I thought the two Javanese ought surely to know that, and I was just opening my mouth to say so in a properly turned sentence— for after all, what did it matter?— when I was suddenly struck by an idea. I can't think where I got it, unless I had caught that sort of thing from recent association with Carton.

It occurred to me that the Javanese did know, that with those swift, cunning minds of theirs, they had laid a trap to test my knowledge of Malay.

If that were so—

I did not answer other than by putting back the guilder and taking out, slowly and with display, a Dutch note for ten guilders. A guilder, you will wish to know, is about one eighth of a pound, roughly speaking.

The Javanese looked at the note, and one said to the other, handing him a piece of fruit, as if they were talking only about food:

"Do you think it is a good thing to tell him anything?"

The other looked at the fruit, examined it, shook his head, and seemed to refuse to buy. What he said was:

"Tell him what he asks; there can't be any harm in that." And I regret to say he added something of a nature not flattering to my intelligence. I don't think I need repeat it.

The first Javanese, speaking slowly and very carefully, told me in Malay that the House of Forgotten Soul was a long way off, but that he had a friend who had a pony carriage. He asked me if I would have the carriage, and mentioned that it would cost me five guilders.

Five guilders was, I knew, an entirely absurd price, but I thought it best— in view of the character I had assumed— to nod agreement. The Javanese undid himself and rose, all in one flowing movement. His orange sarong and green jacket showed bright for a minute in the dark cave of a Chinese godown, and then vanished.

The "friend" must have been himself, for in a few minutes he came clattering out through an alley, seated in a silly little carriage of the kind that obliges the fare to perch uncertainly on a sort of shelf behind. I sprang up on the perch and allowed my Javanese to earn his five guilders by driving me in and out and round about the town of Sourabaya till he thought he had me fairly bewildered. In time he turned down a long, green, quiet road, an out-of-the-way sort of place, scattered with broken-down-looking godowns that once, in the days of the early occupation, might have been dwellinghouses of the old Dutch merchants. He stopped before one of them, shouted, as one shouts to a deaf man, "Forgotten Soul!" and pulled up the rickety little cart. I got down. The Javanese stood waiting, and I handed him his fare.

"You need not stop," I told him.

THE road was very quiet once he had gone. There were no vehicles here, almost no passers-by. Far above, the great poinciana trees met in a flutter of emerald and vermilion. Some Chinese coolies, dullblue clad, with immense willow-pattern hats, went by swinging loads of fruit on the ends of long bamboos. Their yellow, ducklike feet made no sound upon the roadway. It was hot; it was dreamy. I felt, as one so often does in the fever countries, that nothing about me was real, that I had somehow imagined it all.

In the dream, I saw a house at the end of the road, standing a little back. It was the sort of house you do dream about— odd and somewhat sinister-looking, with blind eyes of shuttered window. The stone veranda-pillars were

cracked across and across. There was— had been— a white-painted fence round the lot inclosing the building; it was nothing now but a jagged line of uprights held together by trails of sappy weeds. The paint on the shut door, on the close-fastened shutters, was blue and blistered. A pox of falling plaster overspread the walls. Newer Dutch houses are one-storied, in Java; this, belonging to the old colonial days, was two-storied, its upper windows being sheltered only by the overhang of the immensely steep tiled roof. Something in the very height of the place, something overgrown and weedy, suggested the unwholesome upshooting life of jungles and dank marshes — or so I felt it, in my slightly fevered mood." I remember that I pulled a quinine bottle out of my pocket as I stood there, and swallowed, chokingly, without water, a couple of tabloids.

"If I don't take care," I thought, "I'll have a temperature before I know where I am, and then I shall be seeing things that aren't there."

I pocketed the bottle and looked about me. It might have been the fever, and it might not; but I felt reluctant to pass over the few yards that separated me from the house with the curious name. I fancied, somehow, that it was not as empty as it looked. I also thought that some one was looking at me.

THERE was nobody on the narrow, deserted road. Blue shadows from the poinciana leaves moved, many-fingered, j upon the bone-white dust. A coppersmithbird kept clinking his hammer and anvil, somewhere behind a wall; and I could hear the wind blowing. I gathered up my courage, and went to the door of the house. I don't know what I expected to do there. It was locked, and nobody answered when I rapped on it with a paling from the broken fence. The place sounded hollow inside. At the back I could find no entrance, and all the windows were closely shut and barred.

I went round to the front again, and stood in the roadway looking up. Once more I had the feeling— curiously distinct — that I was being looked at.

"It's the quinine," I said to myself; for by now my head was beginning to swim, i and my skin to sweat, with the ten grains j I had swallowed. But I did not believe what I said. I moved away from the range of shuttered windows at the front, into the tangled Sargasso Sea of creepers — jasmine, alamanda, passion-flower, I don't know what— that overflowed the side veranda. There I felt relief; I could think. And looking down at the cracked, green-molded pavement of the veranda floor, I saw something.

It was a half-smoked cigarette, the kind that colored people make for themselves out of any sort of paper. I don't know to this day why I picked it up. But the moment my eyes fell on the bit of smoked and scorched print that surrounded the ashy kernel, I knew that I, and Carton—

I was sure now that Carton had not been ignorant— were right.

The print was a bit of a well-known mining journal, and it was all about tin. You have probably forgotten that Bell had been a tin man; so I will remind you of it. I had not forgotten. I knew, from internal evidence, that the paper was an old one; still, I was certain, after seeing it, that the house of Forgotten Soul, and Bell, had to do with each other.

There was nothing more to be done at the moment. The house was uninhabited, or if not, it was meant to look unin-habited. I could find no sign of use about either of the entrances; on the contrary, doorsteps and doors looked exactly as if no one had crossed the one, or opened the other, since the days of Stamford Raffles. I went out into the wide streets and the sun again, got an unoccupied pony cart, after a good deal of walking, and drove back into town.

I AM a methodical man. I made inquiries at once from the proper authorities, and learned before four o'clock that the house belonged to an eccentric and miserly old Dutch lady who lived up in the mountains, and would not spend anything on the care of her unused town property. She had left the villa of "Hague" (such was its real, official name) just at it was, ever since her daughters had died in it of the plague, many years before. Had the place been disinfected? Most certainly; it was not that which had kept it unoccupied, merely the whim of a foolish old woman. She was the widow of a former governor— on that account, she had been allowed to leave "Hague" as she pleased; but if it had been anyone else! In any case, she was sure to die soon, and then the Government would pull the place down, and erect a modern bungalow. No, no one was living there, certainly not.

"Look in the native markets for anything," Carton used to say.

I recalled Carton's advice now, and it took me that afternoon, to the marketplace— not to the market of the town of Sourabaya, but to the long stretches of the market that lines the road by the port.

I sent away my car, and began to stroll about. Of course I was stared at; a white man, walking about among the natives attracts as much attention as a white elephant. I remember thinking that that sort of thing gets on a man's nerves before long; I felt glad that mine were steady as pin-wire. I did not care how much the people stared at me.

And remembering what had happened before, I used no native languages, but asked any questions I had to ask in the rudest of pigeon Malay. And as before, I was rewarded.

It may have been chance, and it may have been Providence— I do not know; I keep an open mind about these things— that showed me, in the hands of a Javanese peddler wrapping up hot-cakes, a scrap of greasy paper given

him by the customer he was serving. It was a bit of the mining journal I have already mentioned.

THE buyer turned away with his purchases. I followed him down the road, and asked him if he would sell the cakes to me. I wanted, I said, to try what Javanese food was like.

The man was wearing one of those curious plaited hats, shaped like a medieval helmet, that one sees among the coolies. It was a large hat, close pulled down; I could not see his face clearly. He did not look at me, but he answered roughly in a word or two of curt refusal, gathered the cakes up close in his brown hands and turned away.

I was pondering over his accent— which I knew, but could not place— when I heard something that stopped me dead, there where I stood on the side of the burning roadway.

"Forgotten Soul." It was said in Javanese.

I pretended to drop something, and bent down, raking with one finger in the dust, so that I could hide the change of countenance I knew to be plainly visible. And I listened.

"The fool Englishman," said the voice, "is after Forgotten Soul."

Some one else answered him. I had straightened up now; I looked. It was another Javanese, and he said:

"As he is a fool, he will find out— nothing."

"If he found anything," said the first voice, "he would not understand."

The other made a noise of disdain, and said:

"Offer him fruit, and make him pay seven times the price. When it rains fish, shall one not reach out the hand?"

I thought it well to buy something, when they held me out a leaf full of mixed fruits, and to pay, without dispute, a couple of guilders more than I should have paid. I was going away, with a feeling of heavy defeat about me— for after all, what had I gained, save the knowledge that bits of old tin-mining papers were lying about the market?— when I saw the man in front, the purchaser of the cakes, unconsciously lift his hand to the wicker helmet on his head, and push it to one side.

Bell's way— Bell's gesture! I felt dizzy, as if the sun had pierced my pith topee and struck my brain. Then things cleared again, and I saw that the coolie, across the dark-brown heel that projected from one loose slipper, had an ineffaceable white scar. And in that moment I knew— almost all.

There was no more hesitation. I knew just what I must do. I took another car, and ordered the man to drive to the villa of "Hague." It was not so very far from the market, in a straight line. I should not have long to wait.

Through my mind, as we raced down the endless, black-hot road, with the telegraph-poles beating past us like a wood of thin light trees, so close did they appear, there went the recollection of the green deserted avenue, the house, the clinging weeds.The weeds must do it for me; I could hide myself there.

I LEFT the car a little way from the avenue, and walked down alone. It was almost as I had left it the day before. The sun was getting low by now, and there were pools of liquid gold upon the road; a lot of red flowers had fallen from the tops of the trees, looking, in the dust, like stains of clotted blood. There was nobody about. Without delay— for in teeming Java no spot stays empty long— I hurried to the side veranda and parting the creepers, slipped into shelter behind them. I hadn't time to look for possible snakes, but fortunately there were none. The wide, glossy leaves and cup-shaped yellow flowers were closely knitted; they made a perfect screen. I remember how the flowers smelled, very faint, of honey. As I sat getting my breath again, and waiting, by and by he came.

I saw a lean, tall figure padding up the road, a man in a yellow *kabaya* (Malay jacket) and the long, gay sarong worn by all Javanese. He had a helmet-shaped wicker hat; his bare dark feet were thrust into Javanese heel-less slippers, which flicked annoyingly at every step he took. His hands— carrying the parcel of cakes— and his face under the hat were dark brown; his eyebrows were black. His eyes— when I got a good look at them— were brown too, but not dark enough.

"Yes," I said to myself. I watched.

He did not go in by either of the doors. I understood the deserted appearance of the house, when I saw him glance round, and then, by some secret spring, pull out a shutter on the side veranda. He stepped inside, and before he had time to close the opening, I was in behind him.

THE man gave a great cry, dropped his poor bundle of food, and stood with his back against the nearest wall, staring, his hands stretched out.

I can't tell you how I felt. I ran to him. I seized his hands— the brown stain did not go up quite far enough; when I pulled on his wrists, they came down white inside the crumpling sleeve. I shouted questions; I cursed him for deserting his friends, and called him "good old chap," all in the same tangled sentence. And through it all, Bell, my friend Bell, stood and simply endured. He said nothing. He looked at me with eyes that were, and were not, his.

I fell silent presently. We stood staring at one another. I became aware of the room— it had been a sitting-room, perhaps; it was a mere wreck now— plaster on the floor, doors off their hinges, bars of dull light showing through

broken shutters. There was a Malay mat in one comer, and I saw a couple of cookingpots, and a spare sarong. No more.

"Bell— " I began again. But he interrupted, speaking for the first time:

"You had better talk Malay," he said in Malay. I noticed how well he spoke. I hadn't ever thought him a linguist.

"I want to know what has happened to you," I said. "Are you mad? What made you disappear all these years ago? What made you come to this cursed place? What does it all mean?"

"Do you know," replied Bell, "why the people call this house Forgotten Soul?" "No."

"Because I've lived in it, so long, and I've been forgotten. I wish I could have been forgotten a little longer. A very little!"

"We didn't forget you," I said angrily. "You've been looked for up and down and— "

"Yes. But I didn't want to be found. I have no money."

With a rush it all came upon me. The wretched room, the food bought in the market, the native clothing, that cost almost nothing to buy, and seldom needs renewal! Here, in the house so strangely named, he could have lived, as he had, for a few pence a day. He did not tell me— I do not know even now— where he got the pence. I have sometimes feared that it may have been by actual begging. At first I could find no words. I had to swallow hard before I spoke.

"Of course all that nonsense is finished. You'll come with me to my hotel and stay a bit, and then we'll get you another job somewhere."

Bell looked at me, and was silent. I felt his heavy resistance, like a dead weight dragging down.

"If not here," I said, "in the Malay States— you're known there; and if you lost one job, there'll be more to get. This is sheer madness."

I waited for his answer. It did not come. I saw a rat— two rats— sneak out of the broken flooring, and glide along the wall. They had scented the food. They seemed amazingly bold.

"This place must be alive with the brutes at night," I thought. "How can he stick it?" And again I spoke to him earnestly, urging him to come away with me.

Bell put down the parcel he was carrying, and turned his eyes— too light by just a shade for the dark of his stained face— upon me.

"You had better understand," he said. "There are reasons, three reasons, why I can't."

I was afraid to hear the reasons, but I said: "Go on."

"The first," he said, not looking at me, "is that Avice lost her soul."

"Don't be blasphemous," I told him.

HE did not seem to hear. "Of course," he said, "that made me not care. The Javanese have words even you don't know. They have words for this not caring; they know it. Well, I came not to care, and I came to live here. That was Two. I'd lost all the money I had, but the not-caring helped me to live. I lived like themselves, and they took me as one of themselves, by and by. They all knew, and they all helped me to hide. You came near being knifed here, the first day you came. I saw you, and I told them to let you alone; I didn't think you'd find— but nothing matters now, because there's a— a third reason."

If I had hated to hear the first reasons, I hated still worse to hear the last. I was afraid of it. I set my teeth to hear.

But after all, I was not to hear it. Bell went on:

"The third reason— you shall know tomorrow, if you promise to leave me now. I've only known it— a few minutes— myself."

"Why not today?" I asked. I could not face the night, with the thought of new mysteries overhanging. I have told it badly, no doubt, but this not-caring, this soul-losing, seemed to shake the very marrow of my mind.

Bell did not answer my question. He leaned against the wall, avoiding my eyes. "The rats come out of the ground," he said, as if he did not know that I was there. "They come out of the ground, where the Governor's daughters lie."

"You're going to have fever," I said. "Come back with me to the hotel."

"Not today," he said, still looking at the rats. "I promise you you may send a carriage for me tomorrow— late tomorrow — and I will come in it."

Bell, I remembered, was no promisebreaker. It seemed best to let him have his fancy, this one day.

"All right," I said, "I'll leave you now, but I'll send that carriage tomorrow afternoon."

He did not answer me. I left him there, silent, standing in the semi-darkness, looking down at the rats.

ON the following afternoon, I got a motorcar, and drove again to the street of Forgotten Soul. It was no longer quiet. In front of the house half a dozen Government coolies were waiting. The front door was open, and the weeds torn down.

As I whirled up to the house, a white man came out of it. He was tall and important-looking; he wore some sort of uniform.

"It is forbid to come in," he told me loudly, holding up one hand.

"What's the matter?" I asked him; "I've come to fetch the white man who lives here."

"No white man is living here. There is one dead."

"Dead!"

"He has died of bubonic plague of a very bad quick variety, in the night. They have reported to me, and I am come to remove the corpse and disinfect the place. "

"I— I— he was well yesterday; I saw him. Are you sure it's the same? Can I—"

"It is not permit to go in. This is a white man disguised as native; there is no one who know who he has been. We will ask you for official information, if you have known him."

"How did he get it? Was it a bad— "

"The natives here, they say the rats were always coming out of the ground to the house, because it is too old. In Java, the rat is dangerous."

"Especially," I thought, "when plague people have been buried in the back yard." But I said nothing. What was there to say? Nor did I stop to be questioned; I knew what my mate Bell would have wished. I got into the car, as the Dutchman turned back to his work, and ordered the Malay chauffeur to go hard. We spun fast down the dusty avenue, where the poinciana blossoms still lay piled in clots of scarlet, and all but upset another vehicle coming from the town. It was Bell's carriage, come to fetch him at last— the dead-cart from the hospital.

THE last time I saw the man I have I called Carton, he told me a little— more than Carton generally tells. A flash of lightning one dark night, when he was passing the bungalow had shown him Bell, out in the garden. He had never been intimate with him, but he knew him instantly; Carton forgets nothing. He could not afford— so I gathered— to offend Bell's native friends. Hence the clever hints that set me at work. But Carton says I bungled it. I do not see what more I could have done.

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16: Charon Makes a Discovery

John Kendrick Bangs

1862-1922

In: *A Houseboat on the Styx*, 1895

The Associated Shades series of short stories was a bright invention of John Kendrick Bangs, in which the souls of real and imaginary people, lingering in a fancy houseboat on the River Styx, have amusing encounters and disputes. This is the first story in the long series, which evolved into four volumes.

CHARON, THE FERRYMAN of renown, was cruising slowly along the Styx one pleasant Friday morning not long ago, and as he paddled idly on he chuckled mildly to himself as he thought of the monopoly in ferriage which in the course of years he had managed to build up.

"It's a great thing," he said, with a smirk of satisfaction— "it's a great thing to be the go-between between two states of being; to have the exclusive franchise to export and import shades from one state to the other, and withal to have had as clean a record as mine has been. Valuable as is my franchise, I never corrupted a public official in my life, and—"

Here Charon stopped his soliloquy and his boat simultaneously. As he rounded one of the many turns in the river a singular object met his gaze, and one, too, that filled him with misgiving. It was another craft, and that was a thing not to be tolerated. Had he, Charon, owned the exclusive right of way on the Styx all these years to have it disputed here in the closing decade of the Nineteenth Century? Had not he dealt satisfactorily with all, whether it was in the line of ferriage or in the providing of boats for pleasure-trips up the river? Had he not received expressions of satisfaction, indeed, from the most exclusive families of Hades with the very select series of picnics he had given at Charon's Glen Island? No wonder, then, that the queer-looking boat that met his gaze, moored in a shady nook on the dark side of the river, filled him with dismay.

