PAST MASTERS 209

Don Marquis
John Galsworthy
Rex Beach
George Barr McCutcheon
A E W Mason
Ernest Favenc
H G Wells
Maxwell Bodenheim
Edgar Allan Poe

and more

PAST MASTERS 209

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

23 March 2025

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1: The Silent Guest

E. Nesbit and Oswald Barron

1886-1924 and 1868-1939

Great Southern Herald 15 Nov 1911

PAST 9 O'CLOCK, and a bitter night. It was raining as it had rained all day, a gathering wind lashed the hedge-rows and the shrieking boughs of the naked elms, and there was sleet in the wind.

For his own, reasons, Mr George Masters was avoiding the highway, preferring instead to plunge in the darkness across the fields, falling again and again in the ruts of sandy mud ridged with last week's snow, gray and sodden. He cursed through chattering teeth, as be made for the far twinkling light of the "Hare and Billet."

Pretty luck this for a man— on Christmas eve, too! He had spent a gray, gloomy afternoon lying among the soaked gorse by the road edge, with the sleet in his ears and the steady rain winning through the shag-coat and the greasy brown coat beneath it, to the flannel waistcoat that sheltered his pistols.

Chilled to the soul, with no dry thread on him, he had waited faithfully till Squire Hales' horse-hoofs had splashed the mud over the gorse bushes, and then the numbed fingertips crept under the flannel waist coat. He half rose among the furze as the red *roquelaure* went past him, to the splash of the hoofs and the jangle of the bridle-reins.

But when he saw the two servants turn the corner, with holsters before them, he sank back into his wet nest, a prey to natural annoyance.

The horses went on towards Shooter's Hill, and a dripping figure stood in the way they had come, shaking a helpless fist and cursing all things below the beetling sky. Then George Masters tramped across the strip of furze-clad common and flung himself through a gap in the hedge of the turnip field. He broke into a heavy run when he saw the light from the kitchen of the "Hare and Billet" blinking before him.

The unfortunate footpad unhasped the gate, and stepped forward to stand with the host of the "Hare and Billet" in one gathering puddle.

"Gone by!" said Mr. Masters, bitterly, "Gone by to Greenwich by this time, likely with his two bloody-minded serving men behind!— a cowardly, white-livered, gold-laced hound!"

"You're wet, George," said the landlord. "Come you in under a roof." Reproof of George's bitterness of speech was in the tone— the tone of a man who had his own disappointments to contend with.

They came up the brick path to the : back door and passed in under the lean-to roof of the shed. It was quite dark, and they moved shuffling among

the barrels of beer, the firewood, and farm tools that covered the earth floor. The landlord raised the heavy wooden latch of the door leading to the house, and they passed up the two steps into the big room— kitchen and tap-room in one-and shut out the night and the cold.

A pleasant kitchen with tiled floor and a comforting mass of red coals glowing in an iron basket sticking out of the wall. A kitchen ,with blackened settles, long benches, and tables ringed with many ale-cans. A quiet kitchen where only one man was, and he, the hostler, in the big armchair asleep.

The landlord roused him with his foot, and he sat up, rubbing a beery eye with a chilblained fist.

"Mr George is coming in here to sleep to-night, Bill," said the landlord. "I take it in his majesty the King won't trouble a poor fellow a Christmas Eve. Hot him some ale— a quart of ale— and spread his coat over that chair-back— main wet and main dry, Mr George be, I take it."

"He'll sleep in his chair, then," returned the hostler. "There's a man above us how, in the bed, a real gentleman he is, with his sword and his rooklay— come in when, you was out, when the heavy rain come on. I showed him up to the bedroom and kindled the fire, and he lies there, burning two of the big wax candles; and if he don't drink the bottle of claret, it's opened, and will have to be paid for, too. Terry don't like 'im, Terry don't; hark to him howling— he'th whined like that ever sin' the old gentleman come. Hark to un again, now the wind's quiet."

The mongrel fastened by the front door was baying howl upon howl. A kick at the panel, and a command to "lie down" from the landlord, appeared to soothe him for a moment, but the long whines soon broke out again. The dog wailed to the wind, which answered with fierce gusts of passion, and hurtling of sleet against the lattice panes.

When the dog was silent for a while and the wind paused to gather itself for new effort, the rain pattered gently, the clock ticked, to the chorus of a choir of crickets— and East Wickham's belfry jangled in the distance.

The men in the kitchen were sitting in the shadow of an idea.

"He don't seem to be moving," said the holster, breaking the silence. "He's not awake now, for sure."

The others looked at him with sudden interest, as if the presence upstairs had passed from their thoughts.

"There's a purse above stairs I make no doubt, and a gold sneezin' box up there, as'll keep awake, if they've any sense," Bill went on, grinning at the subtlety and success of his conversation, but not looking at his companies.

"There's something I don't like, Willum," Mr. Masters remarked, "about old gentlemen's purses."

"I wouldn't like," put in the landlord, apparently addressing a pewter measure, "an old gentleman to lose his purse here. Give the house a bad name— that sort of thing— and a good name," he continued, facing his subordinate—' a good name to a house of entertainment is better than rubies.'

Having delivered himself of this sentiment, he spread his hands over the arms of his Windsor chair and leaned forward with an air of awaiting suggestions But none came.

He coughed, looked at Mr Masters, and went on.

"There was a dear old gentleman come here, let me see, why it was as near ad possible a year ago."

"It was a year ago," put in George.

"Well, he come here (I'll have to go out and' kick that dog), and 'Is this the Deptford Road,' he says, 'my men?' and you says, 'Matter of twenty mile, master, and a bad road for a lonely traveller to leave a comfortable public behind on.' And he says, 'My horse is at the gate-post and he'd be better in the stable,' and he walks in and orders candles and supper."

"Did he have them?" asked the hostler, breathlessly.

"He had all he ordered, and more," said the landlord, slowly, "but he went on that night, after all." He looked at his companion; appreciated the reminiscence in the eye of George, the childlike admiration for superior achievement in that of Bill, and pursued: "Yes," he went on, "and when he went, he left his gold watch and sneezing-box, and nineteen guineas in a red silk bag. He didn't want 'em where he was going."

"Where was that?"

"Don't I tell you? Deptford."

They all laughed gayly, and the landlord took out a stone bottle and thick glass runners from the corner cupboard.

"His Majesty, King George, wot you're so fond of— here's his health, and our gracious Queen Charlotte, and long to reign over us!" George gave the toast, and they drained their glasses.

"Giniver," said the hostler, and added tentatively, "a man could do anything wot's drunk, Giniver."

"Anything short of murder he could," assented George; "but it's nothing short of murder would do for that dog of yourn, Tom.'

Indeed, the dog's long drawn howls still disturbed their Christmas festivities. Moved by this incongruity, the landlord went out and kicked it.

A gust of wind and rain found its way into the room, and Mr Masters coughed again violently, and shivered and swore.

"Can't you shut the door?" he asked; "this ain't the weather for a poor man with his living to get, and his pockets as empty as the day he was born."

"Well," said the landlord, "our pockets was empty enough last Christmas here, afore that ole gentleman called."

And still no sound from the room upstairs.

"There's another purse up there this night," remarked the footpad, "waiting for them as is sportsman enough to take it, as two bold lads did last Christmas eve."

The chill wind must have made its entry still felt in the room, for the landlord shivered again, and the footpad widened the palms of his hands upon his knees.

"And another old man," he said, "I was the man that did it, and I suppose it'll be my job again. That dog howls fit to wake the dead. I don't like this indoors work, with doors and curtains, and stairs a-creaking, and having to wash your hands this weather. I'm a man that earns his living in the open air, I am, where things is straightforward, and nothing can't come creeping up behind you without your seeing it."

The landlord, suddenly lifted the wooden latch of the inner door, held his candle above his head, and peered into the darkness.

"No one there," he said; "and I could have sworn that minute I heard a breath. I don't like your talk tonight, George. Wake the dead, and washing of your hands indeed; ain't it enough—"

He stopped abruptly, to pour out more spirit.

"Oh, let him talk, master," cried the hostler, "it puts heart into a man, it do— talking over old times.'

George chuckled grimly, and when he had drained his glass, he said cheerfully: "Aye, that does it. It all comes back to me. It was him as held the light by the door, when l run in; and it was me as— He bled very free, he did, very free."

"Yes! I held the light, though much against my wish, mind you— thank Them as be," said the landlord, regarding his grimy fingers with satisfaction. "Thank Them as be, my hands is clean."

"They won't be clean long, then. It's me what holds the light tonight," said George, firmly, and he took the candle and walked to the foot of the stair.

"Not a sound." he said.

The landlord had risen— the shock-headed man shifted his big shoulder on the bench where he lay, and the expression rose in his face of a terrier awaiting with eager nose the rush from cover of his first rat.

"If," said he, hesitatingly— "If it comes to that, you can both hold this light— sooner than see them guineas should get up and rided off in the morning. I know a young man what would as lief hold a bill-hook as a candle any day of the week."

And he looked so savage that the landlord was unaffectedly shocked. But George came back to the table for another dream, and after it had been tendered him, remarked that that young man would not want for a backer. Then he knocked damp priming out of his pistol on the table edge and filled the pan.

"I'll just listen once again, if so be he's soundly off," and he disappeared cautiously up the winding stairs, turning back to add: "And don't any of you come creeping up behind me, for I don't like it."

The other two looked anywhere but at each other, without speaking. There was no sound from, above after the stairs had ceased to creak under the footpad's weight. Outside the dog howled, a long, low baying that never ceased.

The hostler fetched a bill-hook from the lean-to shed and employed the time in taking off his boots. After a glance at the other, he sat down with the bill-hook hidden by his coat-flap.

Both men started at the first creak of the stair.

George stood at the stair-foot, blinking in the sudden light,

"He's a-sleeping like the dead," he whispered. "Can't even hear him breathe. His candles are burning yet; I see them through the key-hole. Come on!"

All three stood together for a moment at the bottom of the stairway. There was a moment's hesitation, while the landlord and Mr Masters adjusted the procession behind Bill, who had planted his foot on the bottom stair. At this inopportune instant, the tail clock in the corner struck, with a shrill metallic stroke, and Bill withdrew his foot suddenly, dropping the bill-hook. It fell to the red tiles of the floor, which gave back clang on clang.

Aghast at this mishap, the host pushed his clumsy-fingered servant back into his place in the corner, Mr. Masters and himself reseating themselves with a hastily assumed appearance of genial domesticity.

But no startled guest appearing on the stairs after ten minutes of complete silence, the procession reformed in its old order, and went up.

Outside the bedroom door they held their breath and listened— not a sound but the ticking of the clock below, the rushing of the wind without, and the moaning plaint of the dog.

A stealthier man than the hostler, the landlord thrust a sleek hand forward to grasp the latch of the door. It was unsecured, and opened a little way under his gentle pressure. Through the foot of opening they could see the two waxen candles flame in the sockets as they burned by the sleeping man. By their light his legs modeled themselves under the white counterpane. His face and

shoulders, were in the deep shadows of the faded, green curtains of the half-tester.

At the sight of the bed the heart of the hostler became suddenly sick within him. With white lips and shaking knees he vacated his place in the procession, and pushing past the landlord, who was still poising himself at the stairhead, he made his way to the room below. At that moment, could their limbs have borne them, his companions would have followed him. They huddled together in the corner of the landing, holding their breath and listening until the taproom door opened and shut; and they knew themselves alone with the sleeper.

The wind had lulled, and the rain, falling ceaselessly and silently, made no sound on the thatched roof. For a while the dog was silent in the yard. This was an old man; scant of breath, or surely his breathing could have been heard in the dreadful calmness of the night.

The landlord, with his shoulders raised, had stolen on tip-toe into the room. One of the candles was now guttering and flaring, preparatory to going out; the fragment of the other burned on with a long, red, smoking wick, lighting up the bright point of the rusty case-knife clenched in his fingers.

He glanced upward at the brutal features of the footpad. Their eyes met with the same thought in each. It was the recollection of that other night, when they had stolen into that room to rob another helpless, sleeping old man of sleep and life.

The great silence was not to be borne. The footpad put out his hand and thrust the landlord forward by the shoulder. He drew back, stumbling heavily. As he recovered himself, they both sprang forward toward the bed and tore back the old green curtains.

Behind these, his poor white face thrown back over the pillows, lay the old man, his thin hands rigidly grasping the edges of the sheet, drawn up close under his chin. They leaned over the bed and half drew back.

"My God! 'tis very like him," said the landlord in a whisper.

George had his hands on the sheets and pulled it back roughly.

"It is him, my God!" he cried. For, as he pulled back the sheet, the last candle flared up and died down and went out. Its last light shone on the sleeper's throat, gashed across— horribly gaping— red and wet. This was no stranger, but the man they had murdered a year ago; they had left him just so last Christmas morning.

Their wild cries narrowly prevented some of the others from meeting a similar fate.

The dog in the yard whined with pleasure to hear a human voice, and then once more there was the silence of death in the Hare and Billet.

IN THE best bedroom the landlord lay dead on the floor— dead beside the white counterpane and impressed pillows of an empty bed. Something wrong with his heart, folk said.

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2: Psychic Phenomena

Maxwell Bodenheim

1892-1954

In: *Introducing Irony*, New York, 1922

The author was a highly controversial bohemian poet and novelist, who had great success in the 1920s and 30s, but whose life disintegrated afterwards. He and his third wife were murdered in a New York flophouse by a young man they had befriended.

CARL DELL and Anita Starr were speaking of a dead woman who had influenced their eyes. She had also refined their heads to a chill protest. Their faces, involved and disconsolate, had not solved her absence, and their voices were freighted with a primitive martyrdom. Carl was fencing with the end of his youth. His body held that inpenetrable cringing which pretends to ignore the coming of middle age and is only betrayed by rare gestures. He was tall, with a slenderness that barely escaped being feminine. The upper part of his face was scholarly and the lower part roguish, and the two gave him the effect of a sprite who has become erudite but still retains the memory of his former identity. His protruding eyes were embarrassed, as though someone behind them had unexpectedly pushed them from a refuge. With immense finesse they apologised for intruding upon the world. It is almost tautology to say that they were gray. His small brown moustache had a candidly misplaced air as it touched the thin bacchanale of his lips. It was a mourner at the feast.

Anita Starr's form would have seemed stout but for the sweeping discipline of its lines, but this careful suppression ended in a riot when it came to her face. Her face was a small, lyrical revel that had terminated in a fight. Her nose and chin were strident but her cheeks and mouth were subtlely unassuming. Her blue eyes brilliantly and impartially aided both sides of the conflict. Glistening spirals of reddish brown hair courted her head.

Sitting in the parlor of the Starr home Anita and Carl spoke of a dead woman who had influenced their eyes. It was two A. M. and the atmosphere resembled a disillusioned reminiscence: still and heavy. They had talked about this dead woman throughout the evening, welcoming any sound that might surprise her profile into life. When alive she had been the chanting whirlpool of their existences, and when she died sound ceased for them. Their voices became mere copies of its past reign.

"Because I loved her any common pebble became a chance word concerning her and flowers were enthusiastic anecdotes of her presence," said Carl.

For an hour he had been breaking his love into insatiable variations—one who seduces the fleeting expressions of a past torture.

"She may have been an august vagabond from another planet—a planet where loitering is a solemn profession," said Anita. "Even when she performed a menial task she awed it with her thoughtful reluctance. Like a fitful gleaner she crept through bare fields of people, accepting their bits of laughter and refusal. When she met us she stepped backward, as from a tempting unreality, and knocked against death."

Carl sat, like a groveling fantasy weary of attempting to capture a genuine animation, but Anita had forced herself into a tormented erectness. The clock struck three. Without a word or glance in each other's direction they left their chairs, turned out the lights, and ascended the stairway, Carl slightly in advance. They halted at the first landing and faced each other with the uncomplaining helplessness of people suddenly scalded by reality.

"In the morning we will eat oranges from a silver dish and glibly cheat our emotions," said Carl.

"This deftly impolite proceeding never stops to ask our consent," said Anita in a voice whose lethargy barely observed a satirical twinkle.

Another word would have been a ridiculous impropriety. They parted and entered their rooms. Flower scents filtered through Carl's open window, like softly dismayed sins and the cool repentance of a summer night glided into his room upon a pathway of moonlight. For a while he sat absent-mindedly burnishing the knives that had divided his evening. After he had undressed he fell upon his bed like one hurriedly obliterating an ordeal. His consciousness played with a black hood; then a crash mastered the room and the door swung open. His blanched face paid a spasmodic tribute to the sound and his grey eyes greeted the darkness as though it were an advancing mob. With a strained stoicism he waited for a repetition of the sound. The moments were sledge-hammers fanning his face with their close passage. Then his bed weirdly meddled with his body and became a light cradle rocked by some arrogant hand. The darkness tingled lifelessly, like an electrocuted man.

Carl's waiting began to feel sharply disgraced and his senses planned a revolt. He tried to rise to a sitting posture but his body insulted his desire. At this point the darkness softened to the disguised struggle of a woman striving to reach him. The significance of this cast an impalpable but potent consolation upon the straining of his chained body. The rocking of his bed measured a powerfully cryptic welcome and he tried to decipher it with the beat of his heart. Each of its syllables became the cadenced impact of another person against a toughly pliant wall. His body demolished its tenseness and pressed a refrain into the swaying bed. He decorated the darkness with the crisp flight of his voice.

"Perish upon the turmoil of each day and make it inaudible, but let the night be our hermitage," he cried to a dead woman. As though replying, the rocking of his bed gradually lessened and the darkness became an opaque farewell. He turned to the shaft of moonlight which was tactfully intercepting the floor of his room; it had the unobtrusive intensity of a melted Chinaman. For hours he gave it his eyes and dimly contradicted it with his heart. When the dawn made his room aware of its limitations, he closed his eyes.

At the breakfast table he and Anita greeted each other with a worn brevity: their eyes found an empty solace in the white tablecloth and their minds felt a bright impotence, like beggars idling in the sun. For a while the tinkle of their spoons amiably pardoned their constraint, but Anita finally spoke with the staccato of one who snaps unbearable thongs.

"She came to me last night. I heard a sound like a huge menace stumbling over a chair. The door opened and the darkness grew as heavy as dead flesh. My bed swayed with the precision of a grieving head."

Carl's face broke and gleamed like a soft ground flogged by sudden rain.

"The same things happened to me," he said in the voice of a child wrestling with a minor chord.

They sat heavily disputing each other with their eyes.

"Did you lie afterwards, censuring the moonlight?" asked Anita.

Carl nodded. Anita's mother majestically blundered into the room. Exuberantly substantial, with the face of a child skillfully rebuked by an elderly masquerade, she flattered a chair at the table.

"Wasn't that a terrible storm we had last night," she babbled. "The rain kept me awake for hours— I'm such a light sleeper, you know. I do hope you children managed to rest.

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3: Round Trip

Jack McLaren

1884-1954

Truth (Sydney) 14 Jan 1945

Jack McLaren was an Australian novelist, who as a young man had extensive experience in the north of Australia and the south sea islands; he moved to the UK in 1925 and established himself as a successful novelist, broadcaster and radio scriptwriter. During the war he was in the Ministry of Information, and died of a heart attack at Brighton.

TO the Manager, the Police Station, Port Beach—

Dear Sir—

My name is Pompey, and I send Ruby, my wife, with this letter to ask you send a policeman to come and take charge of a man I've got here who have done a big crime. And please, mister, if there is a reward for catching such a feller, we will be very glad because me and Ruby are just very poor natives who try make a living catching kangaroos in simple bush traps and doing a bit of fishing with our two canoes. Our camp is down the coast just past the end of the swamp country. Till this morning, the only person we ever saw was a prospector named Bill Ryan, who worked a gold claim on his own a Way inland from our camp, at the other side of a gap in the ranges.

WHEN Bill Ryan wanted to go to Port Beach and sell his gold and buy stores, he would come to our camp and borrow one of our canoes to take him there. Bill was a very kind man and always brought us presents. Well this morning we saw a man coming along a little narrow path between the trees and bushes that Jed to our camp— a bad-looking feller with a revolver in his belt.

As he came up he said: 'I've been lost in the bush. Walking round and round till I thought I'd go mad.'

So we were kind to him, and Ruby gave him some food; and when he said he felt better I said:

'How you come to be in this part where nobody ever comes?'

He answered: 'I am a sailor and at one of the ports down the coast I went ashore to have a few drinks and I missed my ship. So I started off to walk through the bush to a port on the other side of the country where my ship is going to call and I could join her again. But I only got lost in the bush. All I can do now is to go on to Port Beach, where I might get job in some other ship.'

'But,' I said, 'you can't walk to Port Beach from here. From here the coast is all deep swamp country.'

He pointed to our canoes, which were drawn up on the sand. 'Lend me one of your canoes, then,' he said. 'I can pay you well.'

He took out some money and handed me three pounds. I said: 'All right, you can have the canoe. But you will have to wait till afternoon because the current is wrong way just now.'

Well, up till then I thought everything was all right, but soon after this Ruby went out into the bush to see if there was a kangaroo in any of the bush traps, like she always did at this time of the day; and when she came back she took me to one side and said quietly:

'I been find out something funny about that man.'

'Oh,' I said. 'What is it?'

So she told me, and. I thought it very funny, too, my word! But we didn't say anything, not wanting to make him think we was suspicious or anything, because we frightened of his revolver. So we just sat there wondering what he had been up to, till at last it came afternoon and, with the current now running the right way, the man got into the canoe and started off up the coast.

As soon as he was put of sight round a point of the land me and Ruby went off into the bush and followed the man's tracks where he had come to our camp through the bush, hoping to find out the reason of the funny thing Ruby had noticed.

We found it all right. We came to where the man had marked the bark of a tree with a knife so he could easily find the place again. Looking round, we found where a small hole had been dug in the ground and covered over. In the hole we found a bag of gold— an old shammy leather bag, mister, that we at once saw was Bill Ryan's.

So we took the bag of gold and started back for our camp, and as we went along we saw the stranger coming through the trees away to one side. We guessed what had happened. The man was no sailor who had missed his ship, but a feller from inland who had come across poor Bill Ryan all on his own at his claim, robbed— and probably killed— him, and then made for the coast. He made up the story about being a sailor who had got lost in the bush so's to account for him being in this part of the country at all. As for the gold, he hadn't dared take it with him into our camp because we should see it and wonder where he got it. So he buried it before coming to our camp, and planned to come back for it later.

Well, he was coming back for it now. After leaving us, as soon as he was out of our sight round the point of the land, he ran the canoe ashore and came back through the bush. Me and Ruby hurried full speed for our camp. It was no use hiding in the bush. He would only track us down. But as we came to the narrow path between the trees and bushes that led to our camp Ruby got an

idea. It was to fix up one of our kangaroo traps in the path, which we did by hiding a strong loop of bush cane under the dead leaves on the path and bending down a strong sapling and fastening it in a certain way. We then fastened the end of the sapling to the loop and fixed up what we call a 'trigger' stick in the middle of the loop. It was a quick trap to make. We heard the man coming.

'You black swine, what you done with that gold?' he was shouting. The next moment he was in the narrow path. 'I'll blow the daylights out of y'!' he roared. 'I'll—'

He never got any more out. There was a swish as the sapling sprang back upright; and me and Ruby came out from behind the bushes to find him danging in the loop, kicking like a big-feller frog, and the revolver lying on the ground where he'd dropped it in his surprise. I picked it up, and me and Ruby tied his hands nice and strong and then got him out of the loop and took him to our camp.

And now I send Ruby off in our other canoe with this letter. Yes, this feller he very nearly got away with a big crime.

But he made one mistake. That was when he said he had been lost in the bush. When Ruby went out that time to look at the traps to see if there were any kangaroos in them she happened to come across the man's tracks. They were straight tracks, mister, coming in straight line from inland, from the gap in the ranges.

Men lost in the bush don't make straight tracks. Their tracks show that they've been walking in curves or going round in a circle.

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4: The Voice from the Inner World

A. Hyatt Verrill

1871-1954

Amazing Stories, July 1927

Naturalist and explorer, author of many non-fiction books; also of adventure/exploration stories for younger readers, and occasional sf stories for the pulps.

ON THE EIGHTEENTH OF OCTOBER, the New York papers reported the appearance of a remarkable meteor which had been seen in mid-Pacific, and the far more startling announcement that it was feared that the amazing celestial visitor had struck and destroyed a steamship.

"At eleven-fifteen last evening," read the account in the *Herald*, "the Panama-Hawaiian Line steamship *Chiriqui* reported by radio the appearance of an immense meteor which suddenly appeared above the horizon to the southeast, and which increased rapidly in size and brilliance. Within ten minutes from the time the phenomenon was first sighted, it appeared as a huge greenish sphere of dazzling brilliance high in the sky, and heading, apparently, directly for the *Chiriqui*. Almost at the same time as reported by the *Chiriqui*, several other ships, among them the Miners and Merchants Line *Vulcan*, and the Japanese liner *Fujiama Maru* also reported the meteorite, although they were more than one thousand miles apart and equidistant from the position of the *Chiriqui*.

"In the midst of a sentence describing the appearance of the rapidly approaching meteor, the *Chiriqui's* wireless message came to an abrupt end, and all attempts to get into further communication with her operator failed. The other vessels reported that a scintillating flash, like an explosion, was followed by the meteor's disappearance, and it is feared that the immense aerolite may have struck the *Chiriqui*, and utterly destroyed her with all on board. As no S O S has been received, and as the ship's radio broke off with the words: 'It is very close and the sea is as bright as day. Below the immense mass of green fire are two smaller spheres of intense red. It is so near we can hear it roaring like a terrific wind. It is headed— ' It is probable that the vessel, if struck, was instantly destroyed. It has been suggested, however, that it is possible that the meteor or meteors were accompanied by electrical phenomena which may have put the *Chiriqui's* wireless apparatus out of commission and that the ship may be safe."

Later editions of the press announced that no word had been received from the *Chiriqui*, that other ships had reported the meteor, and that two of these had radioed that the aerolite, instead of exploding, had been seen to continue on its way and gradually disappear beyond the horizon. These reports

somewhat allayed the fears that the *Chiriqui* had been struck by the meteor, and prominent scientists expressed the opinion that the supposed explosion had been merely an optical illusion caused by its passage through some dense or cloudy layer of air. They also quoted numerous cases of immense meteors having been seen by observers over immense distances, and declared their belief that the aerolite had not reached the earth, but had merely passed through the outer atmosphere. When asked regarding the possibility of the meteor having affected the ship's wireless apparatus, experts stated that such might have been the case, although, hitherto, severe electrical disturbances had never been associated with the passage of meteors. Moreover, they declared that even if the wireless had been injured, it could have been repaired in a few hours, and that they could not explain the continued silence of the *Chiriqui*. Word also came from Panama that the naval commandant at Balboa had despatched a destroyer to search for the *Chiriqui*, or any survivors of the catastrophe if the ship had been destroyed.

A few hours later, despatches were received from various points in Central and South America, reporting the meteor of the previous night. All of these agreed that the fiery mass had swept across the heavens in a wide arc and had vanished in the east beyond the summits of the Andes.

It was, therefore, fairly certain that the *Chiriqui* had not been struck by the meteor, and in a few days the incident was completely forgotten by the public at large.

