PAST MASTERS 207

Stephen Crane
E. Phillips Oppenheim
Jane Barlow
Baroness Orczy
Frances Noyes Hart
Max Pemberton
Saki
R. Ottolengui
John Kendrick Bangs

and more

PAST MASTER 207

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

13 March 2025

Contents

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1: The Detective Detector

O. Henry

1862-1910

The Sunday World (New York) 26 March 1905

Meet Shamrock Jolnes, the Great Consulting Detective (or are we meeting the Great Criminal, who is indeed A Very Knight...)

I WAS WALKING in Central Park with Avery Knight, the great New York burglar, highwayman, and murderer.

"But, my dear Knight," said I, "it sounds incredible. You have undoubtedly performed some of the most wonderful feats in your profession known to modern crime. You have committed some marvellous deeds under the very noses of the police— you have boldly entered the homes of millionaires and held them up with an empty gun while you made free with their silver and jewels; you have sandbagged citizens in the glare of Broadway's electric lights; you have killed and robbed with superb openness and absolute impunity— but when you boast that within forty-eight hours after committing a murder you can run down and actually bring me face to face with the detective assigned to apprehend you, I must beg leave to express my doubts— remember, you are in New York."

Avery Knight smiled indulgently.

"You pique my professional pride, doctor," he said in a nettled tone. "I will convince you."

About twelve yards in advance of us a prosperous-looking citizen was rounding a clump of bushes where the walk curved. Knight suddenly drew a revolver and shot the man in the back. His victim fell and lay without moving.

The great murderer went up to him leisurely and took from his clothes his money, watch, and a valuable ring and cravat pin. He then rejoined me smiling calmly, and we continued our walk. Ten steps and we met a policeman running toward the spot where the shot had been fired. Avery Knight stopped him.

"I have just killed a man," he announced, seriously, "and robbed him of his possessions."

"G'wan," said the policeman, angrily, "or I'll run yez in! Want yer name in the papers, don't yez? I never knew the cranks to come around so quick after a shootin' before. Out of th' park, now, for yours, or I'll fan yez."

"What you have done," I said, argumentatively, as Knight and I walked on, "was easy. But when you come to the task of hunting down the detective that. they send upon your traii you will find that you have undertaken a difficult feat."

"Perhaps so," said Knight, lightly. "I will admit that my success depends in degree upon the sort of man they start after me. If it should be an ordinary plain-clothes man I might fail to gain a sight of him. If they honor me by giving the case to some one of their celebrated sleuths I do not fear to match my cunning and powers of induction against his."

On the next afternoon Knight entered my office with a satisfied look on his keen countenance.

"How goes the mysterious murder?' I asked.

"As usual," said Knight, smilingly. "I have put in the morning at the police station and at the inquest. It seems that a card case of mine containing cards with my name and address was found near the body. They have three witnesses who saw the shooting and gave a description of me. The case has been placed in at the hands of Shamrock Jolnes, the famous detective. 11:30 on the assignment. He left Headquarters waited at my address until two, thinking he might call there."

I laughed, tauntingly. "You will never see Jolnes," I continued, "until this murder has been forgotten, two or three weeks from now. I had a better opinion of your shrewdness, Knight. During the three hours and a half that you waited he has got out of your ken. He is after you on true induction theories now, and no wrongdoer has yet been known to come upon him while thus engaged. I advise you to give it up."

"Doctor," said Knight, with a sudden glint in his keen gray eye and a squaring of his chin, "in spite of the record your city holds of something like a dozen homicides without a subsequent meeting of the perpetrator and the sleuth in charge of the case, I will undertake to break that record. To-morrow I will take you to Shamrock Jolnes— I will unmask him before you and prove to you that it is not an impossibility for an officer of the law and a manslayer to stand face to face in your city."

"Do it," said I, "and you'll have the sincere thanks of the Police Department."

On the next day Knight called for me in a cab.

"I've been on one or two false scents, doctor," he admitted. "I know something of detectives' methods, and I followed out a few of them, expecting to find Jolnes at the other end. The pistol being a .45-caliber, I thought surely I would find him at work on the clue in Forty-fifth Street. Then, again, I looked for the detective at the Columbia University, as the man's being shot in the back naturally suggested hazing. But I could not find a trace of him."

"—Nor will you," I said, emphatically.

"Not by ordinary methods," said Knight. "I might walk up and down Broadway for a month without success. But you have aroused my pride,

doctor; and if I fail to show you Shamrock Jolnes this day, I promise you I will never kill or rob in your city again."

"Nonsense, man," I replied. "When our burglars walk into our houses and politely demand thousands of dollars' worth of jewels, and then dine and bang the piano an hour or two before leaving, how do you, a mere murderer, expect to come in contact with the detective that is looking for you?"

Avery Knight sat lost in thought for a while. At length he looked up brightly.

"Doc," said he, "I have it. Put on your hat, and come with me. In half an hour I guarantee that you shall stand in the presence of Shamrock Jolnes."

I entered a cab with Avery Knight. I did not hear his instructions to the driver, but the vehicle set out at a smart pace up Broadway, turning presently into Fifth Avenue, and proceeding northward again. It was with a rapidly beating heart that I accompanied this wonderful and gifted assassin, whose analytical genius and superb self-confidence had prompted him to make me the tremendous promise of bringing me into the presence of a murderer and the New York detective in pursuit of him simultaneously.

Even yet I could not believe it possible.

"Are you sure that you are not being led into some trap?" I asked. "Suppose that your clue, whatever it is, should bring us only into the presence of the Commissioner of Police and a couple of dozen cops!"

"My dear doctor," said Knight, a little stiffly. "I would remind you that I am no gambler."

"I beg your pardon," said I. "But I do not think you will find Jolnes."

The cab stopped before one of the handsomest residences on the avenue. Walking up and down in front of the house was a man with long red whiskers, the with a detective's badge showing on the lapel of his coat. Now and then the man would remove his whiskers to wipe his face, and then I would recognize at once well-known features of the great New York detective. Jolnes was keeping a sharp watch upon the doors and windows of the house.

"Well, doctor," said Knight, unable to repress a note of triumph in his voice, "have you seen?"

"It is wonderful— wonderful!" I could not help exclaiming as our cab started on its return trip. "But how did you do it? By what process of induction—"

"My dear doctor," interrupted the great murderer, "the inductive theory is what the detectives use. My process is more modern. I call it the saltatorial theory. Without bothering with the tedious mental phenomena necessary to the solution of a mystery from slight clues, I jump at once to a conclusion. I will explain to you the method I employed in this case.

"In the first place, I argued that as the crime was committed in New York City in broad daylight, in a public place and under peculiarly atrocious circumstances, and that as the most skilful sleuth available was let loose upon the case, the perpetrator would never be discovered. Do you not think my postulation justified by precedent?"

"Perhaps so," I replied, doggedly. "But if Big Bill Dev—"

"Stop that," interrupted Knight, with a smile, "I've heard that several times. It's too late now. I will proceed. "If homicides in New York went undiscovered, I reasoned, although the best detective talent was employed to ferret them out, it must be true that the detectives went about their work in the wrong way. And not only in the wrong way, but exactly opposite from the right way.

"I slew the man in Central Park. That was my clue. Now, let me describe myself to you.

"I am tall, with a black beard, and I hate publicity. I have no money to speak of; I do not like oatmeal, and it is the one ambition of my life to die rich. I am of a cold and heartless disposition. I do not care for my fellowmen and I never give a cent to beggars or charity.

"Now, my dear doctor, that is the true description of myself, the man whom that shrewd detective was to hunt down. You who are familiar with the history of crime in New York of late should be able to foretell the result. When I promised you to exhibit to your incredulous gaze the sleuth who was set upon me, you laughed at me because you said that detectives and murderers never met in New York. I have demonstrated to you that the theory is possible."

"But how did you do it?" I asked again.

"It was very simple," replied the distinguished murderer, "I assumed that the detective would go exactly opposite to the clues he had. I have given you a description of myself. Therefore, he must necessarily set to work and trail a short man with a white beard who likes to be in the papers, who is very wealthy, is fond of oatmeal, wants to die poor, and is of an extremely generous and philanthropic disposition. When thus far is reached the mind hesitates no longer. I conveyed you at once to the spot where Shamrock Jolnes was piping off Andrew Carnegie's residence."

"Knight," said I, "you're a wonder. If there was no danger of your reforming, what a rounds man you'd make for the Nineteenth Precinct!"

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2: The Boar-Pig

Saki

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

The Morning Post, 20 Aug 1912 (as by H. H. Munro)

In: *Beasts and Supeerbeasts*, 1914

"THERE is a back way on to the lawn," said Mrs. Philidore Stossen to her daughter, "through a small grass paddock and then through a walled fruit garden full of gooseberry bushes. I went all over the place last year when the family were away. There is a door that opens from the fruit garden into a shrubbery, and once we emerge from there we can mingle with the guests as if we had come in by the ordinary way. It's much safer than going in by the front entrance and running the risk of coming bang up against the hostess; that would be so awkward when she doesn't happen to have invited us."

"Isn't it a lot of trouble to take for getting admittance to a garden party?"

"To a garden party, yes; to the garden party of the season, certainly not. Every one of any consequence in the county, with the exception of ourselves, has been asked to meet the Princess, and it would be far more troublesome to invent explanations as to why we weren't there than to get in by a roundabout way. I stopped Mrs. Cuvering in the road yesterday and talked very pointedly about the Princess. If she didn't choose to take the hint and send me an invitation it's not my fault, is it? Here we are: we just cut across the grass and through that little gate into the garden."

Mrs. Stossen and her daughter, suitably arrayed for a county garden party function with an infusion of Almanack de Gotha, sailed through the narrow grass paddock and the ensuing gooseberry garden with the air of state barges making an unofficial progress along a rural trout stream. There was a certain amount of furtive haste mingled with the stateliness of their advance, as though hostile search-lights might be turned on them at any moment; and, as a matter of fact, they were not unobserved. Matilda Cuvering, with the alert eyes of thirteen years old and the added advantage of an exalted position in the branches of a medlar tree, had enjoyed a good view of the Stossen flanking movement and had foreseen exactly where it would break down in execution.

"They'll find the door locked, and they'll jolly well have to go back the way they came," she remarked to herself. "Serves them right for not coming in by the proper entrance. What a pity Tarquin Superbus isn't loose in the paddock. After all, as every one else is enjoying themselves, I don't see why Tarquin shouldn't have an afternoon out."

Matilda was of an age when thought is action; she slid down from the branches of the medlar tree, and when she clambered back again Tarquin, the huge white Yorkshire boar-pig, had exchanged the narrow limits of his stye for

the wider range of the grass paddock. The discomfited Stossen expedition, returning in recriminatory but otherwise orderly retreat from the unyielding obstacle of the locked door, came to a sudden halt at the gate dividing the paddock from the gooseberry garden.

"What a villainous-looking animal," exclaimed Mrs. Stossen; "it wasn't there when we came in."

"It's there now, anyhow," said her daughter. "What on earth are we to do? I wish we had never come."

The boar-pig had drawn nearer to the gate for a closer inspection of the human intruders, and stood champing his jaws and blinking his small red eyes in a manner that was doubtless intended to be disconcerting, and, as far as the Stossens were concerned, thoroughly achieved that result.

"Shoo! Hish! Hish! Shoo!" cried the ladies in chorus.

"If they think they're going to drive him away by reciting lists of the kings of Israel and Judah they're laying themselves out for disappointment," observed Matilda from her seat in the medlar tree. As she made the observation aloud Mrs. Stossen became for the first time aware of her presence. A moment or two earlier she would have been anything but pleased at the discovery that the garden was not as deserted as it looked, but now she hailed the fact of the child's presence on the scene with absolute relief.

"Little girl, can you find some one to drive away—" she began hopefully.

"*Comment? Comprends pas*," was the response.

"Oh, are you French? *Êtes vous française*?"

"*Pas de tous. 'Suis anglaise*."

"Then why not talk English? I want to know if—"

"*Permettez-moi expliquer*. You see, I'm rather under a cloud," said Matilda. "I'm staying with my aunt, and I was told I must behave particularly well to-day, as lots of people were coming for a garden party, and I was told to imitate Claude, that's my young cousin, who never does anything wrong except by accident, and then is always apologetic about it. It seems they thought I ate too much raspberry trifle at lunch, and they said Claude never eats too much raspberry trifle. Well, Claude always goes to sleep for half an hour after lunch, because he's told to, and I waited till he was asleep, and tied his hands and started forcible feeding with a whole bucketful of raspberry trifle that they were keeping for the garden-party. Lots of it went on to his sailor-suit and some of it on to the bed, but a good deal went down Claude's throat, and they can't say again that he has never been known to eat too much raspberry trifle. That is why I am not allowed to go to the party, and as an additional punishment I must speak French all the afternoon. I've had to tell you all this in English, as there were words like 'forcible feeding' that I didn't know the

French for; of course I could have invented them, but if I had said nourriture obligatoire you wouldn't have had the least idea what I was talking about. *Mais maintenant, nous parlons français*."

"Oh, very well, *trés bien*," said Mrs. Stossen reluctantly; in moments of flurry such French as she knew was not under very good control. "*Là, à l'autre côté de la porte, est un cochon—*"

"*Un cochon? Ah, le petit charmant*!" exclaimed Matilda with enthusiasm.

"*Mais non, pas du tout petit, et pas du tout charmant; un bête féroce—*"

"*Une bête*," corrected Matilda; "a pig is masculine as long as you call it a pig, but if you lose your temper with it and call it a ferocious beast it becomes one of us at once. French is a dreadfully unsexing language."

"For goodness' sake let us talk English then," said Mrs. Stossen. "Is there any way out of this garden except through the paddock where the pig is?"

"I always go over the wall, by way of the plum tree," said Matilda.

"Dressed as we are we could hardly do that," said Mrs. Stossen; it was difficult to imagine her doing it in any costume.

"Do you think you could go and get some one who would drive the pig away?" asked Miss Stossen.

"I promised my aunt I would stay here till five o'clock; it's not four yet."

"I am sure, under the circumstances, your aunt would permit—"

"My conscience would not permit," said Matilda with cold dignity.

"We can't stay here till five o'clock," exclaimed Mrs. Stossen with growing exasperation.

"Shall I recite to you to make the time pass quicker?" asked Matilda obligingly. " 'Belinda, the little Breadwinner,' is considered my best piece, or, perhaps, it ought to be something in French. Henri Quatre's address to his soldiers is the only thing I really know in that language."

"If you will go and fetch some one to drive that animal away I will give you something to buy yourself a nice present," said Mrs. Stossen.

Matilda came several inches lower down the medlar tree.

"That is the most practical suggestion you have made yet for getting out of the garden," she remarked cheerfully; "Claude and I are collecting money for the Children's Fresh Air Fund, and we are seeing which of us can collect the biggest sum."

"I shall be very glad to contribute half a crown, very glad indeed," said Mrs. Stossen, digging that coin out of the depths of a receptacle which formed a detached outwork of her toilet.

"Claude is a long way ahead of me at present," continued Matilda, taking no notice of the suggested offering; "you see, he's only eleven, and has golden hair, and those are enormous advantages when you're on the collecting job.

Only the other day a Russian lady gave him ten shillings. Russians understand the art of giving far better than we do. I expect Claude will net quite twenty-five shillings this afternoon; he'll have the field to himself, and he'll be able to do the pale, fragile, not-long-for-this-world business to perfection after his raspberry trifle experience. Yes, he'll be quite two pounds ahead of me by now."

With much probing and plucking and many regretful murmurs the beleaguered ladies managed to produce seven-and-sixpence between them.

"I am afraid this is all we've got," said Mrs. Stossen.

Matilda showed no sign of coming down either to the earth or to their figure.

"I could not do violence to my conscience for anything less than ten shillings," she announced stiffly.

Mother and daughter muttered certain remarks under their breath, in which the word "beast" was prominent, and probably had no reference to Tarquin.

"I find I have got another half-crown," said Mrs. Stossen in a shaking voice; "here you are. Now please fetch some one quickly."

Matilda slipped down from the tree, took possession of the donation, and proceeded to pick up a handful of over-ripe medlars from the grass at her feet. Then she climbed over the gate and addressed herself affectionately to the boar-pig.

"Come, Tarquin, dear old boy; you know you can't resist medlars when they're rotten and squashy."

Tarquin couldn't. By dint of throwing the fruit in front of him at judicious intervals Matilda decoyed him back to his stye, while the delivered captives hurried across the paddock.

"Well, I never! The little minx!" exclaimed Mrs. Stossen when she was safely on the high road. "The animal wasn't savage at all, and as for the ten shillings, I don't believe the Fresh Air Fund will see a penny of it!"

There she was unwarrantably harsh in her judgment. If you examine the books of the fund you will find the acknowledgment: "Collected by Miss Matilda Cuvering, 2s. 6d."

3: The Hill Street Murder

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Cosmopolitan Feb 1928

A Benskin of the Yard case

THROUGH the silence outside of the brief hour before dawn, and the silence of the sleeping household, Gregory Dent sat at his desk and wrote. He wrote fiercely, with a spluttering pen, like a man who has burning matter in his brain, of which he must rid himself. In his travel-stained clothes— he had motored without a stop from a northern town— he seemed a little out of place in a study which lacked no possible touch of elegance. It was the study of a wealthy man and a man of taste, a man, too, who loved beautiful things. The two simple bronzes, which were the sole adornments of his writing table, were perfect in outline and workmanship, the pen with which he wrote was of beaten gold— a gift from an Indian nabob; the blotter was bound in silver scroll work which had once decorated the treasure box of a Burmese temple. Grimly and forcefully, the pen spelt out its devastating message. The man in whose strong, blunt fingers it was gripped never hesitated for a word, never paused to reread what he had written. It was the ruin of a once powerful and proud commercial undertaking which he was pronouncing, but ruin which, on the hard facts, was fully deserved. He pursued his task without faltering until its completion. Then, for a brief space of time, he leaned back in his chair with an air of relief; the sense of a task accomplished slackened the muscles of his body and the tenseness of his brain.... Presently he rose, opened a cupboard of lacquer work, brought out whisky and a syphon, helped himself to a drink, took up the pen once more, and signed the sheets he had written. Afterwards he turned over the pages of the telephone directory, found the number he wanted, and raised the receiver from its stand.

"Number 890 Mayfair," he demanded.... "Sir Gregory Dent speaking from Number 17a, Hill Street. Is that Miss Fisher's All Night Typewriting Agency?... Good. Could you send me a stenographer round at once to Hill Street? She must bring a machine and do half an hour's typing on the premises. And— wait a moment— she can take a taxi and keep it waiting; but stop at the corner of the street, as I don't want to wake my people up.... Right; then I'll expect her in a quarter of an hour,"

He set down the receiver and for the first time read through what he had written. Apparently it met with his approval, for he made no change in any of the sheets. He lit a cigarette and leaned back once more in his comfortably padded chair. Outside, the silence of the passing night was still unbroken. From

the far distance came the occasional hoot of a taxi, but in this little corner of Mayfair all was quiet. He rose again to his feet, walked quietly to the door, opened it, and stood for a moment in the hall. He was a large man, clumsily but powerfully built, with harsh features, redeemed to some extent by the softer curves of his mouth. As he listened the faintest of smiles softened out some of the hard lines. On the floor above Angela would be sleeping. Presently, when this self-imposed task was brought to a conclusion, he would steal up the stairs and listen from his dressing room. If by any chance she were awake...

He returned to his seat and presently the sound for which he waited arrived— the sound of a taxi drawing up close at hand and footsteps upon the pavement. He left his place and himself opened the front door. A plainly dressed young woman, in a long dark coat and round turban hat, stood there. He wasted no time in purposeless questions, but, with a little gesture imposing silence, ushered her into the study, and led her to the table.

"There are seven pages here of a very important report," he explained. "I want them typed with two extra copies. Afterwards each copy is to be put into an envelope addressed, the first to Lord Eustace Martinhoe, Chairman of the Dent Financial Trust, 32b, Bishopsgate, E.C.2; the second to Sir Walter Cranley, Bart., 14a, Scuddamore Gardens, S.W.1; and the third to Jacob Houlder, Esq., Secretary to the Dent Financial Trust, also to 32b, Bishopsgate. Have you those addresses all right?"

"Thank you— yes."

He drew several treasury notes from his pocket and laid them upon the table.

"I don't know exactly what your charges are," he continued, "but work at this time of night is worth paying well. I am going to try to keep awake long enough to see you out, but I am very tired, and if I should drop off to sleep, put the letters into the envelopes and deliver them for me. The meeting to which they refer is not held until three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, but I want them to be received several hours beforehand. Can you be sure of delivering them for me by ten o'clock?"

"Yes. I can do that."

"Good. Then if, by any chance, I am asleep when you have finished, don't wake me to sign them. Just put 'Gregory Dent' and sign them per pro in your own name as typist.... Take off your coat if you find the room warm. You had better put your typewriter upon this table. Allow me."

With quick and deft fingers she slipped the machine from its case and laid a little roll of paper by its side. She unfastened her coat but kept it on, and stretched out her hand for the copy which he offered her. She read the first

sheet quickly; at the second she paused. Very deliberately she looked around. Gregory Dent had gone back to the cabinet and was searching for another syphon of soda water. Her eyes rested upon him for a moment, filled with a curious, startled expression. One hand was clenched; the nerveless fingers of the other barely retained their grip of the remainder of the copy. At the sound of a movement from him, she recovered herself with an effort. By the time he had found the syphon and turned around, she was reading page three with apparent absorption. When she had come to the end of the manuscript, he noticed her pallor and the fact that her fingers were trembling.

"You look too delicate for this night work," he said, not unkindly. "I'm afraid I have nothing to offer you except whisky and soda. I've just motored up from the country, and if I wake the servants, I shall disturb my wife."

"There is no necessity, thank you," she assured him. "I am not in need of anything. The room was a little warm after the street. I am quite all right."

"You are certain that you can read the copy?"

"Easily."

He moved to the door to be sure that it was closed and dragged a heavy screen in front of it in order to still more effectually deaden the sound. Presently the clicking of the machine commenced. Rapidly and expertly, the typist proceeded with her task. Gregory Dent, his labours over, sank into an easy-chair and closed his eyes. He had spent a strenuous day for a man who had passed middle age. Yet, he reflected, how well it was that he had gone north himself. It showed how little one could trust these ambassadors. There would be trouble to-morrow— trouble and plenty of it— not of his making, though. Besides, there would be the plaudits of all those whose money he had contrived to save. A happy day, on the whole, he decided. His great task accomplished, he would rest. It had been a long winter and it was time he had a holiday. Would Angela care for Monte Carlo, he wondered? An excellent idea, anyhow. Angela loved to gamble. Well, she should gamble to her heart's content. Or, would she prefer Cannes, with its sunny skies, and gaily crowded promenade. He suddenly pictured her upon the Croisette, strolling from the Carlton, arm in arm with him, her little cries of delight as she examined the shop windows and led him gaily inside— a willing victim. Yes, it must be Cannes, he thought drowsily....

Presently, he dozed for a few minutes. The click of the typewriter ceased. He opened his eyes with a queer sense of disquietude and looked into the face of death.

BENSKIN, hardened though he was to the sight of tragedy, gave a little shiver of horror as he leaned down to make his brief examination of the man who, a few hours before, had been so full of life.

"Death," the doctor pointed out in a hushed whisper, "must have been almost instantaneous. You see, he was shot, apparently at close range, by a bullet which went straight through the heart. I doubt whether he had time even to realise what had happened."

Benskin glanced around the room. The sergeant, a policeman, and an awed and trembling butler in the background were its sole remaining occupants.

"Is the body exactly as you found it?" he asked the former.

"The doctor was the first one to touch it, sir," the sergeant assured him.

"Any weapon?"

"Not a sign of one."

"Any one here before you?"

"Only the maid who found the body and the butler. Neither of them came further into the room than the corner of the screen. The butler telephoned at once from the hall, locking up the room. He handed me the key upon my arrival."

"Then he was probably shot from the corner of the screen," Benskin reflected, examining a slight cut in the dead man's head, and a smear of blood upon the leg of an overturned chair. "You are sure that nothing else has been touched, Sergeant?"

"Certain, sir," was the firm reply. "According to the doctor, Sir Gregory must have been dead for a couple of hours, at least, but no one seems to have heard the shot, or to have had any idea that anything had happened. A maid came into the room as usual at about seven o'clock. She rushed away screaming and fetched the butler. It seems that Sir Gregory, who had been up in Manchester on business, was not expected home last night. He must have arrived some time after the household had gone to bed and let himself in with his latchkey."

"Do you know of whom the household consists?"

"Only Lady Dent, so far as I can find out. There are no children and no one staying in the house."

"Has Lady Dent been told yet?"

"Not to my knowledge."

There was a slight fog outside and Benskin switched on the lights. The doctor moved towards the door.

"I shall have to prepare my report," he said. "The body will have to be removed to the mortuary, too, as soon as you have finished your examination. There is nothing more I can do."

He took his leave and then Benskin turned towards the sergeant.

"Is there any one else who sleeps in the front of the house?" he asked.

"Lady Dent's maid. She has been used to sleeping in the dressing-room apparently, when Sir Gregory has been away."

"Go and fetch her."

The sergeant obeyed and presently ushered in a pale-faced, petite Frenchwoman, with fluffy, fair hair and deep-set eyes. Benskin handed her a chair.

"You are Lady Dent's maid, I understand," he said. "Tell me your name."

"Celeste Vignolle, sir," she replied, with a little break in her voice. "I have been her ladyship's maid for two years. Oh, but what a tragedy?"

"Has anyone told her ladyship what has happened?" Benskin enquired.

"*Mon Dieu*, no!" the girl exclaimed, wringing her hands. "Who would dare?"

"As the doctor has gone, I am afraid I must," Benskin decided. "There is a dressing room, I understand, adjoining her ladyship's bedroom?"

"Certainly, sir. I sleep there when Sir Gregory is away."

"You slept there last night?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Gregory was not expected home."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing, Monsieur."

"No shot, or the opening or closing of doors?"

"Nothing at all, sir. I was out myself till midnight. Her ladyship had given me permission."

"Was her ladyship out too?"

"No, sir. I put her to bed before I went out at ten o'clock."

"When you came back, did you enter by the front door?"

"Yes, sir. Her ladyship lent me her latchkey."

"Was there any light in the study then?"

"No, sir."

Benskin reflected for a moment.

"Take me upstairs," he directed. "Tell her ladyship that someone wishes to speak to her and ask her to see me for a moment in the dressing room. And, Mademoiselle."

"Monsieur?"

"I wish to be the first one to tell her of what has happened. You understand? You do not mention the police."

The girl shuddered.

"Is it I who would wish to speak of these things?" she cried. "Her ladyship will be broken-hearted."

She hurried away and Benskin followed her upstairs. From the dressing-room into which she ushered him, he listened. She was apparently obeying orders, for scarcely a sentence was spoken. It was all the more of a shock to Benskin, therefore, when Lady Dent appeared. She was young— she seemed little more, indeed, than a child— with beautiful, deep-set eyes and fragile complexion. She had the air, however, of one already in the throes of mortal terror. She was shivering in every limb and ghastly pale.

"What has happened?" she cried. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"How do you know that anything has happened, Lady Dent?" Benskin asked.

"How do I know—"

She stopped herself suddenly.

"What do you do here? Who are you? What is all this mystery?"

"What time did you go to bed last night, Lady Dent?" Benskin enquired.

"At ten o'clock," she replied. "I had a headache."

"Did you hear any sounds in the night?"

"None."

"Did you expect your husband home?"

"Of course not. He is coming this afternoon, in time for a meeting at three o'clock. Tell me, I insist, who you are and what you want."

"My name is Benskin and I am very sorry to bring you bad news," was the sympathetic rejoinder. "Your husband returned last night and met with an accident. He appears to have been shot."

"An accident!" she cried.

"A serious one, I fear."

"You mean—"

"I mean that he is dead."

The woman threw up her arms, gazed at him for a moment with distended eyes, and sank sobbing upon the bed. Benskin, with a word of sympathy, called for her maid, and made his way downstairs back into the jealously-guarded study. He locked the door on the inside and commenced his search. First of all, he stood for several minutes at the writing table, examining the traces of its recent use. He removed the sheet of blotting paper, and placed it in his pocket, held the ink-pot up to the light, moved once more back to the dead man's side, and, turning his right hand over gently, found a smudge of ink upon his forefinger. The tumbler, with its dregs of whisky and soda, was still there, and a half-burnt cigarette. The telephone book stood open and he made a note of the page. Then he went through the drawers and took possession of some loose sheets of manuscript he found there, which he examined through a pocket microscope. Afterwards he searched the room meticulously, but in

vain, for any trace of the missing weapon. Finally he rang the bell for the butler.

"I understand that Sir Gregory was not expected home last night?" he asked.

"He certainly was not, sir," the man replied. "I should have received orders to have waited up, or to have left some things out for him."

"And no one in the house has any idea as to what hour he arrived?"

"No one, sir. The servants' quarters lie rather far back, and we shouldn't hear anything that took place in the front of the house, or in the street."

Benskin nodded.

"The room had better be kept locked up for another hour," he ordered. "The sergeant will stay with you in case anything is wanted, and the doctor will be here again later on. If Lady Dent has any close friends or relatives in the neighbourhood, they had better be sent for,"

"Very good, sir."

He departed and Benskin beckoned to the sergeant who had been waiting in the hall. "It appears that you were quite right, and that Sir Gregory was not expected home last night," he confided. "He arrived unexpectedly, obviously for some special reason. He wrote letters immediately on his arrival and telephoned. Disconnect the other telephone, sergeant, and answer every enquiry yourself from here until I see you again. All messages that come through to the house to be censored. You understand?"

"Quite well, sir," the sergeant assured him.

Benskin gave one last pitying glance at the crumpled-up figure upon the floor— huge, it seemed, in its cumbrous distortion of limb. Then he started out in search of the murderer.

THE young woman who was presently shown into the waiting room of Miss Fisher's Typewriting Agency, in response to Benskin's enquiry, some ten days later, impressed him from the first with her good looks, her composure, and complete self-control.

"You wished to see me?" she asked. "I am Miss Horton."

"I wished to see you," he admitted, handing her a card. "Forgive me for not sending in my name."

She glanced at it and looked across at him with no sign of alarm.

"A detective," she observed. "What do you want with me?"

"I have come to you on somewhat serious business," he replied, "and I should tell you at once that, although if you have nothing to conceal, I should advise you to be frank with me, you are not obliged to answer my questions."

"There is no reason why I shouldn't."

"Then why didn't you come forward at the inquest on Sir Gregory Dent and give your evidence?" he demanded swiftly.

"Why should I? I wasn't summoned. I could tell the police nothing. Sir Gregory was quite all right when I saw him last."

"Nevertheless, you seem to have been the last person who saw him alive," Benskin reminded her. "I am quite sure that you have intelligence enough to know that that makes your evidence important."

She made no reply beyond the merest shrug of the shoulders.

"Any other questions?" she enquired.

"You typed three letters for Sir Gregory Dent that night, the delivery of which would practically have destroyed the chance of your father's firm being included in the Dent Cotton Amalgamation Scheme," Benskin continued. "Not one of those communications reached its destination."

This time her composure was disturbed.

"How can you possibly know what I typed?" she exclaimed, with a little start.

"I will set you a good example," he declared, "by answering your question. I know because I found the original copy, which Sir Gregory had written with his own hand, in one of the drawers of the writing table. I knew he had probably written it that night because his fingers were badly smudged with ink, there was a telephone book open upon his desk, from which I discovered quite easily that he had telephoned for a stenographer to this office, and that you had answered the summons. There were other signs of a typewriter having been used. I discovered that those communications had never been delivered at their destinations, by enquiry in the usual course. The result was that your father's firm— which, if Sir Gregory Dent was not misinformed during his visit north, is in a precarious financial condition— was included in the amalgamation and relieved of its responsibilities."

"You are really quite clever," she admitted. "Any more questions?"

Benskin reflected for a moment.

"Who let you in when you arrived at the house, and what time?"

"About half-past three. Sir Gregory let me in himself. There seemed to be no one else up."

"You saw no one else all the time you were in the house?"

"Not a soul. If I had, I might have thought of coming and giving evidence. As it is, nothing that I could say would have been of any use."

Benskin looked at her steadily.

"I wonder," he suggested, "if it has occurred to you that without Sir Gregory's death it would have been useless for you to have suppressed the

delivery of those letters? In other words, Sir Gregory Dent's presence at the meeting the following afternoon would have meant your father's ruin."

"I am not so sure," she replied, after a moment's hesitation. "Sir Gregory was very unfair in his strictures and the other directors might have taken a different view. Of course," she went on, "I can see what you're aiming at. You are suggesting that I murdered Sir Gregory Dent."

"You were, at any rate, the last person known to have been with him," Benskin reminded her, "and, furthermore, you had a motive."

"On the other hand," she objected, "how can you believe it possible that I went there with any such idea in my head? He rang up the typewriting office quite unexpectedly. I never heard of him before. I answered the call because I happened to be the girl on duty."

"A good point," Benskin admitted.

"Besides," she added, "I never fired a pistol off in my life. I shouldn't know what to do with one if I had it."

"Then what was this one doing in your room?" Benskin asked, producing a weapon suddenly from his pocket.

She stared at it transfixed.

"In my room?" she repeated. "I never saw it before."

"Really!" he murmured. "Yet it was found in your apartment at Cranford Court, carefully wrapped up in brown paper and hidden in the bottom of one of your drawers."

"I never saw it before," she insisted.

He replaced it in his pocket.

"Miss Hnrton," he said, "I am going to speak to you very seriously. I repeat that you were the last person known to have seen Sir Gregory Dent alive. You had a sufficient motive for the crime. Sir Gregory was killed by a revolver bullet from a weapon of somewhat peculiar gauge. This weapon, which was found concealed in your room, is of the same gauge.... No— don't speak for a moment, please. You must understand, as a young woman of common sense, that the situation is extremely serious. I should be perfectly justified, in fact, in arresting you at this moment. Is there anything you can tell me, as the representative of the police, which would assist us in tracing the murderer of Sir Gregory? Think over that question, please. I shall ask you no other."

"Nothing," she answered stubbornly.

He took up his hat.

"Then I can only wish you good morning," he said,

"You aren't going to arrest me then?"

"There is no charge against you at present. Good morning."

BENSKIN had his first conference with the Sub-Commissioner that afternoon. When he had concluded his report, the latter looked across the desk at him in surprise.

"But, my dear Benskin," he protested, "surely on that evidence you ought to apply for a warrant against the young woman?"

"I can get it at any moment," Benskin pointed out, "and she is of course under police surveillance. At the same time," he went on earnestly, "forgive me, Major Houlden, if I am even a little over-anxious not to put a person on trial for her life until I am perfectly convinced in my own mind of her guilt. She probably did kill Sir Gregory, and if so, she will have to answer for it. She can't escape, I promise you that— but I once made what I always felt was a moral mistake. I don't want to do that again. I want to be sure."

The Sub-Commissioner was not altogether sympathetic.

"I don't blame you for being careful, Benskin," he admitted, "but you can't bring the kid-glove business into a case of this sort. If there is any other person in the world against whom you can collect as much evidence as you have against this young woman, go and bring him in. A day or two longer won't hurt us. However, in the language of the Scots— I hae ma doots.'"

"And I my fears," Benskin acknowledged.

Benskin, waiting in the lounge of a popular *thé dansant* restaurant, drew from his pocket the dossier for which he had applied a few mornings before, and read it through carefully:

"HERMYANAS. Of Greek parentage, born in the Argentine. Age, probably thirty-two. Professional dancer in Nice and Monte Carlo, Understood to have left the Riviera on account of money trouble. First engaged at Marabout's Cabaret Club for six months; afterwards opened small but fashionable night club called Lamb's Cabaret. Believed to be the sole proprietor. Financial reputation now excellent. Understood to have woman backer. Nothing against him in this country. Reputation on Riviera indifferent."

He folded up the report and placed it carefully in his pocket. Almost as he did so, the young woman for whom he was waiting entered. In her very smart clothes, and from her generally chic appearance, few people would have taken Celeste for a lady's maid.

"Mademoiselle," Benskin murmured, rising to his feet and confronting her.

She looked at him pleasantly but with no sign of recognition.

"We met," he reminded her, "under somewhat unhappy circumstances."

All the gaiety seemed to fade from her face. She gave a little gasp.

"You are the detective!" she exclaimed.

"No need to be frightened of me," he reassured her. "I am not really very formidable. Are you alone? Might I have a few minutes with you?"

He spoke in French and the sound of her own language seemed to soothe her.

"I am alone," she admitted, "but— you will not speak of that— I cannot bear it. It was all too terrible."

"I have ordered some tea," he said, as he drew his chair confidentially towards her.

"Mademoiselle," he continued, "it is not my wish to disturb you, yet I have a word or two to say about that night. Shall we converse here, or would you rather come to my rooms?"

"But why should you speak of it again?" she asked.

"You forget," he reminded her, "that it has become my business to trace the murderer of Sir Gregory Dent."

"But— how can I help? Why do you speak to me about it?"

He looked at her for a moment as though measuring her powers of resistance. She had, he decided, more nerve than he had at first given her credit for.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "fortunately you were not called at the inquest, so you have made no statement upon oath, but your account of that night's proceedings was not true, and I am going to give you an opportunity of correcting it."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"You told me that you went out on the night of Sir Gregory Dent's death and returned about midnight."

"Well?"

"It was not you who went out. It was her ladyship."

Celeste was silent. Benskin continued, after a moment's pause:

"A serious affair like this," he explained gravely, "requires very careful investigation, and you know, in the long run, everything becomes known. Lady Dent, it appears, is passionately fond of dancing, and Sir Gregory, naturally, objected to her visiting night clubs and those places. Whenever there was an opportunity, you changed identities. You are reasonably alike and you wear the same clothes. This arrangement enabled Lady Dent to spend many evenings away from home, when even the servants believed that it was you who were out so late. On that particular night you remained in the dressing room, and it was you who went to bed at ten o'clock. Her ladyship went out. Where? At what time did she return?"

"I can tell you nothing, Monsieur," Celeste declared, and now, although her nerve seemed still unshaken, there was dawning terror in her face.

"You must understand," he went on gently, "that in the end I shall discover everything. You do no good by keeping silent. You only force me to remember that you have made a false statement to the police, which is more or less a criminal offence. Consider, Mademoiselle. You have no one to harm. You have yourself to save."

She toyed nervously with her handkerchief. The music of the jazz band, concealed behind some palms, seemed to be filling the air with mockery.

"Where did her ladyship go and at what time did she return?" Benskin asked again. "Remember you can do her ladyship no good by refusing to answer. You can do yourself a great deal of harm."

"She went to the Lamb's Cabaret Club," Celeste confided slowly. "She returned about two o'clock."

For a single moment the thrill of her words was reflected in his quiet, unemotional face. He was to reach then the desired end.

"The Lamb's Cabaret Club," he repeated—"run, I believe, by a man named Hermyanas whose private address is in Cranford Court?"

"Perhaps," she admitted. "I do not know."

"Her ladyship returned alone?"

"How should I know? I was in bed."

"In bed in the dressing room adjoining the bedroom," Benskin reminded her, with a touch of sternness in his tone. "Isn't it true, Mademoiselle, that Hermyanas returned home with her ladyship?"

She looked up at him piteously. He patted the back of her hand.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it is painful, I know, but the truth must come out."

"Mr. Hermyanas came back with my mistress just before two," she acknowledged. "It was madness. I told her ladyship so. She would never listen to me. She was *folle* about him, and he, when milord Sir Gregory was ill— he hung about all the time. He believed if anything happened, she would marry him."

Benskin summoned a waiter and paid for the tea which neither of them had touched. Then he rose to his feet.

"You are a very sensible girl," he said, "and I shall forget that first story of yours. Now you must come with me for a little time."

"You are not going to arrest me?" she cried, horrified. He shook his head.

"Not formally," he assured her. "I shall have to take you somewhere where you can communicate with no one for the next few hours. Afterwards you will be free to go home or wherever you like."

BENSKIN unfolded his napkin, ordered a bottle of wine, and looked around at the furnishing and decoration of London's smallest and most select night club, with interest and admiration.

"Charming!" he murmured to the attentive *maître d'hôtel*, who stood by his side. "Is it true that Monsieur Hermyanas is the sole proprietor?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"One believes so," he admitted.

"He is here to-night?"

"But certainly."

"Will you say that a gentleman would like a word with him as soon as possible."

The *maître d'hôtel* bowed and departed to execute his mission. Presently a dark, sallow-skinned young man of medium height, dressed with meticulous care, approached the table with a slight swagger.

"You wish to speak to me," he observed condescendingly.

"I do," Benskin assented. "Will you sit down for a moment. The matter is confidential."

Hermyanas fingered his eyeglass.

"This is rather my busy time," he remarked. "If it is anything to do with joining the club—"

"It is not," Benskin interrupted. "I do not, as a rule, frequent night clubs."

Something in his manner must have seemed to the other ominous, for he subsided into the indicated chair with a nervous little gesture. Benskin leaned over towards him.

"Hermyanas," he warned him, "don't try any tricks. I have a warrant in my pocket for your arrest."

There was a livid streak in the young man's face. His fingers gripped at the tablecloth.

"My arrest!" he gasped. "You are joking. I have never broken the laws. We serve no drinks after hours."

"You are arrested on a more serious charge," Benskin told him gravely— "on the charge of murdering Sir Gregory Dent on the morning of the 13th. It is my duty to caution you, Hermyanas, that I am bound to take note of anything you say."

There was no instant fear of speech from Hermyanas, for with a terrified little groan, he collapsed in his chair. When he came to himself, the handcuffs were upon his wrists, and the gallows before his eyes.

THE Sub-Commissioner offered his compliments to Benskin the following morning. There was something in the latter's expression which puzzled him.

"Getting callous, young fellow, aren't you?" he remarked. "I never saw you bring a man to the condemned cell and look really happy about it before."

Benskin smiled thoughtfully. There was a little picture before his eyes— the picture of Hermyanas creeping into a girl's room with a brown paper parcel under his arm.

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4: The Aztec Opal

R(odriguez) Ottolengui

1831-1937

The Idler April 1895

Mitchel and Barnes made their detecting debut in the novel "An Artist in Crime" (1892), and then began appearing in short stories, as well as two more novels. The short stories were collected in "Final Proof" (1898). The author was a New York dentist.

"MR. MITCHEL," began Mr. Barnes, after exchanging greetings, "I have called to see you upon a subject which I am sure will enlist your keenest interest, for several reasons. It relates to a magnificent jewel; it concerns your intimate friends; and it is a problem requiring the most analytical qualities of the mind in its solution."

"Ah, then you have solved it?" asked Mr. Mitchel.

"I think so. You shall judge. I have to-day been called in to investigate one of the most singular cases that has fallen in my way. It is one in which the usual detective methods would be utterly valueless. The facts were presented to me, and the solution of the mystery could only be reached by analytical deductions."

"That is to say, by using your brains?"

"Precisely. Now, as you have admitted that you consider yourself more expert in this direction than the ordinary detective, I wish to place you for once in the position of a detective, and then see you prove your ability."

"Early this morning I was summoned, by a messenger, to go aboard of the steam yacht *Idler* which lay at anchor in the lower bay."

"Why, the *Idler* belongs to my friend, Mortimer Gray!" exclaimed Mr. Mitchel.

"Yes," replied Mr. Barnes; "I told you that your friends are interested. I went immediately with the man who had come to my office, and in due season I was aboard of the yacht. Mr. Gray received me very politely, and took me to his private room adjoining the cabin. Here he explained to me that he had been off on a cruise for a few weeks, and was approaching the harbor last night, when, in accordance with his plans, a sumptuous dinner was served, as a sort of farewell feast, the party expecting to separate to-day."

"What guests were on the yacht?"

"I will tell you everything in order, as the facts were presented to me. Mr. Gray enumerated the party as follows: besides himself and his wife, there were his wife's sister, Mrs. Eugene Cortlandt, and her husband, a Wall Street broker; also, Mr. Arthur Livingstone and his sister, and a Mr. Dennett Moore, a young man supposed to be devoting himself to Miss Livingstone."

"That makes seven persons, three of whom are women. I ought to say, Mr. Barnes, that, though Mr. Gray is a club friend, I am not personally acquainted with his wife, nor with the others. So I have no advantage over you."

"I will come at once to the curious incident which made my presence desirable. According to Mr. Gray's story, the dinner had proceeded as far as the roast, when suddenly there was a slight shock as the yacht touched a bar, and at the same time the lamps spluttered and then went out, leaving the room totally dark. A second later the vessel righted herself and sped on, so that, before any panic ensued, it was evident to all that the danger had passed. The gentlemen begged the ladies to resume their seats, and remain quiet till the lamps were lighted; this, however, the attendants were unable to do, and they were ordered to bring fresh lamps. Thus there was almost total darkness for several minutes."

"During which, I presume, the person who planned the affair readily consummated his design?"

"So you think that the whole series of events was prearranged? Be that as it may, something did happen in that dark room. The women had started from their seats when the yacht touched, and when they groped their way back in the darkness some of them found the wrong places, as was seen when the fresh lamps were brought. This was considered a good joke, and there was some laughter, which was suddenly checked by an exclamation from Mr. Gray, who quickly asked his wife, 'Where is your opal?'"

"Her opal?" asked Mr. Mitchel, in tones which showed that his greatest interest was now aroused. "Do you mean, Mr. Barnes, that she was wearing the Aztec Opal?"

"Oh, you know the gem?"

"I know nearly all gems of great value; but what of this one?"

"Mrs. Gray and her sister, Mrs. Cortlandt, had both donned *décolleté* costumes for this occasion, and Mrs. Gray had worn this opal as a pendant to a thin gold chain which hung around her neck. At Mr. Gray's question, all looked towards his wife, and it was noted that the clasp was open, and the opal missing. Of course it was supposed that it had merely fallen to the floor, and a search was immediately instituted. But the opal could not be found."

"That is certainly a very significant fact," said Mr. Mitchel. "But was the search thorough?"

"I should say extremely thorough, when we consider it was not conducted by a detective, who is supposed to be an expert in such matters. Mr. Gray described to me what was done, and he seems to have taken every precaution. He sent the attendants out of the *salon*, and he and his guests systematically examined every part of the room."

"Except the place where the opal really was concealed, you mean."

"With that exception, of course, since they did not find the jewel. Not satisfied with this search by lamplight, Mr. Gray locked the *salon*, so that no one could enter it during the night, and another investigation was made in the morning."

"The pockets of the seven persons present were not examined, I presume?"

"No. I asked Mr. Gray why this had been omitted, and he said it was an indignity which he could not possibly show to a guest. As you have asked this question, Mr. Mitchel, it is only fair for me to tell you that when I spoke to Mr. Gray on the subject he seemed very much confused. Nevertheless, however unwilling he may have been to search those of his guests who are innocent, he emphatically told me that if I had reasonable proof that any one present had purloined the opal, he wished that individual to be treated as any other thief, without regard to sex or social position."

"One can scarcely blame him, because that opal is worth a fabulous sum. I have myself offered Gray twenty thousand dollars for it, which was refused. This opal is one of the eyes of an Aztec idol, and if the other could be found, the two would be as interesting as any jewels in the world."

"That is the story which I was asked to unravel," continued Mr. Barnes, "and I must now relate to you what steps I have taken towards that end. It appears that, because of the loss of the jewel, no person has left the yacht, although no restraint was placed upon anyone by Mr. Gray. All knew, however, that he had sent for a detective, and it was natural that no one should offer to go until formally dismissed by the host. My plan, then, was to have a private interview with each of the seven persons who had been present at the dinner."

"Then you exempted the attendants from your suspicions?"

"I did. There was but one way by which one of the servants could have stolen the opal, and this was prevented by Mr. Gray. It was possible that the opal had fallen on the floor, and, though not found at night, a servant might have discovered and have appropriated it on the following morning, had he been able to enter the *salon*. But Mr. Gray had locked the doors. No servant, however bold, would have been able to take the opal from the lady's neck."

"I think your reasoning is good, and we will confine ourselves to the original seven."

"After my interview with Mr. Gray, I asked to have Mrs. Gray sent in to me. She came in, and at once I noted that she placed herself on the defensive. Women frequently adopt that manner with a detective. Her story was very brief. The main point was that she was aware of the theft before the lamps were relighted. In fact, she felt some one's arms steal around her neck, and

knew when the opal was taken. I asked why she had made no outcry, and whether she suspected any special person. To these questions she replied that she supposed it was merely a joke perpetrated in the darkness, and therefore had made no resistance. She would not name anyone as suspected by her, but she was willing to tell me that the arms were bare, as she detected when they touched her neck. I must say here, that although Miss Livingstone's dress was not cut low in the neck, it was, practically, sleeveless; and Mrs. Cortlandt's dress had no sleeves at all. One other significant statement made by this lady was that her husband had mentioned to her your offer of twenty thousand dollars for the opal, and had urged her to permit him to sell it, but she had refused."

"So it was madame who would not sell? The plot thickens."

"You will observe, of course, the point about the naked arms of the thief. I therefore sent for Mrs. Cortlandt next. She had a curious story to tell. Unlike her sister, she was quite willing to express her suspicions. Indeed, she plainly intimated that she supposed that Mr. Gray himself had taken the jewel. I will endeavor to repeat her words.

" 'Mr. Barnes,' said she, 'the affair is very simple. Gray is a miserable old skinflint. A Mr. Mitchel, a crank who collects gems, offered to buy that opal, and he has been bothering my sister for it ever since. When the lamps went out, he took the opportunity to steal it. I do not think this— I know it. How? Well, on account of the confusion and darkness, I sat in my sister's seat when I returned to the table; this explains his mistake. He put his arms around my neck, and deliberately felt for the opal. I did not understand his purpose at the time, but now it is very evident.'

" 'Yes, madame,' said I, 'but how do you know it was Mr. Gray?'

" 'Why, I grabbed his hand, and before he could pull it away I felt the large cameo ring on his little finger. Oh, there is no doubt whatever.'

"I asked her whether Mr. Gray had his sleeves rolled up, and, though she could not understand the purport of the question, she said 'No.' Next I had Miss Livingstone come in. She is a slight, tremulous young lady, who cries at the slightest provocation. During the interview, brief as it was, it was only by the greatest diplomacy that I avoided a scene of hysterics. She tried very hard to convince me that she knew absolutely nothing. She had not left her seat during the disturbance; of that she was sure. So how could she know anything about it? I asked her to name the one who she thought might have taken the opal, and at this her agitation reached such a climax that I was obliged to let her go."

"You gained very little from her, I should say."

"In a case of this kind, Mr. Mitchel, where the criminal is surely one of a very few persons, we cannot fail to gain something from each person's story. A significant feature here was that though Miss Livingstone assures us that she did not leave her seat, she was sitting in a different place when the lamps were lighted again."

"That might mean anything or nothing."

"Exactly. But we are not deducing values yet. Mr. Dennett Moore came to me next, and he is a straightforward, honest man if I ever saw one. He declared that the whole affair was a great mystery to him, and that, while ordinarily he would not care anything about it, he could not but be somewhat interested, because he thought that one of the ladies, he would not say which one, suspected him. Mr. Livingstone also impressed me favorably, in spite of the fact that he did not remove his cigarette from his mouth throughout the whole of my interview with him. He declined to name the person suspected by him, though he admitted that he could do so. He made this significant remark:

" 'You are a detective of experience, Mr. Barnes, and ought to be able to decide which man amongst us could place his arms around Mrs. Gray's neck without causing her to cry out. But if your imagination fails you, suppose you inquire into the financial standing of all of us, and see which one would be most likely to profit by thieving? Ask Mr. Cortlandt.'"

"Evidently Mr. Livingstone knows more than he tells."

"Yet he told enough for one to guess his suspicions, and to understand the delicacy which prompted him to say no more. He, however, gave me a good point upon which to question Mr. Cortlandt. When I asked that gentleman if any of the men happened to be in pecuniary difficulties, he became grave at once. I will give you his answer.

" 'Mr. Livingstone and Mr. Moore are both exceedingly wealthy men, and I am a millionaire, in very satisfactory business circumstances at present. But I am very sorry to say that though our host, Mr. Gray, is also a distinctly rich man, he has met with some reverses recently, and I can conceive that ready money would be useful to him. But for all that, it is preposterous to believe what your question evidently indicates. None of the persons in this party is a thief, and least of all could we suspect Mr. Gray. I am sure that if he wished his wife's opal, she would give it to him cheerfully. No, Mr. Barnes, the opal is in some crack or crevice which we have overlooked. It is lost, not stolen.'

"That ended the interview with the several persons present, but I made one or two other inquiries, from which I elicited at least two significant facts. First, it was Mr. Gray himself who had indicated the course by which the yacht was steered last night, and which ran her over a sand-bar. Second, some one

had nearly emptied the oil from the lamps, so that they would have burned out in a short time, even though the yacht had not touched."

"These, then, are your facts. And from these you have solved the problem. Well, Mr. Barnes, who stole the opal?"

"Mr. Mitchel, I have told you all I know, but I wish you to work out a solution before I reveal my own opinion."

"I have already done so, Mr. Barnes. Here; I will write my suspicion on a bit of paper. So. Now tell me yours, and you shall know mine afterwards."

"Why, to my mind it is very simple. Mr. Gray, failing to obtain the opal from his wife by fair means, resorted to a trick. He removed the oil from the lamps, and charted out a course for his yacht which would take her over a sand-bar, and when the opportune moment came he stole the jewel. His actions since then have been merely to cover his crime by shrouding the affair with mystery. By insisting upon a thorough search, and even sending for a detective, he makes it impossible for those who were present to accuse him hereafter. Undoubtedly Mr. Cortlandt's opinion will be the one generally adopted. Now what do you think?"

"I think I will go with you at once, and board the yacht *Idler*."

"But you have not told me whom you suspect," said Mr. Barnes, somewhat irritated.

"Oh, that is immaterial," said Mr. Mitchel, calmly preparing for the street. "I do not suspect Mr. Gray, so if you are correct you will have shown better ability than I. Come, let us hurry."

On their way to the dock from which they were to take the little steam launch which was waiting to carry the detective back to the yacht, Mr. Barnes asked Mr. Mitchel the following question:

"Mr. Mitchel," said he, "you will note that Mrs. Cortlandt alluded to you as a 'crank who collects gems.' I must admit that I have myself harbored a great curiosity as to your reasons for purchasing jewels which are valued beyond a mere conservative commercial price. Would you mind explaining why you began your collection?"

"I seldom explain my motives to others, especially when they relate to my more important pursuits in life. But in view of all that has passed between us, I think your curiosity justifiable, and I will gratify it. To begin with, I am a very wealthy man. I inherited great riches, and I have made a fortune myself. Have you any conception of the difficulties which harass a man of means?"

"Perhaps not in minute detail, though I can guess that the lot of the rich is not as free from care as the pauper thinks it is."

"The point is this: the difficulty with a poor man is to get rich, while with the rich man the greatest trouble is to prevent the increase of his wealth.

Some men, of course, make no effort in that direction, and those men are a menace to society. My own idea of the proper use of a fortune is to manage it for the benefit of others, as well as one's self, and especially to prevent its increase."

"And is it so difficult to do this? Cannot money be spent without limit?"

"Yes; but unlimited evil follows such a course. This is sufficient to indicate to you that I am ever in search of a legitimate means of spending my income, provided that I may do good thereby. If I can do this, and at the same time afford myself pleasure, I claim that I am making the best use of my money. Now, I happen to be so constituted that the most interesting studies to me are social problems, and of these I am most entertained with the causes and environments of crime. Such a problem as the one you have brought to me to-day is of immense attractiveness to me, because the environment is one which is commonly supposed to preclude rather than to invite crime. Yet we have seen that despite the wealth of all concerned, some one has stooped to the commonest of crimes,— theft."

"But what has this to do with your collection of jewels?"

"Everything. Jewels— especially those of great magnitude— seem to be a special cause of crime. A hundred-carat diamond will tempt a man to theft as surely as the false beacon on a rocky shore entices the mariner to wreck and ruin. All the great jewels of the world have murder and other crimes woven in their histories. My attention was first called to this by accidentally hearing a plot at a ball to rob the lady of the house of a large ruby which she wore on her breast. I went to her, and told her enough to persuade her to sell the stone to me. I fastened it into my scarf, where the plotters might see it if they remained at the ball. By my act I prevented a crime that night."

"Then am I to understand that you buy jewels with that end in view?"

"After that night I conceived this idea. If all the great jewels in the world could be collected together, and put in a place of safety, hundreds of crimes would be prevented, even before they had been conceived. Moreover, the search for, and acquirement of, these jewels would necessarily afford me abundant opportunity for studying the crimes which are perpetrated in order to gain possession of them. Thus you understand more thoroughly why I am anxious to pursue this problem of the Aztec Opal."

Several hours later Mr. Mitchel and Mr. Barnes were sitting at a quiet table in the corner of the dining-room at Mr. Mitchel's club. On board the yacht Mr. Mitchel had acted rather mysteriously. He had been closeted a while with Mr. Gray, after which he had had an interview with two or three of the others. Then, when Mr. Barnes had begun to feel neglected, and tired of waiting alone

on the deck, Mr. Mitchel had come towards him, arm in arm with Mr. Gray, and the latter had said:

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Barnes, for your services in this affair, and I trust the enclosed check will remunerate you for your trouble."

Mr. Barnes, not quite comprehending it all, had attempted to protest, but Mr. Mitchel had taken him by the arm, and hurried him off. In the cab which bore them to the club the detective asked for an explanation, but Mr. Mitchel only replied:

"I am too hungry to talk now. We will have dinner first."