"Blow me for a landlubber if I like that!" he said, in a hardly audible whisper. "And shiver my timbers if I don't find out what she's there for. If anybody thinks he can run an opposition line to mine on this river he's mightily mistaken. If it comes to competition, I can carry shades for nothing and still quaff the B. & G. yellow-label benzine three times a day without experiencing a financial panic. I'll show 'em a thing or two if they attempt to rival me. And what a boat! It looks for all the world like a Florentine barn on a canal-boat."

Charon paddled up to the side of the craft, and, standing up in the middle of his boat, cried out,

"Ship ahoy!"

There was no answer, and the Ferryman hailed her again. Receiving no response to his second call, he resolved to investigate for himself; so, fastening his own boat to the stern-post of the stranger, he clambered on board. If he was astonished as he sat in his ferry-boat, he was paralysed when he cast his eye over the unwelcome vessel he had boarded. He stood for at least two minutes rooted to the spot. His eye swept over a long, broad deck, the polish of which resembled that of a ball-room floor. Amidships, running from three-quarters aft to three-quarters forward, stood a structure that in its lines resembled, as Charon had intimated, a barn, designed by an architect enamoured of Florentine simplicity; but in its construction the richest of woods had been used, and in its interior arrangement and adornment nothing more palatial could be conceived.

"What's the blooming thing for?" said Charon, more dismayed than ever. "If they start another line with a craft like this, I'm very much afraid I'm done for after all. I wouldn't take a boat like mine myself if there was a floating palace like this going the same way. I'll have to see the Commissioners about this, and find out what it all means. I suppose it'll cost me a pretty penny, too, confound them!"

A prey to these unhappy reflections, Charon investigated further, and the more he saw the less he liked it. He was about to encounter opposition, and an opposition which was apparently backed by persons of great wealth— perhaps the Commissioners themselves. It was a consoling thought that he had saved enough money in the course of his career to enable him to live in comfort all his days, but this was not really what Charon was after. He wished to acquire enough to retire and become one of the smart set. It had been done in that section of the universe which lay on the bright side of the Styx, why not, therefore, on the other, he asked.

"I'm pretty well connected even if I am a boatman," he had been known to say. "With Chaos for a grandfather, and Erebus and Nox for parents, I've just as good blood in my veins as anybody in Hades. The Noxes are a mighty fine family, not as bright as the Days, but older; and we're poor— that's it, poor— and it's money makes caste these days. If I had millions, and owned a railroad, they'd call me a yacht-owner. As I haven't, I'm only a boatman. Bah! Wait and see! I'll be giving swell functions myself someday, and these upstarts will be on their knees before me begging to be asked. Then I'll get up a little aristocracy of my own, and I won't let a soul into it whose name isn't mentioned in the Grecian mythologies. Mention in Burke's *Peerage* and the Élite directories of America won't admit anybody to Commodore Charon's house unless there's some other mighty good reason for it."

Foreseeing an unhappy ending to all his hopes, the old man clambered sadly back into his ancient vessel and paddled off into the darkness. Some hours later, returning with a large company of new arrivals, while counting up the profits of the day Charon again caught sight of the new craft, and saw that it was brilliantly lighted and thronged with the most famous citizens of the Erebean country. Up in the bow was a spirit band discoursing music of the sweetest sort. Merry peals of laughter rang out over the dark waters of the Styx. The clink of glasses and the popping of corks punctuated the music with a frequency which would have delighted the soul of the most ardent lover of commas, all of which so overpowered the grand master boatman of the Stygian Ferry Company that he dropped three oboli and an American dime, which he carried as a pocket-piece, overboard. This, of course, added to his woe; but it was forgotten in an instant, for someone on the new boat had turned a search-light directly upon Charon himself, and simultaneously hailed the master of the ferry-boat.

"Charon!" cried the shade in charge of the light. "Charon, ahoy!"

"Ahoy yourself!" returned the old man, paddling his craft close up to the stranger. "What do you want?"

"You," said the shade. "The house committee want to see you right away."

"What for?" asked Charon, cautiously.

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm only a member of the club, and house committees never let mere members know anything about their plans. All I know is that you are wanted," said the other.

"Who are the house committee?" queried the Ferryman.

"Sir Walter Raleigh, Cassius, Demosthenes, Blackstone, Doctor Johnson, and Confucius," replied the shade.

"Tell 'em I'll be back in an hour," said Charon, pushing off. "I've got a cargo of shades on board consigned to various places up the river. I've promised to get 'em all through tonight, but I'll put on a couple of extra paddles— two of the new arrivals are working their passage this trip— and it won't take as long as usual. What boat is this, anyhow?"

"The *Nancy Nox*, of Erebus."

"Thunder!" cried Charon, as he pushed off and proceeded on his way up the river. "Named after my mother! Perhaps it'll come out all right yet."

More hopeful of mood, Charon, aided by the two dead-head passengers, soon got through with his evening's work, and in less than an hour was back seeking admittance, as requested, to the company of Sir Walter Raleigh and his fellow-members on the house committee. He was received by these worthies with considerable effusiveness, considering his position in society, and it warmed the cockles of his aged heart to note that Sir Walter, who had always

been rather distant to him since he had carelessly upset that worthy and Queen Elizabeth in the middle of the Styx far back in the last century, permitted him to shake three fingers of his left hand when he entered the committee-room.

"How do you do, Charon?" said Sir Walter, affably. "We are very glad to see you."

"Thank you, kindly, Sir Walter," said the boatman. "I'm glad to hear those words, your honour, for I've been feeling very bad since I had the misfortune to drop your Excellency and her Majesty overboard. I never knew how it happened, sir, but happen it did, and but for her Majesty's kind assistance it might have been the worse for us. Eh, Sir Walter?"

The knight shook his head menacingly at Charon. Hitherto he had managed to keep it a secret that the Queen had rescued him from drowning upon that occasion by swimming ashore herself first and throwing Sir Walter her ruff as soon as she landed, which he had used as a life-preserver.

"Sh!" he said, *sotto voce*. "Don't say anything about that, my man."

"Very well, Sir Walter, I won't," said the boatman; but he made a mental note of the knight's agitation, and perceived a means by which that illustrious courtier could be made useful to him in his scheming for social advancement.

"I understood you had something to say to me," said Charon, after he had greeted the others.

"We have," said Sir Walter. "We want you to assume command of this boat."

The old fellow's eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"You want a captain, eh?" he said.

"No," said Confucius, tapping the table with a diamond-studded chopstick. "No. We want a— er— what the deuce is it they call the functionary, Cassius?"

"Senator, I think," said Cassius.

Demosthenes gave a loud laugh.

"Your mind is still running on Senatorships, my dear Cassius. That is quite evident," he said. "This is not one of them, however. The title we wish Charon to assume is neither Captain nor Senator; it is Janitor."

"What's that?" asked Charon, a little disappointed. "What does a Janitor have to do?"

"He has to look after things in the house," explained Sir Walter. "He's a sort of proprietor by proxy. We want you to take charge of the house, and see to it that the boat is kept shipshape."

"Where is the house?" queried the astonished boatman.

"This is it," said Sir Walter. "This is the house, and the boat too. In fact, it is a house-boat."

"Then it isn't a new-fangled scheme to drive me out of business?" said Charon, warily.

"Not at all," returned Sir Walter. "It's a new-fangled scheme to set you up in business. We'll pay you a large salary, and there won't be much to do. You are the best man for the place, because, while you don't know much about houses, you do know a great deal about boats, and the boat part is the most important part of a house-boat. If the boat sinks, you can't save the house; but if the house burns, you may be able to save the boat. See?"

"I think I do, sir," said Charon.

"Another reason why we want to employ you for Janitor," said Confucius, "is that our club wants to be in direct communication with both sides of the Styx; and we think you as Janitor would be able to make better arrangements for transportation with yourself as boatman, than some other man as Janitor could make with you."

"Spoken like a sage," said Demosthenes.

"Furthermore," said Cassius, "occasionally we shall want to have this boat towed up or down the river, according to the house committee's pleasure, and we think it would be well to have a Janitor who has some influence with the towing company which you represent."

"Can't this boat be moved without towing?" asked Charon.

"No," said Cassius.

"And I'm the only man who can tow it, eh?"

"You are," said Blackstone. "Worse luck."

"And you want me to be Janitor on a salary of what?"

"A hundred oboli a month," said Sir Walter, uneasily.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Charon. "I'll accept the office on a salary of two hundred oboli a month, with Saturdays off."

The committee went into executive session for five minutes, and on their return informed Charon that in behalf of the Associated Shades they accepted his offer.

"In behalf of what?" the old man asked.

"The Associated Shades," said Sir Walter. "The swellest organization in Hades, whose new house-boat you are now on board of. When shall you be ready to begin work?"

"Right away," said Charon, noting by the clock that it was the hour of midnight. "I'll start in right away, and as it is now Saturday morning, I'll begin by taking my day off."

17: The Friends

Stacy Aumonier

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WHITE AND MAPLESON often tried to recall the occasion when their friendship began, but neither succeeded. Perhaps it had its origin in some moment when the memory was to some extent blurred. Certain it is that they drifted together across the miasma of commercial London, and founded a deep and lasting friendship that found its chief expression in the chinking of glasses in the saloon and luncheon bars of various hostelries off Oxford Street and Bloomsbury.

White acted as an agent for a firm of wire-mattress manufacturers in Old Street in the City, and as his business was conducted principally among the furnishing and upholstering outfitters in the West End, and as Mapleson was the manager of the brass-bed department at Taunton's, the large furnishing emporium in Bloomsbury, it is not surprising that they came in contact, and that they had many interests in common. There is, alas! no doubt that the most absorbing interest of both was the consumption of liquid refreshment, and there is also, alas! no doubt that the friendship was quickened by the curious coincidence of their mental vision when stimulated by alcoholic fumes. And it is here that one or two curious facts relating to the personalities of the two men should be noted. During the day it would be no uncommon thing for either man to consume anything between ten and fifteen whiskies and sodas, and sometimes even more; yet of neither man could it be said that he was ever really drunk. On the other hand, of neither man could it be said that he was ever really sober. White was a man of medium height, rather pale and slight.

He had a dark moustache, and was always neatly dressed in a dark blue suit, with well-fitting boots and gloves. He was extremely quiet and courteous in manner, and his manner varied but little. The effect of alcohol upon him was only to accentuate his courtesy and politeness. Toward the evening his lips would tremble a little, but he would become more and more ingratiating. His voice would descend to a refined gentle croon, his eyes would just glow with a sympathetic light, and he would listen with his head slightly on one side and an expression that conveyed the idea that the remarks of the speaker were a matter of great moment to him. Not that he did not speak himself; on the contrary, he spoke well, but always with a deferential timbre, as though attuning himself to the mood and mental attitude of his companion.

On the other hand, Mapleson always started the day badly. He was a large, florid man, with a puffy face and strangely colourless eyes. He wore a ponderous frock-coat that was just a little out of date, with a waistcoat that

hung in folds, and the folds never seemed free from sandwich crumbs and tobacco-ash. He had an unfortunate habit with his clothes of never being quite complete. That is to say, that if he had on a new top-hat, his boots were invariably shabby; or if his boots were a recent acquisition, his top-hat would seem all brushed the wrong way. As I say, he always started the day badly. He would be very late and peevish, and would fuss about with pills and cloves. He would complain of not being quite "thumbs up." Eleven-fifteen would invariably find him round at the Monitor, leaning against the mahogany bar and asking Mrs. Wylde to mix him "a whisky and peppermint," or some other decoction that between them they considered would be just the thing for his special complaint that morning. "In the way of business" he would treat and be treated by several other pals in "the sticks," as this confraternity called the furnishing trade, It would be interesting to know what proportion of Mapleson's and White's income was devoted to this good cause. When Mapleson would arrive home sometimes late at night, breathing heavily, and carrying with him the penetrating atmosphere of the tap-room, he would say in response to the complaints of his tired wife:

"I hate the stuff, my dear. You have to do it, though. It's all in the way of business."

A sociologist might have discovered, if he were searching for concrete instances, that White and Mapleson spent on each other every year very nearly eighty pounds, although the business they did together amounted to rather less than thirty, a somewhat unsound premium.

As the day wore on, Mapleson would improve. And it was one of the assets of the White-Mapleson friendship that they usually did not meet till luncheon-time. Then the two friends would chink glasses and stroll arm in arm into Polati's, in Oxford Street, for, as Mapleson would say, "When a man works hard he needs feeding," and White would agree with him deferentially, and they would secure a seat not too near the band, and after thoroughly considering the menu, they would order a "mixed grill," as being "something English and that you can get your teeth into." During the interval of waiting for the mixed grill, which took fifteen minutes to prepare, Mapleson would insist on standing White a gin-and-bitters, and of course it was only right and courteous of White to return the compliment. The mixed grill would be washed down with a tankard of ale or more often with whisky and soda, after which the friends would sometimes share a Welsh rabbit or a savoury, and it was Mapleson who introduced the plan of finishing the meal with a coffee and liqueur. "It stimulates one's mind for the afternoon's business," he would explain, and White flattered him on his good sense, and insisted on standing an extra liqueur, "just to give value to one's cigar." Under the influence of these

good things, Mapleson would become garrulous, and White even more soothing and sympathetic. This luncheon interval invariably lasted two hours or two hours and a half. They would then part, each to his own business, while making an appointment to meet later in the afternoon at the Duke of Gadsburg.

And here a notable fact must be recorded: for an hour or two in the afternoon each man *did* do some work. And it is a remarkable point that Taunton's, the great house in Bloomsbury, always considered Mapleson a good salesman, as indeed he was. The vast lapses of time that he spent away from business were explained away on the score of active canvassing. His "turnover" for the year compared favourably with that of the other managers at Taunton's. While of White strange rumours of the enormous fortune that he was accumulating were always current. The natural reserve of the wire-mattress agent, and his remarkable lucidity on matters of finance, added to the fact that he took in and studied *The Statist*, gave him a unique position in the upholstering world. Men would whisper together over their glasses and say, "Ah, old White! He knows a thing or two," and grave speculations would go on as to whether his income ran into four figures, and in what speculations he invested his money. Considerable profundity was given to these rumours by the fact that White always *had* money and that he was always willing to lend it. He carried a sovereign purse that seemed inexhaustible.

Mapleson, on the other hand, though natively lavish, had periods of "financial depression." At these periods he would drink more and become maudlin and mawkish, and it was invariably White who helped him out of his troubles. The two friends would meet later in the afternoon "to take a cup of tea," and it often happened that Mapleson felt that tea would not be just the thing for his nervous constitution; so White would prescribe a whisky and soda, and they would adjourn to a place where such things may be procured. It is remarkable how quickly the time passed under these conditions; but just before six Mapleson would "run back to the shop to see if any orders had come in." With studious consideration White would wait for him. It was generally half-past six or seven before Mapleson returned, thoroughly exhausted with his day's work.

It was then that the suavity and charm of White's manner was most ingratiating. He would insist on Mapleson having a comfortable seat by the fire in the saloon, and himself carrying across the drinks from the bar. Mapleson soon became comforted, and would suggest "a game of pills before going home." Nothing appealed to White more than this, for he was a remarkable billiard-player. Young Charlie Maybird, who is a furniture draftsman and an expert on sport, used to say that "White could give any pub marker in London

forty in a hundred and beat him off the mark." He had a curious feline way of following the balls round the table; he seemed almost to purr over them, to nurse them and stroke them, and make them perform most astounding twists and turns. And every time he succeeded, he would give a sort of self-depreciatory croon, as much as to say: "I'm so sorry! I really don't know how the balls happen to do all this." And yet it is remarkable how often White lost, especially against Mapleson.

Mapleson was one of those players who give one the impression of being an expert on an off-day. As a matter of fact, he never had an "on" day. He was just a third-rate player; only he would attempt most difficult shots, and then give vent to expressions of the utmost surprise and disgust that they didn't come off.

The billiards would last till eight o'clock or half-past, when a feeling of physical exhaustion would prompt the arrangement that "a chop would be a good idea." They would then adjourn once more to the dining-room at the Monitor, and regale themselves with chops, cheese, and ale, by which time Mapleson would arrive at the conclusion that it wasn't worth while going home; so an adjournment would be made once more to the bar, and the business of the evening would begin.

It might be worth while to recall one or two features of the Monitor bar, which was invariably crowded by salesmen and assistants from Taunton's, and was looked upon as a sort of headquarters of the upholstering trade at that time. It was a large room, fitted in the usual way with glittering mahogany and small glass mirrors. Two long seats upholstered in green leather were set about a cheerful fireplace of blue tiles. There were also four small circular tables with marble tops, and on each side of the fireplace two enormous bright-blue pots of hideous design containing palms. On the side facing the bar was a florid staircase with a brass hand-rail leading up to the dining and billiard-rooms.

The only difference that a stranger might have felt between this and any other place of similar description at that time lay perhaps in its mental atmosphere. There was always a curious feeling of freemasonry. In addition to Mrs. Wylde there were two other barmaids, Nancy and Olive, who was also sometimes called "the Titmouse." Both were tall, rather thin girls, with a wealth of wonderful flaxen hair. They seemed to spend a considerable amount of time, when not engaged in serving, in brewing themselves cocoa and hot milk. Olive was a teetotaller, and confessed frankly with regard to alcohol that she "hated the muck," but Nancy would occasionally drink stout.

To be served by Mrs. Wylde was a treat that only occasionally occurred to the more favoured devotees of the Monitor. She was a woman of enormous proportions, with a white-powdered face and also a wealth of flaxen hair. She

invariably wore a rather shabby black dress, trimmed with lace, and a huge bunch of flowers, usually lilies and carnations.

Now, everybody who came into the bar or the Monitor seemed not only to know Nancy and Olive and Mrs. Wylde by name, but everybody else by their name or nickname. For instance, this sort of thing would happen: a pale, thin young man, with pointed boots and a sort of semi-sporting suit, would creep furtively in and go up to the bar and lean across and shake hands with Nancy, and after a normal greeting would say:

"Has the Captain been in?" Nancy would reply:

"Yes, he was in with the Rabbit about four o'clock." Then the young man would say:

"Oh, didn't he leave nothing for me?" and Nancy would say:

"No. I wouldn't be surprised if he came in later. 'Ere, I tell you what—" and she would draw the young man to a corner of the bar, and there would be a whispered conversation for a few moments, and then the young man would go out. All of which would seem very mysterious to a casual visitor.