But when, ten days later, the warship reported that no sign of the missing ship could be found, and the officials of the Panama-Hawaiian Line admitted that the *Chiriqui* was four days overdue, interest was again aroused. Then came the startling news, featured in screaming headlines, that the meteor or its twin had been again reported by various ships in the Pacific, and that the U. S. S. *McCracken*, which had been scouring the seas for traces of the missing *Chiriqui*, had sent in a detailed report of the meteor's appearance, and that her wireless had gone "dead," exactly as had that of the *Chiriqui*.

And when, after every effort, no communication could be established with the war vessel, and when two weeks had elapsed without word from her, it was generally conceded that both ships had been destroyed by the amazing celestial visitor. For a time the double catastrophe filled the papers to the exclusion of nearly everything else, and such everyday features as scandals and murder trials were crowded to the back pages of the dailies to make room for long articles on meteors and missing ships and interviews with scientists. But as no more meteors appeared, and as no more ships vanished, the subject gradually lost interest and was no longer news.

ABOUT three months after the first report of the green meteor appeared (on January fifteenth, to be exact) I was in Peru, visiting my daughter, when I received a communication of such an utterly amazing character that it appeared incredible, and yet was so borne out by facts and details that it had all the earmarks of truth. So astounding was this communication that, despite the fact that it will unquestionably be scoffed at by the public, I feel that it should be given to the world. As soon as I had received the story I hurried with it to the American Minister in Lima, and related all that I had heard. He agreed with me that the authorities at Washington should be acquainted with the matter at once, and together we devoted many hours to coding the story which was cabled in the secret cipher of the State Department. The officials, however, were inclined to regard the matter as a hoax, and, as far as I am aware, no steps have yet been taken to follow out the suggestions contained in the communication which I received, and thus save humanity from a terrible fate. Personally, I am convinced that the amazing tale which came to me in such an astounding and unexpected manner is absolutely true, incredible as it may seem, but whether fact or fiction, my readers may decide for themselves.

My son-in-law was intensely interested in radio, and devoted all of his spare time to devising and constructing receiving sets, and in his home in the delightful residential suburb of Miraflores, were a number of receiving sets of both conventional and original design. Having been closely in touch with the subject for several years, I was deeply interested in Frank's experiments, and especially in a new type of hook-up which had given most remarkable results in selectivity and distance. Practically every broadcasting station in America, and many in Europe, had been logged by the little set, and on several occasions faint signals had been heard which, although recognizable as English, evidently emanated from a most remote station. These, oddly enough, had come in at the same hour each night, and each time had continued for exactly the same length of time.

We were discussing this, and trying to again pick up the unintelligible and unidentified signals on that memorable January evening, when, without warning, and as clearly as though sent from the station at Buenos Ayres, came the most astounding communication which ever greeted human ears, and which, almost verbatim, was as follows: *

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** The message as it came in, was halting, and interrupted, with many unintelligible words and repetitions, as if the sender were laboring under an intense strain or was an amateur. For the sake of clarity and continuity, the communication has been edited and filled in, but not altered in any detail*

"LISTEN! For God's sake, I implore all who may hear my words to listen! And believe what I say no matter how unbelievable it may seem, for the fate of thousands of human beings, the fate of the human race may depend upon you who by chance may hear this message from another world. My name is James Berry, my home is Butte, Montana, my profession a mining engineer, and I am speaking through the short wave transmitter of the steamship *Chiriqui* on which I was a passenger when the terrible, the incredible events occurred which I am about to relate. On the evening of October sixteenth the *Chiriqui* was steaming across the Pacific in calm weather when our attention was attracted by what appeared to be an unusually brilliant meteor of a peculiar greenish color.*

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** The metropolitan papers reported the meteor on the eighteenth and stated it was observed by those on the* Chiriqui *on the evening of the seventeenth, but it must be remembered that the* Chiriqui *was in the western Pacific and hence had gained a day in time.*

"It first appeared above the horizon to the southeast, and very rapidly increased in size and brilliancy. At the time I was particularly struck by the fact that it left no trail of light or fire behind it, as is usual with large meteorites, but so rapidly did it approach that I had little time to wonder at this. Within a few moments from the time that it was first seen, the immense sphere of green incandescence had grown to the size of the moon, and the entire sea for miles about our ship was illuminated by a sickly green light. It appeared to be headed directly towards our ship, and, standing as I was on the bridge-deck near the wheel-house, I heard the chief officer cry out: 'My God, it will strike us!' By now the mass of fire had altered in appearance, and a short distance below the central green mass could be seen two smaller spheres of blinding red, like huge globes of molten metal. By now, too, the noise made by the meteor was plainly audible, sounding like the roar of surf or the sound of a tornado.

"Everyone aboard the ship was panic-stricken; women screamed, men cursed and shouted, and the crew rushed to man the boats, as everyone felt that the *Chiriqui* was doomed. What happened next I can scarcely describe, so rapidly did the events occur. As the meteor seemed about to hurl itself upon the ship, there was a blinding flash of light, a terrific detonation, and I saw men and women falling to the decks as if struck down by shell fire. The next instant the meteor vanished completely, and intense blackness followed the blinding glare. At the same moment, I was aware of a peculiar pungent, suffocating odor which, perhaps owing to my long experience with deadly gases in mining work, I at once recognized as some noxious gas. Almost involuntarily, and dully realizing that by some miracle the ship had escaped destruction, I dashed

below and reached my cabin almost overcome by the fumes which now penetrated every portion of the ship. Among my possessions was a new type of gas-mask which had been especially designed for mine work, and my idea was to don this, for I felt sure that the meteor had exploded close to the ship and had released vast quantities of poisonous gases which might hang about for a long time.

"Although almost overcome by the choking fumes, I managed to find and put on the apparatus, for one of its greatest advantages was the rapidity and ease with which it could be adjusted, it having been designed for emergency use. But before it was fairly in place over my face, the electric light in my room went out and I was in complete darkness. Also, the ship seemed strangely still, and as I groped my way to the stateroom door it suddenly dawned upon me that the engines had stopped, that there was no longer the whirr of dynamos from the depths of the hull. Not a light glimmered in the passageway, and twice, as I felt my way towards the social hall, I stumbled over the sprawled bodies of men, while in the saloon itself I several times stepped upon the soft and yielding flesh of passengers who lay where they had been struck down by the poisonous gas. In all probability, I thought, I was the sole survivor aboard the ship, unless some of the firemen and engineers survived, and I wondered how I would manage to escape, if the vessel should be sighted by some other ship, or if it should be my gruesome task to search the *Chiriqui* from stem to stern, drag the bodies of the dead to the deck and cast them into the sea, and remain— perhaps for weeks— alone upon the ship until rescued by some passing vessel. But as I reached the door and stepped upon the deck all such thoughts were driven from my brain as I blinked my eyes and stared about in dumfounded amazement. I had stepped from Stygian darkness into dazzling light. Blinded for the moment, I closed my eyes, and when I again opened them I reeled to the rail with a cry of terror. Poised above the ship's masts, and so enormous that it appeared to shut out half the sky, was the stupendous meteor like a gigantic globe of green fire, and seemingly less than one hundred feet above me. Still nearer, and hanging but a few yards above the bow and stern of the ship, were the two smaller spheres of glowing red. Cowering against the rail, expecting to be shrivelled into a charred cinder at any instant, I gazed transfixed and paralyzed at the titanic masses of flaming light above the ship.

"Then reason came back to me. My only chance to escape was to leap into the sea, and I half clambered upon the rail prepared to take the plunge. A scream, like that of a madman, came from my lips. Below me was no sign of the waves, but a limitless void, while, immeasurably distant beneath the ship, I

could dimly see the crinkled surface of the sea. The *Chiriqui* was floating in space!

"It was impossible, absolutely preposterous, and I felt convinced that I had gone mad, or that the small quantity of gas I had breathed had affected my brain and had induced the nightmarish vision. Perhaps, I thought, the meteors above the ship were also visionary, and I again stared upward. Then, I knew that I was insane. The spheres of green and red light were rushing upward as I could see by the brilliant stars studding the sky, and the ship upon which I stood was following in their wake! Weak, limp as a rag, I slumped to the deck and lay staring at the great globes above me. But the insanely impossible events which had crowded upon my overwrought senses were as nothing to the amazing discovery I now made.

"As my eyes became accustomed to the glare of the immense green sphere, I saw that instead of being merely a ball of fire it had definite form. About its middle extended a broad band from which slender rods of light extended. Round or ovoid spots seemed placed in definite order about it, and from the extremities of its axes lines or cables, clearly outlined by the glare, extended downward to the red spheres above the ship. By now, I was so firmly convinced that I was irrational, that these new and absolutely stunning discoveries did not excite or surprise me in the least, and as if in a particularly vivid dream, I lay there gazing upward, and dully, half consciously speculating on what it all meant. Gradually, too, it dawned upon me that the huge sphere with its encircling band of duller light was rotating. The circular markings, which I thought were marvelously like the ports of a ship, were certainly moving from top to bottom of the sphere, and I could distinctly hear a low, vibrant humming.

"The next second I jerked upright with a start and my scalp tingled. Reason had suddenly returned to me. The thing was no meteor, no celestial body, but some marvelous machine, some devilish invention of man, some gigantic form of airship which— God only knew why— had by some incredible means captured the *Chiriqui*, had lifted the twenty thousand ton ship into the air and was bearing her off with myself, the only survivor of all the ship's company, witnessing the miraculous happening! It was the most insane thought that had yet entered my brain, but I knew now for a certainty that I was perfectly sane, and, oddly enough, now that I was convinced that the catastrophe which had overtaken the *Chiriqui* was the devilish work of human beings, I was no longer frightened and my former nightmarish terror of things unknown, gave place to the most intense anger and an inexpressible hatred of the fiends who, without warning or reason, had annihilated hundreds of men and women by means of this new and irresistible engine of destruction. But I was helpless. Alone upon

the stolen and stricken ship I could do nothing. By what tremendous force the spherical airship was moving through space, by what unknown power it was lifting the ship and carrying it,— slung like the gondola of a Zeppelin beneath the sphere,— were matters beyond my comprehension. Calmly, now that I felt assured that I was rational and was the victim of my fellow men— fiendish as they might be,— I walked aft to where one red sphere hung a few yards above the ship's deck.

"There seemed no visible connection between it and the vessel, but I noticed that everything movable upon the deck, the iron cable, the wire ropes, the coiled steel lines of the after derrick, all extended upward from the deck, as rigid as bars of metal, while crackling blue sparks like electrical discharges scintillated from the ship's metal work below the red sphere. Evidently, I decided, the red mass was actuated by some form of electrical energy or magnetism, and I gave the area beneath it a wide berth. Retracing my way to the bow of the ship, I found similar conditions there. As I walked towards the waist of the ship again I mounted the steps to the bridge, hoping from that height to get a better view of the monstrous machine holding the *Chiriqui* captive. I knew that in the chart-house I would find powerful glasses with which to study the machine. Upon the bridge the bodies of the quartermaster, the first officer and an apprentice lay sprawled grotesquely, and across the chart-house door lay the captain. Reaching down I lifted him by the shoulders to move him to one side, and to my amazement I discovered that he was not dead. His heart beat, his pulse, though slow and faint, was plain, he was breathing and his face, still ruddy, was that of a sleeping man rather than of a corpse.

"A wild thought rushed through my brain, and hastily I rushed to the other bodies. There was no doubt of it. All were alive and merely unconscious. The gas had struck them down, but had not killed them, and it came to me as a surprise, though I should long before have realized it, that the fumes had been purposely discharged by the beings who had captured the vessel. Possibly, I mentally decided, they had made a mistake and had failed in their intention to destroy the persons upon the ship, or again, was it not possible that they had intentionally rendered the ship's company unconscious, and had not intended to destroy their lives? Forgetting my original purpose in visiting the bridge, I worked feverishly to resuscitate the captain, but all to no purpose. Many gases, I knew, would render a man unconscious without actually injuring him, and I was also aware, that when under the influence of some of these, the victims could not be revived until the definite period of the gases' effect had passed. So, feeling certain that in due time the captain and the others would come to of their own accord, I entered the chartroom and, securing the

skipper's binoculars, I again stepped upon the bridge. As I could not conveniently use the glasses with my gas-mask in place, and as I felt sure there was no longer any danger from the fumes, I started to remove the apparatus. But no sooner did a breath of the air enter my mouth than I hastily readjusted the contrivance, for the gas which had struck down everyone but myself was as strong as ever. Indeed, the mere whiff of the fumes made my head reel and swim, and I was forced to steady myself by grasping the bridge-rail until the dizzy spell passed.

"Once more myself, I focussed the glasses as best I could upon the whirling sphere above the ship. But I could make out little more than by my naked eyes. The band about the center or equator of the globular thing was, I could now see, divided into segments, each of which bore a round, slightly convex, eye-like object from the centers of which extended slender rods which vibrated with incalculable speed. Indeed, the whole affair reminded me of the glass models of protozoans which I had seen in the American Museum of Natural History. These minute marine organisms I knew, moved with great rapidity by means of vibrating, hair-like appendages or cilia, and I wondered if the enormous spherical machine at which I was gazing, might not move through space in a similar manner by means of vibrating rods moving with such incredible speed that, slender as they were, they produced enormous propulsive power. Also, I could now see that the two extremities of the sphere, or as I may better express it, the axes, were equipped with projecting bosses or shafts to which the cables supporting the red spheres were attached. And as I peered through the glasses at the thing, the huge green sphere, which had been hitherto traveling on an even keel, or, in other words, with the central band vertical, now shifted its position and one end swung sharply upward, throwing the band about the centre at an acute angle. Involuntarily I grasped the rail of the bridge expecting to be thrown from my feet by the abrupt uptilting of the ship. But to my utter amazement the *Chiriqui* remained on an even plane and I then saw that as the sphere tilted, the cable at the uppermost axis ran rapidly out so that the two red spheres, which evidently supported the captive ship, remained, in their original relative horizontal position. No sign of life was visible upon the machine above me, and I surmised that whoever might be handling the thing was within the sphere.

"Wondering how high we had risen above the sea, I stepped to the starboard end of the bridge and glanced down, and an involuntary exclamation escaped my lips. Far beneath the ship and clearly visible through the captain's glasses was land! I could distinguish the white line marking surf breaking on a rocky shore, and ahead I could make out the cloud-topped, serried summits of a mighty range of mountains. Not until then did I realize the terrific speed at

which the machine and captive vessel were traveling. I had been subconsciously aware that a gale had been blowing, but I had not stopped to realize that this was no ordinary wind, but was the rush of air caused by the rapidity of motion. But as I peered at the mountains through the binoculars, and saw the distant surface of the earth whizzing backward far beneath the *Chiriqui's* keel, I knew that we were hurtling onward with the speed of the fastest scout airplane.

"Even as I gazed, the mountains seemed to rush towards me until, in a few minutes after I had first seen them, they appeared almost directly under the ship. Then the gigantic machine above me suddenly altered its course, it veered sharply to one side and swept along the range of summits far beneath. For some reason, just why I cannot explain, I dashed to the binnacle and saw that we were traveling to the south, and it flashed across my mind, that I had a dim recollection of noticing, when I first realized the nature of the machine which had been mistaken for a meteor, that by the stars, we were moving eastward. In that case, my suddenly alert mind told me, the land below must be some portion of America, and if so, judging by the altitude of the mountains, that they must be the Andes. All of this rushed through my brain instantly, and in the brief lapse of time in which I sprang to the binnacle and back to my observation point at the bridge-rail.

"Now, I saw, we were rapidly descending, and focussing my glasses upon the mountains, I made out an immense conical peak in the top of which was a gigantic black opening. Without doubt it was the crater of some stupendous extinct volcano, and, with a shock, I realized that the machine and the ship were headed directly for the yawning opening in the crater. The next instant we were dropping with lightning speed towards it, and so terrified and dumfounded had I become that I could not move from where I stood. Even before I could grasp the fact, the *Chiriqui* was enclosed by towering, rocky walls, inky blackness surrounded me, there was an upward breath-taking rush of air, a roar as of a thousand hurricanes. The *Chiriqui* rocked and pitched beneath my feet, as if in a heavy sea; I clung desperately to the bridge-rail for support and I felt sure that the ship had been dropped into the abysmal crater, that the next instant the vessel would crash into fragments as it struck bottom, or worse, that it would sink into the molten incandescent lava which might fill the depths of the volcano. For what seemed hours, the awful fall continued, though like as not the terrible suspense lasted for only a few minutes, and then, without warning, so abruptly that I lost my balance and was flung to the bridge, the ship ceased falling, an indescribable blue light succeeded the blackness, and unable to believe my senses I found the ship floating

motionless, still suspended from the giant mechanism overhead, above a marvelous landscape.

"On every hand, as far as I could see, stretched jagged rocks, immense cliffs, stupendous crags and rugged knife-ridged hills of the most dazzling reds, yellows and purples. Mile-deep canons cut the forbidding plains, which here and there showed patches of dull green, and in one spot I saw a stream of emerald-hued water pouring in a foaming cataract into a fathomless rift in the rock. But I gave little attention to these sights at the time. My gaze was riveted upon a strange, weird city which capped the cliffs close to the waterfall, and almost directly beneath the *Chiriqui*. Slowly we were dropping towards it, and I could see that the buildings which at first sight had appeared of immense height and tower-like form, were in reality gigantic basaltic columns capped with superimposed edifices of gleaming yellow.

"The next second the glasses dropped from my shaking, nerveless hands. Gathered on an open space of greenish plain were hundreds of human beings! But were they human? In form and features, as nearly as I could judge at that distance, they were human, but in color they were scarlet, and surmounting the head and extending along the arms to the elbows on every individual was a whitish, membraneous frill, which at first sight, reminded me of an Indian's war bonnet. The beings appeared to be of average height, but as the *Chiriqui's* keel touched solid ground and, keeling to one side, she rested upon one of her bilges, I saw with a shock, that the scarlet creatures were of gigantic size, fully thirty feet in height, and that, without exception, all were females! All were stark naked; but despite the frills upon their heads and shoulders, despite their bizarre scarlet skins, despite their gigantic proportions, they were unquestionably human beings, women without doubt, and of the most perfect proportions, the most graceful forms and the most regular and even handsome features. Beside the stranded ship, they loomed as giants; but against the stupendous proportions of their land and city, they appeared no larger than ordinary mortals. By now they were streaming from their houses and even in the surprise and excitement of that moment I noticed that the giant rocky columns were perforated by windows and doors, and had obviously been hollowed out to form dwellings. Meantime, too, the huge machine which had captured the *Chiriqui* had descended and was lying at rest, and no longer emitting its green light, upon a cradle erected near the waterfall, and from openings in its central band several of the scarlet, giant Amazons were emerging. How long, I wondered, would I remain undiscovered? How long would it be before one of the female giants spied me? And then, what would be my fate? Why had they captured the ship? Where was I? What was this strange land reached through a crater?

"All these thoughts rushed through my brain as I peered cautiously down at the giant women who swarmed about the ship. But I had not long to wait for an answer to my first mental question. With a sudden spring, one of the women leaped to the *Chiriqui's* anchor, with a second bound she was on the fore deck, and close at her heels came a score of others. Standing upon the deck with her head fringed by its erect vibrating membrane level with the boat-deck, she gazed about for an instant. Then, catching sight of the form of a sailor sprawled upon the deck, she uttered a shrill, piercing cry, leaped forward, and, before my unbelieving, horror-stricken eyes, tore the still living, palpitating body to pieces and ravenously devoured it.

"Unable to stir through the very repulsiveness of the scene, realizing that my turn might be next, I gazed fascinated. But the giant cannibal female was not to feast in peace. As her companions reached the deck, they rushed upon her and fought viciously for a portion of the reeking flesh. The struggle of these awful giants, as smeared with human blood, scratching and clawing, uttering shrill cries of rage, they rolled and fought on the deck, was indescribably terrible and disgusting. But it came to an abrupt end. With a bound, a giantess of giantesses, a powerfully-muscled female, appeared, and like cowed beasts, the others drew aside, licking their chops, the membranes on their heads rising and falling in excitement, like the frills on an iguana lizard, and watching the newly-arrived giantess with furtive eyes. Evidently she was the leader or chieftainess, and in curt but strangely shrill and, of course, to me, utterly unintelligible words, she gave orders to the others. Instantly, the horde of women began swarming over the ship, searching every nook and corner, and, wherever they discovered the inert bodies of the ship's company, dragged them on deck and piled them in heaps. Shaking with abject terror, I crouched back of the bridge, and racked my brains for thought of some safe spot in which to hide. But before I could make up my mind, one of the terrifying, monstrous females sprang upon the bridge and rushed towards me. With a maniacal scream, I turned and fled. Then, before me, blocking my way, there appeared another of the creatures. And then a most marvelous and surprising thing happened. Instead of falling upon me as I expected her to do, the giantess turned, and with a scream that equalled my own, leaped over the rail and fled to the uttermost extremity of the deck.

"I forgot my terror in my amazement. Why should this giant, cannibal woman fear me? Why should she run from me when, a few moments before, she had been fighting over a meal of an unconscious sailor? And it was evident that the others were equally afraid of me, for at her cry, and my appearance, all had rushed as far from me as possible, and stood regarding me with an odd mixture of wonder and terror on their huge faces. And then it occurred to me

that their fear was, perhaps, due to my gas-mask, to the apparatus that transformed me from a human being to a weird-looking monster. At any rate, I was evidently safe from molestation for the time being, and thanking my lucky stars that I had on the mask, I descended from the bridge, the giantesses retreating as I advanced. I entered the captain's cabin and locked the door.

"Here I breathed more freely, for even if the women overcame their fear of me and attempted to capture me, the steel doors and walls of the cabin would be impregnable defenses. Moreover, upon the wall above the bunk, was a rifle, in a drawer of the dresser was a loaded revolver, and a short search revealed a plentiful supply of cartridges. Yes, if I were attacked, I could give a good account of myself, and I determined, if worst came to the worst, that I would blow out my brains rather than fall a victim to the female cannibal horde.

"Dully, through the thick walls of the cabin, I could hear the sounds of the women on the deck, but I had no desire to witness what was going on, and seated upon the captain's chair, I thought over the events which had transpired during the past few hours and tried to find a reasonable solution to the incredible happenings.

"That I was within the earth seemed certain, though utterly fantastic, but who the giant women were, why they had captured the *Chiriqui* or by what unknown, tremendous power their marvelous airship was operated, were all utterly beyond my comprehension. But I must hurry on and relate the more important matters, for my time is limited and the important thing is to let the world know how the human race may be saved from the terrible fate which has befallen me and all those upon the *Chiriqui*, and upon the destroyer *McCracken*, for that vessel, too, has fallen a victim to these horrible cannibalistic giantesses here within the centre of the earth.

"Hunger and thirst drove me at last from my refuge in the captain's cabin, and armed with the loaded rifle and revolver, I cautiously peered out and stepped upon the deck. Only one woman was in sight, and instantly, at sight of me, she fled away. Not a body of the hundreds of men and women aboard the ship was visible, and feeling relieved that I was for a time safe, I stepped to the ship's rail and peered over. Scores of the women were carrying the inert forms of the unconscious men and women towards the nearby city. Stealthily I hurried below in search of food and drink. Fears assailed me that the women had, in all probability, preceded me and carried off everything edible. But I need not have worried about food. I was yet to learn the horrible truth and the gruesome habits of these red giantesses. The saloon, the corridors, the staterooms, everything, had been searched, and every person upon the vessel removed. In the pantry I found an abundance of food, and quickly satisfied my hunger and thirst. I pondered on my next move. The skipper's cabin seemed

my safest refuge. I placed a supply of provisions within it, and locked myself in the little room again. For several days nothing of great importance occurred. I say days, but there are no days in this terrible place. There is no sun, no moon, no stars and no darkness. The whole place is illuminated by a brilliant, greenish light that issues from a distant mountain range, and which seems to be of the same character as that which emanated from the spherical air machine. Fortunately I had presence of mind enough to keep my watch going, as well as the captain's chronometer, for otherwise I would have had no knowledge of the passage of time. Once or twice the scarlet women visited the ship, but seemed nervous and wary, and made no effort to approach or molest me, merely gazed about as if searching for something— perhaps for me— and then retiring. Several times, too, I ventured on deck, and peered over the ship's side, but saw none of the giantesses, although with the glasses I could see crowds of the beings about the city in the distance.

"Also, I noticed among them, several individuals who were much smaller than the rest, and who appeared to be men, although I could not be sure. I also discovered, and almost lost my life in the discovery, that the atmosphere of this place is unfit for human beings to breathe, and is thick with sulphurous fumes. Close to the ground these fumes are so dense that a person would succumb in a few moments, but at the height of the *Chiriqui's* decks, nearly seventy feet above the rocky bed on which she rests, the air is breathable, although it causes one to choke and cough after a few minutes. And I am sure that the houses of these giant beings have been built on the summits of the basalt columns in order to avoid the suffocating fumes of the lower levels. Later, too, I learned that the membrane-like frills upon these creatures are a sort of gills, or as I might say, natural gas-masks, which by some means enable the beings to breathe the sulphur-laden air. But even with these, they avoid the lower areas where the fumes are the worst, and only visit them when necessity arises, which accounts for my being left in peace, with none of the horrible women near the ship, for days at a time. I discovered the presence of the sulphur gas on the first day when, attempting to eat, I removed my gas-mask. Suffocating as I found the fumes, I was compelled to endure them, and gradually I became slightly accustomed to them, so that now I have little trouble in breathing during the short time it takes me to eat my meals. At all other times I must wear the apparatus, and I thank God that this is so, for I know now that it is the gas-mask which so far has preserved my life.

"On the tenth day after my arrival I noticed a number of the giantesses gathering about the huge, spherical airship which still rested on its cradle near the *Chiriqui*, but which, I have forgotten to state, ceased to emit its green or red lights after it had landed. Lying there it resembled nothing so much as a

gigantic can-buoy or a floating mine, if one can imagine a buoy two hundred yards in diameter.

"On the day I mentioned, all interests seemed to be centered on the thing, and cautiously peering from the shelter of the deck-house, I watched the proceedings. Presently several of the women entered the sphere through an opening in its middle band; the aperture closed behind them, and immediately there was a low, humming sound as of machinery. As the sounds issued from the sphere, the cables to which were attached the smaller spheres (which glowed red when carrying the *Chiriqui* through the air) were drawn in until the two smaller spheres were resting in recesses at the axes of the large sphere, and where they appeared merely as hemi-spherical projections. Then, slowly at first, but with ever increasing speed, the slender rods about the large sphere began to move back and forth, or rather in an oscillating manner, until they were vibrating with such rapidity that they appeared merely rays of light. Slowly, majestically, the immense globe rose from its cradle, and gathering headway, leaped upward to an immense height. Then, tilting at an angle, it passed over the city and headed for an immense pinnacle of rock, which, fully seven miles from where I stood, reminded me of a gigantic chimney or funnel.