The dinner was over at last, and nuts and coffee were before them, when Mr. Mitchel took a small parcel from his pocket, and handed it to Mr. Barnes, saying:

"It is a beauty, is it not?"

Mr. Barnes removed the tissue paper, and a large opal fell on the table-cloth, where it sparkled with a thousand colors under the electric lamps.

"Do you mean that this is—" cried the detective.

"The Aztec Opal, and the finest harlequin I ever saw," interrupted Mr. Mitchel. "But you wish to know how it came into my possession? Principally so that it may join the collection and cease to be a temptation in this world of wickedness."

"Then Mr. Gray did not steal it?" asked Mr. Barnes, with a touch of chagrin in his voice.

"No, Mr. Barnes. Mr. Gray did not steal it. But you are not to consider yourself very much at fault. Mr. Gray tried to steal it, only he failed. That was not your fault, of course. You read his actions aright, but you did not give enough weight to the stories of the others."

"What important point did I omit from my calculations?"

"I might mention the bare arms which Mrs. Gray said she felt around her neck. It was evidently Mr. Gray who looked for the opal on the neck of his sister-in-law, but as he did not bare his arms before approaching her, he would not have done so later."

"Do you mean that Miss Livingstone was the thief?"

"No. Being hysterical, Miss Livingstone changed her seat without realizing it, but that does not make her a thief. Her excitement when with you was due to her suspicions, which, by the way, were correct. But let us return for a moment to the bare arms. That was the clue from which I worked. It was evident to me that the thief was a man, and it was equally plain that, in the hurry of the few moments of darkness, no man would have rolled up his sleeves, risking the return of the attendants with lamps, and the consequent discovery of himself in such a singular disarrangement of costume."

"How do you account for the bare arms?"

"The lady did not tell the truth, that is all. The arms which encircled her neck were not bare. Neither were they unknown to her. She told you that lie to shield the thief. She also told you that her husband wished to sell the Aztec Opal to me, but that she had refused. Thus she deftly led you to suspect him. Now, if she wished to shield the thief, yet was willing to accuse her husband, it followed that the husband was not the thief."

"Very well reasoned, Mr. Mitchel. I see now where you are tending, but I shall not get ahead of your story."

"So much I had deduced before we went on board the yacht. When I found myself alone with Gray I candidly told him of your suspicions, and your reasons for harboring them. He was very much disturbed, and pleadingly asked me what I thought. As frankly, I told him that I believed that he had tried to take the opal from his wife,— we can scarcely call it stealing since the law does not,— but that I believed he had failed. He then confessed; admitted emptying the lamps, though he denied running the boat on the sand-bar. But he assured me that he had not reached his wife's chair when the lamps were brought in. He was, therefore, much astonished at missing the gem. I promised him to find the jewel upon condition that he would sell it to me. To this he most willingly acceded."

"But how could you be sure that you would recover the opal?"

"Partly by my knowledge of human nature, and partly because of my inherent faith in my own abilities. I sent for Mrs. Gray, and noted her attitude of defense, which, however, only satisfied me the more that I was right in my suspicions. I began by asking her if she knew the origin of the superstition that an opal brings bad luck to its owner. She did not, of course, comprehend my tactics, but she added that she 'had heard the stupid superstition, but took no interest in such nonsense.' I then gravely explained to her that the opal is the engagement stone of the Orient. The lover gives it to his sweetheart, and the belief is, that should she deceive him even in the most trifling manner, the opal will lose its brilliancy and become cloudy. I then suddenly asked her if she had ever noted a change in her opal. 'What do you mean to insinuate?' she cried out angrily. 'I mean,' said I, sternly, 'that if any opal has ever changed color in accordance with the superstition, this one should have done so. I mean that though your husband greatly needs the money which I have offered him, you have refused to allow him to sell it, and yet you permitted another to take it from you last night. By this act you might have seriously injured if not ruined Mr. Gray. Why have you done it?'"

"How did she receive it?" asked Mr. Barnes, admiring the ingenuity of Mr. Mitchel.

"She began to sob, and between her tears she admitted that the opal had been taken by the man whom I suspected, but she earnestly declared that she had harbored no idea of injuring her husband. Indeed, she was so agitated in speaking upon this point, that I believe that Gray never thoroughly explained to her why he wished to sell the gem. She urged me to recover the opal if possible, and purchase it, so that her husband might be relieved from his pecuniary embarrassment. I then sent for the thief, Mrs. Gray having told me his name; but would you not like to hear how I had picked him out before he went aboard? I still have that bit of paper upon which I wrote his name, in confirmation of what I say."

"Of course I know that you mean Mr. Livingstone, but I would like to hear your reasons for suspecting him."

"From your account Miss Livingstone suspected some one, and this caused her to be so agitated that she was unaware of the fact that she had changed her seat. Women are shrewd in these affairs, and I was confident that the girl had good reasons for her conduct. It was evident that the person in her mind was either her brother or her sweetheart. I decided between these two men from your account of your interviews with them. Moore impressed you as being honest, and he told you that one of the ladies suspected him. In this he was mistaken, but his speaking to you of it was not the act of a thief. Mr. Livingstone, on the other hand, tried to throw suspicion upon Mr. Gray."

"Of course that was sound reasoning after you had concluded that Mrs. Gray was lying. Now tell me how you recovered the jewel."

"That was easier than I expected. When I got him alone, I simply told Mr. Livingstone what I knew, and asked him to hand me the opal. With a perfectly imperturbable manner, understanding that I promised secrecy, he quietly took it from his pocket and gave it to me, saying:

"Women are very poor conspirators. They are too weak."

"What story did you tell Mr. Gray?"

"Oh, he would not be likely to inquire too closely into what I should tell him. My check was what he most cared for. I told him nothing definitely, but I hinted that his wife had secreted the gem during the darkness, that he might not ask her for it again; and that she had intended to find it again at a future time, just as he had meant to pawn it and then pretend to recover it from the thief by offering a reward."

"One more question. Why did Mr. Livingstone steal it?"

"Ah; the truth about that is another mystery worth probing, and one which I shall make it my business to unravel. I will venture a prophecy. Mr. Livingstone did not steal it at all. Mrs. Gray simply handed it to him in the darkness. There must have been some powerful motive to lead her to such an

act; something which she was weighing, and decided impulsively. This brings me to a second point. Livingstone used the word conspirators; that is a clue. You will recall that I told you that this gem is one of a pair of opals, and that with the other, the two would be as interesting as any jewels in the world. If anyone ever owns both it shall be your humble servant, Leroy Mitchel, Jewel Collector."

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5: Death in the Consulting Room

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

The Chronicle, Adelaide, 29 Jan 1942

Although best known for his long series of Gilbert Larose detective novels, Gask also wrote many short stories, often set in his home city of Adelaide. This story is one of nearly 30 of his short stories to be found, often with original illustrations, in ***Roy Glashan's Library****, an on-line free out-of-copyright book archive.*

ONE evening Dr. Wilkie was staying late at his consulting rooms on North terrace, in Adelaide, the beautiful city of the plains. It was getting on for half-past 6, and his nurse had been gone some time. The big building of Kensington House was by then almost emptied of its usual tenants.

The doctor was a good-looking young fellow of eight and twenty, but just now his face was puckered into a worried and uneasy frown. It was the end of the month, and he was making up his accounts. Unhappily, there were not many to go out, and, more unhappily still, he knew there would be a good many coming in.

Things had not been been going too well with him lately, and he was thankful he was a bachelor, with no one depending upon him. He was quite aware he was under a cloud. Some six months previously a great misfortune had overtaken him, and done his practice a lot of harm. When single-handed, he had lost a patient under an anaesthetic, and, although his professional brethren were unanimous, it had not been his fault, and would have happened with anyone, people generally blamed him, because there had not been another medical man present when he had been attending to the patient.

He had been called in suddenly to a little girl who had dislocated her shoulder. It was quite a simple dislocation, and he knew it would take only a few seconds to replace, but, to save the child any pain he had given her a whiff of chloroform. Then, to his horror, she had all at once stopped breathing, and, though he had tried everything, he had not been able to bring her to.

It had been a ghastly business, with the father and mother standing by, and the most terrible moment of all his life. He would never forget it, however long he lived.

The post-mortem had shown most conclusively that the child's death had been due to status lymphaticus, a rather rare diseased condition in which the lymphatic tissues have become greatly overgrown. By no possibility could the death have been foreseen and prevented, and in any case, it was not likely the child would have lived long. Although apparently in the best of health, she was

yet living in a dangerous state, and even a slight shock might have had fatal consequences.

The whole matter had been most unfortunate for him, particularly so as the parents were wealthy and influential society people. It would be a long time before things were forgotten.

He was working on at his accounts when suddenly the bell up on the waiting-room door pinged loudly. "Confound it!" he exclaimed. "Now who on earth can it be at this time? I can't make out I'm not here, as, of course, he's seen the light."

Opening the door, he was confronted with an elderly-looking man in a long overcoat and a thick scarf round his neck.

"The doctor!" exclaimed the man. "Well, my name is Harris, but you don't know me, and I'm sorry I've come so late. I've only just made up my mind to see someone, and I've been ringing all the doctors' doors in the building. I'd given it up as hopeless until I saw your light. Now, I shall be so much obliged if you'd give me a few minutes. I shan't keep you long."

Dr. Wilkie frowned. It was annoying to be disturbed when he was so busy, but, then, his circumstances were certainly not flourishing enough to warrant his turning away any patient at whatever time they happened to arrive.

"Come in," he said. "It's a bit late," he smiled, "but then we doctors are supposed to be ready any time. Sit down and tell me what's the matter."

"It's my neck," said the man. "I've got a nasty boil there and I think it ought to be lanced."

The doctor made a quick examination. "Yes, it should be done at once," he nodded.

"But I shall want something to send me to sleep," said the man. "I'm a great baby where pain is concerned."

"Well, we'll give you a whiff," said the doctor. "Now when did you last have anything to eat?"

"This morning, about seven o'clock, and then it was only a cup of coffee and a bit of bread and butter. I haven't felt inclined to eat anything with this boil."

"All right, then," said the doctor. "I'll lance it straight away. It's a small matter, and you need not go into any hospital to have it done. I'll do it at your home. Now who would you like to give you the anaesthetic, and where do you live?"

The man laughed. "I don't live anywhere, and I don't know anybody, let alone any doctor. I'm only just passing through Adelaide on a boat, the *Nerbudda*. We arrived this morning from Melbourne, and we're leaving tomorrow at five a.m. I'm going to England."

Dr. Wilkie frowned. "But where do you come from? Where do your relations live?"

"I've come from Townsville just now," replied the man, "but I've no relations there. In fact, I don't know whether I've got any relations at all. I rather think not, but if I have they're in Norwich, in England, from where I came a good many years ago." He spoke persuasively, "Look here, doctor, couldn't you do the whole business on the spot, here now, and then I'd go straight back to the boat in a taxi. The skipper would look after me once I got on board."

"But hasn't the boat got a proper medical man?" asked Dr. Wilkie.

The patient shook his head. "No, we're only a small cargo boat, and when we're sick the skipper's our only standby," he replied. He began taking off his collar. "Come on, doctor, let's get it over."

The doctor still hesitated. "How are you in general health?" he asked. "Ever had any trouble with your heart?"

"Never!" said the patient emphatically, and Dr. Wilkie remembered afterwards how quickly he had spoken. "I've been as fit as a fiddle all my life, and now I'm only fifty-one."

The doctor examined him and found nothing wrong. "Well, I'll want that belt off," he said. "You won't be able to breathe properly with it on," and he turned round and busied himself with getting everything ready. The patient, with a movement which to an observer might, perhaps, have seemed unnecessarily quick, snapped off the belt referred to and thrust it furtively under his coat and waistcoat, which he had already placed upon a chair.

"Now make yourself quite comfortable upon this couch," said the doctor, "and breathe naturally, in the ordinary way," and in a minute, at latest, the anaesthesia should have begun. The instant, however, the inhaler was over the patient's face, he uttered a groan of dreadful agony, and, pulling up his hands, gripped fiercely at his chest. He groaned dreadfully again, his face, from which the doctor had snatched the inhaler, was contorted in spasm, and then, with a long, deep sigh, all his muscles seemed to relax to nothingness and—he was dead. It had all happened in less than ten seconds.

"God," exclaimed Dr. Wilkie with his own face as white as death; "it's angina!"

And angina pectoris it undoubtedly was; that dread disease of the heart which may hover over its victims for years and years and never strike, and yet may strike suddenly and bring death almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Dr. Wilkie saw it was all over, and realised nothing could be done. He sank back into a chair and wiped the beads of sweat from his ghastly face. "God," he

exclaimed again, "what a tragedy! Another death when I have been giving the anaesthetic alone by myself! It will mean ruin for me!"

And then suddenly he heard footsteps in the corridor just outside his room, loud laughing voices and his bell was pinged again.

"What luck," he heard someone say; "so he's in after all, and we can get him to make the fourth! He won't mind playing for five bob a hundred. He's a real gambler at cards."

The doctor swallowed hard. The speaker was well known to him. It was young Bentley of the Stock Exchange. It couldn't be worse, he groaned. The man was one of the biggest gossips in the city, and, if he were one of the first to learn what had just happened, would make a fine tale of it for weeks and weeks. He sat silent and made no sound.

The bell was pinged again. Then the same voice came in disappointment, "Gad, he's not in! The beggar's gone off, forgetting to switch off his lights," and after a few more moments of waiting the late callers returned up the corridor the way they had come.

Dr. Wilkie was much calmer now. He had thought out what he would do. He would take the dead man with him in his car almost straight away to the hospital and, arriving there, make out he must have died on the way. Anything better than that he should have to give out there had been a death in his consulting rooms. Then he would say nothing about having started to give him an anaesthetic. It would be quite simple, the body was not heavy, and he could carry it down to his car through the back entrance of the building. His car was parked in the yard beyond, and no one would be likely to be there if he waited a further few minutes.

Realising, of course, that the body must be fully clothed when it reached the hospital, he started to replace all the dead man's garments. Lifting up the waistcoat, a small tin box dropped out of one of the pockets, and picking it up his eyes opened very wide as they fell on the label on the lid.

"Nitrite of amyl capsules!" he gasped. His face puckered up in furious anger. "Then he was subject to angina attacks! The wretch—he lied to me so that I should give him the anaesthetic! What a dirty trick!"

Putting on the waistcoat, he snatched up the jacket, and the belt which had been tucked underneath came into view. He lifted up that, too, and instantly the expression upon his face underwent a startling change. The belt was heavy, very heavy, as heavy as gold!

His hands shook as he proceeded to examine what it contained. Two of its four pockets were filled with well wrapped-up Australian sovereigns and the others were stuffed hard with Australian and English bank notes!

An hour later Dr. Wilkie was still in his consulting room, which now, however, was in complete darkness. He was sitting back in the chair he always occupied when he was interviewing patients. He was no longer frowning, his expression being only a very thoughtful one. The dead man, fully clothed again, was lying extended upon the couch, but the belt he had been wearing was now locked in one of the drawers of the doctor's desk. Every now and then the doctor flashed a little torch to see how the time was passing. He was waiting to be almost absolutely sure the building was deserted.

At last 9 o'clock struck, and he rose stealthily to his feet. The time for action had come.

Now, in after years, although he knew that what he did that night by sudden decision was absolutely wrong and contrary to all moral code, Dr. Wilkie always tried to make excuses for himself. To begin with, he argued, the patient had treated him most dishonorably in deceiving him and making out he had never suffered from any form of heart trouble, whereas by the carrying about of those capsules with him he must have been aware he had a very grave disease and was living always on the precipice side. And he had lied there, deliberately and selfishly, so that he might receive an anaesthetic straight away, when there was only one doctor to attend him. He had given no thought to the injury it would be doing to the doctor's reputation if anything went wrong. So Dr. Wilkie argued that in bare justice he was entitled to substantial compensation for the predicament he was now in. And in what way could he obtain that compensation, he went on, except by appointing himself the dead man's heir and appropriating what was in the belt. Another thing, the man had said he didn't think he had any living relations, and so, really, no one was actually being robbed.

Of course, it was all very crooked reasoning, but to some extent it eased the doctor's conscience and prevented him regarding himself as an undoubted member of the criminal classes.

The following afternoon a paragraph appeared in the evening newspaper announcing that that morning the body of an unknown man had been found at the entrance to a small by-road leading off the main one to Mount Lofty, and that an inquest would be held on the morrow.

With the inquest duly taking place, it was found the man had died from natural causes. Nothing had been discovered as to his identity, but it was mentioned £10, plus a few shillings, had been found in his pockets. In the same issue of the evening newspaper which gave an account of the inquest was a stop-press message announcing that a steamship, believed to be the *Nerbudda*, had founded in a tremendous storm in the Great Australian Bight, and it was feared all hands had been lost. Neither then or later did it

enter into anybody's mind that the man whose body had been found near Mount Lofty was to have been one of her passengers.

There was exactly £2,105 in the belt which had come off the dead man, £325 in gold and £1,700 in notes, and the money put Dr. Wilkie well upon his feet. He was, however, most cautious how he handled it, paying none of the notes in large amounts into his bank. Instead, he kept them in the safe in his house and, for the most part, drew upon them as he wanted for expenses. They were all in tens and fives, and of no sequence. From appearance, too, they had been well in circulation, and so he had no fear that any of the numbers had been kept.

He did not touch any of the sovereigns until nearly a whole year had gone, and then, finding they were worth more than their face value, sent two hundred of them to the Mint in Melbourne. The remaining one hundred and twenty-five he was intending to retain, with some idea at the back of his mind that they should be kept handy for some unexpected emergency.

It seemed, however, that the tide of prosperity for him had definitely set in. Moving to a good house in North Adelaide, and buying one of the best cars, was evidence to the majority of people that his practice must be increasing, and that, therefore, he must know his work well and be a good doctor. So he began to be talked about as one of the rising young physicians of the city, and more and more patients started to come in.

Then prosperous, good-looking, and with very nice manners, he was considered a most eligible candidate for matrimony, but, although partial to the society of the other sex, he never showed a preference for any particular girl. As the price of success, he knew he would have to marry one day, for no one cares too much for an elderly bachelor doctor. But he told himself there was plenty of time, and when he did marry it would be his head more than his heart which would guide him. His marriage would be one of convenience, and he would probably marry for money. He had not much belief in love, as distinct from the state of passion into which most men could work themselves when intrigued with a pretty girl.

His conscience continued to worry him a little about that money he had taken, and the knowledge of how he had been tempted and fallen made him feel very sorry for those who had done wrong and been caught. One day he read in the newspaper how a middle- aged clerk, with a wife and young family, after struggling for years and years under an ever-increasing load of debt, had at last succumbed to temptation and embezzled his employer's money. The embezzlement had been going on for longer than a year, and the amount involved had mounted up to more than £200. At last the man had been caught,

and, brought before the magistrate, had been committed for trial, bail being refused.

Dr. Wilkie sought the family out, saw to it that they were in no want while the breadwinner was away, and employed a first class lawyer to defend him. Then, when the case came up for trial and the man pleaded guilty, to everyone's amazement it was learnt that every penny of the embezzled money had been refunded by the wife. This made things look not nearly so black, and, after an impassioned appeal by the lawyer for mercy, the presiding judge allowed the prisoner to go free under the First Offender's Act. Added to that, it never came out who, someone provided the man with a motor car and some small amount of capital to enable him to start as a travelling salesman himself.

In many other instances when, through their own weakness and folly, people were down and out, the young doctor helped them to their feet again, and gave them back their self-respect. "Part of my atonement," he told himself. He made a grimace. "But I'm doing it very comfortably and easily for myself, and it's really nothing of the punishment I ought to have. In fact, it's no punishment at all. I can afford the money and don't miss it at all." He sighed. "If the mills of God grind slowly, then I'm certainly getting off very lightly."

About a year later, however, he got a nasty jar, and realised, that though one's wrongdoing might have been most carefully buried very deep down, it's ghost was liable to rise at any moment.

One night he was dining out and his hostess suddenly remarked. "Oh, Dr. Wilkie, have you noticed that pretty little new nurse they've got at the Children's Hospital?" She laughed. "But there, of course, you have! You men are all the same, although some of you try to make out we women have no appeal to you except at patients."

Dr. Wilkie smiled. "To which nurse do you refer, particularly?" he asked. "There are quite a lot of pretty ones there."

"To the little one with that auburn hair and those lovely eyes. Nurse Harris, she's called. You must have seen her. She's a quiet, gentle little thing."

"Yes, I know her," nodded the doctor. "She seems very shy."

"Well, I met her at a small tea party this afternoon," went on his hostess, "and she told us quite a little romance. She's only come over from England a few weeks, and thinks she's got a rich uncle somewhere here. They've heard nothing about him for many years, but someone at home told them a little while ago that they'd met him, and he was very wealthy. He'd made a fortune in sheep or cattle on shares or something."

"Well, why doesn't she look him up?" asked Dr. Wilkie. He smiled. "That seems the reasonable thing for her to do."

"But she doesn't know where he is and the man who brought the news couldn't tell her. All he knew was that he met this supposed uncle once when upon a holiday cruise to New Guinea. He hadn't the remotest idea where he lived, except that it was somewhere in Australia."

"But how does he know the man was this girl's uncle?"

"He doesn't know at all, but it certainly looks like it, the same name, about the right age, and them both coming out here about 30 years ago from the same place in England. Norwich, in Norfolk."

Dr. Wilkie felt a horrible shiver run down his spine. "God, then this girl must be the dead man's niece! His name had been Harris, and he said he came from Norwich. So he had had relations to leave his money to, and, in taking it, he, Derek Wilkie, was just a common thief!"

However, when he got home that night and was thinking everything over, Dr. Wilkie was by no means so certain that the patient who had come to him that fateful evening could have been the girl's uncle. The man had hardly been the type to go on a holiday cruise to New Guinea. Also, he had not seemed as if he were accustomed to riches. Rather, he appeared to have lived rough and not to have made a big success in life. Probably, he had spent all his time in scraping together that money he had in the belt, and had ruined his health in doing so. Besides, a really rich man would not have been carrying so much money on him, and, certainly, would not have been travelling home in a small cargo vessel. Another thing, too, and here the doctor smiled ever so slightly, the man who died was of much too coarse and rough a fibre to have a niece of the daintiness of little nurse Harris now at the Children's Hospital.

Of course, as his hostess that evening had rightly surmised, he had noticed Nurse Harris! Indeed, what man who came to the hospital had not? She was unusually pretty, with eyes of a rare forget-me-not color, and with nice features, a good complexion and rich auburn hair and had a most attractive personality.

The following morning, when visiting the hospital, the very first nurse with whom he was brought in contact was this one, who was occasioning him so much thought. She did some slight services for him, very deftly with her beautifully moulded small hands, and, upon preparing to leave the ward, he stopped for a few moments to ask her how she was getting on. It amused him to notice how deeply she blushed. She was not very intellectual, he thought, but she was certainly very pretty and of the clinging type which so appeals to the other sex. It made him most uncomfortable to think that there was even the most remote possibility he had taken money which, rightly, belonged to her. He, in part, however, consoled himself with the thought that her future was assured. With her prettiness she was sure to get married, and, if she

played her cards well— he was inclined to be a little uncertain there— marry well.

He would have been thunderstruck if he had known what was then passing through Annabel St. Clair Harris's mind. She had certainly decided she would get married, and for her future husband she had chosen a young medical man, one Derek Wilkie, of North terrace. She knew she would have her work cut out to get him, but for all that she was quite confident in her ultimate success. Her mirror told her several times a day that her chances were good.

And then, in the succeeding weeks, followed an interesting little struggle between the two, with one of the participants in the fight being quite unaware that he was taking part in any contest at all.

At first matters proceeded very quietly, all that happened being it had become quite the natural thing for Nurse Harris to catch Dr. Wilkie's eye whenever he came into her ward, and quite natural, too, for him to give her a nod and pleasant smile. Also, whenever they were attending some little patient alone together, he would nearly always make some small chatty remark to her. He was interested to learn how she liked Australia, if she found the climate too hot, and if her work were too tiring for her.

At the annual Nurses' Ball he had two dances with her and took her into supper. On the whole, however, she was disappointed, as she had been half hoping he would have wanted to sit out one of the dances with her in the garden. But nothing happened like that. He was just very pleasant and friendly with her, but there was not the very suggestion of any flirtation.

Still, all the same, Annabel would have, undoubtedly, been not a little heartened had she known he was thinking quite a lot about her after he got home. "A fascinating little girl, that," he told himself with a frown, "and I shall certainly have to be careful. Now, if only I were a marrying man—" but he shook his head and stopped himself from contemplating the possibility. Still, he dreamed about her during the night.

The next morning, however, she went completely out of his mind, for upon opening his paper at breakfast time he received a most terrible shock, with the vision of penal servitude flashing up instantly into his mind.

He read that a number of sovereigns had been found to be missing from the gold reserves of a certain Queensland bank and that, although the theft had only just been discovered, it must have taken place about two years previously. The announcement went on to state that from the number of the stolen sovereigns involved the police were hopeful of being able to trace whoever had disposed of them.

"And what if they were the ones I took from that belt," exclaimed Dr. Wilkie with a face as white as death. His heart beat like a sledge-hammer.

"Good God, they will trace me by my having sold them direct to the Melbourne Mint! Oh, what a fool I've been!"

That day he went through the greatest mental torture he thought it possible for him to endure. He had sowed the wind and now he would reap the whirlwind. His punishment loomed up before him. Ruin and disgrace were staring him in the face. The police might be coming for him any moment now and the only tale he could think of to tell them would sound flimsy and improbable in the extreme.

He was going to make out that his last remaining relation, the old aunt who had died a little less than two years previously, had given him the sovereigns. It was quite true he had been her heir, but, for many years she had been living upon a small annuity, and all that had come to him at her death had been some odd bits of old furniture.

In the first moment of panic he had snatched the remaining one hundred and twenty-five sovereigns out of his safe and, making certain neither of his two maids was about, had thrust them, wrapped round a thick sock, deep in the soft earth under the wood-heap. He realised he would have no explanation at all to give if exactly 325 sovereigns had been stolen and that number traced to him.

With a dreadful anguish in his heart, he yet went about his work that day with his usual smiling face, and no one could have dreamt the trouble he was in. It was his morning at the hospital, and to everyone he was as bright as ever. He was cheerful with the little patients, chatted to the sisters and gave Nurse Harris his nicest smile. His rounds of his wards over, he was just upon the point of going out of the hospital when Nurse Harris came running out after him with his stethoscope which, in his abstraction, he had inadvertently left behind. Then, as he was thanking her, she interrupted hastily, in an intense whisper, "Oh, doctor, here are the parents of that little girl with the bad pneumonia. Do speak to them. They'll think so much of anything coming from you. They know how desperately sick she is and they're terribly worried."

Dr. Wilkie turned sharply to find a man and a woman almost at his elbow. The man was older than the woman, who was, obviously, still in her early twenties. They both looked absolutely worn out with anxiety.

"Mrs. Benson," said Nurse Harris sweetly, "this is the doctor who's looking after your little Dorothy. He'll tell you how she's getting on."

"Oh, doctor, " burst out the woman, almost in tears. "Do tell me she's going to get well!"

"Get well!" smiled Dr. Wilkie. "Of course, she is!" His face sobered down. "She's a very sick little girl now, but she's responding beautifully to that wonderful new drug we've given her, and tomorrow I expect to see a great

change for the better." His nice smile came again. "Now, don't you worry. If your little daughter belonged to the Queen of England she couldn't be better looked after than she is now. Good-bye."

"And Heaven forgive me, for being so sure," he sighed, as he drove away in his car. "The poor kid's deuced bad, but at any rate she's no worse this morning."

That afternoon he got through his patients somehow, but he was devoutly thankful when the last appointment was through. He was just preparing to leave for home, when his nurse came in quickly with the announcement that an Inspector Benson wanted to see him. Then she went on to add, "He says he only just wants to speak to you for one minute about his little girl in the Children's Hospital." She smiled. "He's brought you a lovely bunch of carnations."

The doctor felt almost faint in his relief. With her first words he had been quite sure the police had come for him, but now he remembered that that morning Nurse Harris had addressed the mother of the very sick child as "Mrs. Benson."

"Show him in," he said a little huskily, "but if anyone else comes now, say I've gone."

The inspector was most apologetic for coming to the rooms so late, but was venturing, he said, to bring him some carnations for his kindness to them that morning. "I've just come from the hospital, sir," he went on, "and the sister told me my little girl is decidedly better this afternoon." His voice choked. "Oh, how you relieved our minds this morning sir! My poor wife hadn't eaten a thing for days, but after you had spoken to us she went home and had a good meal. We were so grateful to you."

"Not at all!" smiled the doctor. "They are happy moments for us when we can give our patients and and their friends some hope." A sudden thought struck him and he went on to ask a question, the asking of which was to alter the whole course of his life. "Oh, by the by, he said, "have you, by chance, heard anything officially about those sovereigns which I read in this morning's newspaper had been stolen from a Queensland bank?"

The inspector nodded. "Yes, sir, we heard about it last night, and we're to look out for a possible confederate of the thief. It is thought the sovereigns may have been sold over here. At the time when they are supposed to have been stolen they were worth about twenty-five shillings. Of course, they're worth more than that now."

He went on, "The story's rather interesting. It appears an officer in the All Consolidated Bank in Brisbane died suddenly last week, and the idea came to somebody to go through the bags of gold which, at one time, had been under

his special charge. Then it was found that one of the bags had been tampered with by taking out some of the sovereigns and substituting two-shilling pieces to make up the correct weight." He laughed. "An old trick which ought to have been foreseen and guarded against."

"But how do they know, as the papers say, that the stealing took place two years ago?" frowned the doctor.

The inspector smiled. "Because it happens that two years ago all the bags had been taken away from this particular officer who's just died and put under seal. No one had any access to them since. So, they know they were tampered with when he held them."

"Very bad management, I should say," nodded the doctor. "Do you know if the bank lost much?"

"No, only two hundred sovereigns. Those were all which had been taken."

The doctor's mind functioned slowly. Then he asked sharply, and with rising excitement, "Are you sure it was only two hundred? Not any more?"

"No, no more, sir. They're all we've got to enquire about over here to find out, as I say, if that officer passed them over to some South Australian confederate to get rid of." He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "And a lot of chance we've got after all these months."

The inspector took his leave, and Dr. Wilkie lost no time in getting away. He saw a way out of everything and how, whatever happened now, he could place himself in a position of no danger at all.

Still for all that, he was to learn within an hour that he had had one of the narrowest escapes possible, and that it had been by only a matter of minutes that he had managed to save himself.

He had been back home less than half an hour, occupying himself feverishly in taking certain precautions in case the police ever should come to question him, when he heard a car pull up in the road, and from his study window saw two men, who were strangers to him, getting out. They looked big and hefty, exactly, he told himself with a dreadful pang, like policemen.

His heart beat furiously and he could hardly get his breath. Then, all in the flash of a second, his confidence came back and he smiled. He was sure he had the situation well in hand if only he met it boldly.

A maid knocked at the door and came in. "Two gentlemen to see you, sir," she said. "They say they're not patients and won't give their names. They say the matter is important. I've shown them into the breakfast room."

Dr. Wilkie went into them at once. "Good evening," he said pleasantly, "and what is it you want?"

One of the strangers handed him his card. "I'm Inspector Brandon," he said, "and this gentleman is Inspector Williams." His voice was grim and hard. "We've come to ask you some questions."

To their amazement the doctor looked very amused. "But you're quick, aren't you?" he asked smilingly. "Why it was only this morning that I read about it in the newspapers!" He nodded. "Of course, you've come to ask me about those 200 sovereigns I sold to the Mint in Melbourne last year!"

The inspector scowled. He had certainly not expected quite so cheerful a reception. "That's it!" he nodded back quickly. "You've hit the nail on the head, right enough." He looked very stern. "Then you admit you sold them?"

"Certainly!" laughed Dr. Wilkie. "Didn't I sell them in my own name, and give my proper North terrace address?" It might have been almost a joke from the way he was taking it. "You didn't have any difficulty in finding me, did you?"

The inspector was looking rather annoyed. Evidently, he had thought he was on a soft thing, and now he was note quite so sure. He ignored the doctor's question, and, instead, asked one himself. "Where did you get the 200 sovereigns from? That's what we want to know."

The doctor was still smiling. "And I'll tell you," he replied. "An aunt of mine, the late Mrs. Stone, of Port Augusta, gave them to me. She had died about two months before I sold them."

The inspector spoke with heavy sarcasm. "Ah, and that'll clear up everything, as, of course, they were set down in the probate. She left them to you in her will!"

"No, she didn't," corrected the doctor. "She made me a present of them soon after I qualified, which was nearly six years ago. I was not to sell them until after she was dead, and I didn't do so."

It was the inspector who looked amused now. "And, of course, you will be able to produce ample evidence to prove all this?" he asked.

Dr. Wilkie shook his head. "No, not a soul was told about it." He scoffed. "Who'd want it known he's got a lot of sovereigns in the house, particularly so as I'd got no safe then?"

The two inspectors looked at each other, and then the one who'd been doing all the talking turned back to the doctor and said reprovingly, "Come, come, Dr. Wilkie, all this a little bit thin, isn't it? You don't really expect us to believe it, do you?" He raised his voice harshly. "Two hundred sovereigns were stolen from the Brisbane bank, and you are known to have been in the possession of the same number. You, now, want us to believe that your—"

"I don't want you to believe anything," retorted the doctor angrily. "I'm not interested in your beliefs in the very slightest degree."

"Those two hundred sovereigns," went on the inspector, raising his hand impressively, "were—"

"My own lawful property," broke in Dr. Wilkie hotly, "equally as are the other ones I have in my safe now. They belong definitely to me, and—"

The inspector's words came like the strike of a snake. "What other ones?" he demanded, in an angry tone. "What do you mean? Are you making out you've got any more? How many? Then show us them."

A few minutes later it was a decidedly disgusted pair of detectives who left the doctor's house. They had both seen and handled the other hundred and twenty-five sovereigns, which had been done up in a faded piece of old newspaper, dated seven years before, and which were tucked in an old work-box, from its appearance, made many years before either of them had been born. They had had to admit that their whole case had fallen down, and, rather grudgingly, had apologised to Dr. Wilkie for having entertained suspicions of his honesty. They were most annoyed that to get all the credit of the arrest for themselves they had persuaded the authorities in Melbourne to send them all this long distance upon what had turned out to be a wild-goose chase.

Poor fellows, how were they to know how badly they had been deceived? How they were to know the sovereigns had been put in that work-box only a bare ten minutes before they had arrived, and that the faded piece of old newspaper had been hurriedly snatched from the lining of a drawer in his aunt's very ancient wardrobe, reposing derelict in the lumber-room.

As they were driving away from the doctor's house, the elder inspector remarked frowningly to his colleague, "But there's no getting away from it, Thomas; that tale he told us must be true."

"I suppose so," admitted the other grudgingly. He shook his head. "Still I'd like very much to know why those blessed sovereigns smelt so strong of fresh earth. No, you needn't grin. I'm not a smoker like you and can depend upon my good old nose anywhere." He looked puzzled. "I don't understand it at all."

Dr. Wilkie never heard anything more about the stolen Brisbane sovereigns and, in a few days, the matter had ceased to trouble him and he was picking up the threads of his old carefree life again. He felt under a great debt of gratitude to Nurse Harris for her making the two Bensons known to him that morning outside the hospital. But for that encounter, the father would not have visited him later and furnished him with the information which had enabled him deal so effectively with the detectives from Melbourne. With all his gratitude to the nurse, however, he told himself he was not going to let it drift into any feeling of romance.

In the meantime Annabel had been thinking quite a lot about him, and boldly making up her mind to make him take more interest in her. So one

morning she rang up his professional rooms and told his nurse she was wanting to see him about herself. She said she had got neuritis and was also bothered with insomnia.

Accordingly, the next afternoon she showed him a very nicely- moulded little arm and pointed out where she was getting the pain. He examined the arm carefully, rather annoyed, however, that the thought had entered into his mind how smooth and soft it would feel if he put it against his cheek. Still it was only in a most correct professional way that he advised her what to do, and gave her a prescription for something to make her sleep.

"And come back to me in a fortnight," he told her, "and I'll see how you've been getting on."

Annabel had no intention of getting the sleeping tablets, but that night she wished devoutly that she had. She was deeply in love with the doctor and the thinking about him kept her awake for many hours. She was very despondent, for it seemed now so evident to her there was not the slightest tender feeling on his side. With all his pleasantness towards her he was only regarding her in just the same light as all the other girls he met. He would never fall in love with her.

And then chance came to her help in a most unexpected way.

Upon the afternoon of the day before she was due to pay him the next professional visit she went down to Seacliff to take a little child of some very poor parents some vests she had knitted for him. Upon her way back to the railway station, coming to a café she thought she would go in for a quick cup of tea. As she entered she heard a car draw up outside, and her heart began bumping violently when she saw Dr. Wilkie come in after her. He caught sight of her at once, and, after the very briefest hesitation, came and sat down beside her. He ordered tea for them both, and said there was no hurry for her to catch any train, as he would drive her back to the hospital.

"And it's lucky I met you," he smiled, "for there's a big shower coming over and you'd have certainly got wet before you reached the railway station."

Then for half an hour they sat talking and, of set purpose, he drew her out about her life in England. She told him her father had been a doctor and it was his death a year previously which had determined her to come to Australia. She had now no relations in England, but believed her late father's brother was alive somewhere in Australia. She said nothing, however, about this uncle being supposed to be a very rich man. The doctor listened most interestedly and, regarding her critically, thought many times how attractive she was.

The rain held off and at last they got up to leave. They had not, however, gone very far before the sky blackened and big drops of rain began to fall. "Hullo," exclaimed the doctor, peering through the windscreen, "but it looks as

if a real cloudburst were coming right over us," and, turning into a small bye-road almost arched above with thick branches of trees, he pulled up in the lee of a high wall. "I think we'll stop here for a minute or two," he went on. "It'll only be a shower and will soon pass. Still, it's no good driving through a deluge of rain if one can avoid it."

It was not long before lighting-up time, and with the heavy cloud hanging over, everything became very dark. The rain began to pour down in torrents, and even in part sheltered as they were, it crashed thunderously upon the roof of the car. The air became bitterly cold and Annabel shivered. Dr. Wilkie smiled round at her. "Feeling cold?" he asked. "And so am I." He leant over to the back of the car and pulled up a rug. "It's not a very big one," he called out above the noise of the rain, "but it'll be large enough for us both if you come a bit closer to me. That's it," and he reached out and pulled her near to him.

Annabel shivered, but, it was no longer from cold. "Not feeling warm yet?" laughed the doctor. "Then come nearer still. Don't be afraid," and this time he drew her very close to him. Then what was more natural than that he should look down to see if she were quite comfortable, what was more natural still, when realising the closeness of her face to his, that he should kiss her? Her lips were soft and moist and he thought it quite a nice kiss. Then, to adopt the phraseology of the profession, he took another dose of the same medicine, finding it this time even more to his liking, as the kiss was now returned. A third kiss was exchanged and then, to his horror he realised what he had done.

His regret was instantaneous and profound, but— and he was always most thankful for it afterwards— he did not let Annabel see it. He disengaged himself gently from her, and, bending his head down, peered intently through the windscreen. All his interest now was, apparently, to see how the storm was going. He was trying to act now so that the girl beside him should think his kissing had been just a casual and careless happening, with no real significance. Externally he was quite calm, but inwardly he was furious with himself. Although he admired Annabel, he was not a scrap in love with her, and it simply horrified him to think he might have led her to admit she had some deeper feelings for him. It was a really dreadful thing for him to have done.

An awkward silence followed, and then, the storm beginning to die down, he said briskly, "Well, I think we'd better be getting on. I've got an appointment in North Enfield at six."

They talked very little during the rest of the journey, both being busy with their own thoughts. Annabel could not rightly analyse hers, being thrilled and dejected at the same time. A hopeful tremor went through her when, in parting, the doctor remarked with a smile that he would be seeing her again on the morrow when she came to him about her arm. Later, when he was putting

his car back in the garage, he noticed she had left her purse on the seat. Hesitating a moment, for he was wondering if it were important enough for him to ring her up, and that he most certainly did not want to do and let everybody learn she had been with him in his car, he opened it. It contained the return half of her railway ticket and just over three shillings in money.

"Poor little thing," he frowned, "and perhaps that's all she's got until next pay-day when, as a probationer, she'll only be getting a few shillings a week!" He sighed. "And there's just the chance that this car, as well as almost everything else I've got, by rights belongs to her. Really, it's not nice knowing oneself to be a sort of thief and meeting the very person one, perhaps, has robbed!"

That night his thoughts kept him awake until well into the small hours, and his conscience told him that the very least he could do was to marry Nurse Harris. Then, as he remembered how pretty she had looked when he was bending down over her in the car, he knew that if only he were a marrying man it would be no hardship. She was certainly the prettiest girl he had come across, and, if he were any judge of character, one of the very nicest ones, too. He feel asleep at last and dreamed he was being put in prison. It was a truly dreadful dream, and he woke up bathed in perspiration.

Many times during the next morning he considered how he would meet Annabel when she came to him that afternoon but, in the end, could come to no conclusion. One moment, he was relieved to think his own nurse would be hovering about, and the next he was annoyed that she would be.

Then chance took a hand in the game again and played a strong card in Annabel's favor. At half-past four Dr. Wilkie's nurse came in to him, looking rather flustered. "Oh, doctor," she exclaimed, "I wonder if you would mind if I went off now. I've just had a message that my sister's been taken ill, and I want to go to her as soon as I can. There are only two more patients to come. Nurse Harris at five, and Mrs. Mornington at a quarter past."

Of course he let her go. Then, when Annabel duly arrived at five, she was kept waiting and the patient who had come after her taken in, first. She trembled when at length the doctor himself came to usher her into the consulting room.

His manner was quiet and very professional. He examined the arm gravely and pronounced it all right. Then he leant back to his chair and regarded her critically. "And so, Nurse Harris," he said, "for the time, at all events, I've finished with you as a patient." His face broke into a pleasant smile. "And now I'm going to speak to you as a friend." He raised his hand warningly. "But, first, can I depend upon you to give a message to matron when you get back?"

Poor little Annabel's heart was all of a flutter. His words were very ordinary, but somehow she sensed something behind them, and she noticed his hand was shaking. She steadied her voice with an effort. "Of course, you can," she laughed. "As a nurse, am I not being trained not to forget anything? What's the message?"

He moved his chair a little closer to her and she felt her legs shaking under her. "You're to tell her," he said slowly, "that you'll be leaving the hospital very shortly, as soon as its convenient for her."

Annabel reddened furiously. There was no misunderstanding what he meant, but, with all the thrill of happiness which stirred in her, came also the woman instinct not to surrender herself without some sort of struggle. She rose to her feet to get farther from him and with a little bow, asked mockingly, "And am I to take that, please sir, as an offer of marriage?" She smiled archly. "Because, if so, I shall require time to think it over, and get advice from my friends. I shall have to enquire also, into your charac—" but that was as far as she got before he had taken her in his arms, and for quite a long minute, made speech impossible.

There was surely no happier or more triumphant young woman in all the world than was Nurse Harris when she went to give her message to matron that night. "I've come to tell you," she said very demurely, "that I shall be leaving you very shortly, whenever it is convenient for you after a fortnight from now."

The matron's face fell. "Oh, I'm sorry, nurse," she said. "I'm quite pleased with you, and thought you were getting on so nicely. Why do you want to leave?"

Annabel blushed. "I'm going to be married, matron, as soon as I can get away."

"Oh, and pray to whom?" smiled the matron. ''Who's the fortunate man?"

"Dr. Wilkie," replied Annabel. She looked shy and cast down her eyes. "We became engaged this afternoon."

The matron gasped, "Oh, you sly little puss!" Her face beamed. "And this has been going on under our own eyes, and yet I'm sure none of us have noticed it. I congratulate you, dear. Your doctor's a very nice man."

In about ten minutes everybody in the hospital had heard of the engagement, in a quarter of an hour it was beginning to filter round outside, and long before midnight it had been discussed at scores of bridge tables in society circles.

They were married within the month and went to the Blue Mountains for their honeymoon. If the doctor had not been in love with his wife when he took her away, that was certainly not the case when he returned home with

her. All the honeymoon long he had been wanting to kick himself for having dared to imagine there was going to be any sacrifice on his part in marrying her. Over and over again, he told himself he was one of the most fortunate of men, and that, surely, never had there been a sweeter or prettier girl for a wife.

After six months of marriage, too, his general view of matrimony can be best realised by his telling Annabel one morning that the happiest moment for him of all the day was when he came home at night and saw her waiting for him in the hall.

The months passed on and then came one of the most astonishing happenings to the chain of events following upon the coming of the man with the belt to Dr. Wilkie upon that fateful night.

It was getting on towards Melbourne Cup time, and one day the doctor said to his wife, "Look here, sweetheart, what about us going to see the Cup run? That'll be your last outing for a long time, and then you'll have to begin to take things easier."

Annabel was delighted and so the great day found them upon the historic racecourse. They lost their money on the Cup, but in the race following Annabel saw there was a horse of the unusual name of "Pride of Yare" down to run.

"Oh, do let's back him, dear!" she exclaimed excitedly. "The Yare is the name of the river which runs round my home to dear old England. I've often swum in it as a girl."

So they each invested a pound and, with no one seeming to think the horse stood much chance, the bookmaker gave them twenty to one.

To their great delight the horse won easily, and it was a thrilling moment for Annabel when she saw her husband collect £42. Later, passing the stall where "Pride of Yare" was standing to have his aluminium running shoes taken off, they saw a good- looking, well-dressed man of about fifty talking smilingly to the "boy" who was holding the horse's head. "That's the owner, of course," said the doctor, and, looking down at their race- card, he saw that his name was Montague.

That night after dinner, in the lounge of their hotel, they saw the same man again, standing talking to some friends. "Oh, doesn't he look pleased!" exclaimed Annabel. "I suppose he won a lot of money."

A waiter at that moment came up to bring them their coffee, and the doctor asked casually. "Does that Mr. Montague over there own many horses, do you know?"

The waiter looked in the direction he indicated. "Oh, yes, sir, quite a number! He won the Caulfield Cup the other day with Yarmouth, and, they say,

got a fortune out of it, too." He smiled. "Of course, his real name is not Montague. In private life he's Mr. John Harris. He owns Wongalla, one of the biggest sheep stations in New South Wales."

The waiter moved off, and Annabel exclaimed faintly, "Oh, Derek, Yare and Yarmouth, both Norfolk names, and a John Harris was my father's brother! I do believe he's my uncle!"

Dr. Wilkie frowned. He was inclined to be cautious. "Is he like your father to look at?" he asked sharply.

Annabel looked troubled. "N-o, he's not," she replied hesitatingly. "He's fair, and father was dark. He's much bigger, too, than poor father was. Still—"

But the object of their conversation at that moment left the men he had been talking to and moved up the lounge to pass quite close to where they were sitting. In passing, as most men did the doctor had noticed with pride, he glanced interestedly at Annabel and then, with a quick look from her to her husband. Then he moved on across the lounge and went and sat down by himself.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dr. Wilkie excitedly. "Did you see his eyes?" he could hardly get his breath. "They are the same forget-me-not color as yours." He jumped to his feet. "You stay there and I'll go and give him the surprise of his life."

He walked briskly across the lounge and addressed the good- looking man sitting down. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but does it happen you come from Norwich, in England?"

"I do," nodded the man, looking rather puzzled.

"And did you have a brother, a doctor, whose names were Edward Harris, and who practised in Norwich?"

"I did," was the reply.

Dr. Wilkie laughed happily. "Then come along, sir, and I'll introduce you to your niece, my wife."

For just a moment Mr. Harris appeared to hesitate, and then he rose up and followed the doctor. When he came up to Annabel he took a long look at her and then his face broke into an expression of great delight. "Yes, you're the little Annabel I've heard about," he exclaimed joyfully. "You're the very spit of your mother, the Isabel Bevan I knew thirty years ago, although, like me, you've got my dear mother's forget-me-not colored eyes. Now, how on earth did you find me out? Tell me all about it. I'm a lonely old bachelor and just thrilled to meet one of my own flesh and blood."

A few days later, they all returned to Adelaide together, and the next morning it appeared in the social columns of *"The Advertiser"* that Mr. John

Harris, of Wongalla Station, New South Wales, and the owner of the Caulfield Cup winner, was staying with his niece, Mrs. Derek Wilkie.

A great flutter was caused in society circles, and those important dames who had been inclined to cold-shoulder Mrs. Dr. Wilkie because in her maiden days she had been only a nurse at the Children's Hospital, now tumbled over one another to be quickest on her doorstep. No one was told how Annabel had come to find her uncle, and it was believed she had known about him all along. It was generally conceded that the doctor had been a very clever fellow to have annexed so quietly such a rich prize as the heiress of John Harris for his wife.

When Mr. Harris was bidding them good-bye to return to New South Wales, he gave Annabel a sealed envelope. "A little present between you both," he said, "but you're not to open it until I have gone.

The envelope contained a cheque for £10,000.

A few days later, the treasurer of the Children's Hospital received an anonymous donation, all in bank notes, and the exact sum they amounted to was two thousand, one hundred and five pounds.

At last Dr. Wilkie thought he was purged of his offence, and his opinion was that he had got off very lightly. His conscience was now at rest.

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6: The Pursuit of the Topaz

Max Pemberton

1863-1950

The English Illustrated Magazine July 1894

In: *Jewel Mysteries*, 1894

I WAS STRUGGLING heroically to force my arms through the sleeves of a well-starched shirt, when the man knocked upon the door of my bedroom for the second time. I had heard him faintly five minutes before, when my head was as far in a basin as the limitations of Parisian toilet-ware would allow it to go; but now he knocked imperiously, and when I opened to him he stood hesitatingly with a foolish leer upon his face, and that which he meant for discretion upon his lips.

"Well," said I, "what the devil do you want? Can't you see I'm dressing?"

At this he looked with obvious pity for me towards the basin, but quickly recovered himself.

"*Dame*," said he, with a fine Gascon accent, "there is a lady waiting for monsieur in the *salon*."

"A lady!" cried I with surprise; "who is she?"

"I am but three days in Paris," replied he, "and she is a stranger to me. If monsieur prefers it, I will ask her some questions."

"You will please do nothing of the sort; did she give her name?"

"I seem to remember that she did, but it has escaped me. I shall say that you are engaged, and will see her to-morrow; monsieur leaves Paris at nine o'clock, *hein*?"

He said this with another vulgar leer, but I turned round upon him fiercely, for I had begun to brush what is left of my hair.

"You impudent poltroon!" exclaimed I; "leave the room instantly, and tell the lady that I will be with her in five minutes."

"Ah," said he, "it is like that then? Very good; I shall safeguard your interests; trust in me. May I be permitted to light the candles?"

He said this with a fine eye to the bill; but I sent him away after some display of temper, and finished my dressing quickly, wondering all the time who the woman was, and what she wanted of me. Although I have lived in Paris nigh as much as in London, I have cultivated few acquaintances there other than those arising in the path of business. The domestic side of Parisian life has never appealed to me; I am equally callous to the vaunted attractions of the dismal halls of light and twaddle with which the foreigner usually boasts acquaintance. It was, therefore, not only with profound surprise, but also with a piquant curiosity, that I fell to speculating upon the identity of my visitor, and the mission which brought her to me.

At the time of this occurrence I had been in the French capital for one week, being carried there by the announcement of the sale of the Countess Boccalini's jewels. After my usual custom, I had engaged rooms in the little Hôtel de Bard, which is almost the neighbour of the Grand Hotel, and had passed the week in the haggling and disputation which are the salt of life to a jeweller. The result was the purchase of a superb necklace of brilliants, which subsequently I sold here for nine thousand pounds, and of a quantity of smaller stones, and of chrysoprase, the gem which is now becoming exceedingly fashionable in London. But on the night of which I am writing, my trading was done, and a ridiculous promise to go to the Opera Ball alone kept me in Paris. How the promise came to be given to my friend Tussal I cannot remember; but he had assured me that the ball was the event of April, and that my education would remain imperfect until I had gazed upon the spectacle of *calicots* and *flaneurs* rioting in the great house which Garnier designed and Delaunay painted. And so pressing was he, and so largely did I trade with him, that I yielded at last to his solicitations, and agreed to accept a seat in his box.

By the terms of his invitation I was to meet him at the Grand Café at midnight, and thence was to proceed to the Opera House at half-past twelve. I had determined to dine quietly at my own hotel, and afterwards to spend the intervening hours at the Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin; for which purpose I dressed at a comparatively early hour; and dressing, received the stiff-necked Gascon's message that a lady wished to see me. Yet for what purpose she came, or who she might be, I had not an idea; and I turned over a hundred theories in my mind as I descended to the little reception room of the hotel, and there found her sitting by the uncovered table with a railway guide before her, but obviously agitated, and as obviously pretty.

When looking back upon the extraordinary mystery of which this childish girl was for me the centre, I have often remembered that she was one of the few Frenchwomen I have met who had a thoroughly English face. Her skin was white and pink, untouched by that olive tint which is so prevalent in Paris; her eyes were wondrously blue; she had rich brown hair shot with golden tresses, which gave to the whole a magnificent lustre; she was entirely free of that restless gesture which is the despair of a man of nerves. As I first saw her, she wore a captivating apology for a bonnet, which seemed to consist of a spray of jet and a hairpin; but her hands were gloved as only a Frenchwoman's hands are, and a long cloak of steel-gray cloth edged with fur, fell about her shoulders, yet permitted one to see an exquisite outline of figure beneath. Indeed, she made a perfect little picture, and her exceeding prettiness lost nothing for the rush of colour to her cheeks when I spoke to her.

"I am Bernard Sutton," said I; "if it is possible that I can be of any service to you, the privilege is mine— "

"Thank you, a thousand times," said she, speaking with an accent which added to the charm of her English. "I have heard of you often from Madame Carmalovitch, whose husband owned the famous opal; you were very kind to her— "

"I was exceedingly sorry for her," I replied; "are you a relation of hers?"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed; "I am Mademoiselle Edile Bernier, and I live with my mother at 32, Rue Boissière. You will laugh to hear why I come to you. It is about something you alone can advise me upon, and, of course, you will guess it at once."

"I won't waste your time by being ambiguous," said I; "you have come to consult me about some jewels; pray let me see them."

There was no one else in the *salon* at that time, the few people in the hotel being at dinner. The girl had, therefore, no hesitation in opening a bracelet case, which she had carried under her cloak, and showing me a plain band of gold which served as a mount for a small circle of turquoise and an exceedingly large rose-pink topaz, which possessed all the lustre of a diamond. I saw at once that the gem was from Brazil, and was large enough and rich enough to be worth a considerable sum, but I have never known hunger for the topaz myself, and when I had taken one look at the bracelet I handed it back to her.

"It's exceedingly pretty," said I, "and your stones are very good. There is a little green at the base of the larger turquoises, but you will hardly match the topaz in Paris. Are you seeking to know the value of it?"

"I would never ask that," she answered quickly; "it was a gift from my *fiancé*, Monsieur Georges Barré, whom you may know by name."

I vow it was very bewitching to watch the rosy blush which suffused her cheek when she made this confession. Yet she spoke with the ring of pride in her voice, and I replied to her encouragingly while she put her treasure beneath her cloak, as though she feared that other eyes than hers should rest even upon the case of it.

"Monsieur Barré is well known to me by name," said I; "his bust of Victor Hugo from last year's salon is at this moment the chief ornament of my library. I must now congratulate him for the second time."

At this she laughed, but the ripples died away quickly upon her face, and the look of haunting fear again troubled her eyes. I observed that she was reticent in speaking plainly to me, and did my best to help her out with it.

"You have not yet put to me," said I, "the precise question which brought you here. It concerns the bracelet, of course?"

"Ye— yes," said she; "but I am very much afraid you will laugh at me. I wanted to ask you if, in your judgment— that is, with your experience— there is any reason why I should not wear my present at the Opera Ball to-night?"

Her confusion, when thus she had unburdened herself, was overwhelming. She scarce dared to lift her eyes to mine as she spoke, and one of her hands played restlessly with the railway guide, while the other was closed firmly about her bracelet. Nor did I, who know the potency of woman's superstition in the matter of their jewels, feel the touch of a desire to draw amusement from her dilemma.

"Come," said I, with all the gentleness of voice I could command; "you have been reading something silly. The topaz is the emblem of fidelity, it is also a traditional cure for indigestion. In other words, the ancients were wise enough to know that love and good cooking are not so far apart after all. Wear your jewel at the opera by all means, and regard it as an antidote to the *confetti* you will consume."

She heard me thus far with a restrained smile upon her face, and indeed, she half rose as though to end the interview; but the evidence of fear was still about her eyes, and there was the note of unsatisfied questioning in her voice when she said,—

"I was sure you would tell me that— but I am keeping you from your dinner, and have already troubled you too much I fear."

My answer to this appeal was to close the door of the *salon*, which had been open during our interview, and to draw a chair close to hers.

"Mademoiselle Bernier," said I, "the most important part of the intelligence you meant to bring to me remains unspoken. Let me encourage you to tell me everything freely, and be assured that without your express permission nothing you may say will be remembered by me."

"Thank you, very much," she said quietly, evidently regaining complete confidence; "but I have nothing to conceal. A week ago, Monsieur Barré gave me this bracelet with the stipulation that I should wear it at the ball to-night. Two days ago, I received this letter, which I hesitated to show even to you, lest it should be an injustice to the man I love."

She passed, with her words, a dirty scrap of a note to me, the leaf of a sheet of the commonest lined scribbling paper; and I read upon it, written in very bad French, the warning—

"Mademoiselle. If you wear the topaz bracelet at the Opera Ball to-night you carry death upon your arm."