Of this atmosphere White and Mapleson were part and parcel. They had their own particular little round table near the fire, where, despite Mapleson's daily avowal to get home, one could rely on finding them nearly every evening. And they gathered about them a small colony of kindred spirits. Here they would sit very often till nearly twelve o'clock, when the Monitor shut, drinking whisky and talking. As the evening advanced, Mapleson expanded. One of his favourite themes was conscription. On this subject he and White were absolutely in accord.

"Every man ought to be made to serve his country," Mapleson would say, bringing his fist down with a bang on the marble table. "He ought to be made to realize his civil responsibilities and what he owes to the empire. Every man under thirty-five should serve three years."— Mapleson was forty-four— "It seems to me we're becoming a nation of knock-kneed, sentimental women."

And White would dilate upon what the Germans were doing and would give precise facts and figures of the strength of the German army, and the cost and probabilities of landing ten army corps on the coast of Suffolk.

Another favourite theme was the action of "these silly women," and Mapleson would set the bar in roars of laughter with a description of what *he* would do if *he* were Home Secretary.

Mapleson was very fond of talking about "his principles." In conversation it seemed that his actions must be hedged in by these iron-bound conventions. In effect they were virtually as follows: Business comes first always; never fail to keep a business appointment; never mix port and whisky; never give anything to a stranger that you might give to a pal.

He had other rules of life, but they were concerned exclusively with questions of diet and drinking, and need not concern us here.

Thoroughly exhausted with the day's business, Mapleson would leave the imperturbable White just before twelve o'clock, and not infrequently would find it necessary to take a cab to Baker Street to catch his last train to Willesden Green, where he lived, and where he would arrive at night, having spent during the day a sum varying between twenty and thirty shillings, which was precisely the amount he allowed his wife every week to keep house for a family of five, and to include food, clothing, and washing.

White lived at Acton, and no one ever quite knew how he arrived there or by what means. But he never failed to report at nine o'clock the next morning at Old Street, with all his notes, orders, and instructions neatly written out. It was remarkable how long the Monitor remained the headquarters of this fraternity, for, as one of them remarked, "the licensing business is very sensitive "in the same way that a flock of crows will simultaneously and without any apparent reason fly from one hill to another; it will be a sort of fashion for a group of men to patronise a certain establishment and then suddenly to segregate elsewhere. It is true that there were one or two attempts at defection— Charlie Maybird once made an effort to establish a headquarters as far away as the Trocadero even— but the birds soon returned to the comforting hostelry of Mrs. Wylde.

And then one summer Mapleson was very ill. He got wet through walking to Baker Street one evening when, after having started, he found he had only three coppers on him. He travelled home in his wet clothes, and next day developed a bad chill, which turned into pneumonia. For days he lay in a critical state, but, thanks to the attention of Mrs. Mapleson, who did not go to bed for three nights, and a careful doctor, he got over the crisis. But the doctor forbade him to go back to business for a fortnight, and suggested that if it was possible to arrange it, a few days at the seaside might set him up. White called several times, and was most anxious and solicitous, and assured Mrs. Mapleson that he would do anything in his power to help his friend, and sent a large basket of expensive fruits and some bottles of very old port wine.

Mapleson's illness, however, was of more troublesome a nature than appeared at first. After a rather serious relapse the doctor said that his heart was not quite what it should be, and it was nearly a month before the question of moving him could be considered. Taunton's treated Mapleson very well over this, and his salary was paid every week; only, of course, he lost his commission, which in the ordinary way represented the bulk of his income, and it became necessary for Mrs. Mapleson to economize with the utmost skill, especially as the invalid required plenty of good and well-cooked food on

regaining his strength. The rest of the family had therefore to go on shorter commons than usual, and matters were not helped by the fact of one of the children developing glands and being in an enfeebled condition. White called one evening, and was drinking a glass of the old port with the invalid, and they were discussing how it could be arranged for Mapleson to get a week at Brighton.

"I think I could travel now," said Mapleson; "only I don't see how the missus is going to leave Flora."

It was then that White had an inspiration. If it would help matters in the Mapleson family he would be pleased to take a week off and go to Brighton with Mapleson. Mapleson hailed this idea with delight, and Mrs. Mapleson was informed, on entering the room a little later, "You need not bother about it any more, my dear; White has been good enough to offer to go to Brighton with me." Mrs. Mapleson was a woman who said very little, and it was difficult on this occasion to know what she thought. In fact, her taciturnity at times irritated Mapleson beyond endurance. She merely paused, drew in her thin pale lips, and murmured, "All right, dear," and then busied herself with preparing Mapleson's evening broth.

The friends were very lucky with the weather. Fresh breezes off the Channel tempered the fierce August sun and made the conditions on the front delightful. It might be hinted that perhaps the weather might have been otherwise for all the interest that they took in it.

For the first day or so, finding his vitality returning to him, Mapleson persuaded his companion that the choicest spot in Brighton was the saloon bar of the Old Ship. And he could not show his gratitude sufficiently. White was given carte blanche to order anything he liked. But White would not listen to such generosity. He knew that the expenses that Mapleson had had to endure must be telling on him, so he insisted on paying at least twice out of three times. Mapleson acknowledged that it was "a hell of a worry and responsibility having a family to keep. They simply eat up the money, my dear chap."

The week passed quickly enough, and both were soon back at their occupations in town. The friendship pursued the even tenor of its way, and it was fifteen months before any incident came to disturb it.

Then one day in October something happened to White. He fell down in the street, and was taken to a hospital. It was rumoured that he was dead. Consternation prevailed in the upholstering confraternity, and Mapleson made anxious enquiries at the hospital bureau. It was difficult to gather precise details, but it was announced that White was very ill, and that a very serious operation would have to be performed. Mapleson returned to the bar of the Monitor harbouring a nameless dread. A strange feeling of physical sickness

crept over him. He sat in the corner of the bar, sipping his whisky, enveloped in a lugubrious gloom. He heard the young sparks enter and laugh and joke about White. It was a subject of constant and cynical mirth. "Hullo," they would say, "heard about old White? He's done in at last." And then there would be whisperings and chucklings, and he would hear: "Drunk himself to death. Doesn't stand a dog's chance, my dear chap. My uncle had the same thing. Why, he's been at it now for about twenty-five years. Can't think how he's lasted so long." And then they would come grinning up to Mapleson, hoping for more precise details. "Sorry to hear about your friend, Mr. Mapleson. How did it happen?"

Mapleson could not stand it. He pushed back his half-filled glass, and stumbled out of the bar. He was not aware of an affection for White, or of any sentiment other than a vast fear and a strange absorbing depression. He crept into the saloon of a small house off the Charing Cross Road, where no one would be likely to know him, and sat silently sipping from his glass. It seemed to have no effect upon him. The vision of White lying there, like death, and perhaps even now the doctors busy with their steel knives—Mapleson shivered. He ordered more whisky and drank it neat. He stumbled on into other bars all the way to Trafalgar Square, wrestling with his fear, and drinking. The spirits ultimately took their effect, and he sat somewhere, in some dark corner, he could never remember where, with his mind in a state of trance. He remembered being turned out— it must have been twelve o'clock— and engaging a cab— he could just remember his address— and ordering the man to drive home. In the cab he went sound asleep, hopelessly drunk for the first time in many years. He knew nothing more till the next day. Some one must have come down to help carry him in; he was no light weight. He woke up about one o'clock, feeling very ill and scared. He jumped up and called out:

"What the devil's the time? What are we all doing? Why haven't I been called?"

Mrs. Mapleson came in; she put her hand on his forehead and said:

"It's all right. I sent a telegram to say you were ill. You had better stop here. I'll get you some tea."

Mapleson fell back on the pillows, and the sickening recollection of last night came back to him.

Later in the evening Mrs. Mapleson came in again and said:

"I hear that Mr. White has had his operation, and is going on as well as could be expected."

Beads of perspiration streamed down Mapleson's face, and he murmured, "My God! my God!" That was all that was said, and the next day Mapleson went back to work.

The officials at the hospital seemed curiously reticent about White. The only information to be gleaned for some days was that he was alive. Mapleson went about his work with nerveless indifference. He drank, but his drinking was more automatic than spontaneous. He drank from habit, but he gained neither pleasure nor profit from doing so.

The nameless fear pursued him. Great bags appeared under his eyes, which were partly blood-shot. He stooped in his walk, and began to make mistakes in his accounts, and to be abstracted in dealing with customers.

He was arraigned before two of the directors of Taunton's, and one of them finished a harangue by suggesting that "it might be more conformable to business methods if he would remove the traces of yesterday's breakfast from the folds of his waistcoat." The large man received these criticisms in a pathetic silence. "Poor old Mapleson!" they said round in the bar of the Monitor. "I've never seen a chap cut up so about anything as he is about White," and then abstract discussions on friendship would follow, and remarkable instances of friendship formed in business.

Of course White would die— that was a settled and arranged thing, and curiously enough little sympathy was expressed even by those to whom White had lent money. Despite his charm of manner and his generosity, they all felt that there was something about White they didn't understand. He was too clever, too secretive.

On Friday he was slightly better, but on Saturday he had a relapse, and on Sunday morning, when Mapleson called at the hospital, he was informed that White was sinking, and they didn't expect him to last forty-eight hours.

Mapleson had inured himself to this thought; he had made up his mind to this conclusion from the first, and this last intimation hardly affected him. He went about like one stunned, without volition, without interest. He was only aware of a vast unhappiness and misery of which White was in some way a factor.

For five days the wire-mattress agent lay on the verge of death, and then he began to rally slightly. The house surgeon said it was one of the most remarkable constitutions he had ever come up against. For three days there was a distinct improvement, followed by another relapse; but still White fought on. At the end of another week he was out of danger, but the convalescence was long and tedious.

When at the end of six weeks he was well enough to leave the hospital, the house surgeon took him to one side and said:

"Now look here, my friend, we re going to let you out. And there's no reason why you shouldn't get fairly well again. Only I want you to understand

this: if you touch alcohol again in any form— in any case, for years— well, you might as well put a bullet through your own head."

In another ten days White was back at business, looking exactly the same as ever, speaking in the same suave voice. He soon appeared in the Monitor, but with the utmost courtesy declined all offers of drinks except ginger-ale. It need hardly be said that to Mapleson such an event seemed a miracle. He had sunk into a low, morbid condition from which he had never hoped to rise.

Out of courtesy the first evening Mapleson insisted on drinking ginger-ale himself, so that his friend should not feel out of it.

And they sat and had a discussion far into the night, White giving luminous and precise details of the whole of his illness and operation, eulogizing hospital methods, and discussing the whole aspect of society towards therapeutics in a calmly detached way.

But Mapleson was not happy. He was glad to have White back, but the element of fear that White had introduced him to was not eliminated. He felt ill himself, and there somehow seemed a great gap between White in the old days and White drinking ginger-ale and talking medicine. For three nights Mapleson kept this up, and then thought he would have "just a night-cap."

It gradually developed into the position that Mapleson resumed his whisky and White stuck to his ginger-ale; and it is a curious fact that this arrangement depressed Mapleson more than it did White. He drank copiously and more frequently in order to create an atmosphere of his own; but always there was White looking just the same, talking just the same.

The ginger-ale got on Mapleson's nerves. He felt that he couldn't stand it, and a strange and enervating depression began to creep over him again. For days this arrangement held good. White seeming utterly indifferent as to what he drank, and Mapleson getting more and more depressed because White didn't drink whisky. At length Mapleson suggested one evening that "surely just one" wouldn't hurt White. But White said with the deepest tone of regret that he was afraid it would be rather unwise; and as a matter of fact, he had got so used to doing without it that he really hardly missed it.

From that moment a settled gloom and depression took hold of Mapleson. He just stood there looking at White and listening to him, but hardly troubling to speak himself. He felt utterly wretched. He got into such a state that White began to show a sympathetic alarm, and one evening toward the end of February, as they were sitting at their favourite table in the Monitor, White said, "Well, I'll just have a whisky and soda with you if you like."

This was one of the happiest evenings of Mapleson's life. As soon as his friend began to drink, some chord in his own nature responded; his eyes glowed, he became garrulous and entertaining.

They had another, and then went to a music-hall, into the lounge; but there was such a crowd that they could not see the stage, so they went to the bar at the back and had another drink and a talk. How they talked that night! They talked about business and dogs and conscription and women and the empire and tobacco and the staff of Taunton's. They had a wild orgy of talk and drink. That night White drank eleven whiskies and sodas, and Mapleson got cheerfully and gloriously drunk.

It was perhaps as well that the friends enjoyed this bacchanalia, for it was the last time they met. By four o'clock the next afternoon White was dead.

Mapleson heard of it the following night. He was leaning against the fireplace in the Monitor, expatiating upon the wonderful improvement in White, and extolling his virtues, when young Howard Aldridge, the junior salesman to Mr. Vincent Pelt of Taunton's, came in to say that White's brother-in-law had just rung up Mr. Pelt to say that White was dead. When Mapleson heard this he muttered, "My Christ!"

These were the last words that Mapleson ever uttered in the bar of the Monitor.

He picked up his hat and went out into the street. It was the same feeling of numbed terror and physical sickness that assailed him. With no plan of action arranged, he surprised his wife by arriving home before ten o'clock and by going to bed. He was shivering. She took him up a hot-water bottle and said, "I'm sorry to hear about White." Mapleson didn't answer, but his teeth chattered. He lay awake half the night thinking of death.

The next day he got up and went to business as usual, but for the second time the head of the firm felt it his duty to point out to him one or two cases of negligence and to warn him that "these things must not happen in the future."

Two days later Mapleson received a postcard signed by "F. Peabody," to say that the funeral of the late G. L. White would take place at such-and-such a church at East Acton, and would leave the "Elms," Castlereach Road, Acton, at twelve o'clock, and it was intimated that a seat for Mr. Mapleson would be found in a carriage.

A fine driving rain out of a leaden sky greeted Mapleson when he set out for White's funeral on the Saturday. His wife tried to persuade him not to go, for he was really ill; but he made no comment. He fiddled about with a timetable, and could come to no satisfactory decision about the way to get there. His wife ultimately looked him up a train to Hammersmith, from which terminus he could get a train. Before reaching Hammersmith a strange revulsion came over him. Why, after all, should he go to this funeral? White wouldn't know about it, and what did he know of White's relatives? A strange choking and giddiness came over him, and at Hammersmith he found a

comfortable refreshment-room, where he betook himself, and decided that after refreshing he would go on to business.

After having two whiskies, however, he changed his mind. "No," he muttered to himself, "I'll see it through." He boarded a tram that went in the direction of Acton. He found that he had to change trams at one point. It seemed an interminable journey. He kept wondering how White managed to get home at night from Oxford Street at twelve o'clock. He felt cold and wretched as the effect of the whisky wore off.

At last he reached Acton, and asked for Castlereach Road. Nobody seemed to know it. He was directed first in one direction and then in another; at last a postman put him on the right track, but suggested that as it was some way, he might get a 'bus to Gaddes Green, and then it was only about fifteen-minutes' walk.

Mapleson set off, keeping a sharp look-out for a place of refreshment, for the reactionary spirit was once more upon him. The 'bus put him down at a forlorn-looking corner, where there was only a sort of workman's ale-house. "I expect I'll pass one on the way," he thought, and taking his directions from the assistant of a greengrocer's shop, he set out once more through the rain.

The farther he went, the meaner and more sordid did the streets become. He did not pass a single public-house that he felt he could approach. "I expect the neighbourhood will change soon," he thought; "I expect I've come the wrong way. Why, everyone said White must be making at least eight hundred a year. He wouldn't live in a place like this."

At length he came to a break in the neighbourhood where some newly-built villas crowded one another on the heels of the more ancient squalor. An errand-boy told him that "Castlereach Road was the second turning on the right off Goldsmith's Havenue." He found Goldsmith's Avenue, where a barrel-organ was pouring forth lugubrious music to an audience listening from the shelter of their windows, and swarms of dirty children were hurrying through the rain on nameless errands. A piece of bread and jam was thrown from a second-story window to a little boy in the street, and missed Mapleson's hat by inches. His progress was in any case the source of considerable mirth to the inhabitants.

At last he came to Castlereach Road. After the noise and bustle of Goldsmith's Avenue, it seemed like the end of the world. It was a long straight road of buff-coloured villas, with stucco facings and slate roofs, all identically the same. From the end, where Mapleson entered it, it looked interminable and utterly deserted. Doubtless, if it had been a fine day, the gutters would have been crowded with children; but with the pouring rain, there was not a soul in sight.

Mapleson blundered on in search of Number 227, and as he did so, a thought occurred to him that he and White had a common secret apart. He always had felt in his inmost heart a little ashamed of his red-brick villa in Willesden Green, and that was one reason why he had always kept business well apart from domestic affairs; and White had casually referred to his "place at Acton." His place at Acton! Mapleson entered it, horribly tired, horribly sober, horribly wretched. All the blinds were down. It had taken so long to get there he hoped that he was too late.

A tall, gaunt woman in black, with a slight down on her upper lip, opened the door. She seemed surprised to see him.

He explained who he was.

"Oh, yes. My! you are early. It's only half-past twelve.

"Half-past twelve?" said Mapleson. "But I thought the funeral was to be at twelve."

Then the gaunt woman called into a little side room:

" 'Ere Uncle Frank, what 'ave you been up to? Did you tell Mr. Myple that the funeral was at twelve?"

"Oh, don't sye that; don't sye that!" came a voice from the room, and a small man, with sandy hair and wizened features and small, dark, greedy eyes, came out into the hall. "Oh, don't sye that, Mr. Mypleson! I'm Peabody. I quite thought I said two o'clock."

Mapleson had a wild impulse to whistle for a cab or a fire-engine, and to drive away from this anywhere; but the utter helplessness of his position held him fast. Before he had time to give the matter serious thought he was being shown into the drawing-room, a small stuffy room with a blue floral wall-paper, bamboo furniture, and many framed photographs, and the gaunt woman was saying, "Oh, Uncle Frank, how could you have made that mistyke!" And Uncle Frank was explaining how it might have occurred and at the same time saying that they must make the'best of it; that Mr. Mapleson would have a bit of lunch. There was a nice cut of cold leg of mutton, and of course no one, under circumstances like this, would expect an *elaborate* meal; in fact, no one would *feel* like it, apart from anything else. And then the gaunt woman left the room, and Mapleson was alone with Uncle Frank.