"Although it was barely visible to the naked eye, I could see it distinctly through the glasses, and I watched it with the most intense and concentrated interest. For a few moments it remained, poised a hundred feet or so above the pinnacle. Then, from the towering, tapering rock, a terrific jet of steam roared forth, and striking the great spherical machine above it, hurled it upward and beyond my vision. Give close heed to these words, whoever may, by God's grace, be listening to what I say, for upon them may hinge the fate of the human race. Only by this means, by being shot upward by this titanic jet of steam, can the airship leave this subterranean land and emerge through the crater by which it entered bearing the *Chiriqui*. Within this place it can sail at will; once above the crater opening it can travel anywhere, although it cannot land; but by some unknown force or magnetic attraction or freak of gravitation the machine cannot ascend through the crater, although, when over it, it will drop like a plummet through the opening. And herein— for the sake of humanity, listen to this and remember my words— lies a means of destroying the machine, for by surrounding the crater with powerful guns the sphere can be shelled as it emerges and utterly destroyed. To attempt to do so as it returns to the crater would be suicidal, for once in the outer air, it emanates vast quantities of most poisonous gas, and all living things within a radius of several miles would be struck down unconscious, as were my companions on the *Chiriqui*. Even if gas-masks were worn, it would be most difficult to destroy the machine as it descended, for it travels with incredible speed in its descent

and, moreover, the terrible creatures who man the thing would see that enemies lurked near and would find some means of destroying them, or by the mysterious magnet force they control, would draw even the heaviest cannon to the machine as an ordinary magnet draws needles or iron filings. So if the thing is to be destroyed, it must be done as the machine emerges from the crater. Would to God that I could tell where the crater is, but beyond feeling sure it is at the summit of an Andean peak, I have no means of locating it.

"But I was telling of what occurred on that tenth day when the spherical airship was projected from my sight by the blast of steam. As the machine vanished, the women who had watched its departure, returned to their city, and I swept the landscape with my glasses, wondering at the bleak, terrible scenery and bizarre colors.

"As I focussed the binoculars upon a level plateau, perhaps a mile from where the *Chiriqui* rested, I gasped in surprise. Clearly defined, lay the remnants of what had once been a steamship! Had I given the matter thought, I might have known that the *Chiriqui* was not the first vessel to have fallen a victim to these awful beings; but the sight of another ship's skeleton came to me as a terrific shock. As nearly as I could judge, the vessel had been dismantled, for only the great steel frame remained, with the mighty boilers and other portions of the ship scattered about, and gruesomely like some mammoth creature lying disemboweled upon the earth.

"I was consumed with a mad desire to visit that pathetic wreck, but I knew not to what dangers I would be exposed, once I left the security of my ship. Not a being was in sight, however, and carefully I studied the land, visually measuring the relative distances between myself and the wreck, and between the city and the route I must traverse. Having already observed that the giantesses moved slowly and cumbrously on foot, I at last decided that even if they attempted to intercept me I could regain the *Chiriqui* before I was overtaken, so I threw caution to the winds and prepared to undertake my hazardous journey. Slinging the loaded rifle on my back, with the revolver at my belt, and still further arming myself with a keen-edged fireaxe, I hunted up the pilot's ladder, lowered it over the lowest side of the ship,— which was also the side farthest from the city,— and clambering down the *Chiriqui's* lofty sides, leaped down upon the ground. To my amazement, I landed in a dense jungle of dry, tough vegetation which rose to my shoulders. From the deck, looking directly downwards, I had thought this dull-green growth a short, wiry grass, and, of course, in its relative proportion to the gigantic women, it was no higher than ordinary grass to a normal human being. It was a wonderful example of the theory of relativity, but my mind was not interested in scientific matters at the time, and I merely gave thanks that the miniature jungle,—

which I saw was composed of giant lichens— would afford me cover through which I might sneak in safety, and with little chance of detection.

"Without much difficulty I made my way to the other vessel, and found her even more dissected than I had supposed. Why the denizens of the place had torn her to bits I did not then know, but certain portions of her machinery and fittings had been left intact, and, as I examined these, I made another and most astounding discovery. Deeply engraved upon a brass plate was the ship's name '*U. S. S. Cyclops!*' For a space I stood staring, scarcely able to believe my eyes. Here then was the solution to that mystery of the sea, the disappearance of the collier, as laden with manganese, she vanished without word or trace when off the Barbados during the World War. No doubt, I thought, many a mystery of the sea had been caused by the damnable work of these beings with their infernal machine. But why, for what reason, did they capture ships? Why did they carry off the unconscious persons upon the vessels? And why did they tear the vessels apart? It was all a mystery which, in all its horrible, gruesome, ghoulish details I was soon to solve.

"There was nothing more to be learned from the remains of the *Cyclops*, and in safety I returned to the *Chiriqui* to find, to my surprise and terror, that a gang of the monstrous females had boarded the ship in my absence and were stripping her of everything. But as they caught sight of me, all threw down whatever they had and fled precipitately, leaving me once more in undisputed possession of the ship. I was relieved at this, for it was obvious that I had no need to fear the creatures. By now, too, I had formulated a theory to account for this strange dread of a being who was a puny, miserable thing compared to them. Unquestionably my gas-mask rendered me a most grotesque and unknown creature in their eyes. My remaining alive and active while all others upon the ship had succumbed to the noxious gas had probably caused them to think that I was a supernatural being. The fact that I could go about and breathe the sulphur-laden air would cause them to regard me with even greater wonder and superstition, and, as I found later, the fact that I was never seen to eat, confirmed their belief that I was some mysterious being against whom their gases and their deviltries were of no avail.

"I had not much time to devote to such matters, however. Soon after regaining the *Chiriqui* I heard excited cries from the land, and looking over the ship's rails, I found an immense crowd had gathered near the empty cradle of the airship, and that all were gazing upward. Following their example, I stared into the greenish void and instantly understood. Descending rapidly towards the plain, came the great sphere, and, suspended below it, was the hull of another captive ship. And as I focussed my glasses upon this, I rubbed my eyes and gaped. The dull gray color, the lines, the raking funnels, the barbettes and

gun muzzles left no room for doubt. Incredible as it seemed, the captive vessel was a warship! What hope then had my fellow men upon earth? What chance was there if these giant creatures could send forth their flaming machine, and by it, capture the fastest, most powerful war-vessels— all within the space of a few hours?

"Rapidly the machine and its burden approached, and presently descended gently dropping the war vessel close to the *Chiriqui*. My worst fears were confirmed. The vessel was an American destroyer, the *McCracken*, and I knew that scores of my countrymen must lie unconscious upon her, and in a few moments would be carried off to some unknown horrible fate. What that fate was I had already surmised. That first demonstration of the ferocious cannibalism of the giantesses upon the *Chiriqui's* deck had been enough to make my blood run cold.

"But I had not yet guessed even a fraction of the true horror of it. Scarcely had the *McCracken* been dropped upon the earth, when the women swarmed upon her, and once more I saw the creatures gathering the inert forms of men and carrying them to the city. And rapidly, too, they commenced dismantling and tearing the destroyer into bits. How they had accomplished this with the *Cyclops* had puzzled me, but now I witnessed the process close at hand. From the vicinity of the waterfall, lines or pipes were led to the vessel's side; presently there was the roaring sound of steam; dense clouds of vapor arose from the cataract; the water ceased to flow, and from the extremities of the lines or tubes twenty-foot jets of blinding flame shot out. As easily as though made of wax, the steel sides, the massive beams, the armored barbettes of the warship melted and were cut by these jets, and as the pieces fell apart, the spherical airship took a position above the vessel, and by its magnetic power, lifted tons of the fragments, then sailing off, deposited them in some spot beyond the city. It was then, as I saw the ship rapidly dissolving before my eyes, that the inspiration came to me which may make it possible for me to communicate with the outside world and may, if God wills, serve to warn my fellow men of the fate which will overtake them if these terrible creatures are allowed to follow out their plans. As the jets of flame cut through the *McCracken's* superstructure, and the radio antennae fell in a tangled mass across the deck, I forgot all else and rushed to the wireless room of the *Chiriqui*. Here was my chance. If the ship's radio transmitter was still in working order; if the auxiliary battery was still charged, I might send out messages which, small as the chances were, might reach the ears of some of the countless thousands of persons who listened each night at their receiving sets. I trembled with fear that I would find the transmitter injured or dismantled. I shook with dread that the battery might be dead. I felt faint with apprehension

that the message, if sent, might never penetrate the sulphur-laden atmosphere or might never reach the outer world. And I realized, with a sickening sinking of my heart, that even if heard my communication might be regarded as a hoax, and no attention would be given it. But I would do my best. The radio set had not been molested. Everything was in working order, and I set myself the task of transmitting my story each night at the same hour, repeating it over and over again, until the storage batteries are exhausted, for to get up steam and start the dynamos is beyond my powers. Had I knowledge of Morse I would send my story by that code, but I have not, and so— I must cease. For the love of your race and of your dear ones listen, I beseech you, until I can resume."

Here the message broke off abruptly, and Frank and I sat staring at each other, fearing to speak lest we might interrupt or miss the words which might come, and listening with straining ears at the head-sets. For an hour we sat there and then, once more the voice spoke.

"The doom that I feared is approaching. I have been here for three months and this will, I know, be my final message. Oh that I could only be sure that someone has heard my words, that my fate has not been in vain but has served to warn my fellow beings. But I must hurry on. I have learned everything of importance. I have watched, studied and have even learned to understand much of the language of these beings. I found that there were men. They are puny beings compared to the women, though ten-foot giants compared to normal men, and they are cowed, abject, mere slaves of the females. Only enough male children are permitted to survive to propagate the race. All others are killed.

"As they reach manhood only those males of super-intelligence, strength and virility are permitted to live. The others are destroyed and— yes, horrible as it sounds, their bodies, like those of the murdered infants and of the aged, sick or infirm, are devoured. And as fast as the males attain middle age their lives are forfeited. Long ago these beings subsisted upon the few wild creatures which roamed their land; but long ago all these were exhausted and human flesh became the only meat. There is no vegetable food, and for a time the sacrificed surplus males, and the aged, provided food for the race. But gradually the male births decreased, female children preponderated, and with the increased population resulting, the males were too few to nourish the others. Then, through what damnable accident or design I do not know, the creatures went forth in their airship and discovered the teeming millions of human beings on earth.

"But the bulk of humanity was and still is safe from them, at least until new means of attacking mankind are devised, for the globular airship cannot

approach the land. The very power it uses to lift the greatest steamships and carry them off, draws the machine to the earth and holds it fast. But above water, which acts as an insulator apparently, the apparatus can operate at will. And they have a two-fold purpose in capturing ships. All the available metal in this land was exhausted in constructing two of the spherical machines. One of these never returned from its first trip, and only the one remains. To construct more, these giant women plan to use the metal salvaged from captured ships, until a vast fleet of the infernal things is ready to go forth and wipe the seas clean of ships and human beings. And the bodies of the men and women, struck down by the gas, are to serve as food for these demons in human form.

"This is the most horrible, blood-curdling thing of all. Rendered unconscious by the gas, the victims remain in a state of suspended animation indefinitely, exactly as do grubs, spiders and insects when stung by certain species of wasps and placed in their nests to provide food for their young. Stacked in great storage vaults these breathing, living, but paralyzed human beings are kept, and as needed, are taken out.

"Already they have a supply on hand sufficient to last them for over a year. Some of the *Cyclops* company are still preserved; there are over three hundred from the *Chiriqui*, hundreds from other ships, and the entire crew of the *McCracken*.

"All these things I learned little by little, and mainly through a friend, for marvelous as it may seem, I have a friend— if friend he can be called, a miserable, trembling, terrified male, who, doomed to death, sought to escape his fate and sought refuge with me, dreading my presence less than his doom, and hoping that such a feared and almost reverenced being as myself might protect him. For two months he has been my companion, but he cannot eat anything but meat and the supply of meat upon the ship is getting low, and sooner or later he must succumb. And the women, maddened at his escape from their clutches, though not yet daring to approach too closely to me, are getting bolder. Some time, at some unguarded moment, they will find the poor fellow alone and will fall upon him. And in his terror, in an effort to buy his life, he will, I know, reveal to them that I am but an ordinary mortal, a man who eats and drinks and who survived the gas by mechanical and not supernatural means. But I will not be taken alive by these fearful female cannibals. When the time comes, as I know it will, I will blow my brains out, and though they may devour my body they will not rend me alive. No more ships have been brought in here since the *McCracken* was captured. But this I know is due to the fact that all the energies of these creatures are being devoted to building additional air machines. This work goes on in a vast cavern beyond the city where tremendous forces, furnaces with heat beyond human conception and

machines of which we know nothing, are controlled by the internal steam, the radiant energy and the magnetic powers of the earth's core.

"And now, again let me implore any and all who may hear my words to give close attention to what I say, for here again is a means by which humanity may combat and destroy these ghastly, gigantic cannibals. The spherical air-machines are helpless from above. Their magnetic or electrical forces extend only downwards. The gasses they throw out are heavier than air and descend but cannot ascend, and by means of swift planes, huge bombs and machine guns, the things can be easily destroyed. And they cannot travel without throwing off the dazzling green light. Only when motionless are they dark. And so they will offer easy marks and can be readily detected. So, I beseech you who may hear, that the governments are notified and warned and that a fleet or many fleets of airplanes properly equipped patrol the seas, and at first sight of one of the green meteors rise above it and utterly destroy it without mercy.

"Wait! I hear a terrified scream.... I am back again at the transmitter. It was the fellow who has been with me. Poor devil! He has met his fate, but after all it was the custom of his people, and, moreover, he would have starved to death in a few days. For that matter I, too, face starvation. The ship's stock is running low; all the food upon the *McCracken* was destroyed in cutting up that vessel, and unless another ship is captured I will have no food after two weeks more. What a strange thought! How terrible an idea! That the awful fate of hundreds of my fellows would be my salvation! But I will never live to die from hunger. I can hear the terrible screams of my late companion on the deck outside. God! It is the end! The fellow must have told the enraged females. His body has been torn to shreds. With bloody hands and reeking lips they are rushing towards the upper deck where I sit. They are here! This is my last word! God grant that I have been heard! I am about to—"

Crashing in our ears came the report of a pistol.

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5: The Story of Malachi

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

The Bulletin, 22 Jun 1889

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MALACHI WAS very tall, very thin, and very round-shouldered, and the sandiness of his hair also cried aloud for an adjective. All the boys considered Malachi the greatest ass on the station, and there was no doubt that he *was* an awful fool. He had never been out of his native bush in all his life, excepting once, when he paid a short visit to Sydney, and when he returned it was evident that his nerves had received a shaking. We failed to draw one word out of Malachi regarding his views on the city— to describe it was not in his power, for it had evidently been something far beyond his comprehension. Even after his visit had become a matter of history, if you were to ask him what he thought of Sydney the dazed expression would come back into his face, and he would scratch his head and say in a slow and deliberate manner, "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution." And as such the city remained, so far as Malachi's opinion of it was concerned.

Malachi was always shabbily dressed, in spite of his pound a week and board, and "When Malachi gets a new suit of clothes" was the expression invariably used by the boys to fix a date for some altogether improbable event. We were always having larks with Malachi, for we looked upon him as our legitimate butt. He seldom complained, and when he did his remonstrance hardly ever went beyond repeating the words, "Now, none of your pranktical jokes!" If this had not the desired effect, and we put up some too outrageous trick on him, he would content himself by muttering with sorrowful conviction, "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution."

We were not content with common jokes, such as sewing up the legs of Malachi's trousers while he slept, fixing his bunk, or putting explosives in his pipe— we aspired to some of the higher branches of the practical joker's art. It was well known that Malachi had an undying hatred for words of four syllables and over, and the use of them was always sufficient to forfeit any good opinions he might have previously entertained concerning the user. "I hate them high-flown words," he would say— "I got a book at home that I could get them out of if I wanted them; but I don't." The book referred to was a very dilapidated dictionary. Malachi's hatred for high-flown words was only equalled by his aversion to the opposite sex; and, this being known, we used to write letters to him in a feminine hand, threatening divers breach of promise actions, and composed in the high-flown language above alluded to. We used to think this very funny, and by these means we made his life a burden to him.

Malachi put the most implicit faith in everything we told him; he would take in the most improbable yarn provided we preserved a grave demeanour and used no high-flown expressions. He would indeed sometimes remark that our yarns were a caution, but that was all.

We played upon him the most gigantic joke of all during the visit of a certain bricklayer, who came to do some work at the homestead. "Bricky" was a bit of a phrenologist, and knew enough of physiognomy and human nature to give a pretty fair delineation of character. He also went in for spirit-rapping, greatly to the disgust of the two ancient housekeepers, who declared that they'd have "no dalins wid him and his divil's worruk."

The bricklayer was from the first an object of awe to Malachi, who carefully avoided him; but one night we got the butt into a room where the artisan was entertaining the boys with a seance. After the table-rapping, during which Malachi sat with uncovered head and awe-struck expression, we proposed that he should have his bumps read, and before he could make his escape Malachi was seated in a chair in the middle of the room and the bricklayer was running his fingers over his head. I really believe that Malachi's hair bristled between the phrenologist's fingers. Whenever he made a hit his staunch admirer, "Donegal," would exclaim "Look at that now!" while the girls tittered and said, "Just fancy!" and from time to time Malachi would be heard to mutter to himself, in a tone of the most intense conviction, that, "without the least mistake it was a caution." Several times at his work the next day Malachi was observed to rest on his spade, while he tilted his hat forward with one hand and felt the back of his head as though he had not been previously aware of its existence.

We "ran" Malachi to believe that the bricklayer was mad on the subject of phrenology, and was suspected of having killed several persons in order to obtain their skulls for experimental purposes. We further said that he had been heard to say that Malachi's skull was a most extraordinary one, and so we advised him to be careful.

Malachi occupied a hut some distance from the station, and one night, the last night of the bricklayer's stay, as Malachi sat smoking over the fire the door opened quietly and the phrenologist entered. He carried a bag with a pumpkin in the bottom of it, and, sitting down on a stool, he let the bag down with a bump on the floor between his feet. Malachi was badly scared, but he managed to stammer out—

"'Ello!"

"'Ello!" said the phrenologist.

There was an embarrassing silence, which was at last broken by "Bricky" saying "How are you gettin' on, Malachi?"

"Oh, jist right," replied Malachi.

Nothing was said for a while, until Malachi, after fidgeting a good deal on his stool, asked the bricklayer when he was leaving the station.

"Oh, I'm going away in the morning, early," said he. "I've jist been over to Jimmy Nowlett's camp, and as I was passing I thought I'd call and get your head."

"What?"

"I come for your skull.

"Yes," the phrenologist continued, while Malachi sat horror-stricken; "I've got Jimmy Nowlett's skull here," and he lifted the bag and lovingly felt the pumpkin— it must have weighed forty pounds. "I spoilt one of his best bumps with the tomahawk. I had to hit him twice, but it's no use crying over spilt milk." Here he drew a heavy shingling-hammer out of the bag and wiped off with his sleeve something that looked like blood. Malachi had been edging round for the door, and now he made a rush for it. But the skull-fancier was there before him.

"Gor-sake you don't want to murder me!" gasped Malachi.

"Not if I can get your skull any other way," said Bricky.

"Oh!" gasped Malachi— and then, with a vague idea that it was best to humour a lunatic, he continued, in a tone meant to be off-hand and careless— "Now, look here, if yer only waits till I die you can have my whole skelington and welcome."

"Now Malachi," said the phrenologist sternly, "d'ye think I'm a fool? I ain't going to stand any humbug. If yer acts sensible you'll be quiet, and it'll soon be over, but if yer—"

Malachi did not wait to hear the rest. He made a spring for the back of the hut and through it, taking down a large new sheet of stringy-bark in his flight. Then he could be heard loudly ejaculating "It's a caution!" as he went through the bush like a startled kangaroo, and he didn't stop till he reached the station.

Jimmy Nowlett and I had been peeping through a crack in the same sheet of bark that Malachi dislodged; it fell on us and bruised us somewhat, but it wasn't enough to knock the fun out of the thing.

When Jimmy Nowlett crawled out from under the bark he had to lie down on Malachi's bunk to laugh, and even for some time afterwards it was not unusual for Jimmy to wake up in the night and laugh till we wished him dead.

I should like to finish here, but there remains something more to be said about Malachi.

One of the best cows at the homestead had a calf, about which she made a great deal of fuss. She was ordinarily a quiet, docile creature, and, though somewhat fussy after calving no one ever dreamed that she would injure

anyone. It happened one day that the squatter's daughter and her intended husband, a Sydney exquisite, were strolling in a paddock where the cow was. Whether the cow objected to the masher or his lady love's red parasol, or whether she suspected designs upon her progeny, is not certain; anyhow, she went for them. The young man saw the cow coming first, and he gallantly struck a bee-line for the fence, leaving the girl to manage for herself. She wouldn't have managed very well if Malachi hadn't been passing just then. He saw the girl's danger and ran to intercept the cow with no weapon but his hands.

It didn't last long. There was a roar, a rush, and a cloud of dust, out of which the cow presently emerged, and went scampering back to the bush in which her calf was hidden.

We carried Malachi home and laid him on a bed. He had a terrible wound in the groin, and the blood soaked through the bandages like water. We did all that was possible for him, the boys killed the squatter's best horse and spoilt two others riding for a doctor, but it was of no use. In the last half-hour of his life we all gathered round Malachi's bed; he was only twenty-two. Once he said:

"I wonder how mother'll manage now?"

"Why, where's your mother?" someone asked gently; we had never dreamt that Malachi might have someone to love him and be proud of him.

"In Bathurst," he answered wearily— "she'll take on awful, I 'spect, she was awful fond of me— we've been pulling together this last ten years— mother and me— we wanted to make it all right for my little brother Jim— poor Jim!"

"What's wrong with Jim?" someone asked.

"Oh, he's blind," said Malachi "always was— we wanted to make it all right for him agin time he grows up— I— I managed to send home about— about forty pounds a year— we bought a bit of ground, and— and— I think— I'm going now. Tell 'em, Harry— tell 'em how it was—"

I had to go outside then. I couldn't stand it any more. There was a lump in my throat and I'd have given anything to wipe out my share in the practical jokes, but it was too late now.

Malachi was dead when I went in again, and that night the hat went round with the squatter's cheque in the bottom of it and we made it "all right" for Malachi's blind brother Jim.

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6: The Story of Lee Ping

Guy Boothby

1867-1905

Western Star and Roma Advertiser (Qld) 25 Sep 1895

At the time this story is set, what is now the Northern Territory was part of South Australia. Palmerston was later renamed Darwin.

THIS STORY might very well have been called "The Rout of Love by the Unforeseen." It should also go a long way towards proving the true value of love as a business principle.

You must understand that, even for a Chinaman, Lee Ping was not fair to look upon; his age was nearer seventy than forty, and for a Celestial that is very old indeed. His face was puckered like a sun-dried crab-apple into a thousand wrinkles; and his pigtail, once the pride and glory of his existence, now consisted principally of horse hair. But he was very rich for all that, so rich indeed, that everyone, or nearly everyone, respected him.

The Police Department was the only exception, and, as all the world know, that service invariably casts suspicious eyes on a Chinaman, or, for that matter, on any one else, who wears the same suit of clothes year-in and year-out, and can show no outward and visible sign of how he derives his support. Therefore, to avoid any frictions that might arise, Lee Ping allowed it to be supposed that obtained his income from a general store on the railway works at Banya Creek, in the northern territory of South Australia; when in reality his gains came from an illicit "fan-tan" shop, carried on every night, for the benefit of the coolies, behind the canvas curtains of his store front.

About the beginning of the summer of which I am going to tell you, he complained of being lonely. So, for the sake of his wealth, which was undoubtedly great, a little Chinese lady cast in her lot with his; and being, like all his countryman, fond of high-sounding pet names, he christened her "The Stork that lives a Thousand Years.'

Her name was Sika, and she was in every way delightful— indeed, so charming was she that Quong Shang, a youth of low and dissipated habits, loved her, and even labored as a coolie on the construction works in order to have the wherewithal to meet her and to gamble at Lee Ping's abode.

By some means, system or no system, he won enormous sums, and for better security he hid the plunder in his pigtail, which was nearly a yard long and as thick as his wrist.

In the intervals of the game he found leisure to whisper words of affection into the pretty Sika's ears; and Lee Ping, becoming cognisant of the fact, prayed to his joss daily for the youth's destruction. But being a sound business

man, as well as a jealous, husband, with the desire of accomplishing his ruin he united the hope of obtaining his wealth, and to achieve both these things, he took counsel with "The Stork that lives a Thousand Years."

Thenceforward, Sika allowed her adorer to understand that she was by no means averse to his attentions. On the contrary, she let him see that to such an extent did she favor them, that she was willing to assist in encompassing the death of Lee Ping, and, more important still, to escape with his wealth and the plunder of his house to China.

Quong went as nearly into ecstasies as it is possible for a Chinaman to go, and promised that their future should be spent in devising original, pet images for each other, and in calculating their gains from some remunerative opium concern. Thus you will see that his love was based on the soundest of commercial principles.

Now; to his other occupations Lee Ping added the duties and emoluments of Government informer, and many of the incomprehensible arrests of his too confiding countrymen might have been traced from the whitewashed sanctum of the police office to his musty-smelling back parlor.

If you would clearly understand what followed, you must remember that Chinese life in the northern territory of Australia is permeated through and through by secret societies— social, political, or religious, as the case may be. And to endeavor to bring members of these societies to justice by ordinary means is a hopeless, if not a well-nigh impossible task. But, as we have learned, the authorities had, to a certain extent, overcome these difficulties with the assistance of our versatile friend Lee Ping. Not that even then they always captured the right man, for you will see that it was just as easy for the real offender to buy over the traitor as for the police to do so.

I do not mean to say that the system had not its drawback— what system is without them? Its advantages, however, lay in this: that whenever a crime of extraordinary magnitude had been committed, the police could always satisfy public feeling by bringing some criminal, if only a Chinaman, to trial, and what is more, be certain of convicting him on circumstantial evidence— when, as likely as not, he had never been near the place at all. In the eyes of the law, one little brown man is as another. And this is of course as it should be.

Now, as I have said before, when these events took place, the territory lay travailing in the heat of summer: not an English summer of tennis parties, river picnics, and yacht races, but months of sand flies, with the thermometer hovering continually between one hundred and ten and one hundred and twenty degrees in the shade. A summer when, throughout the day, sun-strokes were common, and where, after nightfall, deadly miasmas crept up the bank of

the water-course, swept down the tented streets, and wrestled for the lives of every human being in the settlement.

In those days, the worn-out overseers on the construction works were as Egyptian task masters, and the heart of the Mongolian was as lead within him.

From morning till night Quong Shang bore burdens on the works and thought of Sika. In the intervals he invented horrible tortures for Lee Ping, and longed for the time when, between the games, he would be able to discuss them with his lady-love.

But about this time rumors were abroad. That mighty potentate, the chief-engineer, in whose eyes individual Chinese coolies were about as important as earthworms, had decreed the moving of the camp ten miles further to the southward. Quong heard of this, and took heed; the time for action had arrived— now or never must his scheme see practice.

For another reason, Quong was additionally anxious to be gone: his pigtail was heavy with gold: and being a prudent youth, he was disinclined to run any more risk than he could help.

In their nightly consultations, they had arranged the details after this fashion: "The Stork that lives a Thousand Tears" was to find the treasure and appropriate the portable articles of plunder, while Quong Shang, "The Brave," carried out the deed itself.

