PAST MASTERS 204

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and more

PAST MASTERS 204

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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O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

The Sunday World, (New York) 18 Sep 1904

PRINCE MICHAEL, of the Electorate of Valleluna, sat on his favourite bench in the park. The coolness of the September night quickened the life in him like a rare, tonic wine. The benches were not filled; for park loungers, with their stagnant blood, are prompt to detect and fly home from the crispness of early autumn. The moon was just clearing the roofs of the range of dwellings that bounded the quadrangle on the east. Children laughed and played about the fine-sprayed fountain. In the shadowed spots fauns and hamadryads wooed, unconscious of the gaze of mortal eyes. A hand organ— Philomel by the grace of our stage carpenter, Fancy— fluted and droned in a side street. Around the enchanted boundaries of the little park street cars spat and mewed and the stilted trains roared like tigers and lions prowling for a place to enter. And above the trees shone the great, round, shining face of an illuminated clock in the tower of an antique public building.

Prince Michael's shoes were wrecked far beyond the skill of the carefullest cobbler. The ragman would have declined any negotiations concerning his clothes. The two weeks' stubble on his face was grey and brown and red and greenish yellow— as if it had been made up from individual contributions from the chorus of a musical comedy. No man existed who had money enough to wear so bad a hat as his.

Prince Michael sat on his favourite bench and smiled. It was a diverting thought to him that he was wealthy enough to buy every one of those close-ranged, bulky, window-lit mansions that faced him, if he chose. He could have matched gold, equipages, jewels, art treasures, estates and acres with any Croesus in this proud city of Manhattan, and scarcely have entered upon the bulk of his holdings. He could have sat at table with reigning sovereigns. The social world, the world of art, the fellowship of the elect, adulation, imitation, the homage of the fairest, honours from the highest, praise from the wisest, flattery, esteem, credit, pleasure, fame— all the honey of life was waiting in the comb in the hive of the world for Prince Michael, of the Electorate of Valleluna, whenever he might choose to take it. But his choice was to sit in rags and dinginess on a bench in a park. For he had tasted of the fruit of the tree of life, and, finding it bitter in his mouth, had stepped out of Eden for a time to seek distraction close to the unarmoured, beating heart of the world.

These thoughts strayed dreamily through the mind of Prince Michael, as he smiled under the stubble of his polychromatic beard. Lounging thus, clad as the

poorest of mendicants in the parks, he loved to study humanity. He found in altruism more pleasure than his riches, his station and all the grosser sweets of life had given him. It was his chief solace and satisfaction to alleviate individual distress, to confer favours upon worthy ones who had need of succour, to dazzle unfortunates by unexpected and bewildering gifts of truly royal magnificence, bestowed, however, with wisdom and judiciousness.

And as Prince Michael's eye rested upon the glowing face of the great clock in the tower, his smile, altruistic as it was, became slightly tinged with contempt. Big thoughts were the Prince's; and it was always with a shake of his head that he considered the subjugation of the world to the arbitrary measures of Time. The comings and goings of people in hurry and dread, controlled by the little metal moving hands of a clock, always made him sad.

By and by came a young man in evening clothes and sat upon the third bench from the Prince. For half an hour he smoked cigars with nervous haste, and then he fell to watching the face of the illuminated clock above the trees. His perturbation was evident, and the Prince noted, in sorrow, that its cause was connected, in some manner, with the slowly moving hands of the timepiece.

His Highness arose and went to the young man's bench.

"I beg your pardon for addressing you," he said, "but I perceive that you are disturbed in mind. If it may serve to mitigate the liberty I have taken I will add that I am Prince Michael, heir to the throne of the Electorate of Valleluna. I appear incognito, of course, as you may gather from my appearance. It is a fancy of mine to render aid to others whom I think worthy of it. Perhaps the matter that seems to distress you is one that would more readily yield to our mutual efforts."

The young man looked up brightly at the Prince. Brightly, but the perpendicular line of perplexity between his brows was not smoothed away. He laughed, and even then it did not. But he accepted the momentary diversion.

"Glad to meet you, Prince," he said, good humouredly. "Yes, I'd say you were incog. all right. Thanks for your offer of assistance— but I don't see where your butting-in would help things any. It's a kind of private affair, you know— but thanks all the same."

Prince Michael sat at the young man's side. He was often rebuffed but never offensively. His courteous manner and words forbade that.

"Clocks," said the Prince, "are shackles on the feet of mankind. I have observed you looking persistently at that clock. Its face is that of a tyrant, its numbers are false as those on a lottery ticket; its hands are those of a bunco steerer, who makes an appointment with you to your ruin. Let me entreat you

to throw off its humiliating bonds and to cease to order your affairs by that insensate monitor of brass and steel."

"I don't usually," said the young man. "I carry a watch except when I've got my radiant rags on."

"I know human nature as I do the trees and grass," said the Prince, with earnest dignity. "I am a master of philosophy, a graduate in art, and I hold the purse of a Fortunatus. There are few mortal misfortunes that I cannot alleviate or overcome. I have read your countenance, and found in it honesty and nobility as well as distress. I beg of you to accept my advice or aid. Do not belie the intelligence I see in your face by judging from my appearance of my ability to defeat your troubles."

The young man glanced at the clock again and frowned darkly. When his gaze strayed from the glowing horologue of time it rested intently upon a four-story red brick house in the row of dwellings opposite to where he sat. The shades were drawn, and the lights in many rooms shone dimly through them.

"Ten minutes to nine!" exclaimed the young man, with an impatient gesture of despair. He turned his back upon the house and took a rapid step or two in a contrary direction.

"Remain!" commanded Prince Michael, in so potent a voice that the disturbed one wheeled around with a somewhat chagrined laugh.

"I'll give her the ten minutes and then I'm off," he muttered, and then aloud to the Prince: "I'll join you in confounding all clocks, my friend, and throw in women, too."

"Sit down," said the Prince calmly. "I do not accept your addition. Women are the natural enemies of clocks, and, therefore, the allies of those who would seek liberation from these monsters that measure our follies and limit our pleasures. If you will so far confide in me I would ask you to relate to me your story."

The young man threw himself upon the bench with a reckless laugh.

"Your Royal Highness, I will," he said, in tones of mock deference. "Do you see yonder house— the one with three upper windows lighted? Well, at 6 o'clock I stood in that house with the young lady I am— that is, I was— engaged to. I had been doing wrong, my dear Prince— I had been a naughty boy, and she had heard of it. I wanted to be forgiven, of course— we are always wanting women to forgive us, aren't we, Prince?"

"'I want time to think it over,' said she. 'There is one thing certain; I will either fully forgive you, or I will never see your face again. There will be no half-way business. At half-past eight,' she said, 'at exactly half-past eight you may be watching the middle upper window of the top floor. If I decide to forgive I will hang out of that window a white silk scarf. You will know by that

that all is as was before, and you may come to me. If you see no scarf you may consider that everything between us is ended forever.' That," concluded the young man bitterly, "is why I have been watching that clock. The time for the signal to appear has passed twenty-three minutes ago. Do you wonder that I am a little disturbed, my Prince of Rags and Whiskers?"

"Let me repeat to you," said Prince Michael, in his even, well-modulated tones, "that women are the natural enemies of clocks. Clocks are an evil, women a blessing. The signal may yet appear."

"Never, on your principality!" exclaimed the young man, hopelessly. "You don't know Marian— of course. She's always on time, to the minute. That was the first thing about her that attracted me. I've got the mitten instead of the scarf. I ought to have known at 8.31 that my goose was cooked. I'll go West on the 11.45 to-night with Jack Milburn. The jig's up. I'll try Jack's ranch awhile and top off with the Klondike and whiskey. Good-night— er— er— Prince."

Prince Michael smiled his enigmatic, gentle, comprehending smile and caught the coat sleeve of the other. The brilliant light in the Prince's eyes was softening to a dreamier, cloudy translucence.

"Wait," he said solemnly, "till the clock strikes. I have wealth and power and knowledge above most men, but when the clock strikes I am afraid. Stay by me until then. This woman shall be yours. You have the word of the hereditary Prince of Valleluna. On the day of your marriage I will give you $100,000 and a palace on the Hudson. But there must be no clocks in that palace— they measure our follies and limit our pleasures. Do you agree to that?"

"Of course," said the young man, cheerfully, "they're a nuisance, anyway— always ticking and striking and getting you late for dinner."

He glanced again at the clock in the tower. The hands stood at three minutes to nine.

"I think," said Prince Michael, "that I will sleep a little. The day has been fatiguing."

He stretched himself upon a bench with the manner of one who had slept thus before.

"You will find me in this park on any evening when the weather is suitable," said the Prince, sleepily. "Come to me when your marriage day is set and I will give you a cheque for the money."

"Thanks, Your Highness," said the young man, seriously. "It doesn't look as if I would need that palace on the Hudson, but I appreciate your offer, just the same."

Prince Michael sank into deep slumber. His battered hat rolled from the bench to the ground. The young man lifted it, placed it over the frowsy face

and moved one of the grotesquely relaxed limbs into a more comfortable position. "Poor devil!" he said, as he drew the tattered clothes closer about the Prince's breast.

Sonorous and startling came the stroke of 9 from the clock tower. The young man sighed again, turned his face for one last look at the house of his relinquished hopes— and cried aloud profane words of holy rapture.

From the middle upper window blossomed in the dusk a waving, snowy, fluttering, wonderful, divine emblem of forgiveness and promised joy.

By came a citizen, rotund, comfortable, home-hurrying, unknowing of the delights of waving silken scarfs on the borders of dimly-lit parks.

"Will you oblige me with the time, sir?" asked the young man; and the citizen, shrewdly conjecturing his watch to be safe, dragged it out and announced:

"Twenty-nine and a half minutes past eight, sir."

And then, from habit, he glanced at the clock in the tower, and made further oration.

"By George! that clock's half an hour fast! First time in ten years I've known it to be off. This watch of mine never varies a—"

But the citizen was talking to vacancy. He turned and saw his hearer, a fast receding black shadow, flying in the direction of a house with three lighted upper windows.

And in the morning came along two policemen on their way to the beats they owned. The park was deserted save for one dilapidated figure that sprawled, asleep, on a bench. They stopped and gazed upon it.

"It's Dopy Mike," said one. "He hits the pipe every night. Park bum for twenty years. On his last legs, I guess."

The other policeman stooped and looked at something crumpled and crisp in the hand of the sleeper.

"Gee!" he remarked. "He's doped out a fifty-dollar bill, anyway. Wish I knew the brand of hop that he smokes."

And then "Rap, rap, rap!" went the club of realism against the shoe soles of Prince Michael, of the Electorate of Valleluna.

2: The Body Snatcher

Robert Louis Stevenson

1850-1894

Pall Mall Gazette Christmas 1884

Christmas "ghost/horror" story, often reprinted.

EVERY NIGHT in the year, four of us sat together in the small parlour of the George, at Debenham; the undertaker, and the landlord, and Fettes, and myself. Sometimes there would be more; but blow high, blow low, come rain, or snow, or frost, we four would be each planted in his own particular armchair. Fettes was an old drunken Scotchman, a man of education obviously, and a man of some property; since he lived in idleness. He had come to Debenham years ago, while still young; and by mere continuance of living had grown to be an adopted townsman. His blue camlet cloak was a local antiquity, like the church spire. His place in the parlour at the George, his absence from church, his old, crapulous, disreputable vices, were all things of course in Debenham. He had some vague Radical opinions and some fleeting infidelities, which he would now and again set forth and emphasize with tottering slaps upon the table. He drank rum— five glasses regularly every evening; and for the greater portion of his nightly visit to the George sat, with his glass in his right hand, in a state of melancholy, alcoholic saturation. We called him the Doctor; for he was supposed to have some special knowledge of medicine, and had been known, upon a pinch, to set a fracture or reduce a dislocation; but beyond these slight particulars, we had no knowledge of his character and antecedents.

One dark winter night, it had struck nine some time before the landlord joined us. There was a sick man in the George, a great neighbouring proprietor suddenly struck down with apoplexy on his way to Parliament; and the great man's still greater London doctor had been telegraphed to his bedside. It was the first time such a thing had happened in Debenham, for the railway was but newly open, and we were all proportionately moved by the occurrence.

'He's come,' said the landlord, after he had filled and lighted his pipe.

'He?' said I. 'Who?— not the doctor?'

'Himself,' replied our host.

'What is his name?'

'Dr Macfarlane,' said the landlord.

Fettes was far through his third tumbler, stupidly fuddled, now nodding over, now staring mazily around him; but at the last word he seemed to awaken, and repeated the name 'Macfarlane' twice, quietly enough the first time, but with a sudden emotion at the second.

'Yes,' said the landlord, 'that's his name, Doctor Wolfe Macfarlane.'

Fettes became instantly sober; his eyes awoke, his voice became clear, loud, and steady, his language forcible and earnest; we were all startled by the transformation, as if a man had risen from the dead.

'I beg your pardon,' he said; 'I am afraid I have not been paying much attention to your talk. Who is this Wolfe Macfarlane?' And then, when he had heard the landlord out, 'It cannot be, it cannot be,' he added; 'and yet I would like well to see him face to face.'

'Do you know him, Doctor?' asked the undertaker, with a gasp.

'God forbid,' was the reply. 'And yet the name is a strange one; it were too much to fancy two. Tell me, landlord, is he old?'

'Well,' said the host, 'he's not a young man, to be sure, and his hair is white; but he looks younger than you.'

'He is older, though; years older. But'— with a slap upon the table— 'it's the rum you see in my face, rum and sin. This man, perhaps, may have an easy conscience and a good digestion. Conscience! hear me speak. You would think I was some good, old, decent Christian; would you not? But no, not I; I never canted. Voltaire might have canted if he'd stood in my shoes; but the brains'— with a rattling fillip on his bald head— 'the brains were clear and active; and I saw and I made no deductions.'

'If you know this doctor,' I ventured to remark after a somewhat awful pause, 'I should gather that you do not share the landlord's good opinion.'

Fettes paid no regard to me. 'Yes,' he said, with sudden decision, 'I must see him face to face.'

There was another pause, and then a door was closed rather sharply on the first floor and a step was heard upon the stair.

'That's the doctor,' cried the landlord; 'look sharp, and you can catch him.'

It was but two steps from the small parlour to the door of the old George inn; the wide oak staircase landed almost in the street; there was room for a Turkey rug and nothing more between the threshold and the last round of the descent; but this little space was every evening brilliantly lit up, not only by the light upon the stair and the great signal lamp below the sign, but by the warm radiance of the bar-room window. The George thus brightly advertised itself to passers-by in the cold street. Fettes walked steadily to the spot, and we, who were hanging behind, beheld the two men meet, as one of them had phrased it, face to face. Dr Macfarlane was alert and vigorous. His white hair set off his pale and placid although energetic countenance; he was richly dressed in the finest of broadcloth and the whitest of linen, with a great gold watch chain and studs and spectacles of the same precious material; he wore a broad folded tie, white and speckled with lilac, and he carried on his arm a comfortable driving-

coat of fur. There was no doubt but he became his years, breathing, as he did, of wealth and consideration; and it was a surprising contrast to see our parlour sot, bald, dirty, pimpled, and robed in his old camlet cloak, confront him at the bottom of the stairs.

'Macfarlane,' he said, somewhat loudly, more like a herald than a friend.

The great doctor pulled up short on the fourth step, as though the familiarity of the address surprised and somewhat shocked his dignity.

'Toddy Macfarlane,' repeated Fettes.

The London man almost staggered; he stared for the swiftest of seconds at the man before him, glanced behind him with a sort of scare, and then in a startled whisper, 'Fettes!' he said, 'you!'

'Ay,' said the other, 'me. Did you think I was dead, too? We are not so easy shot of our acquaintance.'

'Hush, hush!' exclaimed the Doctor. 'Hush, hush! this meeting is so unexpected— I can see you are unmanned. I hardly knew you, I confess, at first; but I am overjoyed, overjoyed, to have this opportunity. For the present it must be how-d'ye-do and good-bye in one; for my fly is waiting, and I must not fail the train; but you shall— let me see— yes— you shall give me your address, and you can count on early news of me. We must do something for you, Fettes; I fear you are out at elbows; but we must see to that— for auld lang syne, as once we sang at suppers.'

'Money!' cried Fettes; 'money from you! The money that I had of you is lying where I cast it in the rain.'

Dr Macfarlane had talked himself into some measure of superiority and confidence; but the uncommon energy of this refusal cast him back into his first confusion. A horrible, ugly look came and went across his almost venerable countenance. 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'be it as you please; my last thought is to offend you. I would intrude on none. I will leave you my address, however—'

'I do not wish it; I do not wish to know the roof that shelters you,' interrupted the other. 'I heard your name; I feared it might be you; I wished to know if, after all, there were a God; I know now that there is none. Begone!'

He still stood in the middle of the rug, between the stair and doorway; and the great London physician, in order to escape, would be forced to step upon one side. It was plain that he hesitated before the thought of this humiliation. White as he was, there was a dangerous glitter in his spectacles; but while he still paused uncertain he became aware that the driver of his fly was peering in from the street at this unusual scene, and caught a glimpse at the same time of our little body from the parlour, huddled by the corner of the bar. The presence of so many witnesses decided him at once to flee. He crouched

together, brushing on the wainscot, and made a dart, like a serpent, striking for the door. But his tribulation was not yet entirely at an end; for even as he was passing Fettes clutched him by the arm, and these words came in a whisper, and yet painfully distinct, 'Have you seen it again?'

The great, rich London doctor cried out aloud with a sharp, throttling cry; he dashed his questioner across the open space, and, with his hands over his head, fled out of the door like a detected thief. Before it had occurred to one of us to make a movement the fly was already rattling towards the station. The scene was over like a dream; but the dream had left proofs and traces of its passage. Next day the servant found the fine gold spectacles crushed and broken on the threshold, and that very night were we not all standing breathless by the bar-room window, and Fettes at our side, sober, pale, and resolute in look?

'God protect us, Mr Fettes!' said the landlord, coming first into possession of his customary senses. 'What in the universe is all this? These are strange things you have been saying.'

Fettes turned towards us: he looked us each in succession in the face. 'See if you can hold your tongues,' said he. 'That man, Macfarlane, is not safe to cross; those that have done so already, have repented it too late.'

And then, without so much as finishing his third glass, far less waiting for the other two, he bade us a good-bye and went forth, under the lamp of the hotel, into the black night.

We three returned to our places in the parlour, with the big red fire and four clear candles; and as we recapitulated what had passed the first chill of our surprise soon changed into a glow of curiosity. We sat late; it was the latest session I have known in the old George; each man, before we parted, had his theory that he was bound to prove; and none of us had any nearer business in this world than to track out the past of our contemned companion, and surprise the secret that he shared with the great London doctor. It is no great boast; but I believe I was a better hand at worming out a story than either of my fellows at the George; and perhaps there is now no other man alive who could narrate to you the following foul and unnatural events:

In his young days Fettes studied medicine in the schools of Edinburgh. He had talent of a kind, the talent that picks up swiftly what it hears and readily retails it for its own. He worked little at home; but he was civil, attentive, and intelligent in the presence of his masters. They soon picked him out as a lad who listened closely and remembered well; nay, strange as it seemed to me when first I heard it, he was in those days well favoured and pleased by his exterior. There was, at this period, a certain extramural teacher of anatomy, whom I shall here designate by the letter K—. His name was subsequently too

well known. The man who bore it skulked through the streets of Edinburgh in disguise, while the mob that applauded at the execution of Burke called loudly for the blood of his employer. But Mr K— was then at the top of his vogue; he enjoyed a popularity due partly to his own talent and address, partly to the incapacity of his rival, the university professor. The students, at least, swore by his name, and Fettes believed himself, and was believed by others, to have laid the foundations of success when he had acquired the favour of this meteorically famous man. Mr K— was a *bon vivant* as well as an accomplished teacher; he liked a sly allusion no less than a careful preparation. In both capacities Fettes enjoyed and deserved his notice, and by the second year of his attendance he held the half-irregular position of second demonstrator or sub-assistant in the class.

In this capacity, the charge of the theatre and lecture-room devolved in particular upon his shoulders; he had to answer for the cleanliness of the premises and the conduct of the other students; and it was a part of his duty to supply, receive, and divide the various subjects. It was with a view to this last— at that time very delicate— affair that he was lodged by Mr K— in the same wynd, and at last in the same building, with the dissecting rooms. Here, after a night of turbulent pleasures, his hand still tottering, his sight still misty and confused, he would be called out of bed in the black hours before the winter dawn by the unclean and desperate interlopers who supplied the table; he would open the door to these men, since infamous throughout the land; he would help them with their tragic burden, pay them their sordid price, and remain alone when they were gone with the unfriended relics of humanity. From such a scene he would return to snatch another hour or two of slumber, to repair the abuses of the night and refresh himself for the labours of the day.

Few lads could have been more insensible to the impressions of a life thus passed among the ensigns of mortality. His mind was closed against all general considerations; he was incapable of interest in the fate and fortunes of another, the slave of his own desires and low ambitions. Cold, light, and selfish in the last resort, he had that modicum of prudence, miscalled morality, which keeps a man from inconvenient drunkenness or punishable theft. He coveted besides a measure of consideration from his masters and his fellow-pupils, and he had no desire to fail conspicuously in the external parts of life. Thus he made it his pleasure to gain some distinction in his studies, and day after day rendered unimpeachable eye service to his employer, Mr K—. For his day of work he indemnified himself by nights of roaring blackguardly enjoyment; and, when that balance had been struck, the organ that he called his conscience declared itself content.

The supply of subjects was a continual trouble to him as well as to his master. In that large and busy class, the raw material of the anatomists kept perpetually running out; and the business thus rendered necessary was not only unpleasant in itself, but threatened dangerous consequences to all who were concerned. It was the policy of Mr K— to ask no question in his dealings with the trade. 'They bring the body, and we pay the price,' he used to say— dwelling on the alliteration— '*quid pro quo*.' And again, and somewhat profanely, 'Ask no questions,' he would tell his assistants, 'for conscience's sake.' There was no understanding that the subjects were provided by the crime of murder; had that idea been broached to him in words he would have recoiled in horror; but the lightness of his speech upon so grave a matter was, in itself, an offence against good manners, and a temptation to the men with whom he dealt. Fettes, for instance, had often remarked to himself upon the singular freshness of the bodies; he had been struck again and again by the hangdog, abominable looks of the ruffians who came to him before the dawn; and, putting things together clearly in his private thoughts, he perhaps attributed a meaning too immoral and too categorical to the unguarded counsels of his master. He understood his duty, in short, to have three branches: to take what was brought, to pay the price, and to avert the eye from any evidence of crime.

One November morning this policy of silence was put sharply to the test. He had been awake all night with racking toothache— pacing his room like a caged beast, or throwing himself in fury on his bed— and had fallen at last into that profound, uneasy slumber that so often follows on a night of pain, when he was awakened by the third or fourth angry repetition of the concerted signal. There was a thin, bright moonshine; it was bitter cold, windy, and frosty; the town had not yet awakened, but an indefinable stir already preluded the noise and business of the day. The ghouls had come later than usual, and they seemed more than usually eager to be gone. Fettes, sick with sleep, lighted them upstairs; he heard their grumbling Irish voices through a dream; as they stripped the sack from their sad merchandise, he leaned, dozing, with his shoulder propped against the wall. He had to shake himself to find the men their money. As he did so his eyes lighted on the dead face. He started; he took two steps nearer, with the candle raised.

'God Almighty,' he cried, 'that is Jane Galbraith!'

The men answered nothing, but they shuffled nearer towards the door.

'I know her, I tell you,' he continued. 'She was alive and hearty yesterday. It's impossible she can be dead; it's impossible you should have got this body fairly.'

'Sure, sir, you're mistaken entirely,' said one of the men.

But the other looked Fettes darkly in the eyes, and demanded his money on the spot.

It was impossible to misconceive the threat or to exaggerate the danger. The lad's heart failed him; he stammered some excuses, counted out the sum, and saw his hateful visitors depart. No sooner were they gone than he hastened to confirm his doubts; by a dozen unquestionable marks he identified the girl he had jested with the day before; he saw with horror, marks upon her body that might well betoken violence. A panic seized him, and he took refuge in his room. There he reflected at length over the discovery that he had made; considered soberly the bearing of Mr K—'s instructions, and the danger to himself of interference in so serious a business; and at last, in sore perplexity, determined to wait for the advice of his immediate superior, the class assistant.

This was a young doctor, Wolfe Macfarlane, a high favourite among all the reckless students, clever, dissipated, and unscrupulous to the last degree. He had travelled and studied abroad; his manners were agreeable and a little forward; he was an authority upon the stage, skilful on the ice or the links with skate or golf club; he dressed with nice audacity, and, to put the finishing touch upon his glory, he kept a gig and a strong, trotting horse. With Fettes he was on terms of intimacy; indeed, their relative positions called for some community of life; and when subjects were scarce, the pair would drive far into the country in Macfarlane's gig, visit and desecrate some lonely graveyard, and return before dawn with their booty to the door of the dissecting room.

On that particular morning Macfarlane arrived somewhat earlier than his wont. Fettes heard him, and met him on the stairs, told him his story, and showed him the cause of his alarm. Macfarlane examined the ecchymoses.

'Yes,' he said with a nod, 'it looks fishy.'

'Well, what should I do?' asked Fettes.

'Do?' repeated the other. 'Do you want to do anything? Least said, soonest mended, I should say.'

'Someone else might recognize her,' objected Fettes. 'She was as well known as the Castle Rock.'

'We'll hope not,' said Macfarlane, 'and if anybody does— well, you didn't, don't you see, and there's an end. The fact is, this has been going on too long. Stir up the mud, and you'll get K— into the most unholy trouble; you'll be in a shocking box yourself, so will I, if you come to that. I should like to know how anyone of us would look, or what the devil we should have to say for ourselves, in any Christian witness-box. For me, you know, there's one thing certain; that, practically speaking, all our subjects have been murdered.'

'Macfarlane!' cried Fettes.

'Come now!' sneered the other. 'As if you hadn't suspected it yourself!'

'Suspecting is one thing—'

'And proof another. Yes, I know; and I'm as sorry as you are *this* should have come here,' tapping the body with his cane. 'The next best thing for me is not to recognize it; and,' he added coolly, 'I don't. You may, if you please. I don't dictate, but I think a man of the world would do as I do; and I may add I fancy that is what K— would look for at our hands. The question is, why did he choose us two for his assistants? And I answer, because he didn't want old wives.'

This was the tone of all others to affect the mind of a lad like Fettes; he agreed to imitate Macfarlane; the body of the unfortunate girl was duly dissected, and no one remarked or appeared to recognize her.

One afternoon, when his day's work was over, Fettes dropped into a popular tavern, and found Macfarlane sitting with a stranger. This was a small man, very pale and dark, with cold black eyes. The cut of his features gave a promise of intellect and refinement which was but feebly realized in his manners; for he proved, upon a nearer acquaintance, coarse, vulgar and stupid. He exercised, however, a very remarkable control over Macfarlane; issued orders like the Great Bashaw; became inflamed at the least discussion or delay, and commented rudely on the servility with which he was obeyed. This most offensive person took a fancy to Fettes on the spot, plied him with drinks, and honoured him with unusual confidences on his past career. If a tenth part of what he confessed were true, he was a very loathsome rogue; and the lad's vanity was tickled by the attention of so experienced a man.

'I'm a pretty bad fellow myself,' the stranger remarked; 'but Macfarlane is the boy— Toddy Macfarlane, I call him. Toddy, order your friend another glass.' Or it might be, 'Toddy, you jump up and shut that door.' 'Toddy hates me,' he said again; 'oh, yes, Toddy, you do.'

'Don't you call me that confounded name,' growled Macfarlane.

'Hear him! Did you ever see the lads play knife? He would like to do that all over my body,' remarked the stranger.

'We medicals have a better way than that,' said Fettes. 'When we dislike a dear friend of ours, we dissect him.'

Macfarlane looked up sharply, as though this jest were scarcely to his mind.

The afternoon passed. Gray, for that was the stranger's name, invited Fettes to join them at dinner, ordered a feast so sumptuous that the tavern was thrown into commotion; and when all was done commanded Macfarlane to settle the bill. It was late before they separated; the man Gray was incapably drunk; Macfarlane, sobered by his fury, chewed the end of the money he had been forced to squander and the slights he had been obliged to swallow;

Fettes, with various liquors singing in his head, returned home with devious footsteps and a mind entirely in abeyance. Next day Macfarlane was absent from the class; and Fettes smiled to himself as he imagined him still squiring the intolerable Gray from tavern to tavern. As soon as the hour of liberty had struck, he posted from place to place in quest of his last night's companions; he could find them, however, nowhere, returned early to his rooms, went early to bed, and slept the sleep of the just.

At four in the morning he was wakened by the well-known signal. Descending to the door, he was filled with astonishment to find Macfarlane with his gig, and, in the gig, one of those long and ghastly packages with which he was so well acquainted.

'What?' he cried. 'Have you been out alone? How did you manage?'

But Macfarlane silenced him roughly, bidding him turn to business. When they had got the body upstairs and laid it on the table, Macfarlane made at first as if he were going away; then he paused and seemed to hesitate; and then, 'You had better look at the face,' said he, in tones of some constraint. 'You had better,' he repeated, as Fettes only stared at him in wonder.

'But where and how and when did you come by it?' cried the other.

'Look at the face,' was the only answer.

Fettes was staggered; strange doubts assailed him; he looked from the young doctor to the body, and then back again; at last with a start, he did as he was bidden. He had almost expected the sight that met his eyes, and yet the shock was cruel. To see, fixed in the rigidity of death and naked on that coarse layer of sackcloth, the man whom he had left well clad and full of meat and sin, upon the threshold of a tavern, awoke, even in the thoughtless Fettes, some of the terrors of the conscience. It was a *cras tibi* which re-echoed in his soul, that two whom he had known should have come to lie upon these icy tables. Yet these were only secondary thoughts. His first concern regarded Wolfe. Unprepared for a challenge so momentous, he knew not how to look his comrade in the face; he durst not meet his eye, and he had neither words nor voice at his command.

It was Macfarlane himself who made the first advance. He came up quietly behind and laid his hand gently but firmly on the other's shoulder.

'Richardson,' said he, 'may have the head.'

Now, Richardson was a student who had long been anxious for that portion of the human subject to dissect. There was no answer, and the murderer resumed: 'Talking of business, you must pay me; your accounts, you see, must tally.'

Fettes found a voice, the ghost of his own: 'Pay you!' he cried. 'Pay you for that!'

'Why, yes, of course you must; by all means and on every possible account you must,' returned the other. 'I dare not give it for nothing; you dare not take it for nothing: it would compromise us both. This is another case like Jane Galbraith's; the more things are wrong, the more we must act as if all were right. Where does old K— keep his money?'

'There,' answered Fettes hoarsely, pointing to a cupboard in the corner.

'Give me the key, then,' said the other calmly, holding out his hand.

There was an instant's hesitation, and the die was cast. Macfarlane could not suppress a nervous twitch, the infinitesimal mark of an immense relief, as he felt the key between his fingers. He opened the cupboard, brought out pen and ink and a paper book that stood in one compartment, and separated from the funds in a drawer a sum suitable to the occasion.

'Now, look here,' he said, 'there is the payment made. First proof of your good faith; first step to your security. You have now to clinch it by a second. Enter the payment in your book, and then you for your part may defy the devil.'

The next few seconds were for Fettes an agony of thought; but in balancing his terrors it was the most immediate that triumphed. Any future difficulty seemed almost welcome if he could avoid a present quarrel with Macfarlane. He set down the candle which he had been carrying all this time, and with a steady hand entered the date, the nature, and the amount of the transaction.

'And now,' said Macfarlane, 'it's only fair that you should pocket the lucre. I've had my share already. By-the-by, when a man of the world falls into a bit of luck, has a few extra shillings in his pocket— I'm ashamed to speak of it, but there's a rule of conduct in the case. No treating, no purchase of expensive class-books, no squaring of old debts; borrow, don't lend.'

'Macfarlane,' began Fettes, still somewhat hoarsely, 'I have put my neck in a halter to oblige you.'

'To oblige me?' cried Wolfe. 'Oh, come! You did, as near as I can see the matter, what you downright had to do in self-defence. Suppose I got into trouble, where would you be? This second little matter flows clearly from the first; Mr Gray is the continuation of Miss Galbraith; you can't begin and then stop; if you begin, you must keep on beginning; that's the truth. No rest for the wicked.'

A horrible sense of blackness and the treachery of fate seized hold upon the soul of the unhappy student.

'My God!' he cried, 'but what have *I* done? and when did *I* begin? To be made a class assistant— in the name of reason, where's the harm in that? Service wanted the position; Service might have got it. Would *he* have been where *I* am now?'

'My dear fellow,' said Macfarlane, 'what a boy you are! What harm *has* come to you? What harm *can* come to you if you hold your tongue? Why, man, do you know what this life is? There are two squads of us— the lions and the lambs. If you're a lamb, you'll come to lie upon these tables like Gray or Jane Galbraith; if you're a lion, you'll live and drive a horse like me, like K—, like all the world with any wit or courage. You're staggered at the first. But look at K—! My dear fellow, you're clever, you have pluck. I like you, and K— likes you; you were born to lead the hunt; and I tell you, on my honour and my experience of life, three days from now you'll laugh at all these scarecrows like a high-school boy at a farce.'

And with that Macfarlane took his departure, and drove off up the wynd in his gig to get under cover before daylight. Fettes was thus left alone with his regrets. He saw the miserable peril in which he stood involved; he saw, with inexpressible dismay, that there was no limit to his weakness, and that, from concession to concession, he had fallen from the arbiter of Macfarlane's destiny to his paid and helpless accomplice. He would have given the world to have been a little braver at the time, but it did not occur to him that he might still be brave. The secret of Jane Galbraith and the cursed entry in the day book closed his mouth.

Hours passed; the class began to arrive; the members of the unhappy Gray were dealt out to one and to another, and received without remark; Richardson was made happy with the head; and before the hour of freedom rang Fettes trembled with exultation to perceive how far they had already gone towards safety. For two days he continued to watch, with increasing joy, the dreadful process of disguise. On the third day Macfarlane made his appearance— he had been ill, he said; but he made up for lost time by the energy with which he directed the students; to Richardson, in particular, he extended the most valuable assistance and advice, and that student, encouraged by the praise of the demonstrator, burned high with ambitious hopes, and saw the medal already in his grasp.

Before the week was out Macfarlane's prophecy had been fulfilled. Fettes had outlived his terrors and forgotten his abasement. He began to plume himself upon his courage; and had so arranged the story in his mind that he could look back on these events with an unhealthy pride. Of his accomplice he saw but little. They met, of course, in the business of the class; they received their orders together from Mr K—; at times they had a word or two in private, and Macfarlane was from first to last particularly kind and jovial. But it was plain that he avoided any reference to their common secret; and even when Fettes whispered to him that he had cast in his lot with the lions and forsworn the lambs, he only signed to him smilingly to hold his peace.

At length an occasion arose which threw the pair once more into a closer union. Mr K— was again short of subjects; pupils were eager; and it was a part of this teacher's pretensions to be always well supplied. At the same time there came the news of a burial in the rustic graveyard of Glencorse. Time has little changed the place in question. It stood, then as now, upon a cross road, out of call of human habitations, and buried fathom deep in the foliage of six cedar trees. The cries of the sheep upon the neighbouring hills, the streamlets upon either hand, one loudly singing among pebbles, the other dripping furtively from pond to pond, the stir of the wind in mountainous old flowering chestnuts, and, once in seven days, the voice of the bell and the old tunes of the precentor, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence round the rural church. The Resurrection Man— to use a by-name of the period— was not to be deterred by any of the sanctities of customary piety. It was part of his trade to despise and desecrate the scrolls and trumpets of old tombs, the paths worn by the feet of worshippers and mourners, and the offerings and the inscriptions of bereaved affection. To rustic neighbourhoods, where love is more than commonly tenacious, and where some bonds of blood or fellowship unite the entire society of a parish, the body snatcher, far from being repelled by natural respect, was attracted by the ease and safety of his task. To bodies that had been laid in the earth in joyful expectation of a far different awakening, there came that hasty, lamp-lit, terror-haunted resurrection of the spade and mattock; the coffin was forced, the cerements torn, and the melancholy relics, clad in sackcloth, after being rattled for hours on moonless byways, were at length exposed to uttermost indignities before a class of gaping boys.

Somewhat as two vultures may swoop upon a dying lamb, Fettes and Macfarlane were to be let loose upon a grave in that green and quiet resting-place. The wife of a farmer, a woman who had lived for sixty years, and been known for nothing but good butter and a godly conversation, was to be rooted from her grave at midnight, and carried, dead and naked, to that far-away city that she had always honoured with her Sunday's best; the place beside her family was to be empty till the crack of doom; her innocent and almost venerable members to be exposed to that last curiosity of the anatomist.

Late one afternoon the pair set forth, well wrapped in cloaks, and furnished with a formidable bottle. It rained without remission; a cold, dense, lashing rain; now and again there blew a puff of wind, but these sheets of falling water kept it down. Bottle and all, it was a sad and silent drive as far as Penicuik, where they were to spend the evening. They stopped once, to hide their implements in a thick bush not far from the churchyard; and once again at the Fisher's Tryst, to have a toast before the kitchen fire, and vary their nips

of whisky with a glass of ale. When they reached their journey's end the gig was housed, the horse was fed and comforted, and the two young doctors, in a private room, sat down to the best dinner and the best wine the house afforded. The lights, the fire, the beating rain upon the window, the cold, incongruous work that lay before them, added zest to their enjoyment of the meal. With every glass their cordiality increased. Soon Macfarlane handed a little pile of gold to his companion.

'A compliment,' he said. 'Between friends these little d—d accommodations ought to fly like pipe-lights.'

Fettes pocketed the money, and applauded the sentiment to the echo. 'You are a philosopher,' he cried. 'I was an ass till I knew you. You and K— between you, by the Lord Harry, but you'll make a man of me.'

'Of course we shall,' applauded Macfarlane. 'A man? I'll tell you it required a man to back me up the other morning. There are some big, brawling, forty-year-old cowards would have turned sick at the look of the d—d thing; but not you— you kept your head. I watched you.'

'Well, and why not?' Fettes thus vaunted himself. 'It was no affair of mine. There was nothing to gain on the one side but disturbance, and on the other I could count on your gratitude, don't you see?' And he slapped his pocket till the gold pieces rang.

Macfarlane somehow felt a certain touch of alarm at these unpleasant words; he may have regretted that he had taught his young companion so successfully; but he had no time to interfere, for the other noisily continued in this boastful strain.

'The great thing is not to be afraid. Now, between you and me, I don't want to hang— that's practical— but for all cant, Macfarlane, I was born with a contempt. Hell, God, devil, right, wrong, sin, crime, and all that old gallery of curiosities— they may frighten boys, but men of the world, like you and me, despise them. Here's to the memory of Gray!'

It was by this time growing somewhat late. The gig, according to order, was brought round to the door with both lamps brightly shining, and the young men had to pay their bill and take the road. They announced that they were bound for Peebles, drove in that direction till they were clear of the last houses of the town; then, extinguishing the lamps, returned upon their course, and followed a by-road towards Glencorse. There was no sound but that of their own passage, and the incessant, strident pouring of the rain. It was pitch dark; here and there a white gate or a white stone in the wall guided them for a short space across the night; but for the most part it was at a foot's pace, and almost groping, that they picked their way through that resonant blackness to their solemn and isolated destination. In the sunken roads that traverse the

neighbourhood of the burying-ground the last glimmer failed them, and it became necessary to kindle a match and reillume one of the lanterns of the gig. Thus, under the dripping trees, and environed by huge and moving shadows, they reached the scene of their unhallowed labours.

They were both experienced in such affairs, and powerful with the spade; and they had scarce been twenty minutes at their task before they were rewarded by a dull rattle on the coffin lid. At the same moment Macfarlane, having hurt his hand upon a stone, flung it carelessly above his head. The grave, in which they now stood almost to the shoulders, was close to the edge of the plateau of the graveyard; and the gig lamp had been propped, the better to illuminate their labours, against a tree, and on the immediate verge of the steep bank descending to the stream. Chance had taken a sure aim with the stone. Then came a clang of broken glass; night fell upon them; sounds alternately dull and ringing announced the bounding of the lantern down the bank, and its occasional collision with the trees; a stone or two, which it had dislodged in its descent, rattled behind it into the profundities of the glen; and then silence, like night, resumed its sway; and they might bend their hearing to its utmost pitch but nought was to be heard except the rain, now marching to the wind, now steadily falling over miles of open country.

They were so nearly at an end of their abhorred task that they judged it wiser to complete it in the dark. The coffin was exhumed and broken open; the body inserted in the dripping sack and carried between them to the gig; one mounted, to keep it in its place, and the other, taking the horse by the mouth, groped along by wall and bush, until they reached the wider road by the Fisher's Tryst. Here was a faint, diffused radiancy which they hailed like daylight; by that they pushed the horse to a good pace and began to rattle almost merrily in the direction of the town.

They had both been wetted to the skin during their operations, and now, as the gig jumped among the deep ruts, the thing that stood propped between them fell now upon the one and now upon the other. At every repetition of the horrid contact each instinctively repelled it with the greater haste; and the process, natural although it was, began to tell upon the nerves of the companions. Macfarlane made some ill-favoured jest about the farmer's wife, but it came hollowly from his lips, and was allowed to drop in silence. Still their unnatural burden bumped from side to side, and now the head would be laid, as if in confidence, upon their shoulders, and now the drenching sackcloth would flap icily about their faces. A creeping chill began to possess the soul of Fettes. He peered at the bundle, and it seemed somehow larger than at first. All over the countryside, and from every degree of distance, the farm dogs accompanied their passage with tragic ululations; and it grew and grew upon

his mind that some unnatural miracle had been accomplished, that some nameless change had befallen the dead body, and that it was in fear of their unholy burden that the dogs were howling.

'For God's sake,' said he, making a great effort to arrive at speech, 'for God's sake let's have a light.'

Seemingly Macfarlane was affected in the same direction; for, though he made no reply, he stopped the horse, passed the reins to his companion, got down, and proceeded to kindle the remaining lamp. They had by that time got no farther than the cross road down to Auchenclinny. The rain still poured, as though the deluge were returning, and it was no easy matter to make a light in such a world of wet and darkness. When at last the flickering blue flame had been transferred to the wick, and began to expand and clarify, and shed a wide circle of misty brightness round the gig, it became possible for the two young men to see each other and the thing they had along with them. The rain had moulded the rough sacking to the outlines of the body underneath; the head was distinct from the trunk, the shoulders plainly modelled; something at once spectral and human riveted their eyes upon the ghastly comrade of their drive.

For some time Macfarlane stood motionless, holding up the hand. A nameless dread was swathed, like a wet sheet, about the body, and tightened the white skin upon the face of Fettes; a fear that was meaningless, a horror of what could not be, kept mounting in his brain. Another beat of the watch, and he had spoken; but his comrade forestalled him.

'That is not a woman,' said Macfarlane, in a hushed voice.

'It was a woman when we put her in,' whispered Fettes.

'Hold that lamp,' said the other; 'I must see her face.'

And as Fettes took the lamp his companion untied the fastenings of the sack and drew down the cover from the head. The light fell very clear upon the dark, well-moulded features and smooth-shaven cheeks of a too familiar countenance, often beheld in dreams by both of these young men. A wild yell rang up into the night; each leaped from his own side into the roadway; the lamp fell, broke, and was extinguished; and the horse, terrified by this unusual commotion, bounded and went off towards Edinburgh at the gallop, bearing along with it, sole occupant of the gig, the body of the long dead and long dissected Gray.

3: The Wild Asses of the Devil

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

In: *Boon*, 1915

A more short story from the book "Boon", a satirical collection in which H. G. Wells parodies Henry James. This story has been reprinted several times.

THERE WAS ONCE an Author who pursued fame and prosperity in a pleasant villa on the south coast of England. He wrote stories of an acceptable nature and rejoiced in a growing public esteem, carefully offending no one and seeking only to please. He had married under circumstances of qualified and tolerable romance a lady who wrote occasional but otherwise regular verse, he was the father of a little daughter, whose reported sayings added much to his popularity, and some of the very best people in the land asked him to dinner. He was a deputy-lieutenant and a friend of the Prime Minister, a literary knighthood was no remote possibility for him, and even the Nobel prize, given a sufficient longevity, was not altogether beyond his hopes. And this amount of prosperity had not betrayed him into any un-English pride. He remembered that manliness and simplicity which are expected from authors. He smoked pipes and not the excellent cigars he could have afforded. He kept his hair cut and never posed. He did not hold himself aloof from people of the inferior and less successful classes. He habitually travelled third class in order to study the characters he put into his delightful novels; he went for long walks and sat in inns, accosting people; he drew out his gardener. And though he worked steadily, he did not give up the care of his body, which threatened a certain plumpness and what is more to the point, a localized plumpness, not generally spread over the system but exaggerating the anterior equator. This expansion was his only care. He thought about fitness and played tennis, and every day, wet or fine, he went for at least an hour’s walk....

Yet this man, so representative of Edwardian literature— for it is in the reign of good King Edward the story begins— in spite of his enviable achievements and prospects, was doomed to the most exhausting and dubious adventures before his life came to its unhonoured end....

Because I have not told you everything about him. Sometimes— in the morning sometimes— he would be irritable and have quarrels with his shaving things, and there were extraordinary moods when it would seem to him that living quite beautifully in a pleasant villa and being well-off and famous, and

writing books that were always good-humoured and grammatical and a little distinguished in an inoffensive way, was about as boring and intolerable a life as any creature with a soul to be damned could possibly pursue. Which shows only that God in putting him together had not forgotten that viscus the liver which is usual on such occasions....

The winter at the seaside is less agreeable and more bracing than the summer, and there were days when this Author had almost to force himself through the wholesome, necessary routines of his life, when the south-west wind savaged his villa and roared in the chimneys and slapped its windows with gustsful of rain and promised to wet that Author thoroughly and exasperatingly down his neck and round his wrists and ankles directly he put his nose outside his door. And the grey waves he saw from his window came rolling inshore under the hurrying grey rain-bursts, line after line, to smash along the undercliff into vast, feathering fountains of foam and sud and send a salt-tasting spin-drift into his eyes. But manfully he would put on his puttees and his water-proof cape and his biggest brierwood pipe, and out he would go into the whurryballoo of it all, knowing that so he would be all the brighter for his nice story-writing after tea.

On such a day he went out. He went out very resolutely along the seaside gardens of gravel and tamarisk and privet, resolved to oblige himself to go right past the harbour and up to the top of the east cliff before ever he turned his face back to the comforts of fire and wife and tea and buttered toast....

And somewhere, perhaps half a mile away from home, he became aware of a queer character trying to keep abreast of him.

His impression was of a very miserable black man in the greasy, blue- black garments of a stoker, a lascar probably from a steamship in the harbour, and going with a sort of lame hobble.

As he passed this individual the Author had a transitory thought of how much Authors don’t know in the world, how much, for instance, this shivering, cringing body might be hiding within itself, of inestimable value as “local colour” if only one could get hold of it for “putting into” one’s large acceptable novels. Why doesn’t one sometimes tap these sources? Kipling, for example, used to do so, with most successful results.... And then the Author became aware that this enigma was hurrying to overtake him. He slackened his pace....

The creature wasn’t asking for a light; it was begging for a box of matches. And, what was odd, in quite good English.

The Author surveyed the beggar and slapped his pockets. Never had he seen so miserable a face. It was by no means a prepossessing face, with its aquiline nose, its sloping brows, its dark, deep, bloodshot eyes much too close together, its V-shaped, dishonest mouth and drenched chin-tuft. And yet it was

attractively animal and pitiful. The idea flashed suddenly into the Author's head: "Why not, instead of going on, thinking emptily, through this beastly weather— why not take this man back home now, to the warm, dry study, and give him a hot drink and something to smoke, and *draw him out*?"

Get something technical and first-hand that would rather score off Kipling.

"Its damnably cold!" he shouted, in a sort of hearty, forecastle voice.

"It's worse than that," said the strange stoker.

"It's a hell of a day!" said the Author, more forcible than ever.

"Don't remind me of hell," said the stoker, in a voice of inappeasable regret.

The Author slapped his pockets again. "You've got an infernal cold. Look here, my man— confound it! would you like a hot grog?..."

THE SCENE shifts to the Author's study— a blazing coal fire, the stoker sitting dripping and steaming before it, with his feet inside the fender, while the Author fusses about the room, directing the preparation of hot drinks. The Author is acutely aware not only of the stoker but of himself. The stoker has probably never been in the home of an Author before; he is probably awe-stricken at the array of books, at the comfort, convenience, and efficiency of the home, at the pleasant personality entertaining him.... Meanwhile the Author does not forget that the stoker is material, is "copy," is being watched, *observed*. So he poses and watches, until presently he forgets to pose in his astonishment at the thing he is observing. Because this stoker is rummier than a stoker ought to be—

He does not simply accept a hot drink; he informs his host just how hot the drink must be to satisfy him.

"Isn't there something you could put in it— something called red pepper? I've tasted that once or twice. It's good. If you could put in a bit of red pepper."

"If you can stand that sort of thing?"

"And if there isn't much water, can't you set light to the stuff? Or let me drink it boiling, out of a pannikin or something? Pepper and all."

Wonderful fellows, these stokers! The Author went to the bell and asked for red pepper.

And then as he came back to the fire he saw something that he instantly dismissed as an optical illusion, as a mirage effect of the clouds of steam his guest was disengaging. The stoker was sitting, all crouched up, as close over the fire as he could contrive; and he was holding his black hands, not to the fire but *in* the fire, holding them pressed flat against two red, glowing masses of coal.... He glanced over his shoulder at the Author with a guilty start, and then

instantly the Author perceived that the hands were five or six inches away from the coal.

Then came smoking. The Author produced one of his big cigars— for although a conscientious pipe-smoker himself he gave people cigars; and then, again struck by something odd, he went off into a corner of the room where a little oval mirror gave him a means of watching the stoker undetected. And this is what he saw.

He saw the stoker, after a furtive glance at him, deliberately turn the cigar round, place the lighted end in his mouth, inhale strongly, and blow a torrent of sparks and smoke out of his nose. His firelit face as he did this expressed a diabolical relief. Then very hastily he reversed the cigar again, and turned round to look at the Author. The Author turned slowly towards him.

"You like that cigar?" he asked, after one of those mutual pauses that break down a pretence.

"It's admirable."

"Why do you smoke it the other way round?"

The stoker perceived he was caught. "It's a stokehole trick," he said. "Do you mind if I do it? I didn't think you saw."

"Pray smoke just as you like," said the Author, and advanced to watch the operation.

It was exactly like the fire-eater at a village fair. The man stuck the burning cigar into his mouth and blew sparks out of his nostrils. "Ah!" he said, with a note of genuine satisfaction. And then, with the cigar still burning in the corner of his mouth, he turned to the fire and *began to rearrange the burning coals with his hands* so as to pile up a great glowing mass. He picked up flaming and white-hot lumps as one might pick up lumps of sugar. The Author watched him, dumbfounded.

"I say!" he cried. "You stokers get a bit tough."

The stoker dropped the glowing piece of coal in his hand. "I forgot," he said, and sat back a little.

"Isn't that a bit— *extra*?" asked the Author, regarding him. "Isn't that some sort of trick?"

"We get so tough down there," said the stoker, and paused discreetly as the servant came in with the red pepper.

"Now you can drink," said the Author, and set himself to mix a drink of a pungency that he would have considered murderous ten minutes before. When he had done the stoker reached over and added more red pepper.

"I don't quite see how it is your hand doesn't burn," said the Author as the stoker drank. The stoker shook his head over the uptilted glass.

"Incombustible," he said, putting it down. "Could I have just a tiny drop more? Just brandy and pepper, if you *don't* mind. Set alight. I don't care for water except when it's super- heated steam."

And as the Author poured out another stiff glass of this incandescent brew, the stoker put up his hand and scratched the matted black hair over his temple. Then instantly he desisted and sat looking wickedly at the Author, while the Author stared at him aghast. For at the corner of his square, high, narrow forehead, revealed for an instant by the thrusting back of the hair, a curious stumpy excrescence had been visible; and the top of his ear— he had a pointed top to his ear!

"A-a-a-a-h!" said the Author, with dilated eyes.

"A-a-a-a-h!" said the stoker, in hopeless distress.

"But you aren't—!"

"I know— I know I'm not. I know.... I'm a devil. A poor, lost, homeless devil."

And suddenly, with a gesture of indescribable despair, the apparent stoker buried his face in his hands and burst into tears.

"Only man who's ever been decently kind to me," he sobbed. "And now— you'll chuck me out again into the beastly wet and cold.... Beautiful fire.... Nice drink.... Almost homelike.... Just to torment me.... Boo-ooh!"

And let it be recorded to the credit of our little Author, that he did overcome his momentary horror, that he did go quickly round the table, and that he patted that dirty stoker's shoulder.

"There!" he said. "There! Don't mind my rudeness. Have another nice drink. Have a hell of a drink. I won't turn you out if you're unhappy— on a day like this. Have just a mouthful of pepper, man, and pull yourself together."

And suddenly the poor devil caught hold of his arm. "Nobody good to me," he sobbed. "Nobody good to me." And his tears ran down over the Author's plump little hand— scalding tears.

ALL REALLY WONDERFUL things happen rather suddenly and without any great emphasis upon their wonderfulness, and this was no exception to the general rule. This Author went on comforting his devil as though this was nothing more than a chance encounter with an unhappy child, and the devil let his grief and discomfort have vent in a manner that seemed at the time as natural as anything could be. He was clearly a devil of feeble character and uncertain purpose, much broken down by harshness and cruelty, and it throws a curious light upon the general state of misconception with regard to matters diabolical that it came as a quite pitiful discovery to our Author that a devil could be unhappy and heart-broken. For a long time his most earnest and

persistent questioning could gather nothing except that his guest was an exile from a land of great warmth and considerable entertainment, and it was only after considerable further applications of brandy and pepper that the sobbing confidences of the poor creature grew into the form of a coherent and understandable narrative.

And then it became apparent that this person was one of the very lowest types of infernal denizen, and that his role in the dark realms of Dis had been that of watcher and minder of a herd of sinister beings hitherto unknown to our Author, the Devil's Wild Asses, which pastured in a stretch of meadows near the Styx. They were, he gathered, unruly, dangerous, and enterprising beasts, amenable only to a certain formula of expletives, which instantly reduced them to obedience. These expletives the stoker-devil would not repeat; to do so except when actually addressing one of the Wild Asses would, he explained, involve torments of the most terrible description. The bare thought of them gave him a shivering fit. But he gave the Author to understand that to crack these curses as one drove the Wild Asses to and from their grazing on the Elysian fields was a by no means disagreeable amusement. The ass-herds would try who could crack the loudest until the welkin rang.

And speaking of these things, the poor creature gave a picture of diabolical life that impressed the Author as by no means unpleasant for any one with a suitable constitution. It was like the Idylls of Theocritus done in fire; the devils drove their charges along burning lanes and sat gossiping in hedges of flames, rejoicing in the warm, dry breezes (which it seems are rendered peculiarly bracing by the faint flavour of brimstone in the air), and watching the harpies and furies and witches circling in the perpetual afterglow of that inferior sky. And ever and again there would be holidays, and one would take one's lunch and wander over the sulphur craters picking flowers of sulphur or fishing for the souls of usurers and publishers and house-agents and land-agents in the lakes of boiling pitch. It was good sport, for the usurers and publishers and house-agents and land-agents were always eager to be caught; they crowded round the hooks and fought violently for the bait, and protested vehemently and entertainingly against the Rules and Regulations that compelled their instant return to the lake of fire.