Mapleson could not recollect ever having met anyone whom he so cordially hated at sight. He had a sort of smug perpetual grin, a habit of running his hands down his thighs as far as his knees, and giving vent to a curious clicking noise with his cheeks.

"Well, this is a very sad hoccasion, Mr. Mypleson," he said; "very sad indeed. Poor George! Did you know him well? Eva— his wife, you know— she's upstairs quite prostrate. That was her sister who showed you in. Yes, yes, well,

how true it is that in the midst of life we are in death! I'm afraid poor George was careless, you know. Very careless. Clever, mind you— clever as they make 'em, but careless. Do you know, Mr. Mypleson, he hadn't even insured his life! And he's left no will. There isn't enough to pay his funeral expenses. Fortunately, Eva's clever; oh, yes, she's clever with her fingers. They say there's no one in the neighbourhood to touch her in the millinery. Oh, yes, she's been at it some time. Why, bless my soul, do you know she's paid the rent of this 'ouse for the last four years? Oh, she's a clever woman. Poor soul, though, her great consolation is that George didn't die in the 'orspital. Yes, Mr. Mypleson, he died upstairs, quiet as a lamb. She was there at the end. It was a great consolation."

And Uncle Frank nodded his head, and his little eyes sparkled, but the grin never left his lips. Mapleson said nothing, but the two men sat there in a sombre silence. Uncle Frank occasionally nodding his head and muttering, "It's a sad hoccasion."

The rain increased, and it seemed unnaturally dark in the blue drawing-room, and Mapleson felt that he had sat there an eternity, consumed by desire to get away, when there was another knock at the door, and a youth was let in.

Uncle Frank called him Chris, and he seemed to be a cousin, or some near relative of White's. He was a raw youth who had just gone to business, and was very much aware of his collar and cuffs. He seemed to take to Mapleson, and he sat watching him furtively. Mapleson seemed a man of the world, a very desirable personality. The youth made many advances, but the latter felt a repugnance for him in only a slightly less degree than in the case of Uncle Frank.

At length the gaunt sister asked them all into the diningroom, which was a room on the other side of the passage that seemed even smaller and stuffier than the drawingroom. It was papered with a dark-red paper, and the woodwork was painted chocolate. As they crossed the hall, they passed Mrs. White, who had apparently been persuaded by her sister "to try and take something." She was a shrivelled little person, with white cheeks, and her eyes were red with weeping.

She hurried by the men without speaking, and a curious thought struck Mapleson. During the twenty years or so that he had known White he could not recollect him speaking of his wife. He probably had done so, but he could not recollect it. He remembered him talking about his "place at Acton," but never of his wife. He did not feel entirely surprised. White was probably ashamed.

In the window of the dining-room were several birdcages, containing two canaries, a bullfinch, and a small highly-coloured bird that hopped from the

floor of its cage to a perch and kept up a toneless squeak, with monotonous regularity. Uncle Frank went up to the cage and tapped the wires, and called out, "Ah, there he is! *Cheep! cheep!* This is our little Orstrylian bird, Mr. Mapleson. Isn't he? Yes, yes; he's our clever little Orstrylian bird." And during the course of the hurried meal of cold mutton and cheese the birds formed a constant diversion. Uncle Frank would continually jump up and call out, "Oh, yes, he's our little Orstrylian bird."

Mapleson tried to recall whether he had ever discussed birds with White, and he felt convinced that he had not. It seemed a strange thing. White apparently had had these birds for some time—three different varieties in his own house! Mapleson would have enjoyed talking about birds with White; he could almost hear White's voice, and his precise and suave manner of discussing their ways and peculiarities. And the terrible thought came to him that he would never hear White talk about birds, never, never. This breach of confidence on White's part of never telling him that he kept birds upset Mapleson even more than his breach of confidence in not talking about his wife.

"Oh, yes, he's a clever little Orstrylian bird." A terrible desire came to Mapleson to throw Uncle Frank through the window the next time he heard this remark.

Before they had finished the meal, three other male relatives appeared, and a terrible craving came over Mapleson for a drink. Then the sister came down with a decanter of sherry and said that perhaps the gentlemen would like a glass. Uncle Frank poured out a glass all round. It was thin, sickly stuff, and to the brass-bed manager like a thimbleful of dew in a parched desert. A horrible feeling of repugnance came over him— of repugnance against all these people, against the discomfort he found himself in.

After all, who was White? When all was said and done. White was really nothing to him, only a man he'd met in the course of business and had a lot of drinks and talks with. At that moment he felt he disliked White and all his snivelling relatives.

He wanted to go, to get away from it all; but he couldn't see how. There was half a glass of sherry left in the decanter. He unblushingly took it as the funeral cortege arrived. There were two ramshackle carriages and a hearse, and a crowd of dirty children had collected. He tried to mumble to Uncle Frank some excuse for not going, but his words were lost by an intensely painful scene that took place in the hall as the coffin was brought down. He did not notice that the sister with the down on her upper lip became an inspired creature for a few moments, and her face became almost beautiful.

He felt that he was an alien element among all these people, that they were nothing to him, and that he was nothing to them, and he felt an intense, insatiable desire for a drink. If he couldn't get a drink, he felt he would go mad.

Someone touched him on the arm and said, "Will you come with us in the second carriage, Mr. Mapleson?" He felt himself walking out of the house and through a row of dirty children. For a moment he contemplated bolting up the street and out of sight, but the feeling that the children would probably follow him and jeer paralysed this action; and then he was in the carriage, with Chris and another male relative who was patently moved by the solemnity of the occasion.

Chris wriggled about and tried to engage him in banal conversation, with an air that suggested, "Of course, Mr. Mapleson, this is a sad affair, but we men of the world know how to behave."

The dismal cortege proceeded at an ambling trot, occasionally stopping. Chris gave up for the moment trying to be entertaining, and the forlorn relative talked about funeral services and the comfort of sympathy in time of bereavement. They crawled past rows of congested villas and miles of indescribable domesticity of every kind, till as they were turning round a rather broader avenue than usual where there were shops, the forlorn relative said, "We shall be in the cemetery in five minutes."

And then Mapleson had an inspiration. They were ambling along this dreary thoroughfare when his eye suddenly caught sight of a large and resplendent public-house. It was picked out in two shades of green, and displayed a gilt sign-board denoting "The Men of Kent."

Almost without thinking, and certainly in less time than it takes to chronicle, Mapleson muttered something to his two companions, and called out of the window to the driver to stop. He then jumped out, and called out to the driver of the hearse and the other carriage to stop, and then before anyone realized what it was all about, he darted into the saloon bar of The Men of Kent!

The bar was fortunately empty, but through the little glass shutters two women and a man in the private bar watched the performance.

There was a moment of dazed surprise, followed by a high shriek of laughter and a woman's voice in strident crescendo:

"He's stopped the funeral to come in an' 'ave a drink! O my Gawd!" Mapleson's tongue seemed to cling to the roof of his mouth, but he gasped out an order for a whisky and soda. To the barman these incidents were nothing, and he served the drink instantly; but to the three in the private bar it was a matter of intense enjoyment. The other woman took it up.

"Well, that's the first time I've known that 'appen. Gawd! fancy stoppin' a funeral to come and 'ave a drink!" Then the man bawled out: "'Ere, I sye, ain't the others cornin' in? Let's make a dye of it."

The women continued shrieking with laughter, and the appalling ignominy of his position came home to him. He knew that he was damned in the eyes of White's friends.

Curiously enough, the thought of White had passed out of his mind altogether. He was a thing in revolt against society, without feelings and without principles.

Yet when the whisky was put in front of him his hand trembled, and he could not drink it. He fumbled with the glass, threw down a sixpence, and darted out of the bar again.

In the meanwhile Uncle Frank and other members of the funeral party had got out of the carriages and were having a whispered consultation on the curb. Instructions had evidently been given for the cortege to proceed, for Uncle Frank was talking to the driver of the hearse when Mapleson appeared.

As all returned to the carriages, the three people came out of the bar and raised a cheer, and one of the women called out, "Oh, I sye, don't go!"

Mapleson lay all of a heap in the corner of the carriage, and he noticed that he was alone with Chris. The forlorn relative had gone into the other carriage.

In a few minutes they arrived at a church, a large new building with Early Victorian Gothic arches and a profusion of coloured glass. The funeral party huddled together in the gloom of the large church, and somehow the paucity of their numbers seemed even more depressing than the wretchedness of their appearance.

Mapleson sat a little way back, and curiously enough his mind kept reverting during the service to the little birds. He felt a distinct grievance against White on account of the little birds. Why hadn't he told him, especially about the small Australian bird? It would have made a distinctly interesting subject of conversation.

The service seemed interminably long, and it was a relief when the tall, rather good-looking young clergyman led the way out into the cemetery. The rain was still driving in penetrating gusts, and as they stood by the grave-side, the relatives looked askance at one another, uncertain whether it was the proper thing to do to hold up an umbrella. As to Mapleson, he was indifferent. For one thing, he had not brought an umbrella; but it seemed frightfully cold.

They lowered the coffin into the grave and earth was sprinkled. For a second it flashed through his mind, "That's White being let down," and then a feeling of indifference and repugnance followed, and the craving desire to get away from all these sordid happenings. Then he suddenly thought of White's

wife. "A miserable-looking slattern she was," he thought. "Why, what was she snivelling about? What could she have been to White or White to her? Why, he never mentioned her during twenty years!"

He experienced a slight feeling of relief when the service was finished and the party broke up, and he hastily made for the cemetery gates, knowing that White's friends would be as anxious to avoid him as he was to avoid them; but he had not reached them before some one, hurrying up behind, caught him. It was Chris.

"I expect you're going up west, Mr. Mapleson," he said. "If it's not putting myself in the way, I'll come too."

Mapleson gave an inarticulate grunt that conveyed nothing at all; but the young man was not to be put off.

There was something about the bulk of Mapleson and the pendulous lines of his clothes and person that made Chris feel, when he was walking with him, that he was "knocking about town" and "mixing with the world." He himself was apprenticed to a firm of wall-paper manufacturers and he felt that Mapleson would be able to enlighten him on the prospects and the outlook of the furnishing and decorating trade. He talked gaily of antique furniture till they came to a gaunt yellow-brick station.

On enquiry, there seemed to be no trains that went from it to any recognizable or habitable spot, but outside were two melancholy hackney-carriages. By this time Mapleson was desperate, and a strange feeling of giddiness possessed him.

He got in, and told the driver vaguely "to drive up to London." Chris came to the rescue, and explained to him that he might drive to Shepherd's Bush first. They started off, and rattled once more through the wilderness of dreary villas.

The young man accepted the position he found himself in with perfect composure. He attributed Mapleson's silence to an expansive boredom, and he talked with discretion and with a sort of callow tact. Before they reached Shepherd's Bush, however, Mapleson muttered something about feeling faint, and Chris immediately suggested that they should go and have a drink. "You might bring me something in," said Mapleson. "I'll have a brandy neat." They drove helplessly through neat avenues and roads for nearly ten minutes without passing anything in the way of a public-house. At last they came to a grocer's shop licensed to sell spirits not to be consumed on the premises. "Go and buy me a bottle of brandy," said Mapleson. The young man got out, and soon returned with a six-and-sixpenny bottle of brandy and a corkscrew. He paid for it himself, relying on the natural honour of Mapleson to settle up afterwards, but the matter was never mentioned again.

He drew the cork, and Mapleson took a long drink, and then wiped the mouth of the bottle and offered it to Chris. Chris behaved like a man, and also took a draught, but spluttered rather.

For the rest of the journey Mapleson at regular intervals took thoughtful and meditative drinks, and gradually began to revive. He went so far as to ask Chris if he knew anything about the little birds, and how long White had had them. Chris said he knew he had had the canaries for four or five years and the bullfinch for two years. He didn't know much about the little Australian bird. This information seemed to cause Mapleson to revert to his former gloom.

When they reached Shepherd's Bush the cabman refused to go farther. So they got out, and entered another cab, Mapleson carrying the brandy-bottle under his arm. He took it upon himself to tell the cabman— this time a taxi— to "drive round the Outer Circle of Hyde Park, and to take the hood down."

It was about half-past four when they reached Hyde Park, and the rain had ceased a little. It was the fashionable hour for the afternoon drive. Magnificent motors and two-horse phaetons were ambling round well within the regulation limit. Their cab was soon almost hemmed in by the equipages of the great world. But after they had completed the circle once, and Mapleson lay back, with his feet on the opposite seat and his hat brushed the wrong way, and without the slightest compunction held the large brandy-bottle to his lips every few yards, Chris began to feel that there was a limit to his desire to "mix with the world."

He got the cab to stop near the Marble Arch, and explained to Mapleson that he must get out and take the tube to business.

AND THEN there was a scene. Mapleson, who up to that time had not addressed a personal word to Chris, suddenly became maudlin. He cried, and said that he had never taken to anyone as he had to Chris. He was the dearest fellow in the world; he mustn't leave him; now that White was dead, he was the only friend he had.

But people began to collect on the side-walk, and Chris simply ran off. The taxi-driver began to be suspicious about his fare, which was registered fourteen shillings. But Mapleson gave him a sovereign on account, and told him to drive to Cleopatra's Needle, on the Embankment.

By the time they reached there, the brandy-bottle was three-quarters empty, and tears were streaming down his cheeks. He offered the driver a drink, but the driver was "not one of that sort," and gruffly suggested that Mapleson "had better drive 'ome." So he got out of the cab pathetically, settled with the driver, and sat on a seat of the Embankment, hugging his bottle and staring at the river.

Now, it is very difficult to know exactly what Mapleson did the rest of that afternoon between the time when he dismissed the cabman and half-past eight, when he turned up in the bar of the *Monitor*.

It is only known that he struggled in there at that time, looking as white as a sheet. He was wet through, and his clothes were covered with mud. He struggled across to the comer where he and White used to sit, and sat down. The bar was fairly crowded at the time, and young Chris made his début there. He felt that he would be a person of interest. When Mapleson appeared, he went up to him, but Mapleson didn't know him, and said nothing.

Several others came up and advised Mapleson to go home and change his clothes and have a drink first; but he just stared stupidly ahead and made no comment. Someone brought some whisky and put it before him, but he ignored it. They then came to the conclusion that he was ill, so they sent for a cab, and two of them volunteered to see him home.

Just as they were about to lead him out he stood up. He then stretched out his arms and waved them away. He picked up the glass of whisky and raised it slowly to his lips; but before it reached them, he dropped it, and fell backward across the table.

"WOMEN, you know," said Charlie Maybird some months later, addressing two friends in the Monitor, "are silly creatures. They think love and friendship is all a question of kissin' and cuddlin'. They think business is all buyin' and sellin'; they don't think men can make friendships in business. Crikey! I reckon there's more friendships made in business— real friendships, I mean— than ever there is outside. Look at the case of White and Mapleson. I tell you, those two men loved each other. For over twenty years they were inseparable; there was nothing they would not have done for each other; hand and glove they was over everything. I've never seen a chap crumple up so as Mapleson did when White died, in fact from the very day when White was took ill. He went about like a wraith. I'll never forget that night when he came in here after the funeral. He sat over there— look— by the fireplace. He looked as though his 'eart was broken. Suddenly he stood up and lifted his glass, and then dropped it, and then fell backwards crash on to the floor. They took him to the 'orspital, but he never regained consciousness. The doctors said it was fatty degeneration of the 'eart, 'elped on by some kidney trouble; but I know better. He died of a broken 'eart. Lord, yes; I tell you, there's a lot of romance in the furnishing trade."

"Did he leave any money?" asked one of the friends.

"My word, yes; more than White," answered the genial Charles. "White never left a bean, and it seems his missus had not only been paying the rent out of her millinery, but allowed White some. White was a card, he was."

"And what did Mapleson leave?"

"Mapleson left nearly four pounds."

"Is that all?"

"Four pounds and a wife and five kids, the eldest twelve."

"A wife and five kids! How the hell does she manage to keep things going?"

"Oh, Gawd knows! Come, let's go over to the Oxford and see what's on."

18: Inferiority Complex

Miles J. Breuer

1889-1945

Amazing Stories, Sep 1930

MY PARTNER, Dr. Shell, had a mind that was focussed on the grossly physical. When I announced to him that I was preparing to spend the summer taking post-graduate work in psychology, he protested,

"It's ridiculous enough for a country doctor past middle-age," he said, "to go gallivanting around like a freshman student. But psychology! Why waste time at that? Study something that will help you take care of sick people!"

I smiled. Already I knew enough of psychology to interpret the fundamental reason behind his annoyed protest. For three months during the hot summer, he would have to scurrry around taking care of his patients and mine also. But, that was our agreement; I had relieved him when he went on his Hudson-Bay hunting expedition.

However, he himself wasn't even conscious of why he was so irritated at my fixed intention of studying psychology.

"I have previously suggested to you," I reminded him gently, "that you can't take care of people's bodies unless you know what is going on in their minds."

"Hifalutin' theorizing!" he muttered. "Fine-spun, abstract stuff for a lot of city guys who are too spiffy to get down to real work and to do some real, honest-to-God medical drudgery."

"You'll admit I'm not strong on rubbing it in," I said slyly; "but who can resist a chance like this? What about Henry Giesler's girl? A whole year you treated her for tuberculosis, until I pointed out to you that all she had was a fear-complex because her aunt had died of it. Just a little explaining one afternoon cured her tuberculosis."

"Aw!" said Dr. Shell.

"*That's psychology*! Or, remember Abe Slosser's sores? Six doctors treated them for four years and couldn't heal them. Until I dug into his mind, and found he was making them himself, faster than you could heal them; because he was depressed, melancholy. Had an *inferiority complex*; so disgusted with himself that he was punishing himself."

Dr. Shell made a sound like a snort.

"Or," I continued, "Maitland, the banker. You and Brown and Hayden all thought me a harmless crank, when I kept warning you about him. I noticed his 'delusions of grandeur' a year before the bank failed, but no one would listen. Until he got to buying gold mines and fleets of ships. He ruined a lot of people before they believed him insane. He was clever. Insane people are. He could explain everything so ingeniously that he fooled them all."