The night set in dark and awesome. A monstrous wind, blowing from across the desert, whistled mournfully down the canvas streets, the trees beat and swayed before it, and black thunder-clouds gathered in the west. Thick banks of dust whirled and eddied round Lee Tung's abode, and at intervals, flashes of lightning glimmered along the horizon.

Quong and Sika met earlier than usual, and for the last time they overhauled their plans together in the jungle behind the camp. Quong, though vindictive, was not courageous, and while in theory he had often butchered Lee Ping with remorseless atrocity, in practice he was already beginning to repent him of his share in the transaction. He even hinted that 'The Stork' would be able to find better opportunity of completing the business than he could. ever hope to do. This, naturally enough, did not meet with her approval, and she told him so in terms which left him no alternative but to carry out the deed, or there and then resign all thoughts of a future with herself. He thereupon changed his mind, and Sika sped away to give her lord his supper, as becomes a faithful and devoted spouse. During the meal she told him all Quong's arrangements, and Lee Ping rattled his toothless gums together to show his appreciation of the joke.

The night rolled on, and from his lair in the jungle, Quong watched the lights fade out one by one till all grew black as the clouds above him. The

deeper darkness that precedes dawn brought him but of hiding and down the little hill. Approaching the store with stealthy tread, he paused to listen. Not a sound came from within— Sika had evidently fulfilled her promise, and, according to arrangement, had soothed her lord to sleep with tender little love-songs and much endearment. Quong chuckled, and moved towards the door. Finding that no one stirred, he gave the signal.

Then the door was softly opened, and Sika stood before him— her finger on her lips. Quong, whispering that she was "the light of his eyes and the lotos leaf of his life," or words to that effect, entered, hatchet in hand, trembling violently.

There is an old saying that "the woman who hesitates is lost." This time it was the man. But the moral is just the same. For while Quong was endeavoring to muster up sufficient courage to find his victim and aim the fatal blow, he was suddenly seized from behind and thrown heavily upon the floor. His dismay was boundless, and it became even more so when he found his intended victim standing over him ferociously brandishing a tomahawk. He remembers no more, for a pair of small thin fingers, undoubtedly Sika's— he had often praised their dainty beauty— were twining themselves remorselessly round his gullet, pressing tighter and tighter till he lost all consciousness.

On recovering, he found himself across the creek, chained hand and foot to a very substantial log in the police cells. He was very confused, very sore, and the marks of eight of the tiniest fingers imaginable were just beginning to turn black around his windpipe. Then came the saddest discovery of all— his pigtail, his bank, as well as the pride and glory of his existence, was gone, cut off at the roots' and with all his treasure. Bumping his head against the log, he wept and groaned in very bitterness of spirit.

A week later he was conveyed to Palmerston, where he was charged with robbing the till of the *Hotel Oriental*, hitherto an unexplained burglary; and, on the evidence of Lee Ping and Sika, was condemned to three years penal servitude with hard labor.

On the expiration of his sentence, he learned that Lee Ping had returned to China, marvellously rich, and that with him had departed the faithless "Stork that lives a Thousand Years."

Quong's new pigtail grows apace, but though he anoints it daily, he takes small pride in it, for he has no Sika now to praise its length and beauty. He has, however, since his release manufactured for himself a most elaborate joss, before whom he burns the most horrible of joss sticks. If you are curious as to his reasons, he will tell you that he is. doing his best to work a spell, whereby

Lee Ping shall lose his health, the love of Sika, every halfpenny of his accumulated wealth, and become the possessor of all miseries conceivable.

Now there are three morals to be deduced from this story, and they run as follows:

Never play with edged tools,
Leave love alone, and*,*
If you must murder the husband, think twice before telling the wife.

There are several others, but I don't suppose you will need my assistance to discover them.

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7: The Ghost's Violin

Erckman-Chatrian

Émile Erckmann (1822–1899) and Alexandre Chatrian (1826–1890)
Translator Unknown
Armidale Express (NSW) 23 Nov 1888

KARL Kafitz had spent six years on the method of counter-point, and had studied Haydn, Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, and Rossini. He enjoyed excellent health and easy circumstances, which permitted him to follow his artistic career. In a word, he possessed all that was necessary for composing grand and beautiful music, except one little thing that is indispensable— inspiration.

Every day, fall of noble ardour, he carried to his worthy master, Albert Kilian, long, melodious compositions, every note of which, alas, reminded one of Peter, Jack, or Christopher.

Master Albert, seated in his great armchair, his feet on the andiron, his elbow on the corner of the table, would smoke his pipe and apply himself to cancelling, one after another, the remarkable discoveries of his pupils. Karl, weeping with rage, would contest the point, but the old master would calmly open one of his innumerable music-books, and say, with his finger on the passage, "Look boy!"

Then Karl would hang his head and despair of the future.

But one fine day, when he had presented under his name a Fantasy of Baccherini, with variations from Viotti, his good-natured master lost his patience for once.

"Karl," he cried, "do you take me for a fool? Do you think me ignorant of your mean pilfering ? This is really too much!"

And, perceiving Karl's dismay at this unexpected outburst, he continued:

"Listen. I willingly admit that you are the dupe of your memory; that your plagiarism is unconscious. But you are decidedly becoming too stout; you drink wine too generously; and, above all, your beer is of too indeterminate a quantity. Now, such indulgence closes the avenues of your intellect. You must grow thin."

"Grow thin!"

"Yes, or renounce music. You are not wanting in knowledge, but you lack a theme. That's the whole trouble. If you spend your life coating the strings of your violin with a layer of fat, how can they vibrate?"

These words of Master Albert came like a flash of light to Kafitz.

"No sacrifice shall be too great for me!" he cried, "since matter oppresses my soul I am resolved to grow thin."

His features expressed so much of heroism in that moment that Master Albert was deeply touched. He embraced his dear pupil and wished Mm the best of fortune.

Early the next day, Karl Kafitz, with a knapsack on his shoulder and a staff in his hand, quitted the hotel of the Three Pigeons to undertake a long journey. He directed his steps towards Switzerland.

Unfortunately, at the end of six months his stoutness was considerably reduced, without his gaining any inspiration whatever.

"Can anyone be more unhappy than I?" he wondered; "Neither fasting nor plenty, neither water, nor wine, nor beer, can make my soul rise to the pitch of the sublime. What have I done to deserve so sad a fate! While a crowd of fools produce remarkable works, I, with all my skill, all my labour, all my courage, I alone accomplish nothing. Ah, Heaven is not just; no, that it is not!"

While grumbling in this fashion he followed the road from Bruck to Fribourg. Night was approaching, and as Kafitz dragged his tired feet along, he felt as if he must fall with fatigue.

At that moment he saw in the moonlight an old ruined house, half-hidden amongst the trees on the other side of the road. The roof was low and sloping, the door off its hinges, the window panes broken, and the chimney in ruins. Tall briars and nettles, tangled together, grew everywhere, and the dormer window scarcely rose above the heath of the upland, where the wind was blowing strong enough to break the horns of an ox. At the same time Karl saw through the dimness the branch of a fir tree waving above the door.

"Come," said he to himself, " the inn isn't beautiful; in fact, it's rather sinister; but we musn't judge things by appearances."

And without hesitation he knocked at the door with his staff.

"Who is there? What do you want?" shouted a rough voice from within.

"Shelter and food."

"Ah, ha! very good!"

The door opened abruptly, and Karl found himself in the presence of a vigorous-looking man, his face square-cut, his eyes gray; his coat was out at elbow. In his hand was an axe.

Behind this personage burned the fire on the hearth, lighting up the entrance to a loft, the steps of a wooden staircase, the mouldering walls, and the figure of a pale, delicate, young girl, clad in a dingy gown of cotton. She looked towards the door with a kind of terror. Her black eyes had an expression of sorrow and of undefinable wandering.

Karl saw all this at one glance, and instinctively grasped his staff tighter.

"Well, you may come in," said the man; "this is not the weather to keep people out of doors."

Then Karl, thinking it would be bad policy to have a frightened air, advanced to the centre of the hut, and seated himself on a stool before the hearth.

"Give me your staff and knapsack," said the man.

At this, Master Albert's pupil trembled in every limb; but the knapsack was unbuckled, the staff placed in a corner, and the host calmly seated near the fireside before he had recovered from his surprise. This circumstance tranquillized him somewhat.

"Mr. Innkeeper," said he, with a smile, "I would not object to eating my supper."

" What does Monsieur desire for supper?" asked the other gravely.

"A ham omelette, a jug of vine, and some cheese."

"Ho ! ho ! ho ! Monsieur is provided with an excellent appetite, but our provisions are exhausted."

"Exhausted?"

"Yes."

"All?"

"All."

"You have no cheese?"

"No."

"No butter?"

"No."

"No bread ? No milk?"

"No."

"But, good heavens, what have you, then?"

" Some potatoes baking under the ashes."

At the same; moment Karl spied in the shadow, on the steps of the staircase, a whole regiment of hens— white, black, and red, all asleep:

"But," said Kafitz, pointing to them, " you must have eggs ?"

"We carried them this morning to market at Bruck."

"Oh! Well, then, cost what it may, put a hen on the spit."

Scarcely had he uttered these words when the pale girl, her locks dishevelled, rushed between him and the staircase crying:

"Let no one dare to touch my hens! Ah, let the creatures of the good God live!"

There was something so terrible in the aspect of this unfortunate being, that Kafitz hastened to reply: "No, no; we will not kill them. Here are potatoes. I will devote myself to potatoes and stay with you. At this moment my vocation assumes a definite form. Here I shall remain three months— six months, in short, the time necessary for becoming thin as a fakir!".

He spoke with a singular animation, and his host cried to the pale young girl—

"Geneveve! Geneveve! look! The spirit possesses him as it did the other!"

At this the cold wind without redoubled its violence, the fire whirled on the hearth and writhed to the ceiling amid a cloud of gray smoke; the hens, in this unsteady light, seemed to dance on the steps of the staircase, and a half-witted girl sang in a piercing voice a strange old air, while the log of green wood, weeping in the midst of the fire, accompanied her with its plaintive sighs.

Kafitz concluded that he had fallen into the haunt of the sorcerer Hecker. He devoured two potatoes, raised the great red jar of water and drank deeply. Then he regained his composure. He found that the girl had departed, and that the man alone remained before the hearth.

"Mr. Innkeeper," he recommenced, "show me the way to bed."

His host thereupon lit a lamp and slowly ascended the worm-eaten staircase.

He pushed up a heavy trap-door with his gray head, and admitted Karl to the loft under the thatched roof.

"That is your bed," said he, while depositing the lamp on the floor. Sleep well, and, above all, be careful with the fire!"

Then he descended, and Kafitz remained alone, bending thoughtfully by the side of a large mattress of straw, covered by a sack of feathers.

He mused for some time, wondering whether it would be prudent to sleep, for the physiognomy of the old man seemed very sinister; while thinking of those clear grey eyes, those bluish lips surrounded by deep wrinkles, that large bony forehead and yellowish complexion, he suddenly remembered that on the Goldenberg three men had been hanged, and that the face of one of them strangely resembled that of his host. He, too, had had these cavernous eyes, he also had been out at the elbows, while the great toe of his left foot had protruded from the shoe shrunken and cracked by the rain.

He remembered also that this wretched being, Melchoir by name, had formerly been something of a musician, and that they had hung him for having murdered with his pitcher the innkeeper of the Golden Sheep, who had demanded of him the conventional half-crown.

The music of this poor devil had profoundly moved him. It was fantastic and original, and the pupil of Master Albert envied the vagrant. But in that moment the appearance of the body on the gallows rose before his mind with perfect distinctness, and he heard once more the fluttering of his rags in the night wind and saw the ravens flying around the gibbet with ravenous cries. He felt himself tremble, and his terror was greatly increased when he found at the

bottom of the loft, against the wall, a violin surmounted by two withered palms.

Then he would have fled, but at the same instant the rough voice of his host struck upon his ear.

"Put out the light!" he cried. "Get into bed. I told you to be careful with the fire."

These words sent a thrill through Karl's terror-stricken heart. He stretched himself on the straw and blew out the light.

All became still in the hut.

Karl listened to the moaning of the wind, to the night-birds calling to one another in the darkness, and to the mice running over the worm-eaten floor, until at last, notwithstanding his resolution not to close an eye, he fell fast asleep when it was nearly morning. Suddenly a sob, bitter, poignant, and full of anguish, waked him with a start. A cold sweat covered his face.

He looked and saw in the corner of the room the crouching figure of a man. It was Melchoir, who was hanged. His black hair fell about his emaciated body; his neck and chest were bare. So horribly thin was he that one might have thought him the skeleton of a gigantic locust.

A beautiful moonbeam, entering by the little skylight, shone softly on him with a bluish gleam and lit up the large cobwebs hanging around.

With wide open eyes and lips apart, Hafitz silently gazed upon this weird being as one might gaze on death when the last hour had come.

Suddenly the skeleton stretched out his long withered hand and snatched the violin from the wall. He supported it against his shoulder; then; after a moment of silence, he began to play.

There were notes as funereal as the sound of the earth falling on the coffin of a well-beloved being; solemn as the thunder of cascades dragged along by the echoes of the mountains; majestic as the great gusts of autumn wind in the midst of sonorous forests; and sometimes sad, sad as incurable despair. Then, amid these passionate sobs, he played a song that was light, silvery, and sweet, like the song of a band of gay goldfinches fluttering over the flowery thickets. These dainty trills went whirling along with an ineffable trembling of carelessness and joy, and then, as if frightened by the waltz, flew suddenly away, palpitating, distracted, mad. Love, joy, and despair all sang, all wept, and rushed pell mell from under the vibrant bow.

And Karl, notwithstanding his unspeakable terror, stretched forth his arms : and cried, "O great, great, great artist! O sublime genius! Ah, how I pity your sad fate! To be hung for having killed that brutal innkeeper who did not know one note of music. To wander through the forest in the moonlight— to have no longer a body, and yet so beautiful a talent. O God!"

But as he thus cried aloud, the rough voice from below interrupted him.

"Halloo, upstairs there! Have you finished talking at last? Are you sick or is the house on fire?"

And the wooden steps creaked under a heavy tread, a bright glow illuminated the cracks in the trapdoor, which opened by a shoulder thrust, letting the innkeeper appear.

"Ah, Mr. Innkeeper, Mr. Innkeeper," cried Hafitz, "what does all this mean? At first celestial music wakes me and transports my soul to the in visible spheres— then behold, how all has vanished like a dream."

The face of the host became thoughtful at once.

"Yes, yes," he murmured, dreamily, "Melchoir has come again to disturb our slumber; then he will always return! Our rest is now lost. Never again can we think of sleeping. But come, comrade, get up and smoke a pipe with me."

Karl did not wait to be begged; he was only too anxious to go. But when he came below, finding that day was yet distant, he sat long, very long, with his head between his hands, his elbows on his knees, plunged in an abyss of melancholy thoughts.

The innkeeper rekindled the fire, and then took his former seat, the broken chair at the hearth, and smoked in silence.

At last the grey morning appeared, and showed in faintly through the dull little , windows. The cock crew, and the hens began to hop from step to step.

"How much do I owe you?" asked Karl, while buckling his knapsack on his shoulders and taking his staff.

"You owe us a prayer at the chapel of St. Blaise," said the man in a strange tone; "a prayer for the soul of my son Melchoir who was hanged, and another for that of his betrothed, Genevieve, who is crazed!"

"Is that all?"

"That is all."

"Then farewell. I shall not forget."

In fact, the first thing that Karl did on arriving at Fribourg was to pray fervently for the poor vagrant, and for her whom he had loved. Then he sought his favourite inn, spread out his music paper on the table, and calling for a bottle of Rikevri, wrote at the head of the first sheet of paper, "The Violin of One Who Was Hanged," and composed, during one sitting, his first only original composition.

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8: The Crystal Egg

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The New Review, May 1897

In: *Tales of Space and Time*, 1899

THERE WAS, until a year ago, a little and very grimy-looking shop near Seven Dials over which, in weather-worn yellow lettering, the name of "C. Cave, Naturalist and Dealer in Antiquities," was inscribed. The contents of its window were curiously variegated. They comprised some elephant tusks and an imperfect set of chessmen, beads and weapons, a box of eyes, two skulls of tigers and one human, several moth-eaten stuffed monkeys (one holding a lamp), an old-fashioned cabinet, a fly-blown ostrich egg or so, some fishing-tackle, and an extraordinarily dirty, empty glass fish-tank. There was also, at the moment the story begins, a mass of crystal, worked into the shape of an egg and brilliantly polished. And at that two people, who stood outside the window, were looking, one of them a tall, thin clergyman, the other a black-bearded young man of dusky complexion and unobtrusive costume. The dusky young man spoke with eager gesticulation, and seemed anxious for his companion to purchase the article.

While they were there, Mr. Cave came into his shop, his beard still wagging with the bread and butter of his tea. When he saw these men and the object of their regard, his countenance fell. He glanced guiltily over his shoulder, and softly shut the door. He was a little old man, with pale face and peculiar watery blue eyes; his hair was a dirty grey, and he wore a shabby blue frock-coat, an ancient silk hat, and carpet slippers very much down at heel. He remained watching the two men as they talked. The clergyman went deep into his trouser pocket, examined a handful of money, and showed his teeth in an agreeable smile. Mr. Cave seemed still more depressed when they came into the shop.

The clergyman, without any ceremony, asked the price of the crystal egg. Mr. Cave glanced nervously towards the door leading into the parlour, and said five pounds. The clergyman protested that the price was high, to his companion as well as to Mr. Cave— it was, indeed, very much more than Mr. Cave had intended to ask, when he had stocked the article— and an attempt at bargaining ensued. Mr. Cave stepped to the shop-door, and held it open. "Five pounds is my price," he said, as though he wished to save himself the trouble of unprofitable discussion. As he did so, the upper portion of a woman's face appeared above the blind in the glass upper panel of the door leading into the parlour, and stared curiously at the two customers. "Five pounds is my price," said Mr. Cave, with a quiver in his voice.

The swarthy young man had so far remained a spectator, watching Cave keenly. Now he spoke. "Give him five pounds," he said. The clergyman glanced at him to see if he were in earnest, and, when he looked at Mr. Cave again, he saw that the latter's face was white.

"It's a lot of money," said the clergyman, and diving into his pocket, began counting his resources. He had little more than thirty shillings, and he appealed to his companion, with whom he seemed to be on terms of considerable intimacy. This gave Mr. Cave an opportunity of collecting his thoughts, and he began to explain in an agitated manner that the crystal was not, as a matter of fact, entirely free for sale. His two customers were naturally surprised at this, and inquired why he had not thought of that before he began to bargain. Mr. Cave became confused, but he stuck to his story, that the crystal was not in the market that afternoon, that a probable purchaser of it had already appeared. The two, treating this as an attempt to raise the price still further, made as if they would leave the shop. But at this point the parlour door opened, and the owner of the dark fringe and the little eyes appeared.

She was a coarse-featured, corpulent woman, younger and very much larger than Mr. Cave; she walked heavily, and her face was flushed. "That crystal is for sale," she said. "And five pounds is a good enough price for it. I can't think what you're about Cave, not to take the gentleman's offer!"

Mr. Cave, greatly perturbed by the irruption, looked angrily at her over the rims of his spectacles, and without excessive assurance, asserted his right to manage his business in his own way. An altercation began. The two customers watched the scene with interest and some amusement, occasionally assisting Mrs. Cave with suggestions. Mr. Cave, hard driven, persisted in a confused and impossible story of an enquiry for the crystal that morning, and his agitation became painful. But he stuck to his point with extraordinary persistence. It was the young Oriental who ended this curious controversy. He proposed that they should call again in the course of two days— so as to give the alleged enquirer a fair chance. "And then we must insist," said the clergyman. "Five pounds." Mrs. Cave took it on herself to apologise for her husband, explaining that he was sometimes "a little odd," and as the two customers left, the couple prepared for a free discussion of the incident in all its bearings.

Mrs. Cave talked to her husband with singular directness. The poor little man, quivering with emotion, muddled himself between his stories, maintaining on the one hand that he had another customer in view, and on the other asserting that the crystal was honestly worth ten guineas. "Why did you ask five pounds?" said his wife. "Do let me manage my business my own way!" said Mr. Cave.

Mr. Cave had living with him a step-daughter and a step-son, and at supper that night the transaction was re-discussed. None of them had a high opinion of Mr. Cave's business methods, and this action seemed a culminating folly.

"It's my opinion he's refused that crystal before," said the step-son, a loose-limbed lout of eighteen.

"But Five Pounds!" said the step-daughter, an argumentative young woman of six-and-twenty.

Mr. Cave's answers were wretched; he could only mumble weak assertions that he knew his own business best. They drove him from his half-eaten supper into the shop, to close it for the night, his ears aflame and tears of vexation behind his spectacles. "Why had he left the crystal in the window so long? The folly of it!" That was the trouble closest in his mind. For a time he could see no way of evading sale.

After supper his step-daughter and step-son smartened themselves up and went out and his wife retired upstairs to reflect upon the business aspects of the crystal, over a little sugar and lemon and so forth in hot water. Mr. Cave went into the shop, and stayed there until late, ostensibly to make ornamental rockeries for gold-fish cases but really for a private purpose that will be better explained later. The next day Mrs. Cave found that the crystal had been removed from the window, and was lying behind some second-hand books on angling. She replaced it in a conspicuous position. But she did not argue further about it, as a nervous headache disinclined her from debate. Mr. Cave was always disinclined. The day passed disagreeably. Mr. Cave was, if anything, more absent-minded than usual, and uncommonly irritable withal. In the afternoon, when his wife was taking her customary sleep, he removed the crystal from the window again.

The next day Mr. Cave had to deliver a consignment of dog-fish at one of the hospital schools, where they were needed for dissection. In his absence Mrs. Cave's mind reverted to the topic of the crystal, and the methods of expenditure suitable to a windfall of five pounds. She had already devised some very agreeable expedients, among others a dress of green silk for herself and a trip to Richmond, when a jangling of the front door bell summoned her into the shop. The customer was an examination coach who came to complain of the non-delivery of certain frogs asked for the previous day. Mrs. Cave did not approve of this particular branch of Mr. Cave's business, and the gentleman, who had called in a somewhat aggressive mood, retired after a brief exchange of words— entirely civil so far as he was concerned. Mrs. Cave's eye then naturally turned to the window; for the sight of the crystal was an assurance of the five pounds and of her dreams. What was her surprise to find it gone!

She went to the place behind the locker on the counter, where she had discovered it the day before. It was not there; and she immediately began an eager search about the shop.

When Mr. Cave returned from his business with the dog-fish, about a quarter to, two in the afternoon, he found the shop in some confusion, and his wife, extremely exasperated and on her knees behind the counter, routing among his taxidermic material. Her face came up hot and angry over the counter, as the jangling bell announced his return, and she forthwith accused him of "hiding it."

"Hid what?" asked Mr. Cave.

"The crystal!"

At that Mr. Cave, apparently much surprised, rushed to the window. "Isn't it here?" he said. "Great Heavens! What has become of it?"

Just then, Mr. Cave's step-son re-entered the shop from the inner room— he had come home a minute or so before Mr. Cave— and he was blaspheming freely. He was apprenticed to a second-hand furniture dealer down the road, but he had his meals at home, and he was naturally annoyed to find no dinner ready.

But when he heard of the loss of the crystal, he forgot his meal, and his anger was diverted from his mother to his step-father. Their first idea, of course, was that he had hidden it. But Mr. Cave stoutly denied all knowledge of its fate— freely offering his bedabbled affidavit in the matter— and at last was worked up to the point of accusing, first, his wife and then his step-son of having taken it with a view to a private sale. So began an exceedingly acrimonious and emotional discussion, which ended for Mrs. Cave in a peculiar nervous condition midway between hysterics and amuck, and caused the step-son to be half-an-hour late at the furniture establishment in the afternoon. Mr. Cave took refuge from his wife's emotions in the shop.

In the evening the matter was resumed, with less passion and in a judicial spirit, under the presidency of the step-daughter. The supper passed unhappily and culminated in a painful scene. Mr. Cave gave way at last to extreme exasperation, and went out banging the front door violently. The rest of the family, having discussed him with the freedom his absence warranted, hunted the house from garret to cellar, hoping to light upon the crystal.

The next day the two customers called again. They were received by Mrs. Cave almost in tears. It transpired that no one could imagine all that she had stood from Cave at various times in her married pilgrimage... She also gave a garbled account of the disappearance. The clergyman and the Oriental laughed silently at one another, and said it was very extraordinary. As Mrs. Cave seemed disposed to give them the complete history of her life they made to

leave the shop. Thereupon Mrs. Cave, still clinging to hope, asked for the clergyman's address, so that, if she could get anything out of Cave, she might communicate it. The address was duly given, but apparently was afterwards mislaid. Mrs. Cave can remember nothing about it.

In the evening of that day, the Caves seem to have exhausted their emotions, and Mr. Cave, who had been out in the afternoon, supped in a gloomy isolation that contrasted pleasantly with the impassioned controversy of the previous days. For some time matters were very badly strained in the Cave household, but neither crystal nor customer reappeared.

Now without mincing the matter, we must admit that Mr. Cave was a liar. He knew perfectly well where the crystal was. It was in the rooms of Mr. Jacoby Wace, Assistant Demonstrator at St. Catherine's Hospital, Westbourne Street. It stood on the sideboard partially covered by a black velvet cloth, and beside a decanter of American whisky. It is from Mr. Wace, indeed, that the particulars upon which this narrative is based were derived. Cave had taken off the thing to the hospital hidden in the dog-fish sack, and there had pressed the young investigator to keep it for him. Mr. Wace was a little dubious at first. His relationship to Cave was peculiar. He had a taste for singular characters, and he had more than once invited the old man to smoke and drink in his rooms, and to unfold his rather amusing views of life in general and of his wife in particular. Mr. Wace had encountered Mrs. Cave too, on occasions when Mr. Cave was not at home to attend to him. He knew the constant interference to which Cave was subjected, and having weighed the story judicially, he decided to give the crystal a refuge. Mr. Cave promised to explain the reasons for his remarkable affection for the crystal more fully on a later occasion, but he spoke distinctly of seeing visions therein. He called on Mr. Wace the same evening.

He told a complicated story. The crystal he said had come into his possession with other oddments at the forced sale of another curiosity dealer's effects, and not knowing what its value might be, he had ticketed it at ten shillings. It had hung upon his hands at that price for some months, and he was thinking of "reducing the figure," when he made a singular discovery.

At that time his health was very bad— and it must be borne in mind that, throughout all this experience, his physical condition was one of ebb— and he was in considerable distress by reason of the negligence, the positive ill-treatment even, he received from his wife and step-children. His wife was vain, extravagant, unfeeling and had a growing taste for private drinking; his step-daughter was mean and over-reaching; and his step-son had conceived a violent dislike for him, and lost no chance of showing it. The requirements of his business pressed heavily upon him, and Mr. Wace does not think that he

was altogether free from occasional intemperance. He had begun life in a comfortable position, he was a man of fair education, and he suffered, for weeks at a stretch, from melancholia and insomnia. Afraid to disturb his family, he would slip quietly from his wife's side, when his thoughts became intolerable, and wander about the house. And about three o'clock one morning, late in August, chance directed him into the shop.