And sometimes when he was on holiday this particular devil would go through the saltpetre dunes, where the witches-brooms grow and the blasted heath is in flower, to the landing-place of the ferry whence the Great Road runs through the shops and banks of the Via Dolorosa to the New Judgement Hall, and watch the crowds of damned arriving by the steam ferry-boats of the Consolidated Charon Company. This steamboat-gazing seems about as popular down there as it is at Folkestone. Almost every day notable people arrive, and,

as the devils are very well informed about terrestrial affairs— for of course all the earthly newspapers go straight to hell— whatever else could one expect?— they get ovations of an almost undergraduate intensity. At times you can hear their cheering or booing, as the case may be, right away on the pastures where the Wild Asses feed. And that had been this particular devil's undoing.

He had always been interested in the career of the Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone....

He was minding the Wild Asses. He knew the risks. He knew the penalties. But when he heard the vast uproar, when he heard the eager voices in the lane of fire saying, "It's Gladstone at last!" when he saw how quietly and unsuspiciously the Wild Asses cropped their pasture, the temptation was too much. He slipped away. He saw the great Englishman landed after a slight struggle. He joined in the outcry of "Speech! Speech!" He heard the first delicious promise of a Home Rule movement which should break the last feeble links of Celestial Control....

And meanwhile the Wild Asses escaped— according to the rules and the prophecies....

THE LITTLE Author sat and listened to this tale of a wonder that never for a moment struck him as incredible. And outside his rain-lashed window the strung-out fishing smacks pitched and rolled on their way home to Folkestone harbour....

THE WILD ASSES escaped.

They got away to the world. And his superior officers took the poor herdsman and tried him and bullied him and passed this judgement upon him: that he must go to the earth and find the Wild Asses, and say to them that certain string of oaths that otherwise must never be repeated, and so control them and bring them back to hell. That— or else one pinch of salt on their tails. It did not matter which. One by one he must bring them back, driving them by spell and curse to the cattle-boat of the ferry. And until he had caught and brought them all back he might never return again to the warmth and comfort of his accustomed life. That was his sentence and punishment. And they put him into a shrapnel shell and fired him out among the stars, and when he had a little recovered he pulled himself together and made his way to the world.

But he never found his Wild Asses and after a little time he gave up trying.

He gave up trying because the Wild Asses, once they had got out of control, developed the most amazing gifts. They could, for instance, disguise themselves with any sort of human shape, and the only way in which they

differed then from a normal human being was— according to the printed paper of instructions that had been given to their custodian when he was fired out— that "their general conduct remains that of a Wild Ass of the Devil."

"And what interpretation can we put upon *that*?" he asked the listening Author.

And there was one night in the year— Walpurgis Night, when the Wild Asses became visibly great black wild asses and kicked up their hind legs and brayed. They had to. "But then, of course," said the devil, "they would take care to shut themselves up somewhere when they felt that coming on."

Like most weak characters, the stoker devil was intensely egotistical. He was anxious to dwell upon his own miseries and discomforts and difficulties and the general injustice of his treatment, and he was careless and casually indicative about the peculiarities of the Wild Asses, the matter which most excited and interested the Author. He bored on with his doleful story, and the Author had to interrupt with questions again and again in order to get any clear idea of the situation.

The devil's main excuse for his nervelessness was his profound ignorance of human nature. "So far as I can see," he said, "they might all be Wild Asses. I tried it once— "

"Tried what?"

"The formula. You know."

"Yes?"

"On a man named Sir Edward Carson."

"Well?"

"*Ugh!*" said the devil.

"Punishment?"

"Don't speak of it. He was just a professional lawyer- politician who had lost his sense of values.... How was *I* to know?... But our people certainly know how to hurt...."

After that it would seem this poor devil desisted absolutely from any attempt to recover his lost charges. He just tried to live for the moment and make his earthly existence as tolerable as possible. It was clear he hated the world. He found it cold, wet, draughty.... "I can't understand why everybody insists upon living outside of it," he said. "If you went inside— "

He sought warmth and dryness. For a time he found a kind of contentment in charge of the upcast furnace of a mine, and then he was superseded by an electric-fan. While in this position he read a vivid account of the intense heat in the Red Sea, and he was struck by the idea that if he could get a job as stoker upon an Indian liner he might snatch some days of real happiness during that portion of the voyage. For some time his natural ineptitude prevented his

realizing this project, but at last, after some bitter experiences of homelessness during a London December, he had been able to ship on an Indiaward boat— only to get stranded in Folkestone in consequence of a propeller breakdown. And so here he was!

He paused.

"But about these Wild Asses?" said the Author.

The mournful, dark eyes looked at him hopelessly.

"Mightn't they do a lot of mischief?" asked the Author.

"They'll do no end of mischief," said the despondent devil.

"Ultimately you'll catch it for that?"

"Ugh!" said the stoker, trying not to think of it.

NOW the spirit of romantic adventure slumbers in the most unexpected places, and I have already told you of our plump Author's discontents. He had been like a smouldering bomb for some years. Now, he burst out. He suddenly became excited, energetic, stimulating, uplifting.

He stood over the drooping devil.

"But my dear chap!" he said. "You must pull yourself together. You must do better than this. These confounded brutes may be doing all sorts of mischief. While you— shirk...."

And so on. Real ginger.

"If I had some one to go with me. Some one who knew his way about."

The Author took whisky in the excitement of the moment. He began to move very rapidly about his room and make short, sharp gestures. You know how this sort of emotion wells up at times. "We must work from some central place," said the Author. "To begin with, London perhaps."

IT WAS NOT two hours later that they started, this Author and this devil he had taken to himself, upon a mission. They went out in overcoats and warm underclothing— the Author gave the devil a thorough outfit, a double lot of Jaeger's extra thick— and they were resolved to find the Wild Asses of the Devil and send them back to hell, or at least the Author was, in the shortest possible time. In the picture you will see him with a field-glass slung under his arm, the better to watch suspected cases; in his pocket, wrapped in oiled paper, is a lot of salt to use if by chance he finds a Wild Ass when the devil and his string of oaths is not at hand. So he started. And when he had caught and done for the Wild Asses, then the Author supposed that he would come back to his nice little villa and his nice little wife, and to his little daughter who said the amusing things, and to his popularity, his large gilt-edged popularity, and— except for an added prestige— be just exactly the man he had always been.

Little knowing that whosoever takes unto himself a devil and goes out upon a quest, goes out upon a quest from which there is no returning—

Nevermore.

———————

4: The Story of No. 1, Karma Crescent

E. & H. Heron

Kate Prichard (1851-1935) and Hesketh Prichard (1876-1922)
Pearson's Magazine March 1899

A Flaxman Low investigation

THE FOLLOWING story is the first full relation of the extraordinary features of the case connected with the house in South London, that at one time occupied so large a portion of the public attention. It may be remembered that several mysterious deaths took place within a few months of each other in a certain new suburb. In each instance the same unaccountable symptoms were present, and the successive inquests gave rise to a quite remarkable amount of discussion in the Press as the evidence furnished points of peculiar interest for the Psychical Societies.

It is a recognised fact that the public will die patiently, and to a large percentage, of any known and preventable epidemic before they trouble to make a stir about it, but they resent instantly and bitterly the removal of half-a-dozen individuals, provided these die from some unknown and, therefore, unpreventable cause. Thus the fate of the victims at No. 1, Karma Crescent, raised a storm of comment, conjecture, and vague accusation; in time this died away, however, and the whole business was forgotten, or only recalled to serve as an example of the many dark and sinister mysteries London carries in her unfathomed heart.

As many people may not be able to recall the details to mind, a brief *résumé* of the chief incidents is given below, together with additional information supplied later by Flaxman Low, the well-known psychical in vestigator.

Karma Crescent is one of several similar terraces planned and partially built upon a newly-opened estate in an out lying suburb of London. The locality is good, though not fashionable, hence the houses, though of fair size, are offered at moderate rentals. Karma Crescent has never been completed. It consists of six or seven houses, most of which were let when Colonel Simpson B. Hendriks and his son walked over from the railway station to inspect No. 1. This was a detached corner house, overlooking an untidy spread of building and, beyond which railway sheds and a network of lines on a rather high level rose against the sky.

To the right of the house an old country lane, deeply rutted, led away between ragged hedges to a congeries of small houses about half a mile distant.

These houses form the outer crust of a poor district, of which no more need be said than that it provides a certain amount of dock labour. The Americans were, however, not deterred by the dreary surroundings; they had come to London on business, and since No. 1 was cheap, commodious, and well - furnished, they closed with the agent who showed them over. It was only when the lease was signed, and they had begun to inquire for servants, that the distinctive characteristics of the abode they had chosen was borne in upon them. Upon making inquiry they gathered that the house had been occupied by three successive sets of tenants, all of whom complained that it was haunted by a dark, evil, whispering face, that lurked in dusky corners, met them in lonely rooms, or hung over the beds, terrifying the awakened sleepers.

This silent, flitting presence foretold death, for each family had left hurriedly and in deep distress upon the loss of one of its members, but as the drains and the roof were sound, and it has been definitely decided that the English law can take no account of ghosts, the Hendriks were obliged to stick to their bargain. Finally, the Colonel, who was a widower, secured the services of a gaunt Scotch house keeper, professing herself well acquainted with the habits of ghosts, and took up his residence with his son at No. 1, being fully persuaded that a free use of shooting- irons was likely to prove as good a preventive against hauntings as any other form of annoyance.

Three days later, on the 5th February, the first symptoms of disturbance set in. The Hendriks had been out very late, and on their return in the small hours, found their house keeper scared and shaking, and with a circumstantial story to tell of the apparition. She said she had been awakened from sleep by the touch of a death-cold hand. Opening her eyes, she saw a fearsome, whispering face hanging over her; she could not catch the meaning of the words it said, but was persuaded that they were threatening.

A faint light flickered about the face, "like I've seen brandy on a dish of raisins," continued Miss Anderson, "and I could see it was wrapped up in its winding-sheet, gone yellow wi' age and lying by. At last the light went out wi' a flash, and I lay trembling in the dairk till I heard the latch-keys in the door, for I was fair frechtened at yon ghaist."

One further detail she added, to the effect that on going to bed she had locked the door and put the key under her pillow, where she found it safe after the visit of the apparition, although the door was still fast locked when she tried to leave the room an hour later.

After this experience the Americans had all the bolts and locks of the house examined and strengthened, also one or other of them remained at home every evening.

It was in the course of the following week that young Lamartine Hendriks went out to a theatre, leaving his father at home.

He was absent something over three hours and a half. When he returned between eleven and twelve o'clock, he found Colonel Hendriks sitting at the table in the dining-room, his body swollen to an enormous size, his face of a livid indigo, and quite dead.

Calling down the housekeeper, the young man went for a doctor.

He recollected having seen a doctor's plate on the door of a house in a shabby street close by.

Dr. Mulroon was at home, a big powerful Irishman, rather the worse for liquor, but with the deep eye and square jaw that indicate ability. Hendriks hurried him round to Karma Crescent. On the way Mulroon asked no questions, he walked silently into the dining-room and looked steadily to the Colonel. Then he shook his head

"Bedad ! It's just what I expected!" he said.

"What?" asked Hendriks sharply.

Mulroon was sober enough by this time.

"It's the old story," he replied with a strong brogue. "This makes the fourth case of this kind I've been called in to see in this house during the last eighteen months."

"In this neighbourhood?"

"In this house, faith, and nowhere else! Didn't ye know it was haunted? Haven't you heard of the ‘Strange Deaths in South London'? The papers had them in capitals an inch long."

Hendriks leant against the table and spoke hoarsely.

"We have just come from America, and I can recall something of what you mention, but I did not connect them with this house. As you have attended similar cases, tell me what is the cause of death?"

"The Public Analyst himself couldn't do that! Not in the way you want to hear it. I made an examination in each case as well as he, and maybe I'm as capable as he, perhaps more so! For I swept off every medal and honour that came in my way at Dublin, and— but what's the use of talking? No man living can tell you more than this. The blue colour of the tissues and the swelling are produced by a change in the condition of the blood, though the most exhaustive examination has failed to discover any reason or cause for such a change. The result is death, that is the only certainty about it."

A long silence ensued, and then Hendriks said quietly: "If it takes me to the last day of my life, I'll get at this business from the inside. I'll never give it up until I know everything!"

"Well, now, look here, Mr. Hendriks, will you take my advice? The police and the doctors have done their living best over this business, and they're just where they were at the beginning. There's only one man in Europe can help you— Flaxman Low, the psychologist."

But Hendriks demurred on the ground of having seen enough of such gentry in the States.

"Low is not like any of them. He is as sensible and as practical a man as you or I. I know what he can do and how he sets about it, for I was in practice in the country four or five years ago, and he came down there and cleared up a mystery that had bothered the neighbourhood for above ten years. Leave this room exactly as it is. Wire for him first— you can get the police in after."

The upshot of this conversation was that Mr. Low arrived at Karma Crescent soon lifter it became light, having been fetched by Mulroon in person.

The dining-room was a square room opening on to the garden by a French window. It was richly furnished, everything was in order, there was no sign of a struggle. At the table about ten feet from the glass doors sat the dead man— a disfigured and horrible spectacle. The body was inclined to the left side, the head dropped rather forward on the left shoulder, the left arm hanging straight down at his side, and the left trouser leg slightly turned up. Low bent over him and looked at the puffed blue lips.

"Does the attitude suggest anything to you?" asked Flaxman Low after some time.

"He was bending forward to get his breath," returned Mulroon.

"On the contrary he had been stooping forward and to the left, but leant back for relief when the final spasm seized him," said Low. "Whatever may have been the cause of death, its action was rapid. Now can you give me the details of the former deaths which have taken place here?"

"I can do that same." Mulroon drew out a pocket-book. "Here you are.

"The first tenant of this house was Dr. Philipson Vines (D.D., you understand). On the 16th November, 1889, he was found dead sitting in that same chair by the servants at 6.30 a.m. A fine edition of Froissart was open on the table before him. He had evidently been dead for several hours. His age was fifty-three, the body was well nourished, and all the organs healthy.

"Next, Richard Stephen Holding, a retired linen draper, with a large family, took the house. On the 3rd February, 1890, he was found dead by his wife at 2 a.m. He was also seated at the table, and in the same attitude as you have noticed in Colonel Hendriks's case. Like the Colonel, he was still warm. His age was sixty-three, and a progressive heart trouble existed— which was not, however, the cause of death.

"Next, the house was taken by a widow lady named Findlater, with one daughter and an invalid son. The son kept to his bedroom during the first fortnight of their stay, but one warm May morning he ventured down here. His sister left him in an armchair at 11.45 in the forenoon, and on returning half-an-hour after to bring him some beef-tea, she found him seated at the table, blue and swollen and dead, just like the others. Findlater was twenty-seven, and must in any case have died shortly from phthisis."

"Can you recollect the attitudes of the bodies when you saw them?"

"Only in the case of Holding. The two others had been laid on the couch before my arrival," answered Mulroon.

"Have you not noticed this left trouser leg?" continued Low.

"Yes; it was the same with Holding's. Probably a convulsive clutch at the last moment, and, no doubt, involuntary."

Some further conversation having taken place, it was eventually arranged that Mr. Low should return in the evening to spend a few days with young Hendriks, and to study the surroundings.

After he had gone notice of the death was given and the usual formalities were carried out. The police examined the whole house, but as far as could be judged by prolonged searching, no one from outside could have got in, yet Colonel Hendriks had been done to death although no wound appeared upon the body.

The evidence of Miss Anderson at the inquest excited much attention. Several persons interested in psychical mysteries were present and made copious notes, besides cross-examining the house keeper subsequently great length. But no one, police, doctors, or psychists, had any workable theory to offer. Miss Anderson stated before the coroner that she wished to leave No. 1, Karma Crescent at once, as she was firmly persuaded that the malignant whispering face, which hung over her while she lay in bed, was the face of the "Wicked One."

The jury returned an open verdict, and Hendriks walked back to his house feeling very dejected. His father's unaccountable death weighed upon him. He could not rid himself of the remembrance of the hideously changed aspect of the keen, handsome face that had been so much to him from his boyhood.

He knew that Flaxman Low had been present unofficially at the inquest, and resolved to question him on arrival. But when Low came, he declined to commit himself to any opinion, though he went so far as to say that he hoped some further information might soon be forthcoming. And with this Hendriks had to be satisfied.

"I should like to occupy your late house keeper's room, where, I understand, several manifestations have taken place." continued Mr. Low, "

and if you would allow it to be understood that I am merely a servant, whom you have hired for the time being to attend upon you, I think it might be a wise precaution."

During the next few days Flaxman Low was busy. He had brought with him a number of solid and peculiar bolts, which he fixed on the various doors and windows, it seemed, almost at random. He shut off the basement very securely, and put another bolt on the outside of the shutters inclosing the glass doors leading from the dining room into the garden. Yet, after all, Hendriks noticed that he went to bed for several nights leaving one or other of these fittings unbolted.

Meanwhile, Low loitered about the garden, and inside and outside the house. He walked over to the railway junction, and lingered in the little lane. He visited the unpleasant colony of houses by the river, and altogether gained a pretty thorough knowledge of the neighbourhood.

"Has that garden door from the lane been much used since you came here?" he asked Hendriks one morning.

"No; my father thought that, under the circumstances, it had better be secured. It was never used. And, as there is no cellarage, I don't see how any persons can enter the house except after the ordinary style of the burglar."

Mulroon dropped in very often to see them, and one night he inquired of Flaxman Low if the apparition had made its appearance.

To his astonishment, Mr. Low replied in the affirmative.

"What did you do?" asked Mulroon.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Low. "My plans do not admit of any overt action yet. But I can assure you that Miss Anderson is a good observer, she gave us a very correct description of its appearance."

"Then it was an evil spirit?"

Mr. Flaxman Low smiled a little.

"Undoubtedly," he said.

That night Mr. Low securely locked off the basement from the upper floor. He had since his coming insisted that no one but himself should enter the dining-room at any time or for any purpose. He begged that it should be neither ventilated nor aired, but left closed and unopened.

Every day he went in and remained for some time, morning and evening. On this occasion he paid the room his usual nightly visit, and Hendriks from the hall could hear him locking the French windows.

"Won't you draw your patent safety bolt outside, too?" he called out. "You've forgotten that every night."

"I think I may leave that for the present," was Low's reply.

"There's nothing to be got out of you, Mr. Low," said Hendriks with some irritation.

"Not yet, but I hope soon to have some thing to say for myself," Flaxman Low answered.

On the next day Mr. Low did not visit the dining-room until the afternoon. He opened the doors to air the room and lit the fire, after which he locked the French windows, and, shutting the door behind him, went to speak to Hendriks in the next room.

"I am going out for a short time," he said. "Will you be good enough not to enter the dining-room during my absence? Mulroon will probably come round. Please warn him also."

It was already growing dark when Mr. Low left the house. He remained away but a short time, and on his return was much disturbed by hearing Mulroon's big voice arguing with Hendriks in the dining-room. He opened the door. Mulroon was sitting in the same high-backed chair. He was a little tipsy, and, in consequence, annoyingly obstinate.

Mr. Low laid down the basket he held in his hand.

"For Heaven's sake, Mulroon, don't move! If you do, you're a dead man!" he said, approaching him. "Now, keep your legs straight— so, and rise gently."

Mulroon, grumbling a good deal, but partially sobered by Flaxman Low's manifest alarm, did as he was told.

"Now," added Low, "if you will kindly leave me for a few minutes alone, I will join you later."

Mulroon, however, had patients to attend to, and left, so that when Mr. Low followed Hendriks into the drawing-room a quarter of an hour afterwards, he found the American alone.

"There were two questions which I set myself to answer when I came to this house," said Low. "One was— Why did these persons die ? There was a peculiar and obscure cause, of which we saw the effects. The second was — By what agency w'ere these persons subjected to the cause of death ? I have partially solved one problem to-night. To-morrow I have some hope of reaching the other. To begin with, I have already satisfied myself as to the precise manner of death. To-morrow night, if you and Mulroon will meet me here, I will tell you, as far as I can, how the whole mystery may be solved."

All the next day Flaxman Low and Hendriks kept close to the house. After dark Flaxman Low disappeared, and had not returned by eleven o'clock. Mulroon and Hendriks sat waiting for him in the drawing room, until presently he walked into the room, and threw himself into an arm chair.

"I think now," he said, " that I may venture to say that I have something to show you.

"To begin at the beginning, this house was declared by successive tenants to be haunted. Further, the manifestations were said to be connected in some way with the deaths that took place after the apparitions had been seen— in all cases by some member of the household other than the victim Whether these saw or heard anything prior to death was naturally beyond the power of their relatives to discover. But I fancy I can now answer that question. I have fairly good proof that they did not see any apparition."

"There never was any sign of a struggle or disturbance," put in Mulroon. "And that reminds me of what an old Irish charwoman, who worked here in the Findlaters' time, told me— that many cases had been known in her part of Ireland where the sight of a ghost turned the blood in the veins of the beholder. To be sure, we only smile at such sayings, but if you can give me any better reason why these men died, I'll thank you."

"This is exactly the point I hope to make," replied Low. " But to return to the manifestations. Miss Anderson's account of the ghost tallies with the stories of other residents. It nearly always appeared to the servants, by the way. The thing was evil and whispered, and each was convinced they could have understood what it said had they not been too frightened to do so. Then all agreed in saying it wore its winding-sheet. This added strength to my first conclusion and the further I pushed my inquiries the more I was confirmed in my theory."

"But the deaths. You cannot account for them?" asked Hendriks. "You can't persuade me that any whispering face killed my father. He would have put a bullet through it on sight."

"Pray be patient," said Flaxman Low. "You must remember that I had very little data to go upon. In all cases the post-mortem aspect was the same— the terribly distended bodies, the puffy lips, the bluish skin. Something had brought about his aspect with its concurrent effect— death, but no one could find out anything more. Knowledge stopped at the ultimate fact of death. It appeared to be impossible to get behind that last wall."

Hendriks made a movement of impatience.

"Yes, yes, but where do the ghosts come in?"

"Nowhere," replied Flaxman Low decisively. "At a very early stage of the business I entirely cast aside all thoughts of spiritual phenomena. Two points I noticed in connection with Colonel Hendriks' appearance aided me— the turning up of the left trouser leg and the position of the body in the chair. From these two facts the conclusion was obvious. I then knew why the people had died. There was, of course, no ghost at all. They had simply been murdered!"

"By whom? I shall be glad to meet that man," said Hendriks suddenly.

"But allow me to ask you what you deduced from the winding-sheet and the whisperings?" asked Mulroon.

"Taken in conjunction with the manner of death of the inmates of this house," said Flaxman Low, "I deduced a Chinaman. The winding-sheet meant simply loose garments, which might readily be nothing more than the formless wide-sleeved jacket of dirty yellow worn by the Chinese. Upon this I searched the whole neighbourhood for a yellow skin, and came upon a furtive little colony down bv the river side."

"But we had this house secured in all sorts of ways. How could this fellow have gained an entrance, and what grudge can he bear against us? Then, as you know, there was no struggle."

"The reason of the haunting and the murders are evident. Certain persons wanted to keep this house empty. They have some means of entering from the basement, and they are in possession of duplicate keys for every lock, a matter which reduces the haunting to a very simple process. If you remember one of my very first steps was to fix bolts— which cannot be unlocked— upon some of the doors. I bolted off the basement for two nights after my arrival and consequently I slept in peace. On the third night I left the dividing door locked only, and I was at once favoured with a glimpse of the whispering face lit up by the usual phosphorescent trick. As I expected, the face was of the Malay cast, and it threatened in mumbling pidgin English.

"You told me, Mr. Hendriks, that the garden door had not been opened since your tenancy began— that it was in fact secured. I had reason to think otherwise, and made certain of the correctness by tying a thread across the doorway on the inner side, which was broken more than once. From the garden door to the French window in the dining-room was a natural step in my theory."

"But that bolt you put upon the outside of the wooden shutters?" said Mulroon.

"It suited my plans to put it there; in fact, I hope it is holding well at this moment. Knowing that duplicate keys existed, I presumed that someone would enter the dining room shortly, for a purpose which I will presently explain. I, therefore, put up my little thread-detective, and it also gave satisfactory evidence. Someone had entered the room, and to make sure of their motive for doing so, I purchased a rat, which I brought back in a basket with me last evening, but Mulroon very nearly saved me the trouble of trying any experiment on my own part by sitting down in the chair which seems to be the fatal one here."

Mulroon turned pale, and laughed in a forced manner.

"Well, well," he said; "the drink makes fools of us all, but my luck stood to me. How did I escape, Mr. Low?"

"You had the luck of long legs, that is all. When you sat in the chair, the backs of your knees did not come against the frame of the seat; if they had, you would have been in your coffin by now."

"Then you have discovered how my father met his death ? " exclaimed Hendriks.

"Yes. In examining the chair, I found the legs had been neatly cut, so as to tilt back the chair at a slight angle, and any person sitting in it would naturally sit far back in consequence, thus bringing the back of the knees against the wooden bar in front of the seat. To the left of this bar I found a tiny splinter of steel fixed in, and I tried its effect last night upon a rat, with the result that it died almost immediately, its body being dreadfully swollen in the course of a few minutes. The turned-up trouser on the left leg led me directly to this discovery. To take the case of Colonel Hendriks, he felt the prick on the inner side of the left knee, and was turning up his trouser when the poison took effect, and he died in the act."

"I remember now that at the post-mortem examination you pointed out a hardly visible mark on the Colonel's knee," said Mulroon; " but it seemed too faint and tiny to afford any clue. But as you are in a position to prove that the persons who have died here have died of poison, can you account for the fact that no trace of poison has been discovered in any of the bodies?"

"Other known poisons disappear from the system in a similar manner. In this instance, guided by my supposition that the perpetrators of the murders were Chinese, I naturally set about finding out as much as possible upon the subject of Chinese poisons. I cannot tell you the name, much less the specific nature of the poison used here, but I am prepared to show proofs that similar results have been recorded with regard to thg victims of a certain dreaded secret society in China, which owes much of its power and prestige to the fact that it can strike its opponents with the dreaded ‘Blue Death.' "

"But we are as far as ever from finding the murderer," objected Hendriks. "To find him and punish him is all that I care for. Nothing else has the slightest interest for me."

"I calculated," began Low, when this out burst was over, "I calculated that as the murderer had not yet accom plished his purpose of driving us out of the house, he would return to his diabolical work sooner or later. Hence I was quite cheered when the ghost visited me. I had identified my man two days ago, but I waited to get an opportunity of bring ing his crimes home to him. Will yotreome with me into the dining-room?"

Hendriks and Mulroon followed Flaxman Low, who carried a candle. For a second he listened at the door of the dining-room, but dead silence reigned. "I bolted the shutters of the windows on the outside after I had seen my man enter to renew the supply of poison on the steel point," said Flaxman Low. "I hope we may find him still here. He will probably make a dash at us. Will you be careful?"

"All right," said Hendriks, showing his revolver.

Low opened the door. Nothing moved inside the room, but sitting at the table was a huddled figure. The hat had fallen off, the head with its coiled pig-tail lay upon the outstretched arms. Another moment made it clear that the man was dead. They lit the candles on the mantel-piece, and proceeded to examine the dead body.

The yellow face was puffed beyond recognition, the whole man was strangely and quiescently horrible. On the table before him lay a small lacquered box containing a scrap of a dark ointment, and in the man's forefinger was found a splinter of steel. Finding himself trapped, he had made away with himself rather than face his captors.

At this stage of the proceedings, Flaxman Low retired from the affair.

THE POLICE managed to hush up the business— the death of a Chinaman more or less makes little stir at any time— and they had further investigations of importance to make, which they wished to keep quiet.

It was, indeed, ultimately proved that No. 1, Karma Crescent, formed a very convenient head-quarters for Chinese and other ruffianism, being situated as it was near a junction, near the river, and near a low part of London. It was found that extensive excavations had been made in communication with the house and a well-built tunnel opened by a cleverly masked entrance into the lane. Thus by Flaxman Low's efforts a very distinct danger had been warded off, for the society in question were making very alarming head way in London, chiefly by allying themselves with other bands of criminals in this country, to whom they offered a secure place of hiding.

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5: The Temple Bowl

Percy Stanway Tapp

1877-1950

Western Mail (Perth) 28 Nov 1929

Percy Stanway Tapp was born in Yorkshire in 1877 and moved to Western Australia as a young man, at an unknown date but likely around 1900. Other than that, biographical detail is hard to find. He was a commercial artist, and from 1908 graphic designer and art director at West Australian Newspapers. He was the author of several short stories and poems, and wrote numerous newspaper pieces for his employers.

OLD QUONG was a personage among his countrymen. You knew this as soon a you entered his barn-like store, with it mingled odours of spices, tea. matting, and dirt, where he sat with owl-like solemnity behind his brushes, his slab with Chinese ink, and abacus, missing (one may say) nothing of what took place before his half closed, sleepy eyes. His treatment was not due to respect for wealth, for there were other merchants, rounder, more opulent, with far more modern and Europeanised shops, who did not arouse on tithe of the reverence that appeared in the greetings of Old Quong's customers.

Among Quong's varied and odoriferous stock was weird and wonderful crockery: green-lined bowls, on the exterior of which loose-limbed, sprawling dragons forever chased an elusive tail; blue bowls, sprinkled with white blossoms; orange elephants of no known zoological nomenclature: brass trays, baskets, and innumerable other odd examples of the oriental outlook.

Pride of place was held by a huge orange bowl, which, if the evidence of the dust might be taken, had reposed undisturbed on a pile of matting-covered bales and chests since the store was opened. And about this bowl hangs a story, for, without it, neither Murray's desire for possession nor Old Quong's anger, would have been aroused.

Murray was after a tray when the bowl caught his eye; and Murray was one of the old original clan that used to run around with a peculiarly nasty knife (locally softened to a dirk) in his stocking, a very useful tool on a dark night when the other fellow wasn't expecting you.

When a Murray wanted anything, he usually got it, unless he got killed first; and the Murray of our story was true type, barring a difference of time and place. Once the bowl caught Murray's eye, he was a lost man. It gripped his imagination, fascinated him, though why he would probably have found it very difficult to explain.

It was big, and he loved big things. There was a depth and richness in its tawny orange glaze, and an opulence in its fat, soft curves, and within; though Murray did not know it, a hieroglyphic design in gold, at the sight of which the

inhabitants of a large area of China, mentally, if not physically, bowed the knee, if they did not actually cringe. Well, the bowl caught Murray's eye, and, being Murray, he demanded it with every expectation of getting it, and was met, to his extreme astonishment, by a frightened negative from the attendant.

"No! No! No sellee you that!"

Being Murray, he insisted, thinking it was a matter of price; but the more he persisted, the more apologetic and furtive became the shopman, and the more incoherent became his flow of negatives.

"No! No! No velly good. This one velly good. You likee this piece? No, not olange one. No good!" And so on, with deprecating shoulders and hands.

No matter how Murray's offers rose, for he did make very liberal offers, being well provided with this world's goods, the result was the same. The slit-like eyes m Quong's old ivory face absorbed every detail, while apparently oblivious of everything external.

At last the catastrophe occurred. Murray stretched out. his hands to lift down the bowl. The excited attendant— excited for a Chinaman that is— made a grab for his nearest arm, accompanied boy a string of guttural interjections, rising In a shrill crescendo. Even Old Quong's muscles seemed to tense, and fire came into his coal-black slits. But Murray, the descendant of Hielan chiefs, brushed aside the Chink's protesting action, and cupped his two muscular hands under the bowl.

What happened then only Quong could have told, and he never did. The next definite picture is that of an angry, cursing Scot, a scared Chinese shopman grovelling (there is no other word), and babbling incoherently among broken orange china on a dirty floor. Behind them is a small, wrinkled, old Chinese merchant, looking strangely menacing for one so small, silently pointing a shrivelled forefinger at Murray.

Now Murray will always swear, when he will speak of the incident at all, that Quong's lips never moved, that they set in a hard menacing line. Yet Murray will also swear that Quong did talk to him, and that, in the purest English which Quong certainly never spoke with his lips. And the words were something like this, though, of course, Murray, being very excited, his evidence may not be quite accurate, even if the sense is good.

"Murray," said the unspoken words, "Murray." (It was hard and clear like, so Murray put it, cut glass.) "You of the dark north, you of the fighting men who have always taken as they wished. You have done wrong. You must pay to the uttermost— for so it is written. You have broken the bowl of Koo-loon and sorrow shall come to you. I, Quong, the servant of the temple, speak. Never shall you forget your deed till you pass the portals of this life. Go!"

And Murray went.

At first Murray's mind was in too much of a turmoil to realise anything. Incredulity, anger, puzzlement, fought for place, but by the time he had returned to his office, his canny Scotch sense was overcoming his inborn belief in the Supernatural, and he was mentally poo-poohing the whole incident as due to excitement and environment. Within a week he was regarding the whole affair as rather a joke; a bit rough on Quong perhaps, but that was the old fool's own fault anyway

Then the impossible began to happen. Subconsciously the bowl was always in his thoughts, at first as a vague under-current, a flavour, so to speak, afterwards as a haunting idea. He began to notice that the first thought in the morning was always of the bowl lying smashed upon the dirty floor of Quong's store, and through the day the bowl was always with him, whole or in pieces. His memories of the incident became strangely mingled with other pictures where the bowl gleamed dully on an altar behind which loomed a vaguely-sensed goddess against the pines that towered to the night sky. There were orange lanterns swaying uncertainly in the soft incense-laden breeze, in the light of which the bowl took on the colour or blood. A vague uncanny, chanting rose and fell-from the line of the copper and scarlet robed priests who moved through the scene, there were times when the bowl was carried high on an altar born on the shoulders of priests, and behind it in a palanquin sat a high priest or some other great dignitary strangely like Old Quong to look at; at others there rose from the bowl a strange blue pungent vapour (Murray swore he could smell it) wherein appeared to float the form and features of Quong; Quong young and noble with a smooth unwrinkled face, inscrutable smiling lips and eyes that encompassed the earth in their unseeing gaze.

Day after day these mental images— dreams, call them what you will, became more and more entangled with his daily life until he found it at times difficult to separate the real from the visionary, and with the growing sense of his helplessness in the face, of this tenuous prison of ideas, his time of terror came upon him. Of what avail were doctors who would tell him it was imagination. Of course, it was imagination, only it was not. Of what avail to tell himself that the Chinese bowl he saw on the table did not exist? He saw it. How could he explain his look of fear to his head clerk? It was Quong he saw, though his head clerk had answered his bell. And that ever-present voice like a thin icicle, clear and sharp.

"You have sinned. You must suffer, for so it is written."

Then, as the obsession grew, his fear of ultimate madness came upon him. He doubted every sense, every sound, every sight. Life was a maze of

uncertainties, a line of spider's web swinging precariously over the depths of a huge orange bowl.

How long the obsession lasted I do not know. To Murray it was years, a lifetime. He began to see his friends look at him curiously and hurry away. His business associates glanced at each other meaningly when he came in sight. He caught himself changing such things as cornsacks and binder twine into bowls, and began to consider the possibility of being forced to sell out or shut down his business altogether.

The last horror was of water, for the bowl was no longer empty; water rose in it to the brim, bubbling up in some mysterious way from the golden hieroglyph. Water that enticed him with little gurgling cooing sounds that seemed to be holding out invisible hands like a bride welcoming her lord. Down in the depths was life, escape, peace. "The peace of God that passeth understanding," he phrased it to himself. He longed to bathe himself in its translucent depths, to sink, sink, sink to peace, to rest, to oblivion.

Then somehow the bowl faded, and the river issued the same invitation which he both longed for and feared, so that while his feet carried him perforce to the river's bank, his mind drove him away as from some lovely but dangerous snare. But the spell of the water was not to be denied, and more and more he found himself drawn to the river, looking at the river, watching for that swirling bubbling downward vortex, that invitation to rest and peace. And yet, strange to say, it was this last torture that brought relief to the agonised soul of Murray.

He was standing on one of the jetties gazing fascinated at the mirage of-invitation that overlaid the usual sluggishly moving stream, while around him played the usual tag-rag of small, boys and girls, arguing, quarrelling, fishing and very busy and important generally about their own affairs.

Murray stood unseeing, deaf and blind to all except the spell of the siren invitation to rest, to sink peacefully down, down, down to utter oblivion. Unconsciously he moved nearer and nearer to the jetty's edge. Before him was a huge tawny orange bowl, while within slowly circled the waters of forgetfulness, round and round till they sucked down into the centre.

Blind and deaf to everything else, impelled by something outside his own consciousness, he stretched out his hands to the compelling refuge before him— moved— and fell.

As the shock of the cold water roused for a second the instinct of self-preservation, a child's scream, frightened, full of terror, broke suddenly upon his vision-drugged senses, and the Murray blood quickened and sprang to life. Never forgetting either, enemy or friends the Murray clan always rose to the call for help, for a Murray would help his foe out of the loch even if only for a

fight to the death on the beach. One wild struggle, two strokes, and his hand, gripped a dripping, struggling youngster.

There was a blur of faces over the edge of the wharf and down reaching hands that hauled up first a very limp, very wet youngster, and later assisted his own efforts to climb up to the planking of the wharf. In a daze, Murray looked down, at the sobbing child, and the ring of fussing, questioning onlookers, and heard the one Word, "Quong." With one movement he swept a man aside and gripped the boy's arm.

"You belong Quong?" he asked. The boy nodded miserably as Murray took in his Chinese eyes, straight nose and olive skin.

"Damn Quong," he said, and half turned away. But the Murray blood held true; after all, he must finish his job. He turned again and, gripping the boy's hand, jerked him off the wharf with a muttered, "Come on, you little devil ... A Chink," he thought. "Spoilt a suit for a damned Chink; but after all he's a kid and he's got a right to live. He can't help being a Chink; even a blooming piccaninny has a right to live."

Hurrying along, feeling exceedingly foolish in his wet clothes, he reached Quong's shop and pushed the boy in before him. "Here's your kid, Quong," he said. "He fell in the river, so I fished him out; you'd better dry him."

Quong's mask-like. face never altered, only his eyes changed as they focussed on Murray's face. "A deed of mercy," he said, "is a priceless jewel."

Then, as Murray stared, he rose slowly and pointed to the floor. Murray started, for the orange bowl was lying shattered, as he had last seen it. But Quong's hand. rose slowly and Murray's following eyes saw the unseeable, the unbelievable; for there, on the throne of bales was the bowl, the great rotund orange mischief-maker, whole and perfect. The floor was absolutely devoid of broken china.

"The goddess has seen your virtuous act," said Quong. "The book is closed. Go in peace."

And Murray went.

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6: A Mate in Two Moves

Being the Strange Adventures of Miss Matilda Moreton

Gertrude Stanway Tapp

1866?-1926

Western Mail (Perth) 30 March 1922

Wife of Percy Stanway Tapp; frequent contributor of articles to West Australian press, and also a few short stories and poems. Western Australian cemetery records give her age as 60 when she died.

IT WAS SOON OVER, that love affair of long ago. It began in England. She was a clergyman's daughter. Het father was incumbent of a small country town. He had married young; Matilda's mother had died when Matilda was six years old. The Reverend Henry Moreton and his daughter had ever since been ruled, benevolently and firmly, by his sister, the doctor's wife. She was a most charming and, capable lady, who invariably knew what was best for everybody So Matilda's life had been uneventful Services, choir, concerts, and Christmas parties at her aunt's house had been the chief excitements, and now, for six years she had kept her father's house, under her aunt's supervision. She was just twenty-three.

Then happened Tom Danby. His father had bought the chief grocery business in Arblesford three years before. He was an ambitious man, and had sent his only son to Oxford— Oxford, mind you! and now the young man had come home, and expressed his intention of helping his father in the business, instead of going into the Church, or reading for the Bar, or doing anything else natural and proper. Arblesford was disgusted, and considered a university education wasted upon a youth with no ambition. Then it found out that for two whole months he had been secretly "courting" the vicar's daughter. The nurse who was in attendance at Dr. Wingthorpe's surgery "got wind of it"; she lost no time in telling the news to the doctor, and he left before his usual hour in order to be the first to repeat it to his wife, who hastened to her brother.

Yet it was soon over. It was so unsuitable, you see. There was no scene, no bother. "Mattie," of course, capitulated. She always did; she never dreamed of resisting, having never had her own way in her life; and her father had to have a housekeeper. So she only shed a few tears, and put three small possessions away in an envelope at the back of a drawer with her mother's photograph— a snap of Tom, taken at the choir picnic; a postcard view he had sent her of New College, Oxford; and a tiny, leather-bound volume of Marcus Aurelius, "To My Matey." She had hidden them when her aunt made her send his other few presents back.

And Tom? Oh, he went to Australia. Later, they heard he had married. His father took care that news should get to their ears. So Mattie went on housekeeping.

Twelve years later her father died. He had been an invalid for a long time, and the illness had eaten up all his small savings. A little while before his death he had told her that he feared there would be nothing left for her when he was gone, and she had replied that it did not matter; she could earn her own living, she supposed. He looked at her somewhat apologetically.

"I fear," Mattie, my dear," he admitted, "that I have been wrong in preventing your marriage, but I did it for the best."

His daughter turned her head away for a moment. Then she replied in n business-like tone: "Yes, father, I know you did. It's time for your beef-tea now," and left the room.

The nurse, however, brought in the beef-tea.

And now he was gone. Having given so much to him, Mattie felt his loss acutely, but did not wish him back again. Her aunt, drew up an advertisement to be sent to the "Church Times" and the "Guardian."

"You must come to us, my dear," she said, "till we can find you a suitable position."

But as it turned out, that advertisement was never sent. The incoming vicar, a widower, wanted a lady to housekeep and bring up his three little children.

"Nothing could be more opportune!" said Mrs. Wingthorpe enthusiastically.

"Quite providential, I'm sure!" murmured the doctor.

So Mattie went on housekeeping in the same house. The sale of the furniture just paid all outstanding debts.

So much by way of introduction.

NOW, please, kind reader, pass with me over 18 more years, and also over 12,000 miles of ocean, and come into St. George's-terrace, Perth, Western Australia. There Mr. Danby is just stepping into his motor after leaving the office. A January day, 98 deg. in the shade.

Heat haze throbbing in the distance; a vivid crimson sunset, flooding Parliament House in a blaze of splendour as the motor slipped away round Mount's Bay-road. There's your scene! now let's get on with the yarn!

The car took Mr. Danby to a very comfortable house in Peppermint Grove, where two girls, who were obviously on the look-out for him, got up from hammocks on the verandah, one taking off his coat, while the other produced delectable refreshment from an ice-box. He sat down with them in a deck-

chair, and they took up a conversation which had evidently been broken in upon by his arrival.

"We were just saying, Dad," began Bertha, the eldest, "that we wondered what on earth you'll do when we are gone. Only three months, you know, before our double wedding! We shall be married and done for, and you'll be here all alone in this big house

"The same thought has occurred to me," said her father, somewhat grimly.

The older girl looked at her sister. It was evident she wished to say something, but did not know how to begin.

"Nell and I," she said, "feel so bad about leaving you like this; the house has always been so bright— you've been so kind and good to us, dear, about Hugh and Charlie; you're always done everything for us— couldn't you divide your time between us, and give up the house? Hugh and Charlie don't mind— or—"

But a servant arrived to announce dinner.

Tom Danby got up out of his deck chair.

"Come on, girls!" he said. "Never mind your old Dad! He'll get along all right!''

Nevertheless, they had started a train of thought which would not be silenced.

Danby's married life had not been a happy one. Perhaps his wife might have said the same of her own, but the fact remained that two excellent people did not get on together. Mrs. Danby had died, four years before, of influenza, and Tom Danby, overwhelmed by the condolences of non-comprehending friends, felt almost criminal for the sense of freedom which stole over him, and the happiness be found in his home and daughters. And now, as Bertha said, they were both going. He had known the parting must come, but had not realised the nearness of it. Oh! well! Oh! well! he must make the best of it, he supposed!

Bertha persistently returned to the subject after dinner, as she lit a match for his pipe on the verandah.

"You'll be so dull," she said. "You'd better come to us— or— why don't you marry again?"

"We wouldn't mind," added Nell, "we only want you to be happy!" It was out at last.

Tom Danby took the pipe out of hit mouth and laid it on the verandah ledge.

"There's no time to marry," he said, somewhat lamely, "unless— unless— Oh well! girls, I may as well tell you now. You said I was kind about Hugh and Charlie, Bertha, my dear. Well someone was unkind to me, about a girl, years ago, and it all but wrecked my life. Good as your mother was, as you know we

were misfits. My fault, I daresay; I should never have married her; I should have fought harder for the one I really cared for. But you came, my dears, and you have been all in all to me. You were all I had. I swore to myself that your lives should never be spoilt as mine was— that you should have the mates you wanted. I won't say I shan't miss you— I shall. But I'd never marry again, unless—"

Nell, the ever impulsive, made one bound for her father's knee. "Daddy!' she cried, "Send for her! Yes! do! You'll be able to find her! He ought to oughtn't he, Bertha? She'd come."

"Yes father," assented Bertha, "why not?"

"In the first place," replied their matter-of-fact father, "I haven't the remotest idea where she is. In the second she might not want me. It is 30 years since I left, the old country. As you know, both your grandparents are dead, I and I have no other relatives in England. Her father may be dead, too. She may have married. What's the use?

But Nell persisted. "Write to the Post Office at Arblesford," she said "enclosing a letter to be returned to you if her address is not known."

"But suppose she has married?" said their father, again.

"Oh! Dad!" cried both girls together, with true Australian recklessness, "Chance that!"

MISS MORETON sat at the vicarage table pouring out coffee. Beside her plate was a letter which the maid had just brought in. To her left sat a tall young man in hat, worn-out khaki, with one arm, for whom she had just carefully buttered a piece of toast. The white-haired vicar, seated opposite to him, propped up the *Standard* against the hot water jug and read out items of news between mouthfuls.

"Hm, I see Bayley has got in for Worthinghampton. Another Liberal. I fear that won't be a success. Greaves appointed Bishop of Wealden— oh, well, that was only to be expected. Another Royal Commission to inquire into— why, Miss Moreton, is anything the matter? Are you ill?"

For Miss Moreton had turned suddenly white, and the coffee she had been filling was running over. Jack Barton turned off the tap with his remaining band, and the Reverend Frederick Barton salvaged his coffee. The little housekeeper, pulling herself together, hurriedly murmured something about an unexpected letter. She was scanning its contents eagerly, while, mopping up the spilt coffee awkwardly, her serviette in her left hand.

"Not bad news, I hope?'" said the vicar politely.

"Oh, no!" she replied, hastily, "by no means, thank you! It was stupid of me to be so startled."

The vicar finished his breakfast a went away to his study. As the door closed behind his father, Jack Barton turned to Miss Moreton. He, the soldier, was the youngest of the vicar's three children. The others had married and left home some time before.

"Morty," he demanded, "what's up?"

And Miss Moreton handed over this letter for him to read. It was from Peppermint Grove, Western Australia.

Dear old friend, [it began] *I know not if these lines will ever reach you, or if they will come back to the sender, but I am wondering if the girl I left because I had to— and, perhaps because I was too easily daunted, so many years ago— has still in her memory kindly thought for me and if she is free, even now, to come to me. I married, as I expect you heard, soon after I reached Australia. I was miserable and desperate. I ought never to have it.*

My wife was a good women, but she and I never got on. She died four years ago and my two daughters— the best of girls— are shortly to be married. I offer you a good home; we are in comfortable circumstances. I want you. Can you come? I am sending £5 which will pay for a cabled reply. If it is, as I hope, favourable, I will money for your passage.

Yours as always,
Tom Danby.
P.S.—Do come! Dad's a real dear and we'll all love you!
Bertha and Nell Danby.

The young man read the letter through slowly, and handed it back. Then he ejaculated, '"Well, I'm blest! What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" said Miss Moreton, intrepidly. "Do? What should I do? Go, of course!"

Jack looked at her admiringly. "Good for you!" he said. "I knew you would But oh! Morty, who's going to break my eggs and butter my toast when you're gone? And what'll the pater say?"

"I can't help what he says!" replied the new Miss Moreton with decision. And she went to the study door. She did not enter without knocking; you see she had a housekeeper for a long time.

The vicar disliked being interrupted on a Saturday morning. He turned somewhat irritably from his bookcase as Miss Moreton entered.

"I should like you to read this letter if you please, Mr. Barton," she said "and then will you tell me if I can send a cablegram from Arblesford Post Office?"

The vicar rubbed his spectacles an adjusted them on his nose. Then he read the letter through— twice. Then he turned the sheet over, as if in search of further information, and finally looked carefully into the envelope before replacing it.

"Dear me! Dear me!-' he said. "Very surprising! Most extraordinary! Exceedingly unusual! But you will scarcely, I imagine, need to cable. You can return the money by letter. You will hardly leave a comfortable situation to go to what might prove— er— a— er— wild goose chase— or— er— it might prove— er—so very unsuitable!"'

And then Miss Moreton, the house, keeper, did a most surprising thing. She actually "talked back" to the vicar. Reprehensible, one grants, but this was a new Miss Moreton. Her 53 years had fallen from her, and again she was little Mattie, the girl of 23, standing in the same room, tearful and trembling, while her relations told her, "It would he so unsuitable!"

"Mr. Barton," she said. "have I or have I not, do you consider, my fair share of common sense? Am I not the best judge of what is suitable or other wise, for myself? Have I not manages your house and brought up your children? Am I so totally unable to look after myself? I have taken care of you and yours!"

And the vicar apologised,. He even offered to send the cablegram.

Miss Moreton, however, despatched it herself. It ran:

Coming of course. Love. Matilda Moreton. Arblesford Vicarage, Westshire, England.

"GIRLS," said Mr. Danby, as he passed the cablegram to them to read, "she's the same little Matey!"

"Good for you, dad!" replied his daughters together. "If she catches the *Naldera*," added Nell, "she'll be here in time for our wedding!"

"Wedding? Ours will be the first by three weeks!" laughed her father, happily, as he ran down the steps to the car which was waiting below.

Bertha turned to her sister. "Oh, Nell!" she said, "I do hope the dear old dad won't be disappointed! He recollects a pretty young girl, and she's a woman of 53! Goodness me! what'll we do if she doesn't come up to his expectations! We shall wish for the rest of our lives that we'd never asked him to send for her!"

"I'll bet you what you like," said Charlie Baynes, Nell's fiancé, who had come in from the garden with a tennis racquet in his hand, "that she'll be a real officious old maid. Dyed hair, paint, powder, and a voice like—"

"Charlie, Charlie, shut up!" shrieked Nell, her hands over her cars. "You're a horrid wretch! How dare you? She's going to be an old dear, I'm sure. You'll like her as well as—as well as— we all shall! as everybody will!"

"We'll wait and see," observed Bertha.

MISS MORETON took the notes over the Post Office counter, and counted them carefully. £150. One hundred and fifty pounds! She had never had so much money all at once in her hands before.

Hastily she crammed it into her bag, and hurried down the street to tell her old friends, the Misses Smythe, about it. Miss Agnes and Miss Ethel Smythe had gone to school with her, and, after a struggling life of governessing for some years, had settled in Arblesford to teach music. They had a small income, and lived fairly comfortably. To them, for 17 years, Miss Moreton had taken all her joys and sorrows, sure of sympathy. She turned the handle of the front door, and went in, as was her custom. Miss Ethel was ironing in the kitchen, while Miss Agnes peeled potatoes.

"Ah, Mattie, my dear!" they greeted her. She sat down in the nearest chair.

"The cable has come!" cried Miss Agnes. "I can see it in your face!"

"And you will go by the *Naldera*!" supplemented Miss Ethel. "She sails next week— the 15th. I looked it up in the paper this morning!"

"The cable has come," assented Miss Mattie, "But oh, Ethel and Agnes! I am puzzled as to what to do! He has sent me £150!"

"He means you to travel first-class," said Miss Agnes.

"So I thought at first," replied Miss Mattie, hesitatingly, "but when I considered again, I saw that he couldn't really have meant that. You see, he says in his letter, 'comfortable circumstances.' He might, perhaps, be getting £5 or even £6 a week, don't you think? I expect he has denied himself over so much to send it. Perhaps he thought I had bills to pay here, and would need it. And his daughters are going to be married; I couldn't take it from them, you see that. Of course. Fortunately, I have nothing to pay; I can take a third-class ticket, and give him back the change. Besides. I haven't any clothes suitable for first, or even second class. They dress for dinner, I've heard. I don't need to buy any clothes, except, perhaps, a washing dress or two; I have a few pounds of my own put by. My black silk was only done up last year: I have my new grey alpaca, and the black dress I had for aunt Wingthorpe's funeral will do nicely for travelling. Don't you think I'm right?"

Miss Mattie paused for breath. It was a long speech for her to have made.

"But you will allow that the occasion was momentous."

"I suppose you are, replied Miss Ethel. "You always are so sensible. But—" (she had a romantic mind)— "I'd love to have imagined you in the first class!"

MR. DANBY and his two girls, with Charlie Baynes in attendance, arrived at Fremantle wharf in the motor just as the Naldera was drawing slowly up to the quay. He was one of the first to board her. The girls and Charlie sat waiting in

the car, some distance from the crowd. They saw him go up the gangway. Charlie handed a pair of field glasses to Nell.

"Why did you bring those?" she asked. "You aren't at the front now!"

"Oh," be replied, "I thought we might ! perhaps go to see the yacht races this afternoon."

Nellie raised the binoculars to her eyes. "What a crowd!" she remarked. "I can't see dad. Oh, yes, though, I can! He's with an officer. No, he hasn't any lady with him. I wonder what is the matter. The officer is pointing out some one. No, dad shakes his head he's coming off!"

"Give me the glasses'." cried Bertha. "What can he be leaving her behind for? I do hope she isn't ill!" But Mr. Danby was coming towards them.

"She hasn't come, girls!" he said.

"Not come, Dad!" exclaimed Nell; "but she must have come! She cabled she was sailing on the *Naldera*. She must be there!"

"So I told the purser," her father said. "I went straight to him. But he says there is no one of that name on board. A Miss Marston, in the third class, he said, was the nearest. He had the passenger list there. He showed the old lady to me. She had just been to him to get her money and valuables. He'd been keeping them for her. Poor old thing! I wonder who she belonged to. She was not Miss Moreton. I should know her anywhere. I must cable, I suppose, to ask if she really did sail. I wish I'd asked her to cable from the first port of call! I wonder if— Hullo!, Rankin! What do you want?" a young man, who for some moments had been vainly endeavouring to attract Mr. Danny's attention, stepped to the side of the car.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but Mr. Betts saw you go on to the wharf, and sent me to ask if you could go down to the Customs. He's been trying to get you on the 'phone. That consignment of goods from Singapore has been tampered with— the cases—"

"All right." Mr. Danby turned to his daughters. "You'd better go back to the hotel," he said, rather miserably. "Someone must eat the lunch, I suppose, as it's ordered. Wait about five minutes for me, and if I'm not back, I'll join you later." And he hurried off with the messenger.

"Poor dad!" said Nell. "What can it be? I can't believe she hasn't come!" Don't you think the purser may have made a mistake? Perhaps she's in the third-class, after all. Marston and Moreton might look very much alike in some people's handwriting." (Which was, indeed, the reason of the mistake.)

MISS MORETON stood leaning on the rail, watching the crowd. Everyone, she was thinking, seemed to have friends to meet them except herself. But it was early yet. The boat had not berthed at the quay more than half an hour.

She watched a white-bearded old gentleman talking to the purser. He seemed annoyed about something. Later, she saw him speaking to two young ladies, who, with a great, broad-shouldered giant of a young man, had been waiting some time in a motor. She was interested in them— they looked so prosperous, and flourishing— that is as well as she could see from where she stood. Perhaps, she reflected, Tom was working, and could not get away to meet the boat so soon. In any case, it was of no use being impatient.