Dr. Shell preserved a fuming silence.

"Finally, when I caught Sam Wallow with a shotgun," I went on inexorably, "you listened, and people listened. He had been having 'delusions of persecution'; claimed his cousin was causing his downfall. Signs of an unbalanced mind, with a shotgun—"

Dr. Shell grunted and shifted his position until the chair creaked.

"Well," he said grumpily, "while you're up there, look up Twitchett. Twitchett and I were chums during our two academic years. He went on in biology and I went into medicine. Head professor of biology at Chicago now. We correspond— about a letter every five years."

"How kind of you," I said, "after my cruelty to you. I'll be only too glad to have some introductions and some means for making friends there. I don't know a soul,"

"Brilliant man, Twitchett," Shell mused. "Genius, even as a freshman. Has published some deuced good stuff already. A year or two ago I heard from him, and he hinted at some astonishing research of his, His hints roused my curiosity. I'll be glad if you can give me some news of what he's driving at, as well as some gossip about him personally. I'll give you a note to him."

THE University of Chicago is a strange and wonderful place. It is a demonstration of how money can make dreams come true. Wise men dreamed of ideals, of a huge university, the greatest seat of learning in the West, of beautiful buildings in which learned minds toiled at unheard-of research. Rockefeller donated the millions. Experienced educators studied and planned. Here it all stands today, just as they first dreamed it. Thousands of busy students swarm here like bees in a hive. It is an institution famous the world over.

"It is a strange and wonderful place," was what I remarked to Dr. Twitchett, when I at last met him and after we had chattered awhile over Shell's letter. His doctorate was a philosophical, not a medical one. He was small, fine-featured, dark; with a suggestion of swiftness in his movements, and a genuine swiftness in his thoughts and conversation. I had met him by telephone appointment in the reading-room of the Faculty Club, under the square tower of Hutchinson Hall.

"Yes," he nodded swiftly. "Here one has opportunities."

I thought of the huge buildings of the Biological Laboratories, and I agreed that there were indeed opportunities for real work. The sight of microscopes through the windows, and of the little courtyard with fountains and pools for growing algae and raising frogs, roused old memories in my mind of a fascinating subject. In my student days I had found biology intensely

interesting. I had always meant to learn more about it, to study living forms again; but I had never had time.

"There are some remarkable minds at work in this institution," he went on after a pause. He spoke in short sentences and his tiny black mustache bobbed as he talked.

He seemed to be glad to make my acquaintance, and I, on my side, appreciated the opportunity to make a personal friend in that strange and distant place. Nowhere can one be more lonely than among thousands of strangers. Besides, he had a fascinating personality. I saw him several times at the Faculty Club, lunched at the Commons with him, and once met him for a stroll in the park.

"I've got to show you what I'm working on, one of these days," he remarked, gazing out over the Lake. "I'm putting all my efforts on it, and it's taking all of my time."

He fell silent. Some hidden thought must have sidetracked his intention of talking further about it. In spite of my intense curiosity as to what this strange and brilliant man was doing for the glory of this magnificent institution, I forbore asking him directly. It did not seem that I had known him long enough to be entitled to pry impertinently into his affairs. Therefore, a long time passed before I really found out what it was, to which he was devoting his life.

Several days later we were in the Faculty Club reading-room, and he must have thought of the subject again. Without any introduction, as though we had been talking about it all along, he suddenly said:

"Laymen would not understand it. It isn't suitable material for a popular account. You are a physician. It does not strictly belong in the field of medicine, but nevertheless you will grasp more or less of its significance."

I waited till he should speak further of his research, his particular function at the University. He, however, mused on:

"I wish I were a physician. It is a vast field for research; much work to be done. My baby died of hydrocephalus. My cousin has epilepsy. I wish I could be a physician."

Suddenly I learned of the line which his research had taken. It was amazing enough. We were walking down the Midway Plaisance on a hot Sunday afternoon, speaking little. Our walk was not rhythmic, and annoyed me; his step was too short and quick for me. I was thinking of his special subject, biology. During this hot summer season, psychology classes were dry and boring. Biology would be much more attractive, it seems so cool and pleasant for biology students to be fishing up green things out of a shady pool and looking at them in a microscope. I hadn't seen protozoa swimming on a slide

for many years, and the recollection of these old things threw a pleasant glamour over them.

"You work with living things?" I said rhetorically.

His eyes lighted up with sudden interest.

"I work with them," he answered breathlessly. "I control their life. I direct their growth. In my laboratory I have some strange creatures. You've never seen their like."

I do not know by what accident the wall of reticence that had previously guarded his speech was now broken down, He talked eagerly, rapidly; his swift gestures, his blazing eyes, the rapidity with which his tongue ricocheted over the polysyllabic names, lent a fiery, dramatic quality to the amazing things he told me.

"You know *paramoecium*, *hydra*, *vorticella*—?" he asked,

I nodded. They were familiar laboratory forms, and readily found in Nature. I had seen any numbers of them through my own microscope.

"Tiny, one-celled organisms," he jerked out. "So minute that even through a powerful microscope, they appear as mere specks?"

I nodded again.

"Fair representatives of the microscopic world?" he inquired eagerly.

"What's that?" I didn't know what he meant by that.

"I mean," he explained, "if I were selecting examples of the minute world, invisible to the naked eye, these would make a fair choice?"

I nodded in assent.

"I've got 'em big. Huge! A *paramoecium* as big as a dog! Can you imagine it at all? Other protozoa just as large. Hundreds of thousands of times increased in size. Just think for a moment how relatively tiny I must seem among them!"

A *paramoecium* as big as a dog! So this was his research, that for several years had been occupying all his time and energy, and making a thin, nervous man out of him! Normally a *paramoecium* is not at all visible to the naked eye; and here I had to picture it as huge and visible; a great, gelatinous mass, which one could carry in one's arms; and in it a nucleus, and over it, cilia. The reader who is not accustomed to seeing these things under a microscope cannot grasp the difficulty I had in imagining this creature large enough to be visible.

"But how— how did you get them to grow that big?"

"Oh," he said nonchalantly, "chiefly by stimulation with endocrines and selective reproduction,"

He did not seem to be very willing to talk about that part of it. Distinctly he gave the impression that he was holding the essential portion of it back. I attributed it to his unwillingness to divulge the details of his work until they were formally published. However, I was just a little nettled because he was

not willing to trust me with the knowledge. I certainly would be the last man to steal it from him.

A few days later I passed him on the campus. I could not conceal my interest in his work and in his personality.

"You'd like to see them?" he asked, as though the conversation had never been interrupted. He seemed very much gratified in my interest in himself and his research. "They are in my laboratory. As soon as I can arrange it so that it is safe— it is necessary to safeguard visitors from these animals— then I shall show them to you."

"You don't mean—?"

"Oh, yes. They are dangerous. One blow from the poisonous tentacle of the hydra— But I know how to handle them. And the things grow bigger and bigger every day. Some day they're going to get me,"

"They can't be that dangerous."

"Well. Consider. The hydra is taller than I am, with tentacles six feet long. You know how it acts. When it notices its prey, it shoots out a poisoned whip from a trichocyst on the tentacle and knocks the victim unconscious, whereupon the tentacles drag the prey into its mouth. I am among them constantly. All day their huge, slimy forms tower about me. Can you imagine how insignificant it would make you feel? Those microscopic forms looming around you all day long! Day and night in fact. The tentacles reach out after me. They would like to seize me and drag me into that mouth. Yes, I know they are after me and I'm careful."

It seemed indeed as though he lived in fear of the creatures his own hand had fashioned. I could not get it off my mind. That night I dreamed of slimy hydrae, as tall as a man. It was hideous. Our talk must have been on his mind also, for the next day he, brought two photographs to show me. I gasped at them.

I peered at them closely; I turned them about; I examined them at an angle. Obviously, they were photographs. The glossy surface and the smooth and minute blended rendering of detail could be produced by no other process than photography. There on one of them was Twitchett, with an ugly, eight-foot hydra reaching out at him, with a couple of *vorticellae* in the background; the scene was laid in the botanical garden. The other picture was of a laboratory, with huge protozoa scattered about, and Twitchett standing among them. If I had any doubt about the hugeness of the protozoa, here were the proofs.

"Made with one of the Eastman self-timers," he explained. "Simple matter: you set the camera and the timer, and then step into the picture; in a few seconds the camera snaps itself."

His readiness to explain this detail confirmed my suspicion of the previous day that he was unwilling to explain his method for growing the huge protozoa, because he wished to keep it secret from me.

"I'm sorry that I can't take you in there and show you the things," he apologized. "My own life may pay for it.some day; but I don't want to be responsible for any accident to someone else. See, how small I look. Just imagine what a microscopic creature I am beside those ugly beasts. See how that hydra would like to seize me. And see how many of them I have in the laboratory. All my days belong to these creatures."

For a long time I stared at the photographs without comment. I did not know what to say. Had I seen the photograph of a ghost, I could not have been more amazed. These forms, that I had seen so frequently in the microscope, that, enlarged 500 times looked as large as the head of a pin, here on the photograph looked so large that beside them the man looked tiny. And still I could not picture to myself how they could possibly look in actuality, those gelatinous masses as huge as the photographs showed them.

"Nothing is impossible to svience," I finally said, breathlessly.

"I don't know what it may not cost me— perhaps my life," he said thoughtfully.

"Would you think I had a lot of nerve," I asked rather hesitantly, "if I asked you to give me one of these pictures ?"

A bright light leaped into his eyes. My interest in his work gratified him beyond measure. Such is the humility of a scientific man. He gave me both of the photographs, and I am attaching them to this written account of the case.

"Suppose," he suggested, "that these creatures escaped? Suppose they got out of my laboratory and multiplied over the face of the earth? They multiply with unbelievable rapidity. A creature such as this would eat men as a frog eats flies. Do you see what a responsibility I carry? I am in constant fear lest these things get away from me."

He sighed.

"When do you plan on publishing this? In which journal will it appear?" I asked eagerly.

"I don't know," he mused, in deep thought. "I really don't know. Would it be believed? I wonder?"

That seemed queer to me.

"Haven't you the photographs?" I urged. "And you've published enough first-class stuff to have a good reputation already."

He did not answer, but appeared to be pondering it deeply.

The evening after this meeting, I spent a couple of hours gazing at the pictures he gave me. I saw him a time or two after that, and then an entire

week passed without Professor Twitchett's having shown himself in the reading-room of the Faculty Club. As I rarely met him anywhere else, I did not see him during this entire time.

Finally, I grew impatient, or worried, I don't know which, and went over to the Biological Laboratories. He was not in the building. I went through one laboratory after another and found no trace of him.

"I saw him day before yesterday," his assistant said, with a worried look on his face. "This morning we had to dismiss his third-year lecture class because he didn't show up; and this afternoon I am planning on conducting the elementary laboratory section myself. Are you a friend of his— do you know him very well?"

"I know him well enough to be considerably concerned about him," I replied. "Where is his private office— his private laboratory?"

The assistant led me upstairs. He waved his arm into a room.

"This has bothered me a lot lately," he told me.

It was the most disorderly office I have ever seen. How anyone could make head or tail out of those dusty stacks of books, journals, papers, and specimen jars, was a mystery to me. It had a vague suggestion about it that there must be something wrong with the man who belonged there.

"What about this private research of his, these gigantic protozoa?" I asked.

The assistant shook his head.

"He has mentioned it," he said. "But my job is purely a teaching position. I do not get time for research. But he *has* been rather queer lately."

I told the assistant all I knew about it. He gazed at me, his face paralyzed into amazement.

"Now where is this private laboratory of his?" I concluded.

He motioned to a door at the farther end. I got up and seized the knob. It was locked. I shook it till the glass rattled in the bookcases. But it was a firm, heavy door.

"We've got to get in there!" I exclaimed, looking about for something to smash down the door with. "The wonder is that he lasted as long as he did!"

"You think they got him?" he gasped. He was a young man.

"You've seen amoebae engulf blood corpuscles?" I reminded him.

He nodded. I seized a chair. He took hold of my arm.

"Wait!" he urged. "The curator has duplicate keys."

He dashed out in search of the curator. For fifteen minutes I paced back and forth, listened with my ear to the door, sniffed at the keyhole, but not a hint of anything penetrated to me; fifteen minutes that seemed like a century. I walked out into the hall, and looked up and down; then I went back in and grabbed the chair and swung it tentatively at the door, but checked myself and

waited. Then the assistant hurried in with the curator, a whiskered, breathless, astonished man.

"I have no key to this door," he protested. "Dr. Twitchett wanted it to be strictly private. No one is admitted. I have no duplicate key."

An assistant professor came in, attracted by the commotion, a couple of laboratory assistants, and some students. The story got to them in rapid whispers. The group stood astonished, puzzled, restless.

"We've got to get in there!" I said determinedly, through my gritted teeth. Silent heads nodded in assent.

I swung my chair, but the pieces of it clattered to the floor and the door held. Another chair was wasted in a vain repetition of the attempt. Chair rungs littered the floor. Two students came in carrying a paint-spattered ladder between them. Books and journals were unceremoniously raked aside to clear a way for the battering ram.

"Crash! crash!" the ladder swung against the door, in the hands of a half dozen people. A crack showed in the door; in another moment half of it crashed to the floor far in the other room, and half of it swung around on the hinges. The crowd poured into the room.

It was a laboratory, with a queer, musty smell. But a quick glance showed that it was empty of living things. Long tables, shelves of glassware, preserved specimens everywhere; but not a sign of Professor Twitchett. Not a sign of huge protozoa. As a matter of fact, the dust on everything, the stuffy, musty smell, indicated the suggestion that the room had not been used nor occupied for a long time. I hastened out of there sheepishly, and many queer looks were directed at me.

"But Dr. Twitchett is missing," I reminded them. They dispersed, talking among themselves. I walked toward my room, very much puzzled. Outdoors, walking down the street, I could not get the idea out of my mind that the huge things had eaten Twitchett and then escaped to wreck havoc outside. I wished I could be sure that the queer, musty, organic odor was a natural thing in such a laboratory.

When I reached my room I found on the table a letter addressed to me in Professor Twitchett's handwriting. I tore it open hurriedly.

"Dear Dr. Kane," it read*: "As you have evinced a very kind interest in my work, I feel that you might also care to be present at a demonstration of some of my ideas, which will be given before a group of distinguished scientific men. Come then, Tuesday at ten, to the dark brick building on the corner of Polk and Wood streets. Twitchett."*

I breathed a sigh of relief. Polk and Wood streets were a long distance from here. I searched for the place on a map of Chicago; it was on the West Side in a

section where one can find the greatest concentration of hospitals and medical colleges in the space of a square mile in the whole world. I had thought that Professor Twitchett was doing his work here on the South Side, on the campus of the University.

"Well, anyway," I thought, "at least the world oa now hear of this remarkable thing."

I found the corner of Polk and Wood streets and the dark brick building. How I dread to go on with the account of this melancholy case! A sad blow awaited me in that building. It was the southeast corner of the Cook County Hospital grounds, and bore the sign "Detention Hospital." I asked an attendant at the door where I could find Dr. Twitchett. He swelled up pompously and jerked his thumb toward a double door at the end of the corridor. There another guard barred my way; when I showed him the letter from Dr. Twitchett, he stared blankly at me for a while, thought it over, and then opened the door and let me through.

Within I found a group of men about a table littered with papers. Among them I recognized Dr. Kuh, the eminent psychiatrist, under whom I had already done some studying. Nowhere any gigantic protozoa. Professor Twitchett, energetic, fiery, sat in a chair some six feet from the table, with a dull-looking man on each side of him.

I don't know how soon or in what way the truth dawned on me that this was a commitment hearing. My heart sank as soon as I stepped in, and kept on sinking during the entire time. Papers rustled, grave men pursed their lips, and a group of students in a tiny amphitheater stared. Not until Dr. Kuh made his little talk to his students, was I thoroughly clear as to the status of affairs. Dr. Twitchett was adjudged insane and committed to the care of the Psychopathic Hospital.

"This is not an uncommon type of case," Dr. Kuh said to his students. "Micromania, a condition in which the patient believes himself to be very small in size, is quite as common a condition as the more popularly known variety in which the patient thinks he is Napoleon Bonaparte.

"But this case is unusual because of the form assumed by the patient's attempts at explaining his fixed idea to himself. The mechanism of explanation is also well known in psychiatry. The patient cannot rid himself of his fixed idea; therefore he proceeds to build up a structure of other ideas to support it, and to make it appear plausible and reasonable. The ingenuity of the structure of ideas constructed to bolster up the false idea has no limits and is often astonishing. It depends on the native cleverness and intelligence of the patient. I confess that this particular variation has never before come under my observation.

"This patient is obsessed with the idea that he is microscopically small. Thus far he is no different from many of the other cases I have shown you. But, to justify himself in his own eyes and before those who knew him, who would never have believed the claim of his microscopic size, he evolved the idea that he had around him huge protozoa; he could not shake off the idea that he was a microscopic being, therefore he built up a world of microscopic beings around himself, That gave the proper reasonableness to his micromania, and at the same time compensated for his self-deprecation; for thus his friends would feel that he had accomplished a marvelous scientific feat."

"But!" I interrupted, digging into my inside pocket, regardless of how ridiculous I must have looked, interrupting the proceedings; "the photographs!"

"Ah!" said Dr. Kuh. He was glad to see the photographs, and passed them around. "Very ingenious. Merely shows to what lengths a trained and educated mind will go, when its functions become dissociated. This is one of the most ingenious efforts I have ever seen to make a delusion seem plausible. Of course," turning to me, "any photographer can explain to you how to fake a picture like these you have handed me.

"Micromania," he went on to the students, "is merely one of the forms assumed by the depressive psychosis. The mild form of it is popularly well comprehended under the colloquial name of *'inferiority complex*.' You have before you an extreme case of that innocent failing."

"Poor Twitchett!" I thought. I went back to my country practice some weeks later, an humbler, as well as a wiser man

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19: Maru

A Dream of the Sea

H de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

Popular Magazine, 20 Sep 1921

THE night was filled with vanilla and frangipanni odors and the endless sound of the rollers on the reef. Somewhere away back amid the trees a woman was singing, the tide was out, and from the veranda of Lygon's house, cross the star-shot waters of the lagoon, moving yellow points of light caught the eye. They were spearing fish by torchlight in the reef pools.