The dirty little place was impenetrably black except in one spot, where he perceived an unusual glow of light. Approaching this, he discovered it to be the crystal egg, which was standing on the corner of the counter towards the window. A thin ray smote through a crack in the shutters, impinged upon the object, and seemed as it were to fill its entire interior.

It occurred to Mr. Cave that this was not in accordance with the laws of optics as he had known them in his younger days. He could understand the rays being refracted by the crystal and coming to a focus in its interior, but this diffusion jarred with his physical conceptions. He approached the crystal nearly, peering into it and round it, with a transient revival of the scientific curiosity that in his youth had determined his choice of a calling. He was surprised to find the light not steady, but writhing within the substance of the egg, as though that object was a hollow sphere of some luminous vapour. In moving about to get different points of view, he suddenly found that he had come between it and the ray, and that the crystal none the less remained luminous. Greatly astonished, he lifted it out of the light ray and carried it to the darkest part of the shop. It remained bright for some four or five minutes, when it slowly faded and went out. He placed it in the thin streak of daylight, and its luminousness was almost immediately restored.

So far, at least, Mr. Wace was able to verify the remarkable story of Mr. Cave. He has himself repeatedly held this crystal in a ray of light (which had to be of a less diameter than one millimetre). And in a perfect darkness, such as could be produced by velvet wrapping, the crystal did undoubtedly appear very faintly phosphorescent. It would seem, however, that the luminousness was of some exceptional sort, and not equally visible to all eyes; for Mr. Harbinger— whose name will be familiar to the scientific reader in connection with the Pasteur Institute— was quite unable to see any light whatever. And Mr. Wace's own capacity for its appreciation was out of comparison inferior to that of Mr. Cave's. Even with Mr. Cave the power varied very considerably: his vision was most vivid during states of extreme weakness and fatigue.

Now, from the outset this light in the crystal exercised a curious fascination upon Mr. Cave. And it says more for his loneliness of soul than a volume of pathetic writing could do, that he told no human being of his curious observations. He seems to have been living in such an atmosphere of petty

spite that to admit the existence of a pleasure would have been to risk the loss of it. He found that as the dawn advanced, and the amount of diffused light increased, the crystal became to all appearance non-luminous. And for some time he was unable to see anything in it, except at night-time, in dark corners of the shop.

But the use of an old velvet cloth, which he used as a background for a collection of minerals, occurred to him, and by doubling this, and putting it over his head and hands, he was able to get a sight of the luminous movement within the crystal even in the day-time. He was very cautious lest he should be thus discovered by his wife, and he practised this occupation only in the afternoons, while she was asleep upstairs, and then circumspectly in a hollow under the counter. And one day, turning the crystal about in his hands, he saw something. It came and went like a flash, but it gave him the impression that the object had for a moment opened to him the view of a wide and spacious and strange country; and turning it about, he did, just as the light faded, see the same vision again.

Now, it would be tedious and unnecessary to state all the phases of Mr. Cave's discovery from this point. Suffice that the effect was this: the crystal, being peered into at an angle of about 137 degrees from the direction of the illuminating ray, gave a clear and consistent picture of a wide and peculiar countryside. It was not dream-like at all: it produced a definite impression of reality, and the better the light the more real and solid it seemed. It was a moving picture: that is to say, certain objects moved in it, but slowly in an orderly manner like real things, and according as the direction of the lighting and vision changed, the picture changed also. It must, indeed, have been like looking through an oval glass at a view, and turning the glass about to get at different aspects.

Mr. Cave's statements, Mr. Wace assures me, were extremely circumstantial, and entirely free from any of that emotional quality that taints hallucinatory impressions. But it must be remembered that all the efforts of Mr. Wace to see any similar clarity in the faint opalescence of the crystal were wholly unsuccessful, try as he would. The difference in intensity of the impressions received by the two men was very great, and it is quite conceivable that what was a view to Mr. Cave was a mere blurred nebulosity to Mr. Wace.

The view, as Mr. Cave described it, was invariably of an extensive plain, and he seemed always to be looking at it from a considerable height, as if from a tower or a mast. To the east and to the west the plain was bounded at a remote distance by vast reddish cliffs, which reminded him of those he had seen in some picture; but what the picture was Mr. Wace was unable to

ascertain. These cliffs passed north and south— he could tell the points of the compass by the stars that were visible of a night— receding in an almost illimitable perspective and fading into the mists of the distance before they met. He was nearer the eastern set of cliffs, on the occasion of his first vision the sun was rising over them, and black against the sunlight and pale against their shadow appeared a multitude of soaring forms that Mr. Cave regarded as birds. A vast range of buildings spread below him; he seemed to be looking down upon them; and as they approached the blurred and refracted edge of the picture, they became indistinct. There were also trees curious in shape, and in colouring, a deep mossy green and an exquisite grey, beside a wide and shining canal. And something great and brilliantly coloured flew across the picture. But the first time Mr. Cave saw these pictures he saw only in flashes, his hands shook, his head moved, the vision came and went, and grew foggy and indistinct. And at first he had the greatest difficulty in finding the picture again once the direction of it was lost.

His next clear vision, which came about a week after the first, the interval having yielded nothing but tantalising glimpses and some useful experience, showed him the view down the length of the valley. The view was different, but he had a curious persuasion, which his subsequent observations abundantly confirmed, that he was regarding this strange world from exactly the same spot, although he was looking in a different direction. The long facade of the great building, whose roof he had looked down upon before, was now receding in perspective. He recognised the roof. In the front of the facade was a terrace of massive proportions and extraordinary length, and down the middle of the terrace, at certain intervals, stood huge but very graceful masts, bearing small shiny objects which reflected the setting sun. The import of these small objects did not occur to Mr. Cave until some time after, as he was describing the scene to Mr. Wace. The terrace overhung a thicket of the most luxuriant and graceful vegetation, and beyond this was a wide grassy lawn on which certain broad creatures, in form like beetles but enormously larger, reposed. Beyond this again was a richly decorated causeway of pinkish stone; and beyond that, and lined with dense red weeds, and passing up the valley exactly parallel with the distant cliffs, was a broad and mirror-like expanse of water. The air seemed full of squadrons of great birds, manoeuvring in stately curves; and across the river was a multitude of splendid buildings, richly coloured and glittering with metallic tracery and facets, among a forest of moss-like and lichenous trees. And suddenly something flapped repeatedly across the vision, like the fluttering of a jewelled fan or the beating of a wing, and a face, or rather the upper part of a face with very large eyes, came as it were close to his own and as if on the other side of the crystal. Mr. Cave was so

startled and so impressed by the absolute reality of these eyes, that he drew his head back from the crystal to look behind it. He had become so absorbed in watching that he was quite surprised to find himself in the cool darkness of his little shop, with its familiar odour of methyl, mustiness, and decay. And as he blinked about him, the glowing crystal faded, and went out.

Such were the first general impressions of Mr. Cave. The story is curiously direct and circumstantial. From the outset, when the valley first flashed momentarily on his senses, his imagination was strangely affected, and as he began to appreciate the details of the scene he saw, his wonder rose to the point of a passion. He went about his business listless and distraught, thinking only of the time when he should be able to return to his watching. And then a few weeks after his first sight of the valley came the two customers, the stress and excitement of their offer, and the narrow escape of the crystal from sale, as I have already told.

Now, while the thing was Mr. Cave's secret, it remained a mere wonder, a thing to creep to covertly and peep at, as a child might peep upon a forbidden garden. But Mr. Wace has, for a young scientific investigator, a particularly lucid and consecutive habit of mind. Directly the crystal and its story came to him, and he had satisfied himself, by seeing the phosphorescence with his own eyes, that there really was a certain evidence for Mr. Cave's statements, he proceeded to develop the matter systematically. Mr. Cave was only too eager to come and feast his eyes on this wonderland he saw, and he came every night from half-past eight until half-past ten, and sometimes, in Mr. Wace's absence, during the day. On Sunday afternoons, also he came. From the outset Mr. Wace made copious notes, and it was due to his scientific method that the relation between the direction from which the initiating ray entered the crystal and the orientation of the picture were proved. And by covering the crystal in a box perforated only with a small aperture to admit the exciting ray, and by substituting black holland for his buff blinds, he greatly improved the conditions of the observations; so that in a little while they were able to survey the valley in any direction they desired.

So having cleared the way, we may give a brief account of this visionary world within the crystal. The things were in all cases seen by Mr. Cave, and the method of working was invariably for him to watch the crystal and report what he saw, while Mr. Wace (who as a science student had learnt the trick of writing in the dark) wrote a brief note of his report. When the crystal faded, it was put into its box in the proper position and the electric light turned on. Mr. Wace asked questions, and suggested observations to clear up difficult points. Nothing, indeed, could have been less visionary and more matter-of-fact.

The attention of Mr. Cave had been speedily directed to the bird-like creatures he had seen so abundantly present in each of his earlier visions. His first impression was soon corrected, and he considered for a time that they might represent a diurnal species of bat. Then he thought, grotesquely enough, that they might be cherubs. Their heads were round, and curiously human, and it was the eyes of one of them that had so startled him on his second observation. They had broad, silvery wings, not feathered, but glistening almost as brilliantly as new-killed fish and with the same subtle play of colour, and these wings were not built on the plan of a bird-wing or bat, Mr. Wace learned, but supported by curved ribs radiating from the body. (A sort of butterfly wing with curved ribs seems best to express their appearance.) The body was small, but fitted with two bunches of prehensile organs, like long tentacles, immediately under the mouth. Incredible as it appeared to Mr. Wace, the persuasion at last became irresistible, that it was these creatures which owned the great quasi-human buildings and the magnificent garden that made the broad valley so splendid. And Mr. Cave perceived that the buildings, with other peculiarities, had no doors, but that the great circular windows, which opened freely, gave the creatures egress and entrance. They would alight upon their tentacles, fold their wings to a smallness almost rod-like, and hop into the interior. But among them was a multitude of smaller-winged creatures, like great dragon-flies and moths and flying beetles, and across the greensward brilliantly-coloured gigantic ground-beetles crawled lazily to and fro. Moreover, on the causeways and terraces, large-headed creatures similar to the greater winged flies, but wingless, were visible, hopping busily upon their hand-like tangle of tentacles.

Allusion has already been made to the glittering objects upon masts that stood upon the terrace of the nearer building. It dawned upon Mr. Cave, after regarding one of these masts very fixedly on one particularly vivid day, that the glittering object there was a crystal exactly like that into which he peered. And a still more careful scrutiny convinced him that each one in a vista of nearly twenty carried a similar object.

Occasionally one of the large flying creatures would flutter up to one, and folding its wings and coiling a number of its tentacles about the mast, would regard the crystal fixedly for a space— , sometimes for as long as fifteen minutes. And a series of observations, made at the suggestion of Mr. Wace, convinced both watchers that, so far as this visionary world was concerned, the crystal into which they peered actually stood at the summit of the end-most mast on the terrace, and that on one occasion at least one of these inhabitants of this other world had looked into Mr. Cave's face while he was making these observations.

So much for the essential facts of this very singular story. Unless we dismiss it all as the ingenious fabrication of Mr. Wace, we have to believe one of two things: either that Mr. Cave's crystal was in two worlds at once, and that, while it was carried about in one, it remained stationary in the other, which seems altogether absurd; or else that it had some peculiar relation of sympathy with another and exactly similar crystal in this other world, so that what was seen in the interior of the one in this world, was under suitable conditions, visible to an observer in the corresponding crystal in the other world; and vice versa. At present indeed, we do not know of any way in which two crystals could so come en rapport, but nowadays we know enough to understand that the thing is not altogether impossible. This view of the crystals as en rapport was the supposition that occurred to Mr. Wace, and to me at least it seems extremely plausible...

And where was this other world? On this also, the alert intelligence of Mr. Wace speedily threw light. After sunset, the sky darkened rapidly— there was a very brief twilight interval indeed— and the stars shone out. They were recognisably the same as those we see, arranged in the same constellations. Mr. Cave recognised the Bear, the Pleiades, Aldebaran, and Sirius: so that the other world must be somewhere in the solar system, and at the utmost, only a few hundreds of millions of miles from our own. Following up this clue, Mr. Wace learned that the midnight sky was a darker blue even than our midwinter sky, and that the sun seemed a little smaller. And there were two small moons! "Like our moon but smaller, and quite differently marked" one of which moved so rapidly that its motion was clearly visible as one regarded it. These moons were never high in the sky, but vanished as they rose: that is, every time they revolved they were eclipsed because they were so near their primary planet. And all this answers quite completely although, Mr. Cave did not know it, to what must be the condition of things on Mars.

Indeed, it seems an exceedingly plausible conclusion that peering into this crystal Mr. Cave did actually see the planet Mars and its inhabitants. And if that be the case, then the evening star that shone so brilliantly in the sky of that distant vision, was neither more nor less than our own familiar earth.

For a time the Martians— if they were Martians— do not seem to have known of Mr. Cave's inspection. Once or twice one would come to peer, and go away very shortly to some other mast, as though the vision was unsatisfactory. During this time Mr. Cave was able to watch the proceedings of these winged people without being disturbed by their attentions, and although his report is necessarily vague and fragmentary, it is nevertheless very suggestive. Imagine the impression of humanity a Martian observer would get who, after a difficult process of preparation and with considerable fatigue to

the eyes, was able to peer at London from the steeple of St. Martin's Church for stretches, at longest, of four minutes at a time. Mr. Cave was unable to ascertain if the winged Martians were the same as the Martians who hopped about the causeways and terraces, and if the latter could put on wings at will. He several times saw certain clumsy bipeds, dimly suggestive of apes, white and partially translucent, feeding among certain of the lichenous trees, and once some of these fled before one of the hopping, round-headed Martians. The latter caught one in its tentacles, and then the picture faded suddenly and left Mr. Cave most tantalisingly in the dark. On another occasion a vast thing, that Mr. Cave thought at first was some gigantic insect, appeared advancing along the causeway beside the canal with extraordinary rapidity. As this drew nearer Mr. Cave perceived that it was a mechanism of shining metals and of extraordinary complexity. And then, when he looked again, it had passed out of sight.

After a time Mr. Wace aspired to attract the attention of the Martians, and the next time that the strange eyes of one of them appeared close to the crystal Mr. Cave cried out and sprang away, and they immediately turned on the light and began to gesticulate in a manner suggestive of signalling. But when at last Mr. Cave examined the crystal again the Martian had departed.

Thus far these observations had progressed in early November, and then Mr. Cave, feeling that the suspicions of his family about the crystal were allayed, began to take it to and fro with him in order that, as occasion arose in the daytime or night, he might comfort himself with what was fast becoming the most real thing in his existence.

In December Mr. Wace's work in connection with a forthcoming examination became heavy, the sittings were reluctantly suspended for a week, and for ten or eleven days— he is not quite sure which— he saw nothing of Cave. He then grew anxious to resume these investigations, and the stress of his seasonal labours being abated, he went down to Seven Dials. At the corner he noticed a shutter before a bird fancier's window, and then another at a cobbler's. Mr. Cave's shop was closed.

He rapped and the door was opened by the step-son in black. He at once called Mrs. Cave, who was, Mr. Wace could not but observe, in cheap but ample widow's weeds of the most imposing pattern. Without any very great surprise Mr. Wace learnt that Cave was dead and already buried. She was in tears, and her voice was a little thick. She had just returned from Highgate. Her mind seemed occupied with her own prospects and the honourable details of the obsequies, but Mr. Wace was at last able to learn the particulars of Cave's death. He had been found dead in his shop in the early morning, the day after his last visit to Mr. Wace, and the crystal had been clasped in his stone-cold

hands. His face was smiling, said Mrs. Cave, and the velvet cloth from the minerals lay on the floor at his feet. He must have been dead five or six hours when he was found.

This came as a great shock to Wace, and he began to reproach himself bitterly for having neglected the plain symptoms of the old man's ill-health. But his chief thought was of the crystal. He approached that topic in a gingerly manner, because he knew Mrs. Cave's peculiarities. He was dumbfounded to learn that it was sold.

Mrs. Cave's first impulse, directly Cave's body had been taken upstairs, had been to write to the mad clergyman who had offered five pounds for the crystal, informing him of its recovery; but after a violent hunt in which her daughter joined her, they were convinced of the loss of his address. As they were without the means required to mourn and bury Cave in the elaborate style the dignity of an old Seven Dials inhabitant demands, they had appealed to a friendly fellow-tradesman in Great Portland Street. He had very kindly taken over a portion of the stock at a valuation. The valuation was his own and the crystal egg was included in one of the lots. Mr. Wace, after a few suitable consolatory observations, a little off-handedly proffered perhaps, hurried at once to Great Portland Street. But there he learned that the crystal egg had already been sold to a tall, dark man in grey. And there the material facts in this curious, and to me at least very suggestive, story come abruptly to an end. The Great Portland Street dealer did not know who the tall dark man in grey was, nor had he observed him with sufficient attention to describe him minutely. He did not even know which way this person had gone after leaving the shop. For a time Mr. Wace remained in the shop, trying the dealer's patience with hopeless questions, venting his own exasperation. And at last, realising abruptly that the whole thing had passed out of his hands, had vanished like a vision of the night, he returned to his own rooms, a little astonished to find the notes he had made still tangible and visible upon his untidy table.

His annoyance and disappointment were naturally very great. He made a second call (equally ineffectual) upon the Great Portland Street dealer, and he resorted to advertisements in such periodicals as were likely to come into the hands of a bric-a-brac collector. He also wrote letters to *The Daily Chronicle* and *Nature*, but both those periodicals, suspecting a hoax, asked him to reconsider his action before they printed, and he was advised that such a strange story, unfortunately so bare of supporting evidence, might imperil his reputation as an investigator. Moreover, the calls of his proper work were urgent. So that after a month or so, save for an occasional reminder to certain dealers, he had reluctantly to abandon the quest for the crystal egg, and from

that day to this it remains undiscovered. Occasionally however, he tells me, and I can quite believe him, he has bursts of zeal, in which he abandons his more urgent occupation and resumes the search.

Whether or not it will remain lost for ever, with the material and origin of it, are things equally speculative at the present time. If the present purchaser is a collector, one would have expected the enquiries of Mr. Wace to have readied him through the dealers. He has been able to discover Mr. Cave's clergyman and "Oriental— " no other than the Rev. James Parker and the young Prince of Bosso-Kuni in Java. I am obliged to them for certain particulars. The object of the Prince was simply curiosity— and extravagance. He was so eager to buy, because Cave was so oddly reluctant to sell. It is just as possible that the buyer in the second instance was simply a casual purchaser and not a collector at all, and the crystal egg, for all I know, may at the present moment be within a mile of me, decorating a drawing-room or serving as a paper-weight— its remarkable functions all unknown. Indeed, it is partly with the idea of such a possibility that I have thrown this narrative into a form that will give it a chance of being read by the ordinary consumer of fiction.

My own ideas in the matter are practically identical with those of Mr. Wace. I believe the crystal on the mast in Mars and the crystal egg of Mr. Cave's to be in some physical, but at present quite inexplicable, way *en rapport*, and we both believe further that the terrestrial crystal must have been— possibly at some remote date— sent hither from that planet, in order to give the Martians a near view of our affairs. Possibly the fellows to the crystals in the other masts are also on our globe. No theory of hallucination suffices for the facts.

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9: The Cub Reporter

Rex Beach

1877-1949

Collier's 31 Oct 1908

In: *Laughing Bill Hyde And Other Stories*, 1917

WHY HE CHOSE BUFFALO Paul Anderson never knew, unless perhaps it had more newspapers than Bay City, Michigan, and because his ticket expired in the vicinity of Buffalo. For that matter, why he should have given up an easy job as the mate of a tugboat to enter the tortuous paths of journalism the young man did not know, and, lacking the introspective faculty, he did not stop to analyze his motives. So far as he could discover he had felt the call to higher endeavor, and just naturally had heeded it. Such things as practical experience and educational equipment were but empty words to him, for he was young and hopeful, and the world is kind at twenty-one.

He had hoped to enter his chosen field with some financial backing, and to that end, when the desire to try his hand at literature had struck him, he had bought an interest in a smoke-consumer which a fireman on another tugboat had patented. In partnership with the inventor he had installed one of the devices beneath a sawmill boiler as an experiment. Although the thing consumed smoke surprisingly well, it likewise unharnessed such an amazing army of heat-units that it melted the crown-sheet of the boiler; whereupon the sawmill men, being singularly coarse and unimaginative fellows, set upon the patentee and his partner with ash-rakes, draw-bars, and other ordinary, unpatented implements; a lumberjack beat hollowly upon their ribs with a peavy, and that night young Anderson sickened of smoke-consumers, harked anew to the call of journalism, and hiked, arriving in Buffalo with seven dollars and fifty cents to the good.

For seven dollars, counted out in advance, he chartered a furnished room for a week, the same carrying with it a meal at each end of the day, which left in Anderson's possession a superfluity of fifty cents to be spent in any extravagance he might choose.

Next day he bought a copy of each newspaper and, carefully scanning them, selected the one upon which to bestow his reportorial gifts. This done, he weighed anchor and steamed through the town in search of the office. Walking in upon the city editor of *The Intelligencer*, he gazed with benevolent approval upon that busy gentleman's broad back. He liked the place, the office suited him, and he decided to have his desk placed over by the window.

After a time the editor wheeled, displaying a young, smooth, fat face, out of which peered gray-blue eyes with pin-point pupils.

"Well?" he queried.

"Here I am," said Anderson.

"So it appears. What do you want?"

"Work."

"What kind?"

"Newspapering."

"What can you do?"

"Anything."

"Well, well!" cried the editor. "You don't look much like a newspaper man."

"I'm not one— yet. But I'm going to be."

"Where have you worked?"

"Nowhere! You see, I'm really a playwright."

The editor's face showed a bit of interest. "Playwright, eh? Anderson! Anderson!" he mused. "Don't recall the name."

"No," said Paul; "I've never written any plays yet, but I'm going to. That's why I want to sort of begin here and get the hang of this writing game."

A boy entered with some proofs at that moment and tossed them upon the table, distracting the attention of the newspaper man. The latter wheeled back to his work and spoke curtly over his shoulder.

"I'm not running a school of journalism. Good-by."

"Maybe you'd like me to do a little space work—?"

"I'd never like you. Get out. I'm busy."

Anderson retired gracefully, jingling his scanty handful of nickels and dimes, and a half-hour later thrust himself boldly in upon another editor, but with no better result. He made the rounds of all the offices; although invariably rebuffed he became more firmly convinced than ever that journalism was his designated sphere.

That night after dinner he retired to his room with the evening papers, wedged a chair against his bed, and, hoisting his feet upon the wash-stand, absorbed the news of the day. It was ineffably sweet and satisfying to be thus identified with the profession of letters, and it was immeasurably more dignified than "tugging" on the Saginaw River. Once he had schooled himself in the tricks of writing, he decided he would step to higher things than newspaper work, but for the present it was well to ground himself firmly in the rudiments of the craft.

In going through the papers he noted one topic which interested him, a "similar mystery" story on the second page. From what he could gather, he judged that much space had already been given to it; for now, inasmuch as no solution offered, the item was dying slowly, the major portion of each article being devoted to a rehash of similar unsolved mysteries.

Anderson read that the body of the golden-haired girl still lay at the Morgue, unidentified. Bit by bit he pieced together the lean story that she was a suicide and that both the police and the press had failed in their efforts to unearth the least particle of information regarding her. In spite of her remarkable beauty and certain unusual circumstances connected with her death investigation had led nowhere.

On the following day Anderson again walked into the editorial-rooms of *The Intelligencer* and greeted the smooth, fat-faced occupant thereof.

"Anything doing yet?" he inquired.

"Not yet," said the newspaper man, with a trace of annoyance in his voice. As the applicant moved out he halted him at the door with the words: "Oh! Wait!"

Anderson's heart leaped. After all, he thought, perseverance would—

"Not yet, nor soon." The editor smiled broadly, and Paul realized that the humor in those pin-point eyes was rather cruel.

Five other calls he made that day, to be greeted gruffly in every instance except one. One man encouraged him slightly by saying:

"Come back next week; I may have an opening then."

In view of the "pay-as-you-enter" policy in vogue at Anderson's boarding-house he knew there could be no next week for him, therefore he inquired:

"How about a little space work in the meantime? I'm pretty good at that stuff."

"You are?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Did you ever do any?"

"No. But I'm good, just the same."

"Huh!" the editor grunted. "There's no room now, and, come to think of it, you needn't bother to get around next week. I can't break in new men."

That evening young Anderson again repaired to his room with his harvest of daily papers, and again he read them thoroughly. He was by no means discouraged as yet, for his week had just begun—there were still five days of grace, and prime ministers have been made overnight, nations have fallen in five days. Six calls a day for five days, that meant thirty chances for a job. It was a cinch!

Hidden away among the back pages once more he encountered the golden-haired-girl story, and although one paper featured it a bit because of some imaginary clue, the others treated it casually, making public the information that the body still lay at the Morgue, a silent, irritating thing of mystery.

On the third day Paul made his usual round of calls. He made them more quickly now because he was recognized, and was practically thrown out of each editorial sanctum. His serenity remained unruffled, and his confidence undisturbed. Of all the six editors, Burns, of The Intelligencer, treated him worst, adding ridicule to his gruffness, a refinement of cruelty which annoyed the young steamboat man. Anderson clenched his hard-knuckled hand and estimated the distance from editorial ear to point of literary chin, but realized in time that steamboat methods were out of place here in the politer realms of journalism.

Four times more he followed his daily routine, and on Monday morning arose early to avoid his landlady. His week was up, his nickels and dimes were gone, nevertheless he spent the day on his customary rounds. He crept in late at night, blue with the cold and rather dazed at his bad luck; he had eaten nothing since the morning before, and he knew that he dared not show up at the breakfast-table the next morning. For the time being discouragement settled upon him; it settled suddenly like some heavy smothering thing; it robbed him of hope and redoubled his hunger. He awoke at daylight, roused by the sense of his defeat, then tiptoed out while yet the landlady was abed, and spent the day looking for work along the water-front. But winter had tied up the shipping, and he failed, as he likewise failed at sundry employment agencies where he offered himself in any capacity.

At noon he wandered into the park, and, finding a sheltered spot, sunned himself as best he could. He picked up the sheets of a wind-scattered paper and read until the chill December afternoon got into his bones and forced him to his feet. The tale of the unidentified girl at the Morgue recurred to him when he read the announcement that she would be buried two days later in the Potter's Field. Perhaps the girl had starved for lack of work, he reflected. Perhaps hunger and cold had driven her to her death. Certainly those two were to blame for many a tragedy calculated to mystify warmly clad policemen and well-fed reporters.

When he stole, shivering, into his bleak bedroom, late that night, he found a note pinned upon his pillow. Of course the landlady needed her rent— all landladies were in need of money— and of course he would get out in the morning. He was glad she had not turned him out during the day, for this afforded him sanctuary for another night at least. After to-morrow it would be a park bench for his.

He left his valise behind in the morning, rather lamenting the fact that the old lady could not wear the shirts it contained, and hoping that she would realize a sufficient sum from their sale to pay his bill.