A fellow passenger came up to her.

"Your folks not here yet, Miss Moreton?" she said. "Oh, well, it's early yet. I see my sister down there, so I'll say good-bye. I wish you all happiness and good luck in Western Australia, I'm sure!" And she bustled oft down the gangway.

Miss Moreton bade her a cordial farewell, but hardly heeded her going. She was fascinated by the group round the motor car. Now the old gentleman had gone away with someone, and the girls and the tall young man seemed to be watching the ship through opera glasses. She watched them intently.

"I don't know," said Bertha as she laid down the glasses. "Dad doesn't seem to be coming back, but somehow I don't like to leave the wharf. I wonder— I wonder if that old lady leaning on the rail could be Miss Moreton! Look at her; she seems to have no one belonging to her. And she really is looking this way! I'm going to ask her name— it can do no harm!"

And she made her way to the ship.

"Charlie, Charlie!" cried Nell, who had snatched up the field glasses. "Look! look! Bertha is kissing her. They're coming! Oh, Charlie! what shall we do? She was close to Dad, and he didn't know her! She isn't a bit like what he expected! oh! dear!"

"Here, be quiet" counselled our young giant. "Don't make a scene, anyway! It's a good thing your Dad's not here!''

"But why—"

The question was not answered, for Bertha's voice broke in.

"Miss Moreton, this is our dear Nell, my only sister, and her fiancé, Charles Baynes— Yes, three boxes, I think you said (to the carrier who had followed them) Moreton is the name. Not dutiable. Get in, please. Dad will be so sorry he was not here, but he had to go away on business."

Miss Moreton lay back in the car, worn black umbrella shading her pathetic little face, framed in a neat black bonnet. Nell, in the tonneau, was talking busily to Charlie in deaf and dumb show.

"What shall we do?" she queried.

"I don't know!" he replied.

"She looks 70!" she spelt out.

"I know!" he answered. "Get her some clothes!"

"Now," said Bertha, "shall we drive straight to the hotel?"

Miss Moreton looked anxious. "Will my luggage be right!" she said.

"Oh, yes, we know the carrier quite well," Bertha assured her, but Charlie jumped out of the car, followed by Nell.

"I'll go and see that he puts it in his lorry" he said.

"I'll go with you," said Nell.

"How kind of Mr. Baynes to take much trouble!" said the little lady to Bertha as they disappeared, "he reminds me of a dear soldier boy I know in England."

"Yes," Bertha replied, "Charlie's a dear boy: but my Hugh is even nicer," she added with a brilliant smile. "They were both at the front, but got off with nothing worse then trench feet in Hugh case, and enteric in Charlie's. Charlie wants us to drive to the yacht race this afternoon, that's why he's not at the office. He's Dad's junior partner, you see," she explained.

Here the chauffeur turned round. "Beg pardon, Miss Danby," he said "but my petrol tank won't hold out if you're going down to Perth. I though the car would only be needed to driving home."

"Very well, Williams," said Miss Danby. "You can take us to the station as soon as Miss Nellie and Mr. Baynes come back. It won't take you long to get it filled at the garage. I see them coming now; then we will wait for you, and afterwards drive to the hotel." (For some inexplicable reason Bertha wanted to get off the wharf, lest her father should return.)

Nell had run after Charlie, as a matter of fact, because she found the deaf and dumb alphabet insufficient for her needs. As soon as they had got out of hearing she looked up at "her giant," as she loved to call him

"She's a dear!" she said. "I'm sure of it. Can't we do something?"

"Do something?" he echoed, "of course you can do something! Didn't I tell you to get her some clothes?"

"Charlie!" remonstrated Nell, "you are silly! How on earth can I say to perfect stranger 'you ought to dress differently?'— not that it would not make just all the difference to her!"

"Oh," her swain replied, "It wouldn't be so difficult! Now if she were a man I should: 'My dear fellow, in this climate one wears—"

Nell lost patience. "You do it then!" she challenged him. "Since you're so clever, you can just tell her yourself!

A mischievous twinkle came into the giant's eyes. "By Jove, I'll take you on! A pair of gloves if Miss Moreton is not rigged out by 1 p.m.!" he cried.

"Charlie! you wouldn't dare!" said Nell.

"You wait and see!" he told her.

"I'm rather glad, my dear," said Miss Moreton to Bertha, as they seated themselves in the station, "that you sent the man away, for I did not like to say so before him, but I should like to buy a hat. The sun is so strong, it really gives me quite a pain in my eyes. But—" she hesitated— "I'm afraid I have no Australian money. I brought some English notes in my bag. Is there anywhere I could change them?"

"Oh, I'll give you a cheque for them,' said Charlie. "I can easily change then later on. How much do you want?" He took his cheque-book from his pocket and stood by a ledge, taking out hw

fountain pen.

"It is very kind of you," said the little lady; "I hardly like to trouble you. 1 have three £10 notes in my purse." She took them out of her bag and handed

them to him.

"No trouble at all," replied he, beaming, "Nellie and I were only just saying how ripping you'd look in a hat, and some cooler things!"

"Charlie!" protested the scandalised Nell. But Miss Moreton, who was accustomed to Jack Barton's banter, looked far from displeased.

"I did think," she said, "of buying some washing dresses with some of the money that your dear father sent me so thoughtfully, but he had said you were both going to be married, and I felt that perhaps you might need— what are you laughing at?"

"Ha! ha!" roared Charlie. "The great T.D. hard up for a hundred quid! Think of it! Ho! ho! ho!"

Bertha laid her hand softly on the little black-gloved one beside her.

"Forgive us," she said. "We all forget that you know nothing about us. I feel as if I had known you all my life. But it does seem so comic to think of considering a hundred pounds where dad is concerned. He is one of the richest merchants in Western Australia!"

Miss Moreton gasped. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "I never guessed! He said in his letter that you were in comfortable circumstances— that was why I came third-class. I couldn't bear to spend so much money. The purser made a mistake in my name, though. He called me Miss Marston when he gave it back to me. I gave it to him to keep during the voyage. It was of no consequence; I did not trouble to contradict him then, it's not surprising that he should some times make a mistake. But 'comfortable circumstances!' I never dreamed it meant riches!"

Charlie handed her the cheque. "People's ideas of comfort may vary," he said, smiling at her.

"They do," responded Miss Moreton. She was thinking of her comfortable situation, and the £25 a year that the vicar had thought her unwise to give up.

"Well, my dears," she said after a few moments, "I only hope you and this car and all the wonderful things you tell me of don't turn out to be a dream!" The happy tears came into her eyes. God knows I don't want to disappoint any of you— let us go and buy the hat."

"And a nice, cool dress?" added Charlie, persuasively.

"And a nice, cool, pretty, silk dress!" replied Miss Moreton, the daring adventuress.

"Come on!" cried Bertha, hurrying her into the car, which had just drawn up. "Go down to the Customs and tell Dad, Charlie! Nell! Nell! we'll have the time of our lives!"

A queer expression came into the eyes of our young giant as he looked after the departing car.

"The girls think of nothing," he said to himself, "but how to save their father disappointment. It's only natural. But— but— will *she* be disappointed?"

He thoughtfully lit a pipe.

"Somehow," he mused, "I don't want her to get a shock. I'm sure she's a decent sort." He pulled himself together and stepped out briskly towards the Customs.

"Seems as if it's up to me to see it through." he told himself.

MR. DANBY stood grimly over a consignment of smashed cases in a dirty warehouse. He was not a little annoyed, and was saying so. He was a small man, and somewhat peppery.

Charlie came up to him.

"She's come," he said, simply.

Mr. Danby seized his hand. "Come!" he cried, "By Jove, my boy, that's good! Great Scott! but I'm thankful! That is a relief! I was worried to death. What happened?"

"I'm not quite clear on that point," said Charlie, "the purser made some mistake, I fancy—"

Bertha went on board and found her directly. "She's there all right. They've gone to buy a shady hat somewhere. Bertha told me to ask you to be sure to be at the hotel at one o'clock. It's only about eleven now." He looked critically at Mr. Danby. "She's a very stylish little lady," he remarked mendaciously.

Mr. Danby looked nervous. "Always was— always," he said. "I look a fine sight to meet her, don't I?— poking about in these dirty holes! I wonder it there's time to run home and get a shower and a change?"

He regarded ruefully a black streak of grease across one knee.

"You do look a bit ruffled," assented Charlie, looking down at his own immaculate flannels. "How would it be to just run in somewhere and buy a ready-made suit?"

"Ready-made!" ejaculated Mr. Danby, "why, I haven't worn a ready-made suit for 20 years! Still, there's no harm in trying. Ten chances to one it'll be of no use, though. However, we'll see. I'll tell you what to do with that stuff later," he said to the astonished clerk, who was standing by. "Come on, boy! you can tell me if it looks too ridiculous! Little Matey! Little Matey!" he added as if to himself, "thank God you're safe, after all these years!"

"I want to go into the exchange to get rid of some English notes," observed Charlie, as they stepped into the street.

"Notes? Where did you get English notes from?" his companion queried.

"Oh, from that little old lady you noticed on the boat," replied our benevolent young giant, truthfully. "Bertha spoke to her. She did not seem to know her way about, and appeared to be worried about changing her money, so I gave her a cheque for them."

"Good boy! Good boy!" said Mr. Danby, approvingly. "She seemed a respectable old body— reminded me of someone, somehow. I wonder if anyone came to meet her!"

"Oh, yes!" replied Charlie, "two girls and a man. Great, tall, hulking fellow. She seemed very pleased to see them. Nice-looking girls, both of 'em."

"Glad of that! Glad of that!" said Mr. Danby.

NELL, critically examining the fit of a silk coat which Miss Moreton was trying on, suddenly became aware of Bertha making frantic signs to her behind that excellent lady's back. Glancing across the shop, she beheld to her dismay her father, in the men's department, trying on a coat likewise. She caught sight of. him under Charlie's arm. He, apparently, was endeavouring to make his broad person a little broader, in order to block up the archway between the two divisions of the shop.

"Come into the fitting-room, Miss Moreton," said Bertha. "There is a better mirror there, isn't there?" she turned to the assistant. "Yes, Miss Moreton," replied that functionary, who knew the family, and had also observed Mr. Danby in the distance. "This way, please."

Nell, creeping up behind Charlie's back, whispered, "Do you think he saw her?" but he vouchsafed no reply, save a poke with his elbow, which nearly knocked her hat off. She fled into the fitting-room after the others.

"None of these hats suit you with your hair done this way," Bertha was saying to the little lady as she entered, "Let me buy a comb and a packet of hairpins, and do it up again for you. It's so pretty, your hair: I love white hair!"

"Would the lady let me do it?" broke in the assistant, eagerly. "I used to be in a first-class hairdresser's before I came here!" She looked at Miss Moreton. "I'd make it look lovely!" she said.

Miss Moreton sat back in her chair with a happy smile. "You may do just what you like," she sighed, ecstatically. "Don't mind me! I'm in your hands, my dears!"

THERE WERE, it appeared, no silk suits with flat collars of Mr. Danby's size. With military collars, oh, yes, certainly, but no flat ones. Could they get him one by to-morrow? No use. Well, how about a white drill suit? No! Could they show him something in a light alpaca or a serge?

"Nuisance!" muttered Mr. Danby to Charlie, irritably,

"That one fits you capitally across the shoulders, only it's the wrong sort of collar," said Charlie. "Pity, that!"

"I used to wear those collars, years ago, before I grew a beard," observed Mr. Danby, "but now, of course, I can't. Must try somewhere else, I suppose!''

Charlie dared greatly. "Why not shave?" (Yes! he certainly dared greatly, for it was well-known that the great T.D.'s beard was his joy and pride. Often had he been heard to say that it was past his comprehension why men over 50 ever shaved!)

"If you'll pardon my saying so, you'd look a good 10 years younger. I'll bet," she added mischievously, "that you had no beard when Miss Moreton used to know you!"

Mr. Danby looked reminiscent. "That's true," he replied, stroking the white cascade of hair which decorated his chest. Then, with sudden decision, "I will! Keep that suit, young man, and I'll slip across to the barber's, and come back to change. Ha! ha! Little Mattie! Get me a pair of white shoes as well, will you? No. 8."

An hour later a very tall young man, accompanied by a very dapper gentleman in a faultless silk suit, came into the vestibule of the hotel.

"Miss Danby and her sister in yet?" the latter inquired of the young lady at the desk.

She looked at him with a puzzled air.

"I inquire, sir." she began, then suddenly, recognition flashed into her eyes. "Oh, Mr. Danby, I didn't know you! you do look so much younger! Yes. they bespoke a private sitting-room. They went in about half-an-hour ago. The lift boy will show you the room. A lady is with them."

The tall young man turned as he followed Mr. Danby into the lift, and deliberately winked at her.

A very elegant lady in tussore silk, with pure white hair framing a sweet face with wistful brown eyes came to meet Tom Danby as he opened the door.

"Matey!" he cried, "my little Mate!" he took her into his arms. "You haven't altered a bit!"

"Nor you, Tom," she answered contentedly, the light of the reward of 30 years' endurance glowing in her eyes. "I'd have known you anywhere!"

Whereat three ribald and unregenerated young people escaped to the balcony to hide their giggles, which, under the circumstances, was hardly surprising.

7: Story of an Advertisement

Anonymous

Tambellup Times (W. Aust) 9 Dec 1914

Also published in several other rural West Australian papers

MY FRIEND, Jack Neverwed, and I were commencing to feel decidedly victim to the giant Ennui. The weather was intolerably warm, and eating ices, though conducive to coolness, cannot be persisted in for any lengthened period.

Untoward circumstances had detained me in the city, and Jack Neverwed, having done Brighton, Eastbourne. Scarborough, &c., some twenty times, and being, withal, a little out of cash, had decided on bearing me company. Accordingly, together we broiled, imbibed cooling liquids, and undertook the education of a highly-sagacious terrier pup, yet time hung heavily on our hands.

Into my attentive ear Jack poured the story of his woes. He told me over and over again the particulars of that quarrel with his rich maiden aunt which had resulted in his being forbidden the house, and the withdrawal of the handsome income which that relative had been in the habit of allowing him. In return, I confided to him some events connected with my engagement to my beloved but false Bandolinna, and together we anathematized the whims of elderly ladies and the falsehoods of the young. But even this exciting excitement palled upon us, and we were sinking into a kind of vegetable existence, when Jack took into his handsome but by no means clever head to answer an advertisements.

It occurred in this wise:

THE DAY had been unusually warm, and we felt correspondingly *triste*. The terrier pup displayed his intellectual endowments in vain, and through a haze of tobacco smoke we regarded each other with a kind of drowsy despair. At length Jack languidly lifted a newspaper from the table, and I noticed a sudden accession of sprightliness in his countenance as his eyes fell upon the advertisement. In a sonorous tone he read aloud:

A LADY of about eight and twenty, considerable personal attractions, and possessing a handsome private fortune, wishes to make the acquaintance of a gentleman of suitable age and prospects, with a view to matrimony. Any one desirous of answering this advertisement will please address Adeliza, Box 100.

"Now, Tom," said Jack, with energy, "I'll answer that appeal to the heart of man immediately."

And so he did.

I MUST SAY the correspondence which ensued was highly amusing. Shakespeare's sonnets were not more poetical than the epistles which Jack (and I) indited to Adeliza, nor those which we received from the lady. The education of the terrier pup was neglected for the superior interest attaching to this interchange of *billets-doux*, and after a fortnight's correspondence, Jack (at my instigation) besought Adeliza to send him her photograph, that he might feast his eyes on her beloved features!

We awaited her reply with anxious expectation, and many were the surmises we hazarded as to the *tout ensemble* of Adeliza.

"Pretty, I daresay," said Jack, looking at the scented, delicately, got-up notes.

"Rather *passe*," I interposed, thinking of the advertisement.

At last it came, and with real curiosity we proceeded to inspect the enclosed *carte-de-visite*. Curiosity changed to astonishment when, instead of the firm countenance we half expected to see, we beheld a face of wonderful loveliness. It was only a vignette, and represented a noble head, with features of magnificent outline, surrounded by clouds of golden hair, surmounted by a massive wreath of white roses.

We exchanged glances of surprise, and I exclaimed, laughing:

"Upon my word, Jack, you might do worse than make her Mrs. Neverwed."

Jack gazed silently at the picture, and I continued: "What does the young lady say for herself?"

Instead of handing me the letter to peruse for myself, as I certainly had a right to do, he glanced over it himself silently, and with the appearance of deep interest.

"Well, Tom!' he exclaimed, when he had finished it, "if Adeliza is half as pretty as her photograph she must be a paragon!"

I assented, and Jack continued, with much energy.

"She says in this letter (what an exquisite hand she writes) that next week she will grant me an interview, as she is much pleased with my epistles, and I am not to write again until I hear from her. How beautifully she words her note."

Jack appeared somewhat excited, and, in some alarm, I said: "Of course we won't go. She is to me adventuress, and will get me into mischief,'

"You won't, of course," retorted Jack, coolly, "but I shall. As to adventuress," he continued, angrily, "I wonder how you can lock at that face and apply such an epithet to its owner!'

"I wonder," I said, meditatively, "how your aunt would like this? If she hears of it *adieu* to your last chance of £10,000!'

Under the name of a cranky, old, gilded hippopotamus, Jack consigned his aunt to latitudes of more than tropic warmth, and seizing photograph and letters strode from the room in a palpable huff.

For the next week Jack's time divided into three equal portions— to wit, that which he spent before the glass, that which was occupied by going to the Post Office, and that during which he contemplated the portrait of Adeliza. At length the promised note arrived, appointing the place of meeting in a shady spot in one of the fashionable parks.

"You will recognise me, my friend," wrote Adeliza, "by a bouquet of white roses which I will carry in my left hand."

"So you're really off?" I said, as he opened the door.

"Certainly I am. *Au revoir*, my dear fellow."

"And your aunt?" I exclaimed. Jack banged the door after him and departed.

TWO HOURS later Jack opened the door and strode in. In the gathering twilight I remarked that he looked decidedly pale, and when he threw himself with a hollow groan, on the sofa, I began to suspect that something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter?" I inquired, curiously. "Was Adeliza—"

"Oh!" groaned Jack, dismally, "don't speak of her!" and he groaned afresh.

After some difficulty I succeeded in drawing from him the history of his adventure.

"Well, sir," he commenced, "after I left this I proceeded to the Park in high feather. I pictured to myself a tall, graceful girl, dressed probably in white, pacing up and down under the shadow of the trees, her beautiful eyes glancing round in search of your humble servant, and a bouquet of roses, pure and fresh as herself, clasped in her tiny hand. I imagined hew I would approach and make myself known, and how we could wander under the trees, enjoying a delightful interchange of thoughts and sentiments, with no tormenting chaperon to interfere.

Here Jack took another nobbler, and proceeded:

"THERE were very few in the Park, and as neared the appointed spot I perceived through the trees a solitary figure seated in one of the chairs. My heart palpitated audibly, and I endeavoured to obtain a glimpse of her features; but her head was turned away, and nothing was left for me but to

approach boldly. One thing was certain, Adeliza was before me, for in her left hand I saw the white glimmer of the roses.

"As I approached noiselessly over the grass I perceived that Adeliza was not of the most sylph-like conformation; in fact, she was decidedly inclined to *embonpoint* in an unusual degree. However, though somewhat disappointed, I recollected that those sunny-haired , Teutonic-looking women are often stout, and then, the extreme beauty of her face would more than compensate for this one failing.

"Another circumstance which struck me was the gorgeous character of her dress. Instead of the robes of vestal white which my imagination had pre-figured, a crimson satin dress glowed like fire in the hot air, and a bright yellow shawl from the shores of India hung from her ample shoulders. A Bird of Paradise plume hung gracefully from a green bonnet and a dedicate rose-coloured parasol completed her toilet. "The spoilt child of wealth!" I mused, as I reached her side. She did not hear my approach, and I coughed once or twice, but in vain, to attract her attention. At length I ventured to touch her arm, murmuring softly, "Adeliza."

"With a start, she turned, and I beheld—"

"What?— who—?" I exclaimed, with nervous expectation.

"My aunt," said Jack, faintly; "the old lady herself, as large as life, bouquet of roses and all, I thought I should have fainted; and when the old girl and I came to explanations, there was a pretty to-do. It appeared she was the veritable Adeliza, and the photograph which led me such a dance, was a fancy portrait of Ophelia. She had purchased it that day, and inclosed it to me in mistake of her own. She was in a dreadful rage, and the only thing which gratified her was my exquisite disappointment. It's sure to get wind, and I'm off to America to-morrow!"

BUT Jack did not go to America. That very night his aunt died, from the combined effects of spite and apoplexy, and, as she left no will, Jack quietly came into possession of a very handsome fortune, and six months afterwards married a golden-haired little sister of mine, who, in her bridal crown of white roses and orange blossoms, looked very like the fancy picture which had placed Jack in such an awkward dilemma.

———————

8: A Little Joke

Anthony Hope

Anthony Hope Hawkins (1863-1933)
In: *Sport Royal and Other Stories*, 1893

A DAY or two before Easter, I was sitting in my office, finishing up some scraps of work, and ever and anon casting happy glances at my portmanteau, which stood in the corner. I was just off to spend a fortnight with my old friend Colonel Gunton, in Norfolk, and I was looking forward to seeing him again with great pleasure. We had not met for ten years, and I had never been to his place or seen any of his family. It would be delightful.

The telephone bell rang.

"Oh, confound it! I hope that's nothing to keep me!" I exclaimed; and I rose to see to it.

"Mr. Miller? Are you there?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll come round."

A few minutes passed, and then my clerk announced, "A lady to see you, sir."

A remarkably pretty girl of about eighteen was ushered in. She stood still some way from me till the door was closed. Then she suddenly rushed toward me, fell at my feet, and exclaimed, "You will protect me, won't you?"

"My dear young lady, what in the world—"

"You're the famous Mr. Miller, aren't you? Mr. Joseph Miller, the philanthropist?"

"My name is Joseph Miller certainly."

"Ah! Then I am safe;" and she sat down in an armchair, and smiled confidingly at me.

"Madam," said I sternly, "will you have the goodness to explain to what I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"They told me to come to you."

"Who?"

"Why, the people at the police station."

"The police station?"

"Yes, when they let me go— because it was a first offense, you know. They said you always took up cases like mine, and that if I stuck to you I should be well looked after."

It was quite true that I have taken an interest in rescuing young persons from becoming habitual criminals; but I was hardly prepared for this.

"What have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing this time— only a bracelet."

"This time?"

"They didn't know me up here," she explained smilingly. "I've always practiced in the country. Wasn't it lucky? But really, Mr. Miller, I'm tired of it; I am indeed. The life is too exciting: the doctors say so; so I've come to you."

The case was a strange one, but I had no time to investigate it now. It wanted only half an hour to the time my train left Liverpool Street.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Sarah Jones."

"Well, I will have your case looked into. Come and see me again; or, if you are in distress, you may write to me—at Colonel Gunton's, Beech Hill, Norfolk. I shall be staying there—"

"Going now?"

"I start in a few minutes."

"Oh, I'll come with you."

"Madam," I answered, with emphasis, "I will see you— out of the office first."

"But what am I to do? Oh, it's nonsense! I shall come. I shall say I belong to you."

I rang the bell. "Show this lady out, Thomas, at once."

She laughed, bowed, and went. Evidently a most impudent hussy. I finished my business, drove to Liverpool Street, and established myself in a first-class smoking carriage. I was alone, and settled myself for a comfortable cigar. I was rudely interrupted. Just as the train was starting, the door opened— and that odious young woman jumped in.

"There! I nearly missed you!" she said.

"I can hold no communication with you," said I severely; "you are a disgrace to your— er— sex."

"It's all right. I've wired to the colonel."

"You've wired to my friend Colonel Gunton?"

"Yes, I didn't want to surprise them. I said you would bring a friend with you. It's all right, Mr. Miller."

"I don't know who you are or what you are; but the Guntons are respectable people, and I am a respectable man, and—"

"That's no reason why you should promenade up and down, Mr. Miller. It's very uncomfortable for me."

"What is the meaning of this insolent behavior?"

"Why not be friendly? We're off now, and I must go on."

"I shall give you in charge at the next station."

"What for?"

On reflection, I supposed she had committed no criminal offense; and with a dignified air I opened my paper.

"I don't mind you smoking," she said, and took out a box of chocolates.

I was at my wits' end. Either this girl was mad or she was a dangerous and unscrupulous person. She was quite capable of making a most unpleasant and discreditable commotion on the platform at Beach Hill Station. What in the world was I to do?

"Shall we stay long at the Guntons'?" she asked.

"You, madam, will never go there."

"Oh, yes, I shall."

"Indeed you won't. I'll take care of that. The police will see to that."

"I don't care a fig for the police. I shall go and stay as long as you do. They told me to stick to you."

I became angry. Any man would have. But nothing was to be gained by losing my temper. I took out a sovereign.

"If you'll get out at the next station, I'll give you this."

She laughed merrily. "I thought you went in for personal supervision, not mere pecuniary doles," she said; "I read that in your speech at the Charity Organization meeting. No; I'm not to be bribed. I'm going to the Guntons'."

"It's absurd. It's preposterous. What will— what will Mrs. Gunton say?"

"Oh, she won't mind," answered my companion, with a confident nod. "She's used to girls like me."

"You surprise me," I retorted sarcastically; but she only laughed again. I returned to my paper.

An hour passed in silence. The train began to slacken speed as we neared the station next before Beech Hill. She looked up and said:

"Would you really rather I didn't come with you?"

I had passed a wretched hour. This girl was evidently bent on blasting my character.

"Madam," I said, "if you'll get out at this station, I'll give you a five-pound note."

"What? I heard you never gave away a farthing! They said no one could get a penny out of you."

"It is true that I disapprove of indiscriminate charity; but, under the circumstances, I—"

"Think I am a deserving object? Well, I'll take it."

With a sigh of relief, I took a note from my pocket-book, and gave it her.

"I'll pay it back soon," she said.

"Never let me see your face again."

"Apologize for me to the Guntons. Good-by."

She jumped out lightly, and I sank back, murmuring, "Thank Heaven!"

After I got rid of her my journey was peaceful and happy, and I forgot my troubles in the warm greeting my old friend Bob Gunton and his wife gave me. The girl must have lied about the telegram; at least, Bob made no reference to it. He had a fine family of boys and girls, and presented them to me with natural pride.

"That's my lot— except Addie. She's gone to see some friends; but we expect her back every minute. They keep me alive, I can tell you, Miller."

After tea, my host and hostess insisted on taking me for a stroll on the terrace. It was a beautiful evening, and I did not mind the cold. As we were talking together, I heard the rumble of wheels. An omnibus stopped at the gate.

"Ah, the 'bus," said Gunton; "it runs between here and our market-town."

I hardly heard him; for, to my horror, I saw, descending from the 'bus and opening the gate, that girl!

"Send her away!" I cried; "send her away! On my honor, Bob, as a gentleman, I know nothing about her."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I solemnly assure Mrs. Gunton and yourself that—"

"What's the matter with the man? What's he talking about?"

"Why, Bob, that girl— that barefaced girl!"

"That girl! Why, that's my daughter Addie!"

"Your daughter?"

The little minx walked up to me with a smile, dropped a little courtesy, and said: "I knew, Mr. Miller, that it wasn't true that you would refuse to help a really deserving case. The others said you would; but I thought better of you."

And she had the effrontery, then and there, to tell her parents all about it!

I think parents are the most infatuated class of persons in the community. They laughed, and Mrs. Gunton said, "How clever of you, Addie! You must forgive her, Mr. Miller. My dear girls are so playful!"

Playful! And she never returned the five-pound note!

9: The Development of Steve

Val Jameson

fl 1898-1938

Manilla Express (NSW), 15 May 1912

*The earliest reference to this author that I can find is her wedding at Kalgoorlie in 1898, and the latest a note in "*Smith's Weekly*" in 1938 that she was in poor health. She was then in her 60s.*

HE WAS the family failure— packed home by each successive employer like a parcel of inferior goods labelled, 'Not fit for this trade. Try something else.' Father thrashed. Mother wept. She had a soft heart for the good-for-naught.

'Some day he will astonish everybody,' she said; 'Steve is not an ordinary boy.'

Allowing Mother to know best, Father shelved the whip, and awaited the development of Steve. It was a mighty slow advance. We tired of watching for it, this dilatory comet prophesied by a devoted mother, and diligently pursued our own avocations. We knew that the failure smoked cigarettes and joined a push of larrikins, whose daring exploits in neighbouring streets caused the residents to petition for special constabulary protection.

Father said nothing. He had washed his hands of Steve. Phil warned Mother that her prodigy looked as if he were developing a desire to qualify for a gaol career.

"Shame!' cried Mother. "You're all down on the lad. Why don't you treat him in a brotherly way, and he wouldn't seek the companionship of street boys."

The object of this devotion was then seventeen— a gawky, untidy disgrace, with light hair and eyes, his face peppered with fine freckles. His choice occupation when at home was reading penny 'shockers' and smoking cigarettes.

One day a sallow-faced man, wearing spectacles and a frock coat, called to see Mother.

'My dear madam,' he gushed, 'I congratulate you on having such a gifted son.'

'I have five,' said Mother, in some confusion. 'Which is it?'

'He is Steve.' The stranger smirked and bowed, and squeezed Mother's hand as if it were a lemon.

'I knew it,' said Mother, with a triumphant glance at me. 'Steve has developed. Come inside, Mr.— er— er—'

'Gonzuli,' assisted the unctuous visitor, stepping across the room like a well-conducted cat.

'Another son,' said Mother, proudly indicating me.

'How do—'

Gonzuli was about to take another lemon grip, but I pocketed my hands, propped one leg on the other knee, and fixed him with a look.

'—you do?' he concluded, lamely, and dropped on to the chair Mother hospitably offered.

'Now, tell me all about it,' said the dear, simple soul. Feeling a cold breeze from my quarter, the sensitive stranger veered in a side-on attitude, and turned the collar of his coat up.

'Your son Steve,' he said, 'attended a meeting of ours last night— what we call a séance.'

'Yes?' said Mother, vaguely.

'And there it was discovered he possessed the clairvoyant gift.'

'Clear what?' asked Mother, in a puzzled way.

'Clairvoyant,'' repeated the stranger, 'which means second sight— he sees things.'

'Oh, I know he has very good sight,' said Mother, disappointed.

'You don't quite apprehend me. madam. He has the sperritchool gift of seein' sperritchool things— things that air invisible to most people.'

'O-o-uh!' Mother's long-drawn exclamation expressed perplexity more than enlightenment. 'He never said anything to me about it.'

'It was not known to himself until the truth flashed on him like Moses in the burnin' bush at our public circle, an' came to pass on'y last night, when 'e stood up an' saw a golden crown over my 'ead.'

'Law!' exclaimed Mother, blinking at the stranger's bullet-shaped napper. while he risked an exploring glance at me.

'Yes,' he repeated, shaping a visionary crown with a long, flat forefinger, 'a golden crown over my 'ead. Now,' wagging the finger at Mother, 'although it's a long ways back in my cheneration, my fore-parents was kings. I am a Royal descent. The monkey which my fore-parents owned has become expired— collapsed. We are dethroned, exiled, an' scattered over the sands of the sea.'

At this stage of the interview I recalled an urgent appointment in the city. Mistrusting the motives of this specimen of decayed royalty, I winked a caution to Mother before leaving the room.

But romance, mysticism, and occultism operate on the credulity of women more readily than men. Mother was persuaded to advance a guinea a month to the owner of a visionary crown for the purpose of developing Steve's alleged gift. The family failure assumed his new role with characteristic audacity, accepted Mother's increased solicitude and attentions with condescending airs, affected to ignore our frank brotherly criticism, dropped his larrikin

chums, and secluded himself in obscure corners, whence he would creep unexpectedly and startle people, cultivated a vacant stare, that would travel through space and penetrate brick walls to see things.

Miss Fussy, a nervous old lady, was chatting amiably to Mother over afternoon tea when Steve commenced his mystic practices.

Fixing his eyes on space in the region of Miss Fussy's left shoulder, he exclaimed in sepulchral tones:

'Beware of enemies. I see a great black spider spinning his web over your left shoulder.'

Miss Fussy screamed, smashed Mother's best cup and saucer, overturned a small table, and commenced to rake imaginary spiders from her garments.

'Take it off! Ugh! where is it?' She obstinately refused to accept Mother's explanation of Steve's alleged clairvoyance, and called it a mean practical joke!

Mother advised Steve not to 'see' anything when Father was about.

At dinner one night, when two distinguished visitors were present, the chance to shine was irresistible.

'Dad,' said Steve, solemnly, brushing a mystic haze from before his eyes, 'I see a donkey standing behind you lickin' that bald patch on your head. They tell me,' he went on, while everyone held their breath in suspense, 'that signifies you lost that top hair by foolish speculation.'

After a startled glance over his shoulder, Father turned crimson with rage. The visitors tried to choke a laugh, and almost choked themselves.

'You insolent vagabond!' stormed Father. 'How dare you fling your coarse jokes at her. Try that on again an' I'll give you a darn good hidin'!'

'Steve!' cried his mother, reproachfully.

'It's no use, Mother,' he persisted; 'the donkey's there yet. I can see him.'

'One donkey's got ter git, or I'll know the reason!' said Dad, rising from his chair with determined looks.

'Leave the room, Steve!' said Mother, sternly. 'Father, don't lose your temper. I'll explain.'

Mother's explanation did not mend matters for Steve.

'Clairvoyance, is it? I'll thrash it out of him. Seein' crowns on other folks' heads an' donkeys over 'is father! I'll make 'im see straight, by the Lord, or hand 'im over to a lunatic asylum: so you make 'im understand that, madam!'

The family clairvoyant shammed indisposition for a week to avoid paternal violence. He was careful afterwards to keep his uncanny genius submerged in the home circle, and Father thought the freak had expired.

SEEING an advertisement in the daily paper announcing a public meeting to be addressed by a youthful clairvoyant, Steve Boxton, we (his brothers) planned a trap for the wonder.

Phil rigged himself up in a skirt, shawl, and bonnet, also a veil of Mother's, and, confident of a successful make-up, took a central seat in the hall. I and a friend, unknown to Steve, framed him in from the crowd, mostly women, who filled the chairs and benches before and behind us.

After a preliminary song the lights were lowered, and the wonder was requested by Gonzuli to step up on the platform and 'see' things.

After a series of mystic passes before his eyes, the stock humbug of such craft, he lisped:

'I see a man with long white hair and beard standing between the stout lady and the thin lady in the fourth row from the platform.'

'Father!' gushed one. 'Uncle!' claimed the other, and glanced sourly at her neighbour as if suspecting her of designs to steal the shade of her departed uncle.

'He's bendin' towards the stout lady,' said Steve, 'an' fastenin' a red rose on her breast.'

'I knoo it was Father!' chirped the triumphant one, while the other looked dejected, but hopeful. 'Uncle' might arrive at any moment.

Now came our opportunity. The friend who sat at Phil's right hand stood up and bawled, 'This old lady wants to know can you see anything for her!'

The dreamy eyes of the mystic explored our psychic environment. The pause was delicious. We expected to hear him plunge into the trap.

'I see,' he said at last, 'a nurse at her right shoulder holding a child's comforter to her lips. The word "Deceit" is written just above.'

'The pest!' muttered Phil. People tittered and stared at us. Some laughed noisily.

'He's smoked us,' muttered Phil; 'we'd better git!'

The fraud on the platform gasped and fluttered his flippers. 'There's disturbin' influences heah. Will those disturbin' influences kindly step out side?'

A well-directed and venerable egg from the rear choked further eloquence and acted as a timely avenger. A mob of enthusiasts jostled us through the door and annexed Mother's bonnet and veil as souvenirs.

When Steve came floating home in a visionary cloud of glory, his clairvoyant vision was apparently exhausted. Whatever he saw to gratify the deluded mystery seekers, he saw not the hiding that awaited him in the arms of his practical-minded brothers. Father gave us a sovereign each for this

service, and Mother said if it happened again she'd divide the family, taking Steve for her share.

Steve hasn't seen anything visionary since his remarkable gift brought him into a collision with a tram car which he failed to 'see.'

Result: Concussion, fever, convalescence, and sanity. Exit Gonzuli.

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10: The Living Portraint

Tod Robbins

Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949

All-Story Weekly 5 April 1919

I AM not insane! You doctors who wag your pointed beards over me, you specialists who attempt to analyze my brain in all its separate cells, you nurses and keepers who buzz about me continually like summer flies, have you no pity for a man robbed of everything which can make life dear— a man unjustly accused of homicidal mania— a man forcibly deprived of the sovereign rights which accompany intelligence? You have incarcerated me in this beehive of insanity because the scope of human imagination cannot embrace an unusual chain of events. Like Christ, I find myself abused because I am neither understood nor believed. Very well— but I shall snarl a bit.

May I ask, learned doctors, in what way your combined intelligences overshadow my single mind? You who follow in dead men's footsteps; you, the apprentices of a profession which it has been my lot to advance into a yet unexplored wilderness; you, pitiful practitioners of a knowledge handed down to you between the covers of countless books, dare to put your hands upon me and lead me to this dungeon!

Like Gulliver, I am at the mercy of Lilliputian minds!

But if I could once escape from here, if I could once break down the barrier which you have so carefully erected, what then, learned doctors?

There are elements in the sea and air as yet unknown to science. I have the key which unlocks the arsenal of the heavens: Did you think, when the Purple Veil lies ready to my hand, that I would strike with a poniard?

If so, you little guessed your man— if so, you did rightly by confining me in this place. It is written that one's acts cannot exceed one's intelligence.

And yet it is not with your stupidity that I quarrel— it is rather with the teaspoonful of knowledge which you have absorbed and which has made you incapable of understanding the slightest truth not written on a printed page. You smile— wagging your beards at me, you smile.

But will you smile at my translucent child, the Purple Veil? I doubt it very much, my genial friends.

But I must not wander. Even though the moon has pressed her soft, leprous face against my barred window, I must not wander.

And yet what a strange power rests- behind those haggard, sightless eyes! With them she beckons from us our calm, collected thoughts. Like a mother she bends ever us— a sad, shy mother who dares visit her children only at night.

She has stolen into the nursery to see us play. Now she is shaking her black, tangled locks over the world. They trail out behind her; and, afar off, through their moving blackness, tiny trembling disks of light appear.

She, our mother, has plundered the infinite. Like a mad queen she steals to my window, her diadem of precious stones caught and dangling from the intertangled meshes of her hair.

"Play!" she commands with a wide, toothless smile. "Play!"

But I will not play— not to-night. Even she shall not dominate my mind. It is necessary that I first give to the world a clear, collected account of the strange chain of events which has drawn me hither — a narrative which shall prove to unborn generations that Gustave Ericson was a victim to the stupidity of his age rather than to the slow inroads of egomania.

After that, if she is still there and still smiling— well, perhaps—

1. Two Discoveries.

I WAS not born to battle for existence. My father had amassed a considerable fortune before I came into the world. He was a large, obese man with round, protruding eyes which gave his florid face a look of perpetual astonishment.

He never understood me; and it tickled the ribs of my humor to set his slow mind revolving on the axis of a new idea. At these times he would regard me with an air of amazement and pique— the air, in fact, of a hen that has inadvertently mothered a duck's egg with brain-numbing results. Undoubtedly I was the cause of much mental worry to the poor old man.

It is not my purpose to bore you with a long dissertation on my boyhood. Suffice it to say that even at that time I had an instinctive love for chemistry. Soon I fitted up a room in the house as a miniature laboratory, and with a school friend, Paul Grey, experienced the various vicissitudes common to most youthful exponents of science.

What soul-stirring odors permeated the atmosphere of that house! What ear-jarring explosions rattled the window-panes!

Daily the expression of rapt astonishment on my father's face deepened. I was at last breaking through the barrier of his mercantile calm; I was proving the fact that life is precious only because it is precarious.

Paul Grey, even in his teens, gave promise of some day making his mark in the world. He was my direct opposite in every physical and mental attribute.

Excessively blond, with pale-blue eyes and the girlish trick of turning fiery-red at any emotional crisis, he fluttered about our laboratory like a pigeon

swooping after each stray crumb of knowledge, while I, with my swarthy skin and unmanageable tangle of blue-black hair, followed as sedately as a crow.

And yet, although he was far quicker, he lacked the depth of insight which makes toward originality of thought. It was I who unearthed hidden knowledge in later years; it was he who put it to an immediate practical use.

I was very attached to Paul— I am still attached to his memory despite his colossal theft of my discovery. You smile incredulously, but it is a fact, I assure you.

One could not cherish a lasting hatred for such a sunny personality. Even a thief is forgiven, if he can amuse.

We grew up together like two brothers, united by the chain of a common interest. At school and college we were inseparable.

I shared the burden of his wild escapades; he dispelled the gloom of my rather melancholy temperament. He was sunshine; I, shadow.

We were as united as day and night, as moonshine and madness, as sorrow and joy. Then one day the old, old story— a woman came between us.

Only a month ago Evelyn testified at my trial. As she stood in the witness-box I looked at her quite calmly. There was no feverish throbbing of the senses, no wild beating of the heart, no feeling of sadness or of joy.

On the contrary, this slender figure in black conjured up nothing but a kind of dull resentment. "What a tiny speck of dust," I thought, "to slow down the wheel of Progress!"

And suddenly this inconsequential doll in her widow's weeds, this female straw whom I had loved, lost all semblance to humanity and became a meaningless automaton— an automaton created by my attorney to squeak out on the silent air one mechanical phrase:

"He is insane— he is insane — he is insane!"

Ah, no, waxen puppet, Gustave Ericson is not insane! Squeak on till the end of time that lying phrase and still it will find no echo of the truth.

Many years ago, perhaps, there were chords of moonlight in my brain which you could play upon, intertangled threads of wild desire which throbbed at your slightest touch— but now I am reason itself enthroned, silent and smiling, as impervious to that small, petty passion as is the mountain-peak to the fretful, flickering lightning.

I do not attempt to justify my youthful infatuation. Evelyn Lawrence, as I saw her in the court-room— her eyes red from weeping, her dark hair prematurely streaked with gray— makes that impossible.

But there was a time, not so many years ago, when she possessed a certain languid charm which one associates with a warm summer afternoon spent in

the country. She was the kind of woman toward whom an overworked man naturally turns with thoughts of rest.

I remember distinctly how I chanced to meet her. It was two years after my graduation from college. Paul and I had been working steadily in the laboratory for upward of a month.

I was at that time on the point of discovering Zodium, the life-giving chemical which was afterward to revolutionize medicine. We were both worn out and plunged into a fit of depression. We had gone far, but still success trembled in the balance.

Suddenly Paul, with a muttered imprecation, flung himself on the leather couch in one corner. Spots of color flamed up in his cheeks, and he began to pluck at his lower lip— a sure sign that he was out of sorts with the world.

"What's the matter?" I asked, looking up from the test-tube which I was heating over an electric burner.

Paul's blue eyes wandered to the window.

"It's hell to be cooped up in here day after day!" he murmured. "I've grown to feel like a run-down machine. Let's chuck it and get out into the air."

"But there's our experiment," I expostulated. "We may find the secret any day now."

"That's what you've been saying for the last week!" he cried impatiently. "Let Zodium wait a while. My aunt's having some sort of an affair over the week-end. Let's go!"

"Who'll be there?"

"Oh, there'll be the Turners and a cousin of theirs— Evelyn Lawrence I believe her name is. She's quite a beauty, Aunt Grace tells me."

I snorted contemptuously. Here we were on the brink of one of the most noteworthy discoveries of the age, and Paul was yapping about house-parties and pretty girls!

As fond as I was of him, I was never quite reconciled to this frivolous strain in his nature— a strain that kept popping up at the most inopportune moments, interfering with hard, conscientious work toward the furthering of science. And yet it was necessary to humor him on these occasions— otherwise he would sulk for days and be of no use in the laboratory.

"Well, if you go on a strike, I suppose the shop must close up!" I said regretfully. "But it seems a shame when—"

He cut me short with the gleeful shout of a released schoolboy:

"Now you're talking!" he cried. "Get your things together and we'll be off in two shakes! And, remember, not a word about chemistry until after Sunday."

The upshot of the affair was that I spent the week-end out of town and met Evelyn Lawrence. I can only explain the emotional crisis I passed through by

the fact that I was in an exhausted mental condition, and that the girl's languid atmosphere soothed my tingling nerves like a sleeping draft.

Certainly love at first sight is a ridiculous hypothesis to be entertained for an instant by the scientific mind. And yet on the evening of the second day— as we drifted lazily along on the smooth, moonlit waters of Lake Deerfoot in one of Miss Grey's canoes, seemingly as far distant from the noisy, frivolous world as the small, remote stars— I had all I could do to refrain from voicing an ardent protestation of an enduring passion.

What a fool! Even then the moon exerted an undue influence over me.

On the following day I regained a measure of common sense. Here I was wasting the precious moments when I might be at work in my laboratory.

If I happened to be in love— well, even love must wait its turn on science. After I had completed my discovery, why, then, it would be time enough to analyze my emotions toward the girl.

I pointed out to Paul that our holiday was over. He seemed very loath to leave the country.

Finally he said that he would follow me into town later in the day, but that no consideration could move him to travel on such a warm morning. I had to content myself with his promise, and, after saying my farewells to Evelyn and Miss Grey, caught the ten-thirty for town.

I have always prided myself on an ability to banish everything from my mind but the work at hand. Perfect concentration is the ladder by which man may ascend to unknown heights.

And yet, on returning home, I had great difficulty in fixing my attention on Zodium. For the first hour or so in the laboratory Evelyn Lawrence's face hung like a brilliant, languid moon over my mental horizon, drawing my thoughts away from the hunt for unknown knowledge. I broke fully three test-tubes and scalded my hand severely before I regained my usual mental equilibrium.

Paul, in spite of his promise, failed to put in an appearance during the afternoon. I did not see him for the entire week— in fact not until after I had made the final, triumphant experiment which gave Zodium to the world.

By an acute chain of reasoning I had succeeded in discovering the essential without him, and was actually holding a vial of the precious amber-colored liquid in my hand when he made a rather shamefaced appearance in the doorway of the laboratory.

At the moment I was so flushed with success that I greeted him with no shade of reproach in my tone.

"Let me introduce you to Zodium, Paul!" I cried, leaping to my feet and advancing toward him. "At last the secret is ours!"

His face, which had worn a ruefully penitent expression, flushed on a sudden to a deep red. He advanced a step and examined the contents of the vial which I held out for his inspection.

"You don't say!" he muttered. "So you got it, after all!" His eyes avoided mine and wandered to the window. "Well, now you've discovered it," he said almost belligerently, "of what practical use is it?"

"Of what practical use?" I cried. "Why, you talk like a grocer, Paul! How should I know as yet? But undoubtedly it will be invaluable for medical purposes."

"Perhaps," he muttered. "That remains to be seen. But tell me how you happened to hit upon it."

When one has worked unremittingly to the successful conclusion of a problem— worked both day and night, as I had done — one often finds recompense for one's labor by explaining the solution to an enthusiastic, comprehending listener.

So it was in my case. It was a pleasure to unburden my mind to Paul. I even went so far as to repeat with equally good results my triumphant experiment.

"You see how near we were to the solution last week," I finished. "If you hadn't insisted on taking a holiday it might have been you who discovered Zodium."

He laughed a trifle bitterly.

"You deserve all the credit, Gustave. It was your idea, in the first place. But I made a discovery this week which puts Zodium in the shade."

"You did? Why, I didn't know you were working this week. What is it?"

I had an uncomfortable feeling that Paul had stolen a march on me.

"You wouldn't call it work, exactly," he answered with one of his vivid flushes. "My discovery is simply this: I am in love!"

In spite of myself a feeling of relief permeated me. So it was just another one of his silly sentimental affairs and no startling chemical discovery which might overshadow Zodium.

Paul, in spite of his brilliancy, was as susceptible to Cupid's darts as any schoolgirl. A lack of constancy alone had pulled him up short on the very brink of matrimony at least a score of times.

"Who's the lucky girl now?" I asked indulgently.

"Mrs. Paul Grey."

"Mrs. Paul Grey?" I repeated, aghast. "You don't mean to tell me that you're married?"

"Just that," he said simply.

"But after that affair with Laura Le Rue, I thought— "

He cut me short impatiently.

"That was just moonshine and nonsense. "This is an entirely different thing. Evelyn Lawrence is a girl any man would be proud of winning. We loved each other from the first day. What was the use of waiting? We were married this morning before a magistrate."

"Evelyn Lawrence!" I muttered. "You married her, Paul?"

Suddenly all the air seemed to have been pumped out of the room. It became difficult to breathe. He had been right— this discovery of his had completely overshadowed Zodium,

"To be sure, Evelyn Lawrence," he continued joyously. "You remember her, don't you?"

And then I could not refrain from smiling. Remember her? Good God, I should always do that— always! And this redfaced fool had dared to ask me, Gustave Ericson, if I—

But I must be quite calm, smiling, cheerful. He must never know that he had blundered unpardonably into the web of my attachment. While I had been working like a slave for science, he, the shirker, the woman-seeker, had slipped out and stolen my life's happiness!

Very well— but some day he should answer for that! Now it was necessary that no shadow of the truth should fall between us.

Rising I grasped his hand.

"My heartiest congratulations, Paul!" I cried. "She is indeed a prize well worth winning!"

How much longer we talked I do not know. I was like a man coming out of an opiate to the presence of feverish pain. And everything I said did not seem to come from myself but rather from a talking-machine which had suddenly been placed in my; breast, wound, and started; and everything he said fell on my ear-drums like the res lentless beating of tiny steel hammers. Tip tap! tip tap! his words sounded, driving in painful thoughts which were like red-hot nails.

And all the time the vial of Zodium grinned at me from the table like a tiny, misshapen Judas.

2. The Portrait.

THERE is no medicine in all nature's apothecary shop so potent, so soothing as the slow-falling sands of time.

They cover up in due course the painful bleeding wounds of yesterday; and when we attempt to retrace our steps into that bygone era, when we attempt to portray the agonies which once seemed so real to us, we stumble over the mounds of buried feeling like strangers in an unknown graveyard.

My infatuation for Evelyn was real enough at the time— so real indeed that it caused me unparalleled agony to think of her as another man's wife.

Even my sincere affection for Paul failed to lessen the weight of the blow. Realizing that I could no longer put my mind on science, I closed up the laboratory and left the city.

For several months I traveled aimlessly from place to place, driven on by a restless energy to be moving. Gradually peace began to settle over my tormented mind.

And then, a year after Paul's marriage— just as I had begun to take a brighter view of life— I met the man who was unconsciously to play such an important part in future events.

At the time I was living at a small hotel in one of those picturesque little towns to be found in Virginia. I was in the third week of my stay when a young man stepped up to where I was sitting on the veranda and accosted me.

"You have a most interesting face," he said without any preamble. "I would like to paint your portrait."

Naturally I was rather taken aback by his bluntness. However, I had already learned never to take offense at an artist. One might as well grow angry at a humming-bird. It is a waste of energy.

Besides, there was a pleasing frankness in this young man's manner which was very attractive. He stood with his legs wide apart, cocking his head at me as though I were some strange specimen under a microscope.

"You flatter me!" I said with a half-smile. "But may I ask why you find my face of interest?"

Before he answered he scrutinized me with a pair of very keen gray eyes. In spite of his immaculate flannels, pink cheeks, and youthfully egotistical mustache, there was something of the wolf about this young man. He had the air of one sniffing at the heels of vanishing Truth.

"Before I tell you that," said he, "I wish you would visit my studio. I'm sure I could explain everything more easily there.

"An artist can only be natural when he is surrounded by the works of his art. Can I presume upon your good nature to the extent of enticing you up three flights of stairs?"

I rose to my feet willingly enough. The boredom which so often accompanies loneliness had weighed down my spirits of late. Perhaps the company of this ingenious young man would prove amusing.

"I must warn you beforehand that I know nothing about art!" I told him as we entered the hotel together.

"No matter," he rejoined lightly. "You yourself— if you will pardon my frankness — are a work of art, a walking portrait of an advanced passion. There

is a look in your eyes at times— a certain twist to your lips that— But, no matter, I will explain later."

As we mounted to his room he told me that he was the famous portrait painter, Anthony Worthington, of New York, and that his doctor had ordered him to take a protracted rest in the country. He had already been away from town for nearly two months, and during that time had not done a single stroke of work.

"I'm fairly itching to get back at it," he continued. "And when I saw your face at breakfast this morning I knew that the moment had come."

Anthony Worthington had secured the largest and brightest room in the hotel. It had two long French windows, through which the sunlight streamed, lighting every corner and illumining several dark portraits on the wall.

The whole place had absorbed the personality of its occupant. It was indisputably the abode of a painter.

"Is this some of your work?" I asked, stepping up to the wall and examining the portrait of a bull-necked individual with a jaw which jutted out like the prow of a battle-ship.

"Yes," he answered, offering me a cigarette and lighting one himself. "That's Bill Sands. I painted him a week before he was arrested for murder.

"You may remember the case. He killed his father and robbed him of a cheap watch. The most primitive type. But still we must have a beginning."

"Am I to understand that you are interested in painting criminal types?"

"Murderers!" he replied simply. "It's my life's work! We all have our hobbies, we artists. Some of us paint cows, sheep, geese— even pigs.

"But give me murderers every time. I've painted dozens of them in the last five years."

"But isn't it rather difficult to find sitters?" I asked.

"Not at all," he told me. "Any city is loaded with murderers. Walk a block and you'll meet ten.

"Most of them are of the primitive type like Bill here; and of course nearly all of them are in the embryonic state. These remain out of jail merely because the peculiar twist in their characters has never been properly developed."

"This poor young man is mentally deranged," I thought to myself. "What a shame it is that so many artists live on the borderland of reason!" Aloud I said:

"But I suppose in time they all succumb to their natural tendencies?"

"Not necessarily," he answered lightly. "On the contrary, very few attain a full mental growth. Perhaps the natural fear of the consequences holds them in check, or perhaps the psychological moment never enters their lives."

I began to feel a strange interest in this crack-brained artist's theory. He stated his opinion with such evident sincerity that I knew well enough that he was not joking.

Could there be any truth in such a bizarre belief? If so, it would cause timid folk like my father no end of worry— timid folk who had amassed large fortunes and whose progeny" would be benefited by an early demise.

"And some of these embryonic murderers go through life never guessing the truth about themselves?" I suggested.

"Just so," said he. "It often takes war to wake them up. A great international conflict serves as a mammoth incubator for all the vices. It hatches out some strange chicks, my friend— some very strange chicks."

He paused for a moment, and I caught the glint of his sharp, gray eyes as he turned, toward the window.

"A fair light," he murmured. If you would oblige—"

"You want me to sit for you? I asked. "I am then one of these embryonic murderers?"

I had spoken facetiously and was scarcely prepared for his answer. When he said:

"Out of your own mouth you have spoken it."

I started involuntarily.

"But not at all like Bill," he went on encouragingly. "You're of a very uncommon type.

"Just glance at that other portrait near the window."

To humor him I did as he told me. I saw a strikingly handsome face, lean, dark, esthetic— a face with haunting eyes and drooping, crimson lips— a face which one felt instinctively to be quite soulless, quite malign.

Like an assassin's mask, time had carefully carved it out of ivory to conceal the grimaces of. the soul. And yet, through the slanting eyelids, death looked out at the world; and behind those languid, crimson ` lips, one sensed the cruel white fangs.

"That," Anthony Worthington continued, "is Burgess Corell. He murdered his wife by mental suggestion. He forced her to commit suicide.