Thrice I read this; and as I repeated the words, the third time aloud, I saw, shaping about the simplicity of the girl, a mystery which seemed as deep, and at first sight as unfathomable, as any as I had known. As for the momentary

victim of it she sat watching me while I, all amazed, held the paper still in my hand, and did not hide my surprise, or, indeed, attempt to.

"Mademoiselle," said I, "you speak to me of very deep matters, I fear. But, of course, you have shown this letter to your relatives?"

"I have but one relative in the world," said she, "my mother, who is a paralytic. I dare not mention such a thing to her; she would die of fear."

"And you yourself have no suspicion, no faint idea of the cause of such a letter as that?"

"I cannot even attempt to guess at it."

"There are none of your lady friends who would hazard a joke with you?"

"Oh, no; they could not think of such a joke as that, and my few friends love me, I believe."

I had now begun to pace up and down the room, being in a very whirl of theory and conjecture. And, in truth, the problem presented so many possibilities that it might well have troubled a man whose whole occupation was the solution of mysteries. Not that I lacked any clue, for my knowledge, such as it is, of the heartburnings, the jealousies, and the crimes which hover over the possession of precious stones at once compelled me to the conclusion, either that M. Georges Barré had been the victim of a previous *affaire du cœur*, or that his *fiancée* had been won only over trampled hopes and vain rivalries. In either case (the case of the woman who resented the man's marriage, or the man who resented the woman's) was there ample warranty for such a letter as Mademoiselle Bernier had received. Yet was I too slow to venture the question with her, and did so at last in sheer pity for her childishness.

"Tell me," said I, stopping of a sudden before her, "what led you to me?"

"Madame Carmalovitch," said she. "I went to her first, but she knew you were in Paris, and would not rest until I had consented to see you. She would have come with me, but is latterly almost always unable to face the night air."

"You have no one else you would care to consult in such a case?"

"No one," said she.

"And if you go to the ball to-night without your bracelet— ?"

She looked up at me with tears in her eyes when she answered,—

"Georges would never forgive me."

"Could you make no excuse to remain at home?"

"Oh, don't ask me to do that," she exclaimed pitifully, "I have lived for the ball since the beginning of the year!"

It was a woman's plea, and not to be resisted. I saw at once that she *would* go to the dance whatever words fell from me, and I turned from the subject to one more important.

"Since you are determined to be there to night," said I, "perhaps you will give me Monsieur Georges Barré's address?"

"Oh, for the love of God, don't tell him!" she cried; "he would never forgive me if I distrusted his present."

"My dear lady, I quite understand that. Really, you credit me with being a very poor diplomatist. When I see him I doubt if I shall even mention your name to him."

"You promise me that?"

"I promise you, at least, that he shall never know of your coming to me. But I must exact another promise from you— it is that you will not wear the topaz until you have my permission."

"But Georges expects me to wear it at the ball."

"He would not expect you to risk your life. And there is no reason, so far as I can see, why I should not be able to give you permission, or to refuse it, by eleven o'clock. You do not go to the opera until midnight, I presume?"

"Monsieur Barré has promised to call in the Rue Boissière at a quarter past twelve. He has an *appartement* in the Hôtel Scribe. I can scarce go with him and leave his gift at home."

"Of course you can't, but I would suggest that, unless you hear from me by midnight, you carry it beneath your cloak as you do now. I shall meet you in the Opera House, at any rate. Meanwhile, I have one more question to put to you, forgive it from a man who is nearly old enough to be your father. Before you became the *fiancée* of Monsieur Barré was there— well, was there any other in your thoughts?"

She looked at me with frankness shining clearly from her eyes, when she said,—

"Never for a moment. I was in a convent until last year, and I have not spoken to six men since I left."

"That is all I want to know. We will both dine now; but first let me look at your bracelet once more."

She handed me the case again; and I, leaving her for a moment to fetch my glass, put the jewel under the strong light of the chandelier, and examined every inch of it within and without. I discovered then that which had escaped me upon first acquaintance with it. In one of the crevices of the clasp there was a blood-stain, unmistakable, even fresh, yet so concealed by the embossment of the jewels that I did not wonder she had remained in ignorance of it. But when I gave it to her again I doubt not that I was very serious, and this she observed, and made comment upon.

"You see something now which you did not see ten minutes ago," she cried; "you will surely tell me?"

"I see a very pretty pink topaz," said I, forcing a smile, "and a young lady who is missing her dinner. Come, have some confidence in me, and put all these thoughts out of your mind until I ask you to remember them again."

"I will," said she, "and can never thank you enough; you do not know what a trouble you have taken from my mind."

Here was the end of our interview, for we had come to the door of the courtyard as we spoke, and I put her at once into the neat little brougham which was waiting for her. There were but two other men, the concierge, and a short, exceedingly dark man in evening dress, about the place at that time; and as the brougham drove away it occurred to me that the latter fellow was watching me rather closely, upon which I had a good look at him; but he turned away sharply to the coffee-room, while I went to my dinner in as fine a state of bewilderment as I have known. Never in my long years' work had I come across such a case, or one to which a clue, save on the hypothesis of jealousy, was so completely wanting. Yet if jealousy were the motive of the warning, how, I asked, came the bloodstains upon the bracelet? And if the gem had any connection with a previous affair of Barré's why did he give it to his *fiancée*? The latter supposition seemed, in itself, sufficient to upset the whole suggestion; nor could I find another; but I determined to call upon the sculptor at once, and to use every device at my command in the interests of the helpless girl who had called upon me.

It was now near to ten o'clock, and, having dined hastily, I passed through the courtyard on my way to the Hôtel Scribe. There I saw, to my surprise, that the ill-visaged Italian— for so I judged he was— still loitered about the place; but again appeared to avoid scrutiny. This second appearance of his seemed to me— I knew not why— as the shaping of a story from the air; but I had no courage then to speak to him, and I walked on down the boulevard, perceiving as I went that flambeaus already lighted the great Opera House, and that the *canaille* were preparing for the riot. When at last I came to the hotel, and sent up my card, the answer was that Monsieur Barré had just left, and was not expected to return until the next morning.

How completely this answer undid my purpose I could never set down. The man was my only possible hope. In the haste of my conclusions I had never found time to remember that I might not catch him; that every *flaneur* was hither and thither like a will-o'-the-wisp on such a night. In vain I asked, nay, implored, for information— they could give me none; and when further importunity was plainly a farce, I had no alternative but to go to the Rue Boissière, in the ultimate hope that Barré's destination was there, and that he had called upon his *fiancée* before the hour of the appointment. But upon this I

was determined, that until I had found him Mademoiselle Bernier should not wear the bracelet, though I stood at her side from that hour to midnight.

My first attempt culminating unfruitfully, I quitted the passage of the hotel, being still bent upon the journey to the Rue Boissière, and was again upon the pavement before the café, when I saw the Italian for the third time. He stood upon the very edge of the curbstone, undisguisedly waiting for me, so that upon a sudden impulse, which had wisdom in it, I walked over to him, and this time he did not turn away.

"Forgive the question," said I, in my miserable French, "but you are betraying an interest in my movements which is unusual; in fact, you have followed me from my hotel, I think?"

"Exactly," he replied, having even less of the tongue than I had, though I make no attempt to reproduce the vagaries of his idiom. "I followed you here, as you say— "

"For what purpose, may I ask?"

"To warn you!"

"To warn me!"

"Certainly, since you carry in your pocket the topaz bracelet."

"Oh," said I, taken aback at his false conclusion, "it is that, is it? I am much obliged to you, but I don't happen to possess such a thing."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said he; "then she did not sell it to you?"

"She certainly did not!"

"And she will wear it at the ball to-night?"

"Of course!"

"Mother of God! she is a dead woman then."

It is often possible to tell from the chord of voice a man strikes in conversation whether he be friend or enemy. I knew from the sympathetic note in this earnest exclamation that I had to do with one who wished well to Mademoiselle Bernier; but the very sorrow of the words struck me chill with fear. It was plain that I must shape a bold course if I would learn the whole moment of the mystery, and observing that the stranger was a man of much shabbiness and undoubted poverty— if that might be judged by his dress— I played the only possible card at once.

"Look here," said I, "this is no time for words like this. Come into the café with me, and I will pay you fifty pounds for what you know. It shall be worth a hundred if you convince me that you have done a substantial kindness to Mademoiselle Bernier."

He looked at his watch before he made answer. Then he said,—

"The offer is a fair one, but I do not seek your money. We have two hours in which to save her, but before I go with you, you shall swear to me that

anything I may tell you will never be used against me here or in any other country."

"Of course," said I; "you don't think I am a policeman, do you? I have no other interest but that of the lady."

"Nor I," said he; and he followed me into the café, but the place was so intolerably full that I bade him come with me to a little wine-shop in the Rue Lafayette, and there we found a vacant table, and I ordered his absinthe and a glass of coffee for myself. Scarcely, however, had he lighted his cigarette before he began to talk of the matter we had come upon.

"First," said he, "tell me, did Mademoiselle speak of a letter she had received?"

"She not only spoke of it, but she gave it to me to read," I replied.

"Well," said he, "I wrote it."

"I gathered that from your words," said I next; "and of course you wrote it for very good reasons?"

"You shall hear them," said he, sipping freely of his drink. "That bracelet was last worn at the *Mi-Carême* Ball in Marseilles by a girl named Berthe Duval. She was carried from the ball-room stabbed horribly, at one o'clock in the morning. She died in my arms, for in one week she was to have been my wife."

"And the assassin?" I asked.

"Was hunted for by the police in vain," he continued. "I myself offered every shilling that I had to find him, but, despite the activity of us all, he was never so much as named. Let us go back another year— it is painful enough for me because such a retrogression recalls to me the one passion of my life— a passion beside which the affair at Marseilles is not to be spoken of. God knows that the memory of the woman I refer to is at this moment eating out my heart. She was an Italian girl, sixteen years old when she died, and I think— why should I not?— that the world has never held a more beautiful creature. Well, she wore the bracelet, now about twenty-six months ago, at the *Mardi Gras* Ball in Savona, and she fell dead before my very eyes ten minutes after she had entered the ball-room. She had drunk of poisoned coffee, and no man but one knew by whose hand the death had come to her."

"You say no man but one; that one was—"

"Myself!"

"Then you knew who killed the other victim at Marseilles?"

"I knew, as you say; but to know and to arrest are different things."

"Have you any idea as to the man's whereabouts now?"

"Every idea; he was in Paris three days ago— he was in Paris to-day. I should judge it more than likely that he will be at the Opera Ball to-night."

Before he could say more I rose from my chair and summoned the head waiter of the place to me. Then I wrote an urgent message upon a leaf of my note-book, and despatched it by a cab to 32, Rue Boissière. The message implored Mademoiselle Bernier, as she valued her life, to leave the bracelet at home for this night at any rate.

"Now," said I, "we can talk still at our leisure. You have taken me back to Marseilles fourteen months ago; let us have the chapter in your life which precedes that one."

He finished off his absinthe, and called for another glass before he would answer me. At last he said,—

"You ask me to speak of things which I would well forget. I have sufficient confidence in you, however, to trust my safety in your hands. The story is not a long one. Three years ago I was a struggling painter in Savona, giving half my life to a study of the pictures in the cathedral— you may know the work of Antonio Semini there— and the other half to the worship of Pauline di Chigi, the daughter of a silversmith who lives over against the Hotel Royal. Needless to tell you of my poverty, or of my belief in myself. I lived then in the day-dreams which come at the seed-time of art; they were broken only by the waywardness of the girl, by her womanly fickleness, by the riches of the men who sought her. It would weary you to hear of my long nights of agony following the momentary success of this man or that who wooed her, of my curses upon my own poverty, of my bitterness, and sometimes even of my hopelessness. There is something of this sort in the life of every poor man, but the romance will scarce bear the light of other eyes; it has a place in my story only in so far as it prompted me to steal the topaz, if stealing is the word for the act which gave me its possession.

"But *arrivons*! In the end of the January of last year, I, struggling to embrace a career in which I have failed because I have genius and no talent, obtained a commission from the Dominican monks to go to the Valley of San Bernardo, and to take up my residence there while I retouched some of the more modern and more faded pictures in the sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Misericordia. The shrine and village lie in the mountains five miles above Savona. The former is now regaining its splendour, though grievously pillaged by the French and by later vandals. The work would have been recreation to me had it not been for Pauline, whom I left to the persecution of a fat and soulless trader, and to the solicitations of her father that she would marry him. The new lover loaded her with presents and with the follies of speech which a middle-aged man who is amorous can be guilty of. I could give her nothing but the promise of a future, and that being without market value did not convince her. While she would make pretence of affection for me when we were alone,

she did nothing to repulse the other. Thus I left Savona with her kisses on my lips, and rage of her wantonness in my heart; and for three weeks I laboured patiently in the mountain village; and my art lifted me even beyond the spell of the girl.

"It was at the end of the third week that my thoughts were ardently recalled to her by a circumstance which cannot fail to appear remarkable to you. I was walking in the late afternoon of the Sunday in the path which leads one high amongst the mountains, here rising green and purple, and afar with snowcaps above this lovely spot; and, chancing to turn aside from the road and to plunge into a shrubbery, I sat at last upon the log of a tree perched at the side of as wild a glen as I have seen in Italy. Below me were rocks of marble-black, yellow, red— all colours; aloe trees flourished abundantly, springing from every cranny of the dell; and though the reign of winter was not done, flowers blossomed everywhere, and multitudinous shrubs were rich in green and buds. Here I sat for an hour buried in my musings, and when at last I left it was by an overgrown path across the dingle. I found then that the opposite side of the place was vastly steeper than the one by which I had descended; in fact, I mounted it with difficulty; and when near to the summit, I clung to the saplings and the branches for sheer foothold. This action brought all my trouble, for of a sudden, just as I had come to the top, a shrub to which I was holding gave at the roots, and giving, sent me rolling to the bottom again with a great quantity of soft earth all about me and my bones aching indescribably.

"For some minutes I sat, being dizzy and shaken, on the soft grass. When I could look around me I saw a strange thing. In a mound of the mould which had fallen there was a crucifix of gold. Thickly covered with the clammy earth as it was, dulled and tarnished with long burial, the value of the thing was unmistakable. Rubies were set in the hands for blood, there was a crown of diamonds for thorns; the whole was ornamented with a sprinkling of jewels, whose fire was brilliant even through the pasty clay which clung upon the cross. I need scarce tell you that all the curiosity which is a part of me was whetted at this unexpected sight; and believing that I had come upon a very mine of treasure, I shook the mould off me, and went quickly by the easier path to the hill-top and the place of the landslip.

"Twilight was now rushing through the mountains, and a steely light, soon to turn into darkness, fell upon the ravine; yet I was able still to see clearly enough for my purpose— and for my disappointment. It is true that the slip of the earth from the hillside disclosed a cavernous hole which had been dug, no doubt, many years ago; but of the kind of treasure whose image had leaped into my mind I saw little. The few bright things that lay about in the part of the trough which remained were entirely such vessels as serve priests in the Mass.

There was a pyx in silver, a paten in gold, and two smaller ones; a monstrance with some exceedingly fine diamonds and the topaz in it, and a gold chalice much indented. I judged at once that these things had been buried either when the French plunderers came to Italy, or after the trouble of '70. It was equally clear that they were the property of the Dominicans whose house was hard by; and either that their present hiding-place was unknown, or that they had been left in concealment for some reason of diplomacy. In any case, the value of the stones in the monstrance was unquestionable; but I am an Italian, as you see, and I believed then, as now, in nothing but omens. For a long while no thought of touching these things, scarce even of handling them— so strong in human flesh is the grain of early superstition— came to me. I sat there gazing at them and watching the light of the topaz sparkling even above the radiance of the smaller diamonds— sat, in fact, until it was quite dark and the miasma rose from the valley. Then, in one of those flashes of thought which often mean much to a man, I had it in my mind that both the diamonds and the topaz above them would sit well upon the arms of Pauline; I even saw her in my fancy coquetting to me for the present. I began to laugh aloud at the other thoughts, to call them echoes of childish schooling, to handle the chalice and the ring of jewels, and to tell myself that there would be no bigger fool in Europe if I did not take them. Need I tell you that the reasoning convinced me? and quickly, as the cold of the mist grew more intense, I took the baubles in my hand, still lacking the courage to secure the chalice and the crucifix, and rose to leave the place.

"Now, for the first time, I think, you are beginning to see the point of my story. The strangest part of it yet remains. I have told you that dark had fallen upon the ravine as I rose up to quit it, and that mists rose thick from the valley with the early night. You will, therefore, easily understand my discomfiture when, reflected upon the white curtain of fog, I saw the dancing light of a lantern. In the next moment a man, young but ragged, with a full-bearded face, and the cape of a priest about his shoulders, stood swinging his lantern before me, and looking down at the tomb of the jewels by our feet. I know not why, but there was something of such power and command writ upon the monk's face that I have never called him by any other name than the Christ. With what feelings he inspired me I cannot tell you. Terror, human terror, is no word for my experience; my whole being seemed stricken with an apprehension which tortured me and made my brain burn. God! the memory shakes me even now, and I have seen him thrice since, and the fear is greater every time I look upon his face.

"Thus I stood facing the man when he opened his lips to curse me. I believe now, and shall always believe, that he is nothing but a madman, whose brain

has failed from long fasting. Be that as it may, his words ring yet in my ears. If you search the world through, read the curse upon Barbarossa, and all the volumes of anathema, you will never find such a blasting accusation as the man spoke when he saw the monstrance in my hand. So dreadful was it that I reeled before him; and, losing all command, I struck him down with my stick and fled the place. The next day I quitted the valley of San Bernardo, and in a week Pauline was wearing the topaz, set by her father as a bracelet, and the diamonds sparkled upon her fingers. She covered me with kisses for the gift, and in her embraces I forgot the madman of the hills, and my melancholy passed.

"The rest of my story you know. Pauline wore the topaz at the *Mardi Gras* Ball, and died ten minutes after she had entered the room. A year later, having fled from Italy, I became engaged *pour passer le temps* to Berthe Duval, at Marseilles. A man has many love affairs, but only one passion. I was not in love with her, but she was rich, and troubled herself to get a smattering of art-talk, which amused me. One day she found the topaz in my studio and begged it of me. She died as you have heard; and I, poor as always, and now pursued by the damning curse, came to Paris, selling the topaz on my way here to M. Georges Barré. I have never ceased to regret that which I did; I have lamented it the most since I saw the exquisite creature who is to be his wife. And when, three days ago, I discovered the madman who had cursed me at San Bernardo in the very Rue Boissière where Mademoiselle Bernier lives, I determined to save her though the deed cost me a confession and my liberty."

HE HAD ceased to speak, and had drunk off the remainder of his absinthe, while his amazing story, which I could in no way believe, went whirling through my brain, and yet gave to me no shape of reality. At the first I was led to think that he was the madman, and I cracked for sitting there and hearing the extraordinary narration he had contrived; but there was something in his manner which forbade any long continuance of the assumption; and while I had no leisure to bring critical scrutiny upon his tale, it yet impressed me to immediate action.

"Come," said I, "presuming that your picture is not highly coloured, it is quite time we were at the opera; it is striking half-past twelve now. You know what women are. Mademoiselle Bernier may wear the bracelet in the face of everything I have said; and I am inclined to think with you that it is not wise for her to do so."

"God forbid that she should," said he; and with that we went out together.

The weather at that time was cold and cheerless; a bleak wind swept round the corners of the streets; and the lights which illumined the peristyle of the

great building swayed and flickered with lapping tongues of red and yellow. But once inside, the glow of light and colour passed description. Here, whirling, shouting, dancing, leaping, the maskers rioted, almost drowning with their clamour the blare of the band; the superb entrance hall was ablaze with the flash of tawdry jewels and shining raiment; kings and queens, knights and courtiers, *calicots* and clowns, swarmed up the massive staircase, struggling, screaming, pushing, regardless of everything but the madness of the scene within. It was with the greatest difficulty that I reached Tussal's box, and therefrom looking down upon the wild carnival, seeing at the first but a medley of form and colour, a reckless horde of dancers, grisettes, shepherdesses, over whose heads *confetti* hurtled, or the *spirales* which the youths love. What with the dust and the scream of voices, and the chatter of the thousand tongues, and the heroic efforts of the fiddlers, it was almost impossible to locate anything or any one; but the Italian, readier than I, pointed out to me at last the one we sought; and I observed her sitting in a box quite close to us, where she seemed to talk with all a girl's *esprit* to the young sculptor at her side. A fairer spectacle never was than that of this childish creature, quaintly dressed in a simple gown of white and black, with a necklace of pearls about her throat, and a bouquet of roses in her hand; but the very sight of her turned me sick with fear, for she wore upon her arm the cursed topaz, and you could see the light of it half over the house.

The Italian and I perceived the thing at the one time; indeed, we rose from our seats together.

"For the love of Heaven go to her!" said he; "tell the whole story to both of them; she may not have ten minutes to live."

He had need to say no more, for I was in the *foyer* as he spoke; but scarce had I opened the door of Barré's box— which was upon the ground floor, almost at the level of the dancers— when an appalling scream rose up even above the clamour of the throng. For one moment, as I stood quaking with my fears, and sore tempted to draw back, I saw nothing but a haze of white smoke, a vision of lurid faces and black forms, and sharper than them all, the figure of Barré himself bending over the body of the insensible girl. Then, amidst the babbling of voices, and the sobbing of women, and the cry of the man, which was the most bitter cry imaginable, I heard the words, "Stop the student in the black cloak— he has shot Mademoiselle!"

But the girl lay dead, with a bullet through her heart.

THE TRAGEDY at the Opera House was talk for many days in Paris; but the assassin was never taken, nor indeed, heard of. The police inclined to the theory that some masquerader had discharged a pistol by accident in the heat

of the riot; and to this theory most people inclined. But there was a large sympathy for M. Georges Barré, who lay near to death for many weeks after the shock, and who quitted the capital subsequently to take up his residence in London. I told him the story the Italian had narrated to me so soon as he was well enough to hear it; but, like the police of Paris who had it also, I could see that he did not believe a word of it. He sold me the topaz bracelet, however, and I have it to this day, for I want the courage to sell it.

Of the Italian I never heard again. I saw him last immediately after the drama of the ball, when he lurched away from me, wringing his hands pitifully, begging me to tell his story to the police, and crying that a curse was upon him. But I take it, in conjunction with his confession, as a little curious that a madman, described as an ecclesiastic of Savona, should have thrown himself before a train in the Gare du Nord two days after the death of Mademoiselle Bernier.

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7: An Innocent Thief

Mary E. Penn

fl 1875-1897

The Argosy (UK) March 1894

Nothing is known of this author, other than the series of short stories published under her name between 1875 and 1897. They are often ghost stories, and toward the end, crime stories such as this one.

"YES, MISS FALCONER IS a remarkably pretty girl, but— "

"Pretty! She is the loveliest girl I ever saw, and the sweetest!"

This emphatic declaration was uttered by my ex-ward, Reginald Dane, as we stood together, one brilliant January afternoon, on the terrace of the Casino at Monte Carlo.

He turned his back on the sea as he spoke, and faced me with a rather militant air, and his hands in his pockets.

"My dear boy, I don't deny it," I answered, pacifically, taking out my cigar-case; "she is all that is lovely and of good repute; but— she has a father." I paused impressively. "I ask you frankly— is Captain Falconer precisely the sort of man you would select for a papa-in-law?"

Reginald stared moodily at his boots, and made no reply.

"A man," I continued, deliberately, "of whom it is flattery to say that his character is doubtful, for there has long ceased to be any doubt about it. A *roué* and gambler, and worse, if report speaks truly."

"I know all that," he rejoined; "but if I married her, I should sever all connection with the Captain, you may be sure. He should never cross my threshold."

"Would Miss Falconer consent to a total separation from her only parent? She is evidently devoted to him."

"I don't know about devotion; she is very sweet and dutiful, but I fancy she has more fear than affection for him. He has an iron will."

"And an extraordinary influence over the will of others," I added. "I have felt it myself. By the way, it remains to be seen whether he will consent to the marriage."

Reginald looked at me rather blankly.

"Why, do you think there is any doubt of that? I fancied that— living the life he does— he would be rather glad to get his daughter off his hands."

"Perhaps— living the life he does— he may find her useful."

"Useful? Good heavens. Sir John, you don't mean that he uses Elsie as— as a decoy? What a horrible idea!"

"Not as a decoy, but as what the French call a *porte-respect*. The presence of a beautiful, lady-like, and irreproachable daughter gives him a sort of cachet of respectability which inspires confidence."

My companion was silent a moment, pulling his moustache.

"Oh, well," he said at last, looking up, "it's no use anticipating evils. I fancy I shall be able to square the Captain if he makes any difficulties. I happen to know that he is at rather a low ebb just now."

I also happened to be aware of the same fact, it having been brought to my notice, as no doubt it had to Reginald's, by a request for a loan. I might have complied with it, having the misfortune to belong to what Charles Lamb calls "the inferior race" of lenders, but for the interposition of a certain lady who is not only the partner of my joys and sorrows, but the keeper of my purse.

"No, Sir John, you will not lend Captain Falconer fifty pounds," that lady had said with decision, in the privacy of a conjugal tête-à-tête. "He is a dangerous and disreputable person, and if it were not for his daughter— whom I pity sincerely, poor child!— I would have nothing whatever to do with him. As it is, I wish with all my heart he was staying at another hotel."

But though she expressed her opinion of him with great vigour in private, it was noticeable that my wife was rather markedly civil to Captain Falconer in public. The fact is, there was something about the man— a suggestion of latent power— which, though it might not inspire respect, exacted politeness, even from those who disliked and distrusted him.

He was a tall, soldierly-looking man of four or five and forty, with a beak-like aquiline nose, a drooping moustache, and remarkably bright, penetrating dark eyes: "mesmeric eyes," my wife called them, and declared they had an uncanny power of reading one's thoughts.

Coming into lunch at the —— Hotel somewhat late, after my conversation with Reginald Dane above recorded, I found the usual group assembled at the end of the long *table-d'hôte*; Captain Falconer next to my wife, and beyond him, his daughter, Elsie, a pretty, fair-haired, fragile-looking girl of nineteen, at whose side sat Reginald.

Captain Falconer, I found, had hit upon a topic which was sure to interest my wife. He was talking of diamonds.

"I was telling Lady Rushton," he explained affably, turning to me, "that I, like herself, am something of a connoisseur in diamonds."

"And Captain Falconer says, John," she added, "that he has never seen finer stones than those in the bracelet I wore last night— the one you gave me on my last birthday."

"H'm, they ought to be good, they cost enough," I grumbled, being hungry and somewhat cross.

"They are magnificent; old Brazilian of the purest water. But, my dear Lady Rushton," he continued, "is it wise to travel with such valuable jewellery, in these days of railway robberies and hotel thieves? Nothing is more easily snapped up than a jewel-case."

"I don't carry my jewels in a case," she returned confidentially; "when we are on a journey I wear them in a belt, and at night I put the belt— "

I touched her foot under the table, and she paused.

"Yes?" the Captain said interrogatively, looking her straight in the face with his piercing dark eyes.

"I put it— " she repeated, and paused again, then, as he still looked at her steadily, she finished her sentence with a jerk, as if the words had been forced from her— "under my pillow."

"Hush— sh, my dear madam— not so loud!" he whispered warningly, glancing over his shoulder; "I fear the waiter heard you. Let us talk of something else."

When my wife and I were alone, half an hour later, she startled me by exclaiming: "John, I believe Captain Falconer is Mephistopheles in person! You heard the stupid thing I said at lunch?"

"I heard you announcing to all whom it might concern, where you put your jewels at night," I answered drily.

"Yes— was it not idiotic? I was perfectly aware of it at the time, but, do you know, Captain Falconer forced me to tell him. I tried to keep the words back, but his eyes seemed to wring them from me in spite of myself. Do you think— " she hesitated— "do you think he had any particular motive in asking?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't say, I'm sure, what his motive was," I rejoined, "but I think, on the whole, my dear, you had better find another hiding-place for your diamonds."

NOW IT BEFELL that two nights after this episode I was visited by a strange dream— if dream it were; but it was uncommonly like reality. I was unusually restless that night, and for some hours after Lady Rushton had been peacefully slumbering, I tossed and turned, trying in vain to sleep.

At last I fell into a doze, in which there came to me a hazy idea that the window, which I had left half closed, was now wide open, and that something, or someone, was moving near it.

For the better understanding of what follows, I must explain that our room was on the second floor front, and adjoined Miss Falconer's chamber, on the other side of which was that occupied by Reginald Dane. Captain Falconer slept on the floor above. The window opened after the usual foreign fashion, like a

folding door, and had a hand-rail, but no balcony. Beneath was the stone terrace in front of the hotel.

It was clearly impossible for any living creature without wings to enter the room from that window; yet in my half-waking, half-dozing condition, it seemed to me that someone had entered by it.

A woman's figure, which might have dropped from the clouds, so suddenly had it appeared, stood in the opening, and after a pause stepped lightly in between the muslin curtains, and noiselessly approached the bed. As it came forward, the light of the night-lamp fell full upon its face. With a sudden shock and thrill of startled recognition, I saw that it was Miss Falconer.

She still wore her dinner-dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders. Her face was pale, and had a strained and anxious look which was not the vacant expression of a sleep-walker.

Without the least hesitation, she made her way to Lady Rushton's side of the bed, and cautiously slipped her hand beneath the pillow.

Whatever she expected to find was evidently not there. Again and again the stealthy hand renewed its search— in vain.

At length she withdrew it, stood for a few seconds irresolute, then turned away, and crossing the room with a noiseless but leisurely step, passed out through the window— passed out, as it seemed, into mid-air— and vanished!

For a few moments I was literally too astonished to move, and lay staring stupidly at the window by which she had so unaccountably disappeared.

Then, waking up all at once, I sprang from the bed, and looked out wildly at earth, and air, and sky, in search of my mysterious visitor. There was not a trace of her to be seen, nor was there any rope or ladder by which she could have entered. A broad ledge, or pediment of sculptured stone, forming part of the architectural decoration of the house, projected beneath the windows, but it was divided by a good four feet from the corresponding ledge of the next one.

That she could have crossed the intervening space, unaided, at such a giddy height, was clearly an impossible supposition. Then how had she come, and gone?

Craning my neck, I could see that her window was closed and shuttered, no gleam of light appearing between the shutters, and no sound coming from the room. The more I puzzled over the matter, the more mysterious did it appear, and I began to think that I must in fact have dreamt the whole incident.

"What in the world are you doing at the window?" my wife's voice demanded, sleepily.

"I— was looking at the moon, my dear," I answered in some confusion, and was preparing to return to bed and resume my interrupted slumbers, when I caught sight of a small white object lying on the floor at my feet.

It was a lady's handkerchief— a dainty little lace-bordered square of cambric, embroidered in one corner with a Christian name in full. The name was Elsie.

The following morning, contrary to my usual habit, I rose early and went at once in search of Miss Falconer, whom I knew I should be pretty sure to find in the garden. I came upon her presently seated under a drooping pepper-tree, with a book on her knee.

The day was Sunday, and there was, I thought, a sort of Sabbath atmosphere about the girl as she sat there in her fresh white gown, the image of maiden purity and peace. With her delicate pensive face framed in cloudy golden hair, her soft appealing blue eyes and sensitive lips, she might have been the original of one of Raphael's Madonnas. So lovely and so lovable she looked, it seemed sacrilege to suppose her capable of any evil thought or deed.

She glanced up with a smile as I approached— we were very good friends, she and I, "You are up early this morning, Sir John," she said, closing her book; "that is unusual, is it not?"

"Yes; early rising is not one of the virtues I practise habitually," I rejoined; "I keep it for special occasions."

"And is this a special occasion?"

"Certainly! I got up early to meet you."

She laughed.

"I should be immensely flattered if I could quite believe it."

"Well, it is partly true, but it is also true that I had a restless night, and was glad to be out of bed. You look as if you had not slept yourself," I added, glancing at her. "Your eyes are heavy."

"Oh yes, I slept very well last night," she answered, "though, strange to say, I never went to bed."

"How was that?" I inquired, pricking up my ears.

"Well, I had a bad headache yesterday evening, and papa persuaded me to lie down on the couch in my room and let him 'charm it away.' You have no idea how soothing his touch is. He just strokes my forehead and all the pain vanishes directly. In five minutes I was asleep; a deep dreamless sleep from which I did not wake till morning, when I was very much astonished to find myself still on the couch fully dressed."

"Ah!" I murmured thoughtfully, and was silent so long that she looked at me in surprise.

"I think I have something that belongs to you," I resumed at last, taking the handkerchief from my pocket.

"Oh yes, that is mine," she exclaimed; "where did you find it?"

"I found it," I answered deliberately, watching her face as I spoke, "in our bedroom, last night. How do you suppose it came there?"

She met my eyes without the faintest shadow of consciousness or confusion.

"Probably Lady Rushton took it in mistake for her own."

"H'm— perhaps so. You never walk in your sleep, I suppose?"

She laughed outright.

"Not that I am aware of. I hope you and Lady Rushton don't suspect me of prowling about your room at night?"

To that I made no reply, but fell into a brown study again, tracing figures in the gravel with my cane.

She watched me with a flicker of amusement in her eyes.

"I don't think early rising agrees with you, Sir John," she observed demurely, after a pause.

"You are right, it does not," I answered, rousing myself. "I suppose I ought to be as lively as a lark at this virtuous hour, but I find myself as stupid as an owl. I shall make no apology for leaving you— particularly," I added, glancing down the walk, where Reginald Dane had just appeared, "as a more entertaining companion will take my place. *Au revoir*!"

Nodding to Reginald as I passed, I returned to the house, in a denser fog of perplexity than ever.

One thing was evident; Elsie was utterly unconscious of her action of the previous night. She had been a victim, not an accomplice; the helpless instrument of another's will.

What unholy spells had Captain Falconer exercised upon his daughter? Had she acted in obedience to "hypnotic suggestion"? That supposition seemed the most probable, in the light of what she had told me, but it still left unaccounted for the most perplexing point of the problem— how she could possibly have entered the room by the window. I puzzled over it till I was thoroughly bewildered, and at last dismissed the subject from my mind with the reflection that time would probably clear up the mystery, which, meanwhile, I resolved to keep strictly to myself.

Some days passed, however, and brought no solution, though they brought forth another event of some interest.

Reginald formally proposed to Captain Falconer for his daughter's hand— and, as I had anticipated, was rejected.

The Captain would condescend to give no explanation of his refusal except the statement that he had "other views" for her. The fact was, I suspect, that he did not see any prospective advantage to himself in the marriage, knowing that, when once it was a *fait accompli*, he would have nothing further to expect from Reginald, who frankly disliked him.

Anyhow, he refused point-blank, totally declining to be "squared." In vain the young man stormed and expostulated: in vain Elsie pleaded and wept. He met tears and anger with the same bland, but immovable determination. He laid no embargo on their intercourse, being fully aware that the girl was too dutiful, and too much afraid of him, to set him at defiance.

So the lovers continued to see each other as usual, but all their happiness was blighted. Elsie fretted openly, and Reginald took to evil courses; that is to say, he drank more than was good for him, and haunted the tables at the Casino when he ought to have been in bed. To compensate for having thwarted him in love, fortune favoured him in play. He won steadily, and on one particular evening, after a longer séance than usual, rose from the trente-et-quarante table, the richer by some twenty thousand francs.

I was with him at the time, having thought it well, in his present reckless mood, to keep an eye on his proceedings.

He was not in the least elated by his good luck, seeming to care little whether he won or lost. He thrust his pocket-book, which was crammed with notes, into the breast-pocket of his coat, and turned from the table with a yawn.

"My head aches," he said; "let's go and have a soda at the buffet."

But I linked my arm in his, and drew him towards the door. Captain Falconer was hovering near us, and there was a peculiar gleam in that "mesmeric" eye of his which I did not like.

"No more 'sodas' to-night," I said firmly; "you are going straight home to bed, and the first thing to-morrow morning you will deposit that money in the bank."

When we reached the hotel, I followed him upstairs to his room, and saw him throw the pocket-book carelessly into a drawer.

"I'm dead tired," he said, stretching himself; "I shall tumble in at once. Good-night, Sir John."

"Good-night and pleasant dreams," I rejoined; but instead of leaving the room, I locked the door, then proceeded with much deliberation to divest myself of my boots, and stretch myself on a couch which stood in the corner of the room.

Reginald stopped short in the act of removing his coat, and stared at me. "Hallo! what does that mean?" he demanded.

"It means, my dear boy, that I am going to pass the night here, if you have no objection."

"As guardian of the treasure?" he suggested, laughing. "I'm awfully obliged, I'm sure, but it really isn't necessary. The door is locked, and no one can possibly come in through the window."

"No matter, *J'y suis, j'y reste*."

"All right! But don't lie there, anyhow. Take the bed, and I'll have the couch."

"I'm perfectly comfortable here, thank you," I answered, and tried to think I was; but what human being was ever comfortable on a French hotel sofa? However, the inhospitable piece of furniture had one advantage; it offered no temptation to sleep, and, for certain reasons, I was particularly anxious to keep awake to-night.

Reginald insisted on giving me a pillow, then he "tumbled in," and in ten minutes was fast asleep.

According to his usual habit, he had left the window wide open, and the soft, flower-scented air— mild as if the month were June, instead of January— blew in, gently fluttering the curtains. There was no toilette table to obstruct the view, and I caught a glimpse of the sea, above which a pale half-moon was rising.

It was long after midnight. The moon rose, brightening as it rose, and a dread pale ray of light streamed across the floor from the open window. Suddenly, a shadow obscured it, and, looking up, I saw a woman's figure framed in the opening, its outlines darkly relieved against the background of moonlit sky. It was Elsie Falconer!

She stood for a moment in a listening attitude, then stepped into the room. I could see her face distinctly, and saw that it had the same strained and troubled look I had noticed before.

She crossed into the middle of the room, and paused, looking about her, as if hesitating where to begin her search.

Then I stepped noiselessly forward out of the shadow, and confronted her. She showed not the least alarm or surprise at my appearance, regarding me with mild, unspeculative eyes.

"You are looking for Reginald's pocket-book?" I said, in an undertone.

"Yes," she acquiesced quietly, as if it were the most simple and natural errand in the world.

"I will give it you," I answered, turning my back on her as I opened the drawer where Reginald had placed it.

After a moment I handed it to her. It contained, now, nothing, but a slip of paper on which I had hastily pencilled a short but pithy note addressed to Captain Falconer.

She took it from me without a word, and turned to go. I followed her to the window, and a glance outside showed me how she had reached it. The solution of the mystery was so simple that I only wondered I had not guessed it before.

I have already said that beneath each of the windows on the second floor was a projecting ledge of sculptured stone. A narrow board about four feet long— evidently the shelf of a cupboard— had been placed between Miss Falconer's window and Reginald's, resting on the ledges, and forming a bridge which connected them.

What if the board slipped? What if she turned giddy at that perilous height? A false step would probably cost her her life, for nothing interposed to break her fall on to the stone-paved terrace beneath.

Involuntarily I made a movement to hold her back, but it was already too late.

Lightly, steadily, without a trace of fear, she stepped across. I saw a hand put forth from the adjoining window to draw her in; the board was instantly removed, the window closed, and all was still.

I listened intently for any sound of voices from the next room, but none reached me. After an interval, however, I heard the door softly open and close, and footsteps passed down the corridor. The Captain had probably read my note, and had retired to his own room to digest it. I smiled sweetly, and the thought of his discomfiture had so soothing an effect on me that, returning to my inhospitable couch, I slept the sleep of the just till morning.

WHEN WE assembled at lunch next day, I was scarcely surprised to find that one member of our little party was missing.

Captain Falconer, taking to heart my warning, had incontinently vanished from the scene, leaving behind him some valueless luggage, several unpaid bills— and his daughter.

Elsie never saw her father again. He was heard of from time to time at various haunts of high play, and later, the news came that he had lost his life in a gambling affray at San Francisco.

Long before that event, however, Elsie was Reginald Dane's wife.

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8: The Great Ruby Robbery

Grant Allen

1848-1899

The Strand Magazine, Oct 1892

PERSIS REMANET was an American heiress. As she justly remarked, this was a commonplace profession for a young woman nowadays; for almost everybody of late years has been an American and an heiress. A poor Californian, indeed, would be a charming novelty in London society. But London society, so far, has had to go without one.

Persis Remanet was on her way back from the Wilcoxes' ball. She was stopping, of course, with Sir Everard and Lady Maclure at their house at Hampstead. I say "of course" advisedly; because if you or I go to see New York, we have to put up at our own expense (five dollars a day, without wine or extras) at the Windsor or the Fifth Avenue; but when the pretty American comes to London (and every American girl is *ex officio* pretty, in Europe at least; I suppose they keep their ugly ones at home for domestic consumption) she is invariably the guest either of a dowager duchess or of a Royal Academician, like Sir Everard, of the first distinction. Yankees visit Europe, in fact, to see, among other things, our art and our old nobility; and by dint of native persistence they get into places that you and I could never succeed in penetrating, unless we devoted all the energies of a long and blameless life to securing an invitation.

Persis hadn't been to the Wilcoxes with Lady Maclure, however. The Maclures were too really great to know such people as the Wilcoxes, who were something tremendous in the City, but didn't buy pictures; and Academicians, you know, don't care to cultivate City people— unless they're customers. ("Patrons," the Academicians more usually call them; but I prefer the simple business word myself, as being a deal less patronizing.) So Persis had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Duncan Harrison, the wife of the well-known member for the Hackness Division of Elmetshire, to take a seat in her carriage to and from the Wilcoxes. Mrs. Harrison knew the habits and manners of American heiresses too well to offer to chaperon Persis; and indeed, Persis, as a free-born American citizen, was quite as well able to take care of herself, the wide world over, as any three ordinary married Englishwomen.

Now, Mrs. Harrison had a brother, an Irish baronet, Sir Justin O'Byrne, late of the Eighth Hussars, who had been with them to the Wilcoxes, and who accompanied them home to Hampstead on the back seat of the carriage. Sir Justin was one of those charming, ineffective, elusive Irishmen whom everybody likes and everybody disapproves of. He had been everywhere, and done everything— except to earn an honest livelihood. The total absence of

rents during the sixties and seventies had never prevented his father, old Sir Terence O'Byrne, who sat so long for Connemara in the unreformed Parliament, from sending his son Justin in state to Eton, and afterwards to a fashionable college at Oxford. "He gave me the education of a gentleman," Sir Justin was wont regretfully to observe; "but he omitted to give me also the income to keep it up with."

Nevertheless, society felt O'Byrne was the sort of man who must be kept afloat somehow; and it kept him afloat accordingly in those mysterious ways that only society understands, and that you and I, who are not society, could never get to the bottom of if we tried for a century. Sir Justin himself had essayed Parliament, too, where he sat for a while behind the great Parnell without for a moment forfeiting society's regard even in those earlier days when it was held as a prime article of faith by the world that no gentleman could possibly call himself a Home-Ruler. 'Twas only one of O'Byrne's wild Irish tricks, society said, complacently, with that singular indulgence it always extends to special favourites, and which is, in fact, the correlative of that unsparing cruelty it shows in turn to those who happen to offend against its unwritten precepts. If Sir Justin had blown up a Czar or two in a fit of political exuberance, society would only have regarded the escapade as "one of O'Byrne's eccentricities." He had also held a commission for a while in a cavalry regiment, which he left, it was understood, owing to a difference of opinion about a lady with the colonel; and he was now a gentleman-at-large on London society, supposed by those who know more about every one than one knows about one's self, to be on the look-out for a nice girl with a little money.

Sir Justin had paid Persis a great deal of attention that particular evening; in point of fact, he had paid her a great deal of attention from the very first, whenever he met her; and on the way home from the dance he had kept his eyes fixed on Persis's face to an extent that was almost embarrassing. The pretty Californian leaned back in her place in the carriage and surveyed him languidly. She was looking her level best that night, in her pale-pink dress, with the famous Remanet rubies in a cascade of red light setting off that snowy neck of hers. 'Twas a neck for a painter. Sir Justin let his eyes fall regretfully more than once on the glittering rubies. He liked and admired Persis, oh! quite immensely. Your society man who has been through seven or eight London seasons could hardly be expected to go quite so far as falling in love with any woman; his habit is rather to look about him critically among all the nice girls trotted out by their mammas for his lordly inspection, and to reflect with a faint smile that this, that, or the other one might perhaps really suit him— if it were not for— and there comes in the inevitable *But* of all human commendation. Still, Sir Justin admitted with a sigh to himself that he liked

Persis ever so much; she was so fresh and original! and she talked so cleverly! As for Persis, she would have given her eyes (like every other American girl) to be made "my lady"; and she had seen no man yet, with that auxiliary title in his gift, whom she liked half so well as this delightful wild Irishman.

At the Maclures' door the carriage stopped. Sir Justin jumped out and gave his hand to Persis. You know the house well, of course; Sir Everard Maclure's; it's one of those large new artistic mansions, in red brick and old oak, on the top of the hill; and it stands a little way back from the road, discreetly retired, with a big wooden porch, very convenient for leave-taking. Sir Justin ran up the steps with Persis to ring the bell for her; he had too much of the irrepressible Irish blood in his veins to leave that pleasant task to his sister's footman. But he didn't ring it at once; at the risk of keeping Mrs. Harrison waiting outside for nothing, he stopped and talked a minute or so with the pretty American. "You looked charming to-night, Miss Remanet," he said, as she threw back her light opera wrap for a moment in the porch and displayed a single flash of that snowy neck with the famous rubies; "those stones become you so."

Persis looked at him and smiled. "You think so?" she said, a little tremulous, for even your American heiress, after all, is a woman. "Well, I'm glad you do. But it's good-bye to-night, Sir Austin, for I go next week to Paris."

Even in the gloom of the porch, just lighted by an artistic red and blue lantern in wrought iron, she could see a shade of disappointment pass quickly over his handsome face as he answered, with a little gulp, "No! you don't mean that? Oh, Miss Remanet, I'm so sorry!" Then he paused and drew back: "And yet ... after all," he continued, "perhaps—," and there he checked himself.

Persis looked up at him hastily. "Yet, after all, what?" she asked, with evident interest.

The young man drew an almost inaudible sigh. "Yet, after all— nothing," he answered, evasively.

"That might do for an Englishwoman," Persis put in, with American frankness, "but it won't do for me. You must tell me what you mean by it." For she reflected sagely that the happiness of two lives might depend upon those two minutes; and how foolish to throw away the chance of a man you really like (with a my-ladyship to boot), all for the sake of a pure convention!

Sir Justin leaned against the woodwork of that retiring porch. She was a beautiful girl. He had hot Irish blood... Well, yes; just for once— he would say the plain truth to her.

"Miss Remanet," he began, leaning forward, and bringing his face close to hers, "Miss Remanet— Persis— shall I tell you the reason why? Because I like you so much. I almost think I love you!"

Persis felt the blood quiver in her tingling cheeks. How handsome he was—and a baronet!

"And yet you're not altogether sorry," she said, reproachfully, "that I'm going to Paris!"

"No, not altogether sorry," he answered, sticking to it; "and I'll tell you why, too, Miss Remanet. I like you very much, and I think you like me. For a week or two, I've been saying to myself, 'I really believe I *must* ask her to marry me.' The temptation's been so strong I could hardly resist it."

"And why do you want to resist it?" Persis asked, all tremulous.

Sir Justin hesitated a second; then with a perfectly natural and instinctive movement (though only a gentleman would have ventured to make it) he lifted his hand and just touched with the tips of his fingers the ruby pendants on her necklet. "*This* is why," he answered simply, and with manly frankness. "Persis, you're so rich! I never dare ask you."

"Perhaps you don't know what my answer would be," Persis murmured very low, just to preserve her own dignity.

"Oh yes, I think I do," the young man replied, gazing deeply into her dark eyes. "It isn't that; if it were only that, I wouldn't so much mind it. But I think you'd take me." There was moisture in her eye. He went on more boldly: "I know you'd take me, Persis, and that's why I don't ask you. "You're a great deal too rich, and *these* make it impossible."

"Sir Justin," Persis answered, removing his hand gently, but with the moisture growing thicker, for she really liked him, "it's most unkind of you to say so; either you oughtn't to have told me at all, or else— if you did—" She stopped short. Womanly shame overcame her.

The man leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "Oh, don't say that!" he cried, from his heart. "I couldn't bear to offend you. But I couldn't bear, either, to let you go away— well— without having ever told you. In that case you might have thought I didn't care at all for you, and was only flirting with you. But, Persis, I've cared a great deal for you— a great, great deal— and had hard work many times to prevent myself from asking you. And I'll tell you the plain reason why I haven't asked you. I'm a man about town, not much good, I'm afraid, for anybody or anything; and everybody says I'm on the look-out for an heiress— which happens not to be true; and if I married you, everybody'd say, 'Ah, there! I told you so!' Now, I wouldn't mind that for myself; I'm a man, and I could snap my fingers at them; but I'd mind it for *you*, Persis, for I'm enough in love with you to be very, very jealous, indeed, for your honour. I couldn't bear to think people should say, 'There's that pretty American girl, Persis Remanet that was, you know; she's thrown herself away upon that good-for-nothing Irishman, Justin O'Byrne, a regular fortune-hunter, who's married her

for her money.' So for your sake, Persis, I'd rather not ask you; I'd rather leave you for some better man to marry."

"But *I* wouldn't," Persis cried aloud. "Oh, Sir Justin, you must believe me. You must remember—"

At that precise point, Mrs. Harrison put her head out of the carriage window and called out rather loudly—

"Why, Justin, what's keeping you? The horses'll catch their deaths of cold; and they were clipped this morning. Come back at once, my dear boy. Besides, you know, *les convenances*!"

"All right, Nora," her brother answered; "I won't be a minute. We can't get them to answer this precious bell. I believe it don't ring! But I'll try again, anyhow." And half forgetting that his own words weren't strictly true, for he hadn't yet tried, he pressed the knob with a vengeance.

"Is that your room with the light burning, Miss Remanet?" he went on, in a fairly loud official voice, as the servant came to answer. "The one with the balcony, I mean? Quite Venetian, isn't it? Reminds one of Romeo and Juliet. But most convenient for a burglary, too! Such nice low rails! Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies!"

"I don't want to take care of them," Persis answered, wiping her dim eyes hastily with her lace pocket-handkerchief, "if they make you feel as you say, Sir Justin. I don't mind if they go. Let the burglar take them!"

And even as she spoke, the Maclure footman, immutable, sphinx-like, opened the door for her.

ii

PERSIS SAT long in her own room that night before she began undressing. Her head was full of Sir Justin and those mysterious hints of his. At last, however, she took her rubies off, and her pretty silk bodice. "I don't care for them at all," she thought, with a gulp, "if they keep from me the love of the man I'd like to marry."

It was late before she fell asleep; and when she did, her rest was troubled. She dreamt a great deal; in her dreams, Sir Justin, and dance music, and the rubies, and burglars were incongruously mingled. To make up for it, she slept late next morning; and Lady Maclure let her sleep on, thinking she was probably wearied out with much dancing the previous evening— as though any amount of excitement could ever weary a pretty American! About ten o'clock she woke with a start. A vague feeling oppressed her that somebody had come in during the night and stolen her rubies. She rose hastily and went to her

dressing-table to look for them. The case was there all right; she opened it and looked at it. Oh, prophetic soul! the rubies were gone, and the box was empty!

Now, Persis had honestly said the night before the burglar might take her rubies if he chose, and she wouldn't mind the loss of them. But that was last night, and the rubies hadn't then as yet been taken. This morning, somehow, things seemed quite different. It would be rough on us all (especially on politicians) if we must always be bound by what we said yesterday. Persis was an American, and no American is insensible to the charms of precious stones; 'tis a savage taste which the European immigrants seem to have inherited obliquely from their Red Indian predecessors. She rushed over to the bell and rang it with feminine violence. Lady Maclure's maid answered the summons, as usual. She was a clever, demure-looking girl, this maid of Lady Maclure's; and when Persis cried to her wildly, "Send for the police at once, and tell Sir Everard my jewels are stolen!" she answered, "Yes, miss," with such sober acquiescence that Persis, who was American, and therefore a bundle of nerves, turned round and stared at her as an incomprehensible mystery. No Mahatma could have been more unmoved. She seemed quite to expect those rubies would be stolen, and to take no more notice of the incident than if Persis had told her she wanted hot water.

Lady Maclure, indeed, greatly prided herself on this cultivated imperturbability of Bertha's; she regarded it as the fine flower of English domestic service. But Persis was American, and saw things otherwise; to her, the calm repose with which Bertha answered, "Yes, miss; certainly, miss; I'll go and tell Sir Everard," seemed nothing short of exasperating.

Bertha went off with the news, closing the door quite softly; and a few minutes later Lady Maclure herself appeared in the Californian's room, to console her visitor under this severe domestic affliction. She found Persis sitting up in bed, in her pretty French dressing-jacket (pale blue with *revers* of fawn colour), reading a book of verses. "Why, my dear!" Lady Maclure exclaimed, "then you've found them again, I suppose? Bertha told us you'd lost your lovely rubies!"

"So I have, dear Lady Maclure," Persis answered, wiping her eyes; "they're gone. They've been stolen. I forgot to lock my door when I came home last night, and the window was open; somebody must have come in, this way or that, and taken them. But whenever I'm in trouble, I try a dose of Browning. He's splendid for the nerves. He's so consoling, you know; he brings one to anchor."

She breakfasted in bed; she wouldn't leave the room, she declared, till the police arrived. After breakfast she rose and put on her dainty Parisian morning wrap— Americans have always such pretty bedroom things for these informal

receptions— and sat up in state to await the police officer. Sir Everard himself, much disturbed that such a mishap should have happened in his house, went round in person to fetch the official. While he was gone, Lady Maclure made a thorough search of the room, but couldn't find a trace of the missing rubies.

"Are you sure you put them in the case, dear?" she asked, for the honour of the household.

And Persis answered: "Quite confident, Lady Maclure; I always put them there the moment I take them off; and when I came to look for them this morning, the case was empty."

"They were *very* valuable, I believe?" Lady Maclure said, inquiringly.

"Six thousand pounds was the figure in your money, I guess," Persis answered, ruefully. "I don't know if you call that a lot of money in England, but we do in America."

There was a moment's pause, and then Persis spoke again—

"Lady Maclure," she said abruptly, "do you consider that maid of yours a Christian woman?"

Lady Maclure was startled. That was hardly the light in which she was accustomed to regard the lower classes.

"Well, I don't know about that," she said slowly; "that's a great deal, you know, dear, to assert about *anybody*, especially one's maid. But I should think she was honest, quite decidedly honest."

"Well, that's the same thing, about, isn't it?" Persis answered, much relieved. "I'm glad you think that's so; for I was almost half afraid of her. She's too quiet for my taste, somehow; so silent, you know, and inscrutable."

"Oh, my dear," her hostess cried, "don't blame her for silence; that's just what I like about her. It's exactly what I chose her for. Such a nice, noiseless girl; moves about the room like a cat on tiptoe; knows her proper place, and never dreams of speaking unless she's spoken to."

"Well, you may like them that way in Europe," Persis responded frankly; "but in America, we prefer them a little bit human."

Twenty minutes later the police officer arrived. He wasn't in uniform. The inspector, feeling at once the gravity of the case, and recognizing that this was a Big Thing, in which there was glory to be won, and perhaps promotion, sent a detective at once, and advised that if possible nothing should be said to the household on the subject for the present, till the detective had taken a good look round the premises. That was useless, Sir Everard feared, for the lady's-maid knew; and the lady's-maid would be sure to go down, all agog with the news, to the servants' hall immediately. However, they might try; no harm in trying; and the sooner the detective got round to the house, of course, the better.

The detective accompanied him back— a keen-faced, close-shaven, irreproachable-looking man, like a vulgarized copy of Mr. John Morley. He was curt and business-like. His first question was, "Have the servants been told of this?"

Lady Maclure looked inquiringly across at Bertha. She herself had been sitting all the time with the bereaved Persis, to console her (with Browning) under this heavy affliction.

"No, my lady," Bertha answered, ever calm (invaluable servant, Bertha!), "I didn't mention it to anybody downstairs on purpose, thinking perhaps it might be decided to search the servants' boxes."

The detective pricked up his ears. He was engaged already in glancing casually round the room. He moved about it now, like a conjurer, with quiet steps and slow. "He doesn't get on one's nerves," Persis remarked approvingly, in an undertone to her friend; then she added, aloud: "What's your name, please, Mr. Officer?"

The detective was lifting a lace handkerchief on the dressing-table at the side. He turned round softly. "Gregory, madam," he answered, hardly glancing at the girl, and going on with his occupation.

"The same as the powders!" Persis interposed, with a shudder. "I used to take them when I was a child. I never could bear them."

"We're useful, as remedies," the detective replied, with a quiet smile; "but nobody likes us." And he relapsed contentedly into his work once more, searching round the apartment.

"The first thing we have to do," he said, with a calm air of superiority, standing now by the window, with one hand in his pocket, "is to satisfy ourselves whether or not there has really, at all, been a robbery. We must look through the room well, and see you haven't left the rubies lying about loose somewhere. Such things often happen. We're constantly called in to investigate a case, when it's only a matter of a lady's carelessness."

At that Persis flared up. A daughter of the great republic isn't accustomed to be doubted like a mere European woman. "I'm quite sure I took them off," she said, "and put them back in the jewel case. Of that I'm just confident. There isn't a doubt possible."

Mr. Gregory redoubled his search in all likely and unlikely places. "I should say that settles the matter," he answered blandly. "Our experience is that whenever a lady's perfectly certain, beyond the possibility of doubt, she put a thing away safely, it's absolutely sure to turn up where she says she didn't put it."