It had been a shell lagoon once, and in the old days men had come to Tokahoe for sandalwood, now there was only copra to be had and just enough for one man to deal with. Tokahoe is only a little island where one cannot make a fortune, but where you may live fortunately enough if your tastes are simple and beyond the lure of whisky and civilization.

The last trader had died in this paradise, of whisky— or gin— I forget which, and his ghost was supposed to walk the beach on moonlit nights, and it was apropos of this that Lygon suddenly put the question to me: "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Do you?" replied I.

"I don't know," said Lygon. "I almost think I do, because every one does— oh, I know, a handful of hard-headed supercivilized people say they don't, but the mass of humanity does. The Polynesians and Micronesians do. Go to Japan, go to Iceland, go anywhere and everywhere you will find ghost believers."

"Lombroso has written something like that," said I.

"Has he? Well, it's a fact, but all the same it's not evidence, the universality of a belief seems to hint at reality in the thing believed in— yet what is more wanting in real reason than tabu. Yet tabu is universal. You find men here who daren't touch an artu tree because artu trees are tabu to them, or eat turtle or touch a dead body. Well, look at the Jews, a dead body is tabu to a Cohen, India is riddled with the business, so's English society— it's all the same thing under different disguises.

"Funny that talking of ghosts we should have touched on this, for when I asked you did you believe in ghosts I had a ghost story in mind and tabu comes into it. This is it."

And this is the story somewhat as told by Lygon:

SOME FIFTY years back when Pease was a pirate bold and Hayes in his bloom and the topsails of the *Leonora* a terror to all dusky beholders, Maru was a young man of twenty. He was son of Malemake, King of Fukariva, a

kingdom the size of a soup plate, nearly as round and without a middle, an atoll island in short; just a ring of coral, sea-beaten and circling, like a bezel, a sapphire lagoon.

Fukariva lies in the Paumotus or Dangerous Archipelago where the currents run every way and the trades are unaccountable. The underwriters to this day fight shy of a Paumotus trader, and in the '60's few ships came here, and the few that came were on questionable business. Maru, up to the time he was twenty years of age, only remembered three.

There was the Spanish ship that came into the lagoon when he was only seven. The picture of her remained with him, burning and brilliant, yet tinged with the atmosphere of nightmare, a big topsail schooner that lay for a week mirroring herself on the lagoon water while she refitted, fellows with red handkerchiefs tied round their heads crawling aloft and laying out on the spars. They came ashore for water and what they could find in the way of taro and nuts, and made hay on the beach, insulting the island women till the men drove them off. Then, when she was clearing the lagoon, a brass gun was run out and fired, leaving a score of dead and wounded on that salt, white beach.

That was the Spaniard. Then came a whaler, who took what she wanted and cut down trees for fuel and departed leaving behind the smell of her as an enduring recollection, and lastly, when Maru was about eighteen, a little old schooner slung in one early morning.

She lay in the lagoon like a mangy dog, a humble ship, very unlike the Spaniard or the blustering whale man— she only wanted water and a few vegetables and her men gave no trouble; then, one evening, she slunk out again with the ebb, but she left something behind her— smallpox. It cleared the island, and of the hundred and fifty subjects of King Malemake only ten were left— twelve people in all, counting the king and Maru.

The king died of a broken heart and age, and of the eleven people left three were women, widows of men who had died of the smallpox.

Maru was unmarried, and as king of the community he might have collected the women for his own household. But he had no thought of anything but grief— grief for his father and the people who were gone. He drew apart from the others and the seven widowers began to arrange matters as to the distribution of the three widows. They began with arguments and ended with clubs, three men were killed and one of the women killed another man because he had brained the man of her fancy.

Then the dead were buried in the lagoon— Maru refusing to help because of his tabu— and the three newly married couples settled down to live their lives, leaving Maru out in the cold. He was no longer king. The women despised him because he hadn't fought for one of them and the men because he had

failed in brutality and leadership. They were a hard lot, true survivals of the fittest, and Maru, straight as a palm tree, dark-eyed, gentle, and a dreamer, seemed, among them, like a man of another tribe and time.

He lived alone, and sometimes in the sun blaze on that great ring of coral he fancied he saw the spirits of the departed walking as they had walked in life, and sometimes at night he thought he heard the voice of his father chiding him.

When the old man died Maru had refused to touch the body or help in its burial. Filial love, his own salvation, nothing would have induced Maru to break his tabu.

It was part of him, an iron reef in his character beyond the touch of will.

ii

ONE MORNING, some six weeks after all this marrying and settling down, a brig came into the lagoon. She was a blackbirder, the *Portsoy*, owned and captained by Colin Robertson, a Banffshire man, hence the name of his brig. Robertson and his men landed, took off water, coconuts, bananas, and everything else they could find worth taking. Then they turned their attention to the population. Four men were not a great find, but Robertson was not above trifles. He recruited them, that is to say, he kicked them into his boat and took them on board the *Portsoy*, leaving the three widows, grass widows now— wailing on the shore. He had no finer feelings about the marriage tie, and he reckoned they would make out somehow. They were no use to him as labor and they were ill-favored. All the same, being a man of gallantry and some humor, he dipped his flag to them as the *Portsoy* cleared the lagoon and breasted the tumble at the break.

Maru, standing aft, saw the island with the white foam fighting the coral and the gulls thrashing around the break, saw the palms cut against the pale aqua marine of the sky line that swept up into the burning blue of noon, heard the long rumble and boom of the surf on the following wind and watched and listened till the sound of the surf died to nothingness, and of the island nothing remained but the palm tops, like pin heads above the sea dazzle.

He felt no grief. But there came to him a new and strange thing, a silence that the shipboard sounds could not break. Since birth the eternal boom of the waves on coral had been in his ears, night and day and day and night, louder in storms but always there. It was gone. That was why, despite the sound of the bow wash and boost of the waves and the creak of cordage and block, the brig seemed to have carried Maru into the silence of a new world.

They worked free of the Paumotus into the region of settled winds and accountable currents, passing atolls and reefs that showed like the thrashing of a shark's tail in the blue, heading northwest in a world of wind and waves and sky, desolate of life, and, for Maru, the land of Nowhere.

So it went on from week to week, and, as far as he was concerned, so it might have gone on forever. He knew nothing of the world into which he had been suddenly snatched, and land, which was not a ring of coral surrounding a lagoon, was for him unthinkable.

He knew nothing of navigation, and the brass-bound wheel at which a sailor was always standing with his hands on the spokes, now twirling it this way, now that, had for him a fascination beyond words, the fascination of a strange toy for a little child, and something more. It was the first wheel he had ever seen and its movements about its axis seemed magical, and it was never left without some one to hold it and move it— why? The mystery of the binnacle into which the wheel-mover was always staring, as a man stares into a rock pool after fish, was almost 'as fascinating.

Maru peeped into the binnacle one day and saw the fish, something like a star fish that still moved and trembled. Then some one kicked him away, and he ran forward and hid, feeling that he had pried into the secrets of the white men's gods and fearing the consequences.

But the white men's gods were not confined to the wheel and binnacle. Down below they had a god that could warm them of the weather, for that day at noon, and for no apparent reason, the sailors began to strip the brig of her canvas. Then the sea rose, and two hours later the cyclone seized them. It blew everything away and then took them into its calm heart where, dancing like giants in dead, still air and with the sea for a ballroom floor, the hundred-foot high waves broke the *Portsoy* to pieces.

Maru alone was saved, clinging to a piece of hatch cover, half stunned, confused, yet unafraid and feeling vaguely that the magic wheel and little trembling fish god had somehow betrayed the white men. He knew that he was not to die, because this strange world that had taken him from his island had not done with him yet, and the sea, in touch with him like this and half washing over him at times, had no terror for him, for he had learned to swim before he had learned to walk. Also his stomach was full, he had been eating biscuits while the *Portsoy*'s canvas was being stripped away, and though the wind was strong enough almost to whip the food from his hands.

The peaceful swell that followed the cyclone was a thing enough to have driven an ordinary man mad with terror. Now lifted hill high on a glassy slope the whole wheel of the horizon came to view under the breezing wind and blazing sun, then gently down— sliding the hatch cover would sink to a valley

bottom only to climb again a glassy slope and rise again hill high into the wind and sun. Foam flecks passed on the surface, and in the green sun-dazzled crystal of the valley floors he glimpsed strips of fucus floating far down, torn by the storm from their rock attachments, and through the sloping wall of glass up which the hatch cover was climbing he once glimpsed a shark, lifted and cradled in a ridge of the great swell, strange to see as a fly in amber or a fish in ice.

The hatch cover was sweeping with a four-knot current, moving with a whole world of things concealed or half seen or hinted at. A sea current is a street, it is more, it is an escalator— a moving pavement for the people of the sea. Jellyfish were being carried with Maru on the great swell running with the current, a turtle broke the water close to him and plunged again, and once a white, roaring reef passed by only a few cable lengths. He could see the rock exposed for a moment and the water closing on it in a tumble of foam.

iii

FOR A DAY and a night and a day and a night the voyage continued, the swell falling to a gentle heave, and then in the dawn came a sail, the mat sail of a canoe like a brown wing cut against the haliotis-shell colored sky.

In the canoe was a girl, naked as the new moon. Paddle in hand and half crouching, she drove the canoe toward him, the sail loose and flapping in the wind. Then he was on board the canoe, but how he got there he scarcely knew, the whole thing was like a dream within a dream.

In the canoe there was nothing, neither food nor water, only some fishing lines, and as he lay exhausted, consumed with thirst and faint with hunger, he saw the girl resetting the sail. She had been fishing last evening from an island up north and blown out to sea by a squall, had failed to make the land again, but she had sighted an island in the sou'west and was making for it when she saw the hatch cover and the brown, clinging form of Maru.

As he lay half dead in the bottom of the canoe he watched her as she crouched with paddle in hand.

But before they could reach it a squall took them, half filling the canoe with rain water, and Maru drank and drank till his ribs stood out, and then, renewed, half rose as the canoe, steered by the girl, rushed past tumbling green seas and a broken reef to a beach white as salt, toward which the great trees came down with the bread fruits dripping with the new fallen rain and the palms bending like whips in the wind.

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TALIA, that was her name, and though her language was different from the tongue of Maru, it had a likeness of a sort. In those days that little island was uncharted and entirely desolate but for the gulls of the reef and the birds of the woods, and it was a wonderland to Maru, whose idea of land as a sea-beaten ring of coral was shattered by woods that bloomed green as a sea cave to the moonlight, high ground where rivulets danced amid the ferns and a beach protected from the outer seas by a far flung line of reefs. Talia to him was as wonderful as the island, she had come to him out of the sea, she had saved his life, she was as different from the women of the Paumotus as day from night. A European would have called her beautiful, but Maru had no thought of her beauty or her sex. She was just a being, beneficent, almost divorced from earth, the strangest thing in the strange world that Fate had seized him into, part with the great heaving swell he had ridden so long, the turtle that had broken up to look at him, the spouting reef, the sunsets over wastes of water and the stars spread over wastes of sky.

He worshiped her, in his way, and he might have worshiped her at a greater distance only for- the common bond of youth between them and the incessant call of the world around them. Talia was practical. She seemed to have forgotten her people and that island up north and to live entirely in the moment. They made two shacks in the bushes, and she taught him island wood-craft and the uses of berries and fruit that he had never seen before, also when to fish in the lagoon; for, a month after they reached the island, the poisonous season arrived and Talia knew it; how, who can tell? She knew many things by instinct, the approach of storms, and, when the poisonous season had passed, the times for fishing, and little by little their tongues, that had almost been divided at first, became almost one, so that they could chatter together on all sorts of things and she could tell him that her name was Talia, the daughter of Tepairu, that her island was named Makea, that her people had twenty canoes, big ones, and many little ones, and that Tepairu was not the name of a man but a woman. That Tepairu was queen or chief woman of her people, now that her husband was dead.

And Maru was able to tell her by degrees of what he could remember, of the old Spanish ship, and how she spouted smoke and thunder and killed the beach people, of his island and its shape — he drew it on the sand, and Talia, who knew nothing of atolls, at first refused to believe in it thinking he was jesting— of his father who was chief man or King of Fukariva, and of the destruction of the tribe. Then he told of the ship with the little wheel— he drew it on the sand— and the little fish-god; of the center of the cyclone

where the waves were like white dancing men, and of his journey on the hatch cover across the blue heaving sea.

They would swim in the lagoon together right out to the reefs where the great rollers were always breaking, and out there Talia always seemed to remember her island, pointing north with her eyes 'fixed across the sea dazzle as though she could see it and her people and the twenty Canoes beached on the spume white beach beneath the palms.

"Some day they will come," said Talia. She knew her people, those sea rovers, inconsequent as the gulls. Some day for some reason or none one of the fishing canoes would fish as far as this island or be blown there by some squall. She would take Maru back with her. She told him this.

The thought began to trouble Maru.

Then he grew gloomy. He was in love. Love had hit him suddenly. Somehow and in some mysterious manner she had changed 'to a girl of flesh and blood. She knew it, and at the same moment he turned for her into a man.

Up to this she had had no thought of him except as an individual, for all her dreams about him he might as well have been a palm tree, but now it was different, and in a flash he was everything. The surf on the reef said "Maru," and the wind in the trees, "Maru," and the gulls fishing and crying at the break had one word— "Maru! Maru! Maru!" "

hen one day, swimming out near the bigger break in the reefs, a current drove them together, their shoulders touched and Maru's arm went round her, and amid the blue laughing sea and the shouting of the gulls he told her that the whole world was Talia, and as he told her and as she listened the current of the ebb like a treacherous hand was drawing them through the break toward the devouring sea.

They had to fight their way back, the ebb just beginning would soon be a mill race, and they knew, and neither could help the other. It was a hard struggle for love and life against the enmity against life and love that hides in all things from the heart of man to the heart of the sea, but they won. They had reached calm waters and were within twenty strokes of the beach when Talia cried out suddenly and sank.

Maru, who was slightly in front, turned and found her gone, she had been seized with cramp, the cramp that comes from overexertion, but he did not know that; the lagoon was free of sharks, but, despite that he fancied for one fearful moment that a shark had taken her.

Then he saw her below, a dusky form on the coral floor, and he dived.

He brought her to the surface, reached the sandy beach, and carrying her in his arms, ran with her to the higher level of the sands and placed her beneath the shade of the trees. She moved in his arms as he carried her, and

when he laid her down her breast heaved in one great sigh, water ran from her mouth, her limbs stiffened, and she moved no mere.

Then all the world became black for Maru. He knew nothing of the art of resuscitating the drowned. Talia was dead.

He ran among the trees crying out that Talia was dead, he struck himself against tree boles and was tripped by ground lianas. The things of the forest seemed trying to kill him, too. Then he hid among the ferns lying on his face and telling the earth that Talia was dead. Then came sundown and after that the green moonlight of the woods, and suddenly sleep, with a vision of blue, laughing sea and Talia swimming beside him, and then day again and with the day the vision of Talia lying dead beneath the trees. He could not bury her. He could not touch her. The iron reef of his tabu held firm, indestructible, unalterable as the main currents of the sea.

He picked fruits and ate them like an animal and without knowing that he ate, torn toward the beach by the passionate desire to embrace once 'more the form that he loved, but held from the act by a grip ten thousand years old and immutable as gravity or the spirit that lives in religions.

He must not handle the dead. Through all his grief came a weird touch of comfort. She had not been dead when he carried her ashore. He had not touched the dead.

Then terrible thoughts came to him of what would happen to Talia if he left her lying there. Of what predatory gulls might do. He had some knowledge of these matters, and past visions of what had happened on Fukariva when the dead were too numerous for burial came to him, making him shiver like a whipped dog. He could, at all events, drive the birds away without touching her. Without even looking at her, his presence on the beach would keep the birds away. It was near noon when this thought came to him. He had been lying on the ground, but he sat up now as though listening to this thought. Then he rose up and came along cautiously among the trees. As he came the rumble of the reef grew louder and the sea wind began to reach him through the leaves, then the light of day grew stronger, and, slipping between the palm boles, he pushed a great breadfruit leaf aside and peeped, and there on the blinding beach under the forenoon sun more clearly even than he had seen the ghosts of men on Fukariva, he saw the ghost of Talia walking by the sea and wringing its hands.

Then the forest took him again, mad, this time, with terror.

Away, deep in the woods, hiding among the bushes, springing alive with alarm at the slightest sound, he debated this matter with himself and curiously, now, love did not move him at all or urge him. It was as though the ghost of Talia had stepped between him and his love for Talia, not destroying it

but obscuring it. Talia for him had become two things, the body he had left lying on the sand under the trees and the ghost he had seen walking on the beach. The real Talia no longer existed for him except as the vaguest wraith. He lay in the bushes facing the fact that, so long as the body lay unburied, the ghost would walk. It might even leave the beach and come to him.

This thought brought him from his hiding place. He could not lie alone with it among the bushes, and then he found that he could not stand alone with it among the trees, for at any moment she might appear wringing her hands in one of the glades, or glide to his side from behind one of the tree boles. He made for the Southern beach.

He felt safe here. Even when Talia had been with him the woods had always seemed to him peopled with lurking things, unused as he was, to trees in great masses; and now released from them and touched again by the warmth of the sun he felt safe. It seemed to him that the ghost could not come here. The gulls said it to him, and the flashing water, and as he lay down on the sands the surf on the reef said it to him. It was too far away for the ghost to come. It seemed to him that he had traveled many thousand miles from a country remote as his extreme youth, losing everything on the way but a weariness greater than time could hold or thought take recognition of.

Then he fell asleep, and he slept while the sun went down into the west and the flood swept into the lagoon and the stars broke out above. That tremendous sleep, unstirred by the vaguest dream, lasted till the dawn was full.

Then he sat up, renewed as though God had remade him in mind and body.

A gull was strutting on the sands by the water's edge, its long shadow strutting after it, and the shadow of the gull flew straight as a javelin into the renewed mind of Maru. Talia was not dead. He had not seen her ghost. She had come to life and had been walking by the sea wringing her hands for him thinking him drowned. For the form he had seen walking on the sands had cast a shadow. He remembered that now. Ghosts do not cast shadows.

"Talia! Talia! Talia!"