"The law could never touch him. That is the face of an advanced type of murderer, just as Bill's is the primitive type. Together they represent crime's ultimates."

I turned from the portrait with an involuntary shudder. The atmosphere of this mad artist had got on my nerves. Of course, what he had said about me was ridiculous.

And yet there had been a time, a year ago now, when Paul had stood in my laboratory and told me that—

What nonsense! Of course I had been hurt and angry. What man would not? But I had long since reconciled myself to my loss. I-could now view the affair with a philosophic calm. All my affection for Paul had returned.

"Do these murderers whom you paint confess their crimes to you?" I asked.

"Very often," my host answered genially, "It's embarrassing. Murderers are inclined to be too communicative, if anything.

"They're all great egotists at heart, Many a confession has been made because the guilty man thought the story too good to keep all to himself."

"To be the confidant of a murderer I should think would be a trifle dangerous. They might repent of their loquacity at leisure."

Anthony Worthington smiled pleasantly.

"You're right," he said. "It is dangerous. After a few unpleasant experiences, I always put wads of cotton in my ears and made sure that my models saw me do it. Now, if you'll be kind enough to sit in that chair by the window, I'll get to work."

"You think that my face really deserves your attention?" I asked as I seated myself, "Tt stirs me!" he cried enthusiastically. "You have a remarkable expression. Turn your head a trifle to the right, please. The chin a little higher. Ah, that's it! Splendid! Splendid!"

He began to take aim at me with a piece of charcoal.

And I, in spite of my great sanity, once more experienced an involuntary tremor. At first this young man's silly pretense had amused me. I had looked on him as a crack-brained child and had humored him accordingly. But the portrait of Burgess Corell had unaccountably affected me. For an instant it had seemed that I was looking into a distorted mirror at my own face.

There was something about the tilt of the chin, something in the curve of the lips and the lifted eyebrows, which resembled the Gustave Ericson I met each morning in the shaving-mirror. It was just coincidence, of course, but then—

Anthony Worrthington's voice broke in on my'thoughts. He stood before his easel, making quick, definite strokes; and while he worked, he talked coherently.

"We all have two faces," he was saying. "Men go about in masks. It is the art of the portrait-painter to unmask humanity. He must see more than the surface values; he must get a glimpse of the soul, or he is merely a photographer.

"It is difficult in some cases; and especially difficult with you. Now, if you would kindly think of some especial enemy of yours— some person whom you hate with all your soul."

"I have no enemies," I answered coldly. "I hate no one."

"Have you seen the morning paper?" he asked hopefully. "No? Well, there's a most interesting murder on the first page, and a rather vivid description of the details. Allow me."

He rose, and, picking up a copy of the Sentinel, presented it to me.

"Read it carefully," he pleaded. "It's the first column to the right. All about the murder of an old woman in Roanoke."

I smiled in spite of myself. "I have no interest in such things," I assured him. "Well, if you insist." I took the paper and glanced at it. The next moment I had all I could do to stifle a cry of astonishment.

My eyes had become riveted upon an article to the left where he had pointed— an article which bore the heading:

YOUNG SCIENTIST GIVES
ZODIUM TO THE WORLD

I had great difficulty in holding the paper steady while I read the short paragraph.

One of the most interesting discoveries of modern times was recently made by the young chemist and scientist, Paul Grey. And he has put his discovery to an eminently practical use. Zodium, we have been told, is likely to revolutionize medicine. Dr. Madden, an eminent physician and specialist, prophesies that this drug will add at least ten years to the longevity of the race. It acts as a powerful stimulant on diseased and worn-out organs, and is said to be a sure cure for hardening of the arteries.

For a moment the room seemed to be revolving slowly about me. Allowing the newspaper to slip to the floor, I seized the arms of the chair. And then a great wave of blood swam up into my head, blurring my vision with a curtain of dancing purple.

So Paul had betrayed me! Not contented with robbing me of a wife, he had now robbed me of my discovery. Like a sneaking hound, he had waited till my back was turned before stretching out his plundering hands to my treasure.

And I had trusted him always! What a fool I had been! But now— Why, he would smart a bit. I would see to that. I would—

"Hold it, hold it!" Anthony Worthington cried out. He was working like a madman.

"The very expression I wanted! Hold it, man— for God's sake, hold it! Hold it; and I will paint a portrait of you which shall be life itself— as true as your own soul!"

3. "I Have Painted Your Soul."

TWO weeks after I learned of Paul's treachery, Anthony Worthington wrote his name on the canvas and stepped back with a sigh of content. My portrait was finished.

"Come and look at yourself," he called to me. "This is a sample of my very best work."

With no small amount of curiosity I took my stand beside him and examined the painting. Up to this I had purposely refrained from looking at it.

It is unfair to judge a man's work until it is the finished product of its creator. The satisfying results often rest in the very last touch of the master's hand.

For some time I looked at this painted likeness of myself with amazement. This could not be I! This face, distorted by passion, with pinched nostrils and glaring eyes, was not the face of Gustave Ericson — that calm, thoughtful face which had so often looked reassuringly at me from the mirror.

Like Medusa's head, this horrible apparition froze me into dumb immobility. The painted figure seemed to be crouched there waiting but for the signal to spring forward to all its murderous length; and while thus waiting, the stored-up venom of the world was welling into cruel lines about the lips, glowing dully behind the starting eyeballs, writing its message to the world on the furrowed parchment of the forehead.

Shuddering, I turned away.

"This is a portrait painted by a madman," I said aloud.

Anthony Worthington smiled.

"It is you," he answered. "I have painted your soul."

For an instant hot anger overmastered me. It took all my self-command to hold in check a wild desire to pick up one of the pallet-knives and cut into shreds the painted lie.

What right had this crack-brained artist to so parody my emotions? I had been a fool to sit for him!

"It is a very fine piece of work," he continued, rubbing his hands together gleefully. "If you don't want it, I'll hang it in my studio at home."

I was silent for several moments. It would never do to let him have this portrait. He might show it to his friends; he might even put it on exhibition or sell it.

In my mind's eye I could see a crowd of the curious surrounding this abomination and commenting on the model who was so very different. Such a portrait could well-nigh brand a man a felon. I had a shrinking shame that

other eyes might see it. No, that would never do. I would buy it and destroy it at my leisure.

Once more I looked long at the painting. It was necessary to humor the artist until I rescued it from his clutches. After that? Well, after that I could destroy it in a thousand different ways.

"It improves on a second glance," I told him. "In fact, it isn't at all bad. You seem to have got the— er—"

"The hidden expression," he broke in impatiently. "This is your real face, my friend."

"To be sure," I said mildly, "to be sure. The hidden expression, that's what I meant. Now I want this portrait, Mr. Worthington. The price?"

"In your case, nothing. It was a positive joy to paint you. I would like to do another one of you."

"I am leaving for home to-morrow," I told him hastily. "Perhaps some other time."

"That's a shame," said he. "However, as you say, perhaps some other time. When I return to the city, I intend painting my conception of the Spanish Inquisition.

"You will be invaluable as a model. May I call on you?"

"Certainly," I lied. "And my portrait?"

"I'll have it crated up and sent to your address."

We parted with this understanding; and on the following afternoon I boarded the train for home. Strange to say, I had a feeling of unbounded relief as the wheels began to revolve.

It was as though I were escaping some imminent peril. Try as I would, I could not then account for this uncalled-for sensation.

On arriving home, I found my father greatly altered. During my absence, he had aged considerably.

His face, once as round and red as a harvest moon, had dwindled. Now it was as shriveled as a winter apple; and his large, protruding, brown eyes looked out of it with the hopeless expression of a sick animal.

Also his disposition had altered for the worse. He now evinced an impatience toward the petty little annoyances of everyday life which he would have blushed for at an earlier period.

He greeted me with an unpleasant allusion to my long absence which was galling in the extreme. It was all I could do to refrain from voicing my opinion of his churlishness.

"Well, now that you're home," he continued, "I hope-you'll go into the office and be of some credit to me."

The mere thought of Gustave Ericson in an office made me smile. An eagle in a hencoop could not be more incongruous.

"My dear father," I said patiently enough, "do you not realize that I am a scientist? My time is invaluable to the progress of the world. No business is important enough to absorb my mentality."

Now this truthful answer should have silenced him. But it did not silence him. On the contrary, it seemed to infuriate him.

The poor old man was such a mental dullard that he could not appreciate the gifts of his son. No doubt my words sounded to him like hollow boasting.

"A scientist!" he sneered. "What have you ever discovered? All you do is to make vile stinks in your laboratory.

"Now, if you were like Paul Grey, and really did something, Td put up with it. If you had discovered Zodium, which is of practical use, why, then—"

Suddenly he paused, and his eyes seemed to fairly pop out at me. He had the look of one who beholds an unaccountable transformation.

"Why, what's the matter, Gustave? Aren't you well?"

"Certainly, father. Do I look ill?"

"No, not now. A moment ago your face seemed to change. It must be my eyes."

He put his hand to his forehead with a weary gesture.

"I haven't been myself lately. What was I- saying? Oh, yes! You must go into the office, Gustave. I'll not support you in idleness."'

"Idleness!" I cried angrily. "Have you no conception of my life? I have worked very hard."

"Where are the results?" he asked in an aggravating tone.

I had opened my lips for a bitter reply when the tallefigure of the butler appeared in the doorway, interrupting for a time the family quarrel.

"The express company just left a large box for you, Mr. Gustave," he said. "Where shall I put it, sir?"

Instantly the feeling of exhilaration which I had experienced: since leaving Virginia vanished. It was as though an invisible weight had descended upon me.

I had a sensation of guilt— a sensation as though I were in immediate danger of being detected in some crime. If the butler had been a relentless policeman, and I a cowering felon, his words could not have caused me a greater shock.

Ridiculous as it now seems, beads of perspiration gathered on my forehead, and my knees began to tremble.

"You may put it in my laboratory, Tom," I said at length.

"Shall I take the crate off, sir?"

"No!" burst from me with such vehemence that my father and the butler both started involuntarily. "I'll open it myself!"

"Very well, sir," said Tom in a grieved tone. "Ill leave a hammer on the table."

"Why did you shout at Tom like that?" my father asked when the butler had gone. "That's no way to speak to servants, Gustave. I won't tolerate that kind of thing in my house."

"It won't happen again, father.

I turned on my heel and strode into the laboratory, leaving the old man pacing up and down the room with the pompous air of one who has come off best in a battle of words.

Tom had obeyed me with rather more than his customary alacrity. I found a tall, crated package leaning up against one of the walls. Undoubtedly it was the portrait.

Picking up a hammer, I began to tear the laths free. They gave readily enough, coming. out with the sharp, rasping sound of nails torn from wood; and, in a moment more, I lowered the paper-swathed portrait to the floor and began to unwrap it. Soon the painted apparition of myself glared up at me with all its blood-curling ferocity.

While I had been at work, my nerves had been steady enough; but now, as I met the fixed regard of the portrait, I noted something which at the time I thought a foolish fancy. The figure in the gold frame seemed to writhe from side to side, as if in a death agony, its thin, red lips drew back from long, white fangs; its breast rose and fell spasmodically; and its malignant, narrow-lidded eyes rolled wildly, as though seeking some loophole of escape.

And then a strange hallucination possessed me. For an instant it seemed that we had struggled together, this painted creature and I; that we had had a fierce combat in this very room; that at last I had thrown it on its back and was holding it there.

Sweat poured down my face and my knees were trembling from fatigue; yet an overmastering hatred burned my veins like molten lava. I would destroy it forever. That was my only hope, my only salvation.

I would bring the hammer down on its leering face again and again till nothing was left but an unrecognizable pulp. Now for a straight blow and a strong blow. I raised the hammer aloft.

Suddenly a human hand grasped my arm and a loud voice called out: "What are you doing, Gustave?"

Instantly the strange hallucination passed. I found myself on my feet, the hammer still gripped tightly in my hand.

My father stood near me, his face unnaturally white, and his eyes staring. He had raised one arm on a level with his head, as though to protect himself from a blow.

"What do you say?" I muttered hoarsely. The hammer slipped from my hand to the floor.

He lowered his arm, and his face became suffused with blood. He seemed to be in a towering rage.

"You'must be insane!" he shouted. "P1 have no madman in my house! Whether you like it or not, I tell you that that painting does resemble you.

"Just a moment ago, when you lifted the hammer to strike me, your face was exactly like that."

"I lifted the hammer to strike you, father?" I cried, dumfounded.: "Why, I didn't know you were in the room!"

"You're lying or you're mad," he said. "I know you had an abominable temper, but I didn't think— " He paused and shot a suspicious glance at the portrait.

"If I hadn't seen you in time, you'd have killed me, Gustave! I know it. I could see it in your face— it's in the face of your portrait now. Good God, what a son!"

He began sidling toward the door, his frightened eyes still fixed upon me.

"But I don't know what you're talking about!" I cried in desperation. "I was unpacking the portrait and didn't even know— "

He cut me short.

"It's no use lying," he sneered. "I came in here and found you on your knees staring at that painting. Looking over your shoulder I said that I thought it was a very good likeness.

"At that you shouted out, ' You lie!' and, springing to your feet, attacked me with a hammer. I avoided your first blow, and then you came to your senses."

"A ridiculous story!" I shouted after him.

"Perhaps so," said he. "But if the facts were known, you'd get a term in prison. From now on we'll not live under the same roof. I think you'd better be off on your travels again to-morrow."

Once more he gave me a fearful look over his shoulder, and then, without another word, slammed the door in my face. Soon the sound of his shuffling footsteps died away.

4. The Murder.

SOMEONE has said: "Truth is stranger than fiction." Bear this well in mind as you peruse the chronicle of the startling events which befell me and do not deafen your ears to these unparalleled experiences because they seem unbelievable. Once more I repeat: "I am sane, quite sane!" And as a proof of my sanity, I refer you triumphantly to Zodium and the Purple Veil. Which one of you, my readers, has given to the world such proofs of sound mentality as these?

On the night of our altercation, my father was stricken with a severe attack of paralysis. Perhaps the abnormal excitement under which he had been laboring brought it on prematurely; but, as I look back on the scene, as I weigh again on the scales of time his uncalled-for accusation, I exonerate myself from any shadow of blame. Thus all my life I have been more sinned against than sinning.

It is terrifying to see a robust man stricken down in an instant— at one moment to see him strong, upright, master of his powers; at the next, a fallen tree-trunk, twisted, motionless, dumb.

An unseen ax has been at work for days, months, years— but we have noticed nothing till the fall. Who wields this ax so silently, so mysteriously?

Even now the shadowy woodsman may have signaled us out in the waiting forest, even now he may be chopping through the essence of our lives. Who then is safe?

My father, once a virile, boisterous man, had become an inanimate, voiceless lump of humanity— an odd, waxen dummy which lay motionless in its large four-posted bed.

Only his eyes moved. In them had centered the spark of life. They followed the nurse, the doctor and myself about with feverish anxiety; and often, when my back was turned, I knew that they were still staring at me.

Although he had lost both the power of speech and the power of motion, in fact was as completely shut off from human intercourse as if he were already dead and buried, I knew by the expression in his eyes that he feared me and would continue to fear me up to the very end. If nothing else, fear dwelt behind those eyes.

How ridiculous, how laughably absurd! He should have been as immune from fear as a fallen tree is immune from the rising storm.

Suppose his ridiculous surmise ad been correct, suppose I had once threatened him with physical violence; what then? Surely he was now quite safe from me. I could offer him nothing but a blessed relief.

A man of limited intelligence, he remained one to the very end.

I had a consultation with the family doctor shortly after my father's stroke. He offered no hopes of recovery, but seemed to think that his patient might

retain this feeble spark of life for years. It was at that time I made the statement which was later to count so heavily against me at my trial. It was simply this: "It would be a work of kindness to put my father out of his misery."

Surely it was a very innocent and truthful remark. And yet how sinister it hasbeen made to appear when repeated triumphantly by the prosecuting attorney!

For a time my father's illness caused me to forget the portrait. I had a thousand and one things to attend to. It was necessary that his business interests should be looked after. I was plunged into a whirlpool of commercial affairs.

Exactly two weeks after my home-coming, I entered the laboratory for the second time. It was evening and the room was bathed in blackness. Lighting the electric-lamp, I glanced about me.

Unconsciously my eyes sought the corner where my portrait had rested against the wall. It was no longer there.

An unaccountable tremor passed through me. I circled the room with my eyes apprehensively and at the next moment uttered an ejaculation of relief. Some one had hung the portrait above the fireplace.

Now it looked down at me with sneering, sardonic contempt— the look of a lifelong enemy who has suddenly obtained the upper hand. "TI am here for all time," it seemed to be saying.

Instantly all my old hatred and repugnance for this painted abomination returned in full force. Seating myself opposite it, I repaid its baleful stare with all my mental strength, attempting to break its almost hypnotic influence.

And sitting thus, apparently in repose, but in reality tingling all over from an overmastering sensation of loathing and fear, I soon beheld a clarified vision of the truth, It was simply this:

Suddenly my painted likeness moved, its breast rose and fell, and its lips lengthened in a mocking smile. Then, nodding its head at me solemnly, reprovingly, it spoke.

Like dry, wind-swept leaves, its words came to me— leaves that halt for an instant only to rustle on again about our feet.

"Gustave Ericson, why do you deny me?"

And then it seemed to me that hot, angry speech tore my lips`apart, that challenging words leaped forth like an army going out in battle array.

"I know what you want," I cried aloud. "But I will not obey you! How dare you claim to be my soul?— you with your murderous eyes and loathsome lips! I will do more than deny you— I will destroy you!"

"No man can destroy his own thoughts," the portrait murmured.

"You are not my thoughts," I answered. "You are but another's painted fancy of my thoughts."

Again the portrait smiled.

"Your father found me true. Do you not remember when you denied me first?"

An involuntary shudder passed through my frame.

"It was you then," I gasped, "who threatened him with a hammer?"

The portrait bowed and smiled. Placing one of its long, thin hands over its heart, it bowed and smiled.

"You or me, what can it matter?" it murmured politely. "In the eyes of the world, it will not matter."

"In the eyes of the world it will not matter," I repeated dully. The portent of its words sounded a brazen alarm somewhere in my breast. God! how true that was. In the eyes of the world, it would not matter.

What it did, I must answer for. And if it could once escape from its golden prison, what might it not do?

I feared the look in its eyes, the crimson cruelty of its lips, the long, thin hands which seemed to vibrate with evil energy. I must destroy it now or never!

"You wish me to kill my father?" I said at length, glancing about furtively for some weapon to use against it.

"I *demand* that you kill your father," the portrait answered calmly. "We need his fortune to advance science. How can you hesitate?"

At that moment my wandering eyes encountered what they had been in search of— a bottle containing a powerful chemical which had gone into the making of Zodium. A few drops of this sprinkled on the canvas and I would be rid of my loathsome visitor for all time.

Rising, I took the bottle Fa the shelf and approached the portrait.

"You're right," I said in a reassuring tone; "it is evidently my duty. But there are the means to be considered. Now, this chemical is deadly and leaves no telltale traces. If I gave him a drop in his sleeping-draft, he would never wake again."

The portrait's lips were once more contorted in an evil smile, and for an instant its eyes were covered with a gray film.

"Poison?" it muttered. "To be sure, *poison*. Let me see!"

By now I had reached the wall and stood directly beneath the portrait.

"Perhaps you are unfamiliar with this chemical," I murmured, uncorking the bottle deftly. "It is guaranteed to be efficacious— to remove all the stains from our lives. Here, take it in the face, you dog!"

The portrait made a protective movement with its thin, white hands. But it was too late. With the speed of lightning I had thrown the contents of the bottle straight into its leering eyes.

Now the fiery liquid was running dawn the canvas, burning and destroying everything in its path. I heard a choking cry, and then all was silence.

Picking up a large sponge from the laboratory-table, I began to-pass it up and down the canvas till every square inch of paint was saturated with the liquid. Then I seated myself with a feeling of relief and watched the grizzly apparition decompose and fade away before my eyes.

Soon the canvas offered nothing but a bare expanse of withered white. My portrait was no more.

And now a great drowsiness descended on me like a soft, languorous sea of mist. The mental struggle through which I had passed left me weary in both body and mind.

Closing my eyes, I was soon wafted away to the land of dreams— dreams, gigantic and ponderous, under which the subcon- scious mind toiled wearily along up mountain-peaks and down deep declivities, on and on till the break of dawn.

And through these dreams, like the motif in music, as persistent and relentless as the voice of eternal alarm, rang these words in strange cadence: '' What it does, I must answer for; what it does, I must answer for," till all the weird valleys of sleep took up the refrain and whispered it softly.

When I awoke, a sickly morning peered in at me through the trembling curtains. The room was still a ghostly battle-field for day and night.

In the corners, an army of shadows lurked, dark-browed and sinister, crawling ever back before the spear-points of dawn. Suddenly 'the picture above my head was illumined, and I uttered a cry of horror.

Surely I could not have dreamed that I 'had destroyed.the portrait! There was the empty bottle to prove that I had not dreamed. And yet the canvas no longer offered a bare, seamed expanse,

No, there was my abominable painted likeness glaring down at me with an added venom in its eyes! And, while before the crouching figure had seemed several paces in the background, now it appeared closer, as if it had made a long stride forward while I slept. ` Rubbing my eyes, I stared at it. But no stare of mine could wipe it out. If the acid had failed, was there anything in the world which could wipe it out?

And the portrait seemed to answer silently with its eyes: "No man can destroy his own thoughts."

How long-I sat confronting this incomprehensible apparition, I do not know. I was suddenly brought to myself by the sound of the door opening behind my back.

Starting, I turned and saw the butler's long, lugubrious face peering in at me.

"Well?" I asked sharply.

The man's watery eyes avoided mine. He licked his lips as though they were dry.

"I went for the doctor as you told me, sir," he said at last. :

"You went for the doctor?" I cried at a loss. "When did Z tell you to go for the doctor?" `

Again Tom moistened his lips.

"Why, only two hours ago, sir! ` You must remember, sir, it was when I rak against you in the dark just as you were coming out of the sick-room."

"Nonsense! I haven't been near my father all night long."

"Tf you'll pardon me, sir,' Tom continued more firmly, "I advise you to take a little rest. You're not yourself, sir. Your father's sudden death has— "

"My father's death!" I cried, aghast. "You don't mean to tell me that he's dead?"

"Yes, sir. It was as you thought— he was dead when I met you in the hall. Dr. Parkinson said it must have been his heart which failed him at the last.

"Now brace up, sir! Don't give way! Just' lean on my arm, sir. That's right; that's right."

My overstrung nerves had suddenly snapped at the butler's news. Trembling from head to foot, I burst out into uncontrolled sobs. So this was where my portrait had vanished to while I— slept.

I had thought the acid had destroyed it, while in reality it had only liberated it for a time to do a ghastly business. There had been a few drops of the chemical left in the bottle— enough to kill an old man; and when I had dozed off, it had used them. See, the bottle was now bone-dry. God help me! What was I to do?

"Come into your own room and lie down, Mr. Gustave," Tom pleaded. "You need rest, sir."

I could no longer resist him. Indeed, I was so weak both in body and mind that I could not have found the strength to disobey a child.

What I needed was sleep— an ocean of tranquil, dreamless sleep. In the future lay a silent struggle between this painted demon and me, an heroic struggle for which I could expect no help from the world. Before I quitted the room, I glanced over my shoulder at the painting. And as I did so, I saw its crimson lips curl up like a cat's, I saw it place its hand on its breast and bow

ever so gracefully, like a famous actor responding to an encore. Bowing and smiling, it followed me with its eyes.

"Can I destroy it?" I murmured. "Will I ever be able to destroy it?"

5. The Purple Veil.

FORTUNATELY my father's death called for no unpleasant investigations.

It was natural enough that a man well past the prime of life, suffering from paralysis and a weak heart, should flicker out without a moment's warning.

After the funeral I was plunged into a whirlwind of financial affairs which kept me thoroughly occupied. My father's estate proved to be a complex affair and one which took the family lawyer and myself many weeks to straighten out.

And yet I was not able to forget my painted evil genius at this time. It would obtrude itself before my mental vision at the most inopportune moments, parting the calm, collected chain of thought with its ghostly hand, bowing and smiling at me in mockery from the picture-frames which hung in the lawyer's office, and even interrupting me as I spoke solemnly of my affliction with some ribald jest at the expense of my poor dead father— jests which my companions evidently considered as proceeding from my own lips, and which soon won for me an"unenviable reputation.

And I was powerless to clear myself! Even then I realized that any accusation launched against the portrait would rebound and destroy me. The incredulity of a world given over to safety and sanity— a world marked out into squares of possibility like a chess-board— offers no mercy to a man such as I, a man lost in the labyrinth of unparalleled experience.

But do not think that I suffered meekly and in silence. No, on returning home from some scene in which I had been made to appear odious, I would steal into the laboratory, close the door softly, and take my stand before the portrait. Then, with a heart heavy with horror, I would upbraid it.

"You are a murderer!" I would say.

And my portrait would smirk at me with vivid lips, smirk and bow with its hand on its heart.

"I am a thought," it would murmur— "I am your crimson thought!"

"But why do you persecute me?"

"Do you not deny me?"

"And if I did not deny you?"

"Why, then we would be as one, united and peaceful— quite happy with one another. Do you not long for rest?"

And then somewhere in my breast the strident voice of eternal alarm would cry out, "Not yet— not yet!" And fear would ripple over me like an ice-crowned wave; and it would become difficult to face the portrait.

Shivering and drawing my dressing-gown about me for warmth, I would steal out of the laboratory and up the creaking stairs to my room. God! how cold it was!

A month after I came into my inheritance, I once more took up my scientific studies. Under the eyes of the portrait, grimly and in silence, I experimented with various chemicals.

And such was my concentration that even its gorgonlike regard failed to shatter a theory which was springing up in my brain. Already I had visualized my translucent child, the Purple Veil.

You, who have experienced the poisonous gases on foreign battle-fields, can have but a minimized conception of the Purple Veil. Imagine, if you can, a thick, purplish smoke, shot here and there with tiny iridescent specks of flame like spangles in an eastern shawl— a thick, purplish smoke which coils about its victim fold on fold, smothering and burning till all life is transformed into blackened ashes.

Imagine this, and you may have some slight conception of the Purple Veil.

Hate is one of the great motive forces in the world. Often, like love, it inspires its devotees to unprecedented achievement.

It is a matter for speculation as to how many artistic masterpieces have been inspired by the transcending delirium of rage. And if this is true of Art, so also is it true of its calm but more deadly sisters, Science and Invention.

Hate drove me to the discovery of the Purple Veil— hate and fear. The leering, evil face of the portrait lashed me to herculean mental efforts.

"Perhaps," I thought, "my salvation rests in such a discovery. This grimacing, painted thing has life— life hard to touch, indeed; but still life— and what has life can surely be smothered in the Purple Veil.

Thinking in this wise, I redoubled my efforts to reach the goal, slaving both day and night till my brain reeled and my nerves seemed like tightly drawn, throbbing wires. And while I toiled thus, my portrait looked down on me calmly, ironically, seemingly quite safe in its impregnable immortality. Often now it conversed with me.

"Why do you toil thus?"

"Because I hate deeply."

"And whom do you hate?"

"I hate the world. It has taken another to its breast in my place."

"And you would destroy the world?"

"Yes, I would destroy it! I would clothe it in the Purple Veil! Death shall hover over its cities and towns, over its valleys and mountain-tops."'

And then my portrait would smile as 'though well pleased; and it would moisten its Crimson lips like one who is athirst. Ah, my cunning was more than a match for it!

How eagerly it swallowed the bait! Little did it guess for whom I was so carefully preparing the Purple Veil.

Once it said: "But is there no one among the multitudes, no especial enemy whom you have signaled out?"

At that, I nearly dropped the test-tube I was holding. Had it guessed my secret? No, evidently not. It was smiling at me with a new, strange affection in its eyes— a loathsome affection which made my flesh crawl with unspeakable horror and dread.

For an instant I felt that I was stripped bare, that I could move neither hand nor foot, and that its eyes had multiplied into thousands of cold, slimy creatures which were crawling over me in a noisome wave— creatures which nestled against my body with a. sickening sentimentality! It was possible to bear its hatred, but its love—

After a moment I answered:

"Yes, there is one. No doubt you have guessed. I would strike the false friend who robbed me of my discovery— that false friend whose treachery was responsible for your existence."

And then my portrait laughed a low laugh of satisfaction.

"We have become as brothers," it murmured, barely moving its lips. "No longer will we struggle with one another. We will enjoy a lifelong peace."

There came a day at last when my toil culminated in triumph— a day when the Purple Veil became a reality. A dozen tiny glass globes lay on the laboratory table, each one of which contained a thimbleful of crimson liquid— glass globes which, if broken, would exude a poisonous purple vapor spangled here and there with tiny iridescent sparks of living fire.

And my own self-protection had not been neglected. I had taken no risks. Upstairs, in my bedroom, there hung a suit of asbestos and a gas-mask warranted to protect its wearer from the fatal fumes. Also I had designed a covering of asbestos for the picture-frame.

It was a melancholy afternoon in late autumn, an afternoon when Nature seems grieving over the sins of a prodigal youth. Through the laboratory window I could see the rain-swept street glistening dully where the early electric illuminations touched it. Above the heads of passers-by, umbrellas would open their petals like parched buds welcoming the moisture.

And I thought with a grim smile: "What a commotion would be caused in this slow-moving stream of people if I dropped one of the little glass globes at their feet! How they would take to their heels if the Purple Veil were cast among them! Then this multitude of umbrellas, which are passing so sedately, would be caught up and blown away in an instant by a gale of fear."

"Why not do it?" the portrait murmured from its shadowed corner.

But I shook my head.

"You must not forget my personal enemy," I answered. "He comes first, so that others may follow."

"True," said the portrait, believing that I spoke of Paul. "Of course he must be the first and then—"

Suddenly it broke off and cautioned me to silence by a stealthy finger lifted to its lips.

Some one was coming. I heard footsteps in the hall, the murmuring of voices; and then the door swung open, letting in a stream of golden light. I rose to my feet, my heart beating great waves of blood up into my head.

Paul stood on the threshold in the very center of this river of light— Paul, like a vision of the past, who had stolen from me both love and fame! Time had not even touched him in its passage. He looked -not a day older than when I had seen him last.

"So you have come!" I cried.

He shaded his eyes with his hand and peered in.

"Is that you, Gustave?" he asked. "It's so dark in here that it's hard to make things out. I can see your face now, but—"

He broke off suddenly and uttered an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Why, what are you doing?" he cried. "Why are you standing on a chair before the fireplace?"

Instinctively my eyes followed his. A shaft of light from the street rested on the portrait's face; but everything else was in unstable, tottering shadow. One could see indistinctly the leather armchair beneath it; but that was all.

He had evidently taken Anthony Worthington's painted lie to be his friend whom it so brazenly caricatured. It was scarcely complimentary.

A month before, no doubt, I would have been unable to control my temper at this insult, But since then I had learned caution from close association with the portrait.

Now my answer was cooled by cunning before it left my lips. One had to be on guard against the stupid misapprehension of the world.

"This is a case of mistaken identity, Paul," I replied, touching the electric button at my elbow which illumined the room,

He evinced a ludicrous surprise when he realized his mistake. Wheeling about, he stammered:

"Why, I could have sworn that it was you! It seemed to move and smile!"

"Merely the play of light and shadow," I rejoined carelessly. "Surely to a scientific mind there can be nothing incomprehensible in natural phenomena? But what do you think of the portrait?"

"Not at all flattering," he muttered at length. "It portrays you in an ugly mood. But it's you, old man; it's undoubtedly you. I've seen you look just like that."

"When?" I asked curiously.

"Let me see." He paused for an instant and plucked at his lower lip with nervous fingers. "Why, the last time I saw you—"

"You were put out because I had deserted the laboratory for a week to get married. I remember— "

"You didn't lose anything by that desertion," my portrait broke in ironically.

As was usual on such occasions, its words seemed to come from my own mouth. Paul thought that *I* had spoken to upbraid him for his theft of my discovery. His face flushed to a dark-crimson.

"I came here to see you about that, Gustave," he began in a halting voice. "You don't know how I've suffered ever since. I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Evelyn. All my money went in that Wall Street panic and I had to do something."

"Your money went?" I said kindly enough. "How was that?"

He ran his hand feverishly through his flaxen hair.

"It was my father's fault," is continued hastily. "He was always a gambler, you know. Some one gave him the wrong tip; he put everything he had on it and even borrowed Evelyn's little fortune.

"Then came the crash. Everything went— everything! We were all in debt up to our ears."

"That left— Zodium,"' I suggested.

"Yes, Zodium was our only chance. I tried to get hold of you; but your father didn't know where you were. From the first I knew that there was a practical side to Zodium— a side worth millions if we could get the medical profession interested.

"Here was a great scheme lying idle, Evelyn and I at our wits end, and you somewhere in the wilds.

"It was a temptation. I couldn't wait for you— I simply couldn't! You had shown me the formula; I went ahead and made Zodium and put it to a practical, money-getting use."

"You appeared in the eyes of the world as its discoverer," the portrait said coldly. "That was necessary," Paul answered, evidently again laboring under the delusion that *I* had spoken. "I couldn't have sold it otherwise."

"But now," I cried joyfully, "you'll make full reparation; won't you, Paul?"

All my confidence in him had returned. As I spoke, I gazed challengingly at the portrait, which repaid my regard with an almost imperceptible curl of the lip. Evidently it was my friend's enemy as well as mine.

"Most certainly, Gustave," Paul rejoined solemnly. "I've come to offer full reparation. I have prospered in the last year. I am now able to pay you back every cent Zodium has made for me.

"And as for the fame, I will renounce that, too. I have already sent a letter to the *Scientific Monthly*, telling the whole truth about the matter and naming you as the discoverer."

I was overjoyed. All my old-time affection for Paul returned. His offense had not been so heinous as I had imagined.

When one considered the temptation, one had to acknowledge that it would have taken a supernaturally moral man to have resisted. And besides, was he not making full reparation?

Grasping his hand, I told him that there was now nothing to forgive; I assured him of my friendship and spoke so warmly that I soon saw suspicious drops of moisture in his eyes.

And all the time, behind his back, my evil painted passion and mocked and moued, parodying our emotions with ugly grimaces which furrowed its face into wicked lines.

And on the table, within arm's reach, lay the little glass globes, each with a beating, crimson heart— the little glass globes in which lay waiting for any murderous hand, the Purple Veil.

6. In The Laboratory.

I SPENT that evening with Paul. He insisted that I return home with him; and I, nothing loath, accompanied him through the glistening streets.

As we sauntered along, side by side, two united shadows in a world of shadows, it seemed to me that nothing could ever again come between us.

A ten-minute walk brought us to his house. It was a large, pretentious-looking building— a building which reminded me of public libraries one finds in small Southern towns. It exuded an atmosphere of frigid learning not at all.in keeping with its laughter-loving master.

At first I rather dreaded meeting Evelyn again. Perhaps she could still play upon my emotion— perhaps I had not yet outgrown my passion. And if this

were so, would not my reborn affection for Paul be eaten away in an instant by that deadly chemical, jealousy?

But I might have spared myself all fears. That foolish sentiment had been buried somewhere in the past. As I greeted her, it was as though I were meeting her for the first time.

I saw a rather tall, anemic-looking girl with the dissatisfied expression of one who attempts to find happiness in material luxuries. What had become of that languid lily which had grown to such rare beauty in the fertile soil of my imagination?

I dined with Paul and his wife; and he and I talked of the past. We went over again our school and college days, while Evelyn struggled against boredom. At last our conversation flowed into the present.

"What are you working on now, Paul?" I asked.

"Nothing at present," he murmured, flushing slightly. "Evelyn has me nicely crucified on the cross of society. What with bridge, dances, and receptions, I haven't been able to draw a free breath in months."

"But it's a very good thing for you to go about!" Evelyn broke in with a note of irritation in her voice. "You were almost a hermit when I married you."

Paul a hermit! I allowed myself a smile. My friend had never been that. On the contrary, his mixing propensities had interfered greatly with his scientific studies.

"And what are you doing now?" Paul asked eagerly. "Have you made another remarkable discovery?"

Before I answered him, my eyes wandered to-a large oil landscape which hung on the opposite wall. To my horror, a familiar figure suddenly stepped out of a grove of trees in the background of this painting and warned me to silence with a ghostly finger lifted to its lips.

There was something immeasurably terrifying in thus being confronted by my relentless enemy, With a muffled exclamation of dismay, I stared at the canvas.

"Why, what is it?" Evelyn cried in alarm. "What do you see, Mr, Ericson?"

With a superhuman effort of will, I turned my head, glanced at her, and even smiled.

"Nothing," I murmured, "I was trying to discover if there were any human figures in that landscape. A shepherd, perhaps?"

"No," Evelyn answered wonderingly. "There are no figures."

"Quite so," I said lightly. "My eyes have been playing me tricks lately."

"But you haven't told me what you've been doing!" Paul broke in. "Have you come across anything as good as Zodium?"

Stiffening my will, forcing my eyes away from the tiny figure of fear in the painted meadow, I answered truthfully:

"Yes, I believe I have discovered something as good as Zodium."

Paul's cheeks were suddenly suffused with blood, his eyes shone brightly.

"I'd like to be let into the secret, old man," he muttered. "Perhaps I could be of some help, Of course, after what has happened, it seems— "

He broke off lamely, with a muttered "damn" under his breath and a quick look at Evelyn. Evidently she knew nothing of what had formerly transpired.

And now the tiny figure in the painted meadow was waving its arms about as though possessed. "Stop! Stop!" it seemed to be screaming through its wide open mouth.

But my determination to trust Paul was adamant. There was a look in his eyes that wrung my heart. For the once I would prove that I was stronger than my enemy— I would speak.

"My new discovery is called The Purple Veil," I began. "It is the most powerful, the most deadly chemical compound ever known to man. It is invaluable for military purposes. A shell containing the Purple Veil could destroy a city and the population of a city."

"If that is true," Paul cried with flashing eyes, "you can ask your own price for it! Any nation in command of such a secret would soon rule the world. I suppose you invented it with the idea of making it the most powerful weapon of modern warfare?"

Smiling slightly, I bent forward and murmured in his ear:

"I invented it to destroy a portrait which has become loathsome to me."

Evidently Paul considered this remark as an attempted joke. He laughed rather foolishly and immedjately suggested showing me his laboratory which was situated in the garden at. the rear of the house. Evelyn excused herself, saying that she had some domestic matters to attend to and would perhaps join us later.

Strange as it might once have seemed to me, I was glad to be rid of her. To-night I wanted no one but Paul. We had so many things to talk over, he and I, that the presence of an unsympathetic listener seemed an irksome encumbrance.

With a sigh of relief, I followed my friend out of the house and down a winding garden-path which led to a small cement building a score of yards away.

"Why didn't you have your laboratory in the house?" I asked idly.

"Because of Evelyn," he called back over his shoulder. "She didn't like the idea of having all those combustibles so near her."

"What a blessed escape I have had!" was my thought as I followed him up.a flight of stone steps and waited while he swung back the heavy door of his laboratory.

The out-house consisted of a single large room lighted by electricity. The walls and ceiling were of stone; and in the center was a long metal table, on which were grouped several bottles of chemicals and the various appliances to be found in most laboratories. There was a musty odor about the place which called out for thorough airing and cleansing.

"You haven't been very busy here?" I suggested, pointing out several glass jars which were gray with dust.

"No," he answered with an almost inaudible sigh. 'I have let my ambition go to the dogs. I've always needed you, Gustave, to keep me going."

He seated himself on the table.

"This is a wonderful work-shop," he continued, glancing about him, "and yet it's of no use to me. No ideas stirring, Gustave."

"Why not help me with the Purple Veil?" I asked.

Paul leaped down and took a stride toward me with outstretched hands.

"You mean that, Gustave?" he cried. "After all that's happened, you can still trust me? That's awfully decent of you, old man! I'd work my fingers to the bone; I'd—"

I have always had a dread of sentimental outbursts. Now I broke in on him abruptly.

"This is an excellent place to experiment with such a powerful chemical. Nothing can be hurt in this vault."

"When can we begin?" he cried excitedly. "I'd like to start to-night."

"Would you?" I asked. "Well, why not? I've got several vials of the Purple Veil in my laboratory now. It's barely a ten-minute walk. I'll step around and bring them over, if you say the word."

"That would be corking! I'm in just the mood for a little work. Shall I go with you?"

"No, don't do that," I answered. "You stay here and remove every inflammable object that may be about. I tell you the Purple Veil is the nearest thing to hell's fire ever uncorked.'

"Very well," he said with a laugh. "Tl see that everything's shipshape before you get back."

"Will I have to go out through the house?" I asked.

"No, there's a gate in the garden which opens on the street. Come this way."

Paul conducted me to a large iron gate set in the garden wall. At first he had some difficulty in unlocking it; but at last, with a shrill, complaining sound,

the key turned in the lock and the gate swung slowly outward. I followed my friend through this aperture and into a side street.

"I'll leave the gate on the latch," Paul said as we parted. "You can come right in any time. You'll find me in the laboratory when you get back."

"Very well," I answered. "I won't be long."

Turning, I left him standing bareheaded under an arc light and hurried up the street. At the corner, I turned and looked back.

He was still standing where I had left him. To this day I can see him thus— one hand resting on the rusted bars of the gate; the other shading his eyes from the bright electric rays which streamed down on his flaxen hair. And to this day there is a great love in my heart for that slim, upright figure— a great love and a great sorrow.

7. Conquered!

NOW, as I near the end of my tale, once more horror holds my beating heart in the hollow of her hand. It is as if I were once again facing the terrors of the past. I am cold, bitterly cold— so cold that the pencil shakes between my tremblin fingers. And yet I must force myself to finish this chronicle. Truth has lain for months buried deep. Before she crumbles to dust, I must unearth her! Yes, although it is a ghastly business, I must unearth her! After I had left Paul, I hurried home. Opening the door with my latch-key, I mounted the stairs to my own room. Here I found everything as I had left it— the asbestos suit over the back of a chair, the gas-mask hanging from a peg on the wall. It was but the work of a moment to don this gray uniform; and then, resembling some tattered derelict who has slept all night on a dust-heap, I began to descend the stairs to the laboratory. At every step I made a swishing sound as though I were clothed in paper. I had not as yet put on the gas-mask. I carried it in my hand as if it were a lantern. Now and then it swung against my thigh, causing me to start involuntarily. The laboratory was plunged in blackness. Turning on the lights, I took a quick survey of the premises. Tere were the tiny globes in which glistened the Purple Veil; there was the picture-frame cover of asbestos in which I intended placing the portrait at the last moment.

The portrait! I wheeled about and met its satanic regard. During the last few days it had grown ever more lifelike. Now one could fairly see the blood coursing behind the swarthy skin, the beastlike moisture on the crimson lips, the vibrating tension of the curling fingers.

There it crouched— malevolent as a spider — studying me with its unbearable eyes. Would I be able to destroy it? Would I ever be able to destroy it?

"Well," I said at last, "why do you stare at me thus?"

Then its thin, red lips curled in a sneer.

"You interest me," it murmured. "You are such a fool— such-a weak fool!"

"I do not understand you," I answered coldly.

"You do not understand me?" it cried vehemently. 'I thought we had become friends, you and I! Well, I will make my meaning clear. Is it wise to trust one who is untrustworthy— one who has proved himself untrustworthy?

"Did you not see me warning you from that picture in Paul's house? Surely you saw me; and yet you still persevered. Why have you given yourself into the hands of your enemy?"

Veiling the hatred in my eyes, I laughed aloud. « Surely I was more than a match for it! It had called itself a crimson thought— well, even a crimson thought can be the toy of man. Now I would play a little game with it— a game of life or death.

"I do not trust Paul," I answered. "Have I not told you that I intend to kill him?"

"Then why did you speak to him of the Purple Veil?"

"Crude, stupid passion," I cried, "you are like some frenzied wild beast! You have no cunning, no subtlety. I spoke to Paul of the Purple Veil because I intend to choke him with it. He himself has opened the way. He has offered to help me in an experiment tonight— he has given me the use of his laboratory."

"So that he may rob you again," the portrait broke in.

"Perhaps. But in reality I shall rob him. I shall take his most precious possession— his life! There will be an unavoidable accident, you understand? His widow will have the consolation of knowing that her husband died in the service of science."

The portrait began to chuckle. The rasping sound of its merriment, the gray, film which covered its eyes, and lastly the greedy way it licked its lips, made my flesh crawl. And yet it was necessary for me to go on building a dwelling of lies in) which it might feel secure.

"That is the reason I came back and put on my asbestos suit," I continued, "Paul is now awaiting me in the laboratory. I shall take him one of these little glass globes and then we will experiment."

"How I wish I could be there!" the portrait murmured. "Are there any paintings in his laboratory? If so, I might manage it. I have access to all paintings."

"I'm sorry to say that there are not," I said regretfully. ' However, I think it could be managed. PI take you under my arm as a gift to him— you understand?

"But first you must put on this picture frame cover of asbestos. It will protect you from the Purple Veil."

Thė portrait gave me a look of loathsome affection, |

"You are growing very fond of me," if whispered. "We are becoming as brothers. Let us hurry. I am anxious to see Paul enshrouded in the Purple Veil."

Still masking the hate in my eyes, I slipped the asbestos cover over its frame;) next I went to the table and picked up one of the tiny glass globes. Then I returned to the portrait, which still regarded me with its loose-lipped smile.

"Does it suspect anything?" I wondered. "If I can only put on my gas-mask before it suspects anything!"

At that instant, the portrait pointed out my path. It said anxiously:

"How can you carry me when you have that mask in your hand?"

"That is true!" I cried with a laugh. "I'll have to wear the mask then."

With fingers that shook, I slipped the contrivance over my head.

"You will appear ridiculous on the street," the portrait expostulated. "But take me down and let us hurry."

Suddenly its voice changed and it eyed me intently.

"What are you waiting for?" it cried. "Ah, traitor— traitor! You dare not!"

"I dare everything!" I cried exultantly and cast the tiny glass globe straight at its terror-stricken eyes.

What happened then was photographed on the film of my brain for all time. The blinding flash as the glass globe exploded, the thin stream of purplish vapor which coiled over the canvas like twisting snakes, the iridescent sparks of flame which whirled hither and thither in a mad dance— all these I had expected to see.

But the passing of the portrait! Ah, that was different— that was enough to turn a strong man's brain to quivering jelly!

At first the portrait remained motionless, its mouth agape in ludicrous astonishment. But when a stream of the Purple Veil coiled about its knees, it began to struggle.

With distended eyeballs and lolling tongue, with foaming lips and bursting lungs, it writhed back and forth in its efforts to escape. And as it fought for life, silently, vindictively, its venomous eyes were still fixed upon my face.

But soon there came a change. The Purple Veil squirmed upward till it reached the portrait's gaping mouth. For an instant I saw my enemy's breast rise and fall in a last convulsive movement.

At that superhuman effort, its lungs must have broken like wind-distened bags. At the next moment, the portrait toppled for'ward on its face.

Yet all was not over. It still held tenaciously to life. Like a wounded spider it lay there, quivering slightly.

And now the tiny sparks of flame gathered on the fallen body like fireflies settling on a withered branch. Burning now green, now white, now green again, they fell on the portrait in a shower. In vain it writhed beneath their fiery weight.

Soon they had buried it; and the whole canvas was aflame. Then long fingers of fire reached upward till they touched the asbestos-covered frame, retiring sullenly and attempting an outlet on another side.

And I stood looking aghast at this living painting of hell. Long after my enemy had fallen, I saw the heap of red-hot ashes, under which it lay, stir slightly.

At that I turned on my heel, sick and dizzy, and dared not look again till the canyas was but blackened ashes. Then, at last, I realized that I was free.

Trembling with excitement, I then opened the window and let the cool night air cleanse the poisonous atmosphere. Next I removed the gas-mask, and, sinking into the nearest chair, closed my eyes.

A great fatigue had overmastered me. As on a former occasion, I felt myself drifting out on the drowsy sea of dreams. Even Paul had become a secondary consideration.

Why should I not sleep? Had I not earned the right to sleep? I had at last conquered; and to the conqueror what more blessed wreath than sleep?

8. Charged With Murder.

I AWOKE with a start to a feeling of dread. Sitting up, I rubbed my eyes and looked about me. A pallid, ghostly light stole in through the open window; and the air was damp with the promise of dawn.

While I had slept a breeze had sprung up. Now the curtains in the alcove, like fantoms of bygone courtiers, seemed curtsying and bowing to one another.

Long habit turned my eyes to the portrait. With a feeling of unbounded joy, I saw that this time I had really succeeded. The entire surface of the canvas was charred a deep-black.

What delight took possession of me then! — a delight which carried me to childish lengths. I rose and capered about the room, I shook my fist at it, I even laughed aloud.

Suddenly I was brought to myself by the far-away, brazen voice of the door-bell. Who could be ringing at this hour, I won dered. And as I turned this question over in my mind, I once again glanced at the charred canvas.

My God! Will I ever be able to forget what I saw then?

My eyes had fallen on the left-hand corner of the portrait— the side nearest the window. With an inarticulate cry of horror, I saw something stirring there.

It was yellow and small, and not unlike an oddly shaped autumn-leaf; and it twitched spasmodically.

"It must be a leaf, I told myself firmly— "a leaf which has blown in through the open window and caught there."

Once more I looked, and hope deserted me. It was not a leaf— ah, no! It wasa human hand— a human hand which felt its way with writhing fingers— a human hand which I knew only too well!

Ah, there was the arm, long and slender; and there was the body itself sidling into the canvas! Like a thief in the night, it stole forward with averted face.

Crouching, it crawled along till it reached its old spot; and then— ah, then it turned and I saw its eyes!

For an instant I stood there, motionless, dumb, staring into my enemy's face; and then, with a cry of terror, I fled to the door and threw it open.~ As I hesitated on the threshold, I heard the sound of footsteps in the hall.

"There he is now, sir," I heard Tom's voice say; and the next moment I was confronted. by two strangers.

Any human manifestation was welcome indeed on such a night. Instantly I was calm and even smiling.

"You wish to see me, gentlemen?" I asked, wiping the cold perspiration from my forehead. "Won't you step into my laboratory?"

The presence of these strangers had given me confidence. Perhaps, after all, I had dreamed of the reappearance of my enemy. At any rate, it would be as well to get normal opinion on such a phenomenon.

"Now, gentlemen, will you kindly fix your attention on that canvas," I said. "Is there a figure in it, or is there not? My common sense tells me that there is not."

"Certainly, there's a figure there," said one of my guests bruskly. "It's a full-length portrait of you; and a very good likeness, I'd call it."

I turned to the other one in despair. "Do you also see it?" I cried.

But he cut me short with even more bruskness than his companion.

"We've got a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Ericson," he said.

"My arrest! You are police officers, then? Under what charge?"

But before he answered me, I knew well enough what had happened while I had slept. I saw it all in a blinding flash.

Not I, but my portrait, had kept the rendevous with Paul. As on a previous occasion, in my attempt to destroy my enemy I had only succeeded in loosing it on the world.

"You are charged with the murder of Paul Grey," one of the police officers said heavily.

It was as I had suspected then— Paul was dead! Poor old Paul whom I had loved like a brother! And now I was charged with his death, I who would not have harmed a hair of his head!

"You're going a little bit too far in this!" I cried angrily. "You have no reason to accuse me. Are there not others about as capable of committing crimes as I— others who hated Paul while I loved him?

"Look at that face on the canvas! What does it tell you?"

I glanced full at the portrait as I spoke; and, to my joy, it was bowing and smiling— bowing and smiling with its hand on its heart.

"Look, look!" I cried in an agonized voice. "Can't you see it silently affirming my words? Where are you taking me? Stop! I demand justice! The real murderer hangs on the wall!"

But my captors were deaf to my words, They had handcuffed me and were leading me toward the door. On the threshold I cast a last glance over my shoulder.

My portrait was still bowing and smiling like a mechanical doll. And I knew then that it had conquered for all time.

And I? Why, I must suffer for it in silence and solitude. And because of its victory— like a famous actor who has played his rôle-to the applause of the house— it would continue bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling.

9. Find The Murderer!

I HAVE but little more to add. You, who have followed my trial in the papers, will remember Evelyn's testimony— how, on the night of the murder, she visited her husband's laboratory at a late hour to find his charred remains on the stone floor and a crazed being, whom she falsely declared to be Gustave Ericson, crouched in one corner, mumbling to itself; how, when it saw her, this creature leaped to its feet and fled screaming; how she made her way back to the house and called in the police.

And also you will remember that, in spite of my brilliant speech accusing the portrait of the crime, the jury was swayed by the opinions of certain learned asses and brought in a verdict of homicidal mania; and that shortly after my trial, I was removed. to this asylum for the criminal insane.

But have you ever thought of what a terrible punishment it is to be incarcerated among mental derelicts— to be exposed night after night to the caresses of our mother of madness, the moon? When she commands us to play it is difficult to resist.

And have you ever longed, in your safety and sanity, to throw back your head and howl like wolves? We do strange, unaccountable things here— acts which we blush for when the sun again rules the world.

No, this is not a healthy spot. While I still possess all my mental powers: undimmed, I have certain presentiments which make me anxious for the future.

It is on account of these presentiments that I have written this truthful chronicle, hoping that it will fall into the hands of some worthy person who will gather sufficient evidence to secure my release.

And yet, how few there are who can see the truth even when it is pointed out to them! For instance, we hear on all sides such phrases as these: "That painting has life," "this book will live." Yet, who of us actually believes that these statements are true?

When I tried to prove that Anthony Worthington's portrait of me had life, I was laughed at and labeled insane. And even my fellow sufferers mock me when I tell them that I have actually discovered that books may live.

We have a library in the asylum with some splendid books. They whisper all night long. They tell their separate stories over and over again, each vying with the other, each attempting to drown out the other with its low, sibilant whisper.

I have sat in this library listening to them until sometimes my brain began to swim— there are so many of them, each is so convinced of its own immortality!

Please pardon this digression, which perhaps is not such a great digression after all. It may at least be of interest to the kind of man who will be my savior and friend— a man broad enough to acknowledge the still, small area of plowed soil in this wilderness we call the "world"— a man with humanity enough to acknowledge that there may be phenomena of which he is ignorant.

And when my unknown friend has read this chronicle and believed, let him go out and hunt my portrait down. I understand that my relatives have sold all my effects, therefore, the search may be difficult.

But to the strong in heart all things are possible. Somewhere in the city— perhaps in some art-dealer's— the real murderer of Paul Grey is lurking. Hunt down the assassin and deliver it to justice!

Now, give heed, my unknown friend. It is the portrait of a strikingly handsome young man— swarthy, with cruel, crimson lips and a mole on its right cheek. But if this description is not sufficient, it has other telltale characteristics.

The portrait to which I refer— that living portrait of an evil passion— like a great actor responding to an encore, is continually bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling.

And because of these calm, graceful salutations, it should not be difficult to recognize it among thousands.

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11: Professor Todd's Used Car

L. H. Robbins

Leonard Harman Robbins, 1877-1947

Everybody's Magazine July 1920

No relation to Tod Robbins

HE WAS a meek little man with sagging frame, dim lamps and feeble ignition. Anxiously he pressed the salesman to tell him which of us used cars in the wareroom was the slowest and safest.

The salesman laid his hand upon me and declared soberly: "You can't possibly go wrong on this one, Mr. Todd." To a red-haired boy he called, "Willie, drive Mr. Todd out for a lesson."

We ran to the park and stopped beside a lawn. "Take the wheel," said Willie.

Mr. Todd demurred. "Let me watch you awhile," he pleaded. "You see, I'm new at this sort of thing. In mechanical matters I am helpless. I might run somebody down or crash into a tree. I— I don't feel quite up to it to-day, so just let me ride around with you and get used to the— the motion, as it were."