Persis answered him never a word. Her manners had not that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere; so, to prevent an outbreak, she took refuge in Browning.

Mr. Gregory, nothing abashed, searched the room thoroughly, up and down, without the faintest regard to Persis's feelings; he was a detective, he said, and his business was first of all to unmask crime, irrespective of circumstances. Lady Maclure stood by, meanwhile, with the imperturbable Bertha. Mr. Gregory investigated every hole and cranny, like a man who wishes to let the world see for itself he performs a disagreeable duty with unflinching thoroughness. When he had finished, he turned to Lady Maclure. "And now, if you please," he said blandly, "we'll proceed to investigate the servants' boxes."

Lady Maclure looked at her maid. "Bertha," she said, "go downstairs, and see that none of the other servants come up, meanwhile, to their bedrooms." Lady Maclure was not quite to the manner born, and had never acquired the hateful aristocratic habit of calling women-servants by their surnames only.

But the detective interposed. "No, no," he said sharply. "This young woman had better stop here with Miss Remanet— strictly under her eye— till I've searched the boxes. For if I find nothing there, it may perhaps be my disagreeable duty, by-and-by, to call in a female detective to search her."

It was Lady Maclure's turn to flare up now. "Why, this is my own maid," she said, in a chilly tone, "and I've every confidence in her."

"Very sorry for that, my lady," Mr. Gregory responded, in a most official voice; "but our experience teaches us that if there's a person in the case whom nobody ever dreams of suspecting, that person's the one who has committed the robbery."

"Why, you'll be suspecting myself next!" Lady Maclure cried, with some disgust.

"Your ladyship's just the last person in the world I should think of suspecting," the detective answered, with a deferential bow— which, after his previous speech, was to say the least of it equivocal.

Persis began to get annoyed. She didn't half like the look of that girl Bertha, herself; but still, she was there as Lady Maclure's guest, and she couldn't expose her hostess to discomfort on her account.

"The girl shall *not* be searched," she put in, growing hot. "I don't care a cent whether I lose the wretched stones or not. Compared to human dignity, what are they worth? Not five minutes' consideration."

"They're worth just seven years," Mr. Gregory answered, with professional definiteness. "And as to searching, why, that's out of your hands now. This is a criminal case. I'm here to discharge a public duty."

"I don't in the least mind being searched," Bertha put in obligingly, with an air of indifference. "You can search me if you like— when you've got a warrant for it."

The detective looked up sharply; so also did Persis. This ready acquaintance with the liberty of the subject in criminal cases impressed her unfavourably. "Ah! we'll see about that," Mr. Gregory answered, with a cool smile. "Meanwhile, Lady Maclure, I'll have a look at the boxes."

iii

THE SEARCH (strictly illegal) brought out nothing. Mr. Gregory returned to Persis's bedroom, disconsolate. "You can leave the room," he said to Bertha; and Bertha glided out. "I've set another man outside to keep a constant eye on her," he added in explanation.

By this time Persis had almost made her mind up as to who was the culprit; but she said nothing overt, for Lady Maclure's sake, to the detective. As for that immovable official, he began asking questions— some of them, Persis thought, almost bordering on the personal. Where had she been last night? Was she sure she had really worn the rubies? How did she come home? Was she certain she took them off? Did the maid help her undress? Who came back with her in the carriage?

To all these questions, rapidly fired off with cross-examining acuteness, Persis answered in the direct American fashion. She was sure she had the rubies on when she came home to Hampstead, because Sir Justin O'Byrne, who came back with her in his sister's carriage, had noticed them the last thing, and had told her to take care of them.

At mention of that name the detective smiled meaningly. (A meaning smile is stock-in-trade to a detective.) "Oh, Sir Justin O'Byrne!" he repeated, with quiet self-constraint. "*He* came back with you in the carriage, then? And did he sit the same side with you?"

Lady Maclure grew indignant (that was Mr. Gregory's cue). "Really, sir," she said angrily, "if you're going to suspect gentlemen in Sir Justin's position, we shall none of us be safe from you."

"The law," Mr. Gregory replied, with an air of profound deference, "is no respecter of persons."

"But it ought to be of characters," Lady Maclure cried warmly. "What's the good of having a blameless character, I should like to know, if— if—"

"If it doesn't allow you to commit a robbery with impunity?" the detective interposed, finishing her sentence his own way. "Well, well, that's true. That's

per-fectly true— but Sir Justin's character, you see, can hardly be called blameless."

"He's a gentleman," Persis cried, with flashing eyes, turning round upon the officer; "and he's quite incapable of such a mean and despicable crime as you dare to suspect him of."

"Oh, I see," the officer answered, like one to whom a welcome ray of light breaks suddenly through a great darkness. "Sir Justin's a friend of yours! Did he come into the porch with you?"

"He did," Persis answered, flushing crimson; "and if you have the insolence to bring a charge against him—"

"Calm yourself, madam," the detective replied coolly. "I do nothing of the sort— at this stage of the proceedings. It's possible there may have been no robbery in the case at all. We must keep our minds open for the present to every possible alternative. It's— it's a delicate matter to hint at; but before we go any further— do you think, perhaps, Sir Justin may have carried the rubies away by mistake, entangled in his clothes?— say, for example, his coat-sleeve?"

It was a loophole of escape; but Persis didn't jump at it.

"He had never the opportunity," she answered, with a flash. "And I know quite well they were there on my neck when he left me, for the last thing he said to me was, looking up at this very window: 'That balcony's awfully convenient for a burglary. Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies.' And I remembered what he'd said when I took them off last night; and that's what makes me so sure I really had them."

"*And* you slept with the window open!" the detective went on, still smiling to himself. "Well, here we have all the materials, to be sure, for a first-class mystery!"

iv

FOR SOME DAYS more, nothing further turned up of importance about the Great Ruby Robbery. It got into the papers, of course, as everything does nowadays, and all London was talking of it. Persis found herself quite famous as the American lady who had lost her jewels. People pointed her out in the park; people stared at her hard through their opera-glasses at the theatre. Indeed, the possession of the celebrated Remanet rubies had never made her half so conspicuous in the world as the loss of them made her. It was almost worth while losing them, Persis thought, to be so much made of as she was in society in consequence. All the world knows a young lady must be somebody

when she can offer a reward of five hundred pounds for the recovery of gewgaws valued at six thousand.

Sir Justin met her in the Row one day. "Then you don't go to Paris for awhile yet— until you get them back?" he inquired very low.

And Persis answered, blushing, "No, Sir Justin; not yet; and— I'm almost glad of it."

"No, you don't mean that!" the young man cried, with perfect boyish ardour. "Well, I confess, Miss Remanet, the first thing I thought myself when I read it in *The Times* was just the very same: 'Then, after all, she won't go yet to Paris!'"

Persis looked up at him from her pony with American frankness. "And I," she said, quivering, "I found anchor in Browning. For what do you think I read?

'And learn to rate a true man's heart
Far above rubies.'

The book opened at the very place; and *there* I found anchor!"

But when Sir Justin went round to his rooms that same evening his servant said to him, "A gentleman was inquiring for you here this afternoon, sir. A close-shaven gentleman. Not very prepossessin'. And it seemed to me somehow, sir, as if he was trying to pump me."

Sir Justin's face was grave. He went to his bedroom at once. He knew what that man wanted; and he turned straight to his wardrobe, looking hard at the dress coat he had worn on the eventful evening. Things may cling to a sleeve, don't you know— or be entangled in a cuff— or get casually into a pocket! Or some one may put them there.

v

FOR THE NEXT ten days or so Mr. Gregory was busy, constantly busy. Without doubt, he was the most active and energetic of detectives. He carried out so fully his own official principle of suspecting everybody, from China to Peru, that at last poor Persis got fairly mazed with his web of possibilities. Nobody was safe from his cultivated and highly-trained suspicion— not Sir Everard in his studio, nor Lady Maclure in her boudoir, nor the butler in his pantry, nor Sir Justin O'Byrne in his rooms in St. James's. Mr. Gregory kept an open mind against everybody and everything. He even doubted the parrot, and had views as to the intervention of rats and terriers. Persis got rather tired at last of his perverse ingenuity; especially as she had a very shrewd idea herself who had stolen the rubies. When he suggested various doubts, however,

which seemed remotely to implicate Sir Justin's honesty, the sensitive American girl "felt it go on her nerves," and refused to listen to him, though Mr. Gregory never ceased to enforce upon her, by precept and example, his own pet doctrine that the last person on earth one would be likely to suspect is always the one who turns out to have done it.

A morning or two later, Persis looked out of her window as she was dressing her hair. She dressed it herself now, though she was an American heiress, and, therefore, of course, the laziest of her kind; for she had taken an unaccountable dislike, somehow, to that quiet girl Bertha. On this particular morning, however, when Persis looked out, she saw Bertha engaged in close, and apparently very intimate, conversation with the Hampstead postman. This sight disturbed the unstable equilibrium of her equanimity not a little. Why should Bertha go to the door to the postman at all? Surely it was no part of the duty of Lady Maclure's maid to take in the letters! And why should she want to go prying into the question of who wrote to Miss Remanet? For Persis, intensely conscious herself that a note from Sir Justin lay on top of the postman's bundle— she recognized it at once, even at that distance below, by the peculiar shape of the broad rough envelope— jumped to the natural feminine conclusion that Bertha must needs be influenced by some abstruse motive of which she herself, Persis, was, to say the very least, a component element. 'Tis a human fallacy. We're all of us prone to see everything from a personal standpoint; indeed, the one quality which makes a man or woman into a possible novelist, good, bad, or indifferent, is just that special power of throwing himself or herself into a great many people's personalities alternately. And this is a power possessed on an average by not one in a thousand men or not one in ten thousand women.

Persis rang the bell violently. Bertha came up, all smiles: "Did you want anything, miss?" Persis could have choked her. "Yes," she answered plainly, taking the bull by the horns; "I want to know what you were doing down there, prying into other people's letters with the postman?"

Bertha looked up at her, ever bland; she answered at once, without a second's hesitation: "The postman's my young man, miss; and we hope before very long now to get married."

"Odious thing!" Persis thought. "A glib lie always ready on the tip of her tongue for every emergency."

But Bertha's full heart was beating violently. Beating with love and hope and deferred anxiety.

A little later in the day Persis mentioned the incident casually to Lady Maclure— mainly in order to satisfy herself that the girl had been lying. Lady Maclure, however, gave a qualified assent:—

"I *believe* she's engaged to the postman," she said. "I *think* I've heard so; though I make it a rule, you see, my dear, to know as little as I can of these people's love affairs. They're so very uninteresting. But Bertha certainly told me she wouldn't leave me to get married for an indefinite period. That was only ten days ago. She said her young man wasn't just yet in a position to make a home for her."

"Perhaps," Persis suggested grimly, "something has occurred meanwhile to better her position. Such strange things crop up. She may have come into a fortune!"

"Perhaps so," Lady Maclure replied languidly. The subject bored her. "Though, if so, it must really have been very sudden; for I think it was the morning before you lost your jewels she told me so."

Persis thought that odd, but she made no comment.

Before dinner that evening she burst suddenly into Lady Maclure's room for a minute. Bertha was dressing her lady's hair. Friends were coming to dine— among them Sir Justin. "How do these pearls go with my complexion, Lady Maclure?" Persis asked rather anxiously; for she specially wished to look her best that evening, for one of the party.

"Oh, charming!" her hostess answered, with her society smile. "Never saw anything suit you better, Persis."

"Except my poor rubies!" Persis cried rather ruefully, for coloured gewgaws are dear to the savage and the woman. "I wish I could get them back! I wonder that man Gregory hasn't succeeded in finding them."

"Oh! my dear," Lady Maclure drawled out, "you may be sure by this time they're safe at Amsterdam. That's the only place in Europe now to look for them."

"Why to Amsterdam, my lady?" Bertha interposed suddenly, with a quick side-glance at Persis.

Lady Maclure threw her head back in surprise at so unwonted an intrusion. "What do you want to know that for, child?" she asked, somewhat curtly. "Why, to be cut, of course. All the diamond-cutters in the world are concentrated in Amsterdam; and the first thing a thief does when he steals big jewels is to send them across, and have them cut in new shapes so that they can't be identified."

"I shouldn't have thought," Bertha put in, calmly, "they'd have known who to send them to."

Lady Maclure turned to her sharply. "Why, these things," she said, with a calm air of knowledge, "are always done by experienced thieves, who know the ropes well, and are in league with receivers the whole world over. But Gregory has his eye on Amsterdam, I'm sure, and we'll soon hear something."

"Yes, my lady," Bertha answered, in her acquiescent tone, and relapsed into silence.

vi

FOUR DAYS later, about nine at night, that hard-worked man, the posty on the beat, stood loitering outside Sir Everard Maclure's house, openly defying the rules of the department, in close conference with Bertha.

"Well, any news?" Bertha asked, trembling over with excitement, for she was a very different person outside with her lover from the demure and imperturbable model maid who waited on my lady.

"Why, yes," the posty answered, with a low laugh of triumph. "A letter from Amsterdam! And I think we've fixed it!"

Bertha almost flung herself upon him. "Oh, Harry!" she cried, all eagerness, "this is too good to be true! Then in just one other month we can really get married!"

There was a minute's pause, inarticulately filled up by sounds unrepresentable through the art of the typefounder. Then Harry spoke again. "It's an awful lot of money!" he said, musing. "A regular fortune! And what's more, Bertha, if it hadn't been for your cleverness we never should have got it!"

Bertha pressed his hand affectionately. Even ladies'-maids are human.

"Well, if I hadn't been so much in love with you," she answered frankly, "I don't think I could ever have had the wit to manage it. But, oh! Harry, love makes one do or try anything!"

If Persis had heard those singular words, she would have felt no doubt was any longer possible.

vii

NEXT MORNING, at ten o'clock, a policeman came round, post haste, to Sir Everard's. He asked to see Miss Remanet. When Persis came down, in her morning wrap, he had but a brief message from head-quarters to give her: "Your jewels are found, miss. Will you step round and identify them?"

Persis drove back with him, all trembling. Lady Maclure accompanied her. At the police-station they left their cab, and entered the ante-room.

A little group had assembled there. The first person Persis distinctly made out in it was Sir Justin. A great terror seized her. Gregory had so poisoned her mind by this time with suspicion of everybody and everything she came across, that she was afraid of her own shadow. But next moment she saw clearly he

wasn't there as prisoner, or even as witness; merely as spectator. She acknowledged him with a hasty bow, and cast her eye round again. The next person she definitely distinguished was Bertha, as calm and cool as ever, but in the very centre of the group, occupying as it were the place of honour which naturally belongs to the prisoner on all similar occasions. Persis was not surprised at that; she had known it all along; she glanced meaningly at Gregory, who stood a little behind, looking by no means triumphant. Persis found his dejection odd; but he was a proud detective, and perhaps some one else had effected the capture!

"These are your jewels, I believe," the inspector said, holding them up; and Persis admitted it.

"This is a painful case," the inspector went on. "A very painful case. We grieve to have discovered such a clue against one of our own men; but as he owns to it himself, and intends to throw himself on the mercy of the Court, it's no use talking about it. He won't attempt to defend it; indeed, with such evidence, I think he's doing what's best and wisest."

Persis stood there, all dazed. "I— I don't understand," she cried, with a swimming brain. "Who on earth are you talking about?"

The inspector pointed mutely with one hand at Gregory; and then for the first time Persis saw he was guarded. She clapped her hand to her head. In a moment it all broke in upon her. When she had called in the police, the rubies had never been stolen at all. It was Gregory who stole them!

She understood it now, at once. The real facts came back to her. She had taken her necklet off at night, laid it carelessly down on the dressing-table (too full of Sir Justin), covered it accidentally with her lace pocket-handkerchief, and straightway forgotten all about it. Next day she missed it, and jumped at conclusions. When Gregory came, he spied the rubies askance under the corner of the handkerchief— of course, being a woman, she had naturally looked everywhere except in the place where she had laid them— and knowing it was a safe case he had quietly pocketed them before her very eyes, all unsuspected. He felt sure nobody could accuse him of a robbery which was committed before he came, and which he had himself been called in to investigate.

"The worst of it is," the inspector went on, "he had woven a very ingenious case against Sir Justin O'Byrne, whom we were on the very point of arresting to-day, if this young woman hadn't come in at the eleventh hour, in the very nick of time, and earned the reward by giving us the clue that led to the discovery and recovery of the jewels. They were brought over this morning by an Amsterdam detective."

Persis looked hard at Bertha. Bertha answered her look. "My young man was the postman, miss," she explained, quite simply; "and after what my lady said, I put him up to watch Mr. Gregory's delivery for a letter from Amsterdam. I'd suspected him from the very first; and when the letter came, we had him arrested at once, and found out from it who were the people at Amsterdam who had the rubies."

Persis gasped with astonishment. Her brain was reeling. But Gregory in the background put in one last word—

"Well, I was right, after all," he said, with professional pride. "I told you the very last person you'd dream of suspecting was sure to be the one that actually did it."

Lady O'Byrne's rubies were very much admired at Monte Carlo last season. Mr. Gregory has found permanent employment for the next seven years at Her Majesty's quarries on the Isle of Portland. Bertha and her postman have retired to Canada with five hundred pounds to buy a farm. And everybody says Sir Justin O'Byrne has beaten the record, after all, even for Irish baronets, by making a marriage at once of money and affection.

9: A Dead Finger

S. Baring-Gould

1834-1924

In: *A Book of Ghosts*, 1904

WHY THE National Gallery should not attract so many visitors as, say, the British Museum, I cannot explain. The latter does not contain much that, one would suppose, appeals to the interest of the ordinary sightseer. What knows such of prehistoric flints and scratched bones? Of Assyrian sculpture? Of Egyptian hieroglyphics? The Greek and Roman statuary is cold and dead.

The paintings in the National Gallery glow with colour, and are instinct with life. Yet, somehow, a few listless wanderers saunter yawning through the National Gallery, whereas swarms pour through the halls of the British Museum, and talk and pass remarks about the objects there exposed, of the date and meaning of which they have not the faintest conception.

I was thinking of this problem, and endeavouring to unravel it, one morning whilst sitting in the room for English masters at the great collection in Trafalgar Square. At the same time another thought forced itself upon me. I had been through the rooms devoted to foreign schools, and had then come into that given over to Reynolds, Morland, Gainsborough, Constable, and Hogarth. The morning had been for a while propitious, but towards noon a dense umber-tinted fog had come on, making it all but impossible to see the pictures, and quite impossible to do them justice. I was tired, and so seated myself on one of the chairs, and fell into the consideration first of all of— why the National Gallery is not as popular as it should be; and secondly, how it was that the British School had no beginnings, like those of Italy and the Netherlands. We can see the art of the painter from its first initiation in the Italian peninsula, and among the Flemings.

It starts on its progress like a child, and we can trace every stage of its growth. Not so with English art. It springs to life in full and splendid maturity. Who were there before Reynolds and Gainsborough and Hogarth? The great names of those portrait and subject painters who have left their canvases upon the walls of our country houses were those of foreigners— Holbein, Kneller, Van Dyck, and Lely for portraits, and Monnoyer for flower and fruit pieces. Landscapes, figure subjects were all importations, none home-grown. How came that about? Was there no limner that was native? Was it that fashion trampled on homegrown pictorial beginnings as it flouted and spurned native music?

Here was food for contemplation. Dreaming in the brown fog, looking through it without seeing its beauties, at Hogarth's painting of Lavinia Fenton as Polly Peachum, without wondering how so indifferent a beauty could have

captivated the Duke of Bolton and held him for thirty years, I was recalled to myself and my surroundings by the strange conduct of a lady who had seated herself on a chair near me, also discouraged by the fog, and awaiting its dispersion.

I had not noticed her particularly. At the present moment I do not remember particularly what she was like. So far as I can recollect she was middle-aged, and was quietly yet well dressed. It was not her face nor her dress that attracted my attention and disturbed the current of my thoughts; the effect I speak of was produced by her strange movements and behaviour.

She had been sitting listless, probably thinking of nothing at all, or nothing in particular, when, in turning her eyes round, and finding that she could see nothing of the paintings, she began to study me. This did concern me greatly. A cat may look at the king; but to be contemplated by a lady is a compliment sufficient to please any gentleman. It was not gratified vanity that troubled my thoughts, but the consciousness that my appearance produced— first of all a startled surprise, then undisguised alarm, and, finally, indescribable horror.

Now a man can sit quietly leaning on the head of his umbrella, and glow internally, warmed and illumined by the consciousness that he is being surveyed with admiration by a lovely woman, even when he is middle-aged and not fashionably dressed; but no man can maintain his composure when he discovers himself to be an object of aversion and terror.

What was it? I passed my hand over my chin and upper lip, thinking it not impossible that I might have forgotten to shave that morning, and in my confusion not considering that the fog would prevent the lady from discovering neglect in this particular, had it occurred, which it had not. I am a little careless, perhaps, about shaving when in the country; but when in town, never.

The next idea that occurred to me was— a smut. Had a London black, curdled in that dense pea-soup atmosphere, descended on my nose and blackened it? I hastily drew my silk handkerchief from my pocket, moistened it, and passed to my nose, and then each cheek. I then turned my eyes into the corners and looked at the lady, to see whether by this means I had got rid of what was objectionable in my personal appearance.

Then I saw that her eyes, dilated with horror, were riveted, not on my face, but on my leg.

My leg! What on earth could that harmless member have in it so terrifying? The morning had been dull; there had been rain in the night, and I admit that on leaving my hotel I had turned up the bottoms of my trousers. That is a proceeding not so uncommon, not so outrageous as to account for the stony stare of this woman's eyes.

If that were all I would turn my trousers down.

Then I saw her shrink from the chair on which she sat to one further removed from me, but still with her eyes fixed on my leg— about the level of my knee. She had let fall her umbrella, and was grasping the seat of her chair with both hands, as she backed from me.

I need hardly say that I was greatly disturbed in mind and feelings, and forgot all about the origin of the English schools of painters, and the question why the British Museum is more popular than the National Gallery.

Thinking that I might have been spattered by a hansom whilst crossing Oxford Street, I passed my hand down my side hastily, with a sense of annoyance, and all at once touched something, cold, clammy, that sent a thrill to my heart, and made me start and take a step forward. At the same moment, the lady, with a cry of horror, sprang to her feet, and with raised hands fled from the room, leaving her umbrella where it had fallen.

There were other visitors to the Picture Gallery besides ourselves, who had been passing through the saloon, and they turned at her cry, and looked in surprise after her.

The policeman stationed in the room came to me and asked what had happened. I was in such agitation that I hardly knew what to answer. I told him that I could explain what had occurred little better than himself. I had noticed that the lady had worn an odd expression, and had behaved in most extraordinary fashion, and that he had best take charge of her umbrella, and wait for her return to claim it.

This questioning by the official was vexing, as it prevented me from at once and on the spot investigating the cause of her alarm and mine— hers at something she must have seen on my leg, and mine at something I had distinctly felt creeping up my leg.

The numbing and sickening effect on me of the touch of the object I had not seen was not to be shaken off at once. Indeed, I felt as though my hand were contaminated, and that I could have no rest till I had thoroughly washed the hand, and, if possible, washed away the feeling that had been produced.

I looked on the floor, I examined my leg, but saw nothing. As I wore my overcoat, it was probable that in rising from my seat the skirt had fallen over my trousers and hidden the thing, whatever it was: I therefore hastily removed my overcoat and shook it, then I looked at my trousers. There was nothing whatever on my leg, and nothing fell from my overcoat when shaken.

Accordingly I reinvested myself, and hastily left the Gallery; then took my way as speedily as I could, without actually running, to Charing Cross Station and down the narrow way leading to the Metropolitan, where I went into Faulkner's bath and hairdressing establishment, and asked for hot water to

thoroughly wash my hand and well soap it. I bathed my hand in water as hot as I could endure it, employed carbolic soap, and then, after having a good brush down, especially on my left side where my hand had encountered the object that had so affected me, I left. I had entertained the intention of going to the Princess's Theatre that evening, and of securing a ticket in the morning; but all thought of theatre-going was gone from me. I could not free my heart from the sense of nausea and cold that had been produced by the touch. I went into Gatti's to have lunch, and ordered something, I forget what, but, when served, I found that my appetite was gone. I could eat nothing; the food inspired me with disgust. I thrust it from me untasted, and, after drinking a couple of glasses of claret, left the restaurant, and returned to my hotel.

Feeling sick and faint, I threw my overcoat over the sofa-back, and cast myself on my bed.

I do not know that there was any particular reason for my doing so, but as I lay my eyes were on my great-coat.

The density of the fog had passed away, and there was light again, not of first quality, but sufficient for a Londoner to swear by, so that I could see everything in my room, though through a veil, darkly.

I do not think my mind was occupied in any way. About the only occasions on which, to my knowledge, my mind is actually passive or inert is when crossing the Channel in The Foam from Dover to Calais, when I am always, in every weather, abjectly seasick— and thoughtless. But as I now lay on my bed, uncomfortable, squeamish, without knowing why— I was in the same inactive mental condition. But not for long.

I saw something that startled me.

First, it appeared to me as if the lappet of my overcoat pocket were in movement, being raised.

I did not pay much attention to this, as I supposed that the garment was sliding down on to the seat of the sofa, from the back, and that this displacement of gravity caused the movement I observed. But this I soon saw was not the case. That which moved the lappet was something in the pocket that was struggling to get out. I could see now that it was working its way up the inside, and that when it reached the opening it lost balance and fell down again. I could make this out by the projections and indentations in the cloth; these moved as the creature, or whatever it was, worked its way up the lining.

'A mouse,' I said, and forgot my seediness; I was interested. 'The little rascal! However did he contrive to seat himself in my pocket? and I have worn that overcoat all the morning!' But no— it was not a mouse. I saw something white poke its way out from under the lappet; and in another moment an

object was revealed that, though revealed, I could not understand, nor could I distinguish what it was.

Now roused by curiosity, I raised myself on my elbow. In doing this I made some noise, the bed creaked. Instantly the something dropped on the floor, lay outstretched for a moment, to recover itself, and then began, with the motions of a maggot, to run along the floor.

There is a caterpillar called 'The Measurer', because, when it advances, it draws its tail up to where its head is and then throws forward its full length, and again draws up its extremity, forming at each time a loop, and with each step measuring its total length. The object I now saw on the floor was advancing precisely like the measuring caterpillar. It had the colour of a cheese-maggot, and in length was about three and a half inches. It was not, however, like a caterpillar, which is flexible throughout its entire length, but this was, as it seemed to me, jointed in two places, one joint being more conspicuous than the other. For some moments I was so completely paralysed by astonishment that I remained motionless, looking at the thing as it crawled along the carpet— a dull green carpet with darker green, almost black, flowers in it.

It had, as it seemed to me, a glossy head, distinctly marked; but, as the light was not brilliant, I could not make out very clearly, and, moreover, the rapid movements prevented close scrutiny.

Presently, with a shock still more startling than that produced by its apparition at the opening of the pocket of my great-coat, I became convinced that what I saw was a finger, a human forefinger, and that the glossy head was no other than the nail.

The finger did not seem to have been amputated. There was no sign of blood or laceration where the knuckle should be, but the extremity of the finger, or root rather, faded away to indistinctness, and I was unable to make out the root of the finger.

I could see no hand, no body behind this finger, nothing whatever except a finger that had little token of warm life in it, no coloration as though blood circulated in it; and this finger was in active motion creeping along the carpet towards a wardrobe that stood against the wall by the fireplace.

I sprang off the bed and pursued it.

Evidently the finger was alarmed, for it redoubled its pace, reached the wardrobe, and went under it. By the time I had arrived at the article of furniture it had disappeared. I lit a vesta match and held it beneath the wardrobe, that was raised above the carpet by about two inches, on turned feet, but I could see nothing more of the finger.

I got my umbrella and thrust it beneath, and raked forwards and backwards, right and left, and raked out flue, and nothing more solid.

ii

I PACKED my portmanteau next day and returned to my home in the country. All desire for amusement in town was gone, and the faculty to transact business had departed as well.

A languor and qualms had come over me, and my head was in a maze. I was unable to fix my thoughts on anything. At times I was disposed to believe that my wits were deserting me, at others that I was on the verge of a severe illness. Anyhow, whether likely to go off my head or not, or take to my bed, home was the only place for me, and homeward I sped, accordingly. On reaching my country habitation, my servant, as usual, took my portmaneau to my bedroom, unstrapped it, but did not unpack it. I object to his throwing out the contents of my Gladstone bag; not that there is anything in it he may not see, but that he puts my things where I cannot find them again. My clothes— he is welcome to place them where he likes and where they belong, and this latter he knows better than I do; but, then, I carry about with me other things than a dress suit, and changes of linen and flannel. There are letters, papers, books— and the proper destinations of these are known only to myself. A servant has a singular and evil knack of putting away literary matter and odd volumes in such places that it takes the owner half a day to find them again. Although I was uncomfortable, and my head in a whirl, I opened and unpacked my own portmanteau. As I was thus engaged I saw something curled up in my collar-box, the lid of which had got broken in by a boot-heel impinging on it. I had pulled off the damaged cover to see if my collars had been spoiled, when something curled up inside suddenly rose on end and leapt, just like a cheese-jumper, out of the box, over the edge of the Gladstone bag, and scurried away across the floor in a manner already familiar to me.

I could not doubt for a moment what it was— here was the finger again. It had come with me from London to the country.

Whither it went in its run over the floor I do not know, I was too bewildered to observe.

Somewhat later, towards evening, I seated myself in my easy-chair, took up a book, and tried to read. I was tired with the journey, with the knocking about in town, and the discomfort and alarm produced by the apparition of the finger. I felt worn out. I was unable to give my attention to what I read, and before I was aware was asleep. Roused for an instant by the fall of the book from my hands, I speedily relapsed into unconsciousness. I am not sure that a

doze in an armchair ever does good. It usually leaves me in a semi-stupid condition and with a headache.

Five minutes in a horizontal position on my bed is worth thirty in a chair. That is my experience.

In sleeping in a sedentary position the head is a difficulty; it drops forward or lolls on one side or the other, and has to be brought back into a position in which the line to the centre of gravity runs through the trunk, otherwise the head carries the body over in a sort of general capsize out of the chair on to the floor.

I slept, on the occasion of which I am speaking, pretty healthily, because deadly weary; but I was brought to waking, not by my head falling over the arm of the chair, and my trunk tumbling after it, but by a feeling of cold extending from my throat to my heart. When I awoke I was in a diagonal position, with my right ear resting on my right shoulder, and exposing the left side of my throat, and it was here— -where the jugular vein throbs— that I felt the greatest intensity of cold. At once I shrugged my left shoulder, rubbing my neck with the collar of my coat in so doing. Immediately something fell off, upon the floor, and I again saw the finger.

My disgust— horror, were intensified when I perceived that it was dragging something after it, which might have been an old stocking, and which I took at first glance for something of the sort.

The evening sun shone in through my window, in a brilliant golden ray that lighted the object as it scrambled along. With this illumination I was able to distinguish what the object was. It is not easy to describe it, but I will make the attempt.

The finger I saw was solid and material; what it drew after it was neither, or was in a nebulous, protoplasmic condition. The finger was attached to a hand that was curdling into matter and in process of acquiring solidity; attached to the hand was an arm in a very filmy condition, and this arm belonged to a human body in a still more vaporous, immaterial condition. This was being dragged along the floor by the finger, just as a silkworm might pull after it the tangle of its web. I could see legs and arms, and head, and coat-tail tumbling about and interlacing and disentangling again in a promiscuous manner. There were no bone, no muscle, no substance in the figure; the members were attached to the trunk, which was spineless, but they had evidently no functions, and were wholly dependent on the finger which pulled them along in a jumble of parts as it advanced.

In such confusion did the whole vaporous matter seem, that I think— I cannot say for certain it was so, but the impression left on my mind was— that

one of the eyeballs was looking out at a nostril, and the tongue lolling out of one of the ears.

It was, however, only for a moment that I saw this germ-body; I cannot call by another name that which had not more substance than smoke. I saw it only so long as it was being dragged athwart the ray of sunlight. The moment it was pulled jerkily out of the beam into the shadow beyond, I could see nothing of it, only the crawling finger.

I had not sufficient moral energy or physical force in me to rise, pursue, and stamp on the finger, and grind it with my heel into the floor. Both seemed drained out of me. What became of the finger, whither it went, how it managed to secrete itself, I do not know. I had lost the power to inquire. I sat in my chair, chilled, staring before me into space.

'Please, sir,' a voice said, 'there's Mr Square below, electrical engineer.'

'Eh?' I looked dreamily round.

My valet was at the door.

'Please, sir, the gentleman would be glad to be allowed to go over the house and see that all the electrical apparatus is in order.'

'Oh, indeed! Yes— show him up.'

iii

I HAD RECENTLY placed the lighting of my house in the hands of an electrical engineer, a very intelligent man, Mr Square, for whom I had contracted a sincere friendship.

He had built a shed with a dynamo out of sight, and had entrusted the laying of the wires to subordinates, as he had been busy with other orders and could not personally watch every detail.

But he was not the man to let anything pass unobserved, and he knew that electricity was not a force to be played with. Bad or careless workmen will often insufficiently protect the wires, or neglect the insertion of the lead which serves as a safety-valve in the event of the current being too strong. Houses may be set on fire, human beings fatally shocked, by the neglect of a bad or slovenly workman.

The apparatus for my mansion was but just completed, and Mr Square had come to inspect it and make sure that all was right.

He was an enthusiast in the matter of electricity, and saw for it a vast perspective, the limits of which could not be predicted.

'All forces,' said he, 'are correlated. When you have force in one form, you may just turn it into this or that, as you like. In one form it is motive power, in another it is light, in another heat.

'Now we have electricity for illumination. We employ it, but not as freely as in the States, for propelling vehicles. Why should we have horses drawing our buses? We should use only electric trains. Why do we burn coal to warm our shins? There is electricity, which throws out no filthy smoke as does coal. Why should we let the tides waste their energies in the Thames? in other estuaries? There we have Nature supplying us— free, gratis, and for nothing— with all the force we want for propelling, for heating, for lighting. I will tell you something more, my dear sir,' said Mr Square. 'I have mentioned but three modes of force, and have instanced but a limited number of uses to which electricity may be turned. How is it with photography? Is not electric light becoming an artistic agent? I bet you', said he, 'before long it will become a therapeutic agent as well.'

'Oh, yes; I have heard of certain impostors with their life-belts.' Mr Square did not relish this little dig I gave him. He winced, but returned to the charge. 'We don't know how to direct it aright, that is all,' said he. 'I haven't taken the matter up, but others will, I bet; and we shall have electricity used as freely as now we use powders and pills. I don't believe in doctors' stuffs myself. I hold that disease lays hold of a man because he lacks physical force to resist it. Now, is it not obvious that you are beginning at the wrong end when you attack the disease? What you want is to supply force, make up for the lack of physical power, and force is force wherever you find it— here motive, there illuminating, and so on. I don't see why a physician should not utilize the tide rushing out under London Bridge for restoring the feeble vigour of all who are languid and a prey to disorder in the Metropolis. It will come to that, I bet, and that is not all. Force is force, everywhere. Political, moral force, physical force, dynamic force, heat, light, tidal waves, and so on— all are one, all is one. In time we shall know how to galvanize into aptitude and moral energy all the limp and crooked consciences and wills that need taking in hand, and such there always will be in modern civilisation. I don't know how to do it. I don't know how it will be done, but in the future the priest as well as the doctor will turn electricity on as his principal, nay, his only agent. And he can get his force anywhere, out of the running stream, out of the wind, out of the tidal wave.

'I'll give you an instance,' continued Mr Square, chuckling and rubbing his hands, 'to show you the great possibilities in electricity, used in a crude fashion. In a certain great city away far west in the States, a go-ahead place, too, more so than New York, they had electric trains all up and down and along the roads to everywhere. The union men working for the company demanded that the non-unionists should be turned off. But the company didn't see it. Instead, it turned off the union men. It had up its sleeve a sufficiency of the others, and filled all places at once. Union men didn't like it, and passed word

that at a given hour on a certain day every wire was to be cut. The company knew this by means of its spies, and turned on, ready for them, three times the power into all the wires. At the fixed moment, up the poles went the strikers to cut the cables, and down they came a dozen times quicker than they went up, I bet. Then there came wires to the hospitals from all quarters for stretchers to carry off the disabled men, some with broken legs, arms, ribs; two or three had their necks broken. I reckon the company was wonderfully merciful— it didn't put on sufficient force to make cinders of them then and there; possibly opinion might not have liked it. Stopped the strike, did that. Great moral effect— all done by electricity.'

In this manner Mr Square was wont to rattle on. He interested me, and I came to think that there might be something in what he said— that his suggestions were not mere nonsense. I was glad to see Mr Square enter my room, shown in by my man. I did not rise from my chair to shake his hand, for I had not sufficient energy to do so. In a languid tone I welcomed him and signed to him to take a seat. Mr Square looked at me with some surprise.

'Why, what's the matter?' he said. 'You seem unwell. Not got the 'flu, have you?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'The influenza. Every third person is crying out that he has it, and the sale of eucalyptus is enormous, not that eucalyptus is any good. Influenza microbes indeed! What care they for eucalyptus? You've gone down some steps of the ladder of life since I saw you last, squire. How do you account for that?'

I hesitated about mentioning the extraordinary circumstances that had occurred; but Square was a man who would not allow any beating about the bush. He was downright and straight, and in ten minutes had got the entire story out of me.

'Rather boisterous for your nerves that— a crawling finger,' said he. 'It's a queer story taken on end.'

Then he was silent, considering.

After a few minutes he rose, and said: 'I'll go and look at the fittings, and then I'll turn this little matter of yours over again, and see if I can't knock the bottom out of it, I'm kinder fond of these sort of things.'

Mr Square was not a Yankee, but he had lived for some time in America, and affected to speak like an American. He used expressions, terms of speech common in the States, but had none of the Transatlantic twang. He was a man absolutely without affectation in every other particular; this was his sole weakness, and it was harmless.

The man was so thorough in all he did that I did not expect his return immediately. He was certain to examine every portion of the dynamo engine,

and all the connections and burners. This would necessarily engage him for some hours. As the day was nearly done, I knew he could not accomplish what he wanted that evening, and accordingly gave orders that a room should be prepared for him. Then, as my head was full of pain, and my skin was burning, I told my servant to apologize for my absence from dinner, and tell Mr Square that I was really forced to return to my bed by sickness, and that I believed I was about to be prostrated by an attack of influenza.

The valet— a worthy fellow, who has been with me for six years— was concerned at my appearance, and urged me to allow him to send for a doctor. I had no confidence in the local practitioner, and if I sent for another from the nearest town I should offend him, and a row would perhaps ensue, so I declined. If I were really in for an influenza attack, I knew about as much as any doctor how to deal with it. Quinine, quinine— that was all. I bade my man light a small lamp, lower it, so as to give sufficient illumination to enable me to find some lime-juice at my bed head, and my pocket-handkerchief, and to be able to read my watch. When he had done this, I bade him leave me.

I lay in bed, burning, racked with pain in my head, and with my eyeballs on fire.

Whether I fell asleep or went off my head for a while I cannot tell. I may have fainted. I have no recollection of anything after having gone to bed and taken a sip of lime-juice that tasted to me like soap— till I was roused by a sense of pain in my ribs— a slow, gnawing, torturing pain, waxing momentarily more intense. In half-consciousness I was partly dreaming and partly aware of actual suffering. The pain was real; but in my fancy I thought that a great maggot was working its way into my side between my ribs. I seemed to see it. It twisted itself half round, then reverted to its former position, and again twisted itself, moving like a bradawl, not like a gimlet, which latter forms a complete revolution.

This, obviously, must have been a dream, hallucination only, as I was lying on my back and my eyes were directed towards the bottom of the bed, and the coverlet and blankets and sheet intervened between my eyes and my side. But in fever one sees without eyes, and in every direction, and through all obstructions.

Roused thoroughly by an excruciating twinge, I tried to cry out, and succeeded in throwing myself over on my right side, that which was in pain. At once I felt the thing withdrawn that was awling— if I may use the word— in between my ribs.

And now I saw, standing beside the bed, a figure that had its arm under the bedclothes, and was slowly removing it. The hand was leisurely drawn from

under the coverings and rested on the eiderdown coverlet, with the forefinger extended.

The figure was that of a man, in shabby clothes, with a sallow, mean face, a retreating forehead, with hair cut after the French fashion, and a moustache, dark. The jaws and chin were covered with a bristly growth, as if shaving had been neglected for a fortnight. The figure did not appear to be thoroughly solid, but to be of the consistency of curd, and the face was of the complexion of curd. As I looked at this object it withdrew, sliding backward in an odd sort of manner, and as though overweighted by the hand, which was the most substantial, indeed the only substantial portion of it. Though the figure retreated stooping, yet it was no longer huddled along by the finger, as if it had no material existence. If the same, it had acquired a consistency and a solidity which it did not possess before.

How it vanished I do not know, nor whither it went. The door opened, and Square came in.

'What!' he exclaimed with cheery voice; 'influenza is it?'

'I don't know— I think it's that finger again.'

iv

'NOW, LOOK here,' said Square, 'I'm not going to have that cuss at its pranks anymore. Tell me all about it.'

I was now so exhausted, so feeble, that I was not able to give a connected account of what had taken place, but Square put to me just a few pointed questions and elicited the main facts. He pieced them together in his own orderly mind, so as to form a connected whole. 'There is a feature in the case,' said he, 'that strikes me as remarkable and important. At first— a finger only, then a hand, then a nebulous figure attached to the hand, without backbone, without consistency.

'Lastly, a complete form, with consistency and with backbone, but the latter in a gelatinous condition, and the entire figure overweighted by the hand, just as hand and figure were previously overweighted by the finger. Simultaneously with this compacting and consolidating of the figure, came your degeneration and loss of vital force and, in a word, of health. What you lose, that object acquires, and what it acquires, it gains by contact with you. That's clear enough, is it not?'

'I dare say. I don't know. I can't think.'

'I suppose not; the faculty of thought is drained out of you. Very well, I must think for you, and I will. Force is force, and see if I can't deal with your visitant in such a way as will prove just as truly a moral dissuasive as that

employed on the union men on strike in— never mind where it was. That's not to the point.'

'Will you kindly give me some lime-juice?' I entreated.

I sipped the acid draught, but without relief. I listened to Square, but without hope. I wanted to be left alone. I was weary of my pain, weary of everything, even of life. It was a matter of indifference to me whether I recovered or slipped out of existence.

'It will be here again shortly,' said the engineer. 'As the French say, l'appetit vient en mangeant. It has been at you thrice, it won't be content without another peck. And if it does get another, I guess it will pretty well about finish you.'

Mr Square rubbed his chin, and then put his hands into his trouser pockets. That also was a trick acquired in the States, an inelegant one. His hands, when not actively occupied, went into his pockets, inevitably they gravitated thither. Ladies did not like Square; they said he was not a gentleman. But it was not that he said or did anything 'off colour', only he spoke to them, looked at them, walked with them, always with his hands in his pockets. I have seen a lady turn her back on him deliberately because of this trick.

Standing now with his hands in his pockets, he studied my bed, and said contemptuously:

'Old-fashioned and bad, fourposter. Oughtn't to be allowed, I guess; unwholesome all the way round.'

I was not in a condition to dispute this. I like a fourposter with curtains at head and feet; not that I ever draw them, but it gives a sense of privacy that is wanting in one of your half-tester beds.

If there is a window at one's feet, one can lie in bed without the glare in one's eyes, and yet without darkening the room by drawing the blinds. There is much to be said for a fourposter, but this is not the place in which to say it.

Mr Square pulled his hands out of his pockets and began fiddling with the electric point near the head of my bed, attached a wire, swept it in a semicircle along the floor, and then thrust the knob at the end into my hand in the bed.

'Keep your eye open,' said he, 'and your hand shut and covered. If that finger comes again tickling your ribs, try it with the point. I'll manage the switch, from behind the curtain.'

Then he disappeared.

I was too indifferent in my misery to turn my head and observe where he was. I remained inert, with the knob in my hand, and my eyes closed, suffering and thinking of nothing but the shooting pains through my head and the aches in my loins and back and legs.

Some time probably elapsed before I felt the finger again at work at my ribs; it groped, but no longer bored. I now felt the entire hand, not a single finger, and the hand was substantial, cold, and clammy. I was aware, how, I know not, that if the finger-point reached the region of my heart, on the left side, the hand would, so to speak, sit down on it, with the cold palm over it, and that then immediately my heart would cease to beat, and it would be, as Square might express it, 'gone coon' with me.

In self-preservation I brought up the knob of the electric wire against the hand— against one of the fingers, I think— and at once was aware of a rapping, squealing noise. I turned my head languidly, and saw the form, now more substantial than before, capering in an ecstasy of pain, endeavouring fruitlessly to withdraw its arm from under the bedclothes, and the hand from the electric point.

At the same moment Square stepped from behind the curtain, with a dry laugh, and said: 'I thought we should fix him. He has the coil about him, and can't escape. Now let us drop to particulars. But I shan't let you off till I know all about you.'

The last sentence was addressed, not to me, but to the apparition.

Thereupon he bade me take the point away from the hand of the figure— being— whatever it was, but to be ready with it at a moment's notice. He then proceeded to catechize my visitor, who moved restlessly within the circle of wire, but could not escape from it. It replied in a thin, squealing voice that sounded as if it came from a distance, and had a querulous tone in it. I do not pretend to give all that was said. I cannot recollect everything that passed. My memory was affected by my illness, as well as my body. Yet I prefer giving the scraps that I recollect to what Square told me he had heard.

'Yes— I was unsuccessful, always was. Nothing answered with me. The world was against me.

'Society was. I hate Society. I don't like work neither, never did. But I like agitating against what is established. I hate the Royal Family, the landed interest, the parsons, everything that is, except the people— that is, the unemployed. I always did. I couldn't get work as suited me. When I died they buried me in a cheap coffin, dirt cheap, and gave me a nasty grave, cheap, and a service rattled away cheap, and no monument. Didn't want none. Oh! there are lots of us. All discontented. Discontent! That's a passion, it is— it gets into the veins, it fills the brain, it occupies the heart; it's a sort of divine cancer that takes possession of the entire man, and makes him dissatisfied with everything, and hate everybody. But we must have our share of happiness at some time. We all crave for it in one way or other. Some think there's a future state of blessedness and so have hope, and look to attain to it, for hope is a

cable and anchor that attaches to what is real, But when you have no hope of that sort, don't believe in any future state, you must look for happiness in life here. We didn't get it when we were alive, so we seek to procure it after we are dead. We can do it, if we can get out of our cheap and nasty coffins. But not till the greater part of us is mouldered away. If a finger or two remains, that can work its way up to the surface, those cheap deal coffins go to pieces quick enough. Then the only solid part of us left can pull the rest of us that has gone to nothing after it. Then we grope about after the living.

'The well-to-do if we can get at them— the honest working poor if we can't— we hate them too, because they are content and happy. If we reach any of these, and can touch them, then we can draw their vital force out of them into ourselves, and recuperate at their expense. That was about what I was going to do with you. Getting on famous. Nearly solidified into a new man; and given another chance in life. But I've missed it this time. Just like my luck. Miss everything. Always have, except misery and disappointment. Get plenty of that.'

'What are you all?' asked Square. 'Anarchists out of employ?'

'Some of us go by that name, some by other designations, but we are all one, and own allegiance to but one monarch— Sovereign discontent. We are bred to have a distaste for manual work; and we grow up loafers, grumbling at everything and quarrelling with Society that is around us and the Providence that is above us.'

'And what do you call yourselves now?'

'Call ourselves? Nothing; we are the same, in another condition, that is all. Folk once called us Anarchists, Nihilists, Socialists, Levelers, now they call us the Influenza. The learned talk of microbes, and bacilli, and bacteria. Microbes, bacilli, and bacteria be blowed! We are the Influenza; we the social failures, the generally discontented, coming up out of our cheap and nasty graves in the form of physical disease We are the Influenza.'

'There you are, I guess!' exclaimed Square triumphantly. 'Did I not say that all forces were correlated? If so, then all negations, deficiences of force are one in their several manifestations.

'Talk of Divine discontent as a force impelling to progress! Rubbish, it is a paralysis of energy. It turns all it absorbs to acid, to envy, spite, gall. It inspires nothing, but rots the whole moral system. Here you have it— moral, social, political discontent in another form, nay aspect— that is all. What Anarchism is in the body Politic, that Influenza is in the body Physical. Do you see that?'

'Ye-e-e-e-s,' I believe I answered, and dropped away into the land of dreams.

I recovered. What Square did with the Thing I know not, but believe that he reduced it again to its former negative and self-decomposing condition.

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10: An Illusion in Red and White

Stephen Crane

1871-1900

New York World, 20 May 1900

NIGHTS on the Cuban blockade were long, at times exciting, often dull. The men on the small leaping dispatch-boats became as intimate as if they had all been buried in the same coffin.

Correspondents, who in New York, had passed as fairly good fellows sometimes turned out to be perfect rogues of vanity and selfishness, but still more often the conceited chumps of Park Row became the kindly and thoughtful men of the Cuban blockade. Also each correspondent told all he knew, and sometimes more. For this gentle tale I am indebted to one of the brightening stars of New York journalism.

"Now, this is how I imagine it happened. I don't say it happened this way, but this is how I imagine it happened. And it always struck me as being a very interesting story. I hadn't been on the paper very long, but just about long enough to get a good show, when the city editor suddenly gave me this sparkling murder assignment.

"It seems that up in one of the back counties of New York State a farmer had taken a dislike to his wife; and so he went into the kitchen with an axe, and in the presence of their four little children he just casually rapped his wife on the nape of the neck with the head of this axe. It was early in the morning, but he told the children they had better go to bed. Then he took his wife's body out in the woods and buried it.

"This farmer's name was Jones. The widower's eldest child was named Freddy. A week after the murder, one of the long-distance neighbours was rattling past the house in his buckboard when he saw Freddy playing in the road. He pulled up, and asked the boy about the welfare of the Jones family.

" 'Oh, we're all right,' said Freddy, 'only ma— she ain't, she's dead."

" 'Why, when did she die?' cried the startled farmer. 'What did she die of?'"

" 'Oh,' answered Freddy, 'last week a man with red hair and big white teeth and real white hands came into the kitchen, and killed ma with an axe."

"The farmer was indignant with the boy for telling him this strange childish nonsense, and drove off much disgruntled. But he recited the incident at a tavern that evening, and when people began to miss the familiar figure of Mrs. Jones at the Methodist Church on Sunday mornings, they ended by having an investigation. The calm Jones was arrested for murder, and his wife's body was lifted from its grave in the woods and buried by her own family."

"The chief interest now centred upon the children. All four declared that they were in the kitchen at the time of the crime, and that the murderer had red hair. The hair of the virtuous Jones was grey. They said that the murderer's teeth were large and white. Jones only had about eight teeth, and these were small and brown. They said the murderer's hands were white. Jones's hands were the colour of black walnuts. They lifted their dazed, innocent faces, and crying, simply because the mysterious excitement and their new quarters frightened them, they repeated their heroic legend without important deviation, and without the parroty sameness which would excite suspicion."

"Women came to the jail and wept over them, and made little frocks for the girls, and little breeches for the boys, and idiotic detectives questioned them at length. Always they upheld the theory of the murderer with red hair, big white teeth, and white hands. Jones sat in his cell, his chin sullenly on his first vest button. He knew nothing about any murder, he said. He thought his wife had gone on a visit to some relatives. He had had a quarrel with her, and she had said that she was going to leave him for a time, so that he might have proper opportunities for cooling down. Had he seen the blood on the floor? Yes, he had seen the blood on the floor. But he had been cleaning and skinning a rabbit at that spot on the day of his wife's disappearance. He had thought nothing of it. What had his children said when he returned from the fields? They had told him that their mother had been killed by an axe in the hands of a man with red hair, big white teeth, and white hands. To questions as to why he had not informed the police of the county, he answered that he had not thought it a matter of sufficient importance. He had cordially hated his wife, anyhow, and he was glad to be rid of her. He decided afterward that she had run off, and he had never credited the fantastic tale of the children."

"Of course, there was very little doubt in the minds of the majority that Jones was guilty, but there was a fairly strong following who insisted that Jones was a coarse and brutal man, and perhaps weak in his head— yes— but not a murderer. They pointed to the children and declared that children could never lie, and these kids, when asked, said that the murder had been committed by a man with red hair, large white teeth, and white hands. I myself had a number of interviews with the children, and I was amazed at the convincing power of their little story."

"Shining in the depths of the limpid up-turned eyes, one could fairly see tiny mirrored images of men with red hair, big white teeth, and white hands."

"Now, I'll tell you how it happened— how I imagine it was done. Some time after burying his wife in the woods Jones strolled back into the house. Seeing nobody, he called out in the familiar fashion, 'Mother!' Then the kids came out whimpering. 'Where is your mother?' said Jones. The children looked at him

blankly. 'Why, pa,' said Freddy, 'you came in here, and hit ma with the axe; and then you sent us to bed.' 'Me?' cried Jones. 'I haven't been near the house since breakfast-time.' "

"The children did not know how to reply. Their meagre little sense informed them that their father had been the man with the axe, but he denied it, and to their minds everything was a mere great puzzle with no meaning whatever, save that it was mysteriously sad and made them cry."

" 'What kind of a looking man was it?' said Jones.

"Freddy hesitated. 'Now—he looked a good deal like you, pa.'

" 'Like me?' said Jones. 'Why, I thought you said he had red hair?'

" 'No, I didn't,' replied Freddy. 'I thought he had grey hair, like yours.'

" 'Well,' said Jones, 'I saw a man with kind of red hair going along the road up yonder, and I thought maybe that might have been him.'

"Little Lucy, the second child, here piped up with intense conviction. 'His hair was a little teeny bit red. I saw it.'

" 'No,' said Jones. 'The man I saw had very red hair. And what did his teeth look like? Were they big and white?'

" 'Yes,' answered Lucy, 'they were.'

"Even Freddy seemed to incline to think it.

" 'His teeth may have been big and white.'

"Jones said little more at that time. Later he intimated to the children that their mother had gone off on a visit, and although they were full of wonder, and sometimes wept because of the oppression of an incomprehensible feeling in the air, they said nothing. Jones did his chores. Everything was smooth.

"The morning after the day of the murder, Jones and his children had a breakfast of hominy and milk.

" 'Well, this man with red hair and big white teeth, Lucy,' said Jones. 'Did you notice anything else about him?'

"Lucy straightened in her chair, and showed the childish desire to come out with brilliant information which would gain her father's approval. 'He had white hands— hands all white—'

" 'How about you, Freddy?'"

" 'I didn't look at them much, but I think they were white,' answered the boy.

" 'And what did little Martha notice?' cried the tender parent. 'Did she see the big bad man?'

"Martha, aged four, replied solemnly, 'His hair was all red, and his hand was white—all white.'

" 'That's the man I saw up the road,' said Jones to Freddy.

" 'Yes, sir, it seems like it must have been him,' said the boy, his brain now completely muddled.

"Again Jones allowed the subject of his wife's murder to lapse. The children did not know that it was a murder, of course. Adults were always performing in a way to make children's heads swim. For instance, what could be more incomprehensible than that a man with two horses, dragging a queer thing, should walk all day, making the grass turn down and the earth turn up?

"And why did they cut the long grass and put it in a barn? And what was a cow for? Did the water in the well like to be there? All these actions and things were grand, because they were associated with the high estate of grown-up people, but they were deeply mysterious. If, then, a man with red hair, big white teeth, and white hands should hit their mother on the nape of the neck with an axe, it was merely a phenomenon of grownup life. Little Henry, the baby, when he had a want, howled and pounded the table with his spoon. That was all of life to him. He was not concerned with the fact that his mother had been murdered.

"One day Jones said to his children suddenly, 'Look here: I wonder if you could have made a mistake. Are you absolutely sure that the man you saw had red hair, big white teeth, and white hands?'

"The children were indignant with their father. 'Why, of course, pa, we ain't made no mistake. We saw him as plain as day.'

"Later young Freddy's mind began to work like ketchup. His nights were haunted with terrible memories of the man with the red hair, big white teeth, and white hands, and the prolonged absence of his mother made him wonder and wonder. Presently he quite gratuitously developed the theory that his mother was dead. He knew about death. He had once seen a dead dog; also dead chickens, rabbits, and mice. One day he asked his father, 'Pa, is ma ever coming back?'

"Jones said: 'Well, no; I don't think she is.' This answer confirmed the boy in his theory. He knew that dead people did not come back.

"The attitude of Jones toward this descriptive legend of the man with the axe was very peculiar. He came to be in opposition to it. He protested against the convictions of the children, but he could not move them. It was the one thing in their lives of which they were stonily and absolutely positive."

"Now that really ends the story. But I will continue for your amusement. The jury hung Jones as high as they could, and they were quite right: because Jones confessed before he died. Freddy is now a highly respected driver of a grocery wagon in Ogdensburg. When I was up there a good many years afterward people told me that when he ever spoke of the tragedy at all he was certain to denounce the alleged confession as a lie. He considered his father a

victim to the stupidity of juries, and some day he hopes to meet the man with the red hair, big white teeth, and white hands, whose image still remains so distinct in his memory that he could pick him out in a crowd of ten thousand."