He passed the bushes where he had hidden, and the ferns. He heard the sound of the surf coming to meet him, he saw the veils of the leaves divide and the blaze of light and morning splendor on the northern sands and lagoon and sea.

He ran to the place where he had laid her beneath the trees. There was still faintly visible the slight depression made by her body, and close by, strangely and clearly cut, the imprint of a little foot.

Then he knew.

The sand was trodden up and on the sand, clear cut and fresh, lay the mark left by a beached canoe and the marks left by the feet of the men who had beached her and floated her again.

They had come— perhaps her own people— come, maybe, yesterday, while he was hiding from his fears debating with his tabu— come, and found her and taken her away.

He plunged into the lagoon, and, swimming like an otter and helped by the outgoing tide, reached the reef. Scrambling on to the rough coral, bleeding from cuts but feeling nothing of his wounds, he stood with wrinkled eyes facing the sea blaze and with the land breeze blowing past him out beyond the thundering foam of the reef to the blue and heaving sea.

Away to the north, like a brown wing tip, showed the sail of a canoe. He watched it. Tossed by the lilt of the swell it seemed beckoning to him. Now it vanished in the sea dazzle, now reappeared, dwindling to a point to vanish at last like a dream of the sea, gone, never to be recaptured.

"AND Maru?" I asked of Tyson. "Did he ever—"

"Never," said Lygon. "The islands of the sea are many. Wait." He struck a gong that stood close to his chair, struck it three times, and the sounds passing into the night mixed with the voices of the canoe men returning from fishing on the reef.

Then a servant came oh to the veranda, an old, old man half bent like a withered tree.

"Maru," said Lygon, "you can take away these glasses— but one moment, Maru, tell this gentleman your story."

"The islands of the sea are many," said Maru like a child repeating a lesson. He paused for a moment as though trying to remember some more, then he passed out of the lamplight with the glasses.

"A year ago he remembered the whole story," said Lygon.

But for me the whole story lay in those words, that voice, those trembling hands that seemed still searching for what the eyes could see no more.

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20: The Girl of the Bark *Mystery*

Fred MacIsaac

1886-1940

The Popular Magazine, 7 Dec 1926

JUDGING from my business card, you might be apt to consider me as a far more important person than I am. The card contains my name and title and the name of the bank for which I work. It reads:

JOHN Q. MacNABB
Vice President,
Mammoth National Bank of New York City.

It happens that there are fifteen vice presidents of the Mammoth, so the title doesn't mean a great deal. I am in charge of the department of public relations, which is a flossy way of saying "press bureau," but it is a pretty good job at that. And I haven't yet got used to the title of vice president.

I've come up in the world. I'm forty-two years old, a little bald, twenty pounds overweight from sitting behind a big, flat-topped desk, not much to do save get up prospectuses, issue dignified statements in the name of the president, and glad hand the present breed of reporters. For this I draw down ten thousand dollars a year. It's a great life! Of course I wouldn't go back, but once I was a real newspaper man and— those were the days!

Having gobbled up a bank in Boston, the Mammoth sent me over there to explain it to the sensitive natives, which gave me a chance to drop into the *Journal* office, my old shop, where I had not set foot for fifteen years.

When I stepped into the poky, slow moving elevator, a change began to come over me. I am afraid I looked a little pompous, with my banker's walking stick and my big diamond ring and my hundred-and-fifty-dollar suit of dark worsted. I suddenly was ashamed of my prosperity. I felt something like a renegade.

I hadn't come there to four-flush. All I wanted was a drink of old times, a whiff of the past, to breathe the air of the dust-laden city room, to fill my eye with the untidy den, its rubbish-strewn floor. Newspaper offices in New York have changed. They sweep them and keep them clean, but I felt that the *Journal* would be just the same.

It was.

Through there was an office boy in the anteroom to keep out peddlers and romantic old fossils like myself, I passed him by without a challenge and pushed open the swinging door. Fifteen years fell off my shoulders when I stepped inside and saw the row of assignment boxes on the opposite wall.

Mine had been in the third row, first on the right. My eye fell upon it instantly. It was empty.

Nothing seemed to have changed in the old city room. They were always going to paint it in my day, but apparently they hadn't got around yet to doing it. The battered round table of pine, with the slit in it where the head copy reader sat, had not been moved. Four round-shouldered, shirt-sleeved men, gray or bald, with green shades over their eyes squatted under the electric lamps and read the copy that the man in the slot was distributing to them. Though it was mid-afternoon, little light penetrated through the windowpanes so that even the managing editor, whose ancient oak roll-top desk stood beside one of the windows, had to keep his electric bulb burning. I glanced at the managing editor, a little man with iron-gray whiskers. He was a stranger to me, as were the desk men and the group of reporters at the far end of the long room. One of the desk men, glancing up, inspected me insolently and suspiciously. After all, I had no business there. What did these men care if I had worked on the *Journal* fifteen years before?

Just then a man came out of the telephone booth with a sheet of yellow copy paper in his hand and shuffled over to the city desk. I recognized him. It was "Stuffy" Thompson who, in my day, had worked for the *Tribune* and whom, naturally, I had hated. We had never fraternized with the staffs of opposition newspapers; it was against the code of the bitter period of journalism. Now I was glad to see Stuffy. After all, he had been a wonderful reporter, a star when the word meant something. He had been a fat, good-looking blond youth; now he was stooped, thin and gray. Although he could not be forty-five, he looked sixty.

"Hello, Stuffy!" I said cheerfully.

He stopped, glared at me through his bifocals. Probably he had not deserved his old nickname for years. I saw that he knew me.

" 'Black Mac,' the water-front man!" he exclaimed cordially. '"Come over to the light and let me look at you."

So we had a reunion. He asked about me and I asked about him.

"Vice president of the Mammoth National of New York?" He whistled. "You always had all the luck."

"Believe me, if I could afford it, I'd rather be back in the old game."

"The old game is dead," Stuffy declared, with a bitter laugh.

"Of course it isn't. You're getting old, Stuffy."

He picked up a copy of the paper, opened it and showed it to me.

"Comics, syndicated editorials, signed features, wire services, city news dispatches," he said. "We are a carbon copy of a New York paper with a few columns of local items. It's features today; we don't bother about news. Do

you suppose one of my reporters would take a chance to get a story? Mac, this business is as exciting as running a peanut stand."

"Guess you're right," I admitted. "We took chances, hey, Stuffy?"

The city editor's old eyes kindled.

"I'll say so! Will you ever forget the bark *Mystery*? Of course you wouldn't!"

His eyes filled with tears. Understanding his emotion, I choked a little myself.

"I nearly murdered you," said Stuffy, "but the story was worth it. How is she?"

"Great," I said carelessly.

The bark *Mystery*, and the girl, the turning point of my life, my biggest adventure, and I hadn't thought about it for years. That's the way things go, and here was Stuffy, after all that time, a crabbed old city editor with tears in his eyes.

Eighteen years slid back in a moment as we regarded each other. I was the water-front man of the *Journal* and Stuffy was the star reporter of the Tribune. As their water-front man was a dead one, they used to shoot Stuffy out on sea stories.

THAT March afternoon, I dropped into the marine office of the chamber of commerce to look over the wire reports. I found a note that the dismasted bark *Mystery* had passed Provincetown and was being towed into Boston, which meant that she ought to drop her mudhook in the lower harbor about nine in the evening.

The *Journal* was having a hard time, so hard that often it couldn't meet the pay roll. Instead, we would be given orders on advertisers for goods. One man would get a requisition for a suit of clothes; another, for groceries; a third, for dry goods. We would swap until we got what we needed. The *Tribune* was big and prosperous. To-day it's out of business and the *Journal* is going like a house afire, because it was the first to board the feature-syndicate band wagon.

When I turned in my expense account, in the old days, I would have an argument with the city editor about every dime. Yet the sprit of the game held us. We fought our opponents like fiends for the news. An "exclusive" was a triumph which brought everybody from the publisher to the truck drivers to shake the hand of the man who brought it in. Miserably paid, driven like slaves, we were as loyal as bull pups. The chances we took then to get a story, I wouldn't take now for a check for a million dollars.

I knew that a disabled bark would probably have a good story on board, but to get it meant a trip down the harbor. I dared not spend the money without authority, so I called up the city editor and put it up to him.

"Suppose there isn't a story. We're stuck," he expostulated.

"If there is, we're scooped. The *Tribune* will get a tug and go down to her."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, hire a launch. We can't afford a tug."

"It's blowing outside. I doubt if a launch would go below."

"The tug would cost twenty dollars, and we can't afford it. You find a launch, and don't pay more than a five-spot."

I went to Pie Alley and dined royally on baked beans, doughnuts and squash pie, washed down with two cups of coffee, all for a quarter. "Old Joe," who ran the alley joint, prospered so. that he finally owned a string of restaurants, but he never learned efficiency. Rising food costs during the war put him out of business. Heaven bless him! He's in the poorhouse now.

About eight o'clock, I went down to Driscoll's Landing, so named because it belonged to a saloon where you could get a schooner of beer as tall as the Woolworth Building for five cents. There I could be sure of four or five launches waiting for hire. They were on hand, but the boatmen gave me the laugh.

"It's rough as hell below," said "Big Jerry" Sherry. "You better hire a tug."

It was no use to plead. Launches were valuable if my life was not. So I finally crossed to T. Wharf, where a flock of Portuguese fishermen tied up their power dories, men with lots of nerve and much respect for a five-dollar bill. Nevertheless, they had no more desire to go below than the Irish boatmen at Driscoll's until, in despair, I raised the offer to ten dollars. A pair with a sixteen-foot power dory agreed to take me. Dropping my little camera and box of flash-light powder on board— the *Journal* paid me a dollar for every picture it used— I followed the boxes into the boat which smelled of fish as the fishermen smelled of garlic.

As soon as we got off the end of the pier, I realized that it was a bad night. The wind blew cold and hard from the open harbor and we began to pitch even in those comparatively quiet waters. There was no moon or stars, which meant it was going to be difficult to find the bark in the wide stretches of black water below. But we were off!

When we had passed Castle Island, the old revolutionary fort off south Boston, we were in it for fair. A very heavy sea was running, a forty-mile-an-hour gale howled; it was cold as Greenland. When we poked our nose past Governor's the boat began to stand on her head. It was four or five miles to

President Roads, where the sailing ships anchored, a huge expanse of bay where the gale would have full sweep.

In the teeth of the wind we made slow progress, but in time we knew, by the increased size of the waves and more furious whistling of the wind, that we had reached the ship anchorage. Here and there on the inky waste of waters were pin points of light, indicating vessels at anchor. There was no way of finding the bark save by visiting them all.

From the report in the marine office, I had learned that the bark had lost her foremast and main-top-mast, but we would have to run very close before we could distinguish spars in this black night.

THOUGH Portuguese fishermen are good sailors, when the dory shipped water, which sloshed around in the bottom as she rolled and pitched, these two fellows began to protest volubly. They Jacked my urge to drive ahead. Yipping angrily they kept on, however, until we got near enough to one vessel to make out that she was a four-masted schooner, loaded with coal. Coming out of her lee, we met the force of the gale and swung broadside to the heavy seas. One of the waves splashed on board, almost smothered the engine and came over the tops of my rubbers.

Soon I had no feeling in my feet; they were absolutely numb. The motor was sputtering and so were the fishermen, but I had the wheel and steered for the second riding light. This turned out to be a square-rigger with all her masts standing; but when I turned to head for a third vessel, they were growling ominously.

Mutiny came when I left that craft, a five-masted schooner. One of the fishermen tried to take the wheel away from me, but I gave him a shove which sent him backward. He landed flat in six inches of icy water. I roared and threatened, but I was getting weary, was drenched with spray and as eager as they to quit. Something drove me on, though.

"Da gasolina give out!" whined the man at the engine.

"We be swamped!" moaned the fellow I had thrown to the bottom of the boat.

I was inclined to believe him, but by this time we were within a few hundred yards of the fourth ship, just a blot of jet on the ebony of night. Unexpectedly the moon peered out from behind a bank of clouds and showed me her masts— unshrouded skeletons— but the second mast had square yards and was foreshortened, while the foremast was broken off about ten feet above the main deck.

I gave a shout, then turned to see my crew creeping toward me, probably intending to knock me on the head, go through me and drop me overboard,

after which they would call it a night. I had no weapon, but remembered my spectacle case of gun metal. I thrust my hand into my pocket, drew the spectacle case with a flourish and pointed it at them.

"Go back or I'll blow you to pieces!" I bellowed.

Sullenly they returned to their posts.

"Now put me on board that bark," I commanded. "One of you take the wheel."

I knew that if I tried to approach the bark, I would probably shatter the launch against its side. With both of the fishermen busy, they could not start another uprising. We were half full of water, though the wheezy old engine continued to grunt. We came up in the lee of the bark, an ugly greenish-black craft, rather low amidships. Responding to my hail, a sailor tossed over a rope ladder. I clambered up it clumsily with my boxes.

Then the fishermen pushed off and slid into the darkness while I swore waterfront oaths and threatened them with dire punishment, until I remembered that I had not paid them. If they had fled without their ten-dollar bill, the danger must have been greater than I, in my ignorance, had supposed.

"Where's the captain?" I demanded of the seaman, who jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the stern.

"Cabin," he replied.

Stopping for a moment, I considered my situation. I was stranded on the bark with no chance of getting ashore until morning. I was soaked to the skin, shivering like a leaf, probably going to get pneumonia. And it was all for nothing, since no matter how good the story might be, I had no means of delivering it at the office. However, it seemed the intelligent thing to see the captain, find out what sort of a yarn he had to tell and beg something hot to drink and try to borrow dry clothing. Therefore I picked my way along the dark deck, stumbling over coils of rope, running head on into a pile of timber, part of the wrecked foremast which had been neatly sawed, split and piled for firewood. Then there chugged alongside a big tug, which set a ladder against the rail. Over came Mr. Stuffy Thompson, of the *Tribune*, much drier than if he had been spending the evening in a saloon.

"Hello, Stuffy!" I said, as cheerfully as I could.

He looked at me meanly. Supposing he had the story all to himself, he was not pleased to see me there to share it with him.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"Tug," I replied nonchalantly.

"Where is she?"

"Went to another ship. Pick me up on her return."

"That so?" he grunted. "Got the story?"

"Just going after it."

"Come aboard, Finnegan," he shouted, whereupon a big rowdy of a man flopped over the rail, with his huge camera and his plates and flash-light box swung over his shoulder.

We moved together toward the cabin. When we came under the rays of the lantern hung over the cabin door, Stuffy got a good look at me.

"Hanged if I don't think you swam down!" he exclaimed.

I laughed, though my teeth were chattering, then yanked open the cabin door and stepped inside. The place was as hot as an oven, was lighted by a couple of big ship's lamps, which disclosed that the skipper was eating his supper. He was a big raw-boned Scandinavian, with a scar on his right cheek and a drooping, heavy blond mustache, sitting in his shirt and trousers. He was drinking hot tea out of a saucer, while opposite him sat the prettiest girl I have ever seen, before or since.

SHE was one of those gorgeous blondes with a mass of very light yellow hair; I supposed it would have fallen to her heels if she unbound it. Her eyes were like big blue dinner plates, her cheeks pink as strawberries, not rouge, just natural color accentuated by the heat of the cabin. She was at least five feet six and weighed about a hundred and twenty-five pounds.

To think of that clumsy brute of a captain's having a wife like her! Looking at Stuffy, I saw he was thinking the same thing, and we both realized she would show up wonderfully in a photograph to go with our story, if there was one, instead of the picture of the usual group of a shipwrecked crew, looking like an assortment of murderers.

It was obvious that the skipper was annoyed by our intrusion. We were reporters and we were there and couldn't be ejected, so he decided to be amiable and tell us what we wished to know. Then the. girl saw I was soaking wet and that my lips were blue.

"Oh, the poor boy!" she exclaimed, in a voice as sweet as silver chimes. "He is wet through, captain. You should make him drink some spirits."

"Yah," agreed the captain. "All right."

He dug a bottle out of a locker, set it on the table and motioned to me to pour, an invitation I was pleased to accept. Stuffy was dry, but took a drink for luck. The girl was smiling at me sympathetically, which warmed me more than the whisky.

Then the captain began his story, telling it in a long-winded manner. He went into details about his sailing date, his cargo, what kind of weather he had during the first few weeks and how he finally encountered a sixty-mile gale which blew him a couple of hundred miles off his course. When it was over, he

had lost his foremast and his main topmast and most of his sails, as well as a couple of sailors. He had rigged up a jury mast and staggered along until he fell in with a tug off Provincetown.

It was a typical square-rigger yarn, nothing to get excited about. I was thinking what a fool I had been to risk my life for this. If we didn't leave a picture of the girl to save it, the story wouldn't make more than a few sticks on the marine page, and my city editor would growl about the ten dollars which was going on the expense account, even if the Portuguese hadn't collected it.

"And now," said Stuffy, being diplomatic, though we didn't care a rap about the captain's photograph, "will you and your wife kindly pose for a picture for the Tribune?"

The captain threw back his head and cackled.

"She ban not my wife," he assured us.

"Not your wife?" I repeated stupidly.

"No, indeed," said the girl, with a blush and a smile. "Certainly not. Captain Swanson picked me up at sea. I was floating on a piece of wreckage."

Great guns! The old fool had drooled his long-winded yarn for half an hour and omitted the only incident worth while. This lovely creature had been clinging to a log in midocean! He had picked her up and forgot to tell us about it!

"Well, well!" exclaimed Stuffy, his eyes snapping with excitement. 'Tell us about the rescue, captain."

"Oh, it was nodding. I yust picked her up."

"But how? Why?"

"It was easy. Calm. I yust lowered a boat."

"Miss," I pleaded, "will you kindly tell us what happened? How were you shipwrecked? Who are you?"

"I'll try," she said plaintively. 'But my loss is so recent. It's so terrible. I suppose you must know for your newspapers."

"If it won't bring too many unpleasant, harrowing memories," said the gallant Stuffy.

"My name is Rose Murray," she told us. "My father, Gilbert Murray, was captain of the brig *Mary Murray*, named after my dead mother; he was half owner. We sailed from Plymouth, England, five weeks ago, bound for Rio with cargo. I had just been graduated from a school for girls in Bournemouth and I persuaded him to let me make a voyage with him.