"All you need is nerve," Willie replied. "The quickest way for you to get nerve is to grab hold here and, as it were, drive."

"Driving, they say, *does* give a man self-confidence," our passenger observed tremulously. "Quite recently I saw an illustration of it. I saw an automobilist slap his wife's face while traveling thirty miles an hour."

"They will get careless," said Willie.

Mr. Todd clasped the wheel with quivering hands and braced himself for the ordeal.

"Set her in low till her speed's up," Willie directed. "Then wiggle her into high."

It was too mechanical for Mr. Todd. Willie translated with scornful particularity. Under our pupil's diffident manipulation we began to romp through the park at the rate of one mile an hour.

Willie fretted. "Shoot her some gas," said he. "Give it to her. Don't be a-scared." He pulled down the throttle-lever himself.

My sudden roaring was mingled with frightened outcries from Todd. "Stop! Wait a minute! Whoa! Help!"

Fortunately for my radiator, the lamp-post into which he steered me was poorly rooted. He looked at the wreckage of the glass globe on the grass, and declared he had taken as much of the theory of motoring as he could absorb in one session.

"This is the only lesson I can give you free," said Willie. "You'd better keep on while the learning's cheap."

To free education and to compulsory education Mr. Todd pronounced himself opposed. Cramming was harmful to the student; the elective method was the only humane one. He put off the evil hour by engaging Willie as a private tutor for the remaining afternoons of the month.

I have met many rabbits but only one Todd. He would visit me in the barn and look at me in awe by the half-hour. Yet I liked him; I felt drawn toward him in sympathy, for he and I were fellow victims of the hauteur of Mrs. Todd.

In my travels I have never encountered a glacier. When I do run across one I shall be reminded, I am certain, of Mr. Todd's lady.

"So you are still alive?" were her cordial words as we rolled into the yard on the first afternoon.

"Yes, my dear." His tone was almost apologetic.

"Did he drive it?" she asked Willie.

"I'll say so, ma'am."

She looked me over coldly. When she finished, I had shrunk to the dimensions of a wheelbarrow. When Todd sized me up in the warehouse only an hour before, I had felt as imposing as a furniture van.

"Put it in the barn," said Mrs. Todd, "before a bird carries it off."

I began to suspect that a certain little stranger was not unanimously welcome in that household. For a moment I was reassured, but only for a moment.

"John Quincy Burton says," she observed, "that a little old used car like this is sometimes a very good thing to own."

"That is encouraging," said Todd, brightening. In his relief he explained to Willie that John Quincy Burton drove the largest car in the neighbourhood and was therefore to be regarded as an authority.

"Yes," Mrs. Todd concluded, "he says he thinks of buying one himself to carry in his tool-box."

Willie was an excellent teacher, though a severe disciplinarian.

But by way of amends for the rigours of the training, Willie would take Mr. Todd after the practice hour for a spin around the park. At those times I came to learn that the collision I had had with a trolley-car before Todd bought me had not left me with any constitutional defect. I still had power under my hood, and speed in my wheels. But what good were power and speed to me now? I doubted that Todd would ever push me beyond a crawl.

Yet I had hope, for when his relaxation from the tension of a lesson had loosened his tongue he would chatter to Willie about self-confidence.

"Some day you say, I shall be able to drive without thinking?"

"Sure! You won't have to use your bean any more'n when you walk."

At nights, when no one knew, Mr. Todd would steal into the barn and, after performing the motions of winding me up, would sit at the wheel and make believe to drive.

"I advance the spark," he would mutter, "I release the brake, I set the gear, and ever so gently I let in the clutch. Ha! We move, we are off! As we gather speed I pull the gear-lever back, then over, then forward. Now, was that right? At any rate we are going north, let us say, in Witherspoon Street. I observe a limousine approaching from the east in a course perpendicular to mine. It has the right of way, Willie says, so I slip the clutch out, at the same time checking the flow of gasoline…."

Thus in imagination he would drive; get out, crank, get in again, and roll away in fancy, earnestly practising by the hour in the dark and silent barn.

"I'm getting it," he would declare. "I really believe I'm getting it!"

And he got it. In his driving examination he stalled only once, stopping dead across a trolley track in deference to a push-cart. But he was out and in and off again in ten seconds, upbraiding me like an old-timer.

Said the inspector, stepping out at last and surely offering a prayer of thanks to his patron saint: "You're pretty reckless yet on corners, my friend." But he scribbled his O.K.

The written examination in the City Hall Mr. Todd passed with high honours. Willie, who was with us on the fateful morning, exclaimed in admiration: "One hundred! Well, Mr. Todd, you're alive, after all—from the neck up, at least."

In gratitude for the compliment, the glowing graduate pressed a bonus of two dollars into the panegyrist's palm. "Willie," he exulted, "did you hear the inspector call me reckless?"

I can scarcely think of the Todd of the succeeding weeks as the same Todd who bought me. He changed even in looks. He would always be a second, of course, but his frame had rigidity now, his lamps sparkled, he gripped the wheel with purposeful hands and trampled the pedals in the way an engine likes. In his new assurance he reminded me strongly of a man who drove me for a too brief while in my younger days— a rare fellow, now doing time, I believe, in the penitentiary.

No longer Todd and I needed the traffic cop's "Get on out of there, you corn-sheller!" to push us past the busy intersection of Broad and Main streets. We conquered our tendency to scamper panic-stricken for the sidewalk at the raucous bark of a jitney bus. In the winding roads of the park we learned to turn corners on two wheels and rest the other pair for the reverse curve.

One remembered day we went for a run in the country. On a ten-mile piece of new macadam he gave me all the gas I craved. It was the final test, the consummation, and little old Mr. Todd was all there. I felt so good I could have blown my radiator cap off to him.

For he was a master I could trust— and all my brother used cars, whether manufactured or merely born, will understand what comfort that knowledge gives a fellow. I vowed I would do anything for that man! On that very trip, indeed, I carried him the last homeward mile on nothing in my tank but a faint odour.

MRS. TODD was one of those gentle souls who get their happiness in being unhappy in the presence of their so-called loved ones. She was perpetually displeased with Todd.

His Christian name was James, but she did not speak Christian to him. When she hailed him from the house she called him "Jay-eems"—the "eems" an octave higher than the "Jay."

He would drop the grease-can or the monkey-wrench to rush to her side.

"Look at your sleeves!" she would say. "Your best shirt!" Words failing her, she would sigh and go into a silence that was worse than words. He was a great burden to her.

Humbly he entreated her one day for an obsolete tooth-brush.
"I want to clean spark-plugs with it," he explained.

"Next," she replied, icily, "you'll be taking your little pet to the dentist, I suppose."

From such encounters Jay-eems would creep back to the barn and seek consolation in tinkering around me.

He liked to take the lid off my transmission-box and gaze at my wondrous works. He was always tightening my axle-burrs, or dosing me with kerosene through my hot-air pipe, or toying with my timer. While he was never so smart as Willie about such things, he was intelligent and quick to learn; and this was not surprising to me after I discovered the nature of his occupation in life.

I had taken him to be a retired silk-worm fancier, a chronic juryman, or something of the sort. But shiver my windshield if he wasn't a professor in a college!

On the morning when first he dared to drive me to his work, the college must have got wind of our coming, for the students turned out in a body to cheer him as he steered in at the campus gate, and the faculty gathered on the steps to shake his hand.

A bald-headed preceptor asked him if he meant to cyanide me and mount me on a pin for preservation in the college museum. The chancellor inquired if

Todd had identified me. Todd said he had. He said I was a perfect specimen of *Automobilum cursus gandium*, the most beautiful species of the *Golikellece* family. It was the nearest he ever came to profanity in my hearing. I suppose he got it from associating with Willie.

They demanded a speech, and he made one— about me. He said that my name was *Hilaritas*, signifying joy. He said, among other flattering things, that I was no common mundane contraption, though such I might seem to the untutored eye. In their studies of the Greek drama they had read of gods from the machine. I was a machine from the gods. In my cylinders I consumed nectar vapour, in my goo-cups ambrosia, in my radiator flowed the crystal waters of the Fount of Bandusia.

Three other items of his eulogium I remember: The breath of Pan inflated my tires, I could climb Olympus in high, and he, James Todd, a mere professor in a college, while sitting at my wheel, would not bare his head to Zeus himself, no, nor even to the chairman of the college board of trustees.

His nonsense appeared to be as popular in that part of town as it was unpopular in another. They gave the varsity yell with his name at the end.

The day came when Mrs. Todd risked her life in our sportive company. She made it clear to us that she went protesting. She began her pleasantries by complaining that my doors were trivial. Straightening her hat, she remarked that the John Quincy Burtons' car top never took a woman's scalp off.

"But theirs is only a one-man top," Todd hinted vaguely.

"Whatever you mean by that is too deep for me," she said, adding bitterly, "Yours is a one-boy top, I presume."

He waived the point and asked where she preferred to make her début as an automobilist.

"Back roads, by all means," she answered.

As we gained the street a pea-green Mammoth purred past, the passengers putting out their heads to look at us.

"Goodness!" she sighed. "There go the John Quincy Burtons now."

"We can soon join them," said Todd confidently.

She expostulated. "Do you think I have no pride?" Yet we went in pursuit of the John Quincy Burton dust-cloud as it moved toward the park.

"Since you have no regard for my feelings," said she, "you may let me out."

"Oh, no, Amanda, my dear. Why, I'm going to give you a spin to Mountaindale!"

"I do not care to be dragged there," she declared. "That is where the John Quincy Burtons ride."

"Aren't they nice people? It seems to me I've heard you sing hosannas to their name these last twenty years."

They were nice people indeed. That was just it, she said. Did he suspect her of yearning to throw herself in the way of nice people on the day of her abasement? If he chose to ignore her sentiments in the matter, he might at least consider his own interests. Had he forgotten that John Quincy Burton was chairman of the board of trustees of the college? Would the head of the department of classical languages acquire merit in Mr. Burton's eyes through dashing about under Mr. Burton's nose in a pitiable little last-century used car that squeaked?

Todd gripped the wheel tighter and gave me gas.

"You missed that storm sewer by an inch!" she exclaimed.

"My aim is somewhat wild yet," he admitted. "Perhaps I'll get the next one."

"Jay-eems!"

"My dear, we have a horn, remember."

"You did not see that baby carriage until we were right upon it! Don't tell me you did, sir, for I know better."

"I saw it," said Todd, "and I was sure it wouldn't run over us. As you see, it didn't. Trust a baby carriage my love."

His humour, she informed him, was on a par with his driving. Also it was in poor taste at such a moment.

In time of danger, he replied, the brave man jests.

We were now in the park. We clipped a spray of leaves off a syringia bush. On a curve we slid in loose gravel to the wrong side.

"James Todd!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"Let me out! I decline to be butchered to make a holiday for a motormaniac."

"Don't talk to the motormaniac," said Todd.

She clutched a top support and gasped for breath, appalled at his audacity, or my speed, or both. In the straight reaches I could see the Burton Mammoth a quarter of a mile ahead. When it swung into the broad avenue that leads to the mountain, we were holding our own.

"You are following them— deliberately," said Mrs. Todd.

"Yet not so deliberately, at that. Do you feel us pick up my dear, when I give her gas? Aha!" he laughed. "I agree with you, however, that the order of precedence is unsatisfactory. Why should we follow the Burtons, indeed?"

We went after them; we gave them the horn and overtook and passed them on a stiff grade, amid cheers from both cars. But all of our cheering was done by Todd.

"Now they are following us," said he. "Do you feel better, my dear?"

"Better!" she lamented. "How can I ever look them in the face again?"

"Turn around," he suggested, "and direct your gaze through the little window in the back curtain."

She bade him stop at the next corner. She would walk home. She was humiliated. Never had she felt so ashamed.

"Isn't that an odd way to feel when we have beaten the shoes off them?"

"But they will think we tried to."

"So we did," he chuckled; "and we walked right past them, in high, while Burton was fussing with his gear shift. Give our little engine a fair go at a hill, my dear—"

"I am not in the least interested in engines, sir. I am only mortified beyond words."

She had words a-plenty, however.

"Isn't it bad enough for you to drive your little rattletrap to college and get into the paper about it? No; you have to show it off in a fashionable avenue, and run races with the best people in Ashland, and scream at them like a freshman, and make an exhibition of me!"

His attention was absorbed in hopping out from under a truck coming in from a side street. A foolish driver would have slowed and crashed. I was proud of Todd. But his lady was not.

"You have no right to go like this. You don't know enough. You will break something."

He had already broken the speed law. Unknown to him, a motor-cycle cop was tagging close behind us on our blind side.

"If you think this is going, my dear," said Todd reassuringly, "wait till we strike the turnpike. Then I'll show you what little Hilaritas can really do."

"Stop at the car barns," she commanded.

We crossed the car-barn tracks at a gallop. The cop rode abreast of us now. "Cut it out, Bill," he warned.

"You see?" she crowed. "You will wind up in jail and give the papers another scandal. Why didn't you stop at the car barns?"

"Because we are going to Mountaindale," he explained cheerily; "where the nice people drive. Perhaps we shall see the John Quincy Burtons again—as we come back."

"If we ever do come back!"

"Or how would you like to have supper with them up there?"

She had gone into one of her silences.

WE SETTLED DOWN for the long pull over First Mountain. Todd slowed my spark and gave me my head. Then he addressed the partner of his joy-ride in a

new voice: "Amanda, my dear, you and I need to have a frank little understanding."

She agreed.

"For some years past," he began, "I have borne without complaint, even without resentment, a certain attitude that you have seen fit to adopt toward me. I have borne it patiently because I felt that to an extent I deserved it."

My floor boards creaked as she gathered her forces for the counter attack. He went on recklessly:

"In the beginning of our life together, Amanda, you were ambitious. You longed for wealth and position and that sort of thing, in which respect you were like the rest of men and women. Like most people, my dear, you have been disappointed; but unlike most of them you persist in quarrelling with the awards of fortune, just as to-day you are quarrelling with this plebeian car of ours. As you speak of Hilaritas, so you speak of me. At breakfast this morning, for example, you reminded me, for perhaps the tenth time since Sunday, that you are chained to a failure. Those were your words, my dear—chained to a failure."

"Do you call yourself a dazzling success?" she asked.

"Not dazzling, perhaps," he replied, "and yet— yes— yes, I believe I do."

"What I told you at breakfast was that Freddy Burton makes one hundred dollars a week, and he is only twenty-four— not half as old as you."

"Freddy Burton is engaged in the important occupation of selling pickles," Todd answered, "and I am only an educator of youth. Long ago I reached my maximum— three thousand dollars. From one point of view I don't blame you for looking upon me as a futility. I presume I am. Nor will I chide you for not taking the luck of life in a sportsmanlike spirit. But I do insist—"

"At last!" she broke in. "At last I understand some pencil notes that I found yesterday when I cleaned out your desk. A minute ago I thought you were out of your head. Now I see that this— this frightfulness of yours is premeditated. Premeditated, James Todd! You prepared this speech in advance!"

Between you and me, she was right. I had heard him practise it in the barn.

He took her arraignment calmly, "Hereafter," said he, "please refrain from cleaning out my desk."

I heard her catch her breath. "You have never talked to me like this before; never!" she said. "You have never dared. And that is precisely the trouble with you, James Todd. You won't talk back; you won't speak up for your rights. It is the cross of my life."

From the sound, I think she wept.

"You are the same in the outside world as you are at home. You let the college trustees pay you what they please. You slave and slave and wear

yourself out for three thousand a year when we might have twenty if you went into something else. And when your building-loan stock matures and you do get a little money, you spend it for this— this underbred little sewing-machine, and lure me out in it, and lecture me, as if I— as if I were to blame. I don't know what has come over you."

I knew what had come over him. I knew the secret of the new spirit animating the frail personality of Professor Todd. And Willie knew. I recalled that boy's prophetic words: "The quickest way to get nerve is to grab hold here and drive." I worried, nevertheless. I wondered if my little man could finish what he had started.

He could. As we rolled down the mountain into the ten-mile turnpike where he and I had rediscovered our youth, he concluded his discourse without missing an explosion. I knew his peroration by heart.

"To end this painful matter, my dear, I shall ask you in future to accord me at least the civility, if not the respect, to which a hard-working man and a faithful husband is entitled. I speak in all kindliness when I say that I have decided to endure no more hazing. I hope you understand that I have made this decision for your sake as well as for mine, for the psychological effect of hazing is quite as harmful to the hazer as to the hazed. Please govern yourself accordingly."

He opened the throttle wide, and we touched thirty-five miles. I felt a wild wabble in my steering-gear. I heard Todd's sharp command—"Kindly keep your hands off the wheel while I am driving."

At the Mountain Dale Club Todd descended.

"Will you come in and have a lemonade, my dear?" he asked. There was a heartbroken little squeak in his voice.

"Thank you," she replied frigidly. "I have had all the acid I can assimilate in one pleasant day."

"May I remind you," said he, stiffening with the gentle insistence of a steel spring, "that I am not to be addressed in sarcastic tones any longer?"

The Mammoth slid up beside us. The stout John Quincy Burton at the wheel shouted jovially: "I tell you what, Todd, when our soberest university professors get the speed bug, I tremble for civilization!"

My owner grinned with pleasure.

"Mrs. Todd," said Burton, "after that trimming from your road-burning husband, I'll stand treat. Won't you join us?"

"Yes, Mrs. Todd, do be persuaded," Mrs. Burton chimed in. "After twenty miles with your Barney Oldfield you need nourishment, I'm sure. You and I can talk about his recklessness while he and Mr. Burton have their little conference."

If Todd had an appointment for a conference there at that hour with Burton, I am positive it was news to Mrs. Todd and me. I could feel her weight growing heavier on my cushion springs.

"Thank you for the invitation," she replied, "but I am so badly shaken up, I prefer to sit out here."

To which her husband added, laughingly: "She wouldn't risk having her new car stolen for anything."

It was twilight before we started for home, the Burtons pulling out ahead of us. At the beginning of the climb over the mountain I saw the Mammoth stop. We drew alongside.

"Out of gas, confound it," growled Burton, "and five miles from a service station!"

"I'd lend you some, only I haven't much myself," said Todd.
"Got a rope?"

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, we can. We can pull you and never know it. Hitch on behind. We like to travel in stylish company, Mrs. Todd and I."

So we towed them over the mountain and left them at a red pump. John Quincy Burton's gratitude was immense.

"The pleasure is all ours," Todd assured him. "But, say, old man!"

"Well?"

"You ought to buy a little old used car like this some time to carry in your tool-box."

They were still laughing when we drove away.

Not a word did Mrs. Todd utter on the homeward journey; but in the privacy of our humble barn—

"Oh!" she cried. "I could *die*! Why did you have to say that to
Mr. Burton?"

"Amanda!"

She subsided, but she had not surrendered.

"You didn't tell me you had an engagement with him. What—"

Todd laughed. "I was chosen this week, my dear, as a grievance committee of one, representing the teaching staff at the college, to put a few cold facts into John Quincy Burton's ear."

"You?"

"Precisely, my dear. I was the only man in the faculty who seemed to have the— the self-confidence necessary. And I made Burton see the point. I have his promise that the college trustees will campaign the state this summer for a half-million-dollar emergency fund, a good slice of which will go toward salary increases."

"Well! I must say—"

She did not say it. Silently she left us.

He lingered a while in the barn. He opened my hood, for I was quite warm from the towing job. He examined a new cut in one of my tires and loosened my hand-brake a notch. He couldn't seem to find enough to do for me.

From the house came a hail. I am not sure that he did not hold his breath as he listened.

"James, dear!" again.

"Hello!" he answered.

"James, dear, won't you bring your automobile pliers, please, and see if you can open this jar of marmalade?"

My little man went in whistling.

———————

12: Each in His Generation

Maxwell Struthers Burt

1882-1954

Scribner's Magazine, July 1920

American novelist, poet and short story writer

EVERY AFTERNOON at four o'clock, except when the weather was very bad— autumn, winter, and spring— old Mr. Henry McCain drove up to the small, discreet, polished front door, in the small, discreet, fashionable street in which lived fairly old Mrs. Thomas Denby; got out, went up the white marble steps, rang the bell, and was admitted into the narrow but charming hall— dim turquoise-blue velvet panelled into the walls, an etching or two: Whistler, Brangwyn— by a trim parlour-maid. Ten generations, at least, of trim parlour-maids had opened the door for Mr. McCain. They had seen the sparkling victoria change, not too quickly, to a plum-coloured limousine; they had seen Mr. McCain become perhaps a trifle thinner, the colour in his cheeks become a trifle more confined and fixed, his white hair grow somewhat sparser, but beyond that they had seen very little indeed, although, when they had left Mr. McCain in the drawing-room with the announcement that Mrs. Denby would be down immediately, and were once again seeking the back of the house, no doubt their eyebrows, blonde, brunette, or red, apexed to a questioning angle.

In the manner of youth the parlour-maids had come, worked, fallen in love and departed, but Mr. McCain, in the manner of increasing age, had if anything grown more faithful and exact to the moment. If he were late the fraction of five minutes, one suspected that he regretted it, that it came near to spoiling his entire afternoon. He was not articulate, but occasionally he expressed an idea and the most common was that he "liked his things as he liked them"; his eggs, in other words, boiled just so long, no more— after sixty years of inner debate on the subject he had apparently arrived at the conclusion that boiled eggs were the only kind of eggs permissible— his life punctual and serene. The smallest manifestation of unexpectedness disturbed him. Obviously that was one reason why, after a youth not altogether constant, he had become so utterly constant where Mrs. Denby was concerned. She had a quality of perenniality, charming and assuring, even to each strand of her delicate brown hair. Grayness should have been creeping upon her, but it was not. It was doubtful if Mr. McCain permitted himself, even secretly, to wonder why. Effects, fastidious and constant, were all he demanded from life.

This had been going on for twenty years— this afternoon call; this slow drive afterward in the park; this return by dusk to the shining small house in the shining small street; the good-by, reticently ardent, as if it were not fully

Mr. McCain's intention to return again in the evening. Mr. McCain would kiss Mrs. Denby's hand— slim, lovely, with a single gorgeous sapphire upon the third finger. "Good-by, my dear," he would say, "you have given me the most delightful afternoon of my life." For a moment Mrs. Denby's hand would linger on the bowed head; then Mr. McCain would straighten up, smile, square his shoulders in their smart, young-looking coat, and depart to his club, or the large, softly lit house where he dwelt alone. At dinner he would drink two glasses of champagne. Before he drained the last sip of the second pouring he would hold the glass up to the fire, so that the bronze coruscations at the heart of the wine glowed like fireflies in a gold dusk. One imagined him saying to himself: "A perfect woman! A perfect woman— God bless her!" Saying "God bless" any one, mind you, with a distinct warming of the heart, but a thoroughly late-Victorian disbelief in any god to bless…. At least, you thought as much.

And, of course, one had not the slightest notion whether he— old Mr. Henry McCain— was aware that this twenty years of devotion on his part to Mrs. Denby was the point upon which had come to focus the not inconsiderable contempt and hatred for him of his nephew Adrian.

It was an obvious convergence, this devotion of all the traits which composed, so Adrian imagined, the despicable soul that lay beneath his uncle's unangled exterior: undeviating self-indulgence; secrecy; utter selfishness— he was selfish even to the woman he was supposed to love; that is, if he was capable of loving any one but himself— a bland hypocrisy; an unthinking conformation to the dictates of an unthinking world. The list could be multiplied. But to sum it up, here was epitomized, beautifully, concretely, the main and minor vices of a generation for which Adrian found little pity in his heart; a generation brittle as ice; a generation of secret diplomacy; a generation that in its youth had covered a lack of bathing by a vast amount of perfume. That was it—! That expressed it perfectly! The just summation! Camellias, and double intentions in speech, and unnecessary reticences, and refusals to meet the truth, and a deliberate hiding of uglinesses!

Most of the time Adrian was too busy to think about his uncle at all— he was a very busy man with his writing: journalistic writing; essays, political reviews, propaganda— and because he was busy he was usually well-content, and not uncharitable, except professionally; but once a month it was his duty to dine with his uncle, and then, for the rest of the night, he was disturbed, and awoke the next morning with the dusty feeling in his head of a man who has been slightly drunk. Old wounds were recalled, old scars inflamed; a childhood in which his uncle's figure had represented to him the terrors of sarcasm and repression; a youth in which, as his guardian, his uncle had

deprecated all first fine hot-bloodednesses and enthusiasms; a young manhood in which he had been told cynically that the ways of society were good ways, and that the object of life was material advancement; advice which had been followed by the stimulus of an utter refusal to assist financially except where absolutely necessary. There had been willingness, you understand, to provide a gentleman's education, but no willingness to provide beyond that any of a gentleman's perquisites. That much of his early success had been due to this heroic upbringing, Adrian was too honest not to admit, but then— by God, it had been hard! All the colour of youth! No time to dream— except sorely! Some warping, some perversion! A gasping, heart-breaking knowledge that you could not possibly keep up with the people with whom, paradoxically enough, you were supposed to spend your leisure hours. Here was the making of a radical. And yet, despite all this, Adrian dined with his uncle once a month.

The mere fact that this was so, that it could be so, enraged him. It seemed a renunciation of all he affirmed; an implicit falsehood. He would have liked very much to have got to his feet, standing firmly on his two long, well-made legs, and have once and for all delivered himself of a final philippic. The philippic would have ended something like this:

"And this, sir, is the last time I sacrifice any of my good hours to you. Not because you are old, and therefore think you are wise, when you are not; not because you are blind and besotted and damned— a trunk of a tree filled with dry rot that presently a clean wind will blow away; not because your opinions, and the opinions of all like you, have long ago been proven the lies and idiocies that they are; not even because you haven't one single real right left to live— I haven't come to tell you these things, although they are true; for you are past hope and there is no use wasting words upon you; I have come to tell you that you bore me inexpressibly. (That would be the most dreadful revenge of all. He could see his uncle's face!) That you have a genius for taking the wrong side of every question, and I can no longer endure it. I dissipate my time. Good-night!"

He wouldn't have said it in quite so stately a way, possibly, the sentences would not have been quite so rounded, but the context would have been the same.

Glorious; but it wasn't said. Instead, once a month, he got into his dinner-jacket, brushed his hair very sleekly, walked six blocks, said good-evening to his uncle's butler, and went on back to the library, where, in a room rich with costly bindings, and smelling pleasantly of leather, and warmly yellow with the light of two shaded lamps, he would find his uncle reading before a crackling wood fire. What followed was almost a formula, an exquisite presentation of stately manners, an exquisite avoidance of any topic which might cause a real

discussion. The dinner was invariably gentle, persuasive, a thoughtful gastronomic achievement. Heaven might become confused about its weather, and about wars, and things like that, but Mr. McCain never became confused about his menus. He had a habit of commending wine. "Try this claret, my dear fellow, I want your opinion…. A drop of this Napoleonic brandy won't hurt you a bit." He even sniffed the bouquet before each sip; passed, that is, the glass under his nose and then drank. But Adrian, with a preconceived image of the personality back of this, and the memory of too many offences busy in his mind, saw nothing quaint or amusing. His gorge rose. Damn his uncle's wines, and his mushrooms, and his soft-footed servants, and his house of nuances and evasions, and his white grapes, large and outwardly perfect, and inwardly sentimental as the generation whose especial fruit they were. As for himself, he had a recollection of ten years of poverty after leaving college; a recollection of sweat and indignities; he had also a recollection of some poor people whom he had known.

Afterward, when the dinner was over, Adrian would go home and awake his wife, Cecil, who, with the brutal honesty of an honest woman, also some of the ungenerosity, had early in her married life flatly refused any share in the ceremonies described. Cecil would lie in her small white bed, the white of her boudoir-cap losing itself in the white of the pillow, a little sleepy and a little angrily perplexed at the perpetual jesuitical philosophy of the male. "If you feel that way," she would ask, "why do you go there, then? Why don't you banish your uncle utterly?" She asked this not without malice, her long, violet, Slavic eyes widely open, and her red mouth, a trifle too large, perhaps, a trifle cruel, fascinatingly interrogative over her white teeth. She loved Adrian and had at times, therefore, the right and desire to torture him. She knew perfectly well why he went. He was his uncle's heir, and until such time as money and other anachronisms of the present social system were done away with, there was no use throwing a fortune into the gutter, even if by your own efforts you were making an income just sufficiently large to keep up with the increased cost of living.

Sooner or later Adrian's mind reverted to Mrs. Denby. This was usually after he had been in bed and had been thinking for a while in the darkness. He could not understand Mrs. Denby. She affronted his modern habit of thought.

"The whole thing is so silly and adventitious!"

"What thing?"

Adrian was aware that his wife knew exactly of what he was talking, but he had come to expect the question. "Mrs. Denby and my uncle." He would grow rather gently cross. "It has always reminded me of those present-day sword-and-cloak romances fat business men used to write about ten years ago and

sell so enormously— there's an atmosphere of unnecessary intrigue. What's it all about? Here's the point! Why, if she felt this way about things, didn't she divorce that gentle drunkard of a husband of hers years ago and marry my uncle outright and honestly? Or why, if she couldn't get a divorce— which she could— didn't she leave her husband and go with my uncle? Anything in the open! Make a break— have some courage of her opinions! Smash things; build them up again! Thank God nowadays, at least, we have come to believe in the cleanness of surgery rather than the concealing palliatives of medicine. We're no longer— we modern people— afraid of the world; and the world can never hurt for any length of time any one who will stand up to it and tell it courageously to go to hell. No! It comes back and licks hands."

"I'll tell you why. My uncle and Mrs. Denby are the typical moral cowards of their generation. There's selfishness, too. What a travesty of love! Of course there's scandal, a perpetual scandal; but it's a hidden, sniggering scandal they don't have to meet face to face; and that's all they ask of life, they, and people like them— never to have to meet anything face to face. So long as they can bury their heads like ostriches! … Faugh!" There would be a moment's silence; then Adrian would complete his thought. "In my uncle's case," he would grumble in the darkness, "one phase of the selfishness is obvious. He couldn't even get himself originally, I suppose, to face the inevitable matter-of-fact moments of marriage. It began when he was middle-aged, a bachelor— I suppose he wants the sort of Don Juan, eighteen-eighty, perpetual sort of romance that doesn't exist outside the brains of himself and his like…. Camellias!"

Usually he tried to stir up argument with his wife, who in these matters agreed with him utterly; even more than agreed with him, since she was the escaped daughter of rich and stodgy people, and had insisted upon earning her own living by portrait-painting. Theoretically, therefore, she was, of course, an anarchist. But at moments like the present her silent assent and the aura of slight weariness over an ancient subject which emanated from her in the dusk, affronted Adrian as much as positive opposition.

"Why don't you try to understand me?"

"I do, dearest!"— a pathetic attempt at eager agreement.

"Well, then, if you do, why is the tone of your voice like that? You know by now what I think. I'm not talking convention; I believe there are no laws higher than the love of a man for a woman. It should seek expression as a seed seeks sunlight. I'm talking about honesty; bravery; a willingness to accept the consequences of one's acts and come through; about the intention to sacrifice for love just what has to be sacrificed. What's the use of it otherwise? That's

one real advance the modern mind has made, anyhow, despite all the rest of the welter and uncertainty."

"Of course, dearest."

He would go on. After a while Cecil would awake guiltily and inject a fresh, almost gay interest into her sleepy voice. She was not so unfettered as not to dread the wounded esteem of the unlistened-to male. She would lean over and kiss Adrian.

"Do go to sleep, darling! What's the sense? Pretty soon your uncle will be dead— wretched old man! Then you'll never have to think of him again." Being a childless woman, her red, a trifle cruel mouth would twist itself in the darkness into a small, secretive, maternal smile.

But old Mr. Henry McCain didn't die; instead he seemed to be caught up in the condition of static good health which frequently companions entire selfishness and a careful interest in oneself. His butler died, which was very annoying. Mr. McCain seemed to consider it the breaking of a promise made fifteen or so years before. It was endlessly a trouble instructing a new man, and then, of course, there was Adlington's family to be looked after, and taxes had gone up, and Mrs. Adlington was a stout woman who, despite the fact that Adlington, while alive, had frequently interrupted Mr. McCain's breakfast newspaper reading by asserting that she was a person of no character, now insisted upon weeping noisily every time Mr. McCain granted her an interview. Also, and this was equally unexpected, since one rather thought he would go on living forever, like one of the damper sort of fungi, Mr. Denby came home from the club one rainy spring night with a slight cold and died, three days later, with extraordinary gentleness.

"My uncle," said Adrian, "is one by one losing his accessories. After a while it will be his teeth."

Cecil was perplexed. "I don't know exactly what to do," she complained. "I don't know whether to treat Mrs. Denby as a bereaved aunt, a non-existent family skeleton, or a released menace. I dare say now, pretty soon, she and your uncle will be married. Meanwhile, I suppose it is rather silly of me not to call and see if I can help her in any way. After all, we do know her intimately, whether we want to or not, don't we? We meet her about all the time, even if she wasn't motoring over to your uncle's place in the summer when we stop there."

So she went, being fundamentally kindly and fundamentally curious. She spoke of the expedition as "a descent upon Fair Rosamund's tower."

The small, yellow-panelled drawing-room, where she awaited Mrs. Denby's coming, was lit by a single silver vase-lamp under an orange shade and by a fire of thin logs, for the April evening was damp with a hesitant rain. On the table,

near the lamp, was a silver vase with three yellow tulips in it, and Cecil, wandering about, came upon a double photograph frame, back of the vase, that made her gasp. She picked it up and stared at it. Between the alligator edgings, facing each other obliquely, but with the greatest amity, were Mr. Thomas Denby in the fashion of ten years before, very handsome, very well-groomed, with the startled expression which any definite withdrawal from his potational pursuits was likely to produce upon his countenance, and her uncle-in-law, Mr. Henry McCain, also in the fashion of ten years back. She was holding the photographs up to the light, her lips still apart, when she heard a sound behind her, and, putting the frame back guiltily, turned about. Mrs. Denby was advancing toward her. She seemed entirely unaware of Cecil's malfeasance; she was smiling faintly; her hand was cordial, grateful.

"You are very good," she murmured. "Sit here by the fire. We will have some tea directly."

Cecil could not but admit that she was very lovely; particularly lovely in the black of her mourning, with her slim neck, rising up from its string of pearls, to a head small and like a delicate white-and-gold flower. An extraordinarily well-bred woman, a sort of misty Du Maurier woman, of a type that had become almost non-existent, if ever it had existed in its perfection at all. And, curiously enough, a woman whose beauty seemed to have been sharpened by many fine-drawn renunciations. Now she looked at her hands as if expecting Cecil to say something.

"I think such calls as this are always very useless, but then—"

"Exactly— but then! They mean more than anything else in the world, don't they? When one reaches fifty-five one is not always used to kindness…. You are very kind…." She raised her eyes.

Cecil experienced a sudden impulsive warmth. "After all, what did she or any one else know about other peoples' lives? Poor souls! What a base thing life often was!"

"I want you to understand that we are always so glad, both Adrian and myself…. Any time we can help in any way, you know— "

"Yes, I think you would. You— I have watched you both. You don't mind, do you? I think you're both rather great people— at least, my idea of greatness."

Cecil's eyes shone just a little; then she sat back and drew together her eager, rather childish mouth. This wouldn't do! She had not come here to encourage sentimentalization. With a determined effort she lifted her mind outside the circle of commiseration which threatened to surround it. She deliberately reset the conversation to impersonal limits. She was sure that Mrs. Denby was aware of her intention, adroitly concealed as it was. This made her uncomfortable, ashamed. And yet she was irritated with herself. Why

should she particularly care what this woman thought in ways as subtle as this? Obvious kindness was her intention, not mental charity pursued into tortuous by-paths. And, besides, her frank, boyish cynicism, its wariness, revolted, even while she felt herself flattered at the prospect of the confidences that seemed to tremble on Mrs. Denby's lips. It wouldn't do to "let herself in for anything"; to "give herself away." No! She adopted a manner of cool, entirely reflective kindliness. But all along she was not sure that she was thoroughly successful. There was a lingering impression that Mrs. Denby was penetrating the surface to the unwilling interest beneath. Cecil suspected that this woman was trained in discriminations and half-lights to which she and her generation had joyfully made themselves blind. She felt uncomfortably young; a little bit smiled at in the most kindly of hidden ways. Just as she was leaving, the subversive softness came close to her again, like a wave of too much perfume as you open a church-door; as if some one were trying to embrace her against her will.

"You will understand," said Mrs. Denby, "that you have done the very nicest thing in the world. I am horribly lonely. I have few women friends. Perhaps it is too much to ask— but if you could call again sometime. Yes … I would appreciate it so greatly."

She let go of Cecil's hand and walked to the door, and stood with one long arm raised against the curtain, her face turned toward the hall.

"There is no use," she said, "in attempting to hide my husband's life, for every one knows what it was, but then— yes, I think you will understand. I am a childless woman, you see; he was infinitely pathetic."

Cecil felt that she must run away, instantly. "I do—" she said brusquely. "I understand more than other women. Perfectly! Good-by!"

She found herself brushing past the latest trim parlour-maid, and out once more in the keen, sweet, young dampness. She strode briskly down the deserted street. Her fine bronze eyebrows were drawn down to where they met. "Good Lord! Damn!"— Cecil swore very prettily and modernly— "What rotten taste! Not frankness, whatever it might seem outwardly; not frankness, but devious excuses! Some more of Adrian's hated past-generation stuff! And yet— no! The woman was sincere— perfectly! She had meant it— that about her husband. And she *was* lovely— and she was fine, too! It was impossible to deny it. But— a childless woman! About that drunken tailor's model of a husband! And then— Uncle Henry!…" Cecil threw back her head; her eyes gleamed in the wet radiance of a corner lamp; she laughed without making a sound, and entirely without amusement.

But it is not true that good health is static, no matter how carefully looked after. And, despite the present revolt against the Greek spirit, Time persists in being bigotedly Greek. The tragedy— provided one lives long enough— is

always played out to its logical conclusion. For every hour you have spent, no matter how quietly or beautifully or wisely, Nemesis takes toll in the end. You peter out; the engine dulls; the shining coin wears thin. If it's only that it is all right; you are fortunate if you don't become greasy, too, or blurred, or scarred. And Mr. McCain had not spent all his hours wisely or beautifully, or even quietly, underneath the surface. He suddenly developed what he called "acute indigestion."

"Odd!" he complained, "and exceedingly tiresome! I've been able to eat like an ostrich all my life." Adrian smiled covertly at the simile, but his uncle was unaware that it was because in Adrian's mind the simile applied to his uncle's conscience, not his stomach.

It *was* an odd disease, that "acute indigestion." It manifested itself by an abrupt tragic stare in Mr. McCain's eyes, a whiteness of cheek, a clutching at the left side of the breast; it resulted also in his beginning to walk very slowly indeed. One day Adrian met Carron, his uncle's physician, as he was leaving a club after luncheon. Carron stopped him. "Look here, Adrian," he said, "is that new man of your uncle's— that valet, or whatever he is— a good man?"

Adrian smiled. "I didn't hire him," he answered, "and I couldn't discharge him if I wanted— in fact, any suggestion of that kind on my part, would lead to his employment for life. Why?"

"Because," said Carron, "he impresses me as being rather young and flighty, and some day your uncle is going to die suddenly. He may last five years; he may snuff out to-morrow. It's his heart." His lips twisted pityingly. "He prefers to call it by some other name," he added, "and he would never send for me again if he knew I had told you, but you ought to know. He's a game old cock, isn't he?"

"Oh, very!" agreed Adrian. "Yes, game! Very, indeed!"

He walked slowly down the sunlit courtway on which the back door of the club opened, swinging his stick and meditating. Spring was approaching its zenith. In the warm May afternoon pigeons tumbled about near-by church spires which cut brown inlays into the soft blue sky. There was a feeling of open windows; a sense of unseen tulips and hyacinths; of people playing pianos…. Too bad, an old man dying that way, his hand furtively seeking his heart, when all this spring was about! Terror in possession of him, too! People like that hated to die; they couldn't see anything ahead. Well, Adrian reflected, the real tragedy of it hadn't been his fault. He had always been ready at the slightest signal to forget almost everything— yes, almost everything. Even that time when, as a sweating newspaper reporter, he had, one dusk, watched in the park his uncle and Mrs. Denby drive past in the cool seclusion of a shining victoria. Curious! In itself the incident was small, but it had stuck in his memory

more than others far more serious, as concrete instances are likely to do…. No, he wasn't sorry; not a bit! He was glad, despite the hesitation he experienced in saying to himself the final word. He had done his best, and this would mean his own release and Cecil's. It would mean at last the blessed feeling that he could actually afford a holiday, and a little unthinking laughter, and, at thirty-nine, the dreams for which, at twenty-five, he had never had full time. He walked on down the courtway more briskly.

That Saturday night was the night he dined with his uncle. It had turned very warm; unusually warm for the time of year. When he had dressed and had sought out Cecil to say good-by to her he found her by the big studio window on the top floor of the apartment where they lived. She was sitting in the window-seat, her chin cupped in her hand, looking out over the city, in the dark pool of which lights were beginning to open like yellow water-lilies. Her white arm gleamed in the gathering dusk, and she was dressed in some diaphanous blue stuff that enhanced the bronze of her hair. Adrian took his place silently beside her and leaned out. The air was very soft and hot and embracing, and up here it was very quiet, as if one floated above the lower clouds of perpetual sound.

Cecil spoke at last. "It's lovely, isn't it?" she said. "I should have come to find you, but I couldn't. These first warm nights! You really understand why people live, after all, don't you? It's like a pulse coming back to a hand you love." She was silent a moment. "Kiss me," she said, finally. "I— I'm so glad I love you, and we're young."

He stooped down and put his arms about her. He could feel her tremble. How fragrant she was, and queer, and mysterious, even if he had lived with her now for almost fifteen years! He was infinitely glad at the moment for his entire life. He kissed her again, kissed her eyes, and she went down the stairs with him to the hall-door. She was to stop for him at his uncle's, after a dinner to which she was going.

Adrian lit a cigarette and walked instead of taking the elevator. It was appropriate to his mood that on the second floor some one with a golden Italian voice should be singing "Louise." He paused for a moment. He was reminded of a night long ago in Verona, when there had been an open window and moonlight in the street. Then he looked at his watch. He was late; he would have to hurry. It amused him that at his age he should still fear the silent rebuke with which his uncle punished unpunctuality.

He arrived at his destination as a near-by church clock struck the half-hour. The new butler admitted him and led him back to where his uncle was sitting by an open window; the curtains stirred in the languid breeze, the suave room was a little penetrated by the night, as if some sly, disorderly spirit was

investigating uninvited. It was far too hot for the wood fire— that part of the formula had been omitted, but otherwise each detail was the same. "The two hundredth time!" Adrian thought to himself. "The two hundredth time, at least! It will go on forever!" And then the formula was altered again, for his uncle got to his feet, laying aside the evening paper with his usual precise care. "My dear fellow," he began, "so good of you! On the minute, too! I—" and then he stumbled and put out his hand. "My glasses!" he said.

Adrian caught him and held him upright. He swayed a little. "I— Lately I have had to use them sometimes, even when not reading," he murmured. "Thank you! Thank you!"

Adrian went back to the chair where his uncle had been sitting. He found the glasses— gold pince-nez— but they were broken neatly in the middle, lying on the floor, as if they had dropped from someone's hand. He looked at them for a moment, puzzled, before he gave them back to his uncle.

"Here they are, sir," he said. "But— it's very curious. They're broken in such an odd way."

His uncle peered down at them. He hesitated and cleared his throat. "Yes," he began; then he stood up straight, with an unexpected twist of his shoulders. "I was turning them between my fingers," he said, "just before you came in. I had no idea— no, no idea! Shall we go in? I think dinner has been announced."

There was the sherry in the little, deeply cut glasses, and the clear soup, with a dash of lemon in it, and the fish, and afterward the roast chicken, with vegetables discreetly limited and designed not to detract from the main dish; and there was a pint of champagne for Adrian and a mild white wine for his uncle. The latter twisted his mouth in a dry smile. "One finds it difficult to get old," he said. "I have always been very fond of champagne. More aesthetically I think than the actual taste. It seems to sum up so well the evening mood— dinner and laughter and forgetting the day. But now—" he flicked contemptuously the stem of his glass— "I am only allowed this uninspired stuff." He stopped suddenly and his face twisted into the slight grimace which Adrian in the last few weeks had been permitted occasionally to see. His hand began to wander vaguely over the white expanse of his shirt.

Adrian pushed back his chair. "Let me—!" he began, but his uncle waved a deprecating hand. "Sit down!" he managed to say. "Please!" Adrian sank back again. The colour returned to his uncle's cheeks and the staring question left his eyes. He took a sip of wine.

"I cannot tell you," he observed with elaborate indifference, "how humiliating this thing is becoming to me. I have always had a theory that invalids and people when they begin to get old and infirm, should be put away some place where they can undergo the unpleasant struggle alone. It's purely

selfish— there's something about the sanctity of the individual. Dogs have it right— you know the way they creep off? But I suppose I won't. Pride fails when the body weakens, doesn't it, no matter what the will may be?" He lifted his wine-glass. "I am afraid I am giving you a very dull evening, my dear fellow," he apologized. "Forgive me! We will talk of more pleasant things. I drink wine with you! How is Cecil? Doing well with her painting?"

Adrian attempted to relax his own inner grimness. He responded to his uncle's toast. But he wished this old man, so very near the mysterious crisis of his affairs, would begin to forego to some extent the habit of a lifetime, become a little more human. This ridiculous "façade"! The dinner progressed.

Through an open window the night, full of soft, distant sound, made itself felt once more. The candles, under their red shades, flickered at intervals. The noiseless butler came and went. How old his uncle was getting to look, Adrian reflected. There was a grayness about his cheeks; fine, wire-like lines about his mouth. And he was falling into that sure sign of age, a vacant absent-mindedness. Half the time he was not listening to what he, Adrian, was saying; instead, his eyes sought constantly the shadows over the carved sideboard across the table from him. What did he see there? What question was he asking? Adrian wondered. Only once was his uncle very much interested, and that was when Adrian had spoken of the war and the psychology left in its train. Adrian himself had not long before been released from a weary round of training-camps, where, in Texas dust, or the unpleasant resinous summer of the South, he had gone through a repetition that in the end had threatened to render him an imbecile. He was not illusioned. As separate personalities, men had lost much of their glamour for him; there had been too much sweat, too much crowding, too much invasion of dignity, of everything for which the world claimed it had been struggling and praying. But alongside of this revolt on his part had grown up an immense pity and belief in humanity as a mass— struggling, worm-like, aspiring, idiotic, heroic. The thought of it made him uncomfortable and at the same time elate.

His uncle shook a dissenting head. On this subject he permitted himself mild discussion, but his voice was still that of an old, wearied man, annoyed and bewildered. "Oh, no!" he said. "That's the very feature of it that seems to me most dreadful; the vermicular aspect; the massed uprising; the massed death. About professional armies there was something decent— about professional killing. It was cold-blooded and keen, anyway. But this modern war, and this modern craze for self-revelation! Naked! Why, these books— the young men kept their fingers on the pulses of their reactions. It isn't clean; it makes the individual cheap. War is a dreadful thing; it should be as hidden as

murder." He sat back, smiled. "We seem to have a persistent tendency to become serious to-night," he remarked.

Serious! Adrian saw a vision of the drill-grounds, and smiled sardonically; then he raised his head in surprise, for the new butler had broken all the rules of the household and was summoning his uncle to the telephone in the midst of dessert. He awaited the expected rebuke, but it did not come. Instead, his uncle paused in the middle of a sentence, stared, and looked up. "Ah, yes!" he said, and arose from his chair. "Forgive me, Adrian, I will be back shortly." He walked with a new, just noticeable, infirmness toward the door. Once there he seemed to think an apology necessary, for he turned and spoke with absent-minded courtesy.

"You may not have heard," he said, "but Mrs. Denby is seriously ill. Her nurse gives me constant bulletins over the telephone."

Adrian started to his feet, then sat down again. "But—" he stuttered— "but— is it as bad as all that?"

"I am afraid," said his uncle gently, "it could not be worse." The curtain fell behind him.

Adrian picked up his fork and began to stir gently the melting ice on the plate before him, but his eyes were fixed on the wall opposite, where, across the shining table, from a mellow gold frame, a portrait of his grandfather smiled with a benignity, utterly belying his traditional character, into the shadows above the candles. But Adrian was not thinking of his grandfather just then, he was thinking of his uncle— and Mrs. Denby. What in the world—! Dangerously ill, and yet here had been his uncle able to go through with— not entirely calmly, to be sure; Adrian remembered the lack of attention, the broken eye-glasses; and yet, still able to go through with, not obviously shaken, this monthly farce; this dinner that in reality mocked all the real meaning of blood-relationship. Good Lord! To Adrian's modern mind, impatient and courageous, the situation was preposterous, grotesque. He himself would have broken through to the woman he loved, were she seriously ill, if all the city was cordoned to keep him back. What could it mean? Entire selfishness on his uncle's part? Surely not that! That was too inhuman! Adrian was willing to grant his uncle exceptional expertness in the art of self-protection, but there was a limit even to self-protection. There must be some other reason. Discretion? More likely, and yet how absurd! Had Mr. Denby been alive, a meticulous, a fantastic delicacy might have intervened, but Mr. Denby was dead. Who were there to wound, or who left for the telling of tales? A doctor and the servants. This was not altogether reasonable, despite what he knew of his uncle. Here was some oddity of psychology he could not follow. He heard

the curtains stir as his uncle reentered. He looked up, attentive and curious, but his uncle's face was the mask to which he was accustomed.

"How is Mrs. Denby?" he asked.

Mr. McCain hesitated for the fraction of a second. "I am afraid, very ill," he said. "Very ill, indeed! It is pneumonia. I— the doctor thinks it is only a question of a little time, but— well, I shall continue to hope for the best." There was a metallic harshness to his concluding words. "Shall we go into the library?" he continued. "I think the coffee will be pleasanter there."

They talked again of the war; of revolution; of the dark forces at large in the world.

Through that hour or two Adrian had a nakedness of perception unusual even to his sensitive mind. It seemed to him three spirits were abroad in the quiet, softly-lit, book-lined room; three intentions that crept up to him like the waves of the sea, receded, crept back again; or were they currents of air? or hesitant, unheard feet that advanced and withdrew? In at the open windows poured at times the warm, enveloping scent of the spring; pervading, easily overlooked, lawless, persistent, inevitable. Adrian found himself thinking it was like the presence of a woman. And then, overlapping this, would come the careful, dry, sardonic tones of his uncle's voice, as if insisting that the world was an ordinary world, and that nothing, not even love or death, could lay disrespectful fingers upon or hurry for a moment the trained haughtiness of the will. Yet even this compelling arrogance was at times overtaken, submerged, by a third presence, stronger even than the other two; a presence that entered upon the heels of the night; the ceaseless murmur of the streets; the purring of rubber tires upon asphalt; a girl's laugh, high, careless, reckless. Life went on. Never for a moment did it stop.

"I am not sorry that I am getting old," said Mr. McCain. "I think nowadays is an excellent time to die. Perhaps for the very young, the strong— but for me, things are too busy, too hurried. I have always liked my life like potpourri. I liked to keep it in a china jar and occasionally take off the lid. Otherwise one's sense of perfume becomes satiated. Take your young girls; they remain faithful to a love that is not worth being faithful to— all noise, and flushed laughter, and open doors." Quite unexpectedly he began to talk in a way he had never talked before. He held his cigar in his hand until the ash turned cold; his ringers trembled just a little.

"You have been very good to me," he said. Adrian raised startled eyes. "Very good. I am quite aware that you dislike me"— he hesitated and the ghost of a smile hovered about his lips— "and I have always disliked you. Please!" He raised a silencing hand. "You don't mind my saying so? No. Very well, then, there is something I want to tell you. Afterward I will never mention it again. I

dare say our mutual dislike is due to the inevitable misunderstanding that exists between the generations. But it is not important. The point is that we have always been well-bred toward each other. Yes, that is the point. You have always been a gentleman, very considerate, very courteous, I cannot but admire you. And I think you will find I have done the best I could. I am not a rich man, as such things go nowadays, but I will hand you on the money that will be yours quite unimpaired, possibly added to. I feel very strongly on that subject. I am old-fashioned enough to consider the family the most important thing in life. After all, we are the only two McCains left." He hesitated again, and twisted for a moment his bloodless hands in his lap, then he raised his eyes and spoke with a curious hurried embarrassment. "I have sacrificed a great deal for that," he said. "Yes, a great deal."

The soft-footed butler stood at his elbow, like an actor in comedy suddenly cast for the role of a portentous messenger.

"Miss Niles is calling you again, sir," he said.

"On, yes!— ah— Adrian, I am very sorry, my dear fellow. I will finish the conversation when I come back."

This time the telephone was within earshot; in the hall outside. Adrian heard his uncle's slow steps end in the creaking of a chair as he sat down; then the picking up of the receiver. The message was a long one, for his uncle did not speak for fully a minute; finally his voice drifted in through the curtained doorway.

"You think … only a few minutes?"

"…Ah, yes! Conscious? Yes. Well, will you tell her, Miss Niles?— yes, please listen very carefully— tell her this. That I am not there because I dared not come. Yes; on her account. She will understand. My heart— it's my heart. She will understand. I did not dare. For her sake, not mine. Tell her that. She will understand. Please be very careful in repeating the message, Miss Niles. Tell her I dared not come because of my heart…. Yes; thank you. That's it…. What? Yes, I will wait, Miss Niles."

Adrian, sitting in the library, suddenly got to his feet and crossed to the empty fireplace and stood with his back to it, enlightenment and a puzzled frown struggling for possession of his face. His uncle's heart! Ah, he understood, then! It was discretion, after all, but not the kind he thought— a much more forgiveable discretion. And, yet, what possible difference could it make should his uncle die suddenly in Mrs. Denby's house? Fall dead across her bed, or die kneeling beside it? Poor, twisted old fool, afraid even at the end that death might catch him out; afraid of a final undignified gesture.

A motor blew its horn for the street crossing. Another girl laughed; a young, thin, excited girl, to judge by her laughter. The curtains stirred and

again there was that underlying scent of tulips and hyacinths; and then, from the hall outside, came the muffled thud of a receiver falling to the floor. Adrian waited. The receiver was not picked up. He strode to the door. Crumpled up over the telephone was old Mr. McCain.

Cecil came later. She was very quick and helpful, and jealously solicitous on Adrian's account, but in the taxicab going home she said the one thing Adrian had hoped she wouldn't say, and yet was sure she would. She belonged to a sex which, if it is honest at all, is never reticently so. She believed that between the man she loved and herself there were no possible mental withdrawals. "It is very tragic," she said, "but much better— you know it is better. He belonged to the cumberers of the earth. Yes, so much better; and this way, too!"

In the darkness her hand sought his. Adrian took it, but in his heart was the same choked feeling, the same knowledge that something was gone that could not be found again, that, as a little boy, he had had when they sold, at his father's death, the country place where he had spent his summers. Often he had lain awake at night, restless with the memory of heliotrope, and phlox, and mignonette, and afternoons quiet except for the sound of bees.

———————

13: Non-Union Ghost

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Bulletin, 3 Feb 1937

SINCE the only spirits that appeal to my credulity are sold in bottles, I did not believe in ghosts. Neither did Blogson. I knew that his idea of a haunted boarding-house had been one of those freakish schemes characteristic of Blogson, like the one that came to him when, going to a bottle-yard to convert some empties into his fare to town, he caught sight of a pile of peculiarly-shaped medicine bottles which the bottle-yard man said gloomily were unsaleable.