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11: The Barnfield Murder Case

J. E. Muddock (as by Dick Donovan)

1843-1934

In: *Wanted*, 1893

IF any one looks on a map, or in a railway guide, under the expectation of finding Barnfield, he will certainly be disappointed, for Barnfield is not a station, a town, a village, nor a hamlet. But those people who are old enough to let their memories travel back a generation ago will remember how prominently at that time Barnfield figured before the public eye as being the scene of a somewhat mysterious tragedy, which proved something more than a nine days' wonder. Barnfield, in short, was and is an extensive farm situated in Hampshire on the confines of the New Forest, and commanding from the elevated parts of the grounds that truly magnificent panorama which embraces on the one hand the far distant Needles, on the other the picturesque shores and town of Southampton, and opposite that beautiful stretch of delightful country where, embosomed amongst stately trees, is the grand old ruin of Netley Abbey.

Thirty years back Barnfield was a lonely and isolated spot, and though at the present day it is within earshot of the railway whistle, and a new highway runs within a quarter of a mile of it, an air of solitude and loneliness still hangs over it.

It was but last summer, while wandering in the neighbourhood on pleasure bent, that I renewed my acquaintance with the spot, where so long ago I was engaged in investigating the dark crime which seemed to bring a blight upon the place. For it is a singular fact that since the murder the farm has never prospered. Bad season after bad season has served to ruin the unfortunate tenants who have tried to turn its luck. Since the tragedy the place has been in possession of three different families. The present tenant has been almost ruined by pleuro amongst his cattle, and twice in succession he has suffered very heavy loss owing to the destruction by fire of a large number of valuable stacks of hay. And last summer he told me, with tears in his eyes, that though getting an old man, he intended to emigrate with his family and try his luck in far distant New Zealand. "For you know, mister," he added pathetically, "there be blood on this plaace, and nowt that I can do will get rid on it. It's loike as if th' plaice wur curst, and it will have to be razed to th' ground wi' fire before th' evil spirit leaves it."

As I glanced round and noted the changed appearance of everything since I first knew Barnfield, I could not help feeling that something had certainly affected it, and it was painfully obvious that the sun of prosperity had failed to shine upon it for a very long time.

The story of the murder is this.

The farm at the time was in the occupation of Oliver Cudthorpe, who in many respects was a typical Hampshire yeoman— Hampshire yeomen have ever been noted for their sturdiness, their independence, and that generous and true-hearted hospitality which is part of the nature of the English South-countrymen. Oliver came from a race of yeomen, and Barnfield had been farmed by three generations of his family. At the period of his occupation, Barnfield embraced an area of close on 1,500 acres, and it was accounted one of the most prosperous farms in that part of the kingdom. The land was singularly rich, and a succession of bounteous harvests filled the tenants' coffers, and gladdened the ground landlord's heart; while the Barnfield cattle and sheep always fetched the top price in the market.

Oliver Cudthorpe's life had been uneventful in the sense that is generally understood by the expression. But he had had his little romance, which I must tell, as it has a bearing on the tragedy. As a young man he had wooed and won the youngest daughter of a well-to-do Southampton tradesman, by the name of Linton, who had a large family. Fanny, who became Cudthorpe's wife, had the misfortune to be a remarkably pretty girl. It would not have been a misfortune if she had possessed brains, but she was a fickle, flighty girl, too fond of pleasure and homage, and impressed apparently with the idea that she ought to be a great lady. Having regard to this, it may seem strange that she consented to become the wife of a farmer. But it is highly probable that she was entirely ignorant of what her position as a farmer's wife would be; and, knowing that Cudthorpe was prosperous, she may have supposed she would have a fine time of it, and do as she liked.

From all that I have been able to gather, her dream was soon dispelled, and she began to find the isolation of a country life intolerable. She took no interest in her husband's affairs, and was constantly grumbling and sighing for the gaiety of town existence. Cudthorpe, it would seem, was very fond of her, and tried all in his power to make her happy. The marriage proved a childless one, and after four years of wedded life no offspring had come to bless the union. It may be that this fact tended to make the young wife more restless and dissatisfied with her lot, and it became notorious around the country side that domestic affairs up at Barnfield did not flow smoothly.

It chanced one summer that some military operations were being carried on in the neighbourhood in connection with the ordnance survey, and Cudthorpe was asked to afford accommodation for a few weeks to two young officers engaged in the survey, one of them being a lieutenant. In an evil moment the farmer consented to this, thinking it would afford a change for his wife. And at first all seemed to go well. But when six weeks had passed the

farmer had reason to think that his wife and the lieutenant had become too familiar, and he ordered him to leave the house. This caused a scene between the wife and her husband, and about the end of the summer the young wife disappeared from her home. At first Cudthorpe was bowed down with grief, but when in the course of time things came to his knowledge which made it too evident that the guilty woman had gone off with her soldier lover, the deceived husband is said to have become furious, and uttered maledictions upon her. Then for over two years her name was a dead letter in his family, and no one would have dared to utter it in his hearing for fear of incurring his wrath.

Time at last brought him his revenge. Cast off by her faithless and worthless lover, she crept back to her husband's home penitent and broken-hearted, but the man was stern and unforgiving. She had had no pity for him; why should he have any for her? He had clone everything he could to make her happy, and she had repaid him with baseness, and had dishonoured his name and bed. Why, then, should he show her mercy? Such would seem to have been his feelings, for he turned her from his door with a curse. She wandered away, and two days later her dead body was found in a pond in one of the fields in Barnfield. She had committed suicide. Lying on a flat stone near the pond, with another stone on the top to keep it from blowing away, was a half-sheet of paper, on which the unhappy woman had written in pencil:

"My death shall be avenged."

She must have died with strange notions as to what she was entitled to if she thought that the taking of her own life, which she had blighted and blasted, was to be signalized by an act of vengeance.

From the time that the body was discovered Mr. Cudthorpe became a changed man. He grew morose and sullen, and seemed to take no interest in anything. The sunshine of his life had been darkened for ever, and it was said about the country that he was never again known to smile. He had been badly treated, cruelly deceived, and shamefully wronged; but there was good reason to believe that he was strongly impressed with the idea that he had been harsh to his erring wife, whom he had doted upon; and folk said they were sure if she had not destroyed herself, but had gone to him a second time, he would have taken her to his heart again and have forgiven her. Be that as it may, he sorrowed in silence and became a gloomy man. Such was the sorrowful story, and it begot him the sympathy of every one who knew him, for it was a tradition that he had been an exceptionally tender and devoted husband, and the wife had repaid it all by inflicting upon him the cruellest and deadliest

wrong a woman can put upon a man; and even those who were disposed to be most lenient found little to say in extenuation of her fault, or in her favour.

From that dark day when the frail woman's body was dragged from the pond to the tragedy that made me acquainted with the story fifteen years elapsed. Harvest time came and went. The autumns smiled with their wealth of fruit, prosperity shone on Cudthorpe, and he was said to be growing rich. But he still externally remained the same gloomy man. He had, however, found some compensation for his wrong and loss. Three years after his wife's death he had adopted the orphan lad of a neighbouring farmer, who had met with a sudden end through being gored by a bull. Cudthorpe had taken the youth— then eleven years of age— and the young fellow, whose name was William, and who, by his foster-father's request, adopted the name of Cudthorpe, honoured him as a father, and returned him all the affection of a true son. Of course it was generally understood that on the old man's death William would succeed to the property; and as he was known to be a very steady and praiseworthy young fellow, a bright and happy future was predicted for him, notwithstanding that it was an open secret that Cudthorpe had made him vow that he would never marry.

One day Oliver Cudthorpe crossed over to Southampton, to attend a cattle show that was being held in the town. He had distinctly stated, on leaving his home in the morning, that he would be back in the evening; but night came, and he had not returned. No uneasiness, however, was felt, although it was unusual for him to remain away all night. But early the next morning, when the farm hands rose to go to their labours, they were amazed to observe Cudthorpe's horse, which he had ridden the day before, standing at the gate that led into the stable yard. It was covered with mud, as if it had been galloping across the country It had been raining for some days, and the roads and fields were swampy. The horse had been a favourite one of Cudthorpe's, he had ridden it for years, and it seemed to express, by its looks and manner, that something terrible had happened.

An alarm was at once raised, and search parties set off to look for the missing man. It was a natural thought that an accident had happened. Perhaps the farmer had been seized with a fit, and had died on the way. And from the fact of the horse having returned, it was concluded that Mr. Cudthorpe's body, if he were dead, would be found not far away. From the farm, a path ran for nearly half a mile, first through a field, then through a copse, finally through a lane to an oak fence that was the boundary line of the farm estate on that side, and the lane was entered by a gateway from the high road.

The whole of this route was gone over without any discovery being made. Then information was carried about the country side, and inquiries instituted,

with the result that the news spread like wild-fire, and neighbours gathered from far and near. At last some one sharper than the rest occupied himself with examining the ground between the gateway and the farm; because, he argued, the horse could not have got in if the gate had been shut; and as it was found shut on the first search, the inference was that Mr. Cudthorpe had passed through the gateway from the high road. The examination resulted in finding what was unmistakably a little pool of blood on the turfy pathway that ran through the copse. This put a new complexion on the affair, and pointed to a crime rather than an accident; because, if an accident, where was Cudthorpe?

Presently indications were observed that something heavy had been dragged from where the blood was through the ferns and moss of the copse. There was a distinct trail, and blood was noticed on some of the ferns. The trail was followed until a pond was reached— the very pond in which the erring Mrs. Cudthorpe had committed suicide fifteen years before. Appliances were at once procured for dragging the pond, which was deep and rather large, and in a short time, to the horror of every one present, Farmer Cudthorpe's body was brought to the surface. The simple country folk were puzzled to understand what this meant. It was clear enough, of course, that poor Cudthorpe was dead; but if his horse had thrown him in the copse, or he had tumbled off through being seized with a fit, how did his body come into the water?

A consideration of this fact needed no very erudite power of reasoning to determine that the man's death was the result of crime, not accident.

Amidst deep expressions of regret the body was borne to the farm, and carried in the first instance into an outbuilding till the sodden and muddy garments could be removed. It was then noted that the heavy and antiquated repeater watch, with its massive seals and pendants, which Cudthorpe always wore, was still on the body, and when his pockets were searched a considerable sum of money in bank-notes, preserved from the wet by a leather case, was found, but not a coin of any kind was in his pockets. The notes and the watch being there seemed to indicate that he had not been robbed. A little later, when his clothes were being removed, it was observed with horror that there was a wound from which blood was still oozing on the top of the chest, just where it joins the lower part of the throat. There could now no longer be a doubt that a crime had been committed, and William Cudthorpe immediately despatched messengers for a doctor and the police.

The doctor came, and, after a careful examination of the body, he announced that death was due to a gunshot wound. The bullet had entered the gullet, cutting through the upper branches of the bronchial tube and some

of the large veins, and had then passed out through the left side of the back part of the neck. The unfortunate man must have died very quickly, and had bled a great deal. The doctor also stated that Cudthorpe was dead before he was thrown into the water.

It was now painfully evident that a strange and mysterious crime had been committed. But they had the deed before them, and who had done it? It was hardly likely it was any one in the neighbourhood, for the farmer had been universally respected, and not a soul could be pointed to as having borne him any ill- will.

It chanced that at this time a relative of mine was connected in an official capacity with the county police, and he requested that I should be asked to go down from London, and see if I could unravel the apparent mystery. I readily complied with the request, and on my arrival I felt it necessary to inquire into Mr. Cudthorpe's mode of life and antecedents. Of course I soon learnt the story of his wife's frailty and self-sought death. It was common property in the district, and every one knew it. But it did not seem to me then to have the slightest bearing on Cudthorpe's violent death.

Pursuing my inquiries farther afield, I ascertained that when he left Southampton for his house he was known to have a considerable sum of money in gold and silver on his person. Several witnesses testified to this, including the keeper of a tavern who knew him well, and at whose house he had partaken of some bread and cheese and ale preparatory to leaving for Barnfield. This fact seemed to point to robbery as the motive for the crime. The murderer had taken the coin, but had left the watch and notes as being likely to betray him.

After this, my next move was to try and find out if any one had been known to purchase a gun in Southampton about the time of the murder. But I could not get any information to that effect. Then it occurred to me to search about the scene of the crime, as there was a probability that the murderer might have thrown the weapon away. Nothing resulted from the search, however, and then I thought I would have the pond dragged. And after two days' work we fished up an old musket bearing the Tower mark, and date 1836. This, then, was the weapon with which the foul deed had been done; and in it I was sanguine I had a powerful clue that would enable me to run the criminal down.

The possession of a gun of that kind must have been known to others besides the possessor himself, and so I had a strong belief that it would prove the key to solving the mystery. Week after week, however, went by, and brought us no nearer the solution. But at last it came to my knowledge that the gun had been stolen from the armoury of a militia regiment in Southampton, though up to then it had not been missed. My next course was to try and find

out who was likely to have opportunities of stealing the gun, and suspicion fastened on a young man who for some days had been seen hanging about the *dépôt* of the regiment. He was described as being about seventeen or eighteen years of age, rather tall, thin and sickly in appearance, and looking as if he had gone through a great deal of hardship. An old army pensioner was in charge of the place, and to him the young fellow had stated that he was in great poverty, whereupon the pensioner had given him food and allowed him to sleep a couple of nights on the premises.

Even with this information to go upon, it seemed reasonable to assume that the young man was the criminal.

Then a curious question suggested itself to me.

Why did he select Mr. Cudthorpe as his victim, and shoot him down on his own estate? This question brought to my mind the story I had heard about Mrs. Cudthorpe having left a piece of paper behind her when she committed suicide, on which she had written, "My death shall be avenged." Was this crime an act of vengeance? Somehow it seemed to me, when I considered all the circumstances, that it was.

Following up the clue I had got, I succeeded in tracing the young man to Salisbury, where a fair was being held. And I found him at last in company with some soldiers, drinking in a tavern. He was a wretched, starved, miserable-looking creature, with a hunted, scared look in his pale face. As I arrested him he sighed and murmured:

"I am glad."

"Of what?" I asked.

"That you have taken me, for I was going mad with the burden of my secret. But I killed him in order to avenge my mother, and because he would not help me."

These words were a revelation, and soon the sad truth was known. The murderer was the illegitimate son of Mrs. Cudthorpe, his father being the lover with whom she fled. The lad had been brought up by a female relative of Mrs. Cudthorpe, who had preserved the secret of his existence, but she was weak enough to tell him the story of his mother's shame and suicide, and how she had left a paper saying her death would be avenged. That seems to have sunk into the boy's mind, and he dwelt upon it night and day. At last his guardian died, and he was left to his own resources. But he could get no one to own him and no one to help him. Then it occurred to him to write to Mr. Cudthorpe, making known who he was, and solicit help from him. Cudthorpe, however, took no notice of the letters, and kept the existence of his guilty wife's son a secret from every one as far as he was concerned. At last the wretched youth resolved to kill him. He stole the gun, and lay in wait for his victim in the copse,

where he shot him down, and, by dint of extraordinary physical exertion, dragged the dead man to the pond, as he wished to throw his body into the same place where his mother had committed suicide.

Such was the sad and pitiable story of sorrow and shame which a woman's frailty was responsible for. Little could Fanny Cudthorpe have dreamed what the result would be when she listened to the lying words of her false and villainous lover, for whose sake she had abandoned home, friends, honour, husband— everything that an upright woman should most treasure.

The unhappy youth, who had thus deprived his mother's husband of his life, was duly tried and sentenced to death. But an agitation was got up in his favour, and his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. It would have been more merciful, however, to have carried out the original sentence of the law, for at his age penal servitude for life was fraught with horrors, compared with which death would have been a merciful release.

12: The Little Black Door

D. H. Souter

1862-1935

The Bulletin, 23 Dec 1915

IT was a beastly hot day; 92° under the Post Office Arcade and God-knows-how much in the wilds of Pyrmont, where Dicky Hurton had just made his usual 11 o'clock selection at Casey's lunch counter. Devilled kidneys washed down with the customary whisky and soda, flavored by a stale jest with the blonde barmaid before he slipped out into the sun-blistered street and faced the hot wind.

His smelly skin store was only five minutes' walk away, but it seemed a mile. Things were pretty rotten in the hide business. The drought and the war were playing the devil with things. A fellow didn't know where he was. At least Dicky didn't know where he was.

(Compton and Co.'s bill was due to-morrow.)

The perspiration trickled from under his hat, ran down his fat jowl and soaked into his already limp collar. The hot pavement burned through his boot-soles. The dust choked him. What little wind there was felt like a blast from a brick kiln.

(He would see Compton by himself that afternoon.)

There was one part of the street which he always hated to pass. A blank stretch of white wall enclosing a piece of waste ground between two wool stores. It always suggested to him that on its further side lay a disused cemetery. Yet he knew very well that there was nothing there but some scrapped machinery.

(Compton would have to renew that bill for another thirty days.)

Dicky had a heavy day before him. He must put a step in. Not that he was in clined for effort of any description. A hot day always made him lazy. He would like a week at Tuggerah. Fishing. That would be great. Looking down into the dark green water. The nip-nip of the fish at the end of the line, and then hand over—

Coming straight at him was the last man on earth whom he wanted to meet— Compton's accountant, not ten yards away.

Then in the hated wall, right at his elbow, a door opened. A little black door. Just the height of a man, but so narrow that Dicky, who was plump of figure, had to squeeze to get through it. With a sigh of relief he heard it shut softly behind him and found himself in a cool, moonlit gallery at the tail end of a long procession of cowled figures who walked two abreast chanting a plaintive melody. Somewhere, far in the lead, a muffled drum throbbed monotonously. The passage was very long and very narrow; so narrow that the

procession, marching heavily and pausing on each step, brushed the walls with its swaying shoulders. It was so long that the end was lost in vague shadow. In the dim light the peaked cowls, undulating rhythmically, looked like the articulations on the back of a great worm. The floor was cool and springy as a carpet of green moss, and high up on the qails banners swung pendulously.

Dicky carried his hat in his hand. It seemed the proper thing to do as he stepped in time to the solemn beat of that distant drum.

Dicky rather enjoyed it. Unconsciously he realised the spirit of the thing, felt that he was part of the show. He walked for hours without exhaustion. Eyes shut, head and shoulders bent, swaying from side to side.

The drum gave a double beat and they were in a vast space, where stone pillars towered like tree trunks and lost themselves in an altitude which no man could measure. The procession deployed to the right and left, and Dicky found himself standing in front of a great rose window of stained glass beneath which tapers were beginning to wink upon a great altar. On its lower step a coffin rested, covered by a white pall. The cowled figures formed a wide semi-circle, and glancing over his shoulder Dicky saw that they were as the sands of the sea for multitude.

Again the drum beat twice and the chant ceased as a little, grey-bearded man ascended the rostrum and began to pray. His voice had the thin tones of great age, and he spoke in a strange tongue. Supplication, vindication, praise and blame, sarcasm and pity, glory and grief, all had a place in his outpouring. It soothed Dicky like the *vox humana* stop of a great organ. Presently he turned and showed a face haggard and yellow as a skull. Green pin-points blazed in his shadowed orbits, his chin-whisker wagged obscenely as, mumbling something that might have been a benediction or a curse, he pointed at Dicky Burton.

Slowly the cowled figures raised their arms, flung back their sleeves with a quick gesture, and pointed each a fleshless finger at Dicky.

It was all double beats on the drum now. It unnerved Dicky, and he would have collapsed utterly only he was seized from behind and pressed towards the coffin. The old priest swept the pall aside. With a superhuman effort Dicky shook himself free of the clutching hands and turned and ran.

The drum thundered tempestuously. The cowled figures kilted their skirts and, gibbering incoherently, took up the chase, led by the old priest. Winged by terror, Dicky flew; but ever at his heels was the pad-pad of a multitude of following feet. They loped along without effort as if they meant to accompany rather than to recapture. Strive as he might, Dicky could not shake them off, and the little black door seemed so far away. The persistent thudding of the drum drove him on, and he thought he could last the distance. It couldn't be so very far now, for here were the flapping banners and there the converging

walls. Another mile or a mile and a half and he would reach the little black door beyond which lay the sunlit street and safety. He was sure he could do it. The chatter behind him was less voluble and the drum was throbbing more consistently. He was all right.

Another hundred yards— fifty, twenty, ten yards—and springing at the little black door he pulled it open and staggered into the sunshine. Compton's accountant ran a couple of steps and caught him before he fell.

Later in the day he told Compton that Dicky was failing physically as well as financially. Of course Dicky knew that it was only the heat, and, being one of those hard cases who never have a headache in their lives, was quite ashamed of his queer turn, but realised that he ought to see a doctor about it. Not that he could tell all the silly tale to an utter stranger— he would think he was mad. So he dropped in during the evening on Dr. Jim Brady, a chap he used to go to school with, and told it rather as a humorous adventure than as a serious experience. Jim smiled and listened sympathetically. He felt Dicky's pulse, examined his chest, made him hop round the room and take deep breaths, as if he were a real patient to be charged so much a visit and not merely an old chum who had popped in to tell a funny yarn. Dicky was quite huffy about it, and when Dr. Jim wrote him a prescription and advised abstemiousness in food and drink, even counselled him to confine himself to two cigars a day, Dicky said it was all damn rot and not the sort of thing to pass out to a boyhood friend.

"Sorry," said Dr. Jim. "but I can't have you ducking in at that little black door again. They mightn't let you out next time, Dicky."

Compton renewed Dicky's bill in spite of the protests of his accountant, and Dicky lived very quietly for nearly three weeks. He feared and avoided the blank wall. Since he had "cut out the booze" his route did not lie along it so frequently as before. Moreover, he found that one whisky and soda just before going to bed sent him to sleep. Yes. And one at the end of the day didn't hurt him any, either. This was encouraging, so he had one at lunch-time as well; for if a man has to cut all the nice things out of his life in order to live he might just as well be dead.

The very next day he walked the whole length of the blank wall. There was no door there. There never had been one. It was all bunkum.

He turned in at Casey's pub and had a pitch with the blonde barmaid. She was very solicitous about his welfare, and he assured her that the absurd rumors about his being on the water-waggon were entirely without foundation. He proved it to her several times— and made a date with her for 11 a.m. next day if she would guarantee devilled kidneys on the side table. It was a bet.

He was quite all right.

He slapped himself manfully on the chest as the office clock pointed to 10.55 next morning. He took his hat and cocked it jauntily over one ear, and grinning defiance at Dr. Brady's advice set out for Casey's pub, the blonde barmaid and the devilled kidneys by the route of the blank wall. There it stretched in all its vacant whiteness. Not a door in it, not even a crack. He pursed his lips to spit his contempt at it— and the little black door opened again.

"Heart failure," said the Coroner. But Dr. Jim Brady knew that Dicky Ilurton had gone through the little black door for good.

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13: The Weddingcution

Ernest O'Ferrall

1881-1925

The Xmas Bulletin, 13 Dec 1913

As by "Kodak", O'Ferrall's usual pseudonym

"DON'T cry here!" wailed the early and irritable barmaid to the figure of grief strewn on the cushioned lounge.

The figure stirred and a white face looked up at her as she hung over the bar.

"Where can I cry?"

"Not in here, anyhow! It's jus' horrible ter listen to yer!" She rubbed the handle of the beer-pump viciously and carefully avoided the dumb, appealing glances the mourner cast after her.

At last he spoke, slowly and with great difficulty. "You—never had to— go wed— weddingcution!"

"What's that yer say?"

"Weddingcution!"

"What's that?"

"Exemarriage— all same thing!"

The barmaid condescended to puzzle over it for five seconds. Then she waved her rubber despairingly, and turned to her work.

"Oh, I don't know what yer tryin' ter say!"

There was a thoughtful interval. And then the man on the bench roused himself again and muttered, "You never seen man hung."

"No, and I don't wanter! Hangin's is only fit fer hangmen and reporters! You never seen a woman at an execution!"

"Lots of 'em!" scoffed the drunk sleepily. "Gaols full of 'em— all dressed up— horrible!" His chin fell forward on his chest and he began to mumble a strange mixture of solemn words: "Man that is born o' woman hath but short time ter live an's fuller misery. He cometh up like flower an's cut down in holy ceremony o' matrimony, in presence of large an' fashionable congregation. Dearly B'loved, we are gathered together this day to commit body to earth, an' may—"

"Oh, fer goodness sake!" The impatient barmaid moved towards the door— evidently to call the landlord; but held back on seeing two pressmen enter the bar.

"Hello, Tess. Seen Wilson about anywhere? O Lord! Here he is!" They made their way across to the crumpled figure and tried unsuccessfully to rouse him.

"No use, Jack. Go and get a cab and we'll take him home." The younger man went out, and the director of the search party turned to the girl. "Has he been here long?"

"About an hour," she answered wearily. "I never seen him as bad as this before."

The searcher looked at the sleeping man and laughed.

"He was down to do the execution of that chap who died of heart disease in the condemned cell, and took about six whiskies to brace himself up. When the gaol people rang up the office to say the hanging was off, he was put on to do the wedding of old Bullfield's daughter. I guess the champagne must have finished him. Right you are, Jack. Just take his other arm, will you? Good-bye, Tess."

"Good-bye," echoed the girl, as they dragged the limp one forth to his chariot.

Five minutes after they had gone she noticed a crumpled handful of white paper lying on the floor. She picked it up curiously, and, smoothing it out on the counter, found that it consisted of about 30 loose slips covered with untidy handwriting interspersed with strange strokes and circles, and hedged here and there with capital E's with their tongues torn out. Without knowing that she was handling the raw material of a daily paper, she planted her elbows firmly on the counter and started to read: —

PAYING THE PENALTY.
FASHIONABLE WEDDINGCUTION.
CONDEMNED MAN PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE ON SCALTAR.

IT WAS a cold, raw mornoon— the sort of mornoon when the mist clings like a winding sheet to the city and the heavy carts going empty to their work rumble like the tumbrils that rolled through Paris in the days of the Terror. The large and fashionable assemblage of press guests waiting in St. Collection's Gaol, though well wrapped up, shivered in the cold air, and starced nervousy whenever a warder stirred in the central aisle. Contrary to the usual custom, there were a large number of women present, and many of them were observed to be weeping furtively. Even the men were deeply affected. Doubtless the awful court-room scene, which had rung down the curtain three weeks before on a healthy young bachelor's life, was fresh in the minds of all there. And now they were waiting to witness the dreadful finale! A few minutes more and, in obedience to his Judge's sentence, lie would be "married by the neck until he was dead."

The harsh notes of the tolling prison bells, though somewhat muffled by the thick walls, beat ceaselessly on overtaxed nerves. Heavens! how slow they

were! What must be the feelings of the condemned bride-groom, waiting patiently in the vestry cell, with the best hangman's assistant and the awful functionary himself!

A whisper presently ran round the gaol that the condemned man would not be blindfolded or pinioned, and that the hangman had not troubled to disguise himself in any way, save by putting on a white shirt over his ordinary clothes. Scarcely had the witnesses recovered from the shock occasioned by this astounding rumor, when a tragic procession of three was seen to be shuffling towards the scafaltar.

At the same instant, a shiver of horror ran through the staring crowd. The principal witness for the prosecution (a woman dressed in white) swept up the aisle on the arm of the family solicitor and attended by three crying girls bearing floral tributes for the funeral. Right up to the scafaltar went the relentless woman in white, and stood like an avenging ghost by the side of the doomed man. The mumbled words of the burial service were heard, and a woman— probably some stricken relative of the condemned— started a shrill keening that sent an electric thrill of horror through the most hardened verger. They were adjusting the knot now—the knot that would put an end to the life he had revelled in until the very instant he clapped the diamond handcuffs on her finger and knew that he was her prisoner. Though he had never realised it till that moment, the toils had been closing round him for months. It was too late to think of flight, and the evidence was so strong against him that he had pleaded "Guilty" at his trial, and accepted the dread sentence of deathrimony with what resolution he could command. Only those in the front row caught his last words— cruelly cut short by the drawing of the ringbolt. He had paid the penalty of his crime!

The usual inquest was held later amidst great enthusiasm at the home of the bride's parents. The evidence, which was purely of a formal character, was both numerous and costly, and dancing was indulged in till a late hour. The jury returned a verdict of accidental matrimony, and strongly recommended the accused to mercy on the ground of his youth. His Honor, who was much affected, remarked before passing sentence that the prisoner had always been a good son to him, and.... A quiet but pretty execution took place... .The condemned man slept well....

AFTER THAT there was a smudge and a blot and a squashed fly. But the barmaid, who had been married herself, slowly grasped the situation. With tears on her nose she went upstairs and hid the document reverently in her box among the remains of her trousseau.

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14: M'Neills' Tiger-Sheep

Jane Barlow

1857-1917

In: *A Creel of Irish Stories*, 1897

The feud between the Timothy O'Farrells and Neil M'Neills at Meenaclure was not of very long standing, for the dowager Mrs O'Farrell and the elder Mrs M'Neill, who had been by no means young when it began, were still to the fore, and not yet even considered to have attained "a great ould age intirely." This seems a mere mushroom-growth compared with some of our family quarrels, which have been handed down from father to son through so many generations that everybody regards them as a part of the established order of things in the world of their parish. Still, to the younger people, who had been but children at its birth, it seemed to have lasted a long while, and their juniors would have found a different state of affairs almost unthinkable. For them the origin of the enmity had already begun to loom dimly through a mist of tradition, which would tend as time went on to grow vaguer and falser, until at length nobody would be left who could give a clear account of what it was all about. So far, however, all the neighbours who were "any age to speak of" knew the rights of the case well enough. And this is what had happened.

It was a cloudless midsummer evening, perhaps twenty years back— nobody is over-particular about chronology at Meenaclure— and all the dogs and children were away out on the wild land towards the mountains, minding the sheep, to keep them from coming home and eating up the crops. From April to October that was every year their occupation, and a very engrossing one they found it. For the scraggy little sheep of the district are endowed with an appetite for green food worthy of any locust, added to a cleverness at taking fences that would discredit no hunter; and this makes them a constant peril to the painfully-tilled fields, whose produce they threaten like a sort of visibly-embodied blight. Luckily, it is one whose ravages can be averted by timely precautions; and therefore, as soon as potatoes are *kibbed*, and oats sown, the sheep are driven off to a discreet distance on the moors, whence they are prevented from returning by a strong cordon of wary mongrels and active spalpeens. The children of such places as Meenaclure find the sunnier half of the year a season of perpetual school-vacation, when the longest days are watched out to their last lingering glimmer among the tussocks and boulders, so that the morning seems to have begun ages and ages ago by the time one straggles home, three-parts asleep on one's feet, the flocks having already betaken themselves to completer repose, or, recognising the unattainability of young green oats, having set their nibbling mouths safely up

the swarded hill-slopes. For that night the fields may lie secure from marauding trespassers.

On this particular day, however, owing to some remissness of the young M'Neills and their shrewd-visaged dog, who were all led away by the excitement of a rabbit-hunt, one of the sheep under their charge successfully eluded observation, and broke through the line, with two comrades presently pattering after her. With a wiliness well masked by her expression of meek fatuity, she slunk along unseen in furzy folds of the broken ground, and late in the afternoon had arrived near the forbidden pastures. There she lurked furtively for a while, fully determined to hop over the fence of Timothy O'Farrell's oatfield, the very first moment that nobody seemed to be about. This opportunity soon occurred, as the O'Farrells' holding lies somewhat apart in a slight hollow, which secludes it from the little cabin-cluster standing a bit higher round a curve in the long green glacis-like foot-slope of Slieve Gowran.

Thus it came to pass that when Timothy O'Farrell returned from turf-cutting on the bog with his sister Margaret and his brothers Hugh and Patrick, the first thing they noticed was an object like a movable grey boulder cropping up on the delicate sheeny surface of their oat-patch. Whereupon: "Be the powers of smoke," said Timothy, "if there isn't them bastes in it agin."

"Three of them, no less," said Margaret.

"M'Neills', you may bet your brogues," said Hugh.

"The divil doubt it," said Timothy. Patrick, who was a youth of action rather than speech, had already plunged head-foremost towards the scene of the trespass.

There were several reasons why doubts of the M'Neills' responsibility in the matter should be relegated to the divil. In the first place, the M'Neills owned more sheep than anybody else at Meenaclure, whereas the O'Farrells owned none; and secondly, the O'Farrells had sown an unusually extensive patch of oats, while the M'Neills had planted potatoes only. The tendencies of this situation are obvious. Again, the O'Farrells had more than once before undergone the like inroads, and on these occasions Neil M'Neill had not, Timothy considered, shown by any means an adequate amount of penitence. "Bedad, now," Timothy reported to his family, "he was cool enough over it. Maybe it's *his* notion of fine farmin' to graze his bastes on other people's growin' crops." A deep-rooted sentiment of respect, however, restrained him from uttering these sarcasms in public. For Timothy, though the head and father of a family, had seen not many more than a score of harvests; and Neil, a dozen years his senior, enjoyed a high reputation among the neighbours as a very knowledgable man altogether. After the second incursion, it is true, Timothy's wrath had so far overcrowed his awe as to make him "up and tell"

Neil M'Neill that "if he didn't mind his ould shows of sheep himself, he'd be apt to find somebody that'd do it in a way he mightn't like." Still, the affair went no farther, and Timothy had soon reverted to his customary attitude of amicable veneration. But at this third repetition of the offence his anger could not be expected to subside so harmlessly.

Pat's shouts and flourishing gallop speedily routed the conscious-stricken sheep, and two of them whisked up the hillside like thistledown on a brisk breeze; but the third, who was the ringleader, leaped the fence with so little judgment that she came floundering against Timothy, who grasped her dexterously by the hind-legs.

Now, to catch a Slieve Gowran sheep alive in the open is a rare and difficult feat— proverbially impossible, indeed, at Meenaclure; but Timothy and his brethren were at a loss how they should best turn this achievement of it to account. They felt that simply to let the creature go again would be a flat and unprofitable result, yet what else could they do with it? While they pondered, and their captive impotently wriggled, Hugh suddenly had an inspiration. It came to him at the sight of two large black pots, which stood beside a smouldering fire against the white end-wall of their little house. To an unenlightened observer, they might have suggested some gipsy encampment, but Hugh knew they betokened that his mother had been dyeing her yarn. The Widow O'Farrell was a great spinner, and a large part of the wool shorn in the parish travelled over her whirring wheel on its way to Fergus the weaver's loom. A few old sacks lying near the fire had contained the ingredients which she used according to an immemorial recipe. From the mottled grey lichen, *crottal*, which clothes our boulders with hues strangely like those of the fleeces browsing among them, she extracted a warm tawny brown; a flaky mass of the rusty black turf-soot supplied her with a strong yellow, and the dull-red bog-ore boiled paradoxically into black.

"Be aisy, will you, you little thief of the mischief," Hugh said to the sheep. "M'Neills' she is, sure enough; there's the mark. Musha, lads, let's give her a dab or so of what's left in the ould pots. 'Twould improve her apparance finely."

"Ay would it," said Timothy. "She's an unnathural ugly objic' of a crathur the way she is now. Bedad, they've a couple of barrels desthroyed on us."

"A few odd sthrakes of the black and yella'd make her look iligant," said Hugh. "Do you take a hould of her, Tim. Och, man, don't let her away, but lift her aisy. Maggie, did you see e'er a sign of the stick they had stirring the stuff wid? But it's apt to be cool enough agin now."

"Ah, boys dear, but it's ragin' mad M'Neills 'll be if you go for to do such a thing," Margaret said, half-scared, and blundering in her flurry on a wrong

note, as she at once perceived. For her brothers promptly responded in a sort of fugal movement—

"And sure who's purvintin' of them? They're welcome, bedad, them, or the likes of them. Is it ragin'? Maybe it's raison they'll have before they're a great while oulder, musha Moyah." And they proceeded with all the greater enthusiasm to carry out their design, which became more ambitiously elaborate in the course of execution.

Early next morning, while the mountain-shadow still threw a purple cloak over the steep fields of Meenaclure, where all the dewdrops were ready to twinkle as soon as a ray reached them, and when Mrs Neil M'Neill was preparing breakfast, which at this short-coming summer season consisted chiefly of Indian meal, her eldest daughter ran in to her with news. There was somethin', Molly said, leppin' about in the pigstye. Now, the M'Neills' stye just then stood empty, in the interval between the despatch of their last lean fat pig to Letterkenny fair and the hoped-for fall in the market-price of the wee springy which was to replace him. So Mrs Neil said, "Och, blathers, child alive, what would there be in it at all?"

"But it's rustlin' in the straw,— I heard it,— and duntin' the door wid its head like," Molly persisted.

"Sure then, run and see what it is, honey," said her mother, who was pre-occupied with a critical stage of her porridge; and a piece of practical business on hand generally disposes us to adopt a sceptical attitude towards marvels. "Maybe one of the hins might have fluttered into it; but there's apter to not be anythin'."

Molly, whose mood was not enterprising, reinforced her courage with the company of Judy and Thady before she went to investigate; and a minute afterwards she came rushing back uttering terrified lamentations, whereof the burden seemed to be, "It's a tiger-sheep." Her report could no longer be disregarded, and the rest of the family were presently grouped round the low wall of the little lean-to shed, which did really contain an inmate of extraordinary aspect. Its form was that of a newly-shorn sheep, long-legged and lank-bodied like others of its race, but in colouring altogether exceptional. Boldly marked stripes of black and tawny yellow alternated all over it, with a brilliant symmetry not surpassed by the natural history chromograph which flamed on the wall of Rathflesk National School, and which now recurred to little Molly's mind in conjunction with the fact that the wearer of the striated skin "was a cruel, savage, wicked baste, that would be swallyin' all before it," whereupon she had shrieked "Tiger-sheep!" and fled from ravening jaws.

Her parents and grandparents, on the contrary, stood and surveyed the phenomenon with almost unutterable wrath. Traces of a human hand in its

production were plain enough, for the beast had been fastened into the stye by a rope round her neck, which was further ornamented with long bracken-fronds and tufts of curiously-coloured wool, studiously grotesque. In fact, had she been mercilessly endowed with "the giftie," she would no doubt have suffered from a mortification as acute as was that of her owners, instead of trotting off quite satisfied, when once she was released and at liberty to resume her fastidious nibbling among the dewy tussocks.

"That's some divilment of the O'Farrells, and the back of me hand to the whole of them!" said Neil M'Neill, with clenched eyebrows. "Themselves and their blamed impidence, and their stinkin' brashes! The ould woman's niver done boilin' them up for her wool. It's slung about her head I wish they were, sooner than to be used for misthratin' other people's dacint bastes."

"'Deed now, thrue for you," said his mother. "Sure wasn't she tellin' me herself yesterday evenin' she'd been busy all day gettin' her yarn dyed, agin she would be knittin' the boys their socks? Gad'rin' the sut she said she was this good while. That's the way they done it— och, the vagabones!"

"It's a bad job," said old Joe M'Neill, shaking his despondent white head.

"I wouldn't ever ha' thought it of them," said Mrs Neil. "On'y them boys is that terrible wild; goodness forgive them, there's no demented notion they mayn't take into their heads. But what at all could we do for the misfort'nit crather? Sure it's distressful to see her goin' about that scandalous figure. I can't abide the sight of her."

Our bogland dyes, however, are very fast, and for many a day that summer Mrs Neil had to endure the apparition of the O'Farrells' victim, who of course became a painfully conspicuous object on the hillside, where she roamed blissfully unaware of how her owners' eyes followed her with gloomy resentment, and of how their neighbours' children, catching up Molly's cry, shouted one to another derisively, "Och, look at M'Neills' tiger-sheep!" But long and long after the parti-coloured fleece had vanished for good and all, the effects of the outrage continued to make themselves felt in the social life of Meenaclure, where it must be owned that the inhabitants are rather prone to keep their grudges in the same time-proof wallet with their gratitudes. And the grudges, somehow, often seem to lie atop. In this case, moreover, the injury had an especial bitterness, because the M'Neills came of an old sheep-keeping class, whose little flock was an inheritance handed down, dwindling, through many generations, and whose main interests and activities had time out of mind turned upon wool, so that everything connected with it had acquired in their eyes the peculiar sanctity with which we often invest the materials and implements belonging to our own craft. A chimney-sweep has probably some feeling of disinterested regard for his bags and brushes. Accordingly, sheep

were to them a serious, almost solemn subject, altogether unsuitable for a practical joke; and an insult offered to them was felt to strike at the honour of the family. Small blame to them, therefore, if, as the neighbours said, they were ragin' mad entirely, and turned a deaf ear to all pacific overtures.

The O'Farrells, to do them justice, admitted upon reflection that they had maybe gone a little beyond the beyonds, and were disposed to be apologetic and conciliatory. But when old Mrs O'Farrell, one day meeting the two smallest M'Neills on the road, presented each of them with a pale brown egg, which she had just found in the nest of her speckled hen away down beside the river, the result merely was that her gifts were smashed into an impromptu omelet before the M'Neills' door, by the direction of the master of the house, who only wished the ould sinner had been there herself to see the way he'd serve that, or anythin' else she'd have the impidence to be sendin' into his place. And later on, when the feathery gold of the O'Farrells' oatfield had been bound in stooks, and the hobbledehoy Pat was despatched to inquire whether the M'Neills might be wantin' e'er a thrifle of straw after the thrashin' for darnin' their bit of thatch, the polite attention elicited nothing except a peremptory injunction to "quit out of that."

In taking up this attitude, the M'Neills had at first the support of their neighbours' sympathy, public opinion being that it was no thing for the O'Farrells to go do. But as time went on, people began to add occasionally that sure maybe they didn't mean any such great harm after all, and that they were only young boyoes, without as much sense among the whole of them as would keep a duck waddling straight. What was the use of being so stiff over a trifle? These magnanimous sentiments were, no doubt, strengthened by the fact that in so small a community as Meenaclure a permanent breach between any two families could not but entail some inconveniences upon all the rest. It was irksome, for instance, to bear in mind throughout a friendly chat that at the casual mention of a neighbour's name the person you were talking to would look "as bitter as sut" and freeze into grim dumbness; or to have to consider, should you wish for a loan of Widdy O'Farrell's market-basket, that you must by no means "let on" to her your intention of carrying home in it Mrs M'Neill's grain of tea; or to be called upon to choose between the company of Neil M'Neill and Hugh O'Farrell on the way home from the fair, because neither of them, as the saying is, would look the same side of the road as the other. Such obligations lay stumbling-blocks in our daily path, and nip growths of good fellowship, and are generally embarrassing and vexatious. However, Meenaclure had to put up with this state of things for so many a long day that people learned to include it unprotestingly among their necessary evils.

Under these circumstances, it was of course only in the nature of things that the little M'Neills and O'Farrells, the smallest of whom had not been born at the time of the quarrel, should always put out their tongues at one another whenever they met. They regarded the salutation, indeed, as a sort of ceremonial observance, which could not be omitted without a sense of indecorum. Thus, one inclement autumn, when Patrick O'Farrell was no longer a hobbledehoy, but "as big a man as you'd meet goin' most roads," he went off to a *rabble*, that is, a hiring-fair, at Letterkenny, and took service for six months with a farmer away at Raphoe. On the day that he left Meenaclure, he happened, just as he was setting out, to meet Molly M'Neill, who had by this time grown into "a tall slip of a girl going on for sixteen," and they duly exchanged the customary greeting, Pat getting the better of her by at least half-an-inch of insult. But when he returned on a soft April evening, it chanced again that one of the first persons he fell in with was Molly. She was coming along between the newly-clad hedges of a narrow lane, and when he caught sight of her first he mistook her for his cousin, Norah O'Farrell, she looked so much taller than his recollections. But, on perceiving his error, he merely gave up his intention of saying, "Well, Norah, and how's yourself this great while?" and slunk past without making any demonstration whatever. Molly would hardly have noticed it, indeed, as when she saw him coming she began to minutely examine the buds on the thorn-bushes, and did not lift an eyelash while they were passing. Yet, as they went their several ways, Pat felt that he had somehow shirked a duty; and Molly, for her part, could not shake off a sense of having failed in loyalty to her family until she had relieved her conscience by announcing at home that she was "just after meetin' that great *ugly*-lookin' gomeral, Pat O'Farrell, slingein' down the road below Widdy Byrne's."

The year which followed this spring was one of bad seasons and hard fare at Meenaclure, and towards the end of it Pat O'Farrell came reluctantly to perceive that he could best mend his own and his family's tattered fortunes by emigrating to the States. His resolve, though regretted by all his neighbours, except of course the M'Neills, was considered sensible enough; and at the "convoy" which assembled according to custom to see him off on his long journey the general purport of conversation was to the effect that, bedad, everybody'd be missing poor Pat, but sure himself was the fine clever boy wouldn't be any time gettin' together the price of a little place back again in the ould country. The M'Neills alone were of the opinion, expressed by Neil's mother, that "the only pity was the rest of the pack weren't goin' along wid Pat; unless, like enough, they'd be more than the people out in those parts

could put up wid all at onst, the way they'd be landin' them back on us like a bundle of ould rubbish washin' up agin wid the tide."

But surprise was the universal feeling when, about six months later, it became known that Neil M'Neill's eldest child Molly had also made up her mind to cross over the water. Her own family were foremost among the wonderers; for Molly had always been considered rather excessively timid and quiet— certainly the very last girl in the parish whom one would have thought likely to make such a venture. They half-believed that when it came to the point, "sorra a fut of her would go"; and they much more than half hoped so, notwithstanding that their rent had fallen into alarming arrears, and none of her brethren were old enough to help. Molly, however, actually went, amid lamentations and forebodings, both of her own and other people's, all alike unavailing to stop her. Mrs Timothy O'Farrell said she'd be long sorry to have a daughter of hers streeling off to the ends of the earth. And I think that Molly's mother *was* long sorry, poor soul, through many a lonesome day and anxious night.

After these two departures, things at Meenaclure took their wonted course, a little more sadly and dully perhaps than heretofore. Communications from abroad came rarely and scantily, for neither of the absentees had much scholarship. Their sheep-herding summers had greatly curtailed that, and it would have been difficult to say whether Pat's or Molly's scrawls were the briefer or obscurer. But not long after Molly M'Neill had gone, one of Pat O'Farrell's letters contained an important piece of news— nothing less than that he was "just about gettin' married." He did not go into particulars about the match, merely describing the future Mrs Pat as the "best little girl in or out of Ireland," and opining that they mightn't do too badly. His family were not overjoyed at the event, which might be considered to presage a falling off in remittances; and his mother was much cast down thereby, her thoughts going to the tune of "my son is my son till he gets him a wife." Still, she was not so dispirited as to be past finding some solace in an innuendo; and she almost certainly designed one when she took occasion to remark just outside the chapel door, where she had been telling the neighbours her news: "But ah, sure, I don't mind so long as he hasn't took up wid one of them black-headed girls I never can abide the looks of. And 'deed now there's no fear of that. Pat's just the same notion as myself, I know very well." For Mrs Neil M'Neill was standing well within earshot, and, as everybody remembered, "there wasn't a fair hair on the head of e'er a one of her childer." However, Mrs Neil proved equal to the emergency, and remarked, addressing Katty Byrne, that "It was rael queer the sort of omadhawns she'd heard tell of some girls, who, belike, knew no better, bein' content to take great lumberin' louts of fellers, wid the

ugly-coloured hair on their heads like nothin' in the world except a bit of new thatch before it would be combed straight."

She spoke without any presentiment that she would soon have to go through much the same experience as old Mrs O'Farrell; but so it was. For a week or two later came a letter from Molly stating that she was "just after gettin' married." Her husband, who she said was earning grand wages, bore the obnoxious name of O'Farrell, but there was nothing strange in the coincidence, as the district about Meenaclure abounds in Farrells and Neills, with and without prefixes of O and Mac; and it seemed only natural to suppose a similar state of things in New York. Nobody could deny that there were plenty of O'Farrells very dacint people. So Molly's mother mourned in private over an event which seemed to set a seal upon the separation between her daughter and herself; and in public was well pleased and very proud, laying great stress upon the fact that Molly had sent the money-order just as usual,— "Sorra a fear of little Molly forgettin' the ould people at all,"— and serenely scorning Mesdames O'Farrell's opinion that "when a girl had to thravel off that far after a husband, it was the quare crooked stick of a one she'd be apt to pick up."

After this Meenaclure received no very thrilling foreign news for about a twelve-month. Then one fine Sunday, the Widdy O'Farrell was to be seen sailing along Masswards, with her head held extremely high in its stiff-frilled cap and dark blue hood, and with a swinging sweep of her black homespun skirt, which betrayed an exultant stride. All her family, indeed, wore a somewhat elated and consequential air, which most of her neighbours allowed to be justifiable when she explained that she had become the happy grandmother of her Pat's fine young son: the letter with the announcement had come last night. This was indeed promotion, for her son Tim's children were all girls. With the congratulations upon so auspicious an event even old Mrs M'Neill could mingle only subdued murmurs about brats taking after their fathers that weren't good for much, the dear knows. However, she had not long to wait for as good or better a right to strut chin in air, since it was with a great-grandmother's dignity that a few days later she could inform everybody of the arrival of Molly's boy. She would, I believe, have found it very hard to forgive Molly if the child had been merely a daughter.

This rivalry, as it were, between the estranged families in the matter of news from their non-resident members recurred with the same equipoised result on more than one similar occasion, and was extended even to less happy events. For instance, one time when Pat wrote in great distraction, and a wilder scrawl than usual, that the "three childer was dreadful bad wid the mumps, he doubted would they get over it," the next mail brought just such a

report from Molly; which was rather awkward for her mother and grandmother, who had been going about passing the remark that "when childer got proper mindin' they never took anythin' of the sort."

At length, however, when perhaps half-a-dozen years had gone by, the balance of good fortune dipped decidedly towards the O'Farrells. One autumn morning a letter came from Pat to say that he and his family were coming home. He had saved up a tidy little bit of money, and meant to try could he settle himself on a dacint little bit of land; at any rate he would get a sight of the ould place and the ould people. Great was the rejoicing of the O'Farrells. Whereas for the M'Neills at this time the meagre mail-bags contained no foreign letter, no letter at all, bad or good, let alone one fraught with such grand news. Molly's mother, it is true, dreamt two nights running that Molly had come home; but dreams are a sorry substitute for a letter, especially when everybody knows, and some people remind you, that they always go by contraries. So Mrs Neil fretted and foreboded, and had not the heart to be sarcastic, no matter how arrogantly the O'Farrells might comport themselves.

Then the autumn days shrivelled and shrank, and one morning in late November the word went round Meenaclure that the *Kaley* that evening would be up at Fergus the weaver's. This meeting-place was always popular, Fergus being a well-liked man, with a wide space round his hearth. And this night's conversazione promised to be particularly enjoyable, as it had leaked out that Dan Farrell and Mrs Keogh and Dinny O'Neill were concerned in what is at Meenaclure technically termed "a join," for the purpose of treating the kaleying company to cups of tea. In fact, the materials for that refreshment, done up in familiar purple paper parcels, lying on the window-seat, were obvious to everybody who came into the room, though to have seemed aware of them would have been a grave breach of manners. When all the company were mustered, and the fire was burning its brightest, Fergus might well look round his house with satisfaction, for so large an assembly seldom came together, and universal harmony seemed to prevail. This was not disturbed by the fact that several both of the Timothy O'Farrells and Neil M'Neills were present, as by this time everybody thoroughly understood the situation, and the neighbours arranged themselves as a matter of course in ways which precluded any awkward juxtapositions of persons "who weren't spakin'."

It was a showery evening, with a wafting to and fro of wide gusts, which made the Widdy O'Farrell wonder more than once as she sat on the form by the hearth, with the Widdy Byrne interposed buffer-wise between her and old Joe M'Neill. What she wondered was, whether her poor Pat might be apt to be crossin' over the say on such an ugly wild night. Just as Mrs Keogh, with an eye on the lid-bobbing kettle, was about to ask Fergus if he might happen to have

e'er a drop of hot water he could spare her— that being the orthodox preface to tea-making on the occasion of a join— the house-door rattled violently, and opened with a fling. As nobody appeared at it, this was supposed to be simply the wind's freak, and Fergus said to Mick M'Murdo, who sat next to it, "Musha, lad, be givin' it a clap to wid your fut." But at that instant a voice was heard close outside, calling as if to another person a little farther off, "Molly, Molly, come along wid you; they're all here right enough, and I wouldn't be keepin' the door open on them." Whereupon there was a quick patter of approaching feet, followed by the entrance of two bundle-bearing figures. As they advanced into the flickering light, it showed that the figures were a man and a woman, and the bundles children; and in another moment there rose up recognising shrieks and shouts of "Pat" and "Molly," and then everybody rushed together tumultuously across a chasm of half-a-dozen years.

"They tould us below at Widdy Byrne's that we'd find yous all up here," said Pat O'Farrell, "so we left the baby there, and stepped along. Och, mother, it's younger you're grown instead of oulder, and that's a fac.'"

"And where's the wife, Paudyeen agra?" said Pat's mother; "or maybe she sted below wid the child?"

"And where's himself, Molly jewel?" said Molly's mother. "Sure you didn't come your lone?"

"Why, here he is," said Molly. "Pat, man, wasn't you spakin' to me mother?"

"Och, whethen now, and is it Pat O'Farrell?" his mother-in-law said with a half-strangled gasp.

"And who else would it be at all at all, only Pat?" said Molly, as if propounding an unanswerable argument.

"Mercy be among us all— and you niver let on— och, you rogue of the world— you niver let on, Patsy avic, it was little Molly M'Neill you'd took up wid all the while," said his mother.

"Sure I was writin' to you all about her times and agin," Pat averred stoutly.

Perhaps things might have turned out differently if people had not been delighted and taken by surprise. But as it was, how could a feud be conducted with any propriety when Mrs Neil had unprotestingly been hugged by Pat O'Farrell, and when old Joe M'Neill and his wife and daughter were already worshipping a very fat small two-year-old girl, who unmistakably featured all the O'Farrells that ever walked? The thing was impossible.

For one moment, indeed, an unhappy resurrection seemed to be threatened. It was when everybody had got into a circle round the hearth, in expectation of the cups of tea, which were beginning to clatter in the background, and when Pat O'Farrell, who was talking over old times with Neil

M'Neill, suddenly gave his father-in-law a great thump on the back, exclaiming with a chuckle, "Och, man, and do you remimber your ould sheep that we got in the oats, and gave a coloured wash to? Faix, but she was the comical objec'— 'the tiger-sheep,' the childer used to call her." Whereupon all the rest looked at one another with dismayed countenances, as if they had caught sight of something uncanny. But their alarm was needless. For Neil returned Pat's thump promptly with interest, and replied, "Haw, haw, haw! Bedad, and I do remimber her right well. Och now, man alive, I'll bet you me best brogues that wid all you've been behouldin' out there in the States you niver set eyes on e'er a baste'd aquil her for quareness— haw, haw, haw!" And the whole company took up the chorus, as if minded to make up on the spot all arrears of laughter owing on that long unappreciated joke. Amid the sound of which I have reason to believe that there fled away from Meenaclure for ever the last haunting phantasm of the unchancy tiger-sheep.

15: Polyp with a Past

The Story of an Organism With a Heart

Robert Benchley

1889-1945

In: *Benchley Beside Himself*, 1943

OF ALL FORMS of animal life, the polyp is probably the most neglected by fanciers. People seem willing to pay attention to anything, cats, lizards, canaries, or even fish, but simply because the polyp is reserved by nature and not given to showing off or wearing its heart on its sleeve, it is left alone under the sea to slave away at coral-building with never a kind word or a pat on the tentacles from anybody.

It was quite by accident that I was brought face to face with the human side of a polyp. I had been working on a thesis on "Emotional Crises in Sponge Life," and came upon a polyp formation on a piece of coral in the course of my laboratory work. To say that I was astounded would be putting it mildly. I was surprised.

The difficulty in research work in this field came in isolating a single polyp from the rest in order to study the personal peculiarities of the little organism, for, as is so often the case (even, I fear, with us great big humans sometimes), the individual behaves in an entirely different manner in private from the one he adopts when there is a crowd around. And a polyp, among all creatures, has a minimum of time to himself in which to sit down and think. There is always a crowd of other polyps dropping in on him, urging him to make a fourth in a string of coral beads or just to come out and stick around on a rock for the sake of good-fellowship.

The one which I finally succeeded in isolating was an engaging organism with a provocative manner and a little way of wrinkling up its ectoderm which put you at once at your ease. There could be no formality about your relations with this polyp five minutes after your first meeting. You were just like one great big family.

Although I have no desire to retail gossip, I think that readers of this treatise ought to be made aware of the fact (if, indeed, they do not already know it) that a polyp is really neither one thing nor another in matters of gender. One day it may be a little boy polyp, another day a little girl, according to its whim or practical considerations of policy. On gray days, when everything seems to be going wrong, it may decide that it will be neither boy nor girl but will just drift. I think that if we big human cousins of the little polyp were to follow the example set by these lowliest of God's creatures in this matter, we all would find ourselves much better off in the end. Am I not right, little polyp?

What was my surprise, then, to discover my little friend one day in a gloomy and morose mood. It refused the peanut-butter which I had brought it and I observed through the microscope that it was shaking with sobs. Lifting it up with a pair of pincers I took it over to the window to let it watch the automobiles go by, a diversion which had, in the past, never failed to amuse. But I could see that it was not interested. A tune from the Victrola fell equally flat, even though I set my little charge on the center of the disc and allowed it to revolve at a dizzy pace, which frolic usually sent it into spasms of excited giggling. Something was wrong. It was under emotional stress of the most racking kind.

I consulted Klunzinger's "*Die Korallenthiere des Rothen Meeres*" and there found that at an early age the polyp is quite likely to become the victim of a sentimental passion which is directed at its own self.

In other words, my tiny companion was in love with itself, bitterly, desperately, head-over-heels in love.

In an attempt to divert it from this madness, I took it on an extended tour of the Continent, visiting all the old cathedrals and stopping at none but the best hotels. The malady grew worse, instead of better. I thought that perhaps the warm sun of Granada would bring the color back into those pale tentacles, but there the inevitable romance in the soft air was only fuel to the flame, and, in the shadow of the Alhambra, my little polyp gave up the fight and died of a broken heart without ever having declared its love to itself.