It was late afternoon when he commenced his listless tramp toward the newspaper offices. Since Burns had become his pet aversion, he saved him for the last, framing a few farewell remarks befitting the death of hopes like his, and rehearsing an exit speech suitable to mark his departure from the field of letters.

When he finally reached *The Intelligencer* editorial-rooms, Burns rounded on him angrily.

"For the love of Mike! Are you here again?" he demanded.

"I thought you might like to have some space work—"

"By heavens! You're persistent."

"Yes."

"We editors are an unfeeling lot, aren't we?" the fat young man inquired. "No temperament, no appreciation." He laughed noiselessly.

"Give me a job," Anderson cried, his voice breaking huskily. "I'll make good. I'll do anything."

"How long do you intend to keep bothering me?" questioned Burns.

Anderson's cheeks were blue and the backs of his legs were trembling from weakness, but he repeated, stolidly: "Give me a job. I— I won't bother you after that. I'll make good, see if I don't."

"You think well of yourself, don't you?"

"If you thought half as well of me as I do," Paul assured him, "I'd be your star reporter."

"Star hell!" testily cried the editor. "We haven't got such a thing. They don't know they're alive, except on pay-day. Look at this blond girl at the Morgue—they've wasted two weeks on that case." He paused suddenly, then his soft lips spread, showing his sharp, white teeth. Modifying his tone, he continued: "Say, I rather like you, Anderson, you're such a blamed nuisance. You've half convinced me that you're a genius."

The younger man's hunger, which had given up in despair, raised its head and bit into his vitals sharply.

"Maybe I—"

"I've a notion to give you a chance."

"That's all I want," the caller quavered, in a panic. "Just give me a toe-hold, that's all," His voice broke in spite of his effort to hold it steady. Burns wasn't a bad sort, after all; just grouchy and irritable. Perhaps this was merely his way.

Burns continued: "Well, I will give you an assignment, a good assignment, too, and if you cover it I'll put you on permanently. I'll do more than that, I'll pay you what we pay our best man, if you make good. That's fair, isn't it?"

He smiled benignly, and the soon-to-be reporter's wits went capering off in a hysterical stampede. Anderson felt the desire to wring the fellow's hand.

"All that counts in this office is efficiency," the latter went on. "We play no favorites. When a man delivers the goods we boost him; when he fails we fire him. There's no sentiment here, and I hold my job merely because I'm the best man in the shop. Can you go to work to-night?"

"Why— why— yes, sir!"

"Very well. That's the spirit I like. You can take your time on the story, and you needn't come back till you bring it."

"Yes, sir."

"Now pay attention, here it is. About two weeks ago a blond girl committed suicide in a Main Street boarding-house. The body's down at the Morgue now. Find out who she is." He turned back to his desk and began to work.

The hungry youth behind him experienced a sudden sinking at the stomach. All at once he became hopelessly empty and friendless, and he felt his knees urging him to sit down. He next became conscious that the shoulders of Mr. Burns were shaking a bit, as if he had encountered a piece of rare humor. After an instant, when Anderson made no move to go, the man at the desk wheeled about, exposing a bloated countenance purple with suppressed enjoyment.

"What's the matter?" he giggled. "Don't you want the job? I can't tell you any more about the girl; that's all we know. The rest is up to you. You'll find out everything, won't you? Please do, for your own sake and the sake of The Intelligencer. Yes, yes, I'm sure you will, because you're a good newspaper man— you told me so yourself." His appreciation of the jest threatened to strangle him.

"Mr. Burns," began the other, "I— I'm up against it. I guess you don't know it, but I'm hungry. I haven't eaten for three days."

At this the editor became positively apoplectic.

"Oh yes— yes, I do!" He nodded vigorously. "You show it in your face. That's why I went out of my way to help you. He! He! He! Now you run along and get me the girl's name and address while I finish this proof. Then come back and have supper with me at the Press Club." Again he chortled and snickered, whereupon something sullen and fierce awoke in young Anderson. He knew of a way to get food and a bed and a place to work even if it would only last thirty days, for he judged Burns was the kind of man who would yell for the police in case of an assault. Paul would have welcomed the prospect of prison fare, but he reasoned that it would be an incomplete satisfaction merely to mash the pudgy face of Mr. Burns and hear him clamor. What he wanted at this moment was a job; Burns's beating could hold over. This suicide case had baffled the pick of Buffalo's trained reporters; it had foiled the best efforts of her police; nevertheless, this fat-paunched fellow had baited a starving man by

offering him the assignment. It was impossible; it was a cruel joke, and yet—there might be a chance of success. Even while he was debating the point he heard himself say:

"Very well, Mr. Burns. If you want her name I'll get it for you."

He crammed his hat down over his ears and walked out, leaving the astonished editor gazing after him with open mouth.

Anderson's first impulse had been merely to get out of Burns's office, out of sight of that grinning satyr, and never to come back, but before he had reached the street he had decided that it was as well to starve striving as with folded hands. After all, the dead girl had a name.

Instead of leaving the building, he went to the files of the paper and, turning back, uncovered the original story, which he cut out with his pen-knife, folded up, and placed in his pocket. This done, he sought the lobby of a near-by hotel, found a seat near a radiator, and proceeded to read the clipping carefully.

It was a meager story, but it contained facts and was free from the confusion and distortions of the later accounts, which was precisely what he wished to guard against. Late one afternoon, so the story went, the girl had rented a room in a Main Street boarding-house, had eaten supper and retired. At eleven o'clock the next day, when she did not respond to a knock on her door, the room had been broken into and she had been found dead, with an empty morphine-bottle on the bureau. That was all. There were absolutely no clues to the girl's identity, for the closest scrutiny failed to discover a mark on her clothing or any personal articles which could be traced. She had possessed no luggage, save a little hand-satchel or shopping-bag containing a few coins. One fact alone stood out in the whole affair. She had paid for her room with a two-dollar Canadian bill, but this faint clue had been followed with no result. No one knew the girl; she had walked out of nowhere and had disappeared into impenetrable mystery. Those were the facts in the case, and they were sufficiently limited to baffle the best efforts of Buffalo's trained detective force.

It would seem that there can be no human creature so obscure as to have neither relatives, friends, nor acquaintances, and yet this appeared to be the case, for a full description of this girl had been blazoned in the papers of every large city, had been exposed in countless country post-offices, and conveyed to the police of every city of the States and Canada. It was as if the mysterious occupant of the Morgue had been born of the winter wind on that fateful evening two weeks before. The country had been dragged by a net of publicity, that marvelous, fine-meshed fabric from which no living man is small or

shrewd enough to escape, and still the sad, white face at the Morgue continued to smile out from its halo of gold as if in gentle mockery.

For a long time Paul Anderson sat staring into the realms of speculation, his lips white with hunger, his cheeks hollow and feverish from the battle he had waged. His power of exclusion was strong, therefore he lost himself to his surroundings. Finally, however, he roused himself from his abstraction and realized the irony of this situation. He, the weakest, the most inexperienced of all the men who had tried, had been set to solve this mystery, and starvation was to be the fruit of his failure.

He saw that it had begun to snow outside. In the lobby it was warm and bright and vivid with jostling life; the music of a stringed orchestra somewhere back of him was calling well-dressed men and women in to dinner. All of them seemed happy, hopeful, purposeful. He noted, furthermore, that three days without food makes a man cold, even in a warm place, and light-headed, too. The north wind had bitten him cruelly as he crossed the street, and now as he peered out of the plate-glass windows the night seemed to hold other lurking horrors besides. His want was like a burden, and he shuddered weakly, hesitating to venture out where the wind could harry him. It was a great temptation to remain here where there was warmth and laughter and life; nevertheless, he rose and slunk shivering out into the darkness, then laid a course toward the Morgue.

While Anderson trod the snowy streets a slack-jowled editor sat at supper with some friends at the Press Club, eating and drinking heartily, as is the custom of newspaper men let down for a moment from the strain of their work. He had told a story, and his caustic way of telling it had amused his hearers, for each and every one of them remembered the shabby applicant for work, and all of them had wasted baffling hours on the mystery of this girl with the golden hair.

"I guess I put a crimp in him," giggled Mr. Burns. "I gave him a chance to show those talents he recommends so highly."

"The Morgue, on a night like this, is a pretty dismal place for a hungry man," said one of the others. "It's none too cheerful in the daytime."

The others agreed, and Burns wabbled anew in his chair in appreciation of his humor.

Young Anderson had never seen a morgue, and to-night, owing to his condition, his dread of it was child-like. It seemed as if this particular charnel-house harbored some grisly thing which stood between him and food and warmth and hope; the nearer he drew to it the greater grew his dread. A discourteous man, shrunken as if from the chill of the place, was hunched up in front of a glowing stove. He greeted Anderson sourly:

"Out into that courtyard; turn to the left— second door," he directed. "She's in the third compartment."

Anderson lacked courage to ask the fellow to come along, but stumbled out into a snow-filled areaway lighted by a swinging incandescent which danced to the swirling eddies.

Compartment! He supposed bodies were kept upon slabs or tables, or something like that. He had steeled himself to see rows of unspeakable sights, played upon by dripping water, but he found nothing of the sort.

The second door opened into a room which he discovered was colder than the night outside, evidently the result of artificial refrigeration. He was relieved to find the place utterly bare except for a sort of car or truck which ran around the room on a track beneath a row of square doors. These doors evidently opened into the compartments alluded to by the keeper.

Which compartment had the fellow said? Paul abruptly discovered that he was rattled, terribly rattled, and he turned back out of the place. He paused shortly, however, and took hold of himself.

"Now, now!" he said, aloud. "You're a bum reporter, my boy." An instant later he forced himself to jerk open the first door at his hand.

For what seemed a full minute he stared into the cavern, as if petrified, then he closed the door softly. Sweat had started from his every pore. Alone once more in the great room, he stood shivering. "God!" he muttered. This was newspaper training indeed.

He remembered now having read, several days before, about an Italian laborer who had been crushed by a falling column. To one unaccustomed to death in any form that object, head-on in the obscurity of the compartment, had been a trying sight. He began to wonder if it were really cold or stiflingly hot.

The boy ground his teeth and flung open the next door, slamming it hurriedly again to blot out what it exposed. Why didn't they keep them covered? Why didn't they show a card outside? Must he examine every grisly corpse upon the premises?

He stepped to the third door and wrenched it open. He knew the girl at once by her wealth of yellow hair and the beauty of her still, white face. There was no horror here, no ghastly sight to weaken a man's muscles and sicken his stomach; only a tired girl asleep. Anderson felt a great pity as he wheeled the truck opposite the door and reverently drew out the slab on which the body lay. He gazed upon her intently for some time. She was not at all as he had pictured her, and yet there could be no mistake. He took the printed description from his pocket and reread it carefully, comparing it point by point. When he had finished he found that it was a composite word photograph,

vaguely like and yet totally unlike the person it was intended to portray, and so lacking in character that no one knowing the original intimately would have been likely to recognize her from it.

So that was why no word had come in answer to all this newspaper publicity. After all, this case might not be so difficult as it had seemed; for the first time the dispirited youth felt a faint glow of encouragement. He began to formulate a plan.

Hurriedly he fumbled for his note-book, and there, in that house of death, with his paper propped against the wall, he wrote a two-hundred-word description; a description so photographically exact that to this day it is preserved in the Buffalo police archives as a perfect model.

He replaced the body in its resting-place and went out. There was no chill in him now, no stumbling nor weakness of any sort. He had found a starting-point, had uncovered what all those trained newspaper men had missed, and he felt that he had a chance to win.

Twenty minutes later Burns, who had just come in from supper, turned back from his desk with annoyance and challenge in his little, narrow eyes.

"Well?"

"I think I've got her, Mr. Burns."

"Nonsense!"

"Anyhow, I've got a description that her father or her mother or her friends can recognize. The one you and the other papers printed disguised her so that nobody could tell who she was— it might have covered a hundred girls."

Rapidly, and without noting the editor's growing impatience, Paul read the two descriptions, then ran on, breathlessly:

"All we have to do is print ten or twenty thousand of these and mail them out with the morning edition— separate sheets, posters, you understand?— so they can be nailed up in every post-office within two hundred miles. Send some to the police of all the cities, and we'll have a flash in twenty-four hours."

Burns made no comment for a moment. Instead, he looked the young man over angrily from his eager face to his unblacked shoes. His silence, his stare, were eloquent.

"Why? Why not?" Anderson demanded, querulously. "I tell you this description isn't right. It— it's nothing like her, nothing at all."

"Say! I thought I'd seen the last of you," growled the corpulent man."Aren't you on to yourself yet?"

"Do you— mean that your talk this evening don't go?" Paul demanded, quietly. "Do you mean to say you won't even give me the chance you promised?"

"No! I don't mean that. What I said goes, all right, but I told you to identify this girl. I didn't agree to do it. What d'you think this paper is, anyhow? We want stories in this office. We don't care who or what this girl is unless there's a story in her. We're not running a job-print shop nor a mail-order business to identify strayed females. Twenty thousand posters! Bah! And say— don't you know that no two men can write similar descriptions of anybody or anything? What's the difference whether her hair is burnished gold or 'raw gold' or her eyes bluish gray instead of grayish blue? Rats! Beat it!"

"But I tell you—"

"What's her name? Where does she live? What killed her? That's what I want to know. I'd look fine, wouldn't I, circularizing a dead story? Wouldn't that be a laugh on me? No, Mr. Anderson, author, artist, and playwright, I'm getting damned tired of being pestered by you, and you needn't come back here until you bring the goods. Do I make myself plain?"

It was anger which cut short the younger man's reply. On account of petty economy, for fear of ridicule, this editor refused to relieve some withered old woman, some bent and worried old man, who might be, who probably were, waiting, waiting, waiting in some out-of-the-way village. So Anderson reflected. Because there might not be a story in it this girl would go to the Potter's Field and her people would never know. And yet, by Heaven, they would know! Something told him there was a story back of this girl's death, and he swore to get it. With a mighty effort he swallowed his chagrin and, disregarding the insult to himself, replied:

"Very well. I've got you this time."

"Humph!" Burns grunted, viciously.

"I don't know how I'll turn the trick, but I'll turn it." For the second time that evening he left the office with his jaws set stubbornly.

Paul Anderson walked straight to his boarding-house and bearded his landlady. "I've got a job," said he.

"I'm very glad," the lady told him, honestly enough. "I feared you were going to move out."

"Yes!" he repeated. "I've got a job that carries the highest salary on the paper. You remember the yellow-haired girl who killed herself awhile ago?" he asked.

"Indeed I do. Everybody knows about that case."

"Well, it got too tough for the police and the other reporters, so they turned it over to me. It's a bully assignment, and my pay starts when I solve the mystery. Now I'm starved; I wish you'd rustle me some grub."

"But, Mr. Anderson, your bill for this week? You know I get paid in—"

"Tut, tut! You know how newspapers are. They don't pay in advance, and I can't pay you until they pay me. You'll probably have to wait until Saturday, for I'm a little out of practice on detective stuff. But I'll have this thing cleared up by then. You don't appreciate— you can't appreciate— what a corking assignment it is."

Anderson had a peculiarly engaging smile, and five minutes later he was wrecking the pantry of all the edibles his fellow-boarders had overlooked, the while his landlady told him her life's history, wept over the memory of her departed husband, and confessed that she hoped to get out of the boarding-house business some time.

A good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast put the young man in fine fettle, and about ten o'clock he repaired to a certain rooming-house on Main Street, the number of which he obtained from the clipping in his pocket.

A girl answered his ring, but at sight of him she shut the door hurriedly, explaining through the crack:

"Mrs. MacDougal is out and you can't come in."

"But I want to talk to you."

"I'm not allowed to talk to reporters," she declared. "Mrs. MacDougal won't let me."

A slight Scotch accent gave Anderson his cue. "MacDougal is a good Scotch name. I'm Scotch myself, and so are you." He smiled his boarding-house smile, and the girl's eyes twinkled back at him."Didn't she tell you I was coming?"

"Why, no, sir. Aren't you a reporter?"

"I've been told that I'm not. I came to look at a room."

"What room?" the girl asked, quickly. "We haven't any vacant rooms."

"That's queer," Anderson frowned. "I can't be mistaken. I'm sure Mrs. MacDougal said there was one."

The door opened slowly. "Maybe she meant the one on the second floor."

"Precisely." An instant later he was following his guide up-stairs.

Anderson recognized the room at a glance, from its description, but the girl did not mention the tragedy which had occurred therein, so he proceeded to talk terms with her, prolonging his stay as long as possible, meanwhile using his eyes to the best advantage. He invented an elaborate ancestry which he traced backward through the pages of Scottish Chiefs, the only book of the sort he had ever read, and by the time he was ready to leave the girl had thawed out considerably.

"I'll take the room," he told her, "and I'm well pleased to get it. I don't see how such a good one stands vacant in this location."

There was an instant's pause, then his companion confessed: "There's a reason. You'll find it out sooner or later, so I may as well tell you. That's where

the yellow-haired girl you hear so much about killed herself. I hope it won't make any difference to you, Mr.—"

"Gregor. Certainly not. I read about the case. Canadian, wasn't she?"

"Oh yes! There's no doubt of it. She paid her rent with a Canadian bill, and, besides, I noticed her accent. I didn't tell the reporters, however, they're such a fresh lot."

Paul's visit, it appeared, had served to establish one thing, at least, a thing which the trained investigators had not discovered. Canadian money in Buffalo was too common to excite comment, therefore none of them had seen fit to follow out that clue of the two-dollar bill.

"The papers had it that she was some wealthy girl," the former speaker ran on, "but I know better."

"Indeed? How do you know?"

"Her hands! They were good hands, and she used them as if she knew what they were made for."

"Anything else?"

"No. She seemed very sad and didn't say much. Of course I only saw her once."

Anderson questioned the girl at some further length, but discovered nothing of moment, so he left, declaring that he would probably move into the room on the following day.

From the rooming-house he went directly to the Morgue, and for a second time examined the body, confining his attention particularly to the hands. The right one showed nothing upon which to found a theory, save that it was, indeed, a capable hand with smooth skin and well-tended nails; but on examining the left Paul noted a marked peculiarity. Near the ends of the thumb and the first finger the skin was roughened, abrased; there were numerous tiny black spots beneath the skin, which, upon careful scrutiny, he discovered to be microscopic blood-blisters.

For a long time he puzzled over this phenomenon which had escaped all previous observers, but to save him he could invent no explanation for it. He repaired finally to the office of the attendant and asked for the girl's clothes, receiving permission to examine a small bundle.

"Where's the rest?" he demanded.

"That's all she had," said the man.

"No baggage at all?"

"Not a thing but what she stood up in. The coroner has her jewelry and things of that sort."

Anderson searched the contents of the bundle with the utmost care, but found no mark of any sort. The garments, although inexpensive, were

beautifully neat and clean, and they displayed the most marvelous examples of needlework he had ever seen. Among the effects was a plush muff, out of which, as he picked it up, fell a pair of little knitted mittens— or was there a pair? Finding but the one, he shook the muff again, then looked through the other things.

"Where's the other mitten?" he inquired.

"There 'ain't been but the one," the attendant told him.

"Are you sure?"

"See here, do you think I'm trying to hold out a yarn mitten on you? I say there 'ain't been but the one. I was here when she came, and I know."

Discouraged by the paucity of clues which this place offered, Anderson went next to the coroner's office.

The City Hall newspaper squad had desks in this place, but Paul paid no attention to them or to their occupants. He went straight to the wicket and asked for the effects of the dead girl.

It appeared that Burns had told his practical joke broadcast, for the young man heard his name mentioned, and then some one behind him snickered. He paid no attention, however, for the clerk had handed him a small leather bag or purse, together with a morphine-bottle, about the size and shape of an ordinary vaseline-bottle. The bag was cheap and bore no maker's name or mark. Inside of it was a brooch, a ring, a silver chain, and a slip of paper. Stuck to the bottom of the reticule was a small key. Paul came near overlooking the last-named article, for it was well hidden in a fold near the corner. Now a key to an unknown lock is not much to go on at best, therefore he gave his attention to the paper. It was evidently a scrap torn from a sheet of wrapping-paper, and bore these figures in pencil:

9.25
6.25
3.0

While he was reading these figures Paul heard a reporter say, loudly, "Now that I have written the paper, who will take it?"

Another answered, "I will."

"Who are you?" inquired the first voice.

"Hawkshaw, the detective."

Anderson's cheeks flushed, but he returned the bag and its contents without comment and walked out, heedless of the laughter of the six reporters. The injustice of their ridicule burnt him like a branding-iron, for his only offense lay in trying the impossible. These fellows had done their best and

had failed, yet they jeered at him because he had tackled a forlorn hope. They had taken the trail when it was hot and had lost it; now they railed at him when he took it cold.

All that afternoon he tramped the streets, thinking, thinking, until his brain went stale. The only fresh clues he had discovered thus far were the marks on finger and thumb, the fact that the girl was a Canadian, and that she had possessed but one mitten instead of two. This last, for obvious reasons, was too trivial to mean anything, and yet in so obscure a case it could not be ignored. The fact that she was a Canadian helped but little, therefore the best point upon which to hang a line of reasoning seemed to be those black spots on the left hand. But they stumped Anderson absolutely.

He altered his mental approach to the subject and reflected upon the girl's belongings. Taken in their entirety they showed nothing save that the girl was poor, therefore he began mentally to assort them, one by one. First, clothes. They were ordinary clothes; they betrayed nothing. Second, the purse. It was like a million other purses and showed no distinguishing mark, no peculiarity. Third, the jewelry. It was cheap and common, of a sort to be found in any store. Fourth, the morphine-bottle. Paul was forced likewise to dismiss consideration of that. There remained nothing but the scrap of paper, torn from the corner of a large sheet and containing these penciled figures:

9.25
<u>6.25</u>
3.0

It was a simple sum in subtraction, a very simple sum indeed; too simple, Anderson reflected, for any one to reduce to figures unless those figures had been intended for a purpose. He recalled the face at the morgue and vowed that such a girl could have done the sum mentally. Then why the paper? Why had she taken pains to tear off a piece of wrapping-paper, jot down figures so easy to remember, and preserve them in her purse? Why, she did so because she was methodical, something answered. But, his alter ego reasoned, if she had been sufficiently methodical to note a trivial transaction so carefully, she would have been sufficiently methodical to use some better, some more methodical method. She would not have torn off a corner of thick wrapping-paper upon which to keep her books. There was but one answer, memorandum!

All right, memorandum it was, for the time being. Now then, in what business could she have been engaged where she found it necessary to keep memoranda of such inconsiderable sums? Oh, Lord! There were a million! Paul

had been walking on thin ice from the start; now it gave way beneath him, so he abandoned this train of thought and went back once more to the bundle of clothes. Surely there was a clue concealed somewhere among them, if only he could find it. They were poor clothes, and yet, judging by their cut, he fancied the girl had looked exceedingly well in them— nay, even modish. She had evidently spent much time on them, as the beautiful needlework attested. At this point Anderson's mind ran out on to thin ice again, so he reverted to the girl herself for the *n*th time. She was Canadian, her hands were useful, there were tiny blood-blisters on the left thumb and index finger, and the skin was roughened and torn minutely, evidently by some sharp instrument. What instrument? He answered the question almost before he had voiced it. A needle, of course!

Paul stopped in his walk so abruptly that a man poked him in the back with a ladder; but he paid no heed, for his mind was leaping. That thickening of the skin, those tiny scratches, those blood-blisters, those garments without mark of maker, yet so stylish in cut and so carefully made, and furthermore that memorandum:

9.25
6.25
3.0

"Why, she was a dressmaker!" said Anderson, out loud. He went back over his reasoning, but it held good— so good that he would have wagered his own clothes that he was right. Yes, and those figures represented some trifling purchases or commission— for a customer, no doubt.

It followed naturally that she was not a Buffalo dressmaker, else she would have been identified long since; nor was it likely that she came from any city, for her clothes had not given him the impression of being city-made, and, moreover, the publicity given to the case through the press, even allowing for the fact that the printed description had been vague, would have been sure to uncover her identity. No, she was a Canadian country seamstress.

The young man's mind went back a few years to his boyhood on a Michigan farm, where visiting dressmakers used to come and stay by the week to make his mother's clothes. They usually carried a little flat trunk filled with patterns, yard sticks, forms, and other paraphernalia of the trade. Paul remembered that the owners used to buy the cloths and materials at the country stores, and render a strict accounting thereof to his mother. Well, where was the trunk that went with this country dressmaker?

The question of baggage had puzzled him from the start. Had the girl been possessed of a grip or bundle of any kind at the time of her death that question would have been answered. But there was absolutely nothing of the sort in her room. Her complete lack of luggage had made him doubt, at first, that she was an out-of-town visitor; but, following his recent conclusions, he decided now that directly the opposite was true. She had come to Buffalo with nothing but a trunk, otherwise she would have taken her hand-luggage with her to the Main Street rooming-house. It remained to find that trunk.

This problem threatened even greater difficulties than any hitherto, and Paul shivered as the raw Lake wind searched through his clothes. He wondered if it had been as cold as this when the girl arrived in Buffalo. Yes, assuredly. Then why did she go out with only one mitten? His reason told him that the other one had been lost by the police. But the police are careful, as a rule. They had saved every other article found in the girl's possession, even to a brooch and pin and scrap of paper. Probably the girl herself had lost it. But country dressmakers are careful, too; they are not given to losing mittens, especially in cold weather. It was more reasonable to believe that she had mislaid it among her belongings; inasmuch as those belongings, according to Paul's logic, were doubtless contained in her trunk, that was probably where the missing mitten would be found. But, after all, had she really brought a trunk with her?

Like a flash came the recollection of that key stuck to the bottom of the girl's leather purse at the coroner's office. Ten minutes later Paul was back at the City Hall.

For a second time he was greeted with laughter by the reportorial squad; again he paid no heed.

"Why, you saw those things not two hours ago," protested the coroner's clerk, in answer to his inquiry.

"I want to see them again."

"Well, I'm busy. You've had them once, that's enough."

"Friend," said Anderson, quietly, "I want those things and I want them quick. You give them to me or I'll go to the man higher up and get them— and your job along with them."

The fellow obeyed reluctantly. Paul picked the key loose and examined it closely. While he was thus engaged, one of the reporters behind him said:

"Aha! At last he has the key to the mystery."

The general laughter ceased abruptly when the object of this banter thrust the key into his pocket and advanced threateningly toward the speaker, his face white with rage. The latter rose to his feet; he undertook to execute a dignified retreat, but Anderson seized him viciously, flung him back, and pinned him against the wall, crying, furiously:

"You dirty rat! If you open your face to me again, I'll brain you, and that goes for all of this death-watch." He took in the other five men with his reddened eyes. "When you fellows see me coming, hole up. Understand?"

His grip was so fierce, his mouth had such a wicked twist to it, that his victim understood him perfectly and began to grin in a sickly, apologetic fashion. Paul reseated the reporter at his desk with such violence that a chair leg gave way; then he strode out of the building.