"By jingo!" cried Blogson, "a patent medicine in those bottles would sell like hot cakes. I'm going into the patent-medicine business."

"But you have no money," I told him as we walked away, having arranged to take over the bottles.

"An idea is money," he said.

He proved it. "Blogson's Betterelth Banishes Biliousness" was shortly a familiar slogan; and for a time Blogson lived in affluence upon his idea and a start made with a borrowed tenner. The affluence might have remained but for Blogson's characteristic failure to pay his debts and some difficulty in securing fresh supplies of bottles, which were expensive to make. Finally, a meeting of creditors was left with a formula which was, I believe, a mere weak solution of gin and peppermint, and Blogson's Betterelth was forgotten.

In a similar fashion the idea of the haunted boarding-house had come when, looking for a new home, Blogson discovered Grantham Hall. It was one of those old houses which win a reputation for being haunted by remaining empty. The agents were prepared to discuss almost any sort of terms to secure a tenant who might break the evil reputation.

IT was a depressing place, but it filled Blogson with a bubbling enthusiasm, making him forget that he was stony broke and that the cause of his house-hunting was the determination of an unpaid landlord to get rid of him and his family.

"If a place is haunted," Blogson burbled, "people by themselves will shun it; but give them a chance to go there in comfortable social surroundings and they'll rush it with ears back. The whole world is looking for new excitements, and I'm going to give it one."

What followed was an amazing example of the Blogson methods. When he suggested that I should go with him to the agents, curiosity prompted me to

accompany him; and he mesmerised me into the loan of a pound for a formal deposit.

"I came out in my old clothes"— that explained his shabbiness adequately— "and left my cheque-book at home. Herb, old chap, lend me a quid until I cash a cheque," he said.

That was Blogson at his best. Frenzied finance followed. Blogson dug an old, useless cheque-book out of his old papers and rushed round selecting furniture and distributing cheques as deposits for it, gas, new clothes and other necessary things. Then he went to Solomon, who had done fairly well out of Betterelth (probably five or six hundred per cent well), and succeeded in getting some real money to go into the bank to meet the cheques.

I was wondering how soon Blogson would get into gaol when the article on "The Ghost in the Boarding-house," published in the *Evening Alarm*, showed me that his harebrained scheme was developing. It was followed by others; the *Alarm*, in a slack time, had seized upon a haunted boarding-house as good news for daily splurging. It spoke of "manifestations" and of a crush of people filling every room in the house, with a long waiting-list of intending guests willing to pay all sorts of prices to stay at a haunted guest-house. Parties of members of the Psychic Society took it in turns to stay there, and expressed their views— very impressive views— to the papers.

I had a more substantial indication of Blogson's success when Blogson sent me a cheque for a fiver. I hardly believed the cheque until it was cashed. It salved the resentment I had felt for the way Blogson had practically forced me to part up a quid I had never expected to see again; and shortly I accepted his invitation to go out to see him.

IN spite of the papers, I had hardly expected the prosperity I saw in the place. Whilst trimming the previously overgrown garden at Grantham, Blogson had managed to preserve its eeriness.

Blogson, faultlessly arrayed in a dinner-suit, roared an exuberant welcome, although engaged on the 'phone, on which he was telling some inquirer that there was no chance of booking accommodation for another six weeks.

"We're the rage, old man," he said as he hung up the receiver. "People put off getting married until they can arrange dates here for the honeymoon. We've had to send the kids to boarding-school because our space here is so valuable— naturally, people don't expect to get ghosts thrown in at ordinary rates."

"I'm curious about how you work those ghosts," I said.

"Work 'em?" he cried. "I don't work 'em, my boy. I'm always afraid of a strike, as a matter of fact."

Although he laughed, it struck me that there was something uneasy in his manner. He rose from his desk, leading me towards the door of his office.

"I'm sorry, but we're so crowded that I'll have to fix you up in a sort of box-room. But you'll be comfortable."

"Oh, I say, I'm not going to stay. I—"

"You've got to stay—for one night at least," he said. "Let me introduce you. This is Major Dingle— Mr. Hamer; Miss Durack also. Excuse me— there's that 'phone again!"

"You know," said Major Dingle, a tall man with rather protuberant eyes and a strained, austere face, "this isn't right, Mr. Hamer."

"Isn't right?"

"That's my opinion. It isn't right to expose spiritual beings to vulgar curiosity. I take it, sir— you look an intelligent person— that you came here as a genuine inquirer. A place like this should be run with discretion mere vulgar sensation-mongers should be excluded. And that is all most of the people here are. It is an insult— an unwarrantable outrage— on the Beings who manifest themselves in this house."

"There are ghosts here, then?"

"Ghosts?" His eyebrows lifted superciliously. "If you like to call it that, there is at least one."

"There is no doubt about that," said Miss Durack decisively.

"I have seen him," said the Major impressively. "I have spoken to him. I may say he is deeply hurt."

Before I could inquire further Blogson claimed me.

"I'll show you your room, and then have to leave you. The dinner-gong's just about to go— come straight to my table. I'll keep a place for you."

"About these ghosts—"

"Oh, a little ghost goes a long way," he said breezily. "If people come to see ghosts they will see them. I'm afraid we won't have much time together to-night—I'm kept going pretty well— but I'll bring a bottle of whisky along and we'll have a yarn after you've gone to bed."

I HAD to admit he managed his ghosts well. For instance, it was not until dinner was practically over that the mournful, long-drawn howling of a dog sounded somewhere outside, eerily close. It brought a startled clatter of cutlery and an awed silence. I was startled myself.

Blogson jumped up.

"No need to be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen," he cried. "Those who have been here any length of time have grown used to it; that dog gives us a howl every night or so."

"Excuse me," said Major Dingle from a far table, speaking authoritatively, as one with knowledge; "that is the cry of a werewolf. It is no use," he added to several men who had moved towards the door, "to try to discover where it comes from. I have tried myself, six times, with others— Mr. Daley and Mr. Johns there; there is never anything to be seen."

I looked at Blogson, expecting a sly grin, but he kept a solemn face. I should have liked to hear the authoritative description of the habits and usefulness of the werewolf which I observed the Major giving to his neighbors. Men like the Major must have been invaluable to Blogson.

There was another diversion— a sudden terrified scream and one of the women who had left the room came rushing back sobbingly to throw herself into the arms of a young man who had been the first to leap towards the door.

"A hand touched me— out of the blank wall!" sobbed the girl.

"This is what young married couples like," whispered Blogson. "The girl likes the excuse for throwing herself publicly into the arms of her hero, and he likes being the hero."

We joined the solemn but excited procession that patrolled the corridors, examining the wall where the girl said the hand had touched her. Of course we found nothing.

I reflected that it was pretty easy to make people feel phantoms in the air. Even the dining-room of a place where everybody was expecting ghosts had not been the most cheerful spot in the world; an atmosphere of rapt expectancy conveyed even to the unbelieving a feeling of discomfort. The chatter at the tables was full of weird mystery. The psychic researchers revelled in recounting stories of adventures with spirits garnered from all the world, and their habit of whispering was disconcerting.

The atmosphere accentuated itself; although an impromptu concert started in the music-room and in the smoking-room the card-tables were out, people still exchanged their ghosts. Girls shrieked in corridors and came back with stories of mystic tappings.

EVERYBODY seemed to enjoy these sensations immensely; but when, having retired to my comfortable-enough stretcher in my box-like room, I had been twice aroused by further outcries, with subsequent excited gatherings in the corridors to investigate some new manifestations, it seemed plain to me that the guests were allowing their imaginations to run riot. But, waking from a doze into which I had fallen, I myself saw something that sent me out of the room like a shot. I collided with Blogson, clad in trousers and shirt, and nearly upset the promised whisky-bottle.

"Good God, man, you're trembling!" he cried.

My teeth chattered as I tried to talk.

"I was just coming along to talk to you," he said. "I should have told you about it. But he's quite harmless: come back with me and see."

He was so calm that my shock passed. It only returned in part, too, when, entering my room with him, I saw that dim, semi-luminous shadow, the vague figure of a man, sitting on nothing apparent, with his head buried in his hands.

"Hullo, old chap," said Blogson breezily; "you startled my friend. Not your fault, of course; he doesn't know you as I do, and he wasn't prepared to meet you."

The shadow groaned hollowly.

"It's cruel— cruel!" it moaned. "The old home a boarding-house— not a single room left that I can haunt in peace! I used to have the whole house to myself, and now even this room is gone!"

"Only for to-night, old chap," said Blogson soothingly. "It's hard on you, I know, but this is a very old friend of mine and I had to ask him to stay to-night."

"Place full of music and noise, too! It's cruel— cruel!"

The dread had vanished now; I regarded the shadow with mere curiosity and some feeling of pity. He looked pitiful. But a tap at the door startled me again. My nerves were getting jumpy.

Blogson sprang to the door; he seemed to gesture the man who stood there into the room, then closed the door again. I recognised the handyman of the establishment.

"Well, Jones?" demanded Blogson.

"So there he is, the blighter!" said Jones, with a jaundiced look at the shadow. "Still blacklegging, are you?"

The shadow merely groaned again, and Blogson turned to me.

"You see, Herb," he said, "I naturally didn't believe in ghosts when I came, but I was determined to have one. So I engaged Jones here— gave him an extra ten bob a week to slip round in a white night-dress, tapping at doors and scratching walls and getting into the garret and rolling things about— all that sort of thing."

"It was me that thought of the 'owling dawg an of gettin' on the roof an' tapping on the windows with sinkers on the end of fishing-lines," said Jones gloomily. "An' where's yer gratitood?"

"At that time," explained Blogson worriedly, "I hadn't met our friend here. He's a quiet chap; keeps to himself, as it were. I didn't know he was in the house, and I used to laugh when people declared they had seen him."

" 'E's got no idea of being an hartistic ghost. I can scare people worth two of 'im," said Jones scornfully.

"In lots of ways you're certainly a better ghost," admitted Blogson.

"Oh, don't say that!" moaned the shadow.

"Still, he's a *real* ghost," said Blogson. "It's a pity he won't moan in public like he did just now, but he's real."

"You didn't play the game with me," said Jones.

"You still get the extra money— in fact a quid a week extra now."

"Money ain't everythink. There's perfessional pride, said Jones bitterly. "An' this bloke, 'e works tor nothing. 'E's only an amachewer— a bloomin' blackleg!"

The shadow rose wringing its hands. "Oh, I can't stand this— l can't, I can't!" he moaned. "No peace— no place to haunt quietly; bound to intrude upon people to prevent the work being done by an imposter! I am robbed of my home! I must seek some quieter place to haunt. I must go!"

"I'm with you there," said Jones heartily "I'm going. There's heaps of boarding-houses now'd be glad of a good perfessional ghost. That'what made me foller vou in 'ere Mr. Blogson. I wanted ter tell you I put the business up to Sandring'am 'Ouse ternight, an' I took their offer. You ain't goin' to be the only one to run an 'aunted boarding-'ouse, Mr. Blogson."

"Look here, Jones—"

"I've said me larst word," said Jones, with a stride to the door, "I'm done. As you prefer your bloomin' amachewer, blacklegging ghosts, you can keep them!"

Blogson tried to stop him, but the door closed between them

"Well, you'll have it all to yourself now," he said, smiling ingratiatingly at the shadow. "I expect your co-operation. If I don t get it I'll have to employ someone else to do the work that Jones has been doing—"

But the shadow had vanished too. Only a groan came from mid-air. "There were jazz parties last week! The place is too noisy!" said the grieved voice, growing fainter.

"He's gone to sulk in the old coal-cellar. That's the sort of thing he does," said Blogson resentfully. "As a ghost he's not a patch on Jones. If I don't come to an understanding with him I'll have to get someone else."

I FELT sorry for Blogson, a sort of feeling that I had made trouble between him and his ghost by occupying that box-room, and I followed subsequent events with interest.

Sandringham House became, in its advertisements, a ghost-ridden boarding-house also. Then there were others. Some of the stories told about them were ingenious. Blisset House, for instance, was quite new, and there was no ancient reason why it should be haunted ; but the tale was told that

while it was being erected a scaffolding had fallen, killing a woman who had come with her husband's lunch and the child who was with her.

Shortly, however, there was such a glut of haunted boarding-houses that the papers lost interest in such stories.

The glut puzzled me until I saw a very worried Blogson again. It appeared that he was having a fight with a union.

"You see, there is something queer about Grantham," he said, "and the union objects to it."

It appeared that Blogson had hired another man to carry on Jones's work; but Jones, who had developed a spirit of animosity, had got at the newcomer. He had gone over to Blisset House. His successor had passed to The Grange, after Blogson had taught him his work. Blogson could not keep a handyman more than a week or so.

A "Mystic Branch" of the Miscellaneous Workers' Union was formed. Its main plank was preference to unionists; and that was Blogson's trouble. A real ghost could not be expected to join a union, even if Blogson was ready to pay its fees. The union's strongest principle— in this the spirit of Jones, its president, could be seen— was an objection to "amachewers." Men who went to Grantham were called out on principle, and under the threat that they would be barred from future employment, and jobs were found for them elsewhere. And so the haunted boarding-houses grew.

THERE is only a limited number of people, after all, who like haunted boarding-houses, and what had been a goldmine idea began to peter out. But I think it was less a realisation of that than the desire to hit a shrewd blow at the union which had harassed him that caused Blogson to insert the advertisement that I saw one morning in the paper.

Its heading was:—

GRANTHAM HALL
NO BAD DRAINS: NO GHOSTS.

It was a shrewd move at a time when every boarding-house was boasting its spare ghost. It revived newspaper interest; and Blogson was enabled to explain how he had laid the ghosts of Grantham Hall by effecting necessary repairs to defects that had been responsible for queer noises. That annoyed the Psychic Society, especially Major Dingle; and Grantham got a lot of new publicity.

But, as far as I can make out, the Grantham ghost which had refused to give Blogson any real help was annoyed at being associated with bad drains and spots where repairs were needed. It came to life again, and stories revived

about people who had not gone to Grantham to have ghostly experiences being disturbed at night. Anyway, it seemed that people who liked the thrills of far-off dog-howls and mysterious tappings objected to a shadow which sat on the end of the bed and moaned a hard-luck story. While a few of the boarding-houses whose ghosts were definitely bogus still did some business Grantham languished, being distrusted by people who didn't like ghosts and no longer valued by those who did. The Psychic Society, as a matter of fact, had boycotted it.

All this seemed to bear out the union's contention and Blogson's bitter comment that the amateur ghost wasn't a patch on the professional.

Grantham had only a couple of boarders when last I paid Blogson a visit there. Blogson might have held on and come back had it not been for his characteristic failure, during the times of prosperity, to meet the rent and the furniture instalments regularly. The creditors kicked at last, and Grantham went.

THE last time I met Blogson he was in the company of a man he introduced as the president of the Psychical Frauds Suppression Society. He was also, it appeared, the president of the Boarding-house Proprietors' Association.

"We are out to suppress unethical practices in the control of guest-houses," he told me. "This idea of advertising ghosts, for instance. We have found Mr. Blogson— who, I may say, put up to us the idea of the P.F.S.S.— invaluable as an investigator of ghost frauds."

Blogson always found a way out. He is a man of ideas. He passed me a whisper: "I've exposed that cow Jones five times; and I'm after him again."

———————————

14: Five minutes from the Grave

C. S. Montanye

1892-1948

Thrilling Detective Feb 1950

THE knocking grew louder. Dave McClain, the big, cigar smoking Headquarters dick, turned over in bed. That didn't shut the noise out. It continued, stepping up its tempo. Mac opened one drowsy eye. The bedroom was black as the interior of a West Virginia coal mine. He opened the other eye and sat up, rubbing his leathery face. The voice of Anna, the sister he boarded with, drifted in:

"Dave! Wake up! Wake up, Dave!"

McClain grunted, slapped his large, flat feet on the floor and reached for a bathrobe. The phosphorescent hands on his alarm clock told him it was ten minutes after three in the morning.

He said, "Fooey!" switched on a light and bobbed and weaved over to the door. "Where's the fire?"

"There's a man here to see you, Dave." Anna, in a faded kimono, nodded a head full of curlers toward the opposite end of the hall. "His name is Charlie Shramm and he says it's important! He says he knows you."

"He'd better know me well," Mac growled.

Before he could add to the statement he was interrupted by the early morning caller. A young man who wore a taxi driver's hat stepped in from the apartment's foyer. Mac recognized him as a guy he had known for some time. A hard working, on-the-level hot rod chauffeur who hacked for the Green Cab outfit.

"I'm just around the corner." McClain saw that there was a glitter in Charlie Shramm's eyes. "All of a sudden I remembered you parked here, Mac. I came right up. You'd better hustle down."

"On account of— what?"

"Me having a stiff in my wagon!"

Shramm answered, with a wheezy, indrawn breath.

The taxi, as its driver had said, was around the corner. It stood in front of a darkened delicatessen store. It was one of the Green Cab Company's older jobs. It didn't have the new removable roof, Neon advertising or radio equipment.

Shramm pointed to the curb side rear door.

"Open it and take a peek."

McClain did. Crumpled on the floor, when he clicked on the cab's overhead light, he saw the contorted figure of a young man in a blue suit. A gray felt hat had rolled across the seat. The man's face was pressed to the floor mat,

one hand pushed under his coat in a Napoleonic gesture. The other arm was flung limply wide and rested across the foot rail.

Waxy face and glazed, staring eyes, these told their own story. Dave McClain, who knew more about death than most undertakers, took one look and turned to Charlie Shramm.

"The guy's an angel. What happened?"

In reply, the hackie pointed down the street. Almost at the corner was a lighted day-and-night armchair lunchroom.

Shramm said:

"I stopped here. Thirty minutes ago. I walked over for a cup of mud and a sinker. When I came back this party's in my cab."

Mac's brows drew together. Through force of habit he searched his vest pockets for one of his cellophane wrapped torpedoes. But he had dressed in such a rush that he had forgotten to load before leaving. He was weedless.

"You're telling me you never saw him before?"

"That's right. The last fare I had was an hour ago. Two gals and a gent who went uptown. I was bare after I dropped them and rolled down here."

Fingering a nickel out of his pocket, Mac said, "Call Headquarters. Get whoever's on the Homicide desk. Tell him you're calling for me. Tell him to get a squad car and a medical examiner here in a hurry."

Shramm departed hastily in the direction of the lunchroom and Mac turned his attention to the dead man in the cab. He was young, about twenty-four or five. Rather nice looking, cleanly shaved with reddish brown hair and a slim, medium sized figure. The blue suit was well pressed, the black shoes recently polished. Mac's narrowed gaze, traveling down the body, stopped and focused on the shoes. Something on the soles, in under the heels, caught and held his attention. With a thumbnail he loosened a bit of a gray, granular substance and rubbed it thoughtfully between his fingers.

Methodically, Mac searched for the cause of death. He found it a minute later. The man had been shot at a point on his left side some few inches above his alligator belt. There was a small amount of blood around the little hole drilled through his white shirt. The hand under his coat had been pressed tightly against the wound as if trying to hold it closed.

McClain frowned. At first he thought the body had been dumped in Shramm's taxi. A glance at the bullet hole and he wasn't so sure. The man might have been shot some distance away and, by his own power, walked as far as the cab, opened its door and collapsed when he entered.

The pockets of the blue coat contained identification. Several letters, a memo address book, a wallet with a driver's license and eighty-four dollars in cash. Mac thumbed the driver's license out and looked through its plastic

window. It was made out to Arnold Malden, at an address on 115th Street, near Broadway. The money in the leather seemed significant to Mac. It hadn't been a strongarm stickup job. Whoever had gunned Arnold Malden hadn't been after a cash payoff.

Homicide arrived some minutes after Shramm's return. Mac handed the problem to Lieutenant Larry Hartley and went back to his sister's apartment. But not to sleep. He made himself a pot of coffee and filled his empty vest pockets with the ammunition he needed for clear, inspirational thinking. Then, careful not to arouse Anna, her husband or Junior, he washed his coffee cup, put it in the dresser and, leaving a trail of acrid smoke in his wake, went down to the street.

The medical examiner had signed a release for the body. Shramm and his green cab had likewise departed. Mac looked up and down the deserted street. There was no use dreaming things up until he had an autopsy report to work on.

But there was nothing to stop him taking a cruise up to 115th Street and the address that had been on Malden's license. It was an expensive looking apartment. Gray stone, with a bronze canopy and an all night hallman and elevator operator. Half a block away Riverside Drive fringed the silvery flow of the Hudson River. The neighborhood was quiet, eminently respectable.

McClain dug a disgruntled superintendent out of his basement apartment. The man, of Swedish descent, was properly impressed by the visit of the law, but resentful of a four-twenty a. m. awakening.

"You've got a pass-key to Malden's apartment," Mac grunted. "Take me up and open it. I want to look around."

The super didn't object. Mac was all ready with a line of gab in case the man started asking to see a search warrant. He didn't, and a few minutes later they were on the fifth floor.

The door unlocked, Mac went into Arnold Malden's three-room suite. It was nicely decorated, nicely furnished. The living room was large and comfortable. The bedroom was done in maple and colorful chintz. There was a bath adjoining it. Also, a good sized kitchen in red and white.

"He lived here alone," the super explained. "For three years. Quiet. Tipped well and minded his business. He had a cleaning woman come in every other day. Took most of his meals out."

"What was his business?"

The superintendent shrugged. "None of mine. I don't know. He paid his rent on the first day of every month. That was good enough for me."

McClain looked around the living room. An enlargement of a camera snap was silver-framed on a table. He walked over to it. The photo was that of the

dead Malden and a pretty girl. Taken at some beach resort. There was an ocean and a beach background, sun umbrellas in the distance. Malden and the girl were in bathing suits.

While the super swung the pass-key idly, Mac flatfooted around, spilling cigar ashes en route. He noticed a pile of *Wall Street Journals* on a shelf in the hall closet. Beyond that and the picture in the silver frame there seemed nothing to interest him further.

"Thanks," he said to the superintendent. "That's all. You can take to the feathers again."

AT HEADQUARTERS McClain took a look at the flimsy on the clipboard. The medical examiner's report was on top. Mac sat down to read it over.

The bullet, fired from a .22 caliber gun, had not, so the report stated, been instantaneously fatal. There was a lot of technical stuff describing the abdominal course the lead had taken before it had found a final lodging place. The big dick skipped the medical terms. What he wanted to know about was whether Arnold Malden could have lived ten or fifteen minutes with the bullet in him.

Mac hunted up "Doc" Bagby, who had done the autopsy. The Headquarters' surgeon was a mousy little man with a wisp of a mustache and melancholy eyes. McClain thought he could understand the look in them. Bagby's trade wasn't conducive to mirth and merriment. His patients never gave him the satisfaction of recovering.

"Look, Doc. The stiff in the taxi. Could he have walked around with the lead in him?"

"It's possible."

"How far?" McClain rubbed his chin.

"I mean, how long could he have kept on his pins?"

"I don't know. Maybe five minutes, maybe longer. By the way, he had plenty of liquor onboard. There was a half pint of alcohol in his stomach."

Mac nodded and went upstairs to check with Captain Fred Mullin, Homicide's active head.

"How much have we got on the Malden lad?" he asked.

"His memo address book," Mullin answered, "gave us a couple of leads. Malden had an office at Eleven Pine Street. Investments, brokerage and bond sales. One man outfit." He reached across the desk, picked up the book mentioned and tossed it over to McClain. "Help yourself. Lots of phone numbers and addresses to play around with."

"Thanks." Mac tucked the book in his pocket. "I'll wander back uptown and see if I can find where Malden came from before getting in Shramm's heap."

He went back to the street where the taxi had been parked. Standing there, at the curb, Mac thoughtfully stared up and down the block. Where had Malden walked from? Which direction?

If the dead man had bled profusely, McClain knew, it would have been comparatively easy to pick up his trail. But he hadn't. With a shrug of his broad shoulders he went across to the same lunchroom where Charlie Shramm had stopped off and took a doughnut and a steaming cup of coffee to one of the armchairs.

While he stirred the coffee McClain thumbed through Malden's little book. As Mullin had said, there were plenty of scribbled telephone numbers and addresses. Mac combed through them, remembering the photo enlargement in the silver frame. Finally, out of the book's pages, he selected two names and two numbers. One was entitled Fran, with a telephone in the Endicott exchange. The other said Wilda, and had a Rhinelander call number.

McClain used a booth in the rear of the lunchroom. Wilda's number didn't answer. He tried the other with more success. A clear, girl's voice came over the wire.

"Police business," McClain said. "Where are you located? I want to come up and see you."

"It's much too early for gags," the voice said. "Who is this?"

McClain hung up and then got the operator back again. The business office of the telephone company supplied the information he wanted. Twenty minutes later he was on the second floor of a five-story apartment building on 71st Street near West End Avenue.

He stopped beside a door numbered 2G. From the other side of it came the ripple of piano music. Not the boogie woogie of a jive specialist, the music McClain heard was classical stuff, strictly Carnegie Hall type.

The pressure of the buzzer button cut it short. A quick tap of heels on a hardwood floor replaced it. The door opened and he looked into inquisitive dark blue eyes fringed with long, thick lashes. Sunny yellow hair caught and held the light streaming in from the window behind her. The girl was small, radiantly youthful, as pretty as Mac had seen off the screen or on any Broadway stage.

"Miss Hollister, Francisca Hollister?"

The McClain authority was pushed over so she could see it. "I called you awhile ago. The police business you thought was a gag. I want to talk to you."

She led him into the sunny room where the small grand piano he had heard stood with its keyboard away from the windows. It was a sparsely furnished room. She sat down on the piano bench. Mac looked keenly at her small, high-arched feet, the shoes she wore.

"You know Arnold Malden?" When she nodded, her white forehead wrinkling slightly, he added, "When did you see him last?"

"Yesterday— at noon. I had lunch with him. Why?"

McClain said tersely, "He had an accident. Before I tell you about it, you can give me some information."

She spoke slowly, worried he saw over the word "accident" that he had used. She said she was engaged to Malden, that she had known him for a little over three months. Then she cried softly:

"What do you mean— accident. What happened to Arnold?"

"He's dead— he was murdered."

The girl's hands went up over her pretty face. For a minute McClain thought she was about to faint. She slipped forward on the bench, steadied herself with an effort and peered at him with wide, horrified eyes.

"Ivan must have done it!" Strangled words seemed to tear from her quivering lips. "He hated Arnold! He told me I was a fool to have anything to do with him— that I was ruining my career!"

She stopped, sobbing, overcome with emotion. Mac fumbled uneasily among his battery of cigars. Finally he shook his head and let his hand come away empty.

"Who's Ivan?" he asked, quietly.

She told him and Mac got to his feet.

He looked at her somberly. It was no act. He knew enough about emotional reactions to know that these were genuine.

"Look, Miss Hollister. Don't go away. A little later on my boss will want to ask you a few questions. How about your folks? Are they here with you?"

"I live alone," she said, in a muffled tone.

"If I were you," Mac said, "I'd go in and lie down. Take it easy for awhile. You'll feel better later."

From a drug store he phoned Mullin at Centre Street and then hopped a cab, giving the block with the lunchroom as a destination. All at once Mac's spirits began to lift. Fran Hollister's tears faded out of his mind. The bloodhound in him stirred. By a stroke of luck he had grabbed himself a straight lead.

The taxi stopped in front of an old fashioned four-story private house, one building in from the corner of the street. Paying the driver off, McClain stood in the middle of the sidewalk and stared west. Shramm's rig, at the other end of the street, would be about a three minute hike for anyone under normal circumstances. But a guy with lead in his gizzard and half a pint of alcohol in his stomach would take longer.

"Five minutes, anyway," Mac said to himself. "Five minutes from the grave!"

Inside, on a vestibule directory, he found the name he wanted. It read, Ivan Russov and said, Studio 3. Mac went up a flight of narrow margined, uncarpeted stairs.

Two men in plaster-stained coveralls, with ladders, were working toward the rear on the landing above. They were doing something to the ceiling. Beyond them, a red light marked a fire exit. Mac skirted the ladder and came to a stop. A narrow flight of stairs led down. At their head were three tall galvanized-iron trash cans. They were filled to overflowing with chunks of the plaster removed from the ceiling. A tarpaulin on the floor was sprinkled with more of the plaster that gritted under McClain's oversized feet.

He sucked on his cigar meditatively. Then, as he was about to turn away, he caught the blue glint of metal from behind one of the refuse cans.

Mac pushed the can aside and leaned over. Something hot and magnetic sprayed through him as if he had touched a live wire. The workmen weren't paying any attention to him. He slipped one of Anna's best ironing jobs out of his pocket, shook the handkerchief open and reached.

When it came back he had a gun in its linen folds. He scrutinized it intently. It was a Smith and Wesson target revolver, the kind called a K-22 Masterpiece. Mac knew it fired any of the .22 caliber rim fire, short, long or long rifle cartridges. Its stock was checked walnut with the familiar S & W monogram engraved on it.

The gun that had had a workout on Arnold Malden? McClain nodded to himself. He was certain he had the murder rod.

Tucking it way, he found Studio 3 across the corridor. Its door was directly opposite the building's fire exit. Mac pressed the bell and watched the workmen. The door opened. A voice said:

"Yes? You are looking for me?"

McClain stared into a pair of dark, beady eyes. They belonged to a lanky, flat-chested man. He wore a gray flannel shirt, green corduroy trousers, carpet slippers. A cigarette drooped from one corner of his small, tight-lipped mouth.

He had a narrow head, quantities of oily black hair shot with gray. It gave him a sort of wild, temperamental look. Mac noticed his slender fingers were nicotine stained. It was hard to guess his age. He might have been thirty or fifty.

"You're Russov?"

"Yes. And you?" His voice had a flat, expressionless quality to it.

"I have an appointment with you— as of now. Police check up. How about letting me in?"

Ivan Russov stepped aside. Watching him warily, Mac was ushered into a fairly large room. Fran Hollister's living room had been sparsely furnished. This one, in addition to two grand pianos, was crowded with furniture, bookshelves, statuary and framed, autographed photographs on all four walls.

McClain gave the studio a swift, comprehensive glance. Russov didn't ask him to sit down. The man sucked in a lungful of cigarette smoke and rested against one of the pianos.

"What do you want?"

"Information. About a party named Arnold Malden. You knew him?"

"Certainly. He was here this morning— drunk. He woke me up. It was three o'clock. He wanted to come in and argue with me."

"About what?"

"A young lady. A pupil of mine. He is in love with her. He believes I am trying to break up his romance. He has threatened me several times." Russov shrugged.

"You've got a gun?"

"No."

"You've never seen this one before?"

McClain pulled out the target pistol. Russov gave it an indifferent glance. He said, "Firearms do not fit in with my line of work."

"Malden was shot last night. Killed." Mac spaced his words to give them impact. "In this building. With this gun. He was able to walk almost to the corner. Up to a taxi parked there. He got in it— with his last breath. And you're telling me you don't know anything about it?"

"Yes."

"Get your shoes on. You and I are finishing this up at Headquarters."

For the first time Russov lost some of his nonchalance. The beady black eyes widened. A flush of color crept into his thin face. He dropped the cigarette in a glass dish and said:

"You are arresting me?"

"Certainly not." Mac grinned. "Just taking you in for questioning. You and Miss Hollister. We want to know all about her relations with Malden and why you hated him so much that you tried to break up their friendship. Go ahead! Stick your feet into leather."

Two hours later, the fishy eyed, deadpanned Captain Mullin tipped back in his swivel chair at Headquarters and glanced at Mac.

"No good, Dave. Russov can't be budged. Sticks to his story. Says he had words with Malden through the door, turned him away and went back to bed. I gave him the full count but no sale. A tough baby."

"How about the gal?"

"Her, too. She admits being in love with Malden. If she's lying, it's a good act. Last time she saw him was at noon yesterday— like she told you. She was going to be married to him the first of next month."

McClain fingered the piece of lead extracted from Arnold Malden. Ballistics reported it had been fired from the K-22 he had found on Russov's landing. He turned it over idly in his hand, put it back on Mullin's desk and shook his head.

"Maybe the guy's leveling, chief. He had a motive, sure. He could even make it self-defense if he wanted. Malden tried to bust into his studio to beat him up. He gunned him to keep him off. It fits."

"No, it don't." Captain Mullin shook his head. "There were no prints on that target revolver. People shooting in self-defense don't bother to put on gloves or wipe their prints away before getting rid of the weapon. And they wouldn't hold out on using that angle to hide behind. I'm turning Russov loose, the dame, too. You'll have to do better if you want it to stick."

"Okay." Mac moved his shoulders. "No sleep from three this morning, but that's all right. Let's see what I can do."

"Play it smart," Mullin told him. "And while you're doing that, find out where Malden got the ten grand he put in his personal checking account last Wednesday. Might have some bearing on his bow out."

"Ten G's?"

"Hartley raked over Malden's office at Eleven Pine. The bankbook was in his top drawer."

McClain went down to the squad room. He washed, combed his hair and, with a fresh cheroot fuming, walked out of Headquarters. He thought about the beady-eyed Russov. Mullin did funny things sometimes. Maybe he had deliberately turned Russov loose with the idea that the music teacher would cross himself up.

Maybe, Mac thought, the lanky man with the small, tight-lipped mouth had a yen for pretty Fran Hollister himself. Then Mac's thoughts centered about the ten-thousand-dollar deposit Mullin had mentioned. That didn't seem too important. In the brokerage-investment racket Malden engaged in, an amount of dough like that might have been a client's ante for some stock he wanted.

"Only," McClain said to himself, "why did he sock it away in his private account?"

It was after five o'clock when, following through on the other name conned from Malden's address book, he entered an apartment building in the East 50's. This was different from any of the stops he had previously made that day. It was an expensive layout, higher class than the place Arnold Malden had lived in. This building had an air of wealth and exclusiveness.

A liveried hallman tried to stop McClain from going up to the apartment he wanted, without being announced. He didn't succeed and a few minutes later Mac was on the thirteenth floor. He wandered down its heavily carpeted length, thumbed a button that produced chimes and looked into the broad, not too intelligent face of a maid who was adjusting her apron straps while she peered out at him.

"Miss Weston in?" When the girl said she wasn't, Mac, with a foot in the door, added, "I'm a friend of hers. She expects me. She's coming home soon?" When the maid nodded, he said, "I'll step in and wait."

The girl didn't object. Which explained why thefts were so common in Manhattan, Mac thought, when she led him into an attractively appointed sitting room. She went out without further comment. He put his hat down on a polished table, rubbed his chin reflectively and started wandering around.

The telephone company had given him Wilda Weston's last name and address when he had supplied her telephone number. Not finding her home, to Mac, was something that might or might not be a lucky break. In any event he decided to make good use of his time.

From the sitting room he quietly opened doors. After a minute or two he found himself in a mauve-and-gold bedroom. The faint odor of perfume lingered on the air. He listened carefully. He didn't want the maid to find him there.

From some other section of the apartment he heard her moving around. Quickly, Mac pulled open more doors until he found the one he wanted. He was back in the sitting room, cooling his heels and down to the last inch of his stogy when a key grated in the front door's latch. The door opened and closed.

A girl came in— slowly, hesitantly, curiously.

McClain remembered his manners and climbed to his feet. He had the impression of burnished, coppery hair. Of gray-green eyes, a skin almost golden in its warmth. Of curved, vividly red lips and a slender, streamlined figure that was set off to advantage by the smart light woolen dress she wore, the short, fur-collared jacket she slipped off as the gray-green eyes rested on him inquiringly.

She was poised and sure of herself.

Every action and mannerism told Mac that.

"You're Miss Weston. I'm McClain. Plain-clothes detective from Homicide. I'm checking on murder. Arnold Malden's murder early this morning."

"You want to know— what?"

"When did you see him last?"

"In his office, last Wednesday." Her voice was fascinatingly husky. If she were surprised by her visitor's blunt, abrupt questioning, she masked it well.

"Why did you go to his office?"

"To invest some money."

"Ten thousand dollars, for instance?"

The gray-green eyes widened slightly. She seemed about to say, "How did you know?" and changed it to, "Yes, that's right."

"Then Malden was only a business acquaintance?" McClain gave her a sharp look.

"Only that. He made investments for me— from time to time."

Mac shook his head. "That doesn't stand up. Sorry: You'll have to do better."

"What do you mean?" Her tone quickened.

"Sit down, Miss Weston." He waved a big hand at the chair. "Let's talk this out. Last night you followed Malden. You followed him after you said good-night to him. Maybe he told you where he was going— to a building in the Fifties. To see a party named Russov about a babe named Fran Hollister."

Wilda Weston pursed her lips. She smiled faintly. "I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's all right. Few do— at first. I'll give you a memory refresher without charge. You tailed Malden because he was cutting loose from you and about to commit matrimony with one of Russov's piano pupils. The Miss Hollister mentioned. Stop me if I'm wrong."

She didn't say anything and McClain went on. "You had a gun with you, a twenty-two caliber job. There are two stairways in Russov's building. Front and rear. You picked the rear one and waited. Malden didn't get in to take Russov apart. So you went into action. You drilled Malden from one of the steps down from the landing, stashed the cannon back of one of the refuse cans there and blew in a hurry."

STILL the girl said nothing. Mac noticed her hands, slender and white. There was no movement to them, no nervousness.

"I figured it was an amateur's job. Because," he told her, "a real gunny or hood wouldn't let a victim walk away. They'd stick around and make sure he was blacked out before exiting. Malden was able to get down the stairs and almost to the corner before he went in for harp strumming."

Wilda Weston laughed. It was a low, amused little laugh. She walked over to the polished table where Mac's hat rested. She pushed that aside and took a cigarette out of a silver humidor.

"So this is a demonstration of theory and deduction?" she drawled. "How can you prove what you say?"

"That won't be too rough. First, Malden is in a bathing suit picture with you up in his apartment. I don't know. Maybe these brokerage guys take their clients out and get snapped with their arms around them, gazing fondly into each other's eyes. But that was only a pale lead. I've been here for some twenty minutes. I had time to give the closet in the bedroom a gander. Lots of shoes in it. One pair interested me."

She seemed to freeze. The golden face whitened a little.

"Shoes?"

"One pair with some plaster ground into the soles and heels. Stuff from the landing outside Russov's door and on the rear steps. That's important; rule one in anybody's murder book. Clean your shoes when you walk on foreign matter that can be traced. Otherwise— trouble."

He broke it off fast. Wilda Weston's hand had dropped to the drawer in the table beside which she stood. She opened it and snatched a gun out of it in one smooth, quick move.

Wheeling, the gun drew a bead on Dave McClain!

He saw it was a copy of the K-22 he found back of the can. One of a pair. But he was more interested in the set of the girl's mouth and what was in her eyes than the make of the weapon she gripped.

"I killed Arnold," she said, her voice like ice, "because he was a liar and a cheat! Because he took my money, not to buy bonds, but to buy himself a honeymoon! I did a little private investigating myself. I killed him and I'm glad! But I'm not going to pay for it— he wasn't worth it!"

"So," McClain murmured, "you're going to bump me and walk? Not far, Miss Weston. Remember, I said I was here for twenty minutes before you came in."

Arched, narrow brows drew together. The lids came down over her gray-green eyes. Mac's heart was beating it out; eight to the bar. He didn't know if it were going to work, but he figured it was his only chance.

A gal with a gun, keyed up as high as this coppery haired beauty, was twice as dangerous as any of the killers he had tangled with in the past. The rats he had mixed with played it out in orthodox fashion. This amateur murderess didn't know the rules.

Sweat began to trickle down the backs of his ears. He had told his sister Anna to have dinner at seven. Anna was a good cook and he hoped he'd be around to eat it. He drew a deep, silent breath and took the plunge.

"I'm allergic to bullets," he went on in the same quiet, conversational tone. "In the twenty minutes I found something else besides the shoes in your closet. That target revolver you're holding. I thought it might be an idea to do what

the comedians advise— get the lead out. You're holding an empty shooter, honey!"

She fell for it like a ton of brick. With a smothered exclamation the gun moved slightly away from McClain as her gaze dropped to it. His forward lunge carried him over to her. He had her pistol wrist in his big, tight grip before she could squeeze the trigger.

McClain tore the K-22 away from her and grinned.

"Sit down, Miss Weston, before we go slumming to Centre Street. In the future, if you happen to have one, take my advice."

She didn't ask what it was and he gave it to her, gratis, a minute later. Breaking the revolver and turning it so she could see the brass circle of cartridges in its chambers,

Dave McClain said:

"When anybody tells you a gun's unloaded, shoot before you see the white of his lies!"

———————————

15: The Locked Box

Don Marquis

1878-1937

In: *Carter, and Other People*, 1921

IT WAS a small, oblong affair, not more than three inches wide or deep, by twice that much in length, made of some dark, hard wood; brass bound and with brass lock and brass hinges; altogether such a box as a woman might choose to keep about her room for any one of a half dozen possible uses.

Clarke did not remember that he had ever seen it prior to his unexpectedly early return from a western trip of a month's duration. He thought he would give his wife a pleasant surprise, so he did not telephone the news of his arrival to the house, but went home and entered her room unannounced. As he came in his wife hastily slipped something into the box, locked it, and put it into one of the drawers of her desk. Then she came to meet him, and he would not have thought of the matter at all had it not been for just the slightest trace of confusion in her manner.

She was glad to see him. She always was after his absences, but it seemed to him that she was exceptionally so this time. She had never been a demonstrative woman; but it seemed to Clarke that she came nearer that description on the occasion of this home-coming than ever before. They had a deal to say to each other, and it was not until after dinner that the picture of his wife hurriedly disposing of the box crossed Clarke's consciousness again. Even then he mentioned it casually because they were talked out of more important topics rather than because of any very sharp curiosity. He asked her what it was; what was in it.

"Oh, nothing!— nothing of any importance— nothing at all," she said; and moved over to the piano and began one of his favorite airs. And he forgot the box again in an instant. She had always been able to make Clarke forget things, when she wanted to. But the next day it suddenly came to him, out of that nowhere-in-particular from which thoughts come to mortals, that she had been almost as much confused at his sudden question as she had at his previous sudden entrance.

Clarke was not a suspicious person; not even a very curious one, as a rule. But it was so evident to him that there was something in that box which his wife did not wish him to see that he could not help but wonder. Always frank with her, and always accustomed to an equal candor on her part, it occurred to him that he would ask her again, in something more than a casual way, and that she would certainly tell him, at the same time clearing up her former hesitation. But no!— why should he ask her? That would be to make

something out of nothing; this was a trifle, and not worth thinking about. But he continued thinking about it, nevertheless....

Ah, he had it! What a chump he had been, not to guess it sooner! His birthday was only ten days off, and his wife had been planning to surprise him with a remembrance of some sort. Of course! That accounted for the whole thing.

With this idea in his head, he said nothing more about the box, but waited. And when dinner was over and they sat before the fire together, on the evening of the anniversary, he still forbore to mention it, expecting every moment that the next she would present him with the token. But as the evening wore away, with no sign on her part, he finally broke an interval of silence with the remark:

"Well, dear, don't keep me guessing any longer! Bring it to me!"

"Guessing? Bring you—what?" And he could see that she was genuinely puzzled.

"Why, my birthday present."

"Why, my dear boy! And did you expect one? And I had forgotten! Positively forgotten— it *is* your birthday, isn't it, Dickie! If I had only known you *wanted* one—" And she came up and kissed him, with something like contrition, although his birthday had never been one of the sentimental anniversaries which she felt bound to observe with gifts.

"Don't feel bad about it—I don't care, you know— really," he said. "Only, I thought you had something of the sort in that brass-bound box— that was the only reason I mentioned it."

"Brass-bound box— why, no, I— I forgot it. I'm ashamed of myself, but I forgot the date entirely!"

But she volunteered no explanation of what the box contained, although the opportunity was so good a one.

And Clarke wondered more than ever.

What could it be? The letters of some former sweetheart? Well, all girls had sweethearts before they married, he supposed; at least all men did. He had had several himself. There was nothing in that. And he would not make an ass of himself by saying any more about it.

Only... he could not remember any old sweethearts that he wouldn't have told Agnes all about, if she had asked him. He had no secrets from her. But she had a secret from him... innocent enough, of course. But still, a secret. There was none of those old sweethearts of his whose letters he cared to keep after five years of marriage. And there was no... But, steady! Where were his reflections leading him? Into something very like suspicion? Positively, yes; to

the verge of it. Until Agnes got ready to tell him all about it, he would forget that damned box!

And if she never got ready, why, that was all right, too. She was his wife, and he loved her... and that settled it.

Perhaps that should have settled it, but it did not. Certain healthy-looking, fleshy specimens of humanity are said to succumb the quickest to pneumonia, and it may be that the most ingenuous natures suffer the most intensely with suspicion, when once thoroughly inoculated.

ii

CLARKE fought against it, cursing his own baseness. But the very effort necessary to the fight showed him the persistence of the thing itself. He loved his wife, and trusted her, he told himself over and over again, and in all their relations hitherto there had never been the slightest deviation from mutual confidence and understanding. What did he suspect? He could not have told himself. He went over their life together in his mind. In the five years of their married life, he could not have helped but notice that men were attracted to her. Of course they were. That was natural. She was a charming woman. He quite approved of it; it reflected credit upon him, in a way. He was not a Bluebeard of a husband, to lock a wife up and deny her the society proper to her years. And her very catholicity of taste, the perfect frankness of her enjoyment of masculine attention, had but served to make his confidence all the more complete. True, he had never thought she loved him as much as he loved her... but now that he came to think of it, was there not a warmer quality to her affection since his return from this last trip west? Was there not a kind of thoughtfulness, was there not a watchful increase in attentiveness, that he had always missed before? Was she not making love to him every day now; just as he had always made love to her before? Were not the parts which they had played for the five years of their married life suddenly reversed? They were! Indeed they were! And what did that mean? What did that portend? Did the brass-bound box have aught to do with that? What was the explanation of this change?

The subtle imp of suspicion turned this matter of the exchanged rôles into capital. Clarke, still ashamed of himself for doing it, began covertly to watch his wife; to set traps of various kinds for her. He said nothing more about the box, but within six months after the first day upon which he had seen it, it became the constant companion of his thoughts.

What did he suspect? Not even now could he have said. He suspected nothing definite; vaguely, he suspected anything and everything. If his wife

noticed his changed manner towards her, she made no sign. If anything, her efforts to please him, her attentiveness, her thoughtfulness in small things, increased.

iii

THERE CAME a day when he could stand this self-torture no longer, he thought. He came home from his office— Clarke was a partner in a prosperous real-estate concern— at an hour when he thought his wife not yet returned from an afternoon of call making, determined to end the matter once for all.

He went to her room, found the key to her desk, and opened the drawer. He found the box, but It was locked, and he began rummaging through the drawers, and among the papers and letters therein, for the key.

Perhaps she carried it with her. Very well, then, he would break it open! With the thing in his hand he began to look around for something with which to force the fastenings, and was about deciding that he would take it down to the basement, and use the hatchet, when he heard a step. He turned, just as his wife entered the room.

Her glance traveled from the box in his hand to the ransacked desk, and rested there inquiringly for a moment. Strangely enough, in view of the fact that he felt himself an injured husband and well within his rights, it was Clarke who became confused, apologetic, and evasive under her gaze. He essayed a clumsy lie:

"Agnes," he began, indicating the desk, "I— I got a bill to-day from Meigs and Horner, for those furs, you know— I was sure that the account had been settled— that you had paid them, and had shown me the receipt—that you had paid them from your allowance, you know— and I thought I would come home and look up the receipt."

It was very lame; and very lamely done, at that, as he felt even while he was doing it. But it gave him an opportunity of setting the box down on the desk almost in a casual manner, as if he had picked it up quite casually, while he began to tumble the papers again with his hands.

"The receipt is here," she said; and got it for him.

The box lay between them, but they did not look at it, nor at each other, and they both trembled with agitation.

Each knew that the thoughts of the other were on nothing except that little locked receptacle of wood and brass, yet neither one referred to it; and for a full half minute they stood with averted faces, and fumbling hands, and played out the deception.

Finally she looked full at him, and drew a long breath, as if the story were coming now; and there was in her manner a quality of softness— almost of sentimentality, Clarke felt. She was getting ready to try and melt him into a kind of sympathy for her frailty, was she! Well, that would not work with him! And with the receipted bill waving in his hand, he made it the text of a lecture on extravagance, into which he plunged with vehemence.

Why did he not let her speak? He would not admit the real reason to himself, just then. But in his heart he was afraid to have her go on. Afraid, either way it turned. If she were innocent of any wrong, he would have made an ass of himself— and much worse than an ass. If she were guilty, she might melt him into a weak forgiveness in spite of her guilt! No, she must not speak... not now! If she were innocent, how could he confess his suspicions to her and acknowledge his baseness? And besides... women were so damned clever... whatever was in that box, she might fool him about it, somehow!

And then, "Good God!" he thought, "I have got to the place where I hug my suspicion to me as a dearer thing than my love, have I? Have I got so low as that?"

While these thoughts raced and rioted through his mind, his lips were feverishly pouring out torrents in denunciation of feminine extravagance. Even as he spoke he felt the black injustice of his speech, for he had always encouraged his wife, rather than otherwise, in the expenditure of money; his income was a good one; and the very furs which formed the text of his harangue he had helped her select and even urged upon her.

It was their first quarrel, if that can be called a quarrel which has only one side to it. For she listened in silence, with white lips and hurt eyes, and a face that was soon set into a semblance of hard indifference. He stormed out of the room, ashamed of himself, and feeling that he had disgraced the name of civilization.

iv

ASHAMED of himself, indeed; but before the angel of contrition could take full possession of his nature, the devil of suspicion, the imp of the box, regained its place.

For why had she not answered him? She knew he cared nothing about the trivial bill, the matter of the furs, he told himself. Why had she not insisted on a hearing, and told him about the box? She knew as well as he that that was what he had broken into her desk to get!

Justice whispered that she had been about to speak, and that he had denied her the chance. But the imp of the box said that an honest woman

would have *demanded* the chance— would have persisted until she got it! And thus, his very shame, and anger at himself, were cunningly turned and twisted by the genius of the brass-bound box into a confirmation of his suspicions.

v

SUSPICIONS? Nay, convictions! Beliefs. Certainties!

They were certainties, now! Certainties to Clarke's mind, at least. For in a month after this episode he had become a silent monomaniac on the subject of the brass-bound box. He felt shame no longer. She was guilty. Of just what, he did not know. But guilty. Guilty as Hell itself, he told himself, rhetorically, in one of the dumb rages which now became so frequent with him.

Guilty— guilty— guilty— the clock on the mantelpiece ticked off many dragging hours of intolerable minutes to that tune, while Clarke lay awake and listened. *Guilty— guilty— guilty—* repeat any word often enough, and it will hypnotize you. *Guilty— guilty— guilty—* so he and the clock would talk to each other, back and forth, the whole night through. If any suggestions of his former, more normal habits of thought came to him now it was they that were laughed out of court; it was they that were flung away and scorned as traitors.

She was guilty. But he would be crafty! He would be cunning. He would make no mistake. He would allow her no subterfuge. He would give her no chance to snare him back into a condition of half belief. There should be no juggling explanations. They were clever as the devil, women were! But this one should have no chance to fool him again. She had fooled him too long already.

And she kept trying to fool him. Shortly after his outburst over the furs, she began again a series of timid advances which would have struck him as pathetic had he not known that her whole nature was corroded and corrupted with deceit, with abominable deceit. She was trying to make him believe that she did not know why he was angry and estranged, was she? He would show her! He hated her now, with that restless, burning intensity of hatred known only to him who has injured another. A hatred that consumed his own vitality, and made him sick in soul and body. The little sleep he got was passed in uneasy dreams of his revenge; and his waking hours were devoted to plots and plans of the form which it should take. Oh, but she had been cunning to fool him for so long; but she should see! She should see! When the time for action came, she should see!

vi

SOMETHING, one tense and feverish midnight, when he lay in his bed snarling and brooding and chuckling— a kind of snapping sense in some remote interior chamber of his brain, followed by a nervous shock that made him sit upright— warned him that the time for action was at hand. What is it that makes sinners, at provincial revival meetings, suddenly aware that the hours of dalliance are past and the great instant that shall send them to "the mourners' bench" is at hand? Somehow, they seem to know! And, somehow, Clarke felt an occult touch and knew that his time for action had arrived.

He did not care what came afterwards. Any jury in the world, so he told himself, ought to acquit him of his deed, when they once knew his story; when they once looked at the damning evidence of her guilt which she had hidden away for so long in the brass-bound box. But if they did not acquit him, that was all right, too. His work in the world would have been done; he would have punished a guilty woman. He would have shown that all men are not fools.

But he did not spend a great deal of thought on how other people would regard what he was about to do. As he crept down the hall with the knife in his hand, his chief sensation was a premonitory itch, a salty tang of pleasure in the doing of the deed itself. When hatred comes in where love has gone out, there may be a kind of voluptuary delight in the act of murder.

Very carefully he opened the door of her room. And then he smiled to himself, and entered noisily; for what was the need of being careful about waking up a woman who was already dead? He did not care whether he killed her in her sleep or not;— indeed, if she wakened and begged for her life, he thought it might add a certain zest to the business. He should enjoy hearing her plead. He would not mind prolonging things.

But things were not prolonged. His hand and the muscles of his forearm had tensed so often with the thought, with the idea, that the first blow went home. She never waked.

vii

HE GOT THE BOX, and opened it.

Inside was a long envelope, and written on that were the words:

"To be opened by my husband only after my death."

That time had come!

Within the envelope was a letter. It was dated on the day of his return from his western trip, a few months before. He read:

"Dick, I love you!

"Does it seem strange to you that I should write it down?

"Listen, Dickie dear— I *had* to write it! I couldn't tell you when I was alive— but I just had to tell you, too. And now that I am dead, what I say will come to you with all of its sweetness increased; and all of its bitterness left out! It will, now that I am dead— or if you die first, you will never see this. This is from beyond the grave to you, Dickie dear, to make all your life good to you afterwards!

"Now, listen, dear, and don't be hard on me.

"When I married you, Dickie, I *didn't* love you! You were wild about me. But I only *liked* you very much. It wasn't really love. It wasn't what you *deserved*. But I was only a girl, and you were the first man, and I didn't know things; I didn't know what I *should have* felt.

"Later, when I realized how very much you cared, I was ashamed of myself. I grew to see that I had done wrong in marrying you. Wrong to both of us. For no woman should marry a man she doesn't love. And I was ashamed, and worried about it. You were so good to me! So sweet—and you never suspected that I didn't care like I should. And because you were so good and sweet to me, I felt *worse*. And I made up my mind you should *never* know! That I would be everything to you any woman could be. I tried to be a good wife. Wasn't I, Dickie, even then?

"But I prayed and prayed and prayed. 'O God,' I used to say, 'let me love him like he loves me!' It was five years, Dickie, and I *liked* you more, and *admired* you more, and saw more in you that was worth while, every week; but still, no miracle happened.

"And then one morning *a miracle did happen!*

"It was when you were on that trip West. I had gone to bed thinking how kind and dear you were. I missed you, Dickie dear, and *needed* you. And when I woke up, there was a change over the world. I felt so different, somehow. It had come! Wasn't it wonderful, Dickie?— it had come! And I sang all that day for joy. I could hardly wait for you to come home so that I could tell you. I loved you, loved you, loved you, Dickie, *as you deserved!* My prayers had been answered, somehow— or maybe it was what any woman would do just living near you and being with you.

"And then I saw *I couldn't tell you, after all!*

"For if I told you I loved you now, that would be to tell you that for five years *I hadn't loved you*, Dickie!

"And how would *that* make you feel? Wouldn't that have been like a knife, Dickie?