"Two weeks out," she went on, "we were hit by a heavy gale which blew us far west of our course. It cost us one sailor and some spars. We were already short handed, only ten men before the mast. A few days later we sighted a ship's longboat with a dozen men in it, and we hove to and permitted them to

come on board. They were a rough lot and told a tale of being wrecked several days previously. Their vessel was the four-masted ship *Minerva*, of Liverpool. The mate of the *Minerva*, a man named George Wilson, was in command of the boat. My father made him welcome aft, and there was plenty of room in the forecastle for the crew.

"WILSON immediately began paying attentions to me that I resented, and I told my father about them. He spoke harshly to Wilson and made him promise to behave himself. Two nights later, I was alone in the cabin, father was on deck. Wilson crept up behind me, grasped me tightly and kissed me. I screamed so loudly that father came rushing down and saw what was going on. He struck Wilson, knocked him down. The man got up and they fought.

"I watched in terror and saw Wilson draw a knife and stab my father, who fell dead almost at my feet. I ran on deck, shrieking for help. Our sailors came to the rescue, headed by our mate. The *Minerva* people attacked them and a horrible battle waged up and down the deck. The *Minerva* men were using knives and several of our men were down.

"I hid behind some barrels on deck, and heard Wilson calling me. And then somebody shouted that the ship was on fire. They had knocked over an oil lamp in the cabin, and Wilson had rushed out after me without observing it. Soon the whole after part of the ship was burning. The fight went on for a long time. I heard boats being launched, but did not dare show myself. I preferred death in the fire than to fall into Wilson's hands. The heat got so terrible that I had to leave the vessel. I threw over an empty barrel and leaped into the water. We were in the Gulf Stream and the sea was warm.

"The boats must have been launched on the other side of the ship. I saw nothing of them when I came to the surface, though the glare of the brig made everything as bright as day. I pushed the barrel away from the ship. Presently the Mary Murray sank. After a long while, a big piece of wreckage came floating by and I climbed upon it. I was afloat all night and all next day and a second night. Of course I suffered for lack of water and food, but most of all for my dear father—"

She broke down and could tell no more. She sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Then the *Mystery* came along," said Captain Swanson. "I noticed the wreckage and saw the girl on it through my glass. I yust lowered a boat and saved her life."

Stuffy looked at me, and I looked at him. Though we were rivals, we respected the other's judgment. We each knew that this was a marvelous yarn.

Simply, directly, briefly the girl had related a tremendous tale of horror and tragedy at sea. The rewrite men would expand it, dilate upon it, color it, give it its proper dramatic value and make three or four columns of it. They had done as much in the past with a tenth the material she had given us in five minutes of talk. But they couldn't secure the effect of the sweet, lovely, heartbroken girl telling her story in person, her eyes tear-dimmed, her voice faltering.

Until that time, I had not wasted much thought on girls. I had escaped love. I had a notion that it was a fictitious emotion, fostered by writers, ravaging weak-minded persons perhaps, but having no power over intellectuals. And I considered myself an intellectual. Now a billow of love had swept over me, almost drowning me, leaving me gasping and sputtering— figuratively speaking. I was gazing at her like a seasick calf, and meanwhile Stuffy was getting in his good work.

"What are you going to do now, Miss Murray?" he asked, most sympathetically.

"I don't know."

"Have you any friends in Boston, anybody to whom you can appeal?"

"I don't know anybody in America."

"Then I have a suggestion to make. Let us take some photographs of you and your heroic rescuer. Then come ashore with me on my tug and I will put you up at the best hotel as the guest of my paper, the Boston *Tribune*, where you may remain until you have decided upon your future. We'll supply you with funds to cable home to your friends; in short, take care of you. Can you go ashore immediately?"

She smiled gratefully at him. "Yes. And thank you so much. It is wonderful of you to do this for me."

I couldn't let him get away with that. She mustn't be grateful to him. I thrust myself forward.

"Let me amend that, Miss Murray. I want you to be the guest of the Boston *Journal*, as well as the *Tribune*, during your stay in our city."

STUFFY laughed. I could have murdered him for that. He knew the *Journal,* knew that they wouldn't pay a cent toward the girl's expenses, but he did not know that I had resolved to spend the few hundred dollars I had in the bank in the name of my newspaper.

The smile was transferred to me.

"You are both so good!" she said.

"We will now have our pictures took," declared Captain Swanson.

Finnegan set up his tripod and prepared his flash. I opened my camera, looked at my flash powder and discovered that it was wet, ruined. But I edged close to the *Tribune* photographer, proposing to catch the picture on his flash. As Swanson stood up beside the young woman, he was a comical figure. It had not occurred to him to put on his coat. However, that didn't bother us, for we would cut him out of the photograph when it was developed.

With a bang the flash went off, illuminating the room for a second, then filling it with a cloud of yellow smoke. The girl screamed. Swanson swore. We clicked our cameras and that was all.

"It's over," said Stuffy. "Please get your things together, Miss Murray."

"I have nothing except what I have on."

"The *Tribune* will provide you with an outfit as soon as the shops open tomorrow," he said generously.

How liberal the fathead was with his paper's money! I knew, however, that he could get away with it, and that I couldn't.

"I got an old overcoat. I give it to you to go ashore," said Swanson, with the first gallant impulse of his life.

He dug out of a locker an old yellow ulster, hideous but warm, which covered the girl from head to foot. She shook him by the hand and thanked him for his kindness, then accompanied Thompson and Finnegan from the cabin.

I trotted along, followed by the captain, and we made our way along the deck to the amidship section where the tug was waiting. They were keeping the tug from crashing into the side of the ship with boat hooks, and had extended a ladder from the deck. house to the ship's rail. The ladder was almost horizontal and by no means tranquil, for the tub was lifting and dropping with the swell of the sea.

A tug deckhand stood on one end of the ladder, to make it steady, and held up a lantern. A second man came part way out on the ladder and extended his hand. Thompson perched on the rail, one foot on the ladder, and Finnegan and I lifted up the girl, so that Thompson could pass her along to the waiting deckhand. She uttered a faint shriek as the ladder sank a trifle, then landed safely on the tug.

Finnegan sprang upon the rail and ran across like a monkey. I was preparing to follow, but Stuffy jumped down upon the deck and blocked me.

"Where do you think you are going?" he demanded sharply.

"With you," I declared, with a propitiatory grin.

"Like hell you are! Use your own tug."

"She may not be back for some time."

"I should worry," he retorted, with a sneering laugh.

"Be a good fellow, Stuffy!" I pleaded. "Let me go back with you."

"Not on your life."

"Aw, come on! I'll do the same for you some day. We got this story together. Play the game."

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"I came down on a launch with some Portuguese fishermen. The cowardly rats were afraid to stand by."

"Then you have no way to get back," he exclaimed triumphantly.

"I've got to go back with you, don't you see?"

"Of all monumental galls," he jeered. "So I am to carry you back! My paper hires tugs and pays big bills to get exclusive stories. It looks to me as though I had a real scoop. Good night."

"You can't leave me here!" I exclaimed.

"You bet your life I can! Stay here till you rot. The Tribune is going to have the biggest scoop of the year. Remember, kid, there are two important things about reporting: First, get the story; next, get it into the office. Ta-ta!"

Laughing, he climbed on the rail and ran nimbly across the ladder.

I threw a leg upon the rail, stood up and was about to follow, when he yanked the ladder and pulled it aboard the tug.

"Shove off!" he commanded.

It was too far to jump. Already a couple of yards of water intervened. The tug began to back away.

"Take me with you!" I pleaded futilely. I was so mad I was almost weeping.

"Go to hell!" he shouted.

I saw the girl touch his arm, but he paid no attention to her. The crew of the tug were laughing. The captain, who had his head out the window of the wheelhouse, hollered:

"Swim, young feller, swim!"

To understand part of my anguish, you have to be an old-fashioned newspaper man. With a marvelous story in my possession, I was marooned on this old bark, doomed to remain all night and miss all editions, while my rival steamed away and turned in the best yarn of the year. The *Tribune* would play it up all the more because they knew the *Journal* wouldn't have a line.

My personal angle was that the loveliest girl in the world was going off with Stuffy on the tug, to be the guest of his paper. They would hide her in some remote hotel where I couldn't find her and print stories about her for a week. As Stuffy must be as much in love as myself, he would be engaged to her by the end of that week. I had to get aboard the tug.

SHE had backed until she was twenty or thirty feet away and was now about to go forward. The moon was out again, throwing a faint light upon the black sea. I tossed my camera to the deck of the ship and swung myself out of my overcoat. Then I said a silent prayer and jumped overboard. I heard a scream from the girl as I flew through the air. Then, plop! I struck the water and fairly screamed as its icy waves engulfed me. Down, down, down, I sank, in an ocean so cold it's a wonder my heart didn't stop beating from the shock. Then I struggled upward until my head broke the surface and a wave slapped me in the face, stinging like red-hot needles. I swallowed a mouthful of salt water that choked me.

The agony of that cold bath cannot be described. But I saw the tug had stopped. Though she was forty feet away, I tried to swim toward her. One of the crew with a boat hook was running along the deck, and I saw Stuffy grasp the boat hook from the seaman's hands.

"Let the ship pick him up," he yelled to the captain of the tug.

"I won't be taken on the bark!" I yelled. "I'll drown first!"

Captain Swanson was standing on deck, swinging a rope. It came flying through the air and struck the water a few feet from me. My first impulse was to grasp the end of it. My shoes and clothes made it almost impossible for me to swim and the icy water was paralyzing me, yet, somehow, I turned away from the rope and struck out for the tug.

The tugboat captain must have been perplexed. He had been hired by Thompson and wanted to obey orders, but he realized that I was crazy enough to drown rather than be pulled on board the ship. Stuffy was bellowing to him to leave me to my fate, but what decided the captain was a yellow tornado that fell upon him.

"Captain!" screamed Rose Murray, grasping him by the shoulder, for he had come out of the wheelhouse and was standing on the top of the deck house. "What are you thinking of? Pull that man on board at once. He's drowning!"

"Right!" exclaimed the skipper. He landed on the deck in one jump, grabbed the boat hook from Stuffy, giving him a shove which almost knocked him overboard, then reached over the side and deftly twisted the boat hook in my collar. By that time, I had swum within three or four feet of the side of the tug. Numbed, almost ready to sink because of the cold and my heavy clothing, I was about through. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the deck of the tug with Rose Murray, an expression of deep concern on her lovely face, bending over me solicitously.

"This is an outrage!" Stuffy was howling. "I refuse to pay for this tug!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose. 'What a brute you are!"

"You damn fool!" said the skipper. "Do you carry newspaper rivalry as far as murder?"

"I demand that you put him back on the bark!" shouted Stuffy. "I won't have him on board this tug."

"He needs a doctor's care as soon as possible," said Rose firmly.

That settled it. The captain climbed back into the wheelhouse, after ordering them to take me into the engine room and strip me, and the tug started for the city, which was six or seven miles away.

A fireman gave me a rubdown with a rough towel. In five minutes, my skin was pink and I was feeling pretty good. They had taken my clothes and hung them close to the furnace, and in a quarter of an hour they were dry enough to put on.

AS I dressed, I was grinning contentedly. I was on my way back to town on my competitor's vessel and at his expense, to furnish my paper with the best sea story in an age and to prevent the *Tribune* from having it exclusively. I would stick with Stuffy until I found out at what hotel he intended to leave Miss Murray. If my acquaintance with the delectable young victim of the ocean ended on this night, it would not be my fault.

The only fly in the ointment was that I had been compelled 'to abandon my camera. Although I could probably recover it next day, the picture taken in the cabin of the *Mystery* was not going to be of any use. If I hadn't been so excited or had more time, I could have wound the roll of film and thrust it in my pocket before I jumped. However, salt water probably would have ruined it any way. The *Journal* couldn't complain, in view of circumstances resulting from its own penuriousness. Though the picture had been left on board the *Mystery*, at least we would have the story.

I went out on the narrow deck, but the wind cut through me, so I dodged hastily into the tiny cabin of the tug. There Stuffy was sitting talking to my girl— at least, I hoped she was going to be my girl. He looked up and treated me to one of his sneers.

"I have arranged with the captain to hold you on board this tug until morning," he said. "So your grand-stand play isn't going to do you a particle of good."

I suppose I must have been half out of my head as a result of my excitement, the plunge into the sea, and so on. I let out a bellow and flew at Stuffy like a wild cat. The room was so tiny there was no chance for science. He couldn't get away from me. I couldn't get away from him, but I didn't want to. The result was one of the most savage scraps, the most violent rough-and-

tumble arguments, ever pulled off in Boston harbor. It was biff, slam, crash, bang, clinch, wrestle, and finally we rolled over and over on the deck.

First, I was on top, then Stuffy. I was weak from my bath, and he was very stout. But Stuffy didn't fight fair. When I had him almost out, he used his knee. Then the skipper intruded. He had enjoyed the argument up to then. Besides, he had been busy preventing Rose Murray from trying to stop the fight. I was groaning with pain and crying with disappointment, until the girl bent over me.

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked, deep concern in her blue eyes.

Stuffy was on his feet, breathing heavily, but his clothes were half torn off and his face was all cut. Two black eyes and one front tooth gone was my score on him. I suppose I came off as badly, if not worse, but I couldn't see myself.

"I'm not much hurt," I said. "The big bum made the captain promise to keep me on board until morning, so I can't print my story."

Rose stood up and looked indignantly at Stuffy.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "How mean and unfair you are! After this poor boy risked his life, actually jumped into that horrible black sea to perform his duty, would you stop him now?"

"All's fair in the newspaper game," retorted Stuffy. "Look at the way he's treating me!"

"And serves you jolly well right," she declared. Then she whirled on the captain and pinned him with a glance.

"Captain, this newspaper article these foolish boys are quarreling about belongs to me. It is my miserable, sorrowful experience. I have the right to say what shall be done with it. And I insist that you give this man who jumped overboard the chance to publish it. You must not detain him."

"Lady," returned the skipper, a bearded veteran of the harbor, with a twinkling blue eye, "you know what you're talking about! Thompson, don't bother me any more. Both you kids start off together and I'll trot along behind to see you don't murder each other on the way."

Again the girl had come to my rescue. Evidently she was on my side. But she would not let me thank her. Stuffy turned his back on us and went out on deck to walk off his anger. In time, we reached the landing on the end of Lewis Wharf, and both Stuffy and I scrambled to help the girl ashore. Seeing my hands empty, she said suddenly:

"Where is your camera?"

"I lost it," I replied. "I'm lucky to be alive."

"Does it mean very much to have a picture of me?"

"Does it?" I exclaimed. "It's the best part of the story."

She was silent for a moment as we trudged up the pier, then she asked:

"If I went with you to your office, could you take another picture of me?"

"I should say so!" I exclaimed delightedly.

Flash-light photos usually were horrible. In all probability, my picture was no good, because I wasn't in the right position. It had been the *Tribune*'s flash. Finnegan, right behind' us, cocked up his ears at her suggestion. He knew that if she let us make a time exposure in the office, the result would make his flashlight picture look very badly.

"Would you do that for me?" I asked.

"Of course I shall!" she answered.

"Miss Murray, I protest!" exclaimed Stuffy. "You are the guest of the *Tribune*, traveling at our expense. This fellow is an interloper."

"You have your picture and article," she said, perplexed. 'Why should not he?"

"You don't seem to understand the value of an exclusive story!" declared Stuffy.

"I'm afraid I don't," she returned. "So I'll let this *Journal* reporter make his picture."

"If you do, I must withdraw my offer to pay your expenses."

The girl threw back her head. Although she was in a strange country and didn't have a cent nor know a soul except us— in fact, would probably be grabbed by the immigration authorities when they found she had landed without passing an examination— she was a dead game sport.

"I refuse your kind offer," she said scornfully. "It has too many strings to it."

"You will be our guest," I declared happily.

Suddenly Stuffy's hostility dropped from him. He grinned good-naturedly. He knew when he was licked.

"You win, Mac," he assured me. "Will you slip me one of your prints of Miss 'Murray? She can be the guest of both papers. I've done my duty trying to make this an exclusive story; now I'll make the best of it."

"Shake, Stuffy!" I said, with a grateful laugh. .

He shook hands.

The girl was regarding us in wonder.

"But I thought you were enemies!" she exclaimed. "You," she went on, to Stuffy, "wanted to let him drown!"

"Oh, no, I thought the ship would pick him up," he protested.

"You," she turned to me, "assaulted Mr. Stuffy and nearly killed him!"

"I had no hard feelings," I assured her. "When we're out on a story, we do anything to keep the other fellow from getting it."

"But a newspaper paragraph— surely it's not worth such dreadful effort!"

We both assured her that it was worth the effort, but time has proved that she was right and we were wrong. Finding a hack, we climbed in and drove to

my office, where we threw the whole city room into a frenzy of excitement, made our pictures, then both Stuffy and myself escorted her to a hotel.

"YOU know," said Stuffy, as we sat recalling the ancient experience, "I was batty about the girl from the first. I knew I was ruining my chances when I tried to abandon you, swimming in President Roads. The paper came first."

"Yes," I admitted. "Rose liked you best at first. She told me so afterward, but your despicable conduct turned her against you. If the tug had been mine and you tried to horn in, I suppose I would have treated you exactly as you treated me."

"Of course! How is she? Does she still hate me?"

"Well, you know how women are. I've tried to explain, but I can't seem to make her understand."

"I suppose she is still beautiful?" he asked wistfully.

"You bet! Looks about twenty-five."

"Got any children?"

"A boy of twelve, and a girl, seven."

"Think of that!" He shook his head mournfully. "I never married, Mac. Never saw but one girl I wanted, and you got her. Beautiful and looks twenty-five! I look like an old man. Say, could you send me a snap shot of your wife and the kids?"

"You bet, Stuffy, and if you come to New York, call on us!"

"No." He smiled. 'Women and Indians never forgive. Get along with you now. I've got to line up a big story for the morning."

So I left the old shop and went out into the street, as Stuffy started to pep up his imitation reporters. Poor old vet, scheduled for the gate in a few years more. If it hadn't been for Rose, I suppose Stuffy and I would have been two burned-out old-young men together.

Turning into a telegraph office, I sent her a wire to accompany a bunch of flowers. A married man gets so matter of fact it takes something special to remind him of the treasure he has in his home.

End