For the next few hours Anderson tramped the streets in impotent anger, striving to master himself, for that trifling episode had so upset him that he could not concentrate his mind upon the subject in hand. When he tried to do so his conclusions seemed grotesquely fanciful and farfetched. This delay was all the more annoying because on the morrow the girl was to be buried, and, therefore, the precious hours were slipping away. He tried repeatedly to attain that abstract, subconscious mood in which alone shines the pure light of inductive reasoning.

"Where is that trunk? Where is that trunk? Where is that trunk?" he repeated, tirelessly. Could it be in some other rooming-house? No. If the girl had disappeared from such a place, leaving her trunk behind, the publicity would have uncovered the fact. It might be lying in the baggage-room of some hotel, to be sure; but Paul doubted that, for the same reason. The girl had been poor, too; it was unlikely that she would have gone to a high-priced hotel. Well, he couldn't examine all the baggage in all the cheap hotels of the city— that was evident. Somehow he could not picture that girl in a cheap hotel; she was too fine, too patrician. No, it was more likely that she had left her trunk in some railroad station. This was a long chance, but Paul took it.

The girl had come from Canada, therefore Anderson went to the Grand Trunk Railway depot and asked for the baggage-master. There were other roads, but this seemed the most likely.

A raw-boned Irish baggage-man emerged from the confusion, and of a sudden Paul realized the necessity of even greater tact here than he had used with the Scotch girl, for he had no authority of any sort behind him by virtue of which he could demand so much as a favor.

"Are you a married man?" he inquired, abruptly.

"G'wan! I thought ye wanted a baggage-man," the big fellow replied.

"Don't kid me; this is important."

"Shure, I am, but I don't want any accident insurance. I took a chance and I'm game."

"Have you any daughters?"

"Two of them. But what's it to ye?"

"Suppose one of them disappeared?"

The baggage-man seized Anderson by the shoulder; his eyes dilated; with a catch in his voice he cried:

"Love o' God, speak out! What are ye drivin' at?"

"Nothing has happened to your girls, but—"

"Then what in hell—?"

"Wait! I had to throw a little scare into you so you'd understand what I'm getting at. Suppose one of your girls lay dead and unidentified in the morgue of a strange city and was about to be buried in the Potter's Field. You'd want to know about it, wouldn't you?"

"Are ye daft? Or has something really happened? If not, it's a damn fool question. What d'ye want?"

"Listen! You'd want her to have a decent burial, and you'd want her mother to know how she came to such a pass, wouldn't you?"

The Irishman mopped his brow uncertainly. "I would that."

"Then listen some more." Paul told the man his story, freely, earnestly, but rapidly; he painted the picture of a shy, lonely girl, homeless, hopeless and despondent in a great city, then the picture of two old people waiting in some distant farmhouse, sick at heart and uncertain, seeing their daughter's face in the firelight, hearing her sigh in the night wind. He talked in homely words that left the baggage-man's face grave, then he told how Burns, in a cruel jest, had sent a starving boy out to solve the mystery that had baffled the best detectives. When he had finished his listener cried:

"Shure it was a rotten trick, but why d'ye come here?"

"I want you to go through your baggage-room with me till we find a trunk which this key will fit."

"Come on with ye. I'm blamed if I don't admire yer nerve. Of course ye understand I've no right to let ye in— that's up to the station-master, but he's a grouchy divil." The speaker led Paul into a room piled high with trunks, then summoned two helpers. "We'll move every dam' wan of them till we fit your little key," he declared; then the four men fell to.

A blind search promised to be a job of hours, so Paul walked down the runway between the piles of trunks, using his eyes as he went. At least he could eliminate certain classes of baggage, and thus he might shorten the search; but half-way down the row he called sharply to the smashers:

"Come here, quick!" At his tone they came running. "Look! that one in the bottom row!" he cried. "That's it. Something tells me it is."

On the floor underneath the pile was a little, flat, battered tin trunk, pathetically old-fashioned and out of place among its more stylish neighbors; it was the kind of trunk Paul had seen in his mother's front room on the farm. It was bound about with a bit of rope.

His excitement infected the others, and the three smashers went at the pile, regardless of damage. Anderson's suspense bid fair to choke him; what if this were not the one? he asked himself. But what if it were the right one? What if this key he clutched in his cold palm should fit the lock? Paul pictured what he would see when he lifted the lid: a collection of forms, hangers, patterns, yard-sticks, a tape measure, and somewhere in it a little black yarn mitten. He prayed blindly for courage to withstand disappointment.

"There she is," panted his Irish friend, dragging the object out into the clear. The other men crowded closer. "Come on, lad. What are ye waitin' for?"

Anderson knelt before the little battered trunk and inserted the key. It was the keenest moment he had ever lived. He turned the key; then he was on his feet, cold, calm, his blue eyes glittering.

"Cut those ropes. Quick!" he ordered. "We're right."

The man at his side whipped out a knife and slashed twice.

"Come close, all of you," Paul directed, "and remember everything we find. You may have to testify."

He lifted the lid. On the top of the shallow tray lay a little black yarn mitten, the mate to that one in the city Morgue.

Anderson smiled into the faces of the men at his side. "That's it," he said, simply.

The tall Irishman laid a hand on his shoulder, saying: "Yer all right, boy. Don't get rattled,"

Paul opened the till and found precisely the paraphernalia he had expected: there were forms, hangers, patterns, yard-sticks, and a tape measure. In the compartment beneath were some neatly folded clothes, the needlework of which was fine, and in one corner a bundle of letters which Anderson examined with trembling fingers. They were addressed to "Miss Mabel Wilkes, Highland, Ontario, Canada, Care of Captain Wilkes."

The amateur detective replaced the letters carefully; he closed and locked the trunk; then he thanked his companions.

"If I had a dollar in the world," said he, "I'd ask you boys to have a drink, but I'm broke." Then he began to laugh foolishly, hysterically, until the raw-boned man clapped him on the back again.

"Straighten up, lad. Ye've been strained a bit too hard. I'll telephone for the cops."

In an instant Paul was himself. "You'll do nothing of the sort," he cried. "Why, man, you'll spoil the whole thing. I've worked this out alone, and if the police hear of it they'll notify all the papers and I'll have no story. Burns won't give me that job, and I'll be hungry again."

"True! I forgot that fat-headed divil of an editor. Well, you say the word and nobody won't know nothin' from us. Hey, boys?"

"Sure not," the other men agreed. This lad was one of their kind; he was up against it and fighting for his own, therefore they knew how to sympathize. But Paul had been seized with terror lest his story might get away from him, therefore he bade them a hasty good-by and sped up-town. His feet could not carry him swiftly enough.

Burns greeted him sourly when he burst into the editorial sanctum. It was not yet twenty-four hours since he had sent this fellow away with instructions not to return.

"Are you back again?" he snarled. "I heard about your assaulting Wells down at the City Hall. Don't try it on me or I'll have you pinched."

Paul laughed lightly. "I don't have to fight for my rights any more."

"Indeed! What are you grinning about? Have you found who that girl is?"

"I have."

"*What?*" Burns's jaw dropped limply; he leaned forward in his chair.

"Yes, sir! I've identified her."

The fat man was at first incredulous, then suspicious. "Don't try any tricks on me," he cried, warningly. "Don't try to put anything over—"

"Her name is Mabel Wilkes. She is the daughter of Captain Wilkes, of Highland, Ontario. She was a country dressmaker and lived with her people at that place. Her trunk is down at the Grand Trunk depot with the rest of her clothes in it, together with the mate to the mitten she had when she killed herself. I went through the trunk with the baggage-master, name Corrigan. Here's the key which I got from her purse at the coroner's office."

Burns fixed his round eyes upon the key, then he shifted them slowly to Anderson's face. "Why— why— this is amazing! I— I—" He cleared his throat nervously. "How did you discover all this? Who told you?"

"Nobody told me. I reasoned it out."

"But how— Good Lord! Am I dreaming?"

"I'm a good newspaper man. I've been telling you that every day. Maybe you'll believe me now."

Burns made no reply. Instead, he pushed a button and Wells, of the City Hall squad, entered, pausing abruptly at sight of Anderson. Giving the latter no time for words, Mr. Burns issued his instructions. On the instant he was the trained newspaper man again, cheating the clock dial and trimming minutes: his words were sharp and decisive.

"That suicide story has broken big and we've got a scoop. Anderson has identified her. Take the first G.T. train for Highland, Ontario, and find her

father, Captain Wilkes. Wire me a full story about the girl Mabel, private life, history, everything. Take plenty of space. Have it in by midnight."

Wells's eyes were round, too; they were glued upon Paul with a hypnotic stare, but he managed to answer, "Yes, sir!" He was no longer grinning.

"Now, Anderson," the editor snapped, "get down-stairs and see if you can write the story. Pile it on thick— it's a corker."

"Very good, sir, but I'd like a little money," that elated youth demanded, boldly. "Just advance me fifty, will you? Remember I'm on top salary."

Burns made a wry face. "I'll send a check down to you," he promised, "but get at that story and make it a good one or I'll fire you tonight."

Anderson got. He found a desk and began to write feverishly. A half-hour later he read what he had written and tore it up. Another half-hour and he repeated the performance. Three times he wrote the tale and destroyed it, then paused, realizing blankly that as a newspaper story it was impossible. Every atom of interest surrounding the suicide of the girl grew out of his own efforts to solve the mystery. Nothing had happened, no new clues had been uncovered, no one had been implicated in the girl's death, there was no crime. It was a tale of Paul Anderson's deductions, nothing more, and it had no newspaper value. He found he had written about himself instead of about the girl.

He began again, this time laboriously eliminating himself, and when he had finished his story it was perhaps the poorest journalistic effort ever written.

Upon lagging feet he bore the copy to Burns's office. But the editor gave him no time for explanation, demanding, fiercely:

"Where's that check I sent you?"

"Here it is." The youth handed it to him. "Make a mistake?"

"I certainly did." Burns tore up the check before saying, "Now you get out, you bum, and stay out, or take the consequences."

"Get out? What for?"

"You know what for." Burns was quivering with rage. "You ran a good bluff and you nearly put it over; but I don't want to advertise myself as a jackass, so I shan't have you pinched unless you come back."

"Come back? I intend to stay. What's the matter?"

"I had an idea you were four-flushing," stormed the editor, "so I went down to the G.T. depot myself. There's no trunk of the sort there; Corrigan never saw you or anybody like you. Say, why didn't you walk out when you got that check? What made you come back?"

Anderson began to laugh softly. "Good old Corrigan! He's all right, isn't he? Well, he gets half of that check when you rewrite it, if I don't laugh myself to death before I get to the bank."

"What d'you mean?" Burns was impressed by the other's confidence.

"Nothing, except that I've found one square man in this village. One square guy is a pretty big percentage in a town the size of Buffalo. Corrigan wouldn't let you see the depot if I wasn't along. Put on your coat and come with me—yes, and bring a couple of hired men if it will make you feel any better."

At the depot he called the baggage-master to him, and said:

"Mr. Corrigan, this is Mr. Burns, the city editor of *The Intelligencer*."

"That's what he told me," grinned the Irishman, utterly ignoring the young editor; "but you didn't give him no references, and I wouldn't take a chance."

Burns maintained a dignified silence; he said little even when the contents of the trunk were displayed to him. Nor did he open his mouth on the way back to the office. But when he was seated at his desk and had read Anderson's copy he spoke.

"This is the rottenest story ever turned in at this office," said he.

"I know it is," Paul agreed, frankly, then explained his difficulty in writing it.

"I'll do it myself," Burns told him. "Now, you go home and report to-morrow."

A very tired but a very happy young man routed out the landlady of a cheap boarding-house that night and hugged her like a bear, explaining joyously that he had done a great big thing. He waltzed her down the hall and back, while she clutched wildly at her flapping flannel wrapper and besought him to think of her other boarders. He waltzed her out of her bedroom slippers, gave her a smacking big kiss on her wrinkled cheek, then left her, breathless and scandalized, but all aflutter.

The city had read the story when Anderson awoke the next morning, for *The Intelligencer* had made a clean "beat," and Burns had played up the story tremendously, hence it was with jumping pulses that Paul scanned the front page of that journal. The further he read, however, the greater grew his indignation.

The history of Mabel Wilkes, under the magic touch of Burns, had, to be sure, become a wonderful, tragic story; but nowhere in it was mention made of Paul Anderson. In the patient and ingenious solution of the mystery of the girl's identity no credit was given to him. The cleverness and the perseverance of *The Buffalo Intelligencer* was exploited, its able reportorial staff was praised, its editorial shrewdness extolled, but that was all. When he had concluded reading the article Anderson realized that it was no more than a boost for the city editor, who it was plain to be seen, had uncovered the story bit by bit, greatly to the confusion of the police and the detective bureau.

It astounded as well as angered Paul to realize how cleverly Burns had covered him up, therefore the sense of injustice was strong in him when he

entered the office. His enemy recognized his mood, and seemed to gloat over it.

"That was good work you did," he purred, "and I'll keep you on as long as you show ability. Of course you can't write yet, so I'll let you cover real-estate transactions and the market. I'll send for you when you're needed."

Anderson went back to his desk in silent rage. Real estate! Burns evidently intended to hold him down. His gloomy meditations were somewhat lightened by the congratulations of his fellow-reporters, who rather timidly ventured to introduce themselves. They understood the facts and they voiced a similar indignation to his. Burns had played him a rotten trick, they agreed. Not content with robbing his new reporter of the recognition which was justly his, the fellow was evidently determined to vent his spite in other ways. Well, that was like Burns. They voiced the opinion that Anderson would have a tough job getting through interference of the kind that their editor would throw in his way.

Hour after hour Paul sat around the office nursing his disappointment, waiting for Burns to send him out. About two o'clock Wells hurried into the office, bringing with him the afternoon papers still wet from the press. In his eyes was an unwonted sparkle. He crossed directly to Anderson and thrust out his palm.

"Old man, I want to shake with you," said he. "And I want to apologize for being a rotter."

Paul met him half-way, and the fellow went on:

"Burns gave us the wrong tip on you—said you were a joke—that's why we joshed you. But you showed us up, and I'm glad you did."

"Why— thank you!" stammered the new reporter, upon whom this manly apology had a strong effect. "It— it was more luck than anything."

"Luck nothing! You're a genius, and it's a dirty shame the way the boss tried to steal your credit. However, it seems he overreached himself." Wells began to laugh.

"*Tried* to steal it! Good Lord! he did steal it! How do you mean he overreached himself?"

"Haven't you seen the afternoon papers?"

"No."

"Well! Read 'em!" Mr. Wells spread his papers out before Paul, whose astonished eyes took in for a second time the story of the Wilkes suicide. But what a story!

He read his own name in big, black type; he read head-lines that told of a starving boy sent out on a hopeless assignment as a cruel joke; he read the story as it had really occurred, only told in the third person by an author who

was neither ashamed nor afraid to give credit where it was due. The egotistical pretense of *The Buffalo Intelligencer* was torn to shreds, and ridicule was heaped upon its editor. Paul read nervously, breathlessly, until Wells interrupted him.

"I'm to blame for this," said he. "I couldn't stand for such a crooked deal. When I got in this morning and saw what that fat imbecile had done to you I tipped the true facts off to the others— all of the facts I knew. They got the rest from Corrigan, down at the Grand Trunk depot. Of course this means my job, if the old man finds it out; but I don't give a damn."

As yet Anderson was too dazed to grasp what had happened to him, but the other continued:

"The boys have had it in for Burns, on the quiet, for months, and now I guess they're even."

"I— I don't know how to thank you," stammered Anderson.

"Don't try. You're a born reporter, and the other papers will give you a job even if the baby hippo in yonder fires you."

A boy touched Paul on the arm with the announcement, "Mr. Burns wants to see you."

"Oho!" cried Wells. "He's got the bad news. Gee! I'd like to hear what he says. I'll bet he's biting splinters out of his desk. Let me know what comes off, will you?"

When Anderson entered the office of his editor he was met by a white-faced man whose rage had him so by the throat that speech for a moment was impossible. Beneath Mr. Burns's feet, and strewn broadcast about the room, were the crumpled sheets of the afternoon papers. Burns glared at the newcomer for a moment, then he extended a shaking finger, crying, furiously:

"You did this!"

"Did what?"

"You put up this job. You made a fool of me!"

"No, sir! I did not. Your parents saw to that."

"Don't tell me you didn't, you— you damned ungrateful—" Burns seemed about to assault his reporter, but restrained himself. "You're fired! Do you understand? Fired— discharged."

"Say, Burns—"

"Not a word. I'm done with you. I—"

"Just a minute," young Anderson cried, in a tone that stilled the other. "I'm fired, am I, for something I didn't do? Very well! I'm glad of it, for now you can't stand in my way. You tried to double-cross me and failed. You robbed me of what was mine and got caught at it. You're a big man, in your way, Burns, but some day people will tell you that the biggest thing you ever did was to fire

Paul Anderson. That's how small you'll be, and that's how big I'm going to grow. You've 'welched' on your own word; but there's one thing you gave me that you can't take away, and that's the knowledge that I'm a newspaper man and a good one. Now just one thing more: I'm broke today, but I'm going to lick you as soon as I save up enough for the fine."

With studied insolence the speaker put on his hat, slammed the door behind him, and walked out of *The Intelligencer* office, leaving the apoplectic editor thereof secure in the breathless knowledge that for once in his life he had heard the truth spoken. Mr. Burns wondered how long it would take that young bully to save up ten dollars and costs.

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10: The Black Coat

John Galsworthy

1867-1933

The Saturday Evening Post, 11 Sep 1926

THE OLD GENERAL, émigré and member of the old time Russian nobility, who had commanded a division in the Great War, sat on a crazy chair before a feeble fire in his garret in the city of Prague. His thin, high shouldered form was crouched forward and his bluish hands extended to what there was of flame, for he was seventy, and his blood thin and cold. It had rained on his way back from the Russian friends whom every Sunday evening he went to see, and his coat was carefully spread out to dry, over the back of his one other crazy chair, before the poor conflagration in the grate.

It was the general's custom to light a fire on Sunday evenings when it was at all financially possible; the ceremony prolonged, with its apology for warmth, the three hours a week during which he wore the clothes of a gentleman, in the society of gentlefolk. And he would sit before it in his one suit— very old now and white about the seams, but still modish in essence— smoking what of tobacco he had brought away with him and thinking of the past.

The present he never thought of at such times; it did not bear the process, for his present, day by day, consisted in walking before a dustman's cart, ringing a hell to announce its coming to the inhabitants of the street; and for this he received so little that he was compelled also, to keep soul within body, to wash omnibuses in a garage nearby. These avocations provided him with the rent of his garret and two meals a day; and while engaged in them he wore dingy overalls which had once been blue, and took his two meals at a workman's café.

On Sundays he stayed in bed till six o'clock, when he would rise, wash and shave himself with slow and meticulous care; then, donning his old black coat and carefully creased trousers, would go forth and walk the two miles to the flat of his friends, where he was sure of a meal and a little wine or vodka, and could talk of the old Russia.

This is what he had been doing for fifty-two weeks in the year during the past five years, and what he counted on doing for the rest of his natural life.

How he gained his living was perfectly well known to his friends, but since it was never spoken of by him, none of them would have considered it decent to mention it. Indeed, on those Sunday evenings there was a tacit agreement not to speak of one's misfortunes. Old Russia, politics and the spirit of man held the field, together with such other topics as were suitable to a black coat. And not infrequently there would rise, above the ground bass droning through

the lives of emigres, the gallantry of laughter. His friends themselves, and all their guests, had the dark cupboards of the outcast and the fallen and gleaming skeletons within them; and so it was essential that neither by word, by manner nor by dress should the existence of an evil fate be admitted.

You might talk of restoration, of redress, of revenge, but of daily need and pressure— no! And in truth there was not much talk of the three R's; rather did conversation ape normality. And none was so normal as the old general. His was a single mind, a simple face intensely stamped with wrinkles, like the wrigglings in the texture of old pale leather which is stained here and there a little darker by chance misusage. He had folds in the lids over his rimmed brown eyes, a gray mustache clung close round the corners of his bloodless lips, and gray hair grew fairly low still on his square forehead. High-shouldered, he would stand with his head politely inclined, taking in the talk, just as now, before his meager fire, he seemed taking in the purr and flutter of the flames.

After such evenings of talk, indeed, his memory would step with a sort of busy idleness into the past, as might a person in a garden of familiar flowers and trees; and, with the saving instinct of memory, would choose the grateful experiences of a life which, like most soldiers' lives, had marked a great deal of time and been feverishly active in the intervals. The Czar's stamp was on his soul; for, after a certain age, no matter what the cataclysm, there can be no real change in the souls of men.

The general might ring his dustman's bell and wash his casual omnibuses and eat the fare of workmen, but all such daily efforts were as a dream of dismal quality. Only in his black coat, as it were, was he awake. It could be said with truth that all the life he now lived was passed on Sunday evenings between the hours of six and midnight.

And now, with the smoke of his friend's cigar— for he always brought one away with him; no great shakes, but still a cigar— to lull reality and awaken the past, he smiled faintly, as might some old cat reflecting on a night out, and with all the Russian soul of him savored the moment so paradoxically severed from the present. To go to his lean bed on Sunday nights was ever the last thing he wished to do, and he would put it off and off until the fire was black, and often fall asleep there and wake up in the small hours, shivering.

He had so much that was pleasant in the past to think of every Sunday evening, after those hours spent in his black coat among his own kind had enlivened the soul within him, it was no wonder that he prolonged that séance to the last gasp of warmth.

Tonight he was particularly absent from the present, for a young girl had talked to him who reminded him of an affair he had had in 1880, when he was in garrison in the Don Cossack country. Her name he had forgotten, but not the

kisses she had given him in return for nothing but his own; nor the soft, quizzical and confiding expression on her rose-leaf-colored, rather flat-nosed face, nor her eyes like forget-me-nots.

The night his regiment got its orders and he left her— what a night! The fruit trees white with blossom, someone singing, and the moon hanging low on the far side of the wide river. Heh-heh! The Russian land— the wide, the calm sweet-scented Russian land! And the history that centered round that river, of the Zaporogians— he used to know it well, with his passion for military history, like that of most young men. A scent of nettles, of burdock, of the leaves on young birch trees, seemed mysteriously, conveyed to him in his garret, and he could see lilacs— lilacs and acacias, flowering in front of flat low houses; and the green cupolas of churches, away in the dips of the plain, and the turned earth black. Holy Russia! Ah, and that mare he had of the hook-nosed gypsy at Yekaterinoslaff— he had never seen the equal of her black shining coat— what a jewel of a mare!

The cigar burned his lips and he threw the tiny stump into the ashes. That fire was going out— damp wood. But he had a little petrol from the garage in an old medicine bottle. He would cheer the wood up. His coat wasn't dry yet— a heavy rain tonight. He got the bottle and sparingly dripped its contents on the smoldering wood; his hand shook nowadays, and he spilled a little. Then he sat down again, and the Burg clock struck twelve. Little flames were creeping out now, little memories creeping to him from them. How those Japanese had fought! And how his men went over the ridge the day he got his cross. A wall— a Russian wall— great fellows! Lead us, little father, we will take the wood! And he had led them. Two bullets through his thigh that day, and a wipe on the left shoulder— that was a life!

The crazy chair creaked and he sidled back in it; if one leaned forward, the old chair might break, and that wouldn't do. No chair to sit on then. A cat's weight would break down that on which his coat was spread. And he was drowsy now. He would dream nicely, with that fine blaze. A great evening... The young girl had talked— talked— a pretty little hand to kiss! God bless all warmth!... And the general, in his crazy chair, slept, while the fire crept forward on the trickled petrol. From the streets below, too narrow for any car, came up no sound, and through the un-curtained window the stars were bright. Rain must have ceased, frost must be coming. And there was silence in the room, for the general could not snore; his chin was pressed too hard against his chest. He slept like a traveler who has made a long journey. And in the Elysian fields of his past he still walked in his dreams, and saw the flowering, and the flow of waters, the birds and the maidens and the beasts inhabiting.

Two hours passed and he woke up with a sneeze. Something was tickling his nose. Save for starshine it was dark— the fire out. He rose and groped for his matches and a bit of candle. He must be up in time to ring his bell before the dust cart; and, neatly folding his precious trousers, he crept under his two blankets, wrinkling his nose, full of a nasty bitter smell.

A soldier's habit of waking when the world rang its silent alarm at seven o'clock. Cold! A film of ice had gathered on the water in his cracked ewer. But to precede a dust cart one need not wash too carefully. He had finished and was ready to go forth, when he remembered his black coat. One must fold and put it away with the camphor and dried lavender in the old trunk. He took it hastily from the back of the crazy chair, and his heart stood still. What was this? A great piece of it in the middle of the back, just where the tails were set on, crumbled in his hands— scorched— scorched to tinder! The wreck dangled in his grip like a corpse from a gibbet. His coat his old black coat! Ruined past repair. He stood there quite motionless. It meant— what did it mean? And suddenly, down the leathery yellow of his cheeks, two tears rolled slowly. His old coat, his one coat! In all the weeks of all these years he had never been able to buy a garment, never been able to put by a single stiver. And, dropping the ruined coat, as one might drop the hand of a friend who has played one a dirty trick, he staggered from the room and down the stairs. The smell— that bitter smell! The smell of scorching gone stale!

In front of the dust cart, in his dingy jeans, ringing his bell, he walked through the streets of the old city like a man in a bad dream. In the café he ate his bit of bread and sausage, drank his poor coffee, smoked his one cigarette. His mind refused to dwell on his misfortune. Only when washing an omnibus that evening in the garage he stopped suddenly, as if choked. The smell of the petrol had caught him by the throat— petrol, that had been the ruin of his coat.

So passed that week, and Sunday came. He did not get up at all, but turned his face to the wall instead. He tried his best, but the past would not come to him. It needed the better food, the warming of the little wine, the talk, the scent of tobacco, the sight of friendly faces. And, holding his gray head tight in his hands, he ground his teeth. For only then he realized that he was no longer alive; that all his soul had been in those few Sunday-evening hours, when, within the shelter of his black coat, he refuged in the past. Another, and another week! His friends were all so poor. A soldier of old Russia— a general— wellborn— he made no sign to them; he could not beg and he did not complain. But he had ceased to live, and he knew it, having no longer any past to live for. And something Russian in his soul— something

uncompromising and extreme, something which refused to blink fact and went with hand outstretched to meet fate— hardened and grew within him.

The rest is a paragraph from a journal:

The body of an old gray-haired man was taken from the river this morning. The indications point to suicide, and the cast of features would suggest that another Russian émigré has taken fate into his own hands. The body was clothed in trousers, shirt and waistcoat of worn but decent quality; it had no coat.

———————

11: The Landlord of "The Love-a-Duck"

Stacy Aumonier

1877-1928

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I FORGET the name of the wag in our town who first called him Mr. Seldom Right, but the name caught on. His proper name was James Selden Wright, and the inference of this obvious misnomer was too good to drop. James was invariably wrong, but so lavishly, outrageously, magnificently wrong that he invariably carried the thing through with flying colours. He was a kind of Tartarin of Tibbelsford, which was the name of the town.