"Oh, I wanted you to know! *How* I wanted you to know! But, you see, I couldn't tell you, could I, dear, without telling the other, too? I just *had* to save

you from that! And I just had to make you feel it, somehow or other. And I *will* make you feel it, Dickie!

"But I can't tell you. Who knows what ideas you might get into your head about those five years, if I told you now? Men are so queer, and they can be so stupid sometimes! And I can't bear to think of losing one smallest bit of your love... not now! It would *kill* me!

"But I want you to know, sometime. And so I'm writing you— it's my first love letter— the first real one, Dickie. If *you* die first, I'll tell you in Heaven. And if *I* die first, you'll understand!"

_____

16: A Voluntary Death

François Coppée

1842-1908

Transl. Walter Learned, 1847-1915.

In: *Ten Tales,* Harper (USA), 1890

I KNEW THE POET Louis Miraz very well, in the old times in the Latin Quarter, where we used to take our meals together at a crémerie on the Rue de Seine, kept by an old Polish woman whom we nicknamed the Princess Chocolawska, on account of the enormous bowl of créme and chocolate which she exposed daily in the show-window of her shop. It was possible to dine there for ten sous, with "two breads," an "ordinaire for thirty centimes," and a "small coffee."

Some who were very nice spent a sou more for a napkin.

Besides some young men who were destined to become geniuses, the ordinary guests of the crémerie were some poor compatriots of the proprietress, who had all to some extent commanded armies. There was, above all, an imposing and melancholy old fellow with a white beard, whose old befrogged cloak, shabby boots, and old hat, which looked as if snails had crawled over it, presented a poem of misery, and whom the other Poles treated with a marked respect, for he had been a dictator for three days.

It was, moreover, at the Princess Chocolawska's that I knew a singular fool, who gained his bread by giving German lessons, and declared himself a convert to Buddhism. On the mantle of the miserable room, where he lived with a milliner of Saint-Germain, was enthroned an ugly little Buddha in jade, fixing his hypnotized eyes on his navel, and holding his great toes in his hands. The German professor accorded to the idol the most profound veneration, but on the epoch of quarter-day he was sometimes forced to carry him to the Mont-de-piété, upon which he fell into a state of sombre chagrin, and did not recover his serenity until he was able to make amends for his impious act. He never failed, moreover, to renew his avowals in prosperous times, and finally to take his god out of pawn.

As to Louis Miraz, he had the deep eyes, the pale complexion, and the long and dishevelled hair of all those young men who come to town in third-class carriages to conquer glory, who spend more for midnight oil than for beefsteaks, and who, rich already with some manuscripts, have thrown out to great Paris from the height of some hill in its environs the classic defiance of Rastignac. At that time my hair was archaic enough in length to grease the collar of my coat. Thus we were made to understand each other, and Louis Miraz soon took me to his attic-room in the Rue des Quatre-Vents, where he dragged two thousand alexandrines over me.

Seriously, they were fresh and charming verses, with the inspiration of spring-tide, having the perfume of the first lilacs, and *Forest Birds* (the title of that collection of poems which Louis Miraz published a little while after he read them to me) will retain a place among the volumes in the first rank of belles-lettres, by the side of those poets of a single book—of the Daudet of the Amoureuses, for example.

For Miraz wrote no more verse. A young eaglet seeking the upper air, he made his eyrie on the summit of Montmartre, and for quite a while we lost sight of him. Then I found his name again in Sunday journals and reviews, when he began to write those short and exquisite sketches which have made his reputation. Thus five years passed, when I met him one day in the editor's office of a journal for which I worked.

EACH OF US was as much pleased as the other at thus meeting again; and after the first "What, is that you? Is that you?" we stood facing each other, shaking hands, and exposing, in a laugh of cordial delight, our teeth, which in old times we used to exercise on the same crust of poverty. He had not changed. He had not even sacrificed his long hair, which he threw back with the graceful movement of a horse who tosses his mane. Only he had the clear complexion and calm eye of a contented man, and his slim figure was clad in most fashionable costume.

"We won't drift apart again, will we?" said he, affectionately, taking me by the arm; and he led me out in the boulevard, where the April sun gilded the young leaves of the plane-trees.

Ah, happy day! How we exhausted the "Don't you remembers?" "Do you remember the fried eggs which tasted of straw, and the dreadful rice-milk of the Princess Chocolawska? and the melancholy air of the old dictator? and the German who used to pawn his god every three months?" At last those days of hardship were finished. He had from afar applauded my success, as I had watched his. But one thing I did not know, and that was that he had married a woman whom he adored, and that he had a charming little girl.

"Come and see them; you shall dine with me."

I let myself be persuaded, and he carried me down to the Enclos des Ternes, where he lived in a cottage among the trees. There everything made you welcome. No sooner had we opened the door of the garden than a young dog frisked about our feet.

"Down, Gavroche! He will soil your clothes."

But at the sound of the bell Madame Miraz appeared at the steps with her little daughter in her arms. An imposing and beautiful blond, her well-moulded figure wrapped in a blue gown.

"Put on a plate more. I've an old comrade with me."

And the happy father, keeping his hat on his head and carrying his little girl, showed me all over his establishment— the dining-room, brightened by light bits of faience, the study, abounding in books, with its window opening out on the green turf, so that a puff of wind had strewn with rose-leaves the printer's proofs which were scattered on the table.

"This is only a beginning, you know. It wasn't so long ago that we were working for three sous a line."

And while I luxuriated under a blossoming Judas-tree which I saw in the garden, Miraz, at ease in his home, had slipped into his working-vest, put on his slippers, and, lying on his sofa, caught little Helen in his arms to toss her in the air— "Houp la! Houp la!"

I do not remember ever to have had a more perfect impression of contentment. We dined pleasantly—two good courses, that was all; a dinner without pretence, where we served ourselves with the pepper-mill. The charming Madame Miraz presided with her bright smile, having her child by her side in a high-chair. She spoke but little, but her sweet and intelligent attention followed our light and paradoxical chat, the good-humored fooling of men of letters; and at the dessert she took a rose from the bouquet which ornamented the table, and placed it in her hair near her ear with a supreme grace. She was indeed that lovely and silent friend whom a dreamer requires.

We took our coffee in the study— they intended to furnish the salon very soon with the price of a story to be published by Levy— then, as the evening was cool, a fire of sticks and twigs was built, and while we smoked, Miraz and I, recalling old memories, the mistress of the house, holding on her knees little Helen, now ready for bed, made her repeat "Our Father" and "Hail Mary," which the little one lisped, rubbing her little feet together before the warm flame.

WE SAW EACH OTHER again, often at first, then less frequently, the difficult and complicated life of literary labor taking us each his own way. So the years passed. We met, shook hands. "Everything going well?" "Splendidly." And that was all. Then, later, I found the name of Louis Miraz but rarely in the journals and periodicals. "Happy man; he is resting," I said to myself, remembering that he was spoken of as having made a small fortune. Finally, last autumn, I learned that he was seriously ill.

I hurried to see him. He still lived at the Enclos des Ternes; but on this sombre day of the last of November the little house seemed cold, and looked naked among the leafless trees. It seemed to me shrunken and diminished, like everything that we have not seen for a long time.

The dog was probably dead, for his bark no longer answered the sound of the bell when I passed the little gate and entered the garden, all strewn with dead leaves where the night's frost had withered the last chrysanthemums.

It was not Madame Miraz— she was absent— it was Helen who received me, Helen, who had grown to be a great girl of fourteen, with an awkward manner. She opened for me the door of her father's study, and brusquely lifting her great black eyelashes, turned on me a timid and distressed glance.

I found Miraz huddled in an easy-chair in the corner of the fireplace, wrapped in a sort of bed-gown, with gray locks streaking his long hair; and by the cold, clammy hand which he reached towards me, by the pallid face which he turned upon me, I knew that he was lost. Horrible! I found in my unhappy comrade that worn and ruined look which used to strike us formerly among the poor Poles of the crémerie.

"Ah, well, old man, things are not going well?"

"Deucedly bad, my boy," he answered, with a heart-breaking smile. "I am going out stupidly with consumption, as they do in the fifth act, you know, when the venerable doctor, with a head like Béranger, feels the first walking gentleman's pulse, and lifts his eyes towards heaven, saying, 'The death-struggle approaches!' Only the difference is that with me it continues; it will not conclude, the death-struggle. Smoke away; that doesn't disturb me," he added, seeing me put my cigar one side, his cough sounding like a death-rattle.

I tried to find encouraging words. I talked with him, holding him by the hand and patting him affectionately on the shoulder; but my voice had in my own ears the empty hollowness of deceit, and Miraz, looking at me, seemed to pity my efforts.

I was silent.

"Look," said he, pointing to his table; "see my work-bench. For six months I have not been able to write."

It was true. Nothing could be more sad than that heap of papers covered with dust, and in an old Roman plate there was a bundle of pens, crusted with ink, and like those trophies of rusty foils which hang on the walls of old fencers.

I made a new attempt to revive him. Die! at his age. Nonsense! He wasn't taking care of himself. He must pass the winter in the South, drink a good draught of sunlight. He could. He was easy in his money matters.

But he stopped me, putting his hand on my arm.

"Listen," he said, gravely, "we have seen each other seldom, but you are my oldest, perhaps my best, friend. You have proved me pen in hand. Well, I am going to tell you something in confidence, for you to keep to yourself, unless it may serve on some occasion to discourage the young literary

aspirants who bring their manuscripts to you— always a praiseworthy action. Yes, I have been successful. Yes, I have been paid a franc a line. Yes, I have made money, and there in that drawer are a certain number of yellow, green, and red papers from which a bit is clipped every six months, and which represent three or four thousand francs of income. It is rare in our profession, and to gain that poor hoard I have been obliged— I, a poet— to imitate the unsociable virtues of a bourgeois, know how to deny a jewel to my wife, a dress to my daughter. At last I have that money. And I often said to myself, if I should die their bread is assured, and here is a little marriage portion for Helen! And I was content— I was proud!— for I know them, the stories of our widows and our orphans, the fourpenny help of the government, the tobacco shops for six hundred francs in the province, and, if the daughter is intelligent and pretty like mine, the dramatic author, an old friend of the father, who advises her to enter the Conservatoire, and who makes of her— mercy of God! that shall never be. But for all that, my boy, it is necessary that I should not linger. Sickness is expensive, and already it has been necessary to sell one or two bonds from that drawer. To seek the sunlight, as you suggest, to bask like a lizard at Cannes or at Menton, one more bond must go, and there would not be enough to last to the end, if I should wait for seven or eight years more, now that I can no longer write. Happily, there is nothing to fear. But what I have suffered since I have been incapable of writing, and have felt my hoard of gold shrink and diminish in my hand like the Magic Skin of Balzac, is frightful. Now you understand me, do you not? and you will no longer bid me take care of myself. No; if you still pray to God, ask him to send me speedily to the undertaker's."

FIFTEEN DAYS later some thirty of us followed the hearse which carried Louis Miraz to the Cemetery Montmartre. It had snowed the day before, and Doctor Arnould, the old frequenter of painters' studios, the friend and physician of the dead man, walking behind me, called in his brusque voice,

"Very commonplace, but always terrible the contrast: a burial in the snow— black on white. The Funeral of the Poor, by the late Vigneron, isn't to be ridiculed. Brr!"

At last we came to the edge of the grave. The place and the time were sad. Under a cloudy sky the little yew-trees, swayed by the wind, threw down their burdens of melted snow. The by-standers had formed a circle, and were watching the grave-diggers, who were lowering the coffin by cords. Near a cross-bearer, whose short surplice permitted the bottom of his trousers to be seen, the priest waited with a finger in his book; and, having grasped the rim of his hat under his left arm, the orator of the Society of Men of Letters already

held in his black-gloved hand the funeral oration, hastily patched up by the aid of a comrade over a couple of glasses at the corner of a café table.

Suddenly, as the priest began his Latin prayers, Doctor Arnould seized me by the arm and whispered in my ear,

"You know that he killed himself?"

I looked at him with astonishment. But he pointed to the group in black, composed of Madame Miraz and her daughter, who were sobbing under their long veils and clasping each other in a tragic embrace, and he added,

"For them. Yes, for six months he threw all his medicines in the fire, and designedly committed all sorts of imprudences. He confessed it to me before his death. I had not understood it at all— I, who had expected to prolong his life at least three years by creosote. At last the other night, when it was freezing cold, he left his window open, as if by forgetfulness, and was taken with bleeding at the lungs. Yes, that he might leave bread for those two women. The curé does not dream that he is blessing a suicide. But what of it, my good fellow? Miraz is in the paradise of the brave. The details of such a death. Eh? It is tougher than the passage of the Bridge of Arcole."

———————

17: The Affair of the San Mona Spring

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

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Oppenheim wrote hundreds of short stories for the high-paying American "slick" magazines (so called for their high quality shiny paper, as distinct from the low paying "pulp" magazines with their crude pulp paper). They were frequently in the form of a series of stories with a central character, later collected into a book. This was the first of a series later collected as "Mysteries of the Riviera", 1922. The introduction immediately below comes from the 1922 book.

Note by Colonel Green.—

To the best of my ability, I have tried here to recount such few of the adventures of Mr. Edmund H. Martin as came under my personal notice. That I, Colonel Green, a retired medical officer, sixty-seven years old, of quiet habits but observant disposition, should have become the Boswell of this amazing young man, must always remain to me an insoluble puzzle. I have no explanations to offer— only these facts to present. I shall commence unfashionably at the beginning, I shall try to show how imperceptibly our companionship grew, and I shall find courage, as I proceed, to relate those more sensational adventures, my own share in which, even at the present moment, fills me sometimes with feelings of mingled apprehension and wonder.

AT about nine o'clock on a brilliant February morning, the motor-omnibus which had been down to meet the train *de luxe* from England came into sight, ascending the winding roadway to the Paradise Hotel. About a dozen of us were loitering in front to watch the new arrivals. It had become quite a source of amusement with some of the habitués of the place to watch the confident arrival of newcomers, and to see them pass through the various grades of doubt to despair when they inquired what accommodation could be offered them in this highly popular caravanserai.

On this occasion, the omnibus contained a single passenger only, a passenger, however, of singular and noteworthy appearance. I am forced to admit that when he stepped out of the omnibus and looked around him, we were none of us favourably impressed with the appearance of Mr. Martin— Mr. Edmund H. Martin, as he preferred to call himself. He was large, and abominably dressed in a suit of impossible checks. He wore bright yellow boots with bulgy toes. His tie seemed to have gathered together every colour of the rainbow into its motley mesh. As he stood there gazing around him, I heard a

little titter from Mrs. Moggeridge and her daughters, and I caught the supercilious look exchanged between two of our young men who were lounging against the pillars.

The newcomer, it must be confessed, did not conform in any way to recognized standards, yet even in those first few moments I found something about his appearance which attracted me. Notwithstanding his great size— he was six feet three and very broad— his face was innocent of any beard or moustache. He seemed, indeed, to possess the fresh-complexioned visage of a boy. He stood there, an incipient smile struggling for the least encouragement to take formal possession of his good-humoured face, looking around him for someone to whom he could address the remark which it eventually fell to my lot to receive.

'Say, this is a bully place!' he exclaimed, appealing first to me and then to us all generally.

Mrs. Moggeridge and her daughters— very lady-like young persons— turned around and strolled away. The two young men were gazing over the tops of the trees. An old lady who was knitting seemed to find some cause for personal offence in this simple expression of contentment. Unfortunately, an elderly gentleman of kindly deposition who was sitting on a garden seat, and who might have made some response, was stone deaf. It remained for me, therefore, either to welcome this young man or to contribute to the somewhat chilling silence.

'You see it quite at its best,' I remarked. 'With the wind in its favourable quarter, the climate here is almost perfection.'

'Guess I'll see about my room,' the young man went on, unwillingly giving over what I believe he called a 'grip' to an insistent porter.

'Are your rooms engaged?' I asked.

'Not yet,' the newcomer replied. 'I'll soon fix that all right.'

He disappeared with an air of easy confidence. There was a little exchange of smiles. The hotel was not only always impossibly full, but the whole business of getting rooms was immensely complicated from the fact that no one was ever willing to leave. We watched the disappearance of this young man into the office, and I distinctly saw signs of ill-natured but pleasurable anticipation in the faces of several people standing around.

'What an extraordinary person!' Mrs. Moggeridge exclaimed.

'American, of course,' the elder daughter observed. 'He may be very rich,' the younger one added reflectively.

'We don't want that sort of person here,' the dear old lady by my side snapped.

'Did you ever see such a get-up!' one of the young men yawned. 'Bet you they'll send him down to the Îles d'Or.'

Mr. Edmund H. Martin, however, was apparently possessed of some gifts of persuasion. When he finally emerged from the office, it was to superintend the collection of his baggage. He caught my eye and beamed upon me.

'See you later,' he promised amiably. 'I'm going to see if I can get some breakfast.'

The little air of disappointment was almost apparent. The old lady picked up her knitting and went off into the office to complain of anyone having been given a room when a friend of her cousin's, strongly recommended by herself, had been sent to another hotel only the day before. I nodded back to Mr. Edmund Martin as pleasantly as possible.

'See you down at the golf links,' I remarked.

'Sure!' he replied heartily. 'So long, all,' he added, as he moved steadily off in the direction of the restaurant.

I played my usual round of golf with an opponent of long standing. On looking up after successfully holing my putt on the last green, I found the horizon temporarily blotted out. Mr. Edmund H. Martin, looking larger than ever, was applauding my performance.

'Say, that was a dandy putt,' he declared, removing a large cigar from his mouth. 'You come right along in with me and I'll mix you a cocktail.'

Every natural instinct I possessed prompted me to refuse this— to me— somewhat extraordinary invitation. It was not my habit to take anything to drink in the morning except sometimes a little Dubonnet and soda, and I was already conscious of the somewhat supercilious interest aroused in my companion by the familiarity of this extraordinary young man. The refusal, however, seemed to wither away upon my lips.

'Thank you very much,' I replied. 'I shall have to offer my opponent a little refreshment in exchange for his five francs.'

'Why, that's all right,' the young man declared heartily, leading the way towards the pavilion. 'I'll mix for the whole crowd. I'll give you something that will put a little sting into your carcass.'

I am convinced that this young man was possessed of certain mesmeric powers. My opponent, who was in a very bad temper, and who was also a retired colonel, but a soldier, as he was sometimes pleased to explain, followed meekly in my wake. We watched the little bar being turned upside down and we watched the preparation of a concoction which I, for my part, was perfectly certain must inevitably prove highly injurious.

In the end, however, we not only drank the wineglassful of yellow-white liquid which was tendered to us, but I am bound to say that we enjoyed it. My

opponent crossed his legs and began to explain his defeat. I myself was conscious of a pleasant sense of good-fellowship. I inquired our new friend's name and introduced him to several of the habitués.

'What about a round with me this afternoon, Colonel?' he suggested insinuatingly.

'I shall be delighted,' I assented promptly, abandoning without hesitation my principle of an hour's sleep after luncheon.

Our new friend mixed cocktails for several of the people to whom I introduced him, and we left him there, looking hungrily around for a new victim.

'Something about that drink,' my companion remarked lazily, as we strolled up to the hotel, 'which seems to have done me good, Green. You really did play a fine game this morning.'

'I was very lucky to beat you,' I declared modestly. 'You were driving much straighter than I was... I never thought that these American drinks were so pleasant. Let us sit down and watch the tennis for a few minutes. Most becoming costume these young ladies wear nowadays.'

We sat there for some time, basking in the sunshine and chatting amiably. I enjoyed my lunch none the less for finding our new friend only a few tables off and receiving a very hearty greeting from him. I found him, according to arrangement, waiting upon the tee at two o'clock.

'What,' I asked him, 'is your handicap?' He grinned.

'Never mind about mine. What's yours?'

'I am twelve,' I replied diffidently; 'but I occasionally play a nine game.'

'I am about the same myself,' he announced. 'We'll start level, anyway.'

He insisted upon my taking the honour, and I drove what I considered to be an excellent ball, within forty yards of the green. My opponent, discarding the driver which the caddy offered him, took a light iron from his bag and hit a ball farther than I have ever seen it propelled by human means before. He carried the green and very nearly disappeared into the hedge beyond. As soon as I had recovered, I announced my intention of returning to the pavilion.

'I am not going to play with a Braid in disguise,' I told him. 'If you can do that sort of thing, you ought to have told me.'

He took me by the arm almost affectionately. Against my will, but without any desire for resistance, I was led along the course.

'Say, Colonel,' he confided, 'I'm a holy terror from the tee. You wait till you see me drive! But it's those rotten little shots I can't manage. And as to putting— well, you wait! I can't seem to keep the ball on the green, even.'

I played a very nice approach within a couple of yards of the pin. My opponent overran the green about sixty yards, cheerfully missed his third, and

was nearly back again in the hedge with his fourth. I won the hole and recovered my good humour.

'It would be worth your while,' I remarked, as I watched him drive nearly three hundred yards, 'to give a little time to your short game.'

'I always mean to practise,' he agreed. 'No chance in New York, though.'

We had a very interesting match, which I succeeded in winning. I was then initiated into the mysteries of a Scotch highball, after which I felt it advisable to go and have a nap before dinner. When I descended to the lounge, a little earlier than usual, I discovered Mr. Edmund H. Martin, attired, to my relief, in conventional if somewhat eccentric dinner garb, seated in an easy chair with a cigarette in his mouth, and a small memorandum book, which he was studying in a puzzled fashion, held up in front of him. The moment I appeared he held up two fingers to a waiter, who disappeared as though by magic.

'That's all right, Colonel,' he exclaimed, as I watched the man's hasty exit. 'He's got a couple of the right sort on ice for us. Just sit down for a moment, will you? What is this game all the nice old ladies here want me to play with them?'

I took the memorandum book from his hand. Down the engagement columns, at intervals for the next fortnight, were such entries as— 'Mrs. H.,' 'Mrs. A.,' 'Miss Fuzzy-Wuzzy,' 'Miss Giglamps,' and various other fancy pseudonyms, some of which I readily recognized.

'Had to put down something where I didn't catch the names,' he pointed out. 'What is the game, anyway?'

'Auction bridge, of course,' I told him. 'They are all crazy on it here. Can't you play?'

'Not that I know of,' he replied evasively. 'I never tried.'

'Then what on earth did you accept all these invitations for?'

I had clearly cornered Mr. Edmund H. Martin. He scratched his chin reflectively.

'What was I to do?' he grumbled. 'I like to be friendly with everyone, and I hate to say "No" when a lady comes up and asks me to join in a simple little game of cards.'

'That's all very well,' I objected, 'but you can't play the game. You'll spoil the rubber.'

'Not I,' he assured me cheerfully. 'Between you and me, there's nothing with cards I can't do. Just you watch here.'

He took a pack of cards from his pocket and for several moments I watched him, almost stupefied. Cards came up from his neck, down his trousers legs, they fell in little showers upon the table, apparently from mid-air. He even produced an ace of spades from my shirt-front.

'You see, I'm no mug,' he declared modestly. 'As for this particular game, why, I'll just look into the rules. You haven't got a book about it, have you?'

I sipped the most insinuating contents of one of the glasses which the waiter had just brought us, and afterwards I fetched him my Badsworth and left him studying it. That night I saw him, one of four solemn performers, seated, smileless and eager, at a card-table in a corner of the lounge. He joined me at about ten o'clock. He looked a little older and was glancing about feverishly for a waiter.

'Get through all right?' I inquired.

'I guess so,' he answered. 'I fell a bit behind now and then, but as soon as I tumbled to it that we weren't playing for money, I dealt my partner a hundred aces once or twice, and that made things all right because she kept on having to play the hands. They are talking about it all over the hotel. It seems that no one has had a hundred aces six times in one evening before.'

'Look here,' I begged him earnestly, 'you mustn't be up to any of those tricks here. The people wouldn't understand it. Bridge is a very solemn function, and they wouldn't take it as a joke, anyhow.'

'Joke? It wasn't a joke at all,' he assured me. 'I did it on purpose. If you'd seen my partner's face as she kept on picking 'em up— dear old thing about seventy, she was, with a blue ribbon in her hair— you'd have forgiven me fast enough. She clean forgot a kind of lapse I'd had, playing the hand before. Why, I tell you I made quite a hit. They've asked me to play with them every Tuesday till the hotel closes.'

'But you're only going to stay a fortnight,' I reminded him.

'That's their trouble,' he replied. 'Anyway, I've taken a fancy to the game.'

I induced him without difficulty to partake of a little refreshment with me, and left him, half an hour later, in a deserted corner of the lounge, with a large whisky-and-soda by his side and a freshly lit cigar in his mouth, dealing out four hands, and, after referring to Badsworth, carefully playing the cards.

'There's something in this game,' he declared cheerfully, as he bade me good night. 'I'll have the hang of it all right by to-morrow.'

FOR THE NEXT few days, although spasmodically I saw a great deal of my new friend, I was compelled to deny myself any close association with him owing to the presence of my sister, Lady Chalmont, who had come over from Cannes to stay with me. On the fourth day after her arrival, however, I took her to a little out-of-door restaurant at Carcaran. We were in the middle of a very excellent lunch when a familiar voice from the other side of a clump of rhododendron bushes attracted our attention. My sister listened for a moment.

'It is your delightfully original friend, Mr. Edmund H. Martin, as he calls himself!' she exclaimed. 'Do let us get him to come and join us.'

We both rose and moved towards the narrow path which led through a tangle of rhododendron shrubs to the next table. Then my sister, who was leading, stopped short and turned to me with a frown. A little peal of distinctly feminine laughter reached us from the other side of the shrubs.

'Perhaps you had better first ascertain who Mr. Martin's companions are,' she remarked dryly.

She returned to her seat, whilst I threaded the winding path and came out upon a little luncheon party in the small green enclosure. There were several pails from which protruded the necks of gold-foiled bottles. There was a profusion of food and fruit upon the table, and there was Mr. Edmund H. Martin, red in the face and very jovial in appearance, the central figure of one of the most disreputable companies I have ever set eyes upon. The ladies who sat on either side of him were, to use a mild adjective, cosmopolitan. Of the two men, one looked like a cross between a country bookmaker and a prize-fighter, and the other was a Frenchman whom I knew slightly, a man who notoriously lived by his wits in any place upon the Riviera where he found himself able to induce an hotel proprietor to give him credit.

My new friend, who was wearing a very light grey suit and another amazing tie, was in the act of indulging in a hearty laugh. Suddenly he saw me. The laugh faded away. He sat with his mouth wide open for a moment. Then he waved his hand with a feeble attempt at boisterous cordiality.

'Why, Colonel,' he exclaimed, 'I thought that you'd taken your sister back to Cannes to-day!'

'My sister has decided to remain with me a little longer,' I told him, 'so I brought her over here to lunch. I thought I heard your voice and it occurred to my sister that if you were alone—'

'I'd like to introduce my friend,' Martin interrupted. 'This is Colonel Green— Major Grinley,' he began, indicating the Englishman of pugilistic appearance; 'Monsieur le Comte de Faux,' he went on, motioning towards the Frenchman; 'Mademoiselle— well, these French names fairly bother me,' he wound up confidentially, 'but these two young ladies are friends of the Comte.'

He looked at me wistfully, as though anxious to see how I should accept the situation. I contented myself with a general bow. It was perfectly easy to see that my arrival was disconcerting to the little party.

'Did you say that Lady Chalmont was with you?'

'She is on the other side of the rhododendron bush,' I told him.

The young man sprang to his feet.

'Say, isn't that bully!' he exclaimed, looking almost miserable. 'You'll excuse me, Comte and young ladies? I must just pay my respects to Lady Chalmont.'

'You'll come back?' they all cried in unison.

'Right away,' he assured them heartily. 'Now then, Colonel.'

I led him along the narrow path in silence. My sister really behaved quite charmingly. She had commenced, in fact, to share my unaccountable partiality for the young man, and although she shook her head reproachfully, her tone was still good-humoured.

'Mr. Martin,' she demanded, 'tell us exactly what you are doing here?'

'Just a few friends,' he exclaimed— 'a little luncheon party got together on the spur of the moment.'

'I heard ladies' voices,' my sister insisted. 'Are your guests from the hotel?'

'Not exactly,' Martin admitted. 'The young ladies are friends of the Comte. We fixed this up down at the Casino last night. A very charming man, the Comte de Faux.'

'Where did you get hold of Major Grinley?' I asked dryly.

'An officer in your British Army, sir,' Martin reminded us. 'He is out here just now on a most important affair of business. He is representing, in fact, a syndicate of British financiers.'

I groaned. My sister leaned a little forward.

'Mr. Martin,' she asked kindly, 'how much have they had out of you already?'

The young man looked a little hurt.

'Lady Chalmont, I don't know why you should allude to my friends—'

'How much?' my sister persisted.

'I was fortunate enough to run across the Comte,' Martin replied stiffly, 'last night when he was in urgent need of five hundred francs, and I have obliged Major Grinley by cashing a cheque for him— a friend's cheque.'

'For a large amount?' I inquired.

'A matter of forty pounds— a mere trifle.'

'It might have been worse,' I remarked laconically.

Our young friend stood before us with his hands in his pockets, looking very much like a guilty schoolboy who has been found out in some peccadillo.

'You don't seem to like my guests, Colonel,' he observed dejectedly.

I shook my head.

'I know both of them by reputation. Would you be annoyed if I told you exactly what I thought of them? In any case, I will risk it so far as to tell you that I think they are both crooks.'

'A French nobleman and a major in your British Army!' he protested.

'Excellent material in adversity,' I assured him.

Martin was looking rather like a spoilt child. My sister laughed outright at him.

'It's no use looking cross, Mr. Martin,' she declared. 'You know very well that my brother is only speaking for your good, and you must admit that you are just a little inclined to make friends easily, aren't you?'

'As a matter of fact,' I inquired, 'where did you meet them?'

'We met in the buffet of the Gare de Lyon and travelled down to Hyères together,' Martin explained. 'Most agreeable journey it was, too.'

'Did you play cards?' my sister asked innocently.

'A little poker game,' he admitted. 'I won a trifle.'

Knowing something of this young man's methods with cards, I turned away to hide a smile. He left us a few minutes afterwards, and we heard the enthusiastic reception accorded him by his little party of guests on his return. I paid the bill in silence and we strolled up to where the car was waiting for us.

'I am afraid that your interesting young American friend has got into rather bad hands,' my sister sighed.

'I am sure of it,' I agreed.

'We'll talk to him to-morrow,' she continued. 'He really is a most extraordinary young person, but I can't help feeling a certain amount of interest in him. He seems very simple to be wandering about the world alone.'

'He has lived in New York for some years,' I remarked dubiously.

'Oh, I am not saying that he is unintelligent,' she declared, 'but he is far too ingenuous and trusting.... Tell the man to drive very slowly, Henry, and take the road back through the peach orchards.'

WE INVITED Martin to lunch with us the next day, and at about half-past twelve he duly arrived, the greater part of his person obscured by a bunch of violets as big as a bucket, which he gallantly offered to my sister. No allusion whatever was made to our meeting of the day before, but about half-way through the meal he leaned over the table a little confidentially.

'Say, Colonel,' he inquired, 'how do I get hold of money down here?'

'It depends upon the amount,' I replied dryly.

'Oh, not very much— say three thousand pounds.'

'You take the bus into the town and ask for the English bank,' I told him. 'You get them to wire to your bankers in London, and by this time to-morrow you would probably be able to draw it.'

'Capital!' he declared. 'We couldn't do much better than that at home.'

'But, Mr. Martin,' my sister asked seriously, 'what do you want three thousand pounds for?'

He beamed upon us both.

'To tell you the truth,' he confided,' I have had a very interesting speculation suggested to me.'

'By the Comte de Faux or Major Grinley?' my sister inquired.

'Say, how did you guess that?' Martin exclaimed. 'You're dead right, anyway. Like to hear about it?'

My sister sighed.

'Immensely!'

'And you. Colonel?'

'Of course!'

He glanced around to be sure that our table was out of the reach of eavesdroppers. His voice became more rounded, even portentous.

'Say,' he began, 'there's one thing I don't want you two people to misunderstand. My friends the Comte and Major Grinley are on the square all right, but they've been badly treated. They showed me the whole correspondence, and they've been white all the way through. If what they are suggesting at the present moment seems to you a bit like sharp practice on the men who've sent them out here, you must remember that, after all, it's every man for himself in this world.'

'It is,' I agreed, 'and every man has to look out for himself.'

'Now the Comte and Major Grinley,' Martin continued,' have been sent out here on behalf of an English syndicate of capitalists to inquire into a wonderful mineral-water spring not many miles away from this spot, and to make terms for securing the same, providing everything was O.K. The purchase price was not to exceed thirty thousand pounds for the spring itself and the woods surrounding it— an estate of some two thousand acres. The Comte and Major Grinley, if they succeeded in bringing the thing off, were to have so much in shares and so much cash; I have seen that in writing. And there's another thing to be remembered. It was the Comte who discovered the spring, as it is only a few miles away from the boundary of his own property.'

'So the Comte has property here?' I interrupted.

'I should say so,' Martin declared. 'Now they've bottled some of the water and sent it to London and had a favourable report. They've interviewed the proprietor— he is little more than a French peasant— and they've managed to work the price down to twenty-five thousand pounds. It's a magnificent property and, believe me, there's a huge fortune in the mineral spring. The Comte and Major Grinley have given no end of time to this matter and spent a great deal of money. Now they've made their report and the men at the head of the syndicate are hesitating. They are grumbling about giving the Comte and Major Grinley any interest in the five thousand pounds they arc saving, and

they talk of sending another man out to make a special report. The long and short of it is, there's no money in London. They can't raise the stuff. And here are my two friends committed to the purchase of that estate for twenty-five thousand pounds, and the deposit's got to be paid over this week.'

'A very awkward situation,' I admitted.

Martin nodded. He seemed encouraged by our sympathetic attitude.

'Well,' he proceeded, with an air of growing importance, 'they came to me and they asked my advice as an American man of business, and I guess I let them have it quick. What I said was, if the value is really there, get an offer elsewhere. If the syndicate don't act up to their promises, throw 'em overboard. That's their own look-out. At first I couldn't get either the Comte or Major Grinley to see it. The worst of these aristocrats and army folk is that they've an exaggerated sense of honour, you know. No use at all in business.'

I choked a little and hastily drank some wine. My sister did not even smile. She was hanging upon Martin's words.

'However, I talked 'em over,' he concluded, pulling his waistcoat down with an air of satisfaction, 'and here's the long and short of it. I'm going to buy that spring and estate, and if you two feel in any way interested—why, I'll take you both up there to have a look at it this afternoon.'

'As to the value—' I began.

'Wait till you've looked over the place,' Martin begged me. 'It's not more than half an hour's ride from here. What do you say?'

'I should be delighted to go,' my sister assented.

AN HOUR or so later we arrived at a lonely spot on the top of a range of hills between Toulon and Hyères. We all descended, and our young friend led the way across a stony field, planted with a few unwholesome-looking vines, and past a whitewashed hovel in a wood.

'Is this the place?' I asked dubiously.

'This is the place,' Martin replied. 'The spring is just a little farther in.'

Some efforts had evidently been made to preserve the spring itself from trespassers. There was a barbed-wire fence around it, and a small gate secured by a padlock. A man who had presumably seen us approach issued from the hovel and with many bows produced a key. Martin drew out a phrase-book from his pocket.

'Ont les messieurs, Comte de Faux et Major Grinley visités ici aujourd-hui?' he demanded, speaking a little louder than usual, with the idea, apparently, of making his words more easily apprehended.

'Mais non, monsieur,' the man replied.

'C'est bien!' Martin declared, replacing the phrase-book in his pocket. '*Ouvrez la porte, s'il vous plaît.'*

We were conducted into a glade and shown the spot where the water came bubbling up from an undoubted spring. Our guide produced a tin mug. We tasted the water and on the whole approved. It was, without doubt, excellent. Then we wandered a little farther through the wood and out on the other side. The land, so far as one could see, was stony and poorly cultivated, but the view was magnificent. At our feet lay the harbour of Toulon, and beyond, the blue Mediterranean. The peasant and my sister talked fluently, and Martin made unhappy attempts to follow their conversation with the aid of the phrase-book. Finally, we left the place and took our seats once more in the automobile.

'Pretty spot.' Martin remarked tentatively.

'Very,' I agreed.

'And the water seems good?'

'I am not much of a judge of water,' I replied guardedly, 'but I should say that it was good water.'

We drove down towards San Salvadour almost in silence.

'I am going to buy that place,' Martin announced presently.

It would appear that the time had arrived for plain speech. It had become perfectly clear to me, during my very brief acquaintance with this young man, that sooner or later he was foredoomed to become the prey of one or more of those many adventurers whom one meets in all places of the world.

My sister Mary and I had talked this matter over and we had both come to the same conclusion. His simple, trustful nature and complete guilelessness, while it made him, in a sense, an attractive companion, were a very evil equipment for a young man so completely alone in the world. Major Grinley and the Comte de Faux were both acquaintances of mine, but I felt it my duty to speak out.

'Martin,' I said, dropping at that moment and for ever afterwards any more formal habit of speech, 'I feel it my duty to warn you against doing anything of the sort. The very fact that these two men are concerned in the transaction makes me suspicious. They are, to speak frankly, nothing more or less than adventurers. They have selected you as a probable victim. Take my advice and have nothing whatever to do with them.'

The smile faded from our young friend's face. A look of deep dejection took its place.

'Say, you're not serious. Colonel?'

'My brother is not only serious,' Mary intervened, 'but I am bound to say that I entirely agree with him. You must take our advice, Mr. Martin, and have nothing more to do with the matter.'

'You must see for yourself,' I added,' that twenty-five thousand pounds for two thousand acres of wood and stony fields seems a little excessive.'

'It's the spring, Colonel,' Martin explained eagerly. 'It's astonishing the craze there is for water nowadays, even over on our side. People will pay anything for it—the right sort, that is. I tell you, sir, there are millions of dollars in that spring.'

'That may be so,' I replied dryly,' but I do not think that in any transactions with the Comte de Faux and Major Grinley, the millions, or any part of them, will come into your pocket.'

Our young friend relapsed into deep and gloomy silence. We drove back through San Salvadour and Costabelle into Hyères, and at his request dropped him at the bank. My sister returned to the hotel and I myself looked in at the Casino for an hour, as was sometimes my custom during the afternoon.

The first persons I saw when I entered the concert room were the Comte de Faux and Major Grinley, sitting at one of the small tables outside of the American bar and talking earnestly together. Both men recognized me when I entered, and I saw a meaning glance pass between them. Immediately afterwards they rose and approached me.

'Colonel Green, isn't it?' Major Grinley exclaimed, holding out his hand. 'We have not met for some time.'

'Monsieur the Colonel!' the Frenchman echoed, with a low bow.

I shook hands with them cordially enough— there was no particular object in betraying my suspicions. As soon as they perceived my attitude, they were most effusive and insisted upon my taking a whisky-and-soda with them.

'We were wondering,' Major Grinley said, 'what had become of our very interesting young American friend, Mr. Martin.'

'I left him in the town,' I replied. 'We lunched with him to-day and have just been out to see the spring.'

They were both decidedly anxious.

'Yes?' Major Grinley muttered interrogatively.

'A marvellous spring!' the Frenchman declared. 'Such water! Such purity! Such a flavour!'

'If we succeed in this little transaction of ours,' Major Grinley told me confidentially, 'it should mean at least a hundred thousand pounds in your young friend's pocket. Within two years it will be perfectly easy to float a company for ten times what Mr. Martin is giving for it.'

'I am not a financier,' I confessed, 'and I know nothing of the value of property out here, but twenty-five thousand pounds seems to me rather a large sum.'

Major Grinley set himself to efface that impression. He told me of the profits of Perrier water, he spoke of the fabulous fortunes which had been made by the most inoffensive-looking streams. Every now and then the Frenchman came to his aid in a sort of staccato chorus.

'Well, after all,' I concluded, 'it is Mr. Martin's own business. He seems very young to be travelling about the world alone and to have the control of his own money, but I suppose his guardians consider him competent.'

'He is a young man of great wealth, eh?' the Frenchman inquired. 'There is no doubt about his position?'

'I know nothing whatever about the matter,' I replied, a little stiffly. 'For anything I know, in fact, he may be an adventurer.'

I took my leave of the two men a few minutes afterwards, and returned to the hotel. For the next two days my time was fully taken up with golf and picnic engagements, and I saw nothing of my new acquaintance. I noticed that his table was unoccupied, and upon inquiry from the head porter I learnt that he was spending a day or two with the Comte de Faux, who had a villa in the neighbourhood. On the fourth day, he turned up at the hotel with his two friends. We all met in the hall and Martin insisted that I should join them for luncheon. I gathered that the little deal had been concluded with complete satisfaction to both parties. Major Grinley and the Comte de Faux were miracles of good humour and contentment, and Martin was full of the exuberant spirits of youth. Major Grinley, towards the close of luncheon, raised his glass.

'I drink,' he said, 'to the future of the sweet water of the San Mona Spring!'

'You have really bought it, then, Martin?' I asked.

'Mr. Martin,' the Comte de Faux explained, 'has this morning signed an agreement to purchase from us the San Mona Spring Estate for twenty-five thousand pounds. Your young friend, Colonel, is to be much congratulated. I venture to promise you that if in twelve months' time he should care to part with his interest, my friend Grinley here and I could turn the affair into a company with a capital of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.'

I went on with my luncheon and said nothing. The Comte turned presently to me.

'You do not appreciate, I fear, this good fortune which has come to your young friend,' he remarked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

'I know nothing of land values out here,' I replied. 'To me it seems an awful price to pay for a barren hillside and a tiny spring.'

'It is the tiny spring,' the Comte de Faux declared, 'from which the money comes bubbling up. And then, behold! As the waters become known, hotels will arise like mushrooms, hotels and villas, golf courses, and why not a Casino? Upon whose land, I ask you? Upon the land of this young man! He has acquired it all. Considering his youth, Mr. Martin is a wonderful man of business. He is so keen upon his bargain that he has made us consent to a forfeit of ten thousand francs should we fail to hand over the title deeds to him this week. His only fear is lest he might lose this wonderful chance.'

I bowed.

'Mr. Martin doubtless knows his own business.'

'You bet!' my young friend agreed, solemnly winking at me from behind a vase of carnations. 'Of course, I'm a beginner at these sort of speculations, but the Mona Spring deal is going to be all right. I've lost a bit here and there— want of experience, you know, and all that— but you can bet your bottom dollar that I'm all right this time.'

I took leave of the three a little later on, and they all drove off together to the town in high good humour. I was sorry to part with Martin, for, curiously enough, during the last few days I had quite missed his company. About four o'clock, however, he returned alone. He was in a hired victoria, and, to my surprise, I saw that he was bringing all his luggage. I stepped out to meet him.

'Hullo!' I exclaimed. 'I thought you were going to stay with the Comte for a few days more?'

He overpaid his coachman disgracefully and laid his hand familiarly upon my shoulder.

'There was some talk about it,' he admitted. 'I felt like coming back, though.'

'Any trouble with your friends?' I inquired. 'I thought you all seemed so pleased with one another and your deal to-day.'

'That's just it,' Martin sighed. 'I rather expected to go on feeling pleased myself, but I am not so sure about those other two. We'll talk about it later. Say, is your sister still here?'

'She is out for a picnic to-day,' I told him.

'Then you'll both dine with me to-night?' Martin insisted. 'Not a word! I shall expect you at half-past seven.'

MY SISTER and I were a few minutes late for dinner that evening. When we took our places, we found our table was covered with a perfect canopy of

flowers. A magnum of champagne stood by its side in an ice-pail, and Martin welcomed us with a face like the rising sun.

'Just a little celebration,' he explained cheerfully, as we took our places... 'Gee whiz! Look what's coming!'

Down the middle of the room, unescorted by any waiter, approached in great haste Monsieur le Comte de Faux, followed by Major Grinley. They were still in morning clothes, and they had the appearance of having just left their automobile. They came straight to our table and they both forgot to bow to my sister. They stood over Martin, taking up positions one on either side of him.

'If you imagine for a single moment,' Major Grinley began, his voice shaking with passion, 'that we, the Comte and I, are going to be swindled in this manner by a child of your years, let me assure you—'

'It is a public room, this,' the Comte interrupted, striking his hands together. 'Behold! I shall smack you on the face unless some instant and satisfactory explanation be tendered. I ask you, sir, is this a joke?'

Martin had been leaning back in his chair, turning from one to the other. His expression of blank amazement was wonderful.

'Say, I'm not exactly catching on,' he confessed pleasantly. 'Put it in plain words, will you— one at a time, if possible?'

'Behind our backs,' the Comte declared dramatically, 'you sought out the honest peasant, Jean Lecrois, and you have purchased from him the San Mona Spring Estate. You have paid Jean Lecrois two thousand one hundred pounds. I have seen the receipt.'

'Look here,' Martin suggested, 'let's talk this over. You came to me, didn't you, and you offered to sell me the San Mona Spring Estate for twenty-five thousand pounds?'

'You agreed to buy it!' they both exclaimed in unison.

'Let us put the matter down in black and white,' Martin continued smoothly. 'As a matter of fact, you had already the offer of the property from Jean Lecrois for two thousands pounds. You were out here to buy it for a syndicate who would have given five thousand pounds. Instead of concluding the deal and pocketing a very handsome profit, you were apparently led away by the prospect of making a fortune at one *coup* out of a mug. Now listen, gentlemen. Did you or did you not propose to sell to me for twenty-five thousand pounds an estate you were buying for two thousand, and which you were pledged to hand over to a syndicate for five?'

The Comte closed his eyes and waved his hands in frantic gesticulation.

'That has nothing to do with it,' he almost shrieked. 'The point remains that you intervened and bought the estate for yourself behind our backs.'

Martin grinned broadly.

'It was a shabby trick,' he confessed, winking furtively at me.

Major Grinley plunged into the discussion with a change of tactics.

'Look here,' he suggested, 'let us talk reasonably. We were perhaps foolish to try and make too big a thing of this. We honestly believed the estate to be of vast value. The five thousand pounds offered by the syndicate was a ridiculous price.'

'You would have made three thousand pounds profit,' Martin reminded them.

Once more the Comte's gesticulations were almost feverish.

'What is that?' he demanded. 'Such chances come in one's way but seldom. You have stepped in and bought the estate. Very well, we must accept defeat. You have bought it for two thousand one hundred pounds, so you will not buy it from us for twenty-five thousand pounds now. All that we ask is what you, as a man of honour, cannot fail to grant. Make it over to us at the price you bought it at.'

'So that you may still make your three thousand pounds profit,' Martin remarked. 'That's the idea, is it?'

'It is our affair entirely,' Major Grinley insisted. 'You knew nothing about the estate, nothing about the spring. It was we who took you there.'

Martin was suddenly grave. A change had come over his boyish face. His pink and white complexion seemed less manifest. He was the man of affairs, solemn and impressive.

'Look here,' he said, 'you took me out there to rob me. I wasn't quite the mug you thought me. I knew you, Comte de Faux, when you used to play billiards for a living at a little hotel off Fourth Avenue. As for you, Major Grinley, there's an Army List in the next room.

'You've some record, haven't you? What I think you'd both better understand is this. You set yourselves out to rob me, and you've had the worst of it. I have bought the San Mona Spring Estate and I am going to develop it. So there's an end of that. And now listen to me. You come here blustering, but the boot's on the other leg. You owe me a forfeit of ten thousand francs for not concluding your agreement to sell me the estate. Don't interrupt, please. And let me just remind you that the manager is over there with his eye upon you. He doesn't like brawlers in the dining-room. Take my advice. Go outside into the lounge. Sit down and think it over. If you've anything to say when we come out from dinner, I'll listen to it.'

They went out of the room like dazed men. We saw the lights of their automobile flash by the window a moment later. Martin's features gradually relaxed. Once more he became the ingenuous youth.

'We shan't see them again in a hurry,' he remarked. 'Waiter, open that magnum.'

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18: The Tiger at Twelve

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

In: *The Adventures of Julia*, and two other spy stories, 1954.

"The Adventures of Julia" comprises six W.W.2 spy stories with Julia Heron, secret agent, the narrator, and was published in 1945. The book was reprinted in 1954 with two additional spy stories without Julia, "The Tiger at Twelve" and "Escape for Sandra".

SOMEBODY once said that Life— with a big L— begins at forty. I've never believed this for two reasons. First that it rather sounds like someone making the best of being forty, and secondly because I've always found that life— with a very big L— begins at parties.

If you think back you'll probably agree with me. I'm sure you'll be able to remember all sorts of nice— and not-so-nice— things that have happened as a result of a good or an indifferent party. The reason? Well, I suppose everyone is putting their best foot forward. The women are being as charming and delightful, as well dressed, as they know how, and the men— well some men go to parties to drink cocktails and others go to look at the women. Sometimes they go for some other reason....

I went to Yvette Sterling's party because her house was on my way out of town, and also because I wanted particularly to know the quickest route to Betchworth Park Golf Course. Yvette is a great golfer. She's played every course in the country and I was certain she'd be able to tell me. I wanted to know quickly because I felt that I ought not to waste a great deal of time.

It was ten-thirty and darkish when I arrived. And I wasn't able to speak to Yvette for quite a time. She was surrounded by crowds of admiring friends. Eventually, when she did see me, she came quickly over to where I was standing by the service table and positively hissed in my ear.

'My dear,' she said, 'first of all you're looking devastatingly lovely, but the great thing is that there are two utterly delightful men here whom you must meet. They're both terribly interesting and have done the most wonderful things in the war. But one of them— Hugh Delayn— is definitely psychic and immediately you came into the room he said that he must meet you. Probably he's already tuned in to your psychic aura or whatever they call it.'

I said: 'Yvette.... I don't particularly want to meet anyone. I want you to tell me the way to Betchworth Park Golf Course. I...'

'Of course,' she said. 'That's easy. Fulham Road, Putney Bridge, Kingston By-Pass to Dorking. First left at the Dorking roundabout and there you are. Now....'

I turned and saw that two young men had joined us. They were very nice-looking, well-dressed, young men. Their clothes were absolutely right— almost too right, if you know what I mean. They stood there looking at me with that rather fatuous expression adopted by men when they're waiting to be introduced.

Yvette said: 'This is Major Hugh Delayn.... and this is Captain Cleve Stenning. Mrs. Adela Haynes.'

The Delayn person looked me right in the eyes. He had a humorous expression about his mouth but his eyes were not smiling. I thought perhaps he'd had rather a tough time in the war. He looked like that.

He said: 'Immediately you came into the room, I felt awfully interested in you. I felt that I knew all sorts of things about you.'

'Oh dear,' I said. 'I do hope they're nice things. Yvette has been telling me that one of you is psychic. I suppose you're the psychic one?'

Cleve Stenning nodded. 'He really is, Mrs. Haynes,' he said. 'You wouldn't believe it to look at him, would you? But he definitely is. I know.'

'How terribly interesting,' I said. But I wasn't a bit interested really. I've never been able to work up any real enthusiasm about psychic young men.

Major Delayn smiled. A rather serious sort of smile. 'There are moments when it is a rather useful attribute— this psychic business, I mean. This is one of them. May I have a word in your private ear. I think it's important.'

Yvette laughed. She said: 'He's going to give you the gypsy's warning, my dear. I'd better run along, otherwise he might tell me something I don't want to hear about a dark-haired man or something.'

She disappeared into the adjoining room. Captain Stenning went away too, after murmuring something. Then Major Delayn put his hand under my elbow and piloted me towards a spot near the door that was fairly quiet and free from people.

I'm beginning to feel quite scared,' I told him. 'I do hope that you're not going to tell me something too awful for words.'

I leaned against the wall by the open door. Out of the corner of my eye I could sec Captain Stenning in the hall. He had taken a novel from one of the book-shelves and was flipping over the pages. I thought he seemed a rather lonely sort of person.

Major Delayn dropped his voice. 'I want to convince you that I know what I'm talking about,' he said. 'Let me tell you a few things about yourself. You are on your way to Betchworth Park Golf Club Course. When you get there, you will look for a certain house, the distinguishing marks of which have been given to you. When you find the house you will hand over a package of documents

which you collected in Whitehall about half an hour ago and take a receipt for them.'

I looked at him in amazement. 'But how do you know this?' I asked. 'How can you know it?'

He smiled. 'Please don't ask questions,' he said. 'And leave here as soon as you can. Remember those documents might be vital.'

'But they're not,' I protested. 'I was told....'

He sighed. It was almost a sigh of boredom. 'Very often perfectly nice people like you, Mrs. Haynes, are asked to deliver a package of documents and are told that they are not important. In fact they *might* be terribly important— so important that *you* are asked to carry them because you are just about the last person that an enemy agent would suspect to be a sort of unofficial King's Messenger. Do you see?'

I nodded. 'I think I do,' I answered. 'But I also think that it's terribly clever of you to know about it. I've never known any psychic person to be so awfully well informed.'

I threw another look out of the corner of my eye towards the hall. Captain Stenning was standing there between the bookshelf and the door. The idea occurred to me that he might almost be on guard— standing sentry so that no one should interrupt the *tête-à-tête* that was in progress between his friend and me.

Major Delayn produced a gold cigarette case, offered me a cigarette and lit it. He looked at me through the flame of the lighter. He said very softly: 'Perhaps I'm not really psychic at all. Perhaps that's just a gag.'

'You mean that you've been detailed to keep an eye on me?' I said. 'So that there's no possibility of those documents going astray.'

He nodded. 'That is just what I mean,' he said. 'And it's getting late. Don't you think you ought to be on your way?'

'I do,' I answered. I gave him a very bright smile. 'I should have been on my way already if it had not been for your psychic act,' I went on. 'I merely came in here to get the quickest route from Yvette. Now I'll be going. Perhaps one day we'll meet again.'

He gave me an awfully nice smile. 'I'm sure we shall,' he said. 'Au revoir— and good luck!'

I said goodbye to Yvette and went downstairs. I was thinking of what Major Delayn had said. The documents began to seem more important— if not ominous— every moment.

When I got outside and looked for the car, my heart stood still. It was gone. I felt quite panic stricken. I asked the hall porter who was standing in the entrance what had happened to it.

'It's quite all right, Madam,' he said. 'You see there are a lot of cars here and we can't have the entrance blocked. Some of them have been moved round the corner. One of the chauffeurs moved them.'

I went round the corner. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw the Jaguar, sleek and shining in the light of a street lamp. It was head and bumper on between two other cars with not an inch to spare.

But I need not have worried. A chauffeur, very trim in a blue uniform, said: 'I moved your car round, Ma'm. I'm afraid it's rather a tight fit. Would you like me to get it out?'

I said I'd be glad if he would. Then I thought that whilst I was waiting I might as well go back and get a book I'd forgotten— one I'd asked Yvette to lend to me. I walked quickly round the corner and up the short staircase to Yvette's flat.

The door was open. I went into the hallway and, right in front of me on the hall table, was the book— *Crimson Rambler* by Dechats. It was obvious that Yvette had left it for me.

I picked it up and went downstairs once more. The chauffeur had succeeded in getting my car out of the line. I gave him half-a-crown, got in and drove off.

I felt vaguely uncomfortable and unhappy. And not only vaguely. The chauffeur who had moved my car had adjusted the driving seat for his own convenience. It was too far back for me. I felt angry with him and myself and everyone else. I pulled the car into the kerb, somewhere in the Fulham road, switched on the dashboard light and adjusted the seat to its usual position. As I did so I looked down on to the floor of the car in front of the passenger seat. The book *Crimson Rambler* was lying where I had put it, but the front page was open and there was some writing on it.

I picked up the book and looked at the pencilled note. The handwriting was *not* Yvette's, and anyhow, at first glance, the words did not seem to make sense. Someone had written— 'The Tiger at twelve at twelve'— which, when you come to think of it, is not a fearfully illuminating message.