I returned to America shortly after not a little chastened by what I had witnessed of Nature's wonders in the realm of passion.

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16: The Dublin Mystery

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

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

First published in the Royal Magazine *in 1902, but I don't have the Issue number. There are thirty-seven* Old Man In The Corner *short stories.*

"I ALWAYS THOUGHT that the history of that forged will was about as interesting as any I had read," said the man in the corner that day. He had been silent for some time, and was meditatively sorting and looking through a packet of small photographs in his pocket-book. Polly guessed that some of these would presently be placed before her for inspection— and she had not long to wait.

"That is old Brooks," he said, pointing to one of the photographs, "Millionaire Brooks, as he was called, and these are his two sons, Percival and Murray. It was a curious case, wasn't it? Personally I don't wonder that the police were completely at sea. If a member of that highly estimable force happened to be as clever as the clever author of that forged will, we should have very few undetected crimes in this country."

"That is why I always try to persuade you to give our poor ignorant police the benefit of your great insight and wisdom," said Polly, with a smile.

"I know," he said blandly, "you have been most kind in that way, but I am only an amateur. Crime interests me only when it resembles a clever game of chess, with many intricate moves which all tend to one solution, the checkmating of the antagonist— the detective force of the country. Now, confess that, in the Dublin mystery, the clever police there were absolutely checkmated."

"Absolutely."

"Just as the public was. There were actually two crimes committed in one city which have completely baffled detection: the murder of Patrick Wethered the lawyer, and the forged will of Millionaire Brooks. There are not many millionaires in Ireland; no wonder old Brooks was a notability in his way, since his business— bacon curing, I believe it is— is said to be worth over £2,000,000 of solid money.

"His younger son Murray was a refined, highly educated man, and was, moreover, the apple of his father's eye, as he was the spoilt darling of Dublin society; good-looking, a splendid dancer, and a perfect rider, he was the acknowledged 'catch' of the matrimonial market of Ireland, and many a very aristocratic house was opened hospitably to the favourite son of the millionaire.

"Of course, Percival Brooks, the eldest son, would inherit the bulk of the old man's property and also probably the larger share in the business; he, too, was good-looking, more so than his brother; he, too, rode, danced, and talked well, but it was many years ago that mammas with marriageable daughters had given up all hopes of Percival Brooks as a probable son-in-law. That young man's infatuation for Maisie Fortescue, a lady of undoubted charm but very doubtful antecedents, who had astonished the London and Dublin music-halls with her extravagant dances, was too well known and too old-established to encourage any hopes in other quarters.

"Whether Percival Brooks would ever marry Maisie Fortescue was thought to be very doubtful. Old Brooks had the full disposal of all his wealth, and it would have fared ill with Percival if he introduced an undesirable wife into the magnificent Fitzwilliam Place establishment.

"That is how matters stood," continued the man in the corner, "when Dublin society one morning learnt, with deep regret and dismay, that old Brooks had died very suddenly at his residence after only a few hours' illness. At first it was generally understood that he had had an apoplectic stroke; anyway, he had been at business hale and hearty as ever the day before his death, which occurred late on the evening of February 1st.

"It was the morning papers of February 2nd which told the sad news to their readers, and it was those selfsame papers which on that eventful morning contained another even more startling piece of news, that proved the prelude to a series of sensations such as tranquil, placid Dublin had not experienced for many years. This was, that on that very afternoon which saw the death of Dublin's greatest millionaire, Mr. Patrick Wethered, his solicitor, was murdered in Phoenix Park at five o'clock in the afternoon while actually walking to his own house from his visit to his client in Fitzwilliam Place.

"Patrick Wethered was as well known as the proverbial town pump; his mysterious and tragic death filled all Dublin with dismay. The lawyer, who was a man sixty years of age, had been struck on the back of the head by a heavy stick, garrotted, and subsequently robbed, for neither money, watch, or pocket-book were found upon his person, whilst the police soon gathered from Patrick Wethered's household that he had left home at two o'clock that afternoon, carrying both watch and pocket-book, and undoubtedly money as well.

"An inquest was held, and a verdict of wilful murder was found against some person or persons unknown.

"But Dublin had not exhausted its stock of sensations yet. Millionaire Brooks had been buried with due pomp and magnificence, and his will had been proved (his business and personalty being estimated at £2,500,000) by

Percival Gordon Brooks, his eldest son and sole executor. The younger son, Murray, who had devoted the best years of his life to being a friend and companion to his father, while Percival ran after ballet-dancers and music-hall stars— Murray, who had avowedly been the apple of his father's eye in consequence— was left with a miserly pittance of £300 a year, and no share whatever in the gigantic business of Brooks & Sons, bacon curers, of Dublin.

"Something had evidently happened within the precincts of the Brooks' town mansion, which the public and Dublin society tried in vain to fathom. Elderly mammas and blushing *débutantes* were already thinking of the best means whereby next season they might more easily show the cold shoulder to young Murray Brooks, who had so suddenly become a hopeless 'detrimental' in the marriage market, when all these sensations terminated in one gigantic, overwhelming bit of scandal, which for the next three months furnished food for gossip in every drawing-room in Dublin.

"Mr. Murray Brooks, namely, had entered a claim for probate of a will, made by his father in 1891, declaring that the later will made the very day of his father's death and proved by his brother as sole executor, was null and void, that will being a forgery."

"The facts that transpired in connection with this extraordinary case were sufficiently mysterious to puzzle everybody. As I told you before, all Mr. Brooks' friends never quite grasped the idea that the old man should so completely have cut off his favourite son with the proverbial shilling.

"You see, Percival had always been a thorn in the old man's flesh. Horse-racing, gambling, theatres, and music-halls were, in the old pork-butcher's eyes, so many deadly sins which his son committed every day of his life, and all the Fitzwilliam Place household could testify to the many and bitter quarrels which had arisen between father and son over the latter's gambling or racing debts. Many people asserted that Brooks would sooner have left his money to charitable institutions than seen it squandered upon the brightest stars that adorned the music-hall stage.

"The case came up for hearing early in the autumn. In the meanwhile Percival Brooks had given up his racecourse associates, settled down in the Fitzwilliam Place mansion, and conducted his father's business, without a manager, but with all the energy and forethought which he had previously devoted to more unworthy causes.

"Murray had elected not to stay on in the old house; no doubt associations were of too painful and recent a nature; he was boarding with the family of a Mr. Wilson Hibbert, who was the late Patrick Wethered's, the murdered lawyer's, partner. They were quiet, homely people, who lived in a very pokey little house in Kilkenny Street, and poor Murray must, in spite of his grief, have

felt very bitterly the change from his luxurious quarters in his father's mansion to his present tiny room and homely meals.

"Percival Brooks, who was now drawing an income of over a hundred thousand a year, was very severely criticised for adhering so strictly to the letter of his father's will, and only paying his brother that paltry £300 a year, which was very literally but the crumbs off his own magnificent dinner table.

"The issue of that contested will case was therefore awaited with eager interest. In the meanwhile the police, who had at first seemed fairly loquacious on the subject of the murder of Mr. Patrick Wethered, suddenly became strangely reticent, and by their very reticence aroused a certain amount of uneasiness in the public mind, until one day the *Irish Times* published the following extraordinary, enigmatic paragraph:

" 'We hear on authority which cannot be questioned, that certain extraordinary developments are expected in connection with the brutal murder of our distinguished townsman Mr. Wethered; the police, in fact, are vainly trying to keep it secret that they hold a clue which is as important as it is sensational, and that they only await the impending issue of a well-known litigation in the probate court to effect an arrest.'

"The Dublin public flocked to the court to hear the arguments in the great will case. I myself journeyed down to Dublin. As soon as I succeeded in fighting my way to the densely crowded court, I took stock of the various actors in the drama, which I as a spectator was prepared to enjoy. There were Percival Brooks and Murray his brother, the two litigants, both good-looking and well dressed, and both striving, by keeping up a running conversation with their lawyer, to appear unconcerned and confident of the issue. With Percival Brooks was Henry Oranmore, the eminent Irish K.C., whilst Walter Hibbert, a rising young barrister, the son of Wilson Hibbert, appeared for Murray.

"The will of which the latter claimed probate was one dated 1891, and had been made by Mr. Brooks during a severe illness which threatened to end his days. This will had been deposited in the hands of Messrs. Wethered and Hibbert, solicitors to the deceased, and by it Mr. Brooks left his personalty equally divided between his two sons, but had left his business entirely to his youngest son, with a charge of £2000 a year upon it, payable to Percival. You see that Murray Brooks therefore had a very deep interest in that second will being found null and void.

"Old Mr. Hibbert had very ably instructed his son, and Walter Hibbert's opening speech was exceedingly clever. He would show, he said, on behalf of his client, that the will dated February 1st, 1908, could never have been made by the late Mr. Brooks, as it was absolutely contrary to his avowed intentions, and that if the late Mr. Brooks did on the day in question make any fresh will at

all, it certainly was *not* the one proved by Mr. Percival Brooks, for that was absolutely a forgery from beginning to end. Mr. Walter Hibbert proposed to call several witnesses in support of both these points.

"On the other hand, Mr. Henry Oranmore, K.C., very ably and courteously replied that he too had several witnesses to prove that Mr. Brooks certainly did make a will on the day in question, and that, whatever his intentions may have been in the past, he must have modified them on the day of his death, for the will proved by Mr. Percival Brooks was found after his death under his pillow, duly signed and witnessed and in every way legal.

"Then the battle began in sober earnest. There were a great many witnesses to be called on both sides, their evidence being of more or less importance— chiefly less. But the interest centred round the prosaic figure of John O'Neill, the butler at Fitzwilliam Place, who had been in Mr. Brooks' family for thirty years.

" 'I was clearing away my breakfast things,' said John, 'when I heard the master's voice in the study close by. Oh my, he was that angry! I could hear the words "disgrace," and "villain," and "liar," and "ballet-dancer," and one or two other ugly words as applied to some female lady, which I would not like to repeat. At first I did not take much notice, as I was quite used to hearing my poor dear master having words with Mr. Percival. So I went downstairs carrying my breakfast things; but I had just started cleaning my silver when the study bell goes ringing violently, and I hear Mr. Percival's voice shouting in the hall: "John! quick! Send for Dr. Mulligan at once. Your master is not well! Send one of the men, and you come up and help me to get Mr. Brooks to bed."

" 'I sent one of the grooms for the doctor,' continued John, who seemed still affected at the recollection of his poor master, to whom he had evidently been very much attached, 'and I went up to see Mr. Brooks. I found him lying on the study floor, his head supported in Mr. Percival's arms. "My father has fallen in a faint," said the young master; "help me to get him up to his room before Dr. Mulligan comes."

" 'Mr. Percival looked very white and upset, which was only natural; and when we had got my poor master to bed, I asked if I should not go and break the news to Mr. Murray, who had gone to business an hour ago. However, before Mr. Percival had time to give me an order the doctor came. I thought I had seen death plainly writ in my master's face, and when I showed the doctor out an hour later, and he told me that he would be back directly, I knew that the end was near.

" 'Mr. Brooks rang for me a minute or two later. He told me to send at once for Mr. Wethered, or else for Mr. Hibbert, if Mr. Wethered could not come. "I haven't many hours to live, John," he says to me— "my heart is broke, the

doctor says my heart is broke. A man shouldn't marry and have children, John, for they will sooner or later break his heart." I was so upset I couldn't speak; but I sent round at once for Mr. Wethered, who came himself just about three o'clock that afternoon.

"'After he had been with my master about an hour I was called in, and Mr. Wethered said to me that Mr. Brooks wished me and one other of us servants to witness that he had signed a paper which was on a table by his bedside. I called Pat Mooney, the head footman, and before us both Mr. Brooks put his name at the bottom of that paper. Then Mr. Wethered give me the pen and told me to write my name as a witness, and that Pat Mooney was to do the same. After that we were both told that we could go.'

"The old butler went on to explain that he was present in his late master's room on the following day when the undertakers, who had come to lay the dead man out, found a paper underneath his pillow. John O'Neill, who recognized the paper as the one to which he had appended his signature the day before, took it to Mr. Percival, and gave it into his hands.

"In answer to Mr. Walter Hibbert, John asserted positively that he took the paper from the undertaker's hand and went straight with it to Mr. Percival's room.

" 'He was alone,' said John; 'I gave him the paper. He just glanced at it, and I thought he looked rather astonished, but he said nothing, and I at once left the room.'

" 'When you say that you recognized the paper as the one which you had seen your master sign the day before, how did you actually recognize that it was the same paper?' asked Mr. Hibbert amidst breathless interest on the part of the spectators. I narrowly observed the witness's face.

" 'It looked exactly the same paper to me, sir,' replied John, somewhat vaguely.

" 'Did you look at the contents, then?'

" 'No, sir; certainly not.'

" 'Had you done so the day before?'

" 'No, sir, only at my master's signature.'

" 'Then you only thought by the *outside* look of the paper that it was the same?'

" 'It looked the same thing, sir,' persisted John obstinately.

"You see," continued the man in the corner, leaning eagerly forward across the narrow marble table, "the contention of Murray Brooks' adviser was that Mr. Brooks, having made a will and hidden it— for some reason or other under his pillow— that will had fallen, through the means related by John O'Neill, into the hands of Mr. Percival Brooks, who had destroyed it and substituted a

forged one in its place, which adjudged the whole of Mr. Brooks' millions to himself. It was a terrible and very daring accusation directed against a gentleman who, in spite of his many wild oats sowed in early youth, was a prominent and important figure in Irish high life.

"All those present were aghast at what they heard, and the whispered comments I could hear around me showed me that public opinion, at least, did not uphold Mr. Murray Brooks' daring accusation against his brother.

"But John O'Neill had not finished his evidence, and Mr. Walter Hibbert had a bit of sensation still up his sleeve. He had, namely, produced a paper, the will proved by Mr. Percival Brooks, and had asked John O'Neill if once again he recognized the paper.

" 'Certainly, sir,' said John unhesitatingly, 'that is the one the undertaker found under my poor dead master's pillow, and which I took to Mr. Percival's room immediately.'

"Then the paper was unfolded and placed before the witness.

" 'Now, Mr. O'Neill, will you tell me if that is your signature?'

"John looked at it for a moment; then he said: 'Excuse me, sir,' and produced a pair of spectacles which he carefully adjusted before he again examined the paper. Then he thoughtfully shook his head.

" 'It don't look much like my writing, sir,' he said at last. 'That is to say,' he added, by way of elucidating the matter, 'it does look like my writing, but then I don't think it is.'

"There was at that moment a look in Mr. Percival Brooks' face," continued the man in the corner quietly, "which then and there gave me the whole history of that quarrel, that illness of Mr. Brooks, of the will, aye! and of the murder of Patrick Wethered too.

"All I wondered at was how every one of those learned counsel on both sides did not get the clue just the same as I did, but went on arguing, speechifying, cross-examining for nearly a week, until they arrived at the one conclusion which was inevitable from the very first, namely, that the will *was* a forgery— a gross, clumsy, idiotic forgery, since both John O'Neill and Pat Mooney, the two witnesses, absolutely repudiated the signatures as their own. The only successful bit of caligraphy the forger had done was the signature of old Mr. Brooks.

"It was a very curious fact, and one which had undoubtedly aided the forger in accomplishing his work quickly, that Mr. Wethered the lawyer having, no doubt, realized that Mr. Brooks had not many moments in life to spare, had not drawn up the usual engrossed, magnificent document dear to the lawyer heart, but had used for his client's will one of those regular printed forms which can be purchased at any stationer's.

"Mr. Percival Brooks, of course, flatly denied the serious allegation brought against him. He admitted that the butler had brought him the document the morning after his father's death, and that he certainly, on glancing at it, had been very much astonished to see that that document was his father's will. Against that he declared that its contents did not astonish him in the slightest degree, that he himself knew of the testator's intentions, but that he certainly thought his father had entrusted the will to the care of Mr. Wethered, who did all his business for him.

" 'I only very cursorily glanced at the signature,' he concluded, speaking in a perfectly calm, clear voice; 'you must understand that the thought of forgery was very far from my mind, and that my father's signature is exceedingly well imitated, if, indeed, it is not his own, which I am not at all prepared to believe. As for the two witnesses' signatures, I don't think I had ever seen them before. I took the document to Messrs. Barkston and Maud, who had often done business for me before, and they assured me that the will was in perfect form and order.'

"Asked why he had not entrusted the will to his father's solicitors, he replied:

" 'For the very simple reason that exactly half an hour before the will was placed in my hands, I had read that Mr. Patrick Wethered had been murdered the night before. Mr. Hibbert, the junior partner, was not personally known to me.'

"After that, for form's sake, a good deal of expert evidence was heard on the subject of the dead man's signature. But that was quite unanimous, and merely went to corroborate what had already been established beyond a doubt, namely, that the will dated February 1st, 1908, was a forgery, and probate of the will dated 1891 was therefore granted to Mr. Murray Brooks, the sole executor mentioned therein."

"Two days later the police applied for a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Percival Brooks on a charge of forgery.

"The Crown prosecuted, and Mr. Brooks had again the support of Mr. Oranmore, the eminent K.C. Perfectly calm, like a man conscious of his own innocence and unable to grasp the idea that justice does sometimes miscarry, Mr. Brooks, the son of the millionaire, himself still the possessor of a very large fortune under the former will, stood up in the dock on that memorable day in October, 1908, which still no doubt lives in the memory of his many friends.

"All the evidence with regard to Mr. Brooks' last moments and the forged will was gone through over again. That will, it was the contention of the Crown, had been forged so entirely in favour of the accused, cutting out every one

else, that obviously no one but the beneficiary under that false will would have had any motive in forging it.

"Very pale, and with a frown between his deep-set, handsome Irish eyes, Percival Brooks listened to this large volume of evidence piled up against him by the Crown.

"At times he held brief consultations with Mr. Oranmore, who seemed as cool as a cucumber. Have you ever seen Oranmore in court? He is a character worthy of Dickens. His pronounced brogue, his fat, podgy, clean-shaven face, his not always immaculately clean large hands, have often delighted the caricaturist. As it very soon transpired during that memorable magisterial inquiry, he relied for a verdict in favour of his client upon two main points, and he had concentrated all his skill upon making these two points as telling as he possibly could.

"The first point was the question of time, John O'Neill, cross-examined by Oranmore, stated without hesitation that he had given the will to Mr. Percival at eleven o'clock in the morning. And now the eminent K.C. brought forward and placed in the witness-box the very lawyers into whose hands the accused had then immediately placed the will. Now, Mr. Barkston, a very well-known solicitor of King Street, declared positively that Mr. Percival Brooks was in his office at a quarter before twelve; two of his clerks testified to the same time exactly, and it was *impossible*, contended Mr. Oranmore, that within three-quarters of an hour Mr. Brooks could have gone to a stationer's, bought a will form, copied Mr. Wethered's writing, his father's signature, and that of John O'Neill and Pat Mooney.

"Such a thing might have been planned, arranged, practised, and ultimately, after a great deal of trouble, successfully carried out, but human intelligence could not grasp the other as a possibility.

"Still the judge wavered. The eminent K.C. had shaken but not shattered his belief in the prisoner's guilt. But there was one point more, and this Oranmore, with the skill of a dramatist, had reserved for the fall of the curtain.

"He noted every sign in the judge's face, he guessed that his client was not yet absolutely safe, then only did he produce his last two witnesses.

"One of them was Mary Sullivan, one of the housemaids in the Fitzwilliam mansion. She had been sent up by the cook at a quarter past four o'clock on the afternoon of February 1st with some hot water, which the nurse had ordered, for the master's room. Just as she was about to knock at the door Mr. Wethered was coming out of the room. Mary stopped with the tray in her hand, and at the door Mr. Wethered turned and said quite loudly: 'Now, don't fret, don't be anxious; do try and be calm. Your will is safe in my pocket, nothing can change it or alter one word of it but yourself.'

"It was, of course, a very ticklish point in law whether the housemaid's evidence could be accepted. You see, she was quoting the words of a man since dead, spoken to another man also dead. There is no doubt that had there been very strong evidence on the other side against Percival Brooks, Mary Sullivan's would have counted for nothing; but, as I told you before, the judge's belief in the prisoner's guilt was already very seriously shaken, and now the final blow aimed at it by Mr. Oranmore shattered his last lingering doubts.

"Dr. Mulligan, namely, had been placed by Mr. Oranmore into the witness-box. He was a medical man of unimpeachable authority, in fact, absolutely at the head of his profession in Dublin. What he said practically corroborated Mary Sullivan's testimony. He had gone in to see Mr. Brooks at half-past four, and understood from him that his lawyer had just left him.

"Mr. Brooks certainly, though terribly weak, was calm and more composed. He was dying from a sudden heart attack, and Dr. Mulligan foresaw the almost immediate end. But he was still conscious and managed to murmur feebly: 'I feel much easier in my mind now, doctor— have made my will— Wethered has been— he's got it in his pocket— it is safe there— safe from that— ' But the words died on his lips, and after that he spoke but little. He saw his two sons before he died, but hardly knew them or even looked at them.

"You see," concluded the man in the corner, "you see that the prosecution was bound to collapse. Oranmore did not give it a leg to stand on. The will was forged, it is true, forged in the favour of Percival Brooks and of no one else, forged for him and for his benefit. Whether he knew and connived at the forgery was never proved or, as far as I know, even hinted, but it was impossible to go against all the evidence, which pointed that, as far as the act itself was concerned, he at least was innocent. You see, Dr. Mulligan's evidence was not to be shaken. Mary Sullivan's was equally strong.

"There were two witnesses swearing positively that old Brooks' will was in Mr. Wethered's keeping when that gentleman left the Fitzwilliam mansion at a quarter past four. At five o'clock in the afternoon the lawyer was found dead in Phoenix Park. Between a quarter past four and eight o'clock in the evening Percival Brooks never left the house— that was subsequently proved by Oranmore up to the hilt and beyond a doubt. Since the will found under old Brooks' pillow was a forged will, where then was the will he did make, and which Wethered carried away with him in his pocket?"

"Stolen, of course," said Polly, "by those who murdered and robbed him; it may have been of no value to them, but they naturally would destroy it, lest it might prove a clue against them."

"Then you think it was mere coincidence?" he asked excitedly.

"What?"

"That Wethered was murdered and robbed at the very moment that he carried the will in his pocket, whilst another was being forged in its place?"

"It certainly would be very curious, if it *were* a coincidence," she said musingly.

"Very," he repeated with biting sarcasm, whilst nervously his bony fingers played with the inevitable bit of string. "Very curious indeed. Just think of the whole thing. There was the old man with all his wealth, and two sons, one to whom he is devoted, and the other with whom he does nothing but quarrel. One day there is another of these quarrels, but more violent, more terrible than any that have previously occurred, with the result that the father, heartbroken by it all, has an attack of apoplexy and practically dies of a broken heart. After that he alters his will, and subsequently a will is proved which turns out to be a forgery.

"Now everybody— police, press, and public alike— at once jump to the conclusion that, as Percival Brooks benefits by that forged will, Percival Brooks must be the forger."

"Seek for him whom the crime benefits, is your own axiom," argued the girl.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Percival Brooks benefited to the tune of £2,000,000."

"I beg your pardon. He did nothing of the sort. He was left with less than half the share that his younger brother inherited."

"Now, yes; but that was a former will and— "

"And that forged will was so clumsily executed, the signature so carelessly imitated, that the forgery was bound to come to light. Did *that* never strike you?"

"Yes, but— "

"There is no but," he interrupted. "It was all as clear as daylight to me from the very first. The quarrel with the old man, which broke his heart, was not with his eldest son, with whom he was used to quarrelling, but with the second son whom he idolised, in whom he believed. Don't you remember how John O'Neill heard the words 'liar' and 'deceit'? Percival Brooks had never deceived his father. His sins were all on the surface. Murray had led a quiet life, had pandered to his father, and fawned upon him, until, like most hypocrites, he at last got found out. Who knows what ugly gambling debt or debt of honour, suddenly revealed to old Brooks, was the cause of that last and deadly quarrel?

"You remember that it was Percival who remained beside his father and carried him up to his room. Where was Murray throughout that long and painful day, when his father lay dying— he, the idolised son, the apple of the old man's eye? You never hear his name mentioned as being present there all

that day. But he knew that he had offended his father mortally, and that his father meant to cut him off with a shilling. He knew that Mr. Wethered had been sent for, that Wethered left the house soon after four o'clock.

"And here the cleverness of the man comes in. Having lain in wait for Wethered and knocked him on the back of the head with a stick, he could not very well make that will disappear altogether. There remained the faint chance of some other witnesses knowing that Mr. Brooks had made a fresh will, Mr. Wethered's partner, his clerk, or one of the confidential servants in the house. Therefore *a* will must be discovered after the old man's death.

"Now, Murray Brooks was not an expert forger, it takes years of training to become that. A forged will executed by himself would be sure to be found out— yes, that's it, sure to be found out. The forgery will be palpable— let it be palpable, and then it will be found out, branded as such, and the original will of 1891, so favourable to the young blackguard's interests, would be held as valid. Was it devilry or merely additional caution which prompted Murray to pen that forged will so glaringly in Percival's favour? It is impossible to say.

"Anyhow, it was the cleverest touch in that marvellously devised crime. To plan that evil deed was great, to execute it was easy enough. He had several hours' leisure in which to do it. Then at night it was simplicity itself to slip the document under the dead man's pillow. Sacrilege causes no shudder to such natures as Murray Brooks. The rest of the drama you know already— "

"But Percival Brooks?"

"The jury returned a verdict of 'Not guilty.' There was no evidence against him."

"But the money? Surely the scoundrel does not have the enjoyment of it still?"

"No; he enjoyed it for a time, but he died, about three months ago, and forgot to take the precaution of making a will, so his brother Percival has got the business after all. If you ever go to Dublin, I should order some of Brooks' bacon if I were you. It is very good."

———————————

17: The Red Silk Scarf

Maurice LeBlanc

1864-1941

Transl. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, 1865-1921

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ON LEAVING his house one morning at his usual early hour for going to the Law Courts, Chief Inspector Ganimard noticed the curious behavior of an individual who was walking along the Rue Pergolese in front of him. Shabbily dressed and wearing a straw hat, though the day was the first of December, the man stooped at every thirty or forty yards to fasten his bootlace, or pick up his stick, or for some other reason. And, each time, he took a little piece of orange peel from his pocket and laid it stealthily on the curb of the pavement. It was probably a mere display of eccentricity, a childish amusement to which no one else would have paid attention; but Ganimard was one of those shrewd observers who are indifferent to nothing that strikes their eyes and who are never satisfied until they know the secret cause of things. He therefore began to follow the man.

Now, at the moment when the fellow was turning to the right, into the Avenue de la Grande-Armee, the inspector caught him exchanging signals with a boy of twelve or thirteen, who was walking along the houses on the left-hand side. Twenty yards farther, the man stooped and turned up the bottom of his trousers legs. A bit of orange peel marked the place. At the same moment, the boy stopped and, with a piece of chalk, drew a white cross, surrounded by a circle, on the wall of the house next to him.

The two continued on their way. A minute later, a fresh halt. The strange individual picked up a pin and dropped a piece of orange peel; and the boy at once made a second cross on the wall and again drew a white circle round it.

"By Jove!" thought the chief inspector, with a grunt of satisfaction. "This is rather promising.... What on earth can those two merchants be plotting?"

The two "merchants" went down the Avenue Friedland and the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honore, but nothing occurred that was worthy of special mention. The double performance was repeated at almost regular intervals and, so to speak, mechanically. Nevertheless, it was obvious, on the one hand, that the man with the orange peel did not do his part of the business until after he had picked out with a glance the house that was to be marked and, on the other hand, that the boy did not mark that particular house until after he had observed his companion's signal. It was certain, therefore, that there was an agreement between the two; and the proceedings presented no small interest in the chief inspector's eyes.

At the Place Beauveau the man hesitated. Then, apparently making up his mind, he twice turned up and twice turned down the bottom of his trousers legs. Hereupon, the boy sat down on the curb, opposite the sentry who was mounting guard outside the Ministry of the Interior, and marked the flagstone with two little crosses contained within two circles. The same ceremony was gone through a little farther on, when they reached the Elysee. Only, on the pavement where the President's sentry was marching up and down, there were three signs instead of two.

"Hang it all!" muttered Ganimard, pale with excitement and thinking, in spite of himself, of his inveterate enemy, Lupin, whose name came to his mind whenever a mysterious circumstance presented itself. "Hang it all, what does it mean?" He was nearly collaring and questioning the two "merchants."

But he was too clever to commit so gross a blunder. The man with the orange peel had now lit a cigarette; and the boy, also placing a cigarette end between his lips, had gone up to him, apparently with the object of asking for a light.

They exchanged a few words. Quick as thought, the boy handed his companion an object which looked— at least, so the inspector believed— like a revolver. They both bent over this object; and the man, standing with his face to the wall, put his hand six times in his pocket and made a movement as though he were loading a weapon. As soon as this was done, they walked briskly to the Rue de Surene; and the inspector, who followed them as closely as he was able to do without attracting their attention, saw them enter the gateway of an old house of which all the shutters were closed, with the exception of those on the third or top floor.

He hurried in after them. At the end of the carriage entrance he saw a large courtyard, with a house painter's sign at the back and a staircase on the left.

He went up the stairs and, as soon as he reached the first floor, ran still faster, because he heard, right up at the top, a din as of a free fight.

When he came to the last landing he found the door open. He entered, listened for a second, caught the sound of a struggle, rushed to the room from which the sound appeared to proceed and remained standing on the threshold, very much out of breath and greatly surprised to see the man of the orange peel and the boy banging the floor with chairs.

At that moment a third person walked out of an adjoining room. It was a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, wearing a pair of short whiskers in addition to his moustache, spectacles, and a smoking jacket with an astrakhan collar and looking like a foreigner, a Russian.

"Good morning, Ganimard," he said. And turning to the two companions, "Thank you, my friends, and all my congratulations on the successful result. Here's the reward I promised you."

He gave them a hundred-franc note, pushed them outside and shut both doors.

"I am sorry, old chap," he said to Ganimard. "I wanted to talk to you... wanted to talk to you badly."

He offered him his hand and, seeing that the inspector remained flabbergasted and that his face was still distorted with anger, he exclaimed:

"Why, you don't seem to understand!... And yet it's clear enough.... I wanted to see you particularly. ... So what could I do?" And, pretending to reply to an objection, "No, no, old chap," he continued. "You're quite wrong. If I had written or tele- phoned, you would not have come... or else you would have come with a regiment. Now I wanted to see you all alone; and I thought the best thing was to send those two decent fellows to meet you, with orders to scatter bits of orange peel and draw crosses and circles, in short, to mark out your road to this place.... Why, you look quite bewildered! What is it? Perhaps you don't recognize me? Lupin.... Arsene Lupin.... Ransack your memory.... Doesn't the name remind you of anything?"

"You dirty scoundrel!" Ganimard snarled between his teeth.

Lupin seemed greatly distressed and, in an affectionate voice:

"Are you vexed ? Yes, I can see it in your eyes.... The Dugrival business, I suppose. I ought to have waited for you to come and take me in charge?... There now, the thought never occurred to me! I promise you, next time...."

"You scum of the earth!" growled Ganimard.

"And I thinking I was giving you a treat! Upon my word, I did. I said to myself, 'That dear old Ganimard! We haven't met for an age. He'll simply rush at me when he sees me!'"

Ganimard, who had not yet stirred a limb, seemed to be waking from his stupor. He looked around him, looked at Lupin, visibly asked himself whether he would not do well to rush at him in reality and then, controlling himself, took hold of a chair and settled himself in it, as though he had suddenly made up his mind to listen to his enemy:

"Speak," he said. "And don't waste my time with any nonsense. I'm in a hurry."

"That's it," said Lupin, "let's talk. You can't imagine a quieter place than this. It's an old manor house, which once stood in the open country, and it belongs to the Due de Rochelaure. The duke, who has never lived in it, lets this floor to me and the outhouses to a painter and decorator. I always keep up a few establishments of this kind: it's a sound, practical plan. Here, in spite of my

looking like a Russian nobleman, I am M. Daubreuil, an ex-cabinet-minister.... You understand, I had to select a rather overstocked profession, so as not to attract attention...."

"Do you think I care a hang about all this?" said Ganimard, interrupting him.

"Quite right, I'm wasting words and you're in a hurry. Forgive me. I shan't be long now.... Five minutes, that's all.... I'll start at once.... Have a cigar? No? Very well, no more will I."

He sat down also, drummed his fingers on the table, while thinking, and began in this fashion:

"On the 17th of October, 1599, on a warm and sunny autumn day... Do you follow me?... But, now that I come to think of it, is it really necessary to go back to the reign of Henry IV, and tell you all about the building of the Pont-Neuf ? No, I don't suppose you are very well up in French history; and I should only end by muddling you. Suffice it, then, for you to know that, last night, at one o'clock in the morning, a boatman passing under the last arch of the Pont-Neuf aforesaid, along the left bank of the river, heard something drop into the front part of his barge. The thing had been flung from the bridge and its evident destination was the bottom of the Seine. The bargee's dog rushed forward, barking, and, when the man reached the end of his craft, he saw the animal worrying a piece of newspaper that had served to wrap up a number of objects. He took from the dog such of the contents as had not fallen into the water, went to his cabin and examined them carefully. The result struck him as interesting; and, as the man is connected with one of my friends, he sent to let me know. This morning I was waked up and placed in possession of the facts and of the objects which the man had collected. Here they are."

He pointed to them, spread out on a table. There were, first of all, the torn pieces of a newspaper. Next came a large cut-glass ink-stand, with a long piece of string fastened to the lid. There was a bit of broken glass and a sort of flexible cardboard, reduced to shreds. Lastly, there was a piece of bright scarlet silk, ending in a tassel of the same material and color.

"You see our exhibits, friend of my youth," said Lupin. "No doubt, the problem would be more easily solved if we had the other objects which went overboard owing to the stupidity of the dog. But it seems to me, all the same, that we ought to be able to manage, with a little reflection and intelligence. And those are just your great qualities. How does the business strike you?"

Ganimard did not move a muscle. He was willing to stand Lupin's chaff, but his dignity commanded him not to speak a single word in answer nor even to give a nod or shake of the head that might have been taken to express approval or criticism.

"I see that we are entirely of one mind," continued Lupin, with- out appearing to remark the chief inspector's silence. "And I can sum up the matter briefly, as told us by these exhibits. Yesterday evening, between nine and twelve o'clock, a showily dressed young woman was wounded with a knife and then caught round the throat and choked to death by a well-dressed gentleman, wearing a single eyeglass and interested in racing, with whom the aforesaid showily dressed young lady had been eating three meringues and a coffee eclair."

Lupin lit a cigarette and, taking Ganimard by the sleeve: "Aha, that's up against you, Chief Inspector! You thought that, in the domain of police deductions, such feats as those were prohibited to outsiders! Wrong, sir! Lupin juggles with inferences and deductions for all the world like a detective in a novel. My proofs are dazzling and absolutely simple."

And, pointing to the objects one by one, as he demonstrated his statement, he resumed:

"I said, after nine o'clock yesterday evening. This scrap of newspaper bears yesterday's date, with the words, 'Evening edition.' Also, you will see here, pasted to the paper, a bit of one of those yellow wrappers in which the subscribers' copies are sent out. These copies are always delivered by the nine-o'clock post. Therefore, it was after nine o'clock. I said, a well-dressed man. Please observe that this tiny piece of glass has the round hole of a single eyeglass at one of the edges and that the single eyeglass is an essentially aristocratic article of wear. This well-dressed man walked into a pastry cook's shop. Here is the very thin cardboard, shaped like a box, and still showing a little of the cream of the meringues and eclairs which were packed in it in the usual way. Having got his parcel, the gentleman with the eyeglass joined a young person whose eccentricity in the matter of dress is pretty clearly indicated by this bright-red silk scarf. Having joined her, for some reason as yet unknown he first stabbed her with a knife and then strangled her with the help of this same scarf. Take your magnifying glass, Chief Inspector, and you will see, on the silk, stains of a darker red which are, here, the marks of a knife wiped on the scarf and, there, the marks of a hand, covered with blood, clutching the material. Having committed the murder, his next business is to leave no trace behind him. So he takes from his pocket, first, the newspaper to which he subscribes— a racing- paper, as you will see by glancing at the contents of this scrap; and you will have no difficulty in discovering the title— and, secondly, a cord, which, on inspection, turns out to be a length of whipcord. These two details prove— do they not ?— that our man is interested in racing and that he himself rides. Next, he picks up the fragments of his eyeglass, the cord of which has been broken in the struggle. He takes a pair of

scissors— observe the hacking ofthe scissors— and cuts off the stained part of the scarf, leaving the other end, no doubt, in his victim's clenched hands. He makes a ball of the confectioner's cardboard box. He also puts in certain things that would have betrayed him, such as the knife, which must have slipped into the Seine. He wraps everything in the newspaper, ties it with the cord and fastens this cut-glass inkstand to it, as a make-weight. Then he makes himself scarce. A little later, the parcel falls into the waterman's barge. And there you are. Oof, it's hot work!... What do you say to the story?"

He looked at Ganimard to see what impression his speech had produced on the inspector. Ganimard did not depart from his attitude of silence.

Lupin began to laugh:

"As a matter of fact, you're annoyed and surprised. But you're suspicious as well: 'Why should that confounded Lupin hand the business over to me,' say you, 'instead of keeping it for himself, hunting down the murderer and rifling his pockets, if there was a robbery?' The question is quite logical, of course. But— there is a 'but'— I have no time, you see. I am full up with work at the present moment: a burglary in London, another at Lausanne, an exchange of children at Marseilles, to say nothing of having to save a young girl who is at this moment shadowed by death. That's always the way: it never rains but it pours. So I said to myself, 'Suppose I handed the business over to my dear old Ganimard? Now that it is half-solved for him, he is quite capable of succeeding. And what a service I shall be doing him! How magnificently he will be able to distinguish himself!' No sooner said than done. At eight o'clock in the morning, I sent the joker with the orange peel to meet you. You swallowed the bait; and you were here by nine, all on edge and eager for the fray."

Lupin rose from his chair. He went over to the inspector and, with his eyes in Ganimard's, said:

"That's all. You now know the whole story. Presently, you will know the victim: some ballet dancer, probably, some singer at a music hall. On the other hand, the chances are that the criminal lives near the Pont-Neuf, most likely on the left bank. Lastly, here are all the exhibits. I make you a present of them. Set to work. I shall only keep this end of the scarf. If ever you want to piece the scarf together, bring me the other end, the one which the police will find round the victim's neck. Bring it me in four weeks from now to the day, that is to say, on the 29th of December, at ten o'clock in the morning. You can be sure of finding me here. And don't be afraid: this is all perfectly serious, friend of my youth; I swear it is. No humbug, honor bright. You can go straight ahead. Oh, by the way, when you arrest the fellow with the eyeglass, be a bit careful: he is left-handed! Good-by, old dear, and good luck to you!"

Lupin spun round on his heel, went to the door, opened it and disappeared before Ganimard had even thought of taking a decision. The inspector rushed after him, but at once found that the handle of the door, by some trick of mechanism which he did not know, refused to turn. It took him ten minutes to unscrew the lock and ten minutes more to unscrew the lock of the hall door. By the time that he had scrambled down the three flights of stairs, Ganimard had given up all hope of catching Arsene Lupin.

Besides, he was not thinking of it. Lupin inspired him with a queer, complex feeling, made up of fear, hatred, involuntary admiration and also the vague instinct that he, Ganimard, in spite of all his efforts, in spite of the persistency of his endeavors, would never get the better of this particular adversary. He pursued him from a sense of duty and pride, but with the continual dread of being taken in by that formidable hoaxer and scouted and fooled in the face of a public that was always only too willing to laugh at the chief inspector's mishaps.

This business of the red scarf, in particular, struck him as most

suspicious. It was interesting, certainly, in more ways than one, but so very improbable! And Lupin's explanation, apparently so logical, would never stand the test of a severe examination!

"No," said Ganimard, "this is all swank: a parcel of suppositions and guesswork based upon nothing at all. I'm not to be caught with chaff."

WHEN HE reached the headquarters of police, at 36 Quai des Orfevres, he had quite made up his mind to treat the incident as though it had never happened.

He went up to the Criminal Investigation Department. Here, one of his fellow inspectors said:

"Seen the chief?"

"No."

"He was asking for you just now."

"Oh, was he?"

"Yes, you had better go after him."

"Where?"

"To the Rue de Berne... there was a murder there last night."

"Oh! Who's the victim?"

"I don't know exactly ... a music hall singer, I believe."

Ganimard simply muttered:—

"By Jove!"

Twenty minutes later he stepped out of the underground railway station and made for the Rue de Berne.

The victim, who was known in the theatrical world by her stage name of Jenny Saphir, occupied a small flat on the second floor of one of the houses. A policeman took the chief inspector upstairs and showed him the way, through two sitting rooms, to a bedroom, where he found the magistrates in charge of the inquiry, together with the divisional surgeon and M. Dudouis, the head of the detective service.

Ganimard started at the first glance which he gave into the room. He saw, lying on a sofa, the corpse of a young woman whose hands clutched a strip of red silk! One of the shoulders, which appeared above the low-cut bodice, bore the marks of two wounds surrounded with clotted blood. The distorted and almost blackened features still bore an expression of frenzied terror.

The divisional surgeon, who had just finished his examination, said:

"My first conclusions are very clear. The victim was twice stabbed with a dagger and afterward strangled. The immediate cause of death was asphyxia."

"By Jove!" thought Ganimard again, remembering Lupin's words and the picture which he had drawn of the crime.

The examining magistrate objected:

"But the neck shows no discoloration."

"She may have been strangled with a napkin or a handkerchief," said the doctor.

"Most probably," said the chief detective, "with this silk scarf, which the victim was wearing and a piece of which remains, as though she had clung to it with her two hands to protect herself."

"But why does only that piece remain?" asked the magistrate. "What has become of the other?"

"The other may have been stained with blood and carried off by the murderer. You can plainly distinguish the hurried slashing of the scissors."

"By Jove!" said Ganimard, between his teeth, for the third time. "That brute of a Lupin saw everything without seeing a thing!"

"And what about the motive of the murder?" asked the magistrate. "The locks have been forced, the cupboards turned upside down. Have you anything to tell me, M. Dudouis?"

The chief of the detective service replied:

"I can at least suggest a supposition, derived from the statements made by the servant. The victim, who enjoyed a greater reputation on account of her looks than through her talent as a singer, went to Russia, two years ago, and brought back with her a magnificent sapphire, which she appears to have received from some person of importance at the court. Since then, she went by the name of Jenny Saphir and seems generally to have been very proud of that present, although, for prudence's sake, she never wore it. I daresay that

we shall not be far out if we presume the theft of the sapphire to have been the cause of the crime."

"But did the maid know where the stone was?"

"No, nobody did. And the disorder of the room would tend to prove that the murderer did not know either."

"We will question the maid," said the examining magistrate.

M. Dudouis took the chief inspector aside and said: "You're looking very old-fashioned, Ganimard. What's the matter? Do you suspect anything?"

"Nothing at all, chief."

"That's a pity. We could do with a bit of showy work in the department. This is one of a number of crimes, all of the same class, of which we have failed to discover the perpetrator. This time we want the criminal... and quickly!"

"A difficult job, chief."

"It's got to be done. Listen to me, Ganimard. According to what the maid says, Jenny Saphir led a very regular life. For a month past she was in the habit of frequently receiving visits, on her return from the music hall, that is to say, at about half past ten, from a man who would stay until midnight or so. 'He's a society man,' Jenny Saphir used to say, 'and he wants to marry me.' This society man took every precaution to avoid being seen, such as turning up his coat collar and lowering the brim of his hat when he passed the porter's box. And Jenny Saphir always made a point of sending away her maid, even before he came. This is the man whom we have to find."

"Has he left no traces?"

"None at all. It is obvious that we have to deal with a very clever scoundrel, who prepared his crime beforehand and committed it with every possible chance of escaping unpunished. His arrest would be a great feather in our cap. I rely on you, Ganimard."

"Ah, you rely on me, chief?" replied the inspector. "Well, we shall see... we shall see.... I don't say no.... Only..."

He seemed in a very nervous condition, and his agitation struck M. Dudouis.

"Only," continued Ganimard, "only I swear... do you hear, chief? I swear..."

"What do you swear?"

"Nothing.... We shall see, chief ... we shall see...."

Ganimard did not finish his sentence until he was outside, alone. And he finished it aloud, stamping his foot, in a tone of the most violent anger:

"Only, I swear to Heaven that the arrest shall be effected by my own means, without my employing a single one of the clues with which that villain has supplied me. Ah, no! Ah, no!..."

Railing against Lupin, furious at being mixed up in this business and resolved, nevertheless, to get to the bottom of it, he wandered aimlessly about the streets. His brain was seething with irritation; and he tried to adjust his ideas a little and to discover, among the chaotic facts, some trifling detail, unperceived by all, unsuspected by Lupin himself, that might lead him to success.

He lunched hurriedly at a bar, resumed his stroll and suddenly stopped, petrified, astounded and confused. He was walking under the gateway of the very house in the Rue de Surene to which Lupin had enticed him a few hours earlier! A force stronger than his own will was drawing him there once more. The solution of the problem lay there. There and there alone were all the elements of the truth. Do and say what he would, Lupin's assertions were so precise, his calculations so accurate, that, worried to the innermost recesses of his being by so prodigious a display of perspicacity, he could not do other than take up the work at the point where his enemy had left it.

Abandoning all further resistance, he climbed the three flights of stairs. The door of the flat was open. No one had touched the exhibits. He put them in his pocket and walked away.

From that moment, he reasoned and acted, so to speak, mechanically, under the influence of the master whom he could not choose but obey.

Admitting that the unknown person whom he was seeking lived in the neighborhood of the Pont-Neuf, it became necessary to discover, somewhere between that bridge and the Rue de Berne, the first-class confectioner's shop, open in the evenings, at which the cakes were bought. This did not take long to find. A pastry cook near the Gare Saint-Lazare showed him some little cardboard boxes, identical in material and shape with the one in Ganimard's possession. Moreover, one of the shopgirls remembered having served, on the previous evening, a gentleman whose face was almost concealed in the collar of his fur coat, but whose eyeglass she had happened to notice.

"That's one clue checked," thought the inspector. "Our man wears an eyeglass."

He next collected the pieces of the racing paper and showed them to a news vender, who easily recognized the *Turf lllustre*. Ganimard at once went to the offices of the *Turf* and asked to see the list of subscribers. Going through the list, he jotted down the names and addresses of all those who lived anywhere near the Pont-Neuf and principally— because Lupin had said so— those on the left bank of the river.

He then went back to the Criminal Investigation Department, took half a dozen men and packed them off with the necessary instructions.

At seven o'clock in the evening, the last of these men returned and brought good news with him. A certain M. Prevailles, a subscriber to the *Turf,* occupied an entresol flat on the Quai des Augustins. On the previous evening, he left his place, wearing a fur coat, took his letters and his paper, the *Turf lllustre*, from the porter's wife, walked away and returned home at midnight. This M. Prevailles wore a single eyeglass. He was a regular race-goer and himself owned several hacks which he either rode himself or jobbed out.

The inquiry had taken so short a time and the results obtained were so exactly in accordance with Lupin's predictions that Ganimard felt quite overcome on hearing the detective's report. Once more he was measuring the prodigious extent of the resources at Lupin's disposal. Never in the course of his life— and Ganimard was already well-advanced in years— had he come across such perspicacity, such a quick and far-seeing mind.

He went in search of M. Dudouis.

"Everything's ready, chief. Have you a warrant?"

"Eh?"

"I said, everything is ready for the arrest, chief."

"You know the name of Jenny Saphir's murderer?"

"Yes."

"But how? Explain yourself."

Ganimard had a sort of scruple of conscience, blushed a little and nevertheless replied:

"An accident, chief. The murderer threw everything that was likely to compromise him into the Seine. Part of the parcel was picked up and handed to me.

"By whom?"

"A boatman who refused to give his name, for fear of getting into trouble. But I had all the clues I wanted. It was not so difficult as I expected."

And the inspector described how he had gone to work.

"And you call that an accident!" cried M. Dudouis. "And you say that it was not difficult! Why, it's one of your finest performances! Finish it yourself, Ganimard, and be prudent."

Ganimard was eager to get the business done. He went to the Quai des Augustins with his men and distributed them around the house. He questioned the portress, who said that her tenant took his meals out of doors, but made a point of looking in after dinner. A little before nine o'clock, in fact, leaning out of her window, she warned Ganimard, who at once gave a low whistle. A gentleman in a tall hat and a fur coat was coming along the pavement beside the Seine. He crossed the road and walked up to the house.

Ganimard stepped forward:

"M. Prevailles, I believe?"

"Yes, but who are you?"

"I have a commission to..."

He had not time to finish his sentence. At the sight of the men appearing out of the shadow, Prevailles quickly retreated to the wall and faced his adversaries, with his back to the door of a shop on the ground floor, the shutters of which were closed.

"Stand back!" he cried. "I don't know you!"

His right hand brandished a heavy stick, while his left was slipped behind him and seemed to be trying to open the door. Ganimard had an impression that the man might escape through this way and through some secret outlet:

"None of this nonsense," he said, moving closer to him. "You're caught.... You had better come quietly."

But, just as he was laying hold of Prevailles's stick, Ganimard remembered the warning which Lupin gave him: Prevailles was left-handed; and it was his revolver for which he was feeling behind his back.

The inspector ducked his head. He had noticed the man's sudden movement. Two reports rang out. No one was hit.

A second later, Prevailles received a blow under the chin from the butt end of a revolver, which brought him down where he stood. He was entered at the Depot soon after nine o'clock.

GANIMARD enjoyed a great reputation even at that time. But this capture, so quickly effected, by such very simple means, and at once made public by the police, won him a sudden celebrity. Prevailles was forthwith saddled with all the murders that had remained unpunished; and the newspapers vied with one another in extolling Ganimard's prowess.

The case was conducted briskly at the start. It was first of all ascertained that Prevailles, whose real name was Thomas Derocq, had already been in trouble. Moreover, the search instituted in his rooms, while not supplying any fresh proofs, at least led to the discovery of a ball of whipcord similar to the cord used for doing up the parcel and also to the discovery of daggers which would have produced a wound similar to the wounds on the victim. But, on the eighth day, everything was changed. Until then Prevailles had refused to reply to the questions put to him; but now, assisted by his counsel, he pleaded a circumstantial alibi and maintained that he was at the Folies-Bergere on the night of the murder.

As a matter of fact, the pockets of his dinner jacket contained the counterfoil of a stall ticket and a program of the performance, both bearing the date of that evening.

"An alibi prepared in advance," objected the examining magistrate.

"Prove it," said Prevailles.

The prisoner was confronted with the witnesses for the prosecution. The young lady from the confectioner's "thought she knew" the gentleman with the eyeglass. The hall porter in the Rue de Berne "thought he knew" the gentleman who used to come to see Jenny Saphir. But nobody dared to make a more definite statement. The examination, therefore, led to nothing of a precise character, provided no solid basis whereon to found a serious accusation.

The judge sent for Ganimard and told him of his difficulty.

"I can't possibly persist, at this rate. There is no evidence to support the charge."

"But surely you are convinced in your own mind, *monsieur le juge d'instruction*! Prevailles would never have resisted his arrest unless he was guilty."

"He says that he thought he was being assaulted. He also says that he never set eyes on Jenny Saphir; and, as a matter of fact, we can find no one to contradict his assertion. Then again, admitting that the sapphire has been stolen, we have not been able to find it at his flat."

"Nor anywhere else," suggested Ganimard.

"Quite true, but that is no evidence against him. I'll tell you what we shall want, M. Ganimard, and that very soon: the other end of this red scarf."

"The other end?"

"Yes, for it is obvious that, if the murderer took it away with him, the reason was that the stuff is stained with the marks of the blood on his fingers."

Ganimard made no reply. For several days he had felt that the whole business was tending to this conclusion. There was no other proof possible. Given the silk scarf— and in no other circumstances— Prevailles's guilt was certain. Now Ganimard's position required that Prevailles's guilt should be established. He was responsible for the arrest, it had cast a glamour around him, he had been praised to the skies as the most formidable adversary of criminals; and he would look absolutely ridiculous if Prevailles were released. Unfortunately, the one and only indispensable proof was in Lupin's pocket. How was he to get hold of it?

Ganimard cast about, exhausted himself with fresh investigations, went over the inquiry from start to finish, spent sleepless nights in turning over the mystery of the Rue de Berne, studied the records of Prevailles's life, sent ten men hunting after the invisible sapphire. Everything was useless.

On the 28th of December, the examining magistrate stopped him in one of the passages of the Law Courts:

"Well, M. Ganimard, any news?"

"No, *monsieur le juge d'instruction*."

"Then I shall dismiss the case."

"Wait one day longer."

"What's the use? We want the other end of the scarf; have you got it?"

"I shall have it to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

"Yes, but please lend me the piece in your possession."

"What if I do?"

"If you do, I promise to let you have the whole scarf complete."

"Very well, that's understood."

Ganimard followed the examining magistrate to his room and came out with the piece of silk:

"Hang it all!" he growled. "Yes, I will go and fetch the proof and I shall have it too... always presuming that Master Lupin has the courage to keep the appointment."

In point of fact, he did not doubt for a moment that Master Lupin would have this courage, and that was just what exasperated him. Why had Lupin insisted on this meeting? What was his object, in the circumstances?

Anxious, furious and full of hatred, he resolved to take every precaution necessary not only to prevent his falling into a trap himself, but to make his enemy fall into one, now that the opportunity offered. And, on the next day, which was the 29th of December, the date fixed by Lupin, after spending the night in studying the old manor house in the Rue de Surene and convincing himself that there was no other outlet than the front door, he warned his men that he was going on a dangerous expedition and arrived with them on the field of battle.

He posted them in a cafe and gave them formal instructions: if he showed himself at one of the third-floor windows, or if he failed to return within an hour, the detectives were to enter the house and arrest any one who tried to leave it.

The chief inspector made sure that his revolver was in working order and that he could take it from his pocket easily. Then he went upstairs.

He was surprised to find things as he had left them, the doors open and the locks broken. After ascertaining that the windows of the principal room looked out on the street, he visited the three other rooms that made up the flat. There was no one there.

"Master Lupin was afraid," he muttered, not without a certain satisfaction.

"Don't be silly," said a voice behind him.

Turning round, he saw an old workman, wearing a house-painter's long smock, standing in the doorway.

"You needn't bother your head," said the man. "It's I, Lupin. I have been working in the painter's shop since early morning. This is when we knock off for breakfast. So I came upstairs."

He looked at Ganimard with a quizzing smile and cried:

" 'Pon my word, this is a gorgeous moment I owe you, old chap! I wouldn't sell it for ten years of your life; and yet you know how I love you! What do you think of it, artist? Wasn't it well thought out and well foreseen? Foreseen from alpha to omega? Did I understand the business? Did I penetrate the mystery of the scarf? I'm not saying that there were no holes in my argument, no links missing in the chain... But what a masterpiece of intelligence! Ganimard, what a reconstruction of events! What an intuition of everything that had taken place and of everything that was going to take place, from the discovery of the crime to your arrival here in search of a proof! What really marvellous divination! Have you the scarf?"

"Yes, half of it. Have you the other?"

"Here it is. Let's compare."

They spread the two pieces of silk on the table. The cuts made by the scissors corresponded exactly. Moreover, the colors were identical.

"But I presume," said Lupin, "that this was not the only thing you came for. What you are interested in seeing is the marks of the blood. Come with me, Ganimard: it's rather dark in here."

They moved into the next room, which, though it overlooked the courtyard, was lighter; and Lupin held his piece of silk against the window-pane:

"Look," he said, making room for Ganimard.

The inspector gave a start of delight. The marks of the five fingers and the print of the palm were distinctly visible. The evidence was undeniable. The murderer had seized the stuff in his blood-stained hand, in the same hand that had stabbed Jenny Saphir, and tied the scarf round her neck.

"And it is the print of a left hand," observed Lupin. "Hence my warning, which had nothing miraculous about it, you see. For, though I admit, friend of my youth, that you may look upon me as a superior intelligence, I won't have you treat me as a wizard."

Ganimard had quickly pocketed the piece of silk. Lupin nodded his head in approval:

"Quite right, old boy, it's for you. I'm so glad you're glad! And, you see, there was no trap about all this... only the wish to oblige... a service between friends, between pals.... And also, I confess, a little curiosity.... Yes, I wanted to

examine this other piece of silk, the one the police had.... Don't be afraid: I'll give it back to you.... Just a second...."

Lupin, with a careless movement, played with the tassel at the end of this half of the scarf, while Ganimard listened to him in spite of himself:

"How ingenious these little bits of women's work are! Did you notice one detail in the maid's evidence? Jenny Saphir was very handy with her needle and used to make all her own hats and frocks. It is obvious that she made this scarf herself.... Besides, I noticed that from the first. I am naturally curious, as I have already told you, and I made a thorough examination of the piece of silk which you have just put in your pocket. Inside the tassel, I found a little sacred medal, which the poor girl had stitched into it to bring her luck. Touching, isn't it, Ganimard? A little medal of Our Lady of Good Succor."

The inspector felt greatly puzzled and did not take his eyes off the other. And Lupin continued:

"Then I said to myself, 'How interesting it would be to explore the other half of the scarf, the one which the police will find round the victim's neck!' For this other half, which I hold in my hands at last, is finished off in the same way ... so I shall be able to see if it has a hiding place too and what's inside it.... But look, my friend, isn't it cleverly made? And so simple! All you have to do is to take a skein of red cord and braid it round a wooden cup, leaving a little recess, a little empty space in the middle, very small, of course, but large enough to hold a medal of a saint... or anything.... A precious stone, for instance.... Such as a sapphire."