I dropped the book on to the floor, re-started the car and drove on. When I got outside Putney I began to put on pace. I wanted to get this business of delivering the package over, because for some reason which I could not fathom it seemed to me that the matter was getting a little out of hand.

On the Kingston By-Pass I began to speed. I watched the speedometer needle pass the sixty mark and took a look in the driving mirror. Behind me, maintaining their distance with uncanny precision, were a pair of powerful headlights. Not an unusual thing, but I didn't like *that* either. I came to the conclusion that I didn't like anything very much.

I began to think about Major Delayn and Captain Stenning. If these two young men had been detailed to look after me, to speed me on my way, then it seemed fairly obvious to me that Sir Charles must have thought there was good reason for such a process; that my apparently innocent mission might easily be dangerous; that he was a little scared about me, which when you come to think of it really did not make sense.

I took another look in the driving mirror. The headlights were still behind, about eighty or ninety yards, I thought, and staying there. They made no attempt to pass.

I began to think about the book *Crimson Rambler*. It was funny, I thought, that Yvette had said nothing about it when I was there; that she should have left it in the hall on the chance of my picking it up on my way out. But had she left it in the hall?

A new vista opened up in my mind. I remembered Captain Stenning standing in the hall with a book in his hand, writing something on the fly' leaf. Supposing, for the sake of argument, it was he who had written those words, *'The Tiger at twelve at twelve*.' Just supposing....

I leaned over and switched on the dashboard light. I looked at the clock on the dashboard. Automatically, as I saw the time, which was half-past eleven, I looked at my wrist-watch to check it. My wrist-watch said eleven twenty-five. I thought that was funny because my dashboard clock always lost and never gained. Then I looked down at the floor and saw, on each side of *Crimson Rambler*, a tear or cut in the floor-mat.

Then I realised.....

Women aren't supposed to be awfully good at logical deductions. We are supposed to be intuitive creatures, but I spent the next four or five minutes indulging in a great deal of logical deduction. Occasionally, during the process, I glanced in the driving mirror and saw that the headlights were still following me, still seventy-five to a hundred yards behind.

I'd got to *do* something. I began to realise that I was in ratter a bad spot. I've been in bad spots before and usually managed to get out of them, but I didn't like this one. Not at all. I wondered what I was going to do.

Just then I ran underneath the Dorking railway bridge and started on the stretch of road that leads to the roundabout. Arrived there I knew that I must take the left turning to Betchworth Golf Course, and then, half-way up the straight stretch, my headlights picked up the telephone box. I promptly turned them off.

I put on the brakes and stopped the Jaguar. I stopped immediately by the telephone box. I pushed *Crimson Rambler* under the seat, then got out of the car and looked behind me. Sure enough, some seventy yards behind, just past

the railway bridge, the headlights that had followed me stood stationary. I congratulated myself on my promptness in switching off the headlights.

I went into the telephone box and fumbled in my small handbag for two pennies. It was only when I realised that I had no coppers that I also realised that I didn't need any. Three minutes afterwards I came out of the call box, got into the car and started off again. The headlights behind me started too.

But I felt slightly— but only slightly— happier. I'd at least *done* something about it.

The roundabout was directly ahead. I swung left on to the Reigate Road. Two hundred yards down, my headlights picked up a sign 'Betchworth Park Golf Course'. I swung right up a steep hill. Two minutes' driving found me on the Course.

I was on a road that bisected the golf course. A pale moon had come out and by its light I could see the rolling greens and fairways on each side of the road. Somewhere ahead, about a mile or so I imagined, was the house I was looking for.

I slowed down. As I did so the car behind me drew level; and then, systematically and deliberately, began to edge over, forcing me to drive nearer and nearer to the ditch on the left-hand side of the dirt road.

I sighed. I thought: Well, my dear, here it is and I hope your luck's in. I cut the engine, braked to a standstill and sat, my hands resting on the wheel awaiting whatever fate had in store for me.

The other car— a Bentley— pulled up twenty-five yards ahead. I heard the door open and shut, and a man got out and came back towards my car. As he approached I could see that he was smiling. Obviously, I thought, he's awfully pleased about something or other.

It was Major Delayn. I thought it was going to be Major Delayn. I would have betted on it.

He said: 'Well.... I hope you've had an interesting drive, Mrs. Haynes. And now what about those documents?'

I smiled at him *very* brightly. 'I don't understand,' I said. 'Exactly what do you mean?'

The smile faded from his face. He looked very grim. Now I could see the high cheekbones and the tight lips and the cold eyes clearly. I didn't like him at all.

He said: 'I am not Major Delayn and Stenning wasn't Stenning. We are what you would call enemy agents. We know what those documents are and I propose to have them. The package was bulky and therefore it is not on your person. Your coat and skirt fit much too well—' He cast an appreciative eye over me. 'So the documents are in the car. Where are they? Produce them.'

I said: 'I shall do nothing of the sort.'

He sighed. Then, almost casually, he opened the door of the car, took my right wrist in his hand and began to twist my arm. I bore it as long as I could and then yelped with pain.

He said: 'You'd better tell me. Next time I'm really going to hurt you. I shall make you talk eventually, I promise you.'

I shrugged my shoulders. I was quite furious and my eyes still full of tears from pain and anger.

'I suppose that eventually I *should* have to talk,' I said. 'But the documents are not in the car. I got rid of them.'

'When you stopped by the roundabout?' he asked.

I nodded. 'It's no good my trying to be brave,' I said, 'There's a telephone box at the roundabout. I put the package under the telephone directories on the little shelf inside.'

He smiled at me. 'I think you are telling the truth,' he said. He leaned over and removed the ignition key from the dashboard. 'That's so you can't run away,' he said. 'It will take you quite a time to walk to civilisation and by that time I shall be far away. Good-night.'

He went back to his car, got in, backed and turned and drove past me. I looked at my watch. It was seven minutes to twelve and I calculated that it would take him a good five minutes to drive back to the roundabout, stop at the telephone box and look for the documents.

I got out of the car, opened the boot at the back, and found the heavy jack. I went round to the front of the car, opened the bonnet and took a fearful swipe at the petrol feed. It was a good shot. I smashed the pipe and the petrol began to dribble out. I put the jack away and closed the boot.

Then I scrambled over the low fence that separated the road from the golf course and hurried to the nearest green.

The moon was a little brighter now and I could see that this was the eleventh green and the usual arrow indicated the direction of the twelfth. I hurried towards the twelfth green keeping in the shadow of some lime trees on the way. I didn't want to be seen at that moment.

The twelfth green was shaped like a dog's hind leg. The curved part was only a yard or two from the road that ran through the course in the direction of Brockham. There was lots of scrub and coppice, and quite a few trees, and I was able to make my way towards the road without being too obvious. When I got to that part of the rough that was nearest the road, I stopped and stood behind a tree, trying to relax and make up my mind about one or two small points that were worrying me at the moment.

But I had very little time to make up my mind about anything because, at that moment, I heard the sound of a car; it seemed to be coming from the opposite direction— from Brockham village. It stopped within six or seven yards of my tree, on the grass verge. Nothing happened for a moment and then the door opened and Captain Stenning got out.

He stood for a minute or two looking over the golf course. Then he began to walk towards the twelfth green, passing within a few feet of me in the process.

I let him get well away from me. I waited until I could see him standing by the silver beech tree on the side of the twelfth green and then I slipped from behind my tree and went over to the car. I was there for two or three minutes, after which I emerged into the open and began to walk without any attempt at concealment towards the twelfth green.

But if I looked fearfully nonchalant I did not feel it. Candidly, I wasn't feeling at all brave because it was obvious to me that if Major Delayn— or whatever his real name was— was dangerous, then Captain Stenning— or whatever *his* real name was— was just as bad medicine. Hill it wasn't any good *looking* scared whatever I felt.

The moon was brighter now and as I walked over the well-kept green I could see the look of amazement that appeared on Captain Stenning's features for a fleeting moment.

I said brightly: 'Good evening— or is it good morning, Captain Stenning? I've come to tell you that I don't think Major Delayn will turn up. Do you mind very much?'

He said sarcastically: 'So you don't think he'll turn up? And why not, dear Mrs. Haynes?'

'First of all,' I said, taking out my cigarette case and extracting a cigarette with fingers that were a trifle shaky, 'first of all he did not get your message. The one you wrote on the front page of *Crimson Rambler* and left in the hull for him to see on his way out. You see I went back after you'd gone and picked up the book. Mind you, I had a certain amount of difficulty in working out what "*The Tiger at twelve at twelve*" meant. Then suddenly I got it. It meant "*The Jaguar at twelve o'clock at the twelfth green*." I thought it only polite of me to turn up and tell you that he wouldn't be coming. In fact I doubt If you'll *ever* see him again— well, not for some years anyhow.'

A spasm of something not very nice crossed his face. He said in a low voice: 'Exactly what do you mean by that?'

I tried to keep my voice steady. I said: 'By this time he's in the hands of the Dorking Police. You see, when I was on my way down here I realised that I was being followed. I also realised that having heard me ask Yvette Sterling for the

best route down here, that you had come on ahead after leaving that message and that Major Delayn was carefully following me down here. Then I conceived the rather bright idea that you two people might not be what you seemed to be. So I stopped my car at the telephone box at the Dorking roundabout, left the documents which you want so badly under the telephone directories, and then called through to the Dorking Police and asked them to send down at once, collect the documents and wait for Major Delayn, who was a not-so-nice person, and take him along to the Police Station and wait until Whitehall sent further instructions about him. Then I drove on to the golf course, where Major Delayn caught up with me and twisted my arm until I was forced to tell him where I had hidden the packet of papers. Naturally I did not tell him that I'd spoken to the police. So he carefully removed the ignition key from my car and went back to get the documents. He must have been awfully disappointed when he got there and found the police waiting for him.'

There was an ominous silence. Then he laughed bitterly. He said: 'It's amusing that two very old hands at the game like Delayn and me can be made fools of by a pretty woman. But it *can* happen. I congratulate you.' He clicked his heels and made me a little bow. 'Now I will bid you good night,' he said. 'I do not feel inclined to fall into the hands of your Dorking Police as well as my friend.'

'I can believe that,' I said cheerfully, 'but don't rely too much on driving away in that Jaguar of yours. You see, just now, before I came over here, I cut the petrol feed pipe.'

For a moment after I'd told him this glorious lie— because of course I hadn't cut the petrol feed pipe of *that* car; I'd only stood beside the car for a minute or two to pretend— I thought he was going to strangle me. Then he had the bright idea which I had prayed would come to him. He said: 'Did you leave the ignition key in my car?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'Why?'

'You aren't so clever after all,' he said grinning. 'Your car is a Jaguar— the same model as mine. Delayn took the ignition key away from your car, but the key from mine will fit it. I shall drive away in your car. I only regret that I have not more time at my disposal. I would very much like to strangle you.'

He looked as if he meant it too. I was awfully relieved when he went away.

I watched him as he went back to the car, leant inside and took away the ignition key. I prayed that he would not open the bonnet of the car. I sighed with relief and happiness when he did not. Then he began to walk quickly along the road.

I leaned up against the tree for a moment. I thought that life could sometimes be very funny. I wondered what he would have said if I had told

him that he had driven my Jaguar away from the party; that the packet of documents was under the driver's seat; that he'd been sitting on them most of the evening!

I calculated that by this time he would be half-way to the other car. I hurried round the edge of the green, keeping in the shadows, to my car. I opened the door, got in, opened the cubby trap in the dash-board and found my spare ignition key that I always keep there.

Then I got out, pulled up the driving seat and sighed with relief when I saw the packet of papers where I'd put it. I got back, started up the car and drove like a fiend down the road towards Brockham. I knew that the house I was looking for was near Brockham Green— the last house on this road. I imagined Captain Stenning trying to start up the other car; not being able to; feverishly examining it to discover what was wrong and then finding out that it was *his* car and with a smashed petrol pipe.

I began to feel just a little bit odd. This is the time. I thought, when the danger is all over, that a woman is entitled to faint. I came to the conclusion that I was not going to do anything of the sort. But I felt awfully relieved when I saw the white house with the gables and the red roof and swung the car into the drive.

THE people to whom I had to give the documents were very nice, and it was one o'clock, and after I'd eaten a sandwich and drunk a small glass of whisky and soda, I thought I might ring up Sir Charles.

He came on the line in a hurry. He said: 'By jove, Adela, you've been having an evening, haven't you? The police at Dorking came through to me and gave me your message, after they'd got the so-called Delayn. I sent a couple of men down at once. Incidentally, they've picked up Stenning too. Apparently they found him wandering about near the railway station trying to get away. It seems he hadn't any means of transport. Are you all right? I expect you are, knowing you. And what happened?'

'It's a long story,' I told him. 'I'll tell you tomorrow when I see you. It might have been rather nasty except for the fact that Stenning was driving a Jaguar— exactly the same model as mine— and I stopped at a party to get the quickest route and someone moved the cars and Stenning got into my car thinking it was his own and drove down here to meet Delayn who was to follow me down. I do hope that someone will tell Stenning that he was sitting on the documents all the time!'

He said: 'You've been pretty good. I'll buy you a new hat tomorrow.'

'You'll buy me half-a-dozen new hats,' I told him. 'I suppose Delayn and Stenning were Nazis?'

'Of course,' he said. 'Two very clever agents. They've been here for a long time apparently. Members of the Werewolf organisation. You know, Adela, I wouldn't have put you on this job if I'd the slightest idea that they were on the look-out for you.'

'Of course not, Charles,' I answered brightly. 'You'd have put a tough man on the job, wouldn't you? Someone with brains, I've no doubt. Is that what you mean?'

He said: 'Er.... No, I didn't mean that at all.'

'You better hadn't mean it,' I murmured. 'Otherwise I'll have to buy a dozen new hats. Good night, Charles, and no thanks to you that I'm still alive and all in one piece.'

'You're my best operative, Adela,' he said. 'I don't know what I'd do without you.'

I said good night and rang off. Then I thought I'd get through to Yvette. Her parties always go on until the small hours.

When she came on the line I said: 'I took that book Crimson Rambler away from your hall, Yvette. I'll bring it hack tomorrow.'

She said: 'Don't worry, darling. It's a most uninteresting book— no use to anyone. By the way, did you find your golf course all right? Whatever did you want with a golf course at that time of night?'

'I just wanted to think, sweet,' I said. 'I like wide open spaces.'

She said vaguely: 'Do you, dear? Well, of course you know. Don't you think that Major Delayn and Captain Stenning were awfully nice people? I wonder who asked them. *I* didn't.'

'Maybe they just dropped in on the off-chance of meeting someone they knew,' I said. 'Perhaps they saw me arrive and slipped in quickly. I think they were *fearfully* nice.'

'And so psychic,' said Yvette. 'What did Delayn tell you when he took you aside at my party?'

'Nothing much,' I said. 'He said that he thought he was going away for a very long time.'

'How odd,' she said. 'Well.... good night, dearest.'

I hung up the receiver and went outside. The Jaguar was parked just inside the drive. I got into it, switched on and started for London.

I said: 'Well, Jaguar, I'm awfully glad that *you* were the tiger at twelve. I don't know what I'd have done without you.'

19: Jolly Good Luck

Vernon Ralston

fl. 1907-1920

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express (NSW) 25 Dec 1919

Ralston, probably a pseudonym, appears from 1907, almost exclusively in "Yes or No" and "Weekly Tale-Teller" magazines, both small slim digests selling for a penny. ("Tale-Teller" 48 pages, "Yes or No" 64 pages, were published by Harry Shurey, address 2 and 3 Hind Court, Fleet Street) Ralston was quite prolific until July 1917, after which there appeared just two more items, one in 1920, the last in 1934.

My guess is that he was Harry Shurey himself, and all I can establish is that Shurey was born in the early 1860s and died in 1925.

LIEUTENANT SILDEN was up against it.

When he was demobilised he had expected to get back his old post with his old firm. When he joined in 1914 there had been a promise that it would be kept for him. But the old senior partner was dead. The firm had become a limited liability company. The new managing director had put his son into Silden's post, and had no idea of evicting him to oblige any returned officer.

'Sorry, no vacancy,' he said. 'Business has been very bad since the armistice, and we find it very hard to get work enough for our present staff.' !

'But Mr. Dean promised me my old post.'

'Have you got his -promise in writing?'

'No. Well, even if you had, such a promise would scarcely be binding now the firm has been reconstituted. You cannot expect us to discharge men just because you at some time or other have had a promise of a post. A lot of water has gone under the bridges since 1914. You might leave your address. If there should be a vacancy on the clerical staff I might write to you.'

Then Silden had lost his temper, and told the managing director precisely what he thought of him, and of the son who had been exempted from the Army on the grounds of his important, business position. When he had finished talking to the managing director, it was absolutely hopeless for him ever to give that firm as a reference. He had said bitter, personal things that the mean man would never forgive.

Silden went back to his hotel resolved to get hold of something. He spent hours a day answering advertisements. He sought anxiously amongst his acquaintances forborne opportunity. It seemed a hopeless task. London seemed to be full of demobilised captains and lieutenants, and second lieutenants, all seeking posts. Once there was a vestige of a chance. An old captain of his was going out to Vancouver and offered him a share in a fruit farm. But the captain himself was short of capital, and could not let Silden in

unless he could put down four hundred pounds As Silden had only fifty pounds in the world, he had to give ,up ' that, promising chance.

He became more and more desperate as the days passed on and nothing came,

Once or twice employers said they were inclined to look up his reference, but he never heard from them again. He judged that the vicious managing director had done him more bad turns

All the time there was a girl in a London suburb he kept slipping down to see. He was not engaged to her. He was sportsman enough not to ask her to marry him unless he had some sort of a position to offer her. Besides, she came from a well-to-do family, and would have money of her own. Silden would rather have lost the girl than have been dependent on his wife or his wife's people for his living.

Gradually his nerve went. The perpetual disappointment, the anxious waiting, was too much for him. He had suffered from slight shell-shock in France, and the nervous strain, brought back the insomnia and terrible depression. At last one night, after a series of disappointments, he looked at his money. He had only twenty pounds left. He owed the hotel people about five pounds for that week.

'I'm sick of life,' he thought. 'There's nothing in it for me. I'll have one good day to-morrow and make an end of things.'

He actually slept that night. The prospect of being at an end of his troubles settled his nerves. Anything was better than this wretched suspense.

It was a lovely spring day when he woke the next morning.

He thought, 'When I've written my letters and made my .arrangements, I'll hire a car and have a run round through Surrey. I could get a car for a tenner. Then I'll come back here, have a good dinner, and finish things to-night.'

Directly he had had his breakfast he went up to his room to write. He didn't want to bother with anything when he came back. He wrote two or three letters to friends, settled his business affairs, put the hotel bill and money to meet it ready, and then finished by scribbling a note to the Coroner, saying that he was worn out with strain and thought that this was the best way of ending it all. He wondered whether he should put some reference to the managing director whose conduct had caused him so much misery, and concluded that he would not. He did not wish to go out of the world grumbling.

It was noon before he had finished, and was ready to go out. He was passing.-though the. hotel bar when he noticed a sad-faced looking little man who was having a drink.

'He looks miserable enough,' thought Silden. 'After all, what's the use of wasting that tenner on a car. It'd only be swank. That tenner might pull some poor devil round. I can go down to Hampton Court by train, and that is good enough for me to-day.'

He wont across to the sad-faced stranger, and pressed a ten-pound note into his hand. 'Jolly good luck!' he said; and; turned away to avoid thanks.

He heard the little man come running after him.

'I beg pardon, sir, but I should like to know your name.'

'Silden,' said the lieutenant. 'Good morning.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the little' man.

'Not over effusive,' thought Silden. 'He didn't waste many words in gratitude. Still there isn't much in this world. Anyhow I hope it will do the poor little devil more good than it could ever do me. I don't stand any chance in this world, and that tenner would only mean prolonging the agony for another awful fortnight.'

He went out to Hampton Court. His mind was at ease now, and he spent quite a pleasant afternoon in the park. He returned late in the evening to the hotel for dinner. He tipped the waiter who had always looked after him a pound note.

'I shall be out of this to-morrow,' he said.

'Very sorry you are going, sir,' said, the waiter. 'We shall all miss you, sir.'

Then after dinner he sat and smoked in the lounge. He did not grudge himself a good cigar. It was too late to be economical now.

An acquaintance paused and said: 'Hello, Silden, I wish I could afford your smokes, but half-a-crown cigars are beyond me. I can see you've not gone through your gratuity yet!'

'I'm being a millionaire just for half an hour,' smiled Silden. 'You surely don't grudge me that?'

He looked round the lounge when he had finished his cigar. It seemed a bright and pleasant place enough, but he felt that he would be glad to get out of it. In a few minutes he would be out of reach of any strain or worry.

He nodded, pleasantly to the girl waitress, and passed out of the lounge into the hotel bar. One or two men recognised him, and he returned their greetings cheerfully. He smiled to himself as he thought of their astonishment when they read their papers the next day.

Then all at once he saw the little sad-faced man he had given the tenner to that morning.

'Drinking it away,' thought Silden. 'Well, if he can get any pleasure out of it, I don't grudge, it him.'

The little man gave a start when he saw Silden. He slipped from his stool and drew Silden into a corner of the bar.

'Is he going to try and touch me for another?' thought Silden.

'You did me a very good turn Today, sir,' he said.

'Very glad to hear it,' said Silden. 'You're very welcome, I'm sure.'

'Yes, you see, I guessed from your face that you knew something. You looked kind of grave, sir, and I knew at once that it was meant. Not just the ordinary sort of thing. So I'd a couple of quid on for myself with the boss as well as your tenner. Just cover me with your coat, please, so no one'll see what's passing. Think of it coming off at fifties. You'd have got sixty-sixes if you'd done it on the course. Only fifty is my boss's limit. There you are, sir. Ten fifties and a tenner. That's all right, isn't it? I made a clear 'undred myself. Best tip that I've had for years.'

'What— for?' stammered Silden.

'Jolly Good Luck. Bless me, guv'ner, you're not a bit screwed, are you? You remember giving me a tenner this morning to put on Jolly Good Luck. You see, it's no use expectin' sixty-sixes when the boss never pays more than fifties.'

Silden gasped. His fingers trembled as he took the wad of notes.

'Hadn't you heard that it had come off?' said the little man. 'Seems to have startled you.'

'No,' said Silden; 'I'd been thinking of other matters.'

'Well, I don't wonder it upsets you. I don't mind telling you that when I saw it come up on the tape, I did a bit of a step-dance. Now, guv'nor, if you get any more tips like that you'll come and put 'em on with me. The boss is all right. Good for ten thousand quid.'

'Yes, yes,' said Silden; 'but I'm not likely to stay in England.'

He looked at his watch and hurried from the bar. It was too late to go down and pay a call in a distant suburb that night, and yet he could not wait. He tore across to a telephone-box.

'Give me 4467 Streatham, please.'

'That Mr. Bowser's house?'

'Yes.'

'Will you please tell Miss Mabel that Lieutenant Silden wishes to speak to her at once. Thank you.'

He waited a moment or two, and then he heard a girl's voice say, 'Is that you, Mr. Silden?'

'It's George,' he said. 'Not Mr. Silden. I've .been waiting and waiting to propose to you, but I daren't do it. I wasn't in a position. But I am now. I have a chance in the world at last. Now, dear, will you .marry me at once and come

Vancouver. It will be a rough, hard life, dear, but I'll do my best to make it is a very happy one for you.'

The girl's voice sounded happy and confident. 'Of course I'll come, George; but why didn't you ask me before?'

'I wasn't in a position till to-night, Mabel, then things changed all at once,'

'What made the difference?'

'I'll tell you in the morning. I'll be down by nine. Just Jolly Good Luck,'

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20: The Other *G. 4*

F. St. Mars

Francis Henry Atkins, 1882-1921
Grand Magazine, April 1913

Hit, and hard hit! The blow went home,
The muffled, knocking stroke—
The steam that overruns the foam—
The foam that thins to smoke—
The smoke that chokes the deep aboil—
The deep that chokes her throes
Till, streaked with ash and sleeked with oil
The lukewarm waters close.
—The Destroyers, Rudyard Kipling.

LIEUTENANT OWEN HOUGHTON-CHALDER, R.N., lay luxuriously at his length— like a basking turtle— in the flaring sun, and blinked at the dazzling blue-green waters. He was watching the lane of water, kept more or less clear by buzzing picket-boats, up which— if God and their engines willed— the four finest submarines in His Britannic Majesty's— or any other— fleet would dash at full speed submerged, to attack the heads of the four lines of battleships then anchored for review in Dendridge Downs.

It was no concern of Chalder's what they did. He was outside— off duty for the day. From a motorboat (borrowed), with the help of an engine-room artificer (also borrowed), he was seeing how naval spectacles looked from the point of view of the "hurrah boat." He was profoundly bored.

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder lay back, his eyes on the high bows of a destroyer close by, capped with watching sailors— all in silhouette— and sang softly to himself:—

Tell her, till I see
Those eyes, I do not live—that Rome to me
Is hateful—tell her—oh!

"There she is! Perishin' 'eavens above!—they've sunk 'er."

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder, R.N., stopped singing. The last remark, shouted half across the seas, had come from the engine-room artificer among the motors forrard, but it was the figures in silhouette on the high turtle-back of the anchored destroyer who pointed and ran aft— to "out boats."

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder, R.N., uncrossed his legs and stared over the bow. He beheld a grey yacht with sails a-flap, a grey dinghy spinning

like a whirligig beetle, and the conning-tower of a submarine— even H.M.S. G 5— all mixed up together. His hand flashed to the tiny wheel. He turned forrard. His lips opened to fling a command, but he felt the little boat leap under him in the moment, and he shut his lips again, as a high song, the song of the wavelets under the bows, awoke to dispute the gibbering stutter of the motor-engine in front of him. That "tiffy" was a man of action, it seemed.

Though a dozen boats— miraculously born out of nowhere, it seemed— raced to the scene, none was so quick as the little motor. Even so, just when she was close up, Chalder put the helm hard over and she fell away. The jumble had disentangled itself. The dinghy departed this life quickly— went down by the stern, if you like. The yacht drifted off, and the submarine, her conning-tower disgorging men in sweaters, seethed slowly on up the sea-lane as if nothing had happened, her crew standing sphinx-like and untroubled, quite forgetting apparently that a minute before they had been within an eighth of an inch of death, so to speak. That is a way they have in the Navy. It's not much pirated as a rule.

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder lay back again and half closed his eyes. He was, I think, about to take up his dreamy song where he had left off, when the sight of the grey yacht bending across the sea-lane, her sails bulged to the breeze, heading straight for the harbour of Southmouth, crossed the narrow circle of his vision. The Lieutenant opened his eyes wide as the recollection of a grey yacht which had lain alongside of him twenty minutes before came into his brain. She had, judging by the language, been full of Northonians come down from London to see the review, it was said— all much interested in what was going forward.

"Hum!" mumbled the Lieutenant, his hand sliding up to the baby-wheel again. "Mr. Goring, d'you mind whacking her up a bit? We'll just trundle into harbour astern of that yacht, I think," he called.

"Ah!" said the artificer, and then again, "Ah! I was a-wonderin' if you'd recognised 'er. She's the craft as was full o' them Northonian blighters. Bloomin' strange coincidence, I call it— bloomin' strange."

Chalder made no reply. He appeared to have nearly gone to sleep again, but this cannot have been so really, for he was awake enough to take the motor-boat, figure-of-eight fashion, in and out among the crowded craft and across the patrolled sea-lane at such a speed that he swore the boat's gigantic bow-wave quite drowned the remarks of the middies— in full canonicals, with dirks and all correct— in charge of the panicking, fussing picket boats.

Thus it came about that a little later, just when everyone was hurrying review-wards, there sailed up Southmouth Harbour an unobtrusive and unostentatious little grey yacht, manned by three gentlemen in white flannels

and one "hand"; and behind her, some way astern, also unobtrusive and preoccupied, a black motor-boat, with a gentleman in tweeds lounging half-asleep in her stern, and a mighty-shouldered Navy man bent over her engine.

The yacht put in at the ferry landing-stage that lies alongside Southmouth Harbour station, and disgorged the three gentlemen in white flannels. The motor-boat put in at the same place and delivered up the lazy gentleman in grey tweeds, almost immediately on their heels.

"I shan't want you again to-day, Mr. Goring, thank you," drawled the latter, yawning.

"Aye, aye, sir. Mind you don't get mucked up with any o' their messy Mauser automatics, if I may be allowed to make an observation. Remember, leave's up at 7.45 a.m. to-morrow, an' we're ordered to join Red Fleet' at 9.15 a.m., if you *will* go crossin' the bows of foreign craft without escort, sir.'

Chalder nodded.

"Right ho! *Resurgam*," quoth he with a laugh, and vanished in the crowd.

Chalder overtook his yachting friends just as they were mounting the steps to the station. He followed them with the loving care of a creditor.

"Waterloo— third returns," said he to himself, peering over their shoulders, as the return halves of their tickets were clipped, and promptly booked himself a third return to that station. From the refreshment-room window he kept eye upon the three flannelled gentlemen as they chose them a carriage, and he made a show of the complete chance of the circumstance which led him to hop into that same carriage at the last moment, just as the train was beginning to move. They may not have been pleased to see him, but they were interested. Unlike his brother of the Army, your Naval officer lays aside his swagger with his uniform, but he cannot hide that peculiar "lift" to the very square shoulders, which is a distinctive mark of his calling all the world over. All three Northonians raised their eyebrows. Apparently they knew this too.

Chalder, on the other hand, showed no interest in anything at all, being altogether given over to drowsiness. It was hot, too. The platform-roof radiated heat, it burnt through the oily grime of the glass walls, it shone from the polished metals, the sleepers sweated tar visibly, and inside the great long bogie-carriages it was almost unbearable. Moreover, once in, there was no escape. The 2.51 p.m. is a fast train, calling only at Guildford on the way,

Chalder promptly— not too promptly— went to sleep; at least, he seemed to.

As a matter of fact, he merely looked upon this affair as a "lark." He loved "larks"— was, in fact, no use at all unless roused to something out of the ordinary. Moreover, he had: nothing to do. His very own destroyer—H.M.S.

Velocity, she was —had reported "minor engine-room defects" that morning, and been ordered into dock, there to mend herself with speed and join Red Fleet for manoeuvres in the North Sea next day. Chalder, therefore, was entirely stranded for amusement till 7.45 a.m. on the morrow, all the people whom he knew at Southmouth being out "reviewing." Simply and solely this chance it was, his odd inquisitive character, and the fact that the yacht which had— quite by accident, of course— fouled our latest submarine carried Northonians was, as the "E.R.A." had truly remarked, "a peculiar coincidence,"' which had made him follow these men. He did it for fun, because he was idle. Young men who read this will know the "Demon of pure mischance" that impelled him. Older people and ladies won't understand, or— perhaps the latter understand more than we know or guess.

The three gentlemen of Northonian persuasion felt the heat considerably. Theirs is a colder climate than this, and their menfolk— as do their womenfolk— tend somewhat more to generous proportions. They took off their jackets, and mopped. Now this, you will admit, was an altogether sensible and natural thing to do— among men, of course, in a "smoker"— only, well Have you ever noticed the extreme ease with which a smooth leather letter-case falls out of a breast-pocket when a coat is thrown carelessly on a sofa or chair? Good! Chalder had not before, but he did then. He noticed it just after the train had rumbled over the low bridge over that narrow channel behind the great port which some have called the key to Southmouth. The coat got shifted about in the general state of lounge assumed by the occupants of that carriage ; it hung down a little at the shoulders, and the smooth leather letter-case slid slowly and silently out on to the floor.

It made no sound. Nobody noticed it except Chalder, and he— artless man—kicked it unostentatiously back under the seat. He cannot tell you why he did do so— or will not. Personally, I think it was done in a spirit of pure idle mischief. Any way, there it was, out of sight, unsuspected, unmissed.

Chalder says smilingly that he there and then went to sleep for the remainder of the journey, but I don't believe him. Else how, when, about the longitude of Godalming, the Northonians went to wash and brush up— she was a corridor-train, the 2.51— how, I say, did it come about that the contents of the letter-case— two photographs unmounted, and a boarding-house bill unreceipted— found their way miraculously from their appointed receptacle to an altogether unappointed hiding-place between and under the cushions of the seat upon which friend Chalder reclined, so he tells you, always so peacefully asleep? Moreover, he must have seen at least part of one of the photographs, for I'm convinced that up to that point— upon the actual opening of the letter-case— he had looked upon the affair as merely an idle

"lark," hounded on by his natural extraordinary inquisitiveness. But after that moment—after he had, I believe I am right in saying, caught a momentary glimpse of half only of one photograph— his manner entirely changed. Half-hearted inquisitiveness flared in a flash to flaming suspicion; the "lark" became deadly earnest, and Chalder, instead of returning the photographs instantly to their place in the letter-case and the whole to their rightful owner— as I, knowing him, can swear he would have done— hid them without shame under the cushion. What he had seen of the half of the photograph was the bow end of a British submarine of the "G" class. What of it? Well, you see, this submarine in the photograph was out of water—in dry dock, in fact. But there's nothing wonderful in that to make a fuss about? Very good! Go you and try to photograph one of our later submarines in dry dock, say a "D," and see what happens. Only don't blame me if your camera is smashed to fine powder, and you are slain: once by the sentry who catches you ; once by the P.O. to whom he turns you over; at least twice by the officer commanding the depôt; once by the Naval Police, who will see you off the premises; and several times all over again by the police of Southmouth, in whose hands your wreckage will be eventually stranded.

At Waterloo the Lieutenant awoke to many yawns, the yachting entry put on their jackets— Chalder watched the letter-case man with a clear and wary eye, but the loss did not appear to have been discovered— and departed. Chalder departed, too, and in the same direction, but not for a few seconds, as he had need to be alone to transfer the photographs from their hiding-place to his own square, muscular person.

Then he followed.

His eyes were alight and dancing in his head. He was quite awake at last.

The Northonians took unto themselves a green taxi-cab, and drove off.

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder, R.N., took unto himself a ted taxi-cab, and drove off also.

"Follow that green chap in front there, and don't let him see you are doing it, and I'll add half a crown to your fare," quoth he. And as he ordered so it was.

Somewhere about the location of Soho the green taxi pulled up and unshipped its passengers— all three of them. Just round the corner, the red taxi dropped its passenger, and went away smiling.

Chalder was not smiling now, and his eyes were as cold as drops of the sea, his master. He saw the Northonians enter one of those little restaurants where you can get a most excellent lunch for just so much, and a ripping little dinner for just so much more, Then he took up his watch. It was a longish one. The yachting men did not reappear at all, and Chalder, who was noted for many

things— but patience was not one of them— said: "Oh, hang!" twice at the end of twenty minutes, and— boldly walked in.

He was too late for lunch and too early for dinner, but this did not explain why the place should be empty. It ought to have contained three yachting gentlemen, sitting at a table enjoying a hungry meal. It did not. It contained one cat who slept, and several hundred flies who slept never at all. There was nothing else.

Chalder's eyebrows crawled up his high forehead, and he stared.

"Private room, by Jove! What?" grunted he.

Then he sat down, hammered on a bell, and waited for the waiter. He was in no immediate hurry. Nevertheless he had to hammer three times before a door spoke somewhere in the mysterious darkness round an alcove, and a rotund, dark man, hurriedly adjusting a collar and buttoning a dress-coat which he had obviously only just put on, detached himself from the shadows. He must have only a few minutes ago slipped into the time-honoured costume of his trade, I should think, because he wore deck shoes— as I live, beautifully pipe-clayed deck shoes.

Every day brings a ship,
Every ship brings a word;
Well for him who has no fear
Looking seaward, well assured,

hummed Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder to himself quietly, running his eyes down an old menu card. When his eyes reached the bottom of the card they became aware of those white deck shoes framed clearly beneath it, and the gallant sailor stopped humming with a jerk. For about ten seconds he stared very hard indeed, muttered what may have been a prayer truly under his breath— but it sounded uncommonly like: "Oh, my only other Aunt Maria!" inhaled slowly through his nose, and, putting down the menu, looked up, to find himself staring straight into the dumbfounded eyes of the Northonian yachting gentleman the contents of whose letter-case reposed at that moment in Lieutenant Chalder's breast-pocket.

Did Lieutenant Chalder show the recognition? No, sir; I want to tell you he sat tight. There was no flicker of his fine eyebrows; his eyes— his steady grey eyes— showed no surprise, and, most hard of all, his firm, tight lips were still; there was no twitching of the corners of the mouth.

The Northonian took a hold of himself with an effort.

"I want," said Lieutenant Chalder with entire evenness of voice, "a plate of cold tongue, a roll and butter, and a Bass, please."

"Yes, monsieur."

The Northonian was himself again now. I think he felt certain that Chalder had not recognised him— Chalder, who never forgot any face once seen; especially the face of a pretty girl.

"Thank you."

Chalder acknowledged receipt of the meat and drink complacently, and fell to.

The waiter flicked zealously at a crumbless neighbouring table with a serviette. After a bit:

"Monsieur is brown. Monsieur is from the review, perhaps— yes?"

Monsieur nodded.

"If the man's a Northonian, which he undoubtedly is, he's deliberately acting French to still further jamb my helm, thought Chalder.

"Ah, that fleet! *Magnifique*, one 'ears from the papers. But so many ships— yes? One fears always an accident at such reviews. So terrible, an accident when all are making— 'ow you say?— 'appy day? There were no accidents, one 'opes, monsieur?"

The napkin flicked more zealously than ever.

Chalder looked up slowly, and thoughtfully broke his roll.

"No one was hurt, so far as I could see when I left." He paused a moment. "You see, I had to leave early, having to go on night work with my paper."

"Ah— ha! Monsieur is of the English press. Pardon. But it was as one would 'ave guessed."

Chalder smiled grimly, and asked for some cheese. While the waiter was gone to fetch it the gallant Lieutenant calmly emptied his ale onto a palm in a flaring green and tawny pot that graced his table.

"Drugging is not much resorted to these days," muttered he, "but— one never knows."

After that conversation flagged. Chalder was not to be drawn further by any method. He even refused the offer to have his jacket removed and hung up, "for monsieur; waiving ceremony, because it ess so very 'ot, so terreeble." (This was when Chalder first guessed that he was suspected of having the photographs.) He retired behind a paper, and the waiter behind a pile of napkins being made up in "shapes" for the dining-hour, leaving the horizon to the one cat, which still slept, and the many flies, which revolved round Chalder.

Chalder by this time doubted not that he had found out about all that he was likely to find out, paid his bill, tipped his waiter sixpence—he may have been a baron, or a corvette captain, or a lieutenant in his own country, for aught Chalder knew; anyway, he smiled queerly at the tip —and departed.

"And that is the end of them, so far as I am likely to be concerned, I suppose," quoth he, quite innocently, meaning no disparagement on the power of Fate to order things her own way.

As he spoke, one drunk— or acting drunk— and fighting hard with a fellow, reeled, sorely pressed, out of the bar of a public-house not twenty yards from the restaurant. He reeled straight into Chalder, striking blindly in any and every direction. But it was no blind blow that he aimed at the Lieutenant, for all that, and it ought to have dropped that young gentleman flat. Instead, however, he hopped nimbly out of the way, and made to pass on.

Now it may, or may not, have appeared to an onlooker an entire matter of chance that the man should be driven by his opponent, blundering again and again into Chalder, and that the man, his fists flying wildly all round his head, should each time strike blindly a shrewd blow at the officer. Be that as it may, there is no doubt at all about the third man, who slipped up in the confusion, and made a grab at Chalder's breast-pocket. Next moment that man was yelping like a trapped dog, with Chalder's strong hand closed like a vice near his "funny-bone," and a shooting pain running all up and down his arm.

What might have happened had not a policeman providentially appeared I— who have seen Chalder fight, to the entire discomfiture of his opponent, once or twice— dare not say. The policeman did, as has been said, appear, and the scuffle broke up like a lump of sugar in a tumbler of hot water.

It was rather cleverly done, when you come to think of it; the taxi loitering along idly by the kerb, bang in front of Chalder, as he was walking away, just at the very moment he most needed one. Chalder naturally could not be expected to stop to consider that taxis in search of fares do not loiter much in these parts as a mule, and when the driver politely asked: "Keb, sir?" Chalder jumped at the chance.

Just as he was about to step in, however— no, this was not fate, it was quite natural— he stopped and looked at the driver to give his directions, and— his eyes narrowed suddenly, His face became in a jerk remarkably, if I may so put it, still.

Just over the driver's left eye— truly, it may have been no more than the work of a duelling sword— was a neat diagonal scar. There was nothing very remarkable about it, save in this— it made its owner recognisable in any attire.

Lieutenant Owen Houghton Chalder, R.N., said no word, but turning languidly on his heel, walked across the road, hopped on to a passing motor-bus, and was gone, leaving the taxi driver standing on the kerb, holding open the door of his cab, with a dropped jaw and an odd smile.

"Deuced smart," mused Mr. Chalder, R.N., to himself on the top of the motor-bus. "Now I wonder where they would have taken me in their

confounded bogus taxi, and what they would have done when they got me there?"

You see, it was that scar that did it. Chalder had remembered— just in time only, be it said— that one of the Northonian yachtsmen had carried just such a scar, in just the same spot, at precisely the same angle.

"Another curious coincidence," as the engine-room artificer, Goring, would have said. And it was.

As the 6.40 p.m. (fast) London to Southmouth began to slowly steam out of Waterloo Station, a young man of gentlemanly appearance, to use the language of the papers, dark and tanned, dashed on to the platform, dodged the open arms of at least one porter, and "took" a "first-smoker" flying, so to say. Then he shut the door, put his smooth head out of the window, and explained sweetly to the various officials who had officially yelled "Stand back!" the fact that *he was deaf*. I regret to say they did not believe him.

About five seconds later two other men, not young, but also smartly dressed, dashed on to the platform and essayed to repeat the performance on the same carriage. That, however, was too much for even the officials who have to deal with the vagaries of more Navy and Army men than those of any other terminus, They hugged the two men of gentlemanly appearance to their bosoms like brothers, and would not part with them till the train was past all hope of being caught— not even though they explained heatedly that they could not be parted from their dear friend in the carriage, who had their tickets for a passage on a liner which they were all three going to catch together.

"Are you deaf, too?" asked an irate inspector. "No; well, then, you can go by the 7.10, from platform No. 5."

And I grieve to say that as the train got up speed, that dark young man of gentlemanly appearance inside leant out of the carriage window and gaily waved his handkerchief to his unfortunate friends.

"Better luck next time," he shouted back innocently.

And the porters laughed. His friends didn't. They swore— in Northonian.

Lieutenant Chalder flung himself back on the cushioned seat and chuckled.

"Confound the men! Who'd have thought they'd've shadowed me in that loving fashion? Why, if I'd stolen the day and night private signals of their high seas fleet they couldn't've wanted me more keenly."

As he spoke, half aloud, he took out the contents of the letter-case from his pocket, of which same you will remember he had only seen the half of one photograph. He now looked at the whole of that again. By the shape—they are no longer like gigantic cigars— he had seen that the submarine photographed in dry dock was pretty new. He now saw that she-was H.MS. *G 4*, sister-ship to

that *G 5* which the Northonian in the yacht had so nearly managed to finish off for good and all.

Then he looked at the other photograph, and— very slowly— gave a long-drawn whistle of amazement. You would not have seen why. Nor should I, unless I knew. The photograph was to all appearances just another one of the *G 4*— "94" was her "war number," marked on the conning-tower— taken in dry-dock ; but it was not the same dry-dock. It was another, one Chalder had never seen— one with an unexplainable foreign look about it. Now the *G 4* had only been in the Service three weeks. She had come straight from the makers, and the only dry-dock she had been in during that time was that in which she was shown in the first photograph at Southmouth. How about the makers' dry-dock? True, but— well, private makers in this country do not provide themselves with sentries in uniform and with fixed bayonets, as a rule, nor are their officials allowed to wear swords. The second photograph showed all these things. Therefore did Lieutenant Owen Houghton Chalder, R.N., whistle.

At Southmouth it appeared that the fame of his name had run before him. He had, it seemed, become quite an important personage during the last few hours, and many dear and kind new friends were suddenly burningly anxious as to his welfare. He smiled quietly to himself as he crossed the road by the magnificent town hall, and caught out of the corner of one grey, steady eye the vision of two most quietly-dressed gentlemen unostentatiously following him.

"Telegraphed from Waterloo to agents here, have they?" said Chalder to himself, "Want to find out the name of my ship? Dear me! Well, I must jamb their turrets for 'em somehow, I suppose."

Lieutenant Chalder scratched his clean-shaven chin thoughtfully and took counsel with himself. Then he made down a side-street and discovered a ham-and-beef shop, and, discovering, turned in.

The stay of Lieutenant Chalder in that meek little shop in a meek little back street was not of long duration. (Destroyer officers have their own little way of getting their own little *résumé* meals at odd and unauthorised hours, it seems.) Chalder walked straight through the shop, saying, in the "tight-lipped undertone" which is so peculiarly of the Navy naval:

"A cold roast chicken, some ham, sardines, and pickles, if you please, Monsieur Havre, and get me out of a back entrance somewhere, like a good chap. I'm being followed."

Monsieur Havre, who appeared to be a man of resource, and must have known more than Admirals of the unofficial manoeuvrings of His Majesty's fleet, did exactly as required, and in less than a minute deposited Chalder and a parcel, over boxes, through sheds, and by dark ways that were devious,

outside a little door in a long wall, in a little dark alley where, figuratively, no one ever came.

Chalder thereupon removed to his ship, where, first-class engine-room artificer Goring having variously bedevilled it for him, the two sat long over the meal conjured out of Monsieur Havre's provisions, and discussed— this also is not usual in the Service, or is it more usual than the Admiralty suppose?— the events of the day. And, after waiting two hours outside the front of Monsieur Havre's shop, the two unobtrusive gentlemen aforementioned were politely requested to "move on" by a policeman, and went home also. What their superiors said to them later I don't, but should very much like to, know.

Now it must here be noted that precisely what transpired between Houghton-Chalder and the Admiralty during the next twenty-four hours or so has never, of course, been made public. It is presumed that My Lords received Houghton-Chalder's report with small enthusiasm, not to say coldness. Possibly they considered the photograph to be only a "fake." Anyway, it would appear that their reply— or, more possibly, non-reply— was such as to lead Houghton-Chalder to feel quite justified in acting— and even planning to act— upon his own initiative if the need or the chance arose.

There was a bit of a swell outside the harbour next morning, and the long seas swung by soundlessly till they, went to pieces with a dull roar on the beach crowded with sightseers,

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder was on the bridge of the *Velocity*, watching the submarines go by. It was his place there. He commanded H.M.S. *Velocity*. As the *G 4* went combing past— kicking up no end of a wash, as these new slab and tank-sided submarines do— her oil-skinned crew nigh waist-high in curling, creaming waters, he saluted cheerily his friend Lieutenant William Charles Dendridge, otherwise "Billy D.," under whose command the *G 4* sailed.

Then it pleased the *Swift*, the 1,800-ton flagship of the lean grim destroyers, to wrap herself in flags, and Chalder's "sub," a cloaked, wet figure on the streaming decks below, cried, "All right, sir, let her go!" and at eighteen knots, smothered in spume and flying spray, into the teeth of the wind "she" and seven consorts— two divisions— went. The *G 4*, with her consorts, all grouped round their parent ship— same as flew the enormous red flags at her masthead for "danger"— like chickens round a hen, left later, with orders to "clear the Channel," as they proceeded ahead of the stately battle fleet which would leave later.

History does not record precisely what followed then— these records of manoeuvres being now secret things hugged up in the archives of the Admiralty; but certain it is— even the Admiralty cannot quash the whispers of the "lower deck" when things get talked about— that during the run up the

Channel and round to Scotland, H.M.S. *G 4* seemed to miraculously develop a most amazing proclivity— a most undisciplined proclivity, I might say— for spiriting herself into two places at once. Not once, but several times, she was reported by "look-outs" in places where not only she had received no orders to be, but where "Billy D.," with language proper to the occasion, swore by all his gods— heavy oil ones mostly— that she never had been.

Now if you have ever from the decks of a vibrating, leaping, panting, spray-bespattered destroyer endeavoured to read the "war number"— or any number— of a submarine, seen and gone again, on a dark night or a dull day, you will know just precisely how easy it is to make a mistake about the mere matter of a number. "94," under such conditions, may well be really "82," and so forth. Yet, even allowing for that, there can be no doubt that we are forced to return again to the emphatic comments of engine-room artificer Goring, and admit that it was a "strange coincidence."

What Chalder thought about it— having those twin photos of the *G 4* in his pocket— I don't know. He never said. The whisper— and truly it was no more than a whisper, and never rose above the "lower deck"— could not have escaped him, by reason of the zealous reports of E.R.A. Goring, but he stuck to his maxim that "No flies enter a shut mouth," and took his ship to her Scottish rendezvous in silence and to the best of his ability.

THREE NIGHTS later, anchored all together in that precise Scottish firth which has, and may again, become historical, it pleased the Admiral-in-Chief of our battle squadrons to see what would happen if a reckless and daring commander hurled destroyers and submarines up the firth in such numbers that though many were sunk, there might still be enough surviving to sink a battleship or two and more than compensate the risk and loss of the smaller craft.

The submarines retired down-firth in the afternoon.

The destroyers dug out a little later with orders to proceed to sea, turn after dark, let the submarines— which were too frail to manoeuvre with irresponsible destroyers—by to do their work, and then deliver their own attack when the submarines had finished.

H.M.S. *Velocity* was one of the vessels involved. The *G 4* was another.

"And now," said Lieutenant Chalder, "we shall see what we shall see. This is their chance. Wonder if they will take it."

It was after dark when the *Velocity*, last of the line of destroyers, swung round and followed her leaders slowly back to the firth. That was at 9.40 p.m. about. There was a short choppy sea that troubled one's innards and snatched at the bows sideways, and spat up over the turtleback deck in little white puffs,

and there was a sickly moon that glared in patches through the dark night and fled incontinently, to re-appear anon and flee again.

At 9.45 the submarines passed, making at speed in surface trim for the firth. The destroyers had to go slow to let them get well away, Chalder saw the *G 4* distinctly. She was last of a line of four. She passed quite close to the *Velocity*, so that there could be no mistake. Chalder took care to call several men to see her. He even "spoke" her. Then she slid into the haze ahead, and was swallowed up.

Half an hour later H.M.S. *Tiger*— the giant racing battle cruiser of twenty-six thousand tons with a speed of thirty-one knots, and the finest ship we have, whose business it was to lead the rush and protect the destroyers from the too close attention of hostile active cruisers— came sliding past, like a mountain adrift on the face of the waters.

It seemed to Chalder as he stood on the bridge that another submarine— they had all passed and had been accounted for, mind you— was passing at the same moment on his port bow. He could distinctly hear the swish and seething hiss of her "wash." And his night glasses said the same thing. Bang across his bow, straight towards the gigantic *Tiger*, a submarine was crossing at speed, and the name of her was *G 4*, and her number was "94."

A frantic yell for Goring to go to the bridge at once was followed by that worthy darting up the slippery deck like an otter over a wet rock.

"There she is! There th' beggar is!"

He took Chalder's words out of his mouth even as his feet touched the bridge. He snatched the night glasses held out to him.

"Yes, *G 4* all right, and she's— she's miles a'ead by this." He spun on his heel, his eyes shining like a bird's in the moonlight, his face cut like a plaster casting against blue-black velvet. "And now, sir?"

Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder answered him never a word. He went over to the little wheel and took it. He sent the blue man at the wheel down below to get some private signal papers from his cabin. The decks were deserted for the moment— only Chalder and Goring, standing, dim smears of black on the bridge. Then Goring spoke down the engine-room tube, and— it was as if his words had broken a spell.

Things happened altogether in a jumble— furious, awful, quickly, without warning.

The *Velocity* slowed for a few revolutions, so that her consorts faded into the haze ahead. Then she swerved and literally leapt from her course like a live thing.

At the same moment it was as though a gigantic silver fish shot along the surface of the water from the *G 4*, and there was a little hollow "boomp!" and a haze across the streaky moonlit sea.

Followed then a surprised shout from high overhead on the mammoth battle cruiser's bridge, another from her stern, and a ringing of bells somewhere. Over the water came the words of someone shouting something about being mad. H.MS. *Tiger* slowed visibly, and miraculously swerved to port. Then one saw that the giant silver fish thing had flashed past so close to her ram that from a little distance one could not believe that it had cleared the cliff-high, steel knife-edge cutting through the deep. It had, however, and went tearing on in a little white bubbling streak of its own making.

At that moment the *G 4* began to submerge.

Came next an interval of aching silence, broken only by the boil of the tortured waters in the *Velocity*'s wake as that ship seemed to literally be springing towards the *G 4*, whose periscope and conning-tower top alone showed above water now.

Then— and then, from away beyond the *Tiger*, from far beyond H.MS. *Tiger*, came a booming, knocking roar, a dull and blasting thunder that seemed to hit the night a blow and hurl the silences all over the place. It was the silver fish which had struck a rocky island— marked by a lighthouse it is— about three-quarters of a mile away. The thing had been a twenty-one inch torpedo with its war-nose on.

At the same moment, it seemed— but it must have been a few moments after really— there came a crash, a grating, rasping sound, and— silence. H.M.S. *Velocity* was swinging round back to her course, rapidly reducing speed as she went, and her dazzling wake churned and fumed and seethed exactly over the place where the *G 4* had been.

But there was no *G 4*, nor periscope, nor conning-tower, nor anything that had been hers. There was nothing— only those maddened white waters, and later some smeary oil, and some twisted and dented plates on the bows of H.M.S. *Velocity*, which had sunk her.

A few minutes later the flagship at anchor many miles away up the firth was startled by the furious gibbering of her wireless receiver, which, in longs and shorts, spelt off a frantic message from H.M.S. *Tiger*. In a moment the flagship's masthead light awoke and began to talk across the night in hurried winks. It spoke swiftly and went out. Then, after a pause, came answering winks from the direction of the submarine depôt ashore, and from the submarine tender afloat. Then again silence.

The submarine tender vanished down harbour at speed, and in half an hour returned, her charges clustering all around her, as I have said, just like

chickens round their mother hen. Her masthead light winked clearly and went out, and the flagship answered.

And then at last, way down at the mouth of the firth, Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder on the bridge of the *Velocity*, surrounded by a cluster of destroyers and boats, saw the masthead light of H.MS. *Tiger*, which was standing by, flash through the darkness.

"*Velocity*'s commander to *Tiger* at once, sir," read off a signalman at his elbow, and Chalder streaked from the bridge without a word. He had been awaiting that order.

There was a rush of men and a creak of oars away into the darkness, and he had gone.

He found the captain of the *Tiger* in his cabin.

"The flagship reports 'all submarines present and correct,' " said that grim, clean-shaven, tanned man of war, Then he turned with knit brows, and fixed Chalder with his grey eyes. "And what is the meaning of this, sir?" snapped he.

"Well, sir, perhaps I ought to state that I have already made one report to the Admiral," Chalder replied deferentially. He was quite cool— a little pale beneath his tan, that was all.

"But"— the captain's eyes had never left Chalder's face— "you sank some submarine. What submarine?"

Chalder took two photographs from his breast-pocket, and, advancing to the captain's desk, laid them before him.

"The other *G 4*, sir," he said slowly, pointing to the photos.

And the captain was dumb.

Now, of course, these things never got into the papers, and most people wonder why Lieutenant Owen Houghton-Chalder, R.N., received later such rapid promotion, as also his engine-room artificer, Goring. Seeing that they between them saved the finest ship in our Navy, and probably at least two or three more, saved also many lives in so doing, and finally by their action saved us all from a bloody and appalling war, I do not wonder at their promotion at all. Do you?

End