At that moment he finished pushing back the silk cord and, from the hollow of a cup he took between his thumb and forefinger a wonderful blue stone, perfect in respect of size and purity.

"Ha! What did I tell you, friend of my youth?"

He raised his head. The inspector had turned livid and was staring wild-eyed, as though fascinated by the stone that sparkled before him. He at last realized the whole plot: "You dirty scoundrel!" he muttered, repeating the insults which he had used at the first interview. "You scum of the earth!"

The two men were standing one against the other.

"Give me back that," said the inspector.

Lupin held out the piece of silk.

"And the sapphire," said Ganimard, in a peremptory tone.

"Don't be silly."

"Give it back, or..."

"Or what, you idiot!" cried Lupin. "Look here, do you think I put you on to this soft thing for nothing?"

"Give it back!"

"You haven't noticed what I've been about, that's plain! What! For four weeks I've kept you on the move like a deer; and you want to...! Come, Ganimard, old chap, pull yourself together!... Don't you see that you've been playing the good dog for four weeks on end?... Fetch it, Rover!... There's a nice blue pebble over there, which master can't get at. Hunt it, Ganimard, fetch it... bring it to master.... Ah, he's his master's own good little dog!... Sit up! Beg!... Does'ms want a bit of sugar, then?..."

Ganimard, containing the anger that seethed within him, thought only of one thing, summoning his detectives. And, as the room in which he now was looked out on the courtyard, he tried gradually to work his way round to the communicating door. He would then run to the window and break one of the panes.

"All the same," continued Lupin, "what a pack of dunderheads you and the rest must be! You've had the silk all this time and not one of you ever thought of feeling it, not one of you ever asked himself the reason why the poor girl hung on to her scarf. Not one of you! You just acted at haphazard, without reflecting, without foreseeing anything...."

The inspector had attained his object. Taking advantage of a second when Lupin had turned away from him, he suddenly wheeled round and grasped the door handle. But an oath escaped him: the handle did not budge.

Lupin burst into a fit of laughing:

"Not even that! You did not even foresee that! You lay a trap for me and you won't admit that I may perhaps smell the thing out beforehand.... And you allow yourself to be brought into this room without asking whether I am not bringing you here for a particular reason and without remembering that the locks are fitted with a special mechanism. Come now, speaking frankly, what do you think of it yourself?"

"What do I think of it?" roared Ganimard, beside himself with rage.

He had drawn his revolver and was pointing it straight at Lupin's face.

"Hands up!" he cried. "That's what I think of it!"

Lupin placed himself in front of him and shrugged his shoulders:

"Sold again!" he said.

"Hands up, I say, once more!"

"And sold again, say I. Your deadly weapon won't go off."

"What?"

"Old Catherine, your housekeeper, is in my service. She damped the charges this morning while you were having your breakfast coffee."

Ganimard made a furious gesture, pocketed the revolver and rushed at Lupin.

"Well?" said Lupin, stopping him short with a well-aimed kick on the shin.

Their clothes were almost touching. They exchanged defiant glances, the glances of two adversaries who mean to come to blows. Nevertheless, there was no fight. The recollection of the earlier struggles made any present struggle useless. And Ganimard, who remembered all his past failures, his vain attacks, Lupin's crushing reprisals, did not lift a limb. There was nothing to be done.

He felt it. Lupin had forces at his command against which any individual force simply broke to pieces. So what was the good?

"I agree," said Lupin, in a friendly voice, as though answering Ganimard's unspoken thought, "you would do better to let things be as they are. Besides, friend of my youth, think of all that this incident has brought you: fame, the certainty of quick promotion and, thanks to that, the prospect of a happy and comfortable old age! Surely, you don't want the discovery of the sapphire and the head of poor Arsene Lupin in addition! It wouldn't be fair. To say nothing of the fact that poor Arsene Lupin saved your life.... Yes, sir! Who warned you, at this very spot, that Prevailles was left-handed?... And is this the way you thank me? It's not pretty of you, Ganimard. Upon my word, you make me blush for you!"

While chattering, Lupin had gone through the same performance as Ganimard and was now near the door. Ganimard saw that his foe was about to escape him. Forgetting all prudence, he tried to block his way and received a tremendous butt in the stomach, which sent him rolling to the opposite wall.

Lupin dexterously touched a spring, turned the handle, opened the door and slipped away, roaring with laughter as he went.

TWENTY minutes later, when Ganimard at last succeeded in joining his men, one of them said to him:—

"A house painter left the house, as his mates were coming back from breakfast, and put a letter in my hand. 'Give that to your governor,' he said. 'Which governor?' I asked; but he was gone. I suppose it's meant for you."

"Let's have it."

Ganimard opened the letter. It was hurriedly scribbled in pencil and contained these words:—

This is to warn you, friend of my youth, against excessive credulity. When a fellow tells you that the cartridges in your revolver are damp, however great your confidence in that fellow may be, even though his name be Arsene Lupin, never allow yourself to be taken in. Fire first; and, if the fellow hops the twig, you will have acquired the proof (1) that the cartridges are not damp; and (2)

that old Catherine is the most honest and respectable of housekeepers. One of these days, I hope to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance.

Meanwhile, friend of my youth, believe me always affectionately and sincerely yours,

Arsene Lupin

_____

18: Delilah

Frances Noyes Hart

1890-1943

Pictorial Review Dec 1921

"BUT WHAT is she like?" asked O'Hara impatiently. "Man alive, you've seen her, haven't you? Sat next to her at dinner at the Embassy last night, didn't you? Well, then, for the love of the Saints, what's the creature like?"

De Nemours shrugged his shoulders, raising whimsical eyebrows at the slim young giant towering above him.

"*Mon cher*, one cannot put the lady into two words. *Voyons*— she is, as our Alfred so charmingly puts it, blonde like the wheat—"

"Oh, rot." The ardent voice of the British representative was curt to the point of rudeness, and De Nemour's smile became exquisitely courteous. "I don't care whether she's an albino. She's the American representative on this committee, and I'm interested in her mental qualifications. Is she intelligent?"

"Intelligent! Ah, my poor friend, she is far, far worse." His smile grew reminiscent as he lit his cigarette. "She has a wit like a shining sword, and eyelashes of a truly fantastic length."

"And every time her eyes shine you think it's the sword," commented O'Hara bitterly. "God, this is hideous! I can see her sitting there chattering epigrams and fluttering dimples—"

"You do Mrs. Lindsay an injustice," said another voice quietly, and O'Hara swung around with a slight start.

"Oh, Celati, I clean forgot that you were there. I thought that you had never met the lady."

"Unfortunately for me, you are entirely correct. But last night I came in after the dinner for some bridge, and I watched Mrs. Lindsay with great interest, with great admiration, for more than half an hour. There was a most fat Senator from the South talking to her, and she was listening. I say *listening*, mark. In this great country the most charming of women feel that they have already acquired all desirable information and wisdom and that it is their not unpainful function to disseminate it. I find that it makes intercourse more exciting than flattering. But Mrs. Lindsay was— listening."

"You mean to say that she said nothing at all in half an hour?" O'Hara's tone was flatly incredulous.

"Oh, *si, si*, she spoke three times— and if one may judge by the human countenance, I dare to wager that that most fat Senator thought that never woman spoke more wittily or wisely."

"And we are to have the jewels?"

"But surely. She said after the first ten minutes, 'Oh, but do go on!' and after the next, 'But what happened then?' and after the third 'Good-night— and thank you.' May I have a light, De Nemours? Thanks!"

"And those— those are the epigrams?" O'Hara threw back his head and laughed— a sudden boyish shout, oddly at variance with his stern young face.

"Ah," murmured Celati, a reminiscent and enigmatic smile touching his lips, "you should have heard her voice!"

O'Hara's smile vanished abruptly. He came perilously near scowling as he stood staring down at the inscrutable Latin countenances blandly presented for inspection. De Nemours permitted a flicker of genial appreciation to warm his cold eyes, the tribute of a highly distinguished connoisseur. Truly, this young Irishman, he was of a magnificence. No collector of beauty in all its forms could remain unmoved by the sight of that superb head— that more than superb body. Praxiteles Hermes turned gypsy! One of those Celts with obviously Spanish blood running hot and cold through their veins. The cool appraisal hovered for the moment on the verge of interest— flickered out. De Nemours was quite definitely convinced that not one man in a thousand was deserving of interest, and he had found little in an extremely varied experience to shake his conclusions.

"An exquisite voice," he agreed pleasantly. "It will turn our dullest statistics to madrigals. The gods are merciful."

O'Hara swung his chair to the table, protest bitter in his stormy gray eyes and on his quick tongue. These damned foreigners!

"You don't seem to grasp the situation. We are here to settle matters of vital urgency, not to conduct a salon. Our reports on the various insurgent activities throughout our countries are to be test cases for the world. We're not only to report conditions but to suggest solutions. Think, man, think! This room may be the laboratory where we will discover the formula to heal a world that's near to dying. Can you turn that into an epigram or a jest?"

"No," said De Nemours softly, and he looked suddenly very tired and very old, "that is no epigram, Monsieur O'Hara— that is no jest. Ah, my country, my country." His voice was hardly above a whisper, but in the cold and bitter eyes there was something that wailed aloud.

"Yes, my country," O'Hara retorted fiercely, "but more than that. There are five members of this Committee— not four."

"Not four?" Celati's level voice was suddenly sharp.

"Not four. There will be represented at this table Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States— and Humanity. The greatest of these, gentlemen, will have no voice."

"*Au bonheur!*" commented De Nemours affably. "It, unlike Mrs. Lindsay, might not sing us madrigals."

O'Hara brought his clenched fist down on the table with a gesture at once despairing and menacing. "Now by the Lord," he said, his voice oddly shaken, "if this woman—"

The door into the hall opened very quietly, closed more quietly still, and Delilah Lindsay stood facing them, her hand still on the knob.

"I knocked twice," she said softly. "The woodwork must be very thick."

O'Hara rose slowly to his feet. Celati and De Nemours had already found theirs.

"Good evening," he said, "it's not quite the hour, I believe." He was fighting an absurd and overwhelming impulse— an impulse to reply with perfect candour, "The woodwork is not thick at all. Were you listening at that door?"

For a moment, hardly longer, Delilah stood quite still. It was long enough to stamp on every mind present an indelible picture of the primrose-yellow head shining out against the dark panels; therefore, long enough for all practical purposes. She released the door-knob, smiling very faintly.

"It is unfortunate for a man to be late," she replied, "but unpardonable for a woman. We have so much time of our own to waste that we must be very careful not to waste that of others. *Bon soir*, De Nemours."

She crossed the room with her light, unhurried tread, and stopped, serenely gracious, before O'Hara.

"You are the British representative, are you not? It is very stupid of me, but I don't believe that I have heard your name."

"You have heard it a good hundred times," thought the British representative grimly.

"Madame, permit that I present to you Mr. O'Hara."

"Mr. O'Hara?" Her smile was suddenly as winningly mischievous as a child's. "That's a grand name entirely for an Englishman."

O'Hara's eyes were ice gray. "I'm no Englishman, Mrs. Lindsay. But some of us in Ireland hold still that we are part of Great Britain though the Colonials may have seen fit to forget it."

The velvety eyes lifted to his were warm with sympathy and concern. "That's splendid of you; we hear so much bitterness amongst the Irish here, and somehow it seems— ugly. After all, as you say, no matter what she may do— or has done— England is England! But I am distressed to hear that there has been disloyalty elsewhere. You think Canada— Australia?"

"I think neither. It was of other children of England that I was thinking, Mrs. Lindsay— ungrateful and rebellious children."

"Oh, how stupid. Egypt, of course, and India. But, after all, they are only adopted children, aren't they? Perhaps if we give them time they'll grow to be as loyal and steadfast and dependable as you yourselves. *Pazienza*—"

"I was not—"

She raised a protesting hand, gay and imperious. "No, no, don't even bother to deny it. You must be discreet, I know— indeed, indeed I honour you for it." She turned to De Nemours, the sparkling face suddenly grave. "But we must not be forgetting; we are here to discuss more vital matters than England's colonial policy, vital as that may well be. Will you forgive us— and present my colleague from Italy?"

"Mrs. Lindsay, Signor Celati." Both De Nemours and Celati were struggling with countenances not habitually slaves to mirth, but the look of stony and incredulous amazement on O'Hara's expressive visage was enough to undermine the Sphinx.

By what miracle of dexterity had she turned the tables on him, leaving him gracefully rebuked for triviality— he, the prophet and crusader? And by what magic had she transformed his very palpable hit at the recalcitrant Americans into a boomerang? He drew a long breath. This woman— this woman was so unscrupulously clever that she could afford to seem stupid. That rendered her pretty nearly invulnerable. The stormy eyes grew still— narrowed intently— smiled.

"Mrs. Lindsay is entirely right," he agreed. "Let us get to business; Heaven knows that we have enough of it to get through! Mrs. Lindsay, we have gone over a certain amount of ground in your unavoidable absence. I regret—"

"I, too, regret it," she said quietly. "But it is, as you say, unavoidable. I was greatly honoured by the Government's choice, but it was impossible for me to drop the Oregon investigations at that stage. If I could have the minutes of the previous meetings—"

"We have no minutes. It has been decided to dispense with the services of a stenographer, as the matters handled are of really incalculable delicacy. Each of us, however, keeps an abstract of the proceedings, which we check up together, in order to prevent any possible misunderstandings. These are at your disposal, naturally."

"I see. Then if it will not be too much trouble, I'll run through yours. It will only be necessary to see one lot, if they have been checked, of course. Shall we begin where you left off, then? And shall I take this chair? I'm quite ready. I left my hat and cloak and such feminine trappings downstairs. What is under discussion?"

"I'll have the report for you at the next meeting," said O'Hara. "We were thrashing out the situation in Rome. You think that the Pope will influence the

Blacks to vote against the commonist element, Celati? That's unusual, isn't it? A distinct return to temporal power?"

"Unusual, yes. A return to temporal power? Possibly. But the Vatican contends that it is a spiritual and social matter rather than a political matter. It seems—"

For a moment— for more than a moment O'Hara lost track of the even, unemotional voice. He was watching, with a blazing and concentrated curiosity, the face of the American representative. Mrs. Lindsay was listening to the Italian with rapt interest, but O'Hara could have sworn that it was the same interest, fascinated and indulgent, which an intelligent small child bestows on a grown-up telling fairy tales— an interest which whispers "It's so pretty— let's pretend it's true!" She looked almost like a small child as she sat facing him across the darkly shining table; almost like a small boy. Her thick, soft hair was cut short and framed her face like a little mediæval page's— straight across the low white forehead, curling strongly under about her ears. The blue jacket with its white Eton collar and narrow cuffs was boyish, too. And the chin— O'Hara pulled himself up, frowning. He was mad! His cousin Norah was boyish, if you like, with her honest freckled face and puppy eyes, and red hands— but this small smooth creature could clip her shining hair to its roots— it would only betray the eternal feminine more damningly. No stiff collar would ever do anything but accentuate the velvety darkness of her eyes, the pure beauty of the wistful mouth. Possibly that was why she wore it! He caught back a grim smile as the velvet eyes met his.

"It's desperately awkward, of course," said the voice that De Nemours had accurately described as exquisite. "What solution would you suggest, Mr. O'Hara?"

"I am not yet prepared to offer a solution," Mr. O'Hara informed her a trifle stiffly. What in the name of Gods and Devils had Celati been talking about, anyway?

"But after all," urged Mrs. Lindsay, "it comes down to a question of two alternatives, doesn't it? Which seems to you the lesser evil?"

"I prefer to wait until we hear a little more about it." His back was against the wall, but he thoroughly intended to die fighting.

"More about it? What more is there to hear?" Her amazement was so wide-eyed that it seemed almost impossible that it was not genuine. But if you had put thumb-screws to him, O'Hara would have maintained that in some inexplicable manner the small, demure, deferential fiend across the table was fully aware of the fact that he had not been listening— and fully prepared to make his unsuspicious colleagues aware of it, too.

"Part of it did not seem quite clear to me," he said curtly.

"Not clear?" repeated Celati, his imperturbable calm severely ruffled, "what do you say, not clear? You find my English at fault, possibly— certainly not my explanation. No child could do that."

"Surely not," agreed Mrs. Lindsay, and her voice was as soothing as a cool hand, "I confess that it struck me as— well— limpid. But perhaps Mr. O'Hara will tell us just what part of it he did not follow?"

"Put it," said O'Hara, with something perilously like hatred blazing in his eyes, "that I did not follow. We are simply wasting time. Will someone repeat the alternatives?"

Mrs. Lindsay's gravely solicitous eyes met the look unflinchingly. "Surely. All this is simply wasting time, as you say. It comes down to a question as to whether it is preferable for the Italian Government to countenance or discountenance the Papal entry into politics. In the present case it is naturally an asset, but it is possible that it might entail serious consequences. I put it baldly and clumsily, but I am trying to be quite clear."

"You are succeeding admirably," O'Hara assured her. He was dangerously angry, with the violent and sickening anger of a man who had been made a fool of— and who has richly deserved it. "As you say, it is— limpid. But why not a third alternative? Why should the Italian Government do anything at all? Why not simply lie quiet and play safe? It would not be for the first time."

"Mr. O'Hara!" Celati was on his feet, white to the lips.

Mrs. Lindsay stretched out her hands with a prettily eloquent gesture of despair. "Oh, really!" she said quietly. "Is this kind of thing necessary? We are all working together for the same purpose— a purpose that has surely too much dignity to be degraded to such pettiness. Mr. O'Hara, I beg of you—"

"It is not necessary to beg of me." He leaned across the table, something boyish and winning in his face, his hand outstretched. "I say, Celati, I'm no end of a bounder; do let me off this once— I'm bone tired— haven't slept for nights, trying to think of ways through this beastly mess. I don't know what I'm saying, and that's Heaven's truth. Is it all right?"

"Quite. We are, I think, all tired."

"Men," Mrs. Lindsay murmured gently— "men are really wonderful. What two women would have done that?"

O'Hara considered her for a moment in silence.

"Is that a tribute you are paying us?" he inquired quite as gently.

"Why, what else?" Again the soft amazement.

"I was seeking information. It struck me as ambiguous."

Mrs. Lindsay smiled, that enigmatic smile, wistful and ironic. "It is undue humility on your part, believe me. But shan't we get back to the matter in hand? Monsieur De Nemours, what is your opinion?"

"I think there is much in Mr. O'Hara's suggestion that the Government should not be over-precipitate," replied De Nemours pleasantly. He was horribly bored; politics, unless they concerned France, bored him almost beyond endurance, but his ennui was somewhat alleviated by the fact that a very pretty woman was asking him a question. "If silence were maintained for a few weeks, it might well be—"

O'Hara was listening— fiercely. He was sure that he could smell violets somewhere; why didn't the woman take her hands off the table? They lay there, white and fragile and helpless, like broken flowers. Why didn't she wear a wedding ring? Why— he jerked his tired mind back savagely to De Nemours' easy, fluent voice, his tired eyes to the worn but amiable mask that the Frenchman substituted for a face. Why didn't he stop talking?

"We, in France, have been learning tolerance to God as well as to man," he was saying. "Possibly before the war we have been drastic, but the truly remarkable revival—"

France again! France and Italy and Oregon— on and on and on— the clock on the mantel clicked away the minutes ruthlessly, the precious minutes that belonged to a dying world. It was striking eleven when Mrs. Lindsay rose.

"Then that's cleared up, I think," she said. "We begin the regular routine to-morrow morning, don't we? Half-past nine? And here?"

"The house has been placed at my disposal," replied O'Hara formally. "I have placed it at the Committee's. It has proved a convenient arrangement."

"Are the night sessions usual?" she asked.

"Usual? I don't know." He looked at her wearily; how could any one emerge from that harrowing bickering and manœuvering so fresh and untouched and shining? "We have them when it seems necessary— how often should you say, De Nemours?"

"Never mind." The cool fingers were touching his; she was going. "I will keep my evenings free, too— I was simply wondering what to do about some invitations. But nothing else counts, of course, does it? Do get a good rest; you look so tired. Good-night." She smiled, nodded the golden head graciously, and was gone.

O'Hara stood gazing blankly at the closed door for a moment— then he swung across the room, flung the windows up with a carefully controlled violence, and stood leaning heavily against its frame, his shoulders sagging suddenly, his tired young face turned to the stars.

"You find it too warm?" De Nemours inquired courteously.

"No— I don't know. Those beastly violets—"

"Violets?" De Nemours waited with raised brows.

"The first time the poison gas came over at Ypres, the chap standing next to me said, 'Funny— there's a jolly smell of violets about.' Violets— God!" His voice twisted— broke. But after a minute he continued casually: "Rotten trick to have your senses go back on you like that, what? They're the little beggars Nature has given us for guards and watchmen and here one of them turns traitor and instead of shrieking 'Careful— careful— the ugliest poison ever found is touching you!' it whispers 'See, it smells of violets— oh, England— oh, Spring.' Damned traitors, the lot of them— for ever telling us that poison is sweet!"

"Why, so it is," murmured De Nemours. "Many and many a time. But where were the violets to-night, *mon ami*?"

O'Hara jerked about incredulously, "What! you didn't smell them? Why, every time she moved the air was thick with them!"

"Ah, Youth!" Irony and regret tempered the low laughter. "One must be young indeed to smell violets when a woman moves!"

Celati stirred slightly. "A most remarkable woman, this Mrs. Lindsay."

"Remarkable, indeed. There is something about her fine and direct—"

O'Hara stared at him aghast. "Direct? Man, but you're mad! The woman's tortuous as a winding lane— and it's a dark place it leads to, I'm thinking."

De Nemours yielded once more to indulgent mirth, "*Pauvre ami*, those nerves of yours play tricks with you! Mrs. Lindsay is a woman with an exceptional mind of which she makes exceptional use. She is a beautiful woman, but alas, she does not remind you of it. She is entirely devoted to her work, she shows tact and courage, a rare discretion, a fine simplicity—"

"Oh, God!" There was something very like despair in O'Hara's mirth. "Simplicity, by the Almighty! Because she wears blue serge instead of white lace? Why, I tell you that she trails yards of chiffon behind her when she goes, that her eyes are for ever smiling at you over a scented fan, that there's always a rose in her hair and a kiss on her lips. She's just as simple as Eve— and she still has fast hold of the apple!"

Celati eyed him a trifle sternly. "You object to women in politics, Mr. O'Hara?"

"Object? My soul, no! My mother and sister are in it up to their eyebrows, and making a rattling good job of it, too. But when they play the game, they play it. They leave more trappings than their hats and cloaks downstairs; they let you forget that they are women, and remember that they are human beings."

"I find masculine women— distasteful."

"I never said that they were masculine," O'Hara retorted sharply, "I said that they were first and foremost human beings. Any other attitude is fatal. I

tell you that this woman cares nothing in the world for our game; she is playing her own. And she is playing with loaded dice."

"And what game is she playing, pray?"

"The oldest game in the world," said O'Hara. "Antony's dark-eyed Egypt played it, and that slim witch, Mary Stuart, and the milliner's exquisite minx, Du Barry. Only they played behind silken curtains, with little jewelled hands and heads and words. They fight with other weapons nowadays, but the stakes haven't changed since Antony lost a world and won a kiss."

"And the stakes?"

"Why, you are the Stake," said O'Hara. "And I— and Celati there; they are playing for Power— and Man is Power— and Man, poor fool, is their toy. Little Sisters of Circe— they have come out from behind their pale silken curtains and stripped the jewels from the small hands and perfumed heads and covered their shining shoulders with harsh stuffs and schooled their light tongues to strange words— and we are blind and mad, and call them comrade!"

"*Tiens, tiens!*" murmured De Nemours, "you interest me, O'Hara. I confess that I had failed to find this sinister glamour; but you open pleasant vistas in a parched land!"

O'Hara gave him a wrenched smile. "That was not my endeavour," he said briefly.

Celati rose, a little stiffly. He was a heavy man, and oddly deliberate for a Latin.

"It is late," he said. "Are you coming, De Nemours? Till to-morrow morning, Mr. O'Hara; *a rivederla*."

"Good-night," returned O'Hara. "At nine-thirty, then. Good-night."

He stood staring down absently at the polished surface of the table for a moment or so after the door had closed, and then crossed to the open window. The stars were shining brightly— but they were very far away and cold, the stars. There was something nearer and sweeter in the quiet room behind him, nearer and sweeter even than on that spring day at Ypres. He turned from the window with a gesture at once violent and weary. Those accursed violets! He could smell them still.

ii

"YOU ARE taking Lilah Lindsay in to dinner," said Mrs. Dane. "I am kind to you, you see! She's the most exquisite person."

"Exquisite," O'Hara agreed politely, but there was something in his voice that caused Mrs. Dane to raise her beautifully pencilled eyebrows. There was no doubt about it, her distinguished guest was in no transport of enthusiasm as

to her adored Lilah. Rumour, for once, was correct! She glanced toward the door, bit her lip, and then, with a swift movement of decision, she turned to the high-backed sofa, her draperies fluttering about her as she seated herself.

"I am so very glad that you came early," she informed him graciously, and O'Hara thought again of her astonishing resemblance to a humming-bird— small and restless and vivid, eternally vibrating over some new flower. "I so rarely get a chance to talk to you— you are most impressively busy, aren't you? Do you see a great deal of Lilah?"

"Mrs. Lindsay has attended all our conferences for the past few weeks."

"Oh, of course, but you can hardly get to know her there, can you?"

"Possibly not. However, I have had to content myself with that. She is a very busy woman, of course, and my own time is not at my disposal."

"I suppose not," murmured Mrs. Dane mendaciously. She supposed nothing of the sort. "But you are to be pitied, truly. She is a most enchanting person; all the tragedy and cruelty of her life have left her as gay and sweet and friendly as a child. It's incredible."

"She has had tragedy and cruelty in her life?"

"Oh, it's been a nightmare— nothing less. She hadn't been out of her French convent six months when she married that beast, Heaven knows why— she had every other man in Washington at her feet, but he apparently swept her off them! Of course, he had a brilliant future before him—"

"Of course," murmured O'Hara.

"What do you mean? Did you know Curran Lindsay?"

"Never heard of him," O'Hara assured her. "But do go on: what happened to the beast's future?"

She shrugged her white shoulders distastefully. "Oh, he died in a sanitarium in California several years ago, eaten up with drugs and baffled ambition."

"And languishing away without his favourite pastime of beating the lovely Mrs. Lindsay black and blue, I suppose?"

Mrs. Dane controlled a tremor of annoyance. She disliked flippancy and she disliked grimness; combined she found them irritating to a really incredible degree. "Curran never subjected Lilah to physical maltreatment," she said coldly, "he subjected her to something a thousand times more intolerable— his adoration."

"So the beast adored her?"

"He was mad about her. You find that unlikely?"

"On the contrary," replied O'Hara amiably, "I find it inevitable. But what happened to his brilliant career?"

"Oh, he was crazily, insanely jealous— and some devil chose to send him an anonymous letter in the middle of a crucial party contest when his presence was absolutely vital, saying that Lilah was carrying on an affair with an artist in California, where he'd left her for the winter. He went raving mad— threw up the whole thing— told his backers that they could go to Hell, he was going to California— and he went, too."

"Ah, Antony, Antony!" O'Hara said softly.

Mrs. Dane stared at him, wide-eyed. "Why, what do you mean? Have you heard the story before?"

"It sounds, somehow, vaguely familiar," he told her. "There was a woman in Egypt— no— that was an older story than this. Well, what did the beast find?"

"He found Lilah," replied Mrs. Dane sharply. "The artist had promptly blown his brains out when she had sent him about his business, as she naturally did. But Curran's contest was lost, and so was Curran. He might as well have been Benedict Arnold, from his party's point of view. He went absolutely to pieces; took to drinking more and more— then drugs— oh, the whole thing was a nightmare!"

"And the artist blew his brains out, you say?"

"Yes, it was too tragic. Lilah was almost in despair, poor child. He left some dreadful note saying that exiles from Paradise had no other home than Hell— and that one of them was taking the shortest cut to get there. The newspapers got hold of it and gave it the most ghastly publicity,— you see, everyone had prophesied such wonderful things about his future!"

"Still, he had dwelt in Paradise," murmured O'Hara.

"Dwelt? Nonsense— he said that he was an exile!" Mrs. Dane's voice was distinctly sharp, but O'Hara smiled down at her imperturbably.

"Oh, come. It's a little difficult to be exiled from a spot where you've never set foot, isn't it? No, I rather fancy that Mrs. Lindsay found consolation in the dark hours by remembering that she had not always been unkind to the poor exile— that in Paradise for a time there had been moonlight and starlight and sunlight— and that other light that never was, on sea or land. It must have helped her to remember that."

Mrs. Dane dropped her flaming eyes to the fan that shook a little in her jewelled hands. Perhaps it was best to hold the thunder and lightning that she ached to release; after all, it was clearly impossible that he should actually mean the sinister things that he was implying about her incomparable Lilah! It would be an insult to that radiantly serene creature to admit that insult could so much as touch her. She raised defiant eyes to his mocking ones.

"Yes, that's possible; Lilah is divinely kind to any beggar that crosses her path— it isn't in her to hurt a fly, and she must have been gracious to that wretched boy until he made it impossible. But here is Monsieur De Nemours and the lady herself! Let's go into the next room, shall we? Lilah, you lovely wonder, you look sixteen— and young for your age, at that. Let's see, the Havilands aren't here yet, and Bob Hyde telephoned that he and Sylvia would be late—"

O'Hara followed the swift, bird-like voice into the next room. By and by it would stop and he and Lilah would have to find words to fill the silence. What words should he choose? He was too tired to be careful— too tired to think; what devilish Fate was thrusting him into a position where he must do both?

She was talking to De Nemours, the shining head tilted back a little, the hushed music of her voice drifting across the room to him like a little breeze. She had on a black frock, slim and straight— not a jewel, not a flower, but all of spring laughed and danced and sang and sparkled in that upturned face. O'Hara's hand closed sharply on the back of the chair. What if he were wrong— if this were all some ugly trick that his worn-out nerves were playing? After all, Lucia Dane had known her for years, and women's friendships were notoriously exacting. What did he know of her save that she was lovely? Ah, lovely, lovely to heartbreak, as she stood there laughing up at De Nemours— at once still and sparkling, in that magical way of hers, like sunshine dancing on a quiet pool. Was it some devil in him that made him suspect the angel in her? Sometimes he thought that he must be going mad.

He had been so sure of himself; no woman was to touch his life until he had moulded it into its appointed shape— and then he would find a clear-eyed comrade who would be proud and humble in his glory— some girl, wise and tender and simple, who would always be waiting, quiet-eyed and quiet-hearted when he turned his tired steps to home— someone in whose kind arms he would find peace and rest and quiet. For he would be Man, the conqueror, and he would have deep need of these. So he had decreed, during the hard years that brought him to this place where, if he stretched only a little higher, he could touch the shining dreams— and behold, a door had opened and closed, and a yellow-haired girl had come in— and his ordered world was chaos and madness. He knew, with a sense of profoundly rebellious despair, that he was out of hand; his nerves had him, and they were riding him unmercifully, revenging themselves richly for all the days and nights that he had crushed them down and scorned them and ignored them. They had him now, this arrogant young dreamer, out to save a world— they had him now, for all his dreams!

"Mr. O'Hara, aren't you taking me in to dinner?"

He started as violently as though she had touched his bare heart with those soft fingers of hers.

"You were a thousand miles away," said the fairy voice, and the hand rested lightly on his arm. "I hate to bring you back, but they're all going in, you see. Was it a pleasant country that you were playing in?"

"Pleasant enough," he told her hardly. "But it's poor sport looking down on a lost inheritance from the edge of a precipice. Did I seem to be enjoying it?"

"You looked as most of us feel on the edge of a precipice, I suppose— a little terrified, and a good deal thrilled. Was the lost heritage a pretty place?"

"As pretty as most lost places," said O'Hara.

Lilah Lindsay leaned toward him, pushing the flowers between them a little aside.

"But why not turn your back on it?" she asked, her eyes laughing into his, friendly and adventurous. "You might climb higher up the mountain, and find some spot so strange and beautiful that it will make the little garden in the valley seem a dull spot well lost."

"I have already turned my back," he said.

"I think that I am glad," said Lilah Lindsay. "You see, you do not belong in the valley. Will you tell me something, Mr. O'Hara?"

"What is there that I can tell you?"

"Oh, many things. I'm not wisdom incarnate, I know, but I have enough wits to realize that stupidity has you fast in his clutch if he can once get you to stop asking questions. I shall go down to my grave with 'Why?' still on my lips, I promise you!"

"Aren't you afraid of exhausting our wretched little hoard of information?"

He felt as though some gigantic hand had released its grasp about his heart. If she would only keep the laughter dancing through her lashes he was safe.

"No, no; it's inexhaustible, if properly handled." Her voice was dancing, too. "I came across an old formula once; it's served me well many and many a time, when I've seen a resentful and suspicious look in some man's eyes that says, 'Young woman, you are leading me to believe that you know more than I do. Young woman, you are boring me.' I can drive that look from any man's eyes in the world!"

"With what alchemy, little magician?"

She leaned closer again, and suddenly he smelt the violets— the room was full of them— the world itself was full of them!

"Why, I ask him to spell a word; any nice, simple word like 'cat' or 'dog,' so that he will be sure to be able to spell it, poor dear! And in thirty seconds the

sky is blue, and the birds are singing, and God's in his heaven and woman in her proper place. It's white magic, truly!"

"Truly," O'Hara laughed back at her, "and truly, and truly, I'm believing you." He felt light-headed with happiness— oh, surely, this was clear candour that she was giving him; all this lovely nonsense was cool water to his fever. Lucia Dane was right— the rest was ugly madness. "But what was the nice simple word that you were going to ask me to spell?"

"It's rather a long and difficult word, I'm afraid," she said gravely. "I was going to ask how you, an Irishman, came to be the British Representative in our Council?"

For a minute all the old, sick suspicion clouded the gray laughter of his eyes— his face grew hard and still— then the unswerving candour of the eyes lifted to his smote him to the heart, and he smiled down reassuringly.

"I suppose that it does seem damned queer. But you see, I happen to be British first and Irish second. Does that seem impossible?"

"No," she replied slowly, "but it's unusual, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. It's infernally lonely work, I can tell you. You see, I was born and bred in Dublin; all my family think I'm a black traitor. They're hot against England, and hot against me. They won't believe that Ireland is my heart's heart. But England— oh, she's the power and the glory— she can lift the Irish high and safe out of their despair, though it's blind from weeping the poor souls are— they'll never be seeing it."

The Irish in him was burning in his eyes and on his tongue— she stirred and nodded.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I suppose that our Southern men who fought for the Union met with just such hatred and misunderstanding. And yet they were the ones who loved her best, the proud and lovely South— they who were willing to bear her hatred that they might save her soul."

"Oh, it's the wonder you are for understanding!" His heart was shaking his voice, but the callous and greatly bored gentleman on the other side of Mrs. Lindsay suddenly raised an energetic protest.

"See here, Lovely Lady, are you going to leave me to commune with my soul for the rest of the evening? For the last ten minutes I've been trying—"

O'Hara turned to the impatient young woman on his left, the ardour still lingering in his face. It lingered so convincingly that he proceeded to thrill her clear through to her small bones; she spent the next few days in a state of dreamy preoccupation that fairly distracted her adoring husband, and continued to cherish indefinitely the conviction that she had inspired a devastating if hopeless passion. It was lucky for her that she never knew that all that pulled O'Hara through the next ten minutes was a strong effort of the

imagination, by which he substituted a head of palest gold for the curly brown one and a voice of silver magic for some rather shrill chatter. And then, suddenly, it was in blessed truth the silver voice.

"You see, I was specially interested in your feeling for Ireland because of the situation touched on in your record. That's serious, isn't it?"

"Serious to desperation."

"But a great deal of it's just surmise on your part, I suppose?"

"Surmise?" His voice was suddenly weary. "No, no, it's the rotten truth. All the facts are there, even the names of the leaders in the plot."

"But how can you be so sure?"

"I can be sure." There was a grim certainty in his tone that left little room for doubt.

"You use spies?"

"Spies? You might call them that. There are three ring-leaders in the conspiracy; the youngest was my room-mate in college."

"I see." After a moment in which she sat quite still, clear-eyed and pensive, she asked, "Now that you have all the details of the plot, why don't you crush it?"

"To do anything now would precipitate the bloodiest kind of civil war again. We must move with the greatest care; God help Ireland if wind of it reaches the other party. They're straining at the leash like mad dogs already."

"England must have great faith in your discretion," said Lilah Lindsay, and O'Hara's face suddenly flamed like the Crusader's of old.

"God grant it's not misplaced," he said simply. "It's sleepless I've gone these many nights looking for a way out— and now I think we've found one that's neither too hard nor too weak. It's been weary work hunting it. You see it's not only Ireland we must help; it's all the little, unhappy countries lost in the dark, and like to kill themselves before they find the light. Sometimes it breaks the heart in your body to watch them." His eyes were sombre with all the useless pain in the world.

"Then don't let's watch them for a little while," she said gently. "I should think shame on myself for making you talk shop this way; I do, I do! But it's hard to shake it off, isn't it?"

"Not when you smile like that."

Lilah Lindsay smiled like that again.

"Now and then," she murmured, "you are just about six years old."

"Why did you cut off your hair?" demanded O'Hara, and his voice was a trifle unsteady.

"Why?" She brushed it back with light fingers, gay as a child once more. "Oh, it used to take me hours to wind it about my head and coil it over my

ears; it was way below my waist, you know, and I found it very distracting, to me and— other people. Don't you like it this way?"

"Below your waist," he said. "Oh, then you must be a real Fairy Princess, all shining white and gold."

"But don't you like it this way?" asked Delilah.

"It's beautiful," said O'Hara. "But in every foolish heart of us there's a lady in a tower to whom we call 'Rappunzel, Rappunzel, let down your hair'— waiting to go climbing up the shining locks to her heart— and Paradise."

Delilah rested her chin on linked fingers, her eyes at once dancing and demure. "How lamentably old-fashioned you are for all your radicalism. Shall I let my hair grow?"

"It's the wonder it must be," he whispered. "Breaking and foaming below your waist."

"I've always thought of it, somehow, as a— a symbol," she said, her eyes fixed on the coffee that she was slowly stirring. "When I cut it off, I said to each shining length, 'There you go, Folly— and you, Frailty— and you, Weakness— '"

"And did you never think that your namesake must have cried of old to other shining locks 'There you go, Strength?'"

The new Delilah looked suddenly enchantingly mischievous. "Well, but that was not her own hair! It belonged to a mere man who chose a very vulnerable spot to keep his strength. You have learned wisdom since Samson."

"I wonder!" said O'Hara.

"I'll remember what you have told me," she laughed up at him. "You seem to hold that woman's strength, too, is in her hair. Perhaps— perhaps you are right, after all. Will you come to see me one of these days, and try to convert me?"

They were all standing; he rose, too, his eyes holding her.

"When may I come— to-morrow?"

She smiled back at his swift urgency— then bent the primrose head in assent. O'Hara held back the curtains for her to pass through.

"To-morrow," he told her, his eyes still lit with that incredulous wonder. "To-morrow is a great way off!"

iii

"I'LL JUST WAIT here," he said to the pretty maid. "I'm not dressed for a party. You might tell Mrs. Lindsay that— that when she's not too busy, I'd like awfully to speak to her for a minute."

"Very well, Mr. O'Hara." Her voice had all the impersonal blankness of the well-trained servant, but once on the dark stairs she shook her glossy head dismally. She had come to know him well in the past weeks.

"The Saints preserve the poor man, it's fit for a long rest in a pine box he's looking, and that's no lie at all! And it's my fine lady upstairs that is after painting shadows black as the pit under his poor eyes, or my name's not Bridget O'Neill. It's a wicked world entirely, and that's what it is!"

O'Hara stood watching the door through which she had vanished. In a minute— in five minutes— in ten minutes— someone else might stand framed in that door; he could not tear his eyes from it, but stood staring, hands thrust deep into his pockets, very quiet, with fever playing behind the tense stillness of his face. The painted clock on the mantel chimed the hour out twelve times, each stroke a mocking peal of laughter. His shoulders sagged abruptly and he turned from the door. What was the use?— she wasn't coming. She would never come again.

He crossed to the mantel slowly, noting all the studied grace with desperate tenderness. To whom could it belong but Lilah, the little room that he loved, demure and gay— intimate as a boudoir, formal as a study? Those slim hands of hers must have placed the bright flowers in the low bowls of powdered Venetian glass, and lined the bookcases with deep-coloured books, set the small bright fire burning with pine cones, and lighted the waxen candles that were casting their gracious light all about him. The satin-wood desk looked austere enough, with its orderly stacks of paper, its trays of sharpened pencils and shining pens— but the lace pillow in the deep chair by the fire was a little crumpled, there was a half-burnt cigarette in the enamelled tray, and trailing its rosy grace shamelessly across a sombre cushion was a bit of chiffon and ribbon, the needle still sticking in it. It could not have been so long ago that she had been here; all the dainty disorder spoke eloquently of her still.

Oh, thrice-accursed fool that he had been to risk even for a second the happiness that for weeks had been fluttering closer to him— the happiness that only a day before had almost closed its shining wings about him! They had been looking at some of her old snapshots of a motor trip through Ireland, laughing together in the enchanted intimacy which they had acquired over the begoggled, be-veiled, and beswaddled small creature that she assured him was her exquisite self— and then she had come upon a snapshot that was only too obviously not Ireland. It was of a vine-hung terrace, with the sea stretching far out in the distance, and the sunlight dappling through onto the upturned face of a man— quite a young man, in white flannels, swinging a careless tennis racquet and laughing in the sun. For a minute her sure fingers had faltered;

there, very deliberately, she had picked it up, tearing it into small pieces, dropping them deftly into the dancing fire.

"Here's one of us having tea by the road," she had continued evenly, but O'Hara had not even heard her. His mind was far away, sick with apprehension and suspicion, all the old dim terrors suddenly rampant.

"Lilah— it's unspeakable of me to worry you with this— but I can't get it out of my mind somehow. Will you tell me— will you tell me if they ever found out who sent that anonymous letter to your husband?"

She had stared back at him with strange eyes set in a face from which every trace of emotion had suddenly been frozen.

"The letter? No." The small remote voice was utterly forbidding. "You are quite right; it is cruel to remind of those times. What difference can it possibly make to you?"

He had fought desperately to find some words that would show her what need his sick soul had of assurance, but he had found none. He could only stare at her dumbly, his wretched eyes assuring that it made, somehow, a huge difference.

"But why?"

And he had cried hopelessly, "Oh, I may be mad— I think I am— but I can't get it out of my head. I keep wondering whether you— if you sent—"

"I?" She had cried out as sharply as though he had struck her, and then sat very still, fighting her way back to composure, inch by inch. When she spoke again her voice was very low, incredibly controlled.

"You are implying something that is too monstrous for sanity. May I ask what motive— what possible motive, however abominable— you think that I could have had for wrecking my husband's career?"

He had whispered, "Oh, God forgive me, what motive had Antony's Egypt? What motive have any of you for flaunting your power over us? You crack the whip, and we go crashing through the hoop of our dreams, smashing it— smashing it for ever."

She had risen then, sweeping him from brow to heel with her unrelenting eyes.

"How you know us!" His heart had sickened under that terrible small laugh, cold as frozen water. And she had turned to the door, her head high. "If you can think such things of me— if you can even dream them— your presence here is simply an insult to us both. I must ask you to leave. And unless you realize the grotesque madness of your accusation, I must ask you not to come here again. That releases you from dinner to-morrow night, naturally. I don't think that there is anything more to be said."

No, there had been nothing more to be said— nothing. He could not remember how he had got himself out of the house— he could not remember anything save a dull nightmare of vacillation and despair, that had finally driven him back to the little room, whipped and beaten, ready to capitulate on any terms— ready for any life that would buy him a moment's happiness. And now— now she would not come, even to accept his surrender. He turned from the mantel violently, and felt his heart contract in swift panic. A man was watching him intently from the other end of the room— a man with a hateful, twisted face— he caught his breath in a shaken laugh. Those damned nerves of his would wreck him yet! It was only his reflection in the cloudy Venetian mirror; the firelight and candlelight played strange tricks with it, shadowing it grotesquely— still, even looked at closely, it was nothing to boast of. He stood contemplating it grimly with its tortured mouth and haunted eyes— and then suddenly the air was full of violets. He turned slowly, a strange peace holding his tired heart. She had come to him; nothing else would ever matter again.

She was standing in the doorway, a little cloud of palest gray. It was the first time that he had seen her in light colours, and she had done something to her hair— caught it up with a great sparkling comb— it shone like pale fire. Her arms were quite full of violets— the largest ones that he had ever seen, like purple pansies. He stood drinking her in with his tired eyes, not even looking for words. It was she who spoke.

"Bridget told me that you were here. I thought that you were not coming to-night."

He shook his head, with a torn and lamentable smile. "You said— until I realized my madness. Believe me— believe me, I have realized it, Lilah."

She came slowly into the room, but the nearer she came to him the farther she seemed away, secure in her ethereal loveliness, her velvet eyes turned to ice.

"You have realized it, I am afraid, too late. There are still two tables of bridge upstairs; I have only a few minutes to give you. Was there anything that you wished to say?"

He shook his head dumbly, and she sank into the great chair, stifling a small yawn perfunctorily.

"Oh, I'm deathly tired. It's been a hideous evening, from beginning to end. Come, amuse me, good tragedian, make me laugh just once, and I may forgive you. I may forgive you, even though you do not desire it." Again that fleeting smile, exquisite and terrible.

But O'Hara was on his knees beside her.

"Delilah, don't laugh, don't laugh— I'm telling you the laughter is dead in me. I'd rather see you weeping for the poor, blind fool who lost the key to Paradise."

"Who threw it away," she amended, touching the violets with light fingers. "But never forget, it's better not to have set your foot within its gates than to be exiled from it. Never forget that, my tragedian."

He raised his head, haggard and alert. "Lilah, what do you mean?"

"Why, nothing— only Lucia Dane was here for dinner and she thought it— strange— that you and I should be the gossip of Washington these days. When she had finished with what you had said to her, I thought it strange, too. And I assured her that there would be no more cause for gossip."

"I was mad when I talked to that little fool," he told her fiercely. "Clean out of my head trying to fight off your magic. That was the first night— the first night that I owned to myself that I loved you."

"Your madness seems to be recurrent," she murmured. "You should take measures against it."

"I have taken measures. It shall never touch you again. I know now that it has simply been an obsession— a hallucination— anything in Heaven or Hell that you want to call it. You have all my trust, all my faith."

"It is a terrible thing not to trust a woman," she said. "More terrible than you know. Sometimes it makes her unworthy of trust."

"Not you," he whispered. "Never."

"We're delicate machinery, tragedian. Touch a hidden spring in us with your clumsy fingers and the little thing that was ticking away as faithfully and peacefully as an alarm-clock stops for a minute— and then goes on ticking. Only it has turned to an infernal machine— and it will destroy you."

She was silent for a moment, her fingers resting lightly on that bowed head. When she spoke again her voice was gentle. "Last night, after you had gone, I remembered what you had said about Antony and his Egypt, and I found the play. Parts of it still go singing through my head. They loved each other so, those two magnificent fools. He finds her treacherous a hundred times, and each time forgives her, and loves her again— and she repays him beyond belief— far, far beyond power and treachery and death. Do you remember his cry in that first hour of his disaster?

"'O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?'

"And when she weeps for pardon, how he tells her

"'Fall not a tear, I say: one of them rates All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss, Even this repays me.'

"Though she has ruined him utterly— though he sees it and cries aloud

"'O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,— Whose eye becked forth my wars, and called them home, Like a right gipsy hath at false and loose Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.'

"Still, still his last thought is to reach her arms.

'I am dying, Egypt, dying, only I here importune death awhile, until Of many thousand kisses the poor last I lay upon thy lips.'"

"Why, he was well repaid," said that strange, humble voice.

"I am glad that you feel that," Delilah told him, and she rose swiftly. "Would you like to kiss me? You see, I have ruined you."

O'Hara stumbled to his feet.

"What are you saying?" he whispered, a dreadful incredulity driving the words through his stiffened lips.

"That I have ruined you. I have sent your notes on the Irish situation to the other party."

"You are mad."

"No, no." She shook her head reassuringly. "Quite sane. I didn't address them in my own handwriting, naturally. The envelope is typewritten, but the notes are in long-hand; yours. The English Government will be forced to believe that for once it has misplaced its trust— but Ireland should pay you well— if she lives through civil war."

"By God—" His voice failed him for a moment. "This is some filthy dream."

"No dream, believe me." She came closer to him, radiant and serene. "Did you think that I was a yellow-headed doll, that you could insult me beyond belief, mock me to my friends, slander me to the Committee of which I was a member? Monsieur De Nemours was good enough to warn me against you, also. I am no doll, you see; I happen to be a woman. We have not yet mastered that curiously devised code that you are pleased to term Honour— a code which permits you to betray a woman but not a secret— to cheat a man out of millions in business but not out of a cent at cards. It's a little artificial, and we're ridiculously primitive. We use lynch-law still; swift justice with the nearest weapon at hand."

O'Hara was shaking like a man in a chill, his voice hardly above a whisper. "What have you done? What have you done, Delilah?"

"Don't you understand?" She spoke with pretty patience, as though to some backward child. "I have ruined you— you and your Ireland, too. I sent—"

And suddenly, shaken and breathless, she was in his arms.

"Oh, Ireland— Ireland and I!" But even at that strange cry she never stirred. "It's you— you who are ruined, my Magic— and it's I who have done it, driving you to this ugly madness." He held her as though he would never let her go, sheltering the bowed golden head with his hand. "Though I forgive you a

thousand thousand times, how will you forgive yourself, my little Love? You who would not hurt a flower, where will you turn when you see what you have done?"

He could feel her tears on his hand; she was weeping piteously, like a terrified child.

"Oh, you do love me, you do love me! I was so frightened— I thought that you would never love me."

He held her closer, infinitely careful of that shining fragility.

"I love nothing else."

"Not Ireland?"

He closed his hunted eyes, shutting out Memory.

"I hated Ireland," wept the small voice fiercely, "because you loved her so."

"Hush, hush, my Heart."

"But you do— you do love me best?"

"God forgive me, will you make me say so?"

There was a moment's silence, then something brushed his hand, light as a flower, and Delilah raised her head.

"No, no, wait." She was laughing, tremulous and exquisite. "Did you think— did you think that I had really sent your notes?"

O'Hara felt madness touching him; he stared down at her, voiceless.

"But of course, of course, I never sent them. They are upstairs; wait, I'll get them for you— wait!"

She slipped from his arms and was half way to the door before his voice arrested her.

"Lilah!"

"Yes?"

"You say— that you have not sent the notes?"

"Darling idiot, how could you have thought that I would send them? This is Life, not melodrama!"

"You never— you never thought of sending them?"

"Never, never." Her laughter rippled about him. "I wanted to see—"

But he was groping for the mantel, sick and dizzy now that there was no need of courage. Delilah was at his side in a flash, her arms about him.

"Oh, my dear!" He had found the chair but she still clung to him. "What is it? You're ill— you're ill!"

Someone was coming down the stairs; she straightened to rigidity, and was at the door in a flash.

"Captain Lawrence!"

The young Englishman halted abruptly— wheeled.

"Captain Lawrence, Mr. O'Hara is here; he had to see me about some papers, and he has been taken ill. He's been overworking hideously lately. Will you get me some brandy for him?"

"Oh, I say, what rotten luck!" He lingered, concern touching his pleasant boyish face. "Where do I get the brandy, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"Ask Lucia Dane, she knows how to get hold of the maids. And hurry, will you?"

She was back at his side before the words had left; he could feel her fingers brushing his face like frightened butterflies, but he did not open his eyes. He was too mortally tired to lift his lids.

"Here you are, Mrs. Lindsay. Try this, old son. Steady does it."

He swallowed, choked, felt the warm fire sweep through him, tried to smile, tried to rise.

"No, no, don't move— don't let him move, Captain Lawrence."

"You stay where you are for a bit, young feller, my lad. Awfully sorry that I have to run, Mrs. Lindsay, but they telephoned for me from the Embassy. Some excitement about Turkey, the devil swallow them all. Good-night— take it easy, O'Hara!"

"Oh, Captain Lawrence!" He turned again. "Have you the letter that I asked you to mail?"

"Surely, right here. I'll post it on my way over."

"Thanks a lot, but I've decided not to send it, after all." She stretched out her hand, smiling. "It's an article on women in public life, and it's going to need quite a few changes under the circumstances."

"The circumstances?"

"Yes. You might tell them at the Embassy— if they're interested. I'm handing in my resignation on the International Committee to-morrow."

O'Hara gripped the arm of his chair until he felt it crack beneath his fingers. Captain Lawrence was staring at her in undisguised amazement.

"But I say! How in the world will they get along without you?"

"Oh, they'll get along admirably." She dismissed it as easily as though it were a luncheon engagement. "That young Lyons is the very man they need; he's really brilliant and a perfect encyclopædia of information. I'll see you at the Embassy on Friday, won't I? Good-night."

Her arms were about O'Hara before the hall door slammed.

"You're better now? All right? Oh, you frightened me so! It wasn't that foolish trick of mine that hurt you? Say no, say no— I couldn't ever hurt you!"

"Never. I should be whipped for frightening you." His arms were fast about her, but his eyes were straying. What had she done with that letter? He had

caught a glimpse of it, quite a bulky letter, in a large envelope, with a typewritten address— typewritten.

"Have you noticed my hair?" The magic voice was touched with gayety again, and O'Hara brushed the silken mist with his lips, his eyes still seeking. "I remembered what you said, you see; it grows most awfully fast— one of these days it will be as long as Rappunzel's or Melisande's. Will you like it then?"

Ah, there it was, face down on the lacquer table. He drew a deep breath.

"Lilah, that letter— what did you say was in that letter?"

There was a sudden stillness in the room; he could hear the painted clock ticking clearly. Then she spoke quietly:

"It's an article that I have written on women in public life. Didn't you hear me telling Captain Lawrence?"

"Will you let me see it?"

Again that stillness; then, very gently, Delilah pushed away his arms and rose.

"No," she said.

"You will not?"

"No." The low voice was inflexible. "I know what you are thinking. You are thinking that those are the Irish notes; that I had fully intended to send them this evening; that it was only an impulse of mine that saved you, as it would have been an impulse that wrecked you. You are thinking that next time it may fall differently. And you are willing to believe me guilty until I am proved innocent. You have always been that— always."

He bowed his head.

"I could hand you that envelope and prove that I am entirely innocent, but I'll not purchase your confidence. It should be a gift— oh, it should be more. It is a debt that you owe me. Are you going to pay it?"

O'Hara raised haggard eyes to hers.

"How should I pay it?"

"If you insist on seeing this, I will show it to you; but I swear to you that I will never permit you to enter this house again; I swear it. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"If you will trust me, I will give you your notes, love you for the rest of my life— marry you to-morrow." She went to the table, picked up the envelope, and stood waiting. "What shall I do?"

He rose unsteadily, catching at the mantel. No use— he was beaten.

"Will you get me the notes?"

He saw her shake then, violently, from head to foot, but her eyes never wavered. She nodded, and was gone.

He stood leaning against the mantel, his dark head buried in his arms. Beaten! He would never know what was in that envelope— never, never. She could talk to all Eternity about faith and trust; he would go wondering all his life through. If he had stood his ground— if he had claimed the envelope and she had been proven innocent, he would have lost her but he would have found his faith. He had sold his soul to purchase her body. The painted clock struck once, and he raised his head—

No, no, he was mad. She was right— entirely, absolutely right— she was just and merciful, she who might have scourged him from her sight for ever. What reason in heaven or earth had he to distrust her? Because her voice was silver and her hair was gold? Because violets scattered their fragrance when she stirred? Oh, his folly was thrice damned. If he had a thousand proofs against her, he should still trust her. What was it that that chap Browning said?

"What so false as truth is False to thee?"

That was what love should be— not this sick and faltering thing—

"Here are the notes," said Delilah's voice at his shoulder, and her eyes added, wistful and submissive: "And here am I."

O'Hara took them in silence, his fingers folding them mechanically, measuring, weighing, appraising. The envelope could have held them easily—

She turned from him with a little cry.

"Oh, you are cruel, cruel!"

He stood staring at her for a moment— at the small, desolate figure with its bowed head, one arm flung across her eyes like a stricken child— and suddenly his heart melted within him. She was weeping, and he had made her weep. He took a swift step toward her, and halted. In the mirror at the far end of the room he could see her, dimly caught between firelight and candlelight, shadowy and lovely— in the mirror at the far end of the room she was smiling, mischievous and tragic and triumphant. He stared incredulously— and then swept her to him despairingly, burying his treacherous eyes in the bright hair in which clustered the invisible violets.

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19: The Strength of the Little Thin Thread

Achmed Abdullah

Alexander Nicholayevitch Romanoff, 1881-1945

Collier's, 5 Oct 1912.

IBRAHIM FADLALLAH shrugged his shoulders:

"You do not understand, my friend. You cannot get it through your head that it is impossible to destroy caste and to create fraternity by Act of Parliament. Allah— you can't even do it in your own country."

"But modern progress— the telegraph— the democracy of the railway carriage—" interrupted the American.

"You can compel a Brahmin to sit in the same office and to ride in the same railway compartment with a man of low caste, but you can never force him to eat with him or to give him his daughter in marriage. You spoke of those who are educated abroad and even they, my friend, when they return to Hind, drift back into caste and the ways of caste. For there is a little thread oh, such a tiny, thin little thread which binds them to their own land, their own kin, their own caste. And it seems that they have not the strength to break it— this little thread.

"Ah, yes! Let me tell you something which occurred last year a true tale and please do not forget the thread, the little thread—

"Now the whole thing was like a play in one of your theaters— it was staged, dear one, and well staged. [The scene was the great hall in which meets the caste tribunal of a certain Brahmin clan. Imagine, if you please, a huge quadrangle, impressively bare but for a low dais at one end, covered with a few Bengali shawls and an antelope skin or two— ah!— and then the dramatic atmosphere. Not the atmosphere of death— oh, no!— much worse than death, much worse. For what is death compared to the loss of caste? And that afternoon they were going to try a man who had polluted his blood, who had sinned a great sin, a great sin more heinous than the killing of cows— not a sin according to your code of laws— but then they were men of a different race, and their sins are not your sins— eh?— and mayhap their virtues may not be your virtues.

"On the dais sat his Holiness Srimat Muniswamappa Rama-Swami, and on either side of him stood anxious disciples who looked with awe at his thin, clean-shaven lips and fanned his holy old poll with silver-handled yak tails. Near him sat the pleader and a few Brahmin grandees, whom he was in the habit of consulting in cases of importance. At a respectful distance were the men of the clan: they filed in slowly, prostrating themselves in turn before the Swami and uttering the name of the presiding deity with trembling lips, while

his Holiness smiled a contemplative smile, and while his fingers counted the beads on his rosary.

"The proceeding opened with a sermon pronounced by the Swami. First, he praised Ganesa, Sarasvati, and half a dozen other assorted deities, and then with a great abundance of detail and many long-winded quotations he set forth the duties of the twice-born. He told them that a Brahmin should not break up clods of earth nor tear up the grass under his feet; that he should not look at the setting sun, the rising sun, the sun in eclipse, the image of the sun in a pool of water; that he should not point at the stars with fingers of irreverence; that he should not sleep with his head turned toward the north or west; that he should abstain from cutting his nails with his teeth, from using the same toothpick more than once, from eating off plates used by others, and from wearing sandals worn by strangers— and a thousand such foolish injunctions.

"The assembly was politely bored, but the Swami enjoyed himself hugely. For it gave him an opportunity to show his great learning and his wonderful memory, and then, like most holy men, he loved to lay stress on the outward emblems of his faith. He illustrated his sermon by relating several horrid examples, chiefly that of a wicked barber who had shaved a Brahmin with a razor which had been polluted by the shadow of a low-caste falling on it. Finally, he commented on the advent of modernity and expounded with more lengthy and tiresome quotations how the devils of progress, skepticism, irreverence, and anarchy were making headway amongst the twice-born, how the young Brahmins were making their names a name of scorn in the present world and spoiling their chances for the future world.

"Then he whispered a word to the pleader, who called up the case of Chaganti Samashiva Rao, a young Brahmin accused of having sullied his caste by marrying an infidel.

"There was a commotion at the door, and then Rao appeared, struggling furiously in the arms of half a dozen muscular youngsters. The pleader explained that Rao had studied in Boston and that he had brought home with him a girl, a native of the land of the foreigners and a Christian, whom he had married according to the laws of the Americans. He had thus polluted himself, his father, his mother, his cow, and his caste. Here the pleader was silent for a few moments to let the atrocity of the crime soak into all hearts, and then he asked the assembly for a verdict. And the assembly shouted like one man: Let him lose caste. Drive him out. Drive him out.

"But Rao rose and declared he was going to make a speech. He said he would tell the old fossils, including his Holiness Srimat Muniswamappa Rama-Swami, what he thought of them. There were roars of: Throw him out! Stop his

unclean mouth! and angry hands were raised. But his Holiness smiled a thin, mocking smile and bade the assembly be quiet and listen to what the defendant would have to say for himself.

"Rao acknowledged this permission with a sarcastic bow of gratitude, pulled out his cuffs— he wore English clothes— and proceeded to shock the grave assembly greatly by declaring that he did not give 'a whoop in Hades'— such was the expression he used, he being a perfect English scholar— for all the Brahmins, all the Swamis, and all the caste tribunals in the length and breadth of Hindustan. He had been brought into court by force, he indignantly complained, and he absolutely denied the power and the right of the assembly to punish him. For he had lived several years in America, had become an American citizen, and had voluntarily thrown away his caste as he would a pair of worn-out sandals.

"His Holiness interrupted him, saying that he would now pass sentence on him. But Rao exclaimed: 'Sentence— the devil— you've neither the right nor the might to sentence me.' The Swami, never heeding the interruption, continued with a calm and even voice: 'I sentence you to the living death of the outcast until such time as you expiate your crime, acknowledge your errors, and regain your caste status, which you forfeit today, through the regular methods as laid down in the holy books. Your friends and relatives will assemble on the first unlucky day of next week, and will offer, as if to your manes, a libation in a pot of water which a slave girl shall dash against the walls of your house, and all who take part in this ceremony shall be regarded as impure for three days. Your friends and relatives shall not be permitted to accept your hospitality, nor shall you be allowed to share theirs. Your touch shall be pollution unspeakable. Your children shall be outcasts and shall not marry anybody but Mangs and Mahars. Your own father and mother shall be forbidden your house under the risk of losing caste. Neither your barber, your tailor, your cook, nor your washerwoman shall work for you. Nobody shall assist you in any way, not even at the funeral of a member of your household. You shall be debarred access to the temples—'

"Here Rao, who had mocked and laughed during all this sentence, cried: 'Save your breath, oh holy one, for indeed all this tommyrot can never affect me. As to hospitality, I don't care to invite those old fossils of Brahmins into my house, nor could I ever bring myself to set foot in theirs and listen to their tire some dissertations about the Veda and the Upanishads; besides, I've plenty of European friends. As to my children being outcasts, know, revered uncle, that I have none, and that if ever I should have any they will be Americans like myself and marry like myself. As to my father and mother being forbidden my house

well, they're both dead. As to my being debarred access to your temples by the great God Shiva I never go there anyway!'

"His Holiness waited until Rao had finished, and then he said, with the same inscrutable smile playing about the corners of his thin lips: 'I furthermore sentence you to have torn from your body the sacred thread of your caste, though'— here he smiled again— 'I hardly believe that you, who have voluntarily given up your caste and who mock at everything connected with it, can by any chance still have the thread about your person.'

"Here Rao made a wild dash in the direction of the door, but he was stopped by many willing hands. There was a short and furious struggle, his clothes were torn— and, my friend, it appeared that he, the scoffer, the atheist, the expatriate, who had renounced India, who had thrown much filth at caste, who had become an American, a free-thinker, and a scoffer at superstitions— still wore next his heart the thin thread, the holy thread of his caste— the holiest, the most intimate, the most exclusive, the most secret, the most important emblem of the caste which he affected to despise— "

Ibrahim was silent, and the American asked: "Well— what happened?"

The Egyptian lit a cigarette and continued:

"Oh, the usual thing. Rao did penance, he feasted the priests, he went through the regular process of ceremonious purification—"

"But what about the girl?"

"His wife? Oh— he sent her back to her own country—" Ibrahim gave a dry little laugh. "Yes, my friend, you assuredly understand India. You can reform the world with your progress, your modernity, your splendid democracy— you wonderful Anglo-Saxons. Only it appears that there is a little thread— Allah, what a tiny little thread!— which brings to naught all your wonderful civilization, your liberty, your democracy. Ah, such a tiny little thread, my friend—"

20: The Specter Cook of Bangletop

John Kendrick Bangs

1862-1922

In: *The Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall*, 1894

FOR THE PURPOSES of this bit of history, Bangletop Hall stands upon a grassy knoll on the left bank of the River Dee, about eighteen miles from the quaint old city of Chester. It does not in reality stand there, nor has it ever done so, but consideration for the interests of the living compels me to conceal its exact location, and so to befog the public as to its whereabouts that its identity may never be revealed to its disadvantage. It is a rentable property, and were it known that it has had a mystery connected with it of so deep, dark, and eerie a nature as that about to be related, I fear that its usefulness, save as an accessory to romance, would be seriously impaired, and that as an investment it would become practically worthless.

The hall is a fair specimen of the architecture which prevailed at the time of Edward the Confessor; that is to say, the main portion of the structure, erected in Edward's time by the first Baron Bangletop, has that square, substantial, stony aspect which to the eye versed in architecture identifies it at once as a product of that enlightened era. Later owners, the successive Barons Bangletop, have added to its original dimensions, putting Queen Anne wings here, Elizabethan ells there, and an Italian-Renaissance facade on the river front. A Wisconsin water tower, connected with the main building by a low Gothic alleyway, stands to the south; while toward the east is a Greek chapel, used by the present occupant as a storeroom for his wife's trunks, she having lately returned from Paris with a wardrobe calculated to last through the first half of the coming London season. Altogether Bangletop Hall is an impressive structure, and at first sight gives rise to various emotions in the aesthetic breast; some cavil, others admire. One leading architect of Berlin traveled all the way from his German home to Bangletop Hall to show that famous structure to his son, a student in the profession which his father adorned; to whom he is said to have observed that, architecturally, Bangletop Hall was "cosmopolitan and omniperiodic, and therefore a liberal education to all who should come to study and master its details." In short, Bangletop Hall was an object-lesson to young architects, and showed them at a glance that which they should ever strive to avoid.

Strange to say, for quite two centuries had Bangletop Hall remained without a tenant, and for nearly seventy-five years it had been in the market for rent, the barons, father and son, for many generations having found it impossible to dwell within its walls, and for a very good reason: no cook could ever be induced to live at Bangletop for a longer period than two weeks. Why

the queens of the kitchen invariably took what is commonly known as French leave no occupant could ever learn, because, male or female, the departed domestics never returned to tell, and even had they done so, the pride of the Bangletops would not have permitted them to listen to the explanation. The Bangletop escutcheon was clear of blots, no suspicion even of a conversational blemish appearing thereon, and it was always a matter of extreme satisfaction to the family that no one of its scions since the title was created had ever been known to speak directly to anyone of lesser rank than himself, communication with inferiors being always had through the medium of a private secretary, himself a baron, or better, in reduced circumstances.

The first cook to leave Bangletop under circumstances of a Gallic nature—that is, without known cause, wages, or luggage— had been employed by Fitzherbert Alexander, seventeenth Baron of Bangletop, through Charles Mortimor de Herbert, Baron Peddlington, formerly of Peddlington Manor at Dunwoodie-on-the-Hike, his private secretary, a handsome old gentleman of sixty-five, who had been deprived of his estates by the crown in 1629 because he was suspected of having inspired a comic broadside published in those troublous days, and directed against Charles the First, which had set all London in a roar.

This broadside, one of very few which are not preserved in the British Museum— and a greater tribute to its rarity could not be devised— was called, "A Good Suggestion as to ye Proper Use of ye Chinne Whisker," and consisted of a few lines of doggerel printed beneath a caricature of the king, with the crown hanging from his goatee, reading as follows:

"Ye King doth sporte a gallus grey goatee
Uponne ye chinne, where every one may see.
And since ye Monarch's head's too small to holde
With comfort to himselfe ye crowne of gold,
Why not enwax and hooke ye goatee rare,
And lette ye British crown hang down from there?"

Whether or no the Baron of Peddlington was guilty of this traitorous effusion no one, not even the king, could ever really make up his mind. The charge was never fully proven, nor was De Herbert ever able to refute it successfully, although he made frantic efforts to do so. The king, eminently just in such matters, gave the baron the benefit of the doubt, and inflicted only half the penalty prescribed, confiscating his estates, and letting him keep his head and liberty. De Herbert's family begged the crown to reverse the sentence, permitting them to keep the estates, the king taking their uncle's head in lieu thereof, he being unmarried and having no children who would mourn his loss.

But Charles was poor rather than vindictive at this period, and preferring to adopt the other course, turned a deaf ear to the petitioners. This was probably one of the earliest factors in the decadence of literature as a pastime for men of high station.

De Herbert would have starved had it not been for his old friend Baron Bangletop, who offered him the post of private secretary, lately made vacant by the death of the Duke of Algeria, who had been the incumbent of that office for ten years, and in a short time the Baron of Peddlington was in full charge of the domestic arrangements of his friend. It was far from easy, the work that devolved upon him. He was a proud, haughty man, used to luxury of every sort, to whom contact with those who serve was truly distasteful; to whom the necessity of himself serving was most galling; but he had the manliness to face the hardships Fate had put upon him, particularly when he realized that Baron Bangletop's attitude towards servants was such that he could with impunity impose on the latter seven indignities for every one that was imposed on him. Misery loves company, particularly when she is herself the hostess, and can give generously of her stores to others.

Desiring to retrieve his fallen fortunes, the Baron of Peddlington offered large salaries to those whom he employed to serve in the Bangletop menage, and on payday, through an ingenious system of fines, managed to retain almost seventy-five percent of the funds for his own use. Of this Baron Bangletop, of course, could know nothing. He was aware that under De Herbert the running expenses of his household were nearly twice what they had been under the dusky Duke of Algeria; but he also observed that repairs to the property, for which the late duke had annually paid out several thousands of pounds sterling, with very little to show for it, now cost him as many hundreds with no fewer tangible results. So he winked his eye— the only unaristocratic habit he had, by-the-way— and said nothing. The revenue was large enough, he had been known to say, to support himself and all his relatives in state, with enough left over to satisfy even Ali Baba and the forty thieves.

Had he foreseen the results of his complacency in financial matters, I doubt if he would have persisted therein.

For some ten years under De Herbert's management everything went smoothly and expensively for the Bangletop Hall people, and then there came a change. The Baron Bangletop rang for his breakfast one morning, and his breakfast was not. The cook had disappeared. Whither or why she had gone, the private secretary professed to be unable to say. That she could easily be replaced, he was certain. Equally certain was it that Baron Bangletop stormed and raved for two hours, ate a cold breakfast— a thing he never had been

known to do before— and then departed for London to dine at the club until Peddlington had secured a successor to the departed cook, which the private secretary succeeded in doing within three days. The baron was informed of his manager's success, and at the end of a week returned to Bangletop Hall, arriving there late on a Saturday night, hungry as a bear, and not too amiable, the king having negotiated a forcible loan with him during his sojourn in the metropolis.

"Welcome to Bangletop, Baron," said De Herbert, uneasily, as his employer alighted from his coach.

"Blast your welcome, and serve the dinner," returned the baron, with a somewhat ill grace.

At this the private secretary seemed much embarrassed. "Ahem!" he said. "I'll be very glad to have the dinner served, my dear Baron; but the fact is I— er— I have been unable to provide anything but canned lobster and apples."

"What, in the name of Chaucer, does this mean?" roared Bangletop, who was a great admirer of the father of English poetry; chiefly because, as he was wont to say, Chaucer showed that a bad speller could be a great man, which was a condition of affairs exactly suited to his mind, since in the science of orthography he was weak, like most of the aristocrats of his day. "I thought you sent me word you had a cook?"

"Yes, Baron, I did; but the fact of the matter is, sir, she left us last night, or, rather, early this morning."

"Another one of your beautiful Parisian exits, I presume?" sneered the baron, tapping the floor angrily with his toe.

"Well, yes, somewhat so; only she got her money first."

"Money!" shrieked the baron. "Money! Why in Liverpool did she get her money? What did we owe her money for? Rent?"

"No, Baron; for services. She cooked three dinners."

"Well, you'll pay the bill out of your perquisites, that's all. She's done no cooking for me, and she gets no pay from me. Why do you think she left?"

"She said—"

"Never mind what she said, sir," cried Bangletop, cutting De Herbert short. "When I am interested in the table-talk of cooks, I'll let you know. What I wish to hear is what do *you* think was the cause of her leaving?"

"I have no opinion on the subject," replied the private secretary, with becoming dignity. "I only know that at four o'clock this morning she knocked at my door, and demanded her wages for four days, and vowed she'd stay no longer in the house."

"And why, pray, did you not inform me of the fact, instead of having me travel away down here from London?" queried Bangletop.

"You forget, Baron," replied De Herbert, with a deprecatory gesture— "you forget that there is no system of telegraphy by which you could be reached. I may be poor, sir, but I'm just as much of a baron as you are, and I will take the liberty of saying right here, in what would be the shadow of your beard, if you had one, sir, that a man who insists on receiving cable messages when no such things exist is rather rushing business."

"Pardon my haste, Peddlington, old chap," returned the baron, softening. "You are quite right. My desire was unreasonable; but I swear to you, by all my ancestral Bangletops, that I am hungry as a pit full of bears, and if there's one thing I can't eat, it is lobster and apples. Can't you scare up a snack of bread and cheese and a little cold larded fillet? If you'll supply the fillet, I'll provide the cold."

At this sally the Baron of Peddlington laughed and the quarrel was over. But nonetheless the master of Bangletop went to bed hungry; nor could he do any better in the morning at breakfast-time. The butler had not been trained to cook, and the coachman's art had once been tried on a boiled egg, which no one had been able to open, much less eat, and as it was the parlormaid's Sunday off, there was absolutely no one in the house who could prepare a meal. The Baron of Bangletop had a sort of sneaking notion that if there were nobody around he could have managed the spit or gridiron himself; but, of course, in view of his position, he could not make the attempt. And so he once more returned to London, and vowed never to set his foot within the walls of Bangletop Hall again until his ancestral home was provided with a cook "copper-fastened and riveted to her position."

And Bangletop Hall from that time was as a place deserted. The baron never returned, because he could not return without violating his oath; for De Herbert was not able to obtain a cook for the Bangletop cuisine who would stay, nor was anyone able to discover why. Cook after cook came, stayed a day, a week, and one or two held on for two weeks, but never longer. Their course was invariably the same— they would leave without notice; nor could any inducement be offered which would persuade them to remain. The Baron of Peddlington became, first round-shouldered, then deaf, and then insane in his search for a permanent cook, landing finally in an asylum, where he died, four years after the demise of his employer in London, of softening of the brain. His last words were, "Why did you leave your last place?"

And so time went on. Barons of Bangletop were born, educated, and died. Dynasties rose and fell, but Bangletop Hall remained uninhabited, although it was not until 1799 that the family gave up all hopes of being able to use their ancestral home. Tremendous alterations, as I have already hinted, were made. The drainage was carefully inspected, and a special apartment connected with

the kitchen, finished in hardwood, handsomely decorated, and hung with rich tapestries, was provided for the cook, in the vain hope that she might be induced permanently to occupy her position. The Queen Anne wing and Elizabethan ell were constructed, the latter to provide bowling-alleys and smoking-rooms for the probable cousins of possible culinary queens, and many there were who accepted the office with alacrity, throwing it up with still greater alacrity before the usual fortnight passed. Then the Bangletops saw clearly that it was impossible for them to live there, and moving away, the house was announced to be "for rent, with all modern improvements, conveniently located, spacious grounds, especially adapted to the use of those who do their own cooking." The last clause of the announcement puzzled a great many people, who went to see the mansion for no other reason than to ascertain just what the announcement meant, and the line, which was inserted in a pure spirit of facetious bravado, was probably the cause of the mansion's quickly renting, as hardly a month had passed before it was leased for one year by a retired London brewer, whose wife's curiosity had been so excited by the strange wording of the advertisement that she traveled out to Bangletop to gratify it, fell in love with the place, and insisted upon her husband's taking it for a season. The luck of the brewer and his wife was no better than that of the Bangletops. Their cooks— and they had fourteen during their stay there— fled after an average service of four days apiece, and later the tenants themselves were forced to give up and return to London, where they told their friends that the "'all was 'aunted," which might have filled the Bangletops with concern had they heard of it. They did not hear of it, however, for they and their friends did not know the brewer and the brewer's friends, and as for complaining to the Bangletop agent in the matter, the worthy beer-maker thought he would better not do that, because he had hopes of being knighted someday, and he did not wish to antagonize so illustrious a family as the Bangletops by running down their famous hall—an antagonism which might materially affect the chances of himself and his good wife when they came to knock at the doors of London society. The lease was allowed to run its course, the rent was paid when due, and at the end of the stipulated term Bangletop Hall was once more on the lists as for rent.

ii

FOR FOURSCORE YEARS and ten did the same hard fortune pursue the owners of Bangletop. Additions to the property were made immediately upon request of possible lessees. The Greek chapel was constructed in 1868 at the mere suggestion of a Hellenic prince, who came to England to write a history of

the American rebellion, finding the information in back files of British newspapers exactly suited to the purposes of picturesque narrative, and no more misleading than most homemade history. Bangletop was retired, "far from the gadding crowd," as the prince put it, and therefore just the place in which a historian of the romantic school might produce his *magnum opus* without disturbance; the only objection being that there was no place whither the eminently Christian sojourner could go to worship according to his faith, he being a communicant in the Greek Church. This defect Baron Bangletop immediately remedied by erecting and endowing the chapel; and his youngest son, having been found too delicate morally for the army, was appointed to the living and placed in charge of the chapel, having first embraced with considerable ardor the faith upon which the soul of the princely tenant was wont to feed. All of these improvements— chapel, priest, the latter's change of faith, and all— the Bangletop agent put at the exceedingly low sum of forty-two guineas per annum and board for the priest; an offer which the prince at once accepted, stipulating, however, that the lease should be terminable at any time he or his landlord should see fit. Against this the agent fought nobly, but without avail. The prince had heard rumors about the cooks of Bangletop, and he was wary. Finally the stipulation was accepted by the baron, with what result the reader need hardly be told. The prince stayed two weeks, listened to one sermon in classic university Greek by the youthful Bangletop, was deserted by his cook, and moved away.

After the departure of the prince the estate was neglected for nearly twenty-two years, the owner having made up his mind that the case was hopeless. At the end of that period there came from the United States a wealthy shoemaker, Hankinson J. Terwilliger by name, chief owner of the Terwilliger Three-dollar Shoe Company (Limited), of Soleton, Massachusetts, and to him was leased Bangletop Hall, with all its rights and appurtenances, for a term of five years. Mr. Terwilliger was the first applicant for the hall as a dwelling to whom the agent, at the instance of the baron, spoke in a spirit of absolute candor. The baron was well on in years, and he did not feel like getting into trouble with a Yankee, so he said, at his time of life. The hall had been a thorn in his flesh all his days, and he didn't care if it was never occupied, and therefore he wished nothing concealed from a prospective tenant. It was the agent's candor more than anything else that induced Mr. Terwilliger to close with him for the term of five years. He suspected that the Bangletops did not want him for a tenant, and from the moment that notion entered his head, he was resolved that he would be a tenant.

"I'm as good a man as any baron that ever lived," he said; "and if it pleases Hankinson J. Terwilliger to live in a baronial hall, a baronial hall is where Hankinson J. Terwilliger puts up."

"We certainly have none of the feeling which your words seem to attribute to us, my dear sir," the agent had answered. "Baron Bangletop would feel highly honored to have so distinguished a sojourner in England as yourself occupy his estate, but he does not wish you to take it without fully understanding the circumstances. Desirable as Bangletop Hall is, it seems fated to be unoccupied because it is thought to be haunted, or something of that sort, the effect of which is to drive away cooks, and without cooks life is hardly an ideal."

Mr. Terwilliger laughed. "Ghosts and me are not afraid of each other," he said. "'Let 'em haunt,' I say; and as for cooks, Mrs. H.J.T. hasn't had a liberal education for nothing. We could live if all the cooks in creation were to go off in a whiff. We have daughters too, we have. Good smart American girls, who can adorn a palace or grace a hut on demand, not afraid of poverty, and able to take care of good round dollars. They can play the piano all the morning and cook dinner all the afternoon if they're called on to do it; so your difficulties ain't my difficulties. I'll take the hall at your figures; term, five years; and if the baron'll come down and spend a month with us at any time, I don't care when, we'll show him what a big lap Luxury can get up when she tries."

And so it happened the New York papers announced that Hankinson J. Terwilliger, Mrs. Terwilliger, the Misses Terwilliger, and Master Hankinson J. Terwilliger, Jun., of Soleton, Massachusetts, had plunged into the dizzy whirl of English society, and that the sole of the three-dollar shoe now trod the baronial halls of the Bangletops. Later it was announced that the Misses Terwilliger, of Bangletop Hall, had been presented to the queen; that the Terwilligers had entertained the Prince of Wales at Bangletop; in fact, the Terwilligers became an important factor in the letters of all foreign correspondents of American papers, for the president of the Terwilliger Three-dollar Shoe Company, of Soleton, Massachusetts (Limited), was now in full possession of the historic mansion, and was living up to his surroundings.

For a time everything was plain sailing for the Americans at Bangletop. The dire forebodings of the agent did not seem to be fulfilled, and Mr. Terwilliger was beginning to feel aggrieved. He had hired a house with a ghost, and he wanted the use of it; but when he reflected upon the consequences below stairs, he held his peace. He was not so sure, after he had stayed at Bangletop awhile, and had had his daughters presented to the queen, that he could be so independent of cooks as he had at first supposed. Several times he had hinted rather broadly that some of the old New England homemade flapjacks would

be most pleasing to his palate; but since the prince had spent an afternoon on the lawn of Bangletop, the young ladies seemed deeply pained at the mere mention of their accomplishments in the line of griddles and batter; nor could Mrs. Terwilliger, after having tasted the joys of aristocratic life, bring herself to don the apron which so became her portly person in the early American days, and prepare for her lord and master one of those delicious platters of poached eggs and breakfast bacon, the mere memory of which made his mouth water. In short, palatial surroundings had too obviously destroyed in his wife and daughters all that capacity for happiness in a hovel of which Mr. Terwilliger had been so proud, and concerning which he had so eloquently spoken to Baron Bangletop's agent, and he now found himself in the position of Damocles. The hall was leased for a term, entertainment had been provided for the county with lavish hand; but success was dependent entirely upon his ability to keep a cook, his family having departed from their republican principles, and the history of the house was dead against a successful issue. So he decided that, after all, it was better that the ghost should be allowed to remain quiescent, and he uttered no word of complaint.

It was just as well, too, that Mr. Terwilliger held his peace, and refrained from addressing a complaining missive to the agent of Bangletop Hall; for before a message of that nature could have reached the person addressed, its contents would have been misleading, for at a quarter after midnight on the morning of the date set for the first of a series of grand banquets to the county folk, there came from the kitchen of Bangletop Hall a quick succession of shrieks that sent the three Misses Terwilliger into hysterics, and caused Hankinson J. Terwilliger's sole remaining lock to stand erect. Mrs. Terwilliger did not hear the shrieks, owing to a lately acquired habit of hearing nothing that proceeded from below stairs.

The first impulse of Terwilliger *père* was to dive down under the bedclothes, and endeavor to drown the fearful sound by his own labored breathing, but he never yielded to first impulses. So he awaited the second, which came simultaneously with a second series of shrieks and a cry for help in the unmistakable voice of the cook; a lady, by-the-way, who had followed the Terwilliger fortunes ever since the Terwilligers began to have fortunes, and whose first capacity in the family had been the dual one of mistress of the kitchen and confidante of madame. The second impulse was to arise in his might, put on a stout pair of the Terwilliger three-dollar brogans— the strongest shoe made, having been especially devised for the British Infantry in the Soudan— and garments suitable to the occasion, namely, a mackintosh and pair of broadcloth trousers, and go to the rescue of the distressed domestic. This Hankinson J. Terwilliger at once proceeded to do, arming

himself with a pair of horse-pistols, murmuring on the way below a soft prayer, the only one he knew, and which, with singular inappropriateness on this occasion, began with the words, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

"What's the matter, Judson?" queried Mrs. Terwilliger, drowsily, as she opened her eyes and saw her husband preparing for the fray.

She no longer called him Hankinson, not because she did not think it a good name, nor was it less euphonious to her ear than Judson, but Judson was Mr. Terwilliger's middle name, and middle names were quite the thing, she had observed, in the best circles. It was doubtless due to this discovery that her visiting cards had been engraved to read "Mrs. H. Judson-Terwilliger," the hyphen presumably being a typographical error, for which the engraver was responsible.

"Matter enough," growled Hankinson. "I have reason to believe that that jackass of a ghost is on duty tonight."

At the word ghost a pseudo-aristocratic shriek pervaded the atmosphere, and Mrs. Terwilliger, forgetting her social position for a moment, groaned "Oh, Hank!" and swooned away. And then the president of the Terwilliger Three-dollar Shoe Company of Soleton, Massachusetts (Limited), descended to the kitchen.

Across the sill of the kitchen door lay the culinary treasure whose lobster croquettes the Prince of Wales had likened unto a dream of Lucullus. Within the kitchen were signs of disorder. Chairs were upset; the table was lying flat on its back, with its four legs held rigidly up in the air; the kitchen library, consisting of a copy of *Marie Antoinette's Dream-Book*; a yellow-covered novel bearing the title *Little Lucy; or, The Kitchen-maid who Became a Marchioness*; and *Sixty Soups, by One who Knows*, lay strewn about the room, the *Dream-Book* sadly torn, and *Little Lucy* disfigured forever with batter. Even to the unpracticed eye it was evident that something had happened, and Mr. Terwilliger felt a cold chill mounting his spine three sections at a time. Whether it was the chill or his concern for the prostrate cook that was responsible or not I cannot say, but for some cause or other Mr. Terwilliger immediately got down on his knees, in which position he gazed fearfully about him for a few minutes, and then timidly remarked, "Cook!"

There was no answer.

"Mary, I say. Cook," he whispered, "what the deuce is the meaning of all this?"

A low moan was all that came from the cook, nor would Hankinson have listened to more had there been more to hear, for simultaneously with the moan he became uncomfortably conscious of a presence. In trying to describe it afterwards, Hankinson said that at first he thought a cold draft from a dank

cavern filled with a million eels, and a rattlesnake or two thrown in for luck, was blowing over him, and he avowed that it was anything but pleasant; and then it seemed to change into a mist drawn largely from a stagnant pool in a malarial country, floating through which were great quantities of finely chopped seaweed, wet hair, and an indescribable atmosphere of something the chief quality of which was a sort of stale clamminess that was awful in its intensity.

"I'm glad," Mr. Terwilliger murmured to himself, "that I ain't one of those delicately reared nobles. If I had anything less than a right-down regular republican constitution I'd die of fright."

And then his natural grit came to his rescue, and it was well it did, for the presence had assumed shape, and now sat on the window-ledge in the form of a hag, glaring at him from out of the depths of her unfathomable eyes, in which, despite their deadly greenness, there lurked a tinge of red caused by small specks of that hue semioccasionally seen floating across her dilated pupils.

"You are the Bangletop ghost, I presume?" said Terwilliger, rising and standing near the fire to thaw out his system.

The specter made no reply, but pointed to the door.

"Yes," Terwilliger said, as if answering a question. "That's the way out, madame. It's a beautiful exit, too. Just try it."

"H'I knows the wy out," returned the specter, rising and approaching the tenant of Bangletop, whose solitary lock also rose, being too polite to remain seated while the ghost walked. "H'I also knows the wy in, 'Ankinson Judson Terwilliger."

"That's very evident, madame, and between you and me I wish you didn't," returned Hankinson, somewhat relieved to hear the ghost talk, even if her voice did sound like the roar of a conch-shell with a bad case of grip. "I may say to you that, aside from a certain uncanny satisfaction which I feel at being permitted for the first time in my life to gaze upon the lineaments of a real live misty musty spook, I regard your coming here as an invasion of the sacred rights of privacy which is, as you might say, 'hinexcusable.'"

"Hinvaision?" retorted the ghost, snapping her fingers in his face with such effect that his chin dropped until Terwilliger began to fear it might never resume its normal position. "Hinvaision? H'I'd like to know 'oo's the hinvaider. H'I've occupied these 'ere 'alls for hover two 'undred years."

"Then it's time you moved, unless perchance you are the ghost of a medieval porker," Hankinson said, his calmness returning now that he had succeeded in plastering his iron-gray lock across the top of his otherwise bald

head. "Of course, if you are a spook of that kind, you want the earth, and maybe you'll get it."

"H'I'm no porker," returned the specter. "H'I'm simply the shide of a poor abused cook which is hafter revenge."

"Ah!" ejaculated Terwilliger, raising his eyebrows, "this is getting interesting. You're a spook with a grievance, eh? Against me? I've never wronged a ghost that I know of."

"No, h'I've no 'ard feelinks against you, sir," answered the ghost. "Hin fact h'I don't know nothink about you. My trouble's with them Baingletops, and h'I'm a-pursuin' of 'em. H'I've cut 'em out of two 'undred years of rent 'ere. They might better 'ave pide me me waiges hin full."

"Oho!" cried Terwilliger; "it's a question of wages, is it? The Bangletops were hard up?"

"'Ard up? The Baingletops?" laughed the ghost. "When they gets 'ard up the Baink o' Hengland will be in all the sixty soups mentioned in that there book."

"You seem to be up in the vernacular," returned Terwilliger, with a smile. "I'll bet you are an old fraud of a modern ghost."

Here he discharged all six chambers of his pistol into the body of the specter.

"No taikers," retorted the ghost, as the bullets whistled through her chest, and struck deep into the wall on the other side of the kitchen. "That's a noisy gun you've got, but you carn't ly a ghost with cold lead hany more than you can ly a cornerstone with a chicken. H'I'm 'ere to sty until I gets me waiges."

"What was the amount of your wages due at the time of your discharge?" asked Hankinson.

"H'I was gettin' ten pounds a month," returned the specter.

"Geewhittaker!" cried Terwilliger, "you must have been an all-fired fine cook."

"H'I was," assented the ghost, with a proud smile. "H'I cooked a boar's 'ead for 'is Royal 'Ighness King Charles when 'e visited Baingletop 'All as which was the finest 'e hever taisted, so 'e said, hand 'e'd 'ave knighted me hon the spot honly me sex wasn't suited to the title. 'You carn't make a knight out of a woman,' says the king, 'but give 'er my compliments, and tell 'er 'er monarch says as 'ow she's a cook as is too good for 'er staition.'"

"That was very nice," said Terwilliger. "No one could have desired a higher recommendation than that."

"My words hexackly when the baron's privit secretary told me two dys laiter as 'ow the baron's heggs wasn't done proper," said the ghost. "H'I says to 'im, says I: 'The baron's heggs be blowed. My monarch's hopinion is worth two

of any ten barons's livin', and Mister Baingletop,' (h'I allus called 'im mister when 'e was ugly,) 'can get 'is heggs cooked helsewhere if 'e don't like the wy h'I boils 'em.' Hand what do you suppose the secretary said then?"

"I give it up," replied Terwilliger. "What?"

"'E said as 'ow h'I 'ad the big 'ead."

"How disgusting of him!" murmured Terwilliger. "That was simply low."

"Hand then 'e accuged me of bein' himpudent."

"No!"

"'E did, hindeed; hand then 'e discharged me without me waiges. Hof course h'I wouldn't sty after that; but h'I says to 'im, 'Hif I don't get me py, h'I'll 'aunt this place from the dy of me death;' hand 'e says, ''Aunt awy.'"

"And you have kept your word."

"H'I 'ave that! H'I've made it 'ot for 'em, too."

"Well, now, look here," said Terwilliger, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you your wages if you'll go back to Spookland and mind your own business. Ten pounds isn't much when three-dollar shoes cost fifteen cents a pair and sell like hot waffles. Is it a bargain?"

"H'I was sent off with three months' money owin' me," said the ghost.

"Well, call it thirty pounds, then," replied Terwilliger.

"With hinterest— compound hinterest at six percent— for two 'undred and thirty years," said the ghost.

"Phew!" whistled Terwilliger. "Have you any idea how much money that is?"

"Certingly," replied the ghost. "Hit's just 63,609,609 pounds 6 shillings 4-1/2 pence. When h'I gets that, h'I flies; huntil I gets it h'I stys 'ere an' I 'aunts."

"Say," said Terwilliger, "haven't you been chumming with an Italian ghost named Shylock over on the other shore?"

"Shylock!" said the ghost. "No, h'I've never 'eard the naime. Perhaps 'e's stoppin' at the hother place."

"Very likely," said Terwilliger. "He is an eminent saint alongside of you. But I say now, Mrs. Spook, or whatever your name is, this is rubbing it in, to try to collect as much money as that, particularly from me, who wasn't to blame in any way, and on whom you haven't the spook of a claim."

"H'I'm very sorry for you, Mr. Terwilliger," said the ghost. "But my vow must be kept sacrid."

"But why don't you come down on the Bangletops up in London, and squeeze it out of them?"

"H'I carn't. H'I'm bound to 'aunt this 'all, an' that's hall there is about it. H'I carn't find a better wy to ly them Baingletops low than by attachin' of their hincome, hand the rent of this 'all is the honly bit of hincome within my reach."

"But I've leased the place for five years," said Terwilliger, in despair; "and I've paid the rent in advance."

"Carn't 'elp it," returned the ghost. "Hif you did that, hit's your own fault."

"I wouldn't have done it, except to advertise my shoe business," said Terwilliger, ruefully. "The items in the papers at home that arise from my occupancy of this house, together with the social cinch it gives me, are worth the money; but I'm hanged if it's worth my while to pay back salaries to every grasping apparition that chooses to rise up out of the moat and dip his or her clammy hand into my surplus. The shoe trade is a blooming big thing, but the profits aren't big enough to divide with tramp ghosts."

"Your tone is very 'aughty, 'Ankinson J. Terwilliger, but it don't haffeck me. H'I don't care 'oo pys the money, an' h'I 'aven't got you into this scripe. You've done that yourself. Hon the other 'and, sir, h'I've showed you 'ow to get out of it."

"Well, perhaps you're right," returned Hankinson. "I can't say I blame you for not perjuring yourself, particularly since you've been dead long enough to have discovered what the probable consequences would be. But I do wish there was some other way out of it. *I* couldn't pay you all that money without losing a controlling interest in the shoe company, and that's hardly worth my while, now is it?"

"No, Mr. Terwilliger; hit is not."

"I have a scheme," said Hankinson, after a moment or two of deep thought. "Why don't you go back to the spirit world and expose the Bangletops there? They have spooks, haven't they?"

"Yes," replied the ghost, sadly. "But the spirit world his as bad as this 'ere. The spook of a cook carn't reach the spook of a baron there hany more than a scullery-maid can reach a markis 'ere. H'I tried that when the baron died and came over to the hother world, but 'e 'ad 'is spook flunkies on 'and to tell me 'e was hout drivin' with the ghost of William the Conqueror and the shide of Solomon. H'I knew 'e wasn't, but what could h'I do?"

"It was a mean game of bluff," said Terwilliger. "I suppose, though, if you were the shade of a duchess, you could simply knock Bangletop silly?"

"Yes, and the Baron of Peddlington too. 'E was the private secretary as said h'I 'ad the big 'ead."

"H'm!" said Terwilliger, meditatively. "Would you— er— would you consent to retire from this haunting business of yours, and give me a receipt for that bill for wages, interest and all, if I had you made over into the spook of a duchess? Revenge is sweet, you know, and there are some revenges that are simply a thousand times more balmy than riches."

"Would h'I?" ejaculated the ghost, rising and looking at the clock. "Would h'I?" she repeated. "Well, rather. If h'I could enter spook society as a duchess, you can wager a year's hincome them Bangletops wouldn't be hin it."

"Good! I am glad to see that you are a spook of spirit. If you had veins, I believe there'd be sporting blood in them."

"Thainks," said the ghost, dryly. "But 'ow can it hever be did?"

"Leave that to me," Terwilliger answered. "We'll call a truce for two weeks, at the end of which time you must come back here, and we'll settle on the final arrangements. Keep your own counsel in the matter, and don't breathe a word about your intentions to anybody. Above all, keep sober."

"H'I'm no cannibal," retorted the ghost.

"Who said you were?" asked Terwilliger.

"You intimated as much," said the ghost, with a smile. "You said as 'ow I must keep sober, and 'ow could I do hotherwise hunless I swallered some spirits?"

Terwilliger laughed. He thought it was a pretty good joke for a ghost—especially a cook's ghost— and then, having agreed on the hour of midnight one fortnight thence for the next meeting, they shook hands and parted.

"What was it, Hankinson?" asked Mrs. Terwilliger, as her husband crawled back into bed. "Burglars?"

"Not a burglar," returned Hankinson. "Nothing but a ghost—a poor, old, female ghost."

"Ghost!" cried Mrs. Terwilliger, trembling with fright. "In this house?"

"Yes, my dear. Haunted us by mistake, that's all. Belongs to another place entirely; got a little befogged, and came here without intending to, that's all. When she found out her mistake, she apologized, and left."

"What did she have on?" asked Mrs. Terwilliger, with a sigh of relief.

But the president of the Three-dollar Shoe Company, of Soleton, Massachusetts (Limited), said nothing. He had dropped off into a profound slumber.

iii

FOR THE NEXT two weeks Terwilliger lived in a state of preoccupation that worried his wife and daughters to a very considerable extent. They were afraid that something had happened, or was about to happen, in connection with the shoe corporation; and this deprived them of sleep, particularly the elder Miss Terwilliger, who had danced four times at a recent ball with an impecunious young earl, whom she suspected of having intentions. Ariadne was in a state of grave apprehension, because she knew that much as the earl might love her, it

would be difficult for them to marry on his income, which was literally too small to keep the roof over his head in decent repair.

But it was not business troubles that occupied every sleeping and waking thought of Hankinson Judson Terwilliger. His mind was now set upon the hardest problem it had ever had to cope with, that problem being how to so ennoble the specter cook of Bangletop that she might outrank the ancestors of his landlord in the other world— the shady world, he called it. The living cook had been induced to remain partly by threats and partly by promises of increased pay; the threats consisting largely of expressions of determination to leave her in England, thousands of miles from her home in Massachusetts, deserted and forlorn, the poor woman being insufficiently provided with funds to get back to America, and holding in her veins a strain of Celtic blood quite large enough to make the idea of remaining an outcast in England absolutely intolerable to her. At the end of seven days Terwilliger was seemingly as far from the solution of his problem as ever, and at the grand fete given by himself and wife on the afternoon of the seventh day of his trial, to the Earl of Mugley, the one in whom Ariadne was interested, he seemed almost rude to his guests, which the latter overlooked, taking it for the American way of entertaining. It is very hard for a shoemaker to entertain earls, dukes, and the plainest kind of everyday lords under ordinary circumstances; but when, in addition to the duties of host, the maker of soles has to think out a recipe for the making of an aristocrat out of a deceased plebe, a polite drawing-room manner is hardly to be expected. Mr. Terwilliger's manner remained of the kind to be expected under the circumstances, neither better nor worse, until the flunky at the door announced, in stentorian tones, "The Hearl of Mugley."

The "H'earl" of Mugley seemed to be the open sesame to the door betwixt Terwilliger and success. Simultaneously with the entrance of the earl the solution of his problem flashed across the mind of the master of Bangletop, and his affronting demeanor, his preoccupation and all disappeared in an instant. Indeed, so elegantly enthusiastic was his reception of the earl that Lady Maud Sniffles, on the other side of the room, whispered in the ear of the Hon. Miss Pottleton that Mugley's creditors were in luck; to which the Hon. Miss Pottleton, whose smiles upon the nobleman had been returned unopened, curved her upper lip spitefully, and replied that they were indeed, but she didn't envy Ariadne that pompous little error of nature's, the earl.

"Howdy do, Earl?" said Terwilliger. "Glad to see you looking so well. How's your mamma?"

"The countess is in her usual state of health, Mr. Terwilliger," returned the earl.

"Ain't she coming this afternoon?"

"I really can't say," answered Mugley. "I asked her if she was coming, and all she did was to call for her salts. She's a little given to fainting spells, and the slightest shock rather upsets her."

And then the earl turned on his heel and sought out the fair Ariadne, while Terwilliger, excusing himself, left the assemblage, and went directly to his private office in the crypt of the Greek chapel. Arrived there, he seated himself at his desk and wrote the following formal card, which he put in an envelope and addressed to the Earl of Mugley:

"If the Earl of Mugley will call at the private office of Mr. H. Judson Terwilliger at once, he will not only greatly oblige Mr. H. Judson Terwilliger, but may also hear of something to his advantage."

The card written, Terwilliger summoned an attendant, ordered a quantity of liqueurs, whiskey, sherry, port, and lemon squash for two to be brought to the office, and then sent his communication to the earl.

Now the earl was a great stickler for etiquette, and he did not at all like the idea of one in his position waiting upon one of Mr. Terwilliger's rank, or lack of rank, and, at first thought, he was inclined to ignore the request of his host, but a combination of circumstances served to change his resolution. He so seldom heard anything to his advantage that, for mere novelty's sake, he thought he would do as he was asked; but the question of his dignity rose up again, and shoving the note into his pocket he tried to forget it. After five minutes he found he could not forget it, and putting his hand into the pocket for the missive, meaning to give it a second reading, he drew out another paper by mistake, which was, in brief, a reminder from a firm of London lawyers that he owed certain clients of theirs a few thousands of pounds for the clothing that had adorned his back for the last two years, and stating that proceedings would be begun if at the expiration of three months the account was not paid in full. The reminder settled it. The Earl of Mugley graciously concluded to grant Mr. H. Judson Terwilliger an audience in the private office under the Greek chapel.

"Sit down, Earl, and have a cream de mint with me," said Terwilliger, as the earl, four minutes later, entered the apartment.

"Thanks," returned the earl. "Beautiful color that," he added, pleasantly, smacking his lips with satisfaction as the soft green fluid disappeared from the glass into his inner earl.

"Fine," said Terwilliger. "Little unripe, perhaps, but pleasant to the eye. I prefer the hue of the Maraschino, myself. Just taste that Maraschino, Earl. It's A1; thirty-six dollars a case."

"You wanted to see me about some matter of interest to both of us, I believe, Mr. Terwilliger," said the earl, declining the proffered Maraschino.

"Well, yes," returned Terwilliger. "More of interest to you, perhaps, than to me. The fact is, Earl, I've taken quite a shine to you, so much of a one in fact, that I've looked you up at a commercial agency, and H. J. Terwilliger never does that unless he's mightily interested in a man."

"I— er— I hope you are not to be prejudiced against me," the earl said, uneasily, "by— er— by what those cads of tradesmen say about me."

"Not a bit," returned Terwilliger— "not a bit. In fact, what I've discovered has prejudiced me in your favor. You are just the man I've been looking for for some days. I've wanted a man with three A blood and three Z finances for 'most a week now, and from what I gather from Burke and Bradstreet, you fill the bill. You owe pretty much everybody from your tailor to the collector of pew rents at your church, eh?"

"I've been unfortunate in financial matters," returned the earl; "but I have left the family name untarnished."

"So I believe, Earl. That's what I admire about you. Some men with your debts would be driven to drink or other pastimes of a more or less tarnishing nature, and I admire you for the admirable restraint you have put upon yourself. You owe, I am told, about twenty-seven thousand pounds."

"My secretary has the figures, I believe," said the earl, slightly bored.

"Well, we'll say thirty thousand in round figures. Now what hope have you of ever paying that sum off?"

"None— unless I— er— well, unless I should be fortunate enough to secure a rich wife."

"Precisely; that is exactly what I thought," rejoined Terwilliger. "Marriage is your only asset, and as yet that is hardly negotiable. Now I have called you here this afternoon to make a proposition to you. If you will marry according to my wishes I will give you an income of five thousand pounds a year for the next five years."

"I don't quite understand you," the earl replied, in a disappointed tone. It was evident that five thousand pounds per annum was too small a figure for his tastes.

"I think I was quite plain," said Terwilliger, and he repeated his offer.

"I certainly admire the lady very much," said the earl; "but the settlement of income seems very small."

Terwilliger opened his eyes wide with astonishment. "Oh, you admire the lady, eh?" he said. "Well, there is no accounting for tastes."

"You surprise me slightly," said the earl, in response to this remark. "The lady is certainly worthy of any man's admiration. She is refined, cultivated, beautiful, and—"

"Ahem!" said Terwilliger. "May I ask, my dear Earl, to whom you refer?"

"To Ariadne, of course. I thought your course somewhat unusual, but we do not pretend to comprehend you Americans over here. Your proposition is that I shall marry Ariadne?"

I hesitate to place on record what Terwilliger said in answer to this statement. It was forcible rather than polite, and the earl from that moment adopted a new simile for degrees of profanity, substituting "to swear like an American" for the old forms having to do with pirates and troopers. The string of expletives was about five minutes in length, at the end of which time Terwilliger managed to say:

"No such damned proposition ever entered my mind. I want you to marry a cold, misty, musty specter, nothing more or less, and I'll tell you why."

And then he proceeded to tell the Earl of Mugley all that he knew of the history of Bangletop Hall, concluding with a narration of his experiences with the ghost cook.

"My rent here," he said, in conclusion, "is five thousand pounds per annum. The advertising I get out of the fact of my being here and swelling it with you nabobs is worth twenty-five thousand pounds a year, and I'm willing to pay, in good hard cash, twenty percent of that amount rather than be forced to give up. Now here's your chance to get an income without an encumbrance and stave off your creditors. Marry the spook, so that she can go back to the spirit land a countess and make it hot for the Bangletops, and don't be so allfired proud. She'll be disappointed enough I can tell you, when I inform her that an earl was the best I could do, the promised duke not being within reach. If she says earls are drugs in the market, I won't be able to deny it; and, after all, my lad, a good cook is a greater blessing in this world than any earl that ever lived, and a blamed sight rarer."

"Your proposition is absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Terwilliger," replied the earl. "I'd look well marrying a draft from a dark cavern, as you call it, now wouldn't I? To say nothing of the impossibility of a Mugley marrying a cook. I cannot entertain the proposition."

"You'll find you can't entertain anything if you don't watch out," fumed Terwilliger, in return.

"I'm not so sure about that," replied the earl, haughtily, sipping his lemon squash. "I fancy Miss Ariadne is not entirely indifferent to me."

"Well, you might just as well understand on this 18th day of July, 18—, as any other time, that my daughter Ariadne never becomes the Earless of Mugley," said Terwilliger, in a tone of exasperation.

"Not even when her father considers the commercial value of such an alliance for his daughter?" retorted the earl, shaking his finger in Terwilliger's face. "Not even when the President of the Three-dollar Shoe Company, of

Soleton, Massachusetts (Limited), considers the advertising sure to result from a marriage between his house and that of Mugley, with presents from her majesty the queen, the Duke of York acting as best man, and telegrams of congratulation from the crowned heads of Europe pouring in at the rate of two an hour for half as many hours as there are thrones?"

Terwilliger turned pale.

The picture painted by the earl was terribly alluring.

He hesitated.

He was lost.

"Mugley," he whispered, hoarsely— "Mugley, I have wronged you. I thought you were a fortune-hunter. I see you love her. Take her, my boy, and pass me the brandy."

"Certainly, Mr. Terwilliger," replied the earl, affably. "And then, if you've no objection, you may pass it back, and I'll join you in a thimbleful myself."

And then the two men drank each other's health in silence, which was prolonged for at least five minutes, during which time the earl and his host both appeared to be immersed in deep thought.

"Come," said Terwilliger at last. "Let us go back to the drawing-room, or they'll miss us, and, by-the-way, you might speak of that little matter to Ariadne tonight. It'll help the fall trade to have the engagement announced."

"I will, Mr. Terwilliger," returned the earl, as they started to leave the room; "but I say, father-in-law elect," he whispered, catching Terwilliger's coat sleeve and drawing him back into the office for an instant, "you couldn't let me have five pounds on account this evening, could you?"

TWO MINUTES later Terwilliger and the earl appeared in the drawing-room, the former looking haggard and worn, his eyes feverishly bright, and his manner betraying the presence of disturbing elements in his nerve centers; the latter smiling more affably than was consistent with his title, and jingling a number of gold coins in his pocket, which his intimate friend and old college chum, Lord Dufferton, on the other side of the room, marveled at greatly, for he knew well that upon the earl's arrival at Bangletop Hall an hour before his pockets were as empty as a flunky's head.

iv

TERWILLIGER'S TIME was almost up. The hour for his interview with the specter cook of Bangletop was hardly forty-eight hours distant, and he was well-nigh distracted. No solution of the problem seemed possible since the earl had so peremptorily declined to fall in with his plan. He was glad the earl had

done so, for otherwise he would have been denied the tremendous satisfaction which the consummation of an alliance between his own and one of the oldest and noblest houses of England was about to give him, not to mention the commercial phase of the situation, which had been so potent a factor in bringing the engagement about; for Ariadne had said yes to the earl that same night, and the betrothal was shortly to be announced. It would have been announced at once, only the earl felt that he should break the news himself first to his mother, the countess— an operation which he dreaded, and for which he believed some eight or ten weeks of time were necessary.

"What is the matter, Judson?" Mrs. Terwilliger asked finally, her husband was growing so careworn of aspect.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing."

"But there is something, Judson, and as your wife I demand to know what it is. Perhaps I can help you."

And then Mr. Terwilliger broke down, and told the whole story to Mrs. Terwilliger, omitting no detail, stopping only to bring that worthy lady to on the half-dozen or more occasions when her emotions were too strong for her nerves, causing her to swoon. When he had quite done, she looked him reproachfully in the eye, and said that if he had told her the truth instead of deceiving her on the night of the spectral visitation, he might have been spared all his trouble.

"For you know, Judson," she said, "I have made a study of the art of acquiring titles. Since I read the story of the girl who started in life as an innkeeper's daughter and died a duchess, by Elizabeth Harley Hicks, of Salem, and realized how one might be lowly born and yet rise to lofty heights, it has been my dearest wish that my girls might become noblewomen, and at times, Judson, I have even hoped that you might yet become a duke."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Terwilliger. "That would be awful. Hankinson, Duke of Terwilliger! Why, Molly, I'd never be able to hold up my head in shoe circles with a name on me like that."

"Is there nothing in the world but shoes, Judson?" asked his wife, seriously.

"You'll find shoes are the foundation upon which society stands," chuckled Terwilliger in return.

"You are never serious," returned Mrs. Terwilliger; "but now you must be. You are coping with the supernatural. Now I have discovered," continued the lady, "that there are three methods by which titles are acquired— birth, marriage, and purchase."

"You forget the fourth— achievement," suggested Terwilliger.

"Not these days, Judson. It used to be so, but it is not so now. Now the specter hasn't birth, we can't get any living duke to marry her, dead dukes are hard to find, so there's nothing to do but to buy her a title."

"But where?"

"In Italy. You can get 'em by the dozen. Every hand-organ grinder in America grinds away in the hope of going back to Italy and purchasing a title. Why can't you do the same?"

"Me? Me grind a hand-organ in America?" cried Hankinson.

"No, no; purchase a dukedom."

"I don't want a dukedom; I want a duchessdom."

"That's all right. Buy the title, give it to the cook, and let her marry some specter of her own rank; she can give him the title; and there you are!"

"Good scheme!" cried Terwilliger. "But I say, Molly, don't you think it would be better to get her to bring the specter over here, and have me give him the title, and then let him marry her here?"

"No, I don't. If you give it to him first, the chances are he would go back on his bargain. He'd say that, being a duke, he couldn't marry a cook."

"You have a large mind, Molly," said Terwilliger.

"I know men!" snapped Mrs. Terwilliger.

And so it happened. Hankinson Judson Terwilliger applied by wire to the authorities in Rome for all right, title, and interest in one dukedom, free from encumbrances, irrevocable, and duly witnessed by the proper dignitaries of the Italian government, and at the second interview with the specter cook of Bangletop, he was able to show her a cablegram received from the Eternal City stating that the papers would be sent upon receipt of the applicant's check for one hundred lire.

"'Ow much his that?" asked the ghost.

"One hundred lire?" returned Terwilliger, repeating the sum to gain time to think. He was himself surprised at the cheapness of the duchy, and he was afraid that if the ghost knew its real value she would decline to take it. "One hundred lire? Why, that's about 750,000 dollars— 150,000 pounds. They charge high for their titles," he added, blushing slightly.

"Pretty 'igh," returned the ghost. "But h'I carn't be a duke, ye know. 'Ow'll I manidge that?"

Hankinson explained his wife's scheme to the specter.

"That's helegant," said she. "H'I've loved a butler o' the Bangletops for nigh hon to two 'undred years, but, some'ow or hother, he's kep' shy o' me. This'll fix 'im. But h'I say, Mr. Terwilliger, his one o' them Heyetalian dukes as good as a Henglish one?"

"Every bit," said Terwilliger. "A duke's a duke the world over. Don't you know the lines of Burns, 'A duke's a duke for a' that'?"

"Never 'eard of 'im," replied the ghost.

"Well, you look him up when you get settled down at home. He was a smart man here, and, if his ghost does him justice, you'll be mighty glad to know him," Terwilliger answered.

And thus was Bangletop Hall delivered of its uncanny visitor. The ducal appointment, entitling its owner to call himself "Duke of Cavalcadi," was received in due time, and handed over to the curse of the kitchen, who immediately disappeared, and permanently, from the haunts that had known her for so long and so disadvantageously. Bangletop Hall is now the home of a happy family, to whom all are devoted, and from whose *ménage* no cook has ever been known to depart, save for natural causes, despite all that has gone before.

Ariadne has become Countess of Mugley, and Mrs. Terwilliger is content with her Judson, whom, however, she occasionally calls Duke of Cavalcadi, claiming that he is the representative of that ancient and noble family on earth. As for Judson, he always smiles when his wife calls him Duke, but denies the titular impeachment, for he is on good terms with his landlord, whose admiration for his tenant's wholly unexpected ability to retain his cook causes him to regard him as a supernatural being, and therefore worthy of a Bangletop's regard.

"All of which," Terwilliger says to Mrs. Terwilliger, "might not be so, my dear, were I really the duke, for I honestly believe that if there is a feud of long standing anywhere in the universe, it is between the noble families of Bangletop and Cavalcadi over on the other shore."

End