Everything about Mr. Seldom Right was big, impressive, expansive. He himself was an enormous person, with fat, puffy cheeks with no determinate line between them and his innumerable chins. His large grey eyes with their tiny pupils seemed to embrace the whole universe in a glance. Upon his pendulous front there dangled thick gold chains with signets and seals like miniature flat-irons. His fingers were ribbed with gold bands like curtain-rings. His wife was big; his daughter was big; the great shire horses which worked on his adjoining farm seemed quite normal creatures in this Gargantuan scheme of things.

Above all, "The Love-a-duck" was big. It appeared to dominate the town. It was built at the top of the hill, with great rambling corridors, bars, coffee-rooms, dilapidated ball-rooms, staircases of creaking deal, bedrooms where a four-post bed was difficult to find, a cobbled courtyard with a covered entrance drive where two brewer's drays could have driven through abreast. There was no social function, no town council, no committee of importance that was not driven to meet at "The Love-a-duck." But the biggest thing in Tibbelsford was the voice of the landlord. At night amidst the glittering taps and tankards he would "preside." By this you must understand that the word be taken liberally. He was no ordinary potman to hand mugs of ale across the bar to thirsty carters, or nips of gin to thin-lipped clerks. He would not appear till the evening was well advanced, and then he would stroll in and lean against the bar, his sleepy eyes adjusting the various phenomena of this perspective to a comfortable focus.

And then the old cronies and characters of Tibbelsford would touch their hats and say:

" 'Evening, Mr. Wright!"

And he would nod gravely, like an Emperor receiving the fealty of his serfs. And a stranger might whisper:

"Who is this fat old guy?"

And the answer would be "H'sh!" for the eyes of Mr. Seldom Right missed nothing. Bumptious strangers were treated with complete indifference. If they addressed him, he looked right through them, and breathed heavily. But for the cronies and characters there was a finely-adjusted scale of treatment, a subtle undercurrent of masonry. To get into favour with Mr. Seldom Right one had to work one's way up, and any bad mistake would land one back among the strangers. In which case one would be served fairly and squarely, but there the matter would end. For it should be stated at this point that everything about "The Love-a-duck" was good in quality, and lavish in quantity, and the rooms, in spite of their great size, were always spotlessly clean.

Having carefully considered the relative values of this human panorama, the landlord would single out some individual fortunate enough to catch his momentary favour, and in a voice which seemed to make the glasses tremble and the little Chelsea figures on the high mantelshelf gasp with surprise, he would exclaim:

"Well, Mr. Topsmith, and how are we? Right on the top o' life? Full of beans, bone, blood and benevolence, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

And the laugh would clatter among the tankards, twist the gas-bracket, go rolling down the corridor, and make the dogs bark in the kennels beyond the stables. And Mr. Topsmith would naturally blush, and spill his beer, and say:

"Oh, thank you, sir, nothin' to grumble about; pretty good goin' altogether."

"That's right! that's *right*!"

There were plenty of waitresses and attendants at "The Love-a-duck," but however busy the bars might be, the landlord himself always dined with his wife and daughter, at seven-thirty precisely, in the oblong parlour at the back of the saloon bar. And they dined simply and prodigiously. A large steaming leg of mutton would be carried in, and in twenty minutes' time would return a forlorn white fragment of bone. Great dishes of fried potatoes, cabbages, and marrow, would all vanish. A Stilton cheese would come back like an over-explored ruin of some ancient Assyrian town. And Mine Host would mellow these simple delicacies with three or four tankards of old ale. Occasionally some of the cronies and characters were invited to join the repast, but whoever was there, the shouts and laughter of the landlord rang out above everything, only seconded by the breezy giggles of Mrs. Wright, whose voice would be constantly heard exclaiming:

"Oh, Jim, you are a fule!"

It was when the dinner was finished that the landlord emerged into the president. He produced a long churchwarden and ambled hither and thither, with a pompous, benevolent, consciously proprietary air. The somewhat stilted

formality of his first appearance expanded into a genial but autocratic courtliness. He was an Edwardian of Edwardians. He would be surprisingly gracious, tactful and charming, and he also had that Hanoverian faculty of seeing right through one— a perfectly crushing mannerism.

By slow degrees he would gently shepherd his favourite flock around the fire in the large bar-parlour, decorated with stags' heads, pewter and old Chelsea. Then he would settle himself in the corner of the inglenook by the right side of the fire. Perhaps at this time I may be allowed to enumerate a few of the unbreakable rules which the novice had to learn by degrees. They were as follows:

You must always address the landlord as "sir."

You must never interrupt him in the course of a story.

You must never appear to disbelieve him.

You must never tell a bigger lie than he has just told.

If he offers you a drink you must accept it.

You must never, under any circumstances, offer to stand him a drink in return.

You may ask his opinion about anything, but never any question about his personal affairs.

You may disagree with him, but you must not let him think that you're not taking him seriously.

You must not get drunk.

These were the broad, abstract rules. There were other bye-laws and covenants allowing for variable degrees of interpretation. That, for instance, which governed the improper story. A story could be suggestive but must never be flagrantly vulgar or profane. Also one might have had enough to drink to make one garrulous, but not enough to be boisterous, or maudlin, or even over-familiar.

I have stated that the quality of fare supplied at "The Love-a-duck" was excellent; and so it was. Beyond that, however, our landlord had his own special reserves. There was a little closet just off the central bar where on occasions he would suddenly disappear, and when in the humour produce some special bottle of old port or liqueur. He would come toddling with it back to his seat and exclaim:

"Gentlemen, this is the birthday of Her Imperial Highness the Princess Eulalie of Spain. I must ask you to drink her good health and prosperity!"

And the bar, who had never heard of the Princess Eulalie of Spain, would naturally do so with acclamation.

Over the little glasses he would tell most impressive and incredible stories. He had hunted lions with the King of Abyssinia. He had dined with the Czar of

Russia. He had been a drummer-boy during the North and South war in America. He had travelled all over Africa, Spain, India, China and Japan. There was no crowned head in either of the hemispheres with whom he was not familiar. He knew everything there was to know about diamonds, oil, finance, horses, politics, Eastern religions, ratting, dogs, geology, women, political economy, tobacco, corn or rubber. He was a prolific talker, but he did not object to listening, and he enjoyed an argument. In every way he was a difficult man to place. Perhaps in thinking of him one was apt not to make due allowance for the rather drab background against which his personality stood out so vividly. One must first visualise the company of "The Love-a-duck."

There was old Hargreaves, the local estate agent: a snuffy, gingery, pinched old ruffian, with a pretty bar-side manner, an infinite capacity for listening politely; one whose nature had been completely bowdlerised by years of showing unlikely tenants over empty houses, and keeping cheerful in draughty passages. There was Mr. Bean, the corn-merchant, with a polished red-blue face and no voice. He would sit leaning forward on a thin gold-knobbed cane, and as the evening advanced he seemed to melt into one vast ingratiating smile. One dreaded every moment that the stick would give way and that he would fall forward on his face. There was an argumentative chemist, whose name I have forgotten; he was a keen-faced man, and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles which made him look much cleverer than he really was. There was old Phene Sparfitt. Nobody knew how he lived. He was very old, much too old to be allowed out at night, but quite the most regular and persistent customer. He drank quantities of gin and water, his lower lip was always moist, and he professed an intimate knowledge of the life of birds. Dick Toom, the owner of the local livery-stables, was a spasmodic visitor. He generally came accompanied by several horsey-looking gentlemen. He always talked breezily about some distressing illness he was suffering from, and would want to make a bet with anyone present about some quite ridiculous proposition: for instance, that the distance from the crossroads to the stone wall by Jenkins' black-pig farm was greater than the distance from the fountain in the middle of Piccadilly Circus to the tube station in Dover Street. A great number of these bets took place in the bar, and the fact that the landlord always lost was one of the reasons of his nickname.

It cannot be said that the general standard of intelligence reached a very high level, and against it it was difficult to tell quite how intelligent the landlord was. If he were not a well-educated man he certainly had more than a veneer of education. In an argument he was seldom extended. Sometimes he talked brilliantly for a moment, and then seemed to talk out of his hat. He had an extravagant theatrical way of suddenly declaiming a statement, and then

sinking his voice and repeating it. Sometimes he would be moodish and not talk at all. But at his best he was very good company.

It would be idle to pretend that the frequenters of the bar believed the landlord's stories. On the contrary, I'm afraid we were a very sceptical lot. Most of us had never been further than London or the seaside, and our imagination shied at episodes in Rajahs' palaces and receptions in Spanish courts. It became a byword in the town: "Have you heard old Seldom Right's latest?" Nevertheless he was extremely popular. At the time of which I write the landlord must have been well over sixty years of age, and his wife was possibly forty-five. They appeared to be an extremely happy and united family.

And then Septimus Stourway appeared on the scene. He was an acid, angular, middle-aged man, with sharp features, a heavy black moustache, and eyes too close together. He was a chartered accountant and he came to the town to audit the books of a large brewery near by, and one or two other concerns. He brought his wife and his son, who was eleven years old. He was a man whom everybody disliked from the very beginning. He was probably clever at his job, quick-thinking, self-opinionated, precise, argumentative, aggressively assertive, and altogether objectionable.

The very first occasion on which he visited "The Love-a-duck" he broke every rule of the masonic ring except the one which concerned getting drunk. The company was in session under its president, and he bounced into the circle and joined in the conversation. He interrupted the landlord in the middle of a story, and plainly hinted that he didn't believe him. He called him "old chap," and offered to stand him a drink. He then told a long, boring story about some obscure episode in his own life. The effect of this intrusion was that the landlord, who never replied to him at all, rose heavily from his seat and disappeared. The rest of the company tried to show by their chilling unresponsiveness that they disapproved of him. But Mr. Stourway was not the kind of person to be sensitive to this. He rattled on, occasionally taking tiny sips of his brandy-and-water. He even had the audacity to ask old Hargreaves who the fat disagreeable old buffer was! And poor old Hargreaves was so upset that he nearly cried. He could only murmur feebly:

"He's the landlord."

"H'm! a nice sort of landlord! Now, I know a landlord at—"

The company gradually melted away and left the stranger to sip his brandy-and-water alone.

Everybody hoped, of course, that the first visit would also be the last. But oh, no! The next evening, at the same time, in bounced Mr. Septimus Stourway, quite uncrushed. Again the landlord disappeared, and the company melted away. The third night some of them tried snubbing him and being rude,

but it had no effect at all. At every attempt of this sort he merely laughed in his empty way, and exclaimed:

"My dear fellow, just listen to me—"

Before a week was out Mr. Septimus Stourway began to get on the nerves of the town. He swaggered about the streets as though he was doing us a great honour by being there at all. His wife and son were also seen. His wife was a tall, vinegary looking woman in a semi-fashionable, semi-sporting get-up. She wore a monocle and a short skirt, and carried a cane. The boy was a spectacled, round-shouldered, unattractive-looking youth, more like the mother than the father in appearance. He never seemed to leave his mother's side for an instant.

It appeared that his name was Nick, and that he was the most remarkable boy for his age who had ever lived. He knew Latin, and Greek, and French, and history, and mathematics, and philosophy, and science. Also he had a beautiful nature. Mr. Stourway spent hours boring anyone he could get to listen, with the narration of his son's marvellous attributes. If the *habitués* of "The Love-a-duck" tired of Mr. Stourway, they became thoroughly fed up with his son.

It was on the following Wednesday evening that the dramatic incident happened in the bar-parlour of the famous inn. The landlord had continued his attitude of utter indifference to the interloper. He had been just as cheerful and entertaining, only when Mr. Stourway entered the bar he simply dried up. But during the last two days he appeared to be thinking abstractedly about something. He was annoyed.

On this Wednesday evening the usual company had again assembled, and the landlord appeared anxious to resume his former position of genial host, when in came Mr. Septimus Stourway again. He had not been in the previous evening, and everyone was hoping that at last he had realised that he was not wanted. Up rose the landlord at once, and went away. There was an almost uncontrolled groan from the rest. Mr. Stourway took his seat, and began to talk affably.

It was then observed that the landlord instead of going right away, was hovering about behind the bar. I don't know how the conversation got round to poetry, but after a time, Mr. Stourway started talking about his son's marvellous memory for poetry.

"That boy of mine, you know," he said, "he would simply astound you. He remembers everything. The poetry he's learnt off by heart! Miles and miles of it! I don't suppose there's another boy of his age in the country who could quote half as much."

It was then that the bombshell fell. The landlord was leaning across the bar, and suddenly his enormous voice rang out:

"I'll bet you five pounds to one that I know a little boy of five who could quote twice as much poetry as your son!"

There was a dead silence, and everybody looked from the landlord to Mr. Stourway. That gentleman grinned superciliously, then he rubbed his hands together and said:

"Well, well, that's interesting. I can't believe it. My son's eleven. A boy of five? Ha, ha! I'd like to get a wager like that!"

The landlord's voice, louder than ever, exclaimed:

"I'll bet you a hundred pounds to five!"

Mr. Stourway looked slightly alarmed, but his eyes glittered.

"A hundred pounds to five! I'm not a betting man, but, by God! I'll take that."

"Is your son shy?"

"Oh, no, he enjoys reciting poetry."

"Would he come here and have an open competition?"

"H'm. Well, well, I don't know. He might. I should have to ask his mother. Who is this wonderful boy you speak of?"

"My nephew over at Chagham. They could drive him over in the dog-cart."

It need hardly be said that the members of "The Love-a-duck" fraternity were worked up to a great state of excitement over this sudden challenge. What did it all mean? No one knew that old Seldom Right had any relatives in the country. But then he was always such a secretive old boy about his own affairs. Could a little boy of five possibly remember and repeat more poetry— twice as much!— than this phenomenal Nick Stourway? How was it all to be arranged?

It became evident, however, that the landlord was very much in earnest. He had apparently thought out all the details. It should be an open competition. It could take place in the ball-room of the hotel. The two boys should stand on the platform with their parents, and should recite poems or blank verse in turn. A small committee of judges should count the lines. When one had exhausted his complete répertoire the other, of course, would have won; but it would be necessary for Stephen— that was the name of old Wright's nephew— to go on for double the number of lines that Nick had spoken to win the wager for his uncle.

When it was first put to him, Mr. Stourway looked startled but on going into the details he soon became eager. It was the easiest way of making a hundred pounds he had ever encountered. Of course the little boy might be clever and have a good memory, but that he could possibly recite *twice* as much as the wonderful Nick was unthinkable. Moreover his back was up, and he hated the landlord. He knew that he snubbed him on every occasion, and

this would be an opportunity to score. There was just the mild risk of losing a fiver, and his wife to be talked over, but— he thought he could persuade her. The rumour of the competition spread like wildfire all over the town.

It was not only the chief topic of conversation at "The Love-a-duck" but at all places where men met and talked. It cannot be denied that a considerable number of bets were made. Mr. Seldom Right's tremendous optimism found him many supporters, but the great odds and the fact that he invariably lost in wagers of this sort drove many into the opposing camp of backers.

A committee of ways and means was appointed the following night after Mrs. Septimus Stourway had given her consent and Nick had signified his willingness to display his histrionic abilities to a crowd of admirers.

Old Hargreaves, Mr. Bean, and a schoolmaster named McFarlane were appointed the judges. The ball-room was to be open to anyone, and there was to be no charge for admission. The date of the competition was fixed for the following Saturday afternoon, at five o'clock.

I must now apologise for intruding my own personality into this narrative. I would rather not do so, but it is inevitable. It is true my part in the proceedings was only that of a spectator, but from your point of view—and from mine—it was an exceedingly important part. I must begin with the obvious confession that I had visited "The Love-a-duck" on occasions, and that is the kind of adventure that one naturally doesn't make too much of. Nevertheless I can say with a clear conscience that I was not one of the inner ring. I had so far only made the most tentative efforts to get into the good graces of the landlord. But everyone in Tibbelsford was talking of the forthcoming remarkable competition, and I naturally made a point of turning up in good time.

I managed to get a seat in the fourth row, and I was very fortunate, for the ball-room was packed, and a more remarkable competition I have never attended. The three judges sat in the front row, facing the platform. The Stourway party occupied the right side of the platform and the Wrights the left. The landlord sat with his party, but in the centre, so that he could act as a kind of chairman. He appeared to be in high good-humour, and he came on first and made a few facetious remarks before the performance began. In the first place, he apologised for the lighting. It was certainly very bad. There originally had been footlights, but it was so long since they had been used that they were out of repair. The large room was only lighted by a gas chandelier in the centre, so that the stage was somewhat dim, but, as he explained, this would only help to obscure the blushes of the performers when they received the plaudits of such a distinguished gathering.

The Stourway party entered first. They came in from a door at the back of the platform, Mr. Stourway noisily nonchalant, talking to everyone at random,

in a tailcoat, with grey spats; his wife in a sports skirt and a small hat, looking rather bored and disgusted; and the boy in an Eton jacket and collar with a bunchy tie, and his hair neatly brushed. He looked very much at home and confident. It was obvious that he was out to enjoy himself. Numerous prize-distributions at which he had played a conspicuous part had evidently inured him to such an ordeal.

And then the other party entered, and the proceedings seemed likely to end before they had begun. Mrs. Wright came on first, followed by a lady dressed in black, leading a most diminutive boy. They only reached the door when apparently the sight of the large audience frightened the small person, and he began to cry. The landlord and his wife rushed up and with the mother tried to encourage him, and after a few minutes they succeeded in doing so. The lady in black, however— who was presumably the widowed mother— picked him up and carried him in and sat him on her knee.

The audience became keenly excited, and everyone was laughing and discussing whether the affair would materialise or not. At length they seemed to be arranged, and the landlord came forward and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to the competitors— Master Nick Stourway, Master Stephen Wright. Good gracious! It sounds as though I were announcing the competitors in a prize-ring. But this is to be a very peaceful competition— at least, I hope so! I think you all know the particulars. We're simply going to enjoy ourselves, aren't we, Nick? Aren't we, Stephen?"

Nick smiled indulgently, and said, "Yes, sir."

Stephen glanced up at him for a second, and then buried his face in his mother's lap.

"Well, well," said the landlord, "I will now call on Master Nick to open the ball."

Master Nick was nothing loth. He stood up and bowed, and holding his right arm stiff, and twiddling a button of his waistcoat with his left, he declaimed in ringing tones:

"It was the schooner Hesperus
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter
To bear him company."

There were twenty-two verses of this, of four lines each, and the audience were somewhat impatient, because they had not come there to hear Master Nick recite. They had come for the competition, and it was still an open question whether there would be any competition. They were anxiously

watching Master Stephen. He spent most of the period of his rival's recitation of this long poem with his face buried in his mother's lap, in the dark corner of the platform. His mother stroked his hair and kept on whispering a word to him, and occasionally he would peer round at Nick and watch him for a few seconds; then he glanced at the audience, and immediately ducked out of sight again.

When Nick had finished, he bowed and sat down, and there was a mild round of applause. The judges consulted, and agreed that he had scored 88 lines.

Now, what was going to happen?

The small boy seemed to be shaking his head and stamping his feet, and his mother was talking to him. The landlord coughed. He was obviously a little nervous. He went over to the group and said in a cheerful voice:

"Now, Stephen, tell us a poem!"

A little piping voice said, "No!" and there were all the wriggles and shakes of the recalcitrant youngster. Murmurs ran round the room, and a lot of people were laughing. The Stourway party was extremely amused. At length the landlord took a chair near him, and produced a long stick of barley-sugar.

"Now, Stephen," he said, "if you won't talk to these naughty people, tell *me* a poem. Tell me that beautiful 'Hymn to Apollo' that you told me last winter."

The little boy looked up at him and grinned; then he looked at his mother. Her widow's veil covered the upper part of her face. She kissed him, and said:

"Go on, dear; tell Uncle Jim."

There was a pause; the small boy looked up and down, and then, fixing his eyes solemnly on the landlord's face, he suddenly began in a queer little lisping voice:

God of the golden bow,
And of the golden lyre,
And of the golden hair,
And of the golden fire;
Charioteer
Round the patient year,
Where—where slept thine ire?

It was a short poem, but its rendering was received with vociferous applause. There was going to be a competition, after all! People who had money at stake were laughing and slapping their legs, and people who hadn't were doing the same. Everyone was on the best of terms with each other. There was a certain amount of trouble with the judges, as they didn't know the poem, and they didn't grasp the length of the lines. Fortunately the

schoolmaster had come armed with books, and after some discussion the poem was found to have been written by Keats, and Master Stephen was awarded thirty-six lines. He was cheered, clapped, and kissed by the landlord, and his aunt, and his mother.

Master Nick's reply to this was to recite "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," a performance which bored everyone to tears, especially as he would persist in gesticulating and doing it in a manner as though he thought that the people had simply come to hear his performance. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" is 195 lines. This made his score 283.

The small boy was still very shy, and seemed disinclined to continue, but the landlord said:

"Now come on, Stephen; I'm sure you remember some more beautiful poetry."

At last, to everyone's surprise, he began to lisp:

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more—"

It was screamingly funny. He went right through the speech, and when he got to:

"Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' "

the applause was deafening. People were calling out, and some of the barrackers had to be rebuked by the landlord. King Henry's speech was only 35 lines, so Master Stephen's total was 71. Nick then retaliated with an appalling poem, which commenced:

She stood at the bar of Justice,
A creature wan and wild,
In form too small for a woman,
In feature too old for a child.

Fortunately, it was not quite as long as the other two, and only brought him 60 lines, making a total of 343.

Stephen, who seemed to be gaining a little more confidence and entering into the spirit of the thing, replied with Robert Herrick's "Ode to a Daffodil," a charming little effort, although it only brought in 20 lines.

Master Nick now broke into Shakespeare, and let himself go on:

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

He only did twenty-three lines, however, before he broke down and forgot. The committee had arranged for this. It was agreed, that in the event of either competitor breaking down, he should still score the lines up to where he broke down, and at the end he should be allowed to quote odd lines, provided there were more than one.

At this point there was a very amusing incident. Master Stephen hesitated for some time, and then *he* began "Friends Romans, countrymen," etc., and he went right through the same speech without a slip! It was the first distinct score for the landlord's party, and Master Stephen was credited with 128 lines. The scores, however, were still 366 to 219 in Nick's favour, and he proceeded to pile on the agony by reciting "Beth Gelert." However, at the end of the twelfth verse he again forgot, and only amassed 48 lines.

Balanced against his mother's knee, and looking unutterably solemn— as far as one could see in the dim light— and only occasionally glancing at the audience, Stephen then recited a charming poem by William Blake called "Night," which also contained 48 lines.

Nick then collected 40 lines with "Somebody's Darling," and as a contrast to this sentimental twaddle Stephen attempted Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." Unfortunately it was his turn to break down, but not till he had notched 92 lines. It was quite a feature of the afternoon that whereas Nick's contributions for the most part were the utmost trash, Stephen only did good things.

It would perhaps be tedious to chronicle the full details of the poems attempted and the exact number of lines scored, although, as a matter of fact, at the time I did keep a careful record. But on that afternoon it did not appear tedious, except when Nick let himself go rather freely over some quite commonplace verse. Even then there was always the excitement as to whether he would break down. The audience indeed found it thrilling, and it became more and more exciting as it went on, for it became apparent that both boys were getting to the end of their tether. They both began to forget, and the judges were kept very busy, and the parents were as occupied as seconds in a prize-ring. It must have been nearly half-past six when Master Nick eventually gave out. He started odds and ends, and forgot, and his parents were pulled up for prompting. He collected a few odd lines, and amassed a total of 822, a very considerable amount for a boy of his age.

At this point he was leading by 106 lines. So for Stephen to win the wager for the landlord he would not only have to score that odd 106 but he would have to remember an additional 822 lines! And he already gave evidence of forgetting! There was a fresh burst of betting in odd parts of the hall, and Dick Toom was offering 10 to 1 against the landlord's *protégé* and not getting many takers. The great thing in his favour was that he seemed to have quite lost his nervousness. He was keen on the job, and he seemed to realise that it *was* a competition, and that he had got to do his utmost. The landlord's party were allowed to talk to him and to make suggestions, but not to prompt if he forgot.

There was a short interval, in which milk and other drinks were handed round. The landlord had one of the other drinks, and then he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to ask your indulgence to be as quiet as possible. My small nephew has to recall 928 lines, to win the competition, and he is going to try to do it."

The announcement was received with cheers. And then Stephen started again. He began excellently with Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," and scored 80 lines, and without any pause went on to Milton's "L'Allegro," of which he delivered 126 lines before breaking down. He paused a little, and then did odds and ends of verses, some complete, and some not. Thomas Hood's "Departure of Summer" (14 lines), Shelley's "To Night" (35) and a song by Shelley commencing:

Rarely, rarely comest thou
Spirit of Delight! (48 lines)

I will not enumerate all these poems but he amassed altogether 378 lines in this way. Then he had another brief rest, and reverted once more to Shakespeare. In his little sing-song voice, without any attempt at dramatic expression, he reeled off 160 lines of the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet*; 96 lines of the scene between Hamlet and the Queen; 44 lines of the Brutus and Cassius quarrel; 31 of Jaques' speech on "All the world's a stage." It need hardly be said that by this time the good burghers of Tibbelsford were in a state of the wildest excitement.

The schoolmaster announced that Master Stephen had now scored 689 of the requite 928, so that he only wanted 240 more to win. Mr. Stourway was biting his nails and looking green. Mrs. Stourway looked as though she was disgusted with her husband for having brought her among these common people. Nick sneered superciliously.

But, in the meantime, there was no question but that Master Stephen himself was getting distressed. His small voice was getting huskier and huskier, and tears seemed not far off. I heard Mrs. Rusbridger, sitting behind me, remark:

"Poor little mite! I calls it a shime!"

It was also evident that he was getting seriously to the end of his quoting répertoire. He had no other long speeches. The landlord's party gathered round him and whispered. He tried again, short stanzas and odd verses, sometimes unfinished. He kept the schoolmaster very busy but he blundered on. By these uncertain stages he managed to add another 127 lines; and then he suddenly brought off a veritable *tour de force*. It was quite uncanny. He quoted 109 lines of Spenser's *Faerie Queen!* The matter was quite

unintelligible to the audience, and they were whispering to each other and asking what it was. When he broke down, the schoolmaster announced that it was quite in order, and that Master Stephen's total lines quoted now amounted to 1640, and therefore he only required four lines to win!

Even then the battle was apparently not over. Everyone was cheering and making such a noise that the small boy could not understand it, and he began crying. A lot of people in the audience were calling out "Shame!" and there was all the appearance of a disturbance. The landlord's party were very occupied. It was several minutes before order was restored, and then the landlord rapped on the table and called out "Order! Order!"

He drank a glass of water, and there was dead silence. Stephen's mother held the little boy very tight, and smiled at him. At last, raising his voice for this last despairing effort, he declaimed quite loudly:

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the two Worlds so wisely— they are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

The cheers which greeted this triumphant climax were split by various disturbances, the most distressing coming from Stephen himself for almost as he uttered the last word he gave a yell, and burst into sobs. And he sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. And his mother picked him up and rocked him, and the landlord and his wife did what they could. But it was quite hopeless. Stephen was finished. His mother picked him up and hurried out of the door at the back with him. The Stourway party melted away. There were no more speeches, but people crowded on to the platform, and a lot of the women wanted to just kiss Stephen before he went away; but Mrs. Wright came back and said the poor child was very upset. She was afraid they ought not to have let him do it. His mother was putting him to bed in one of the rooms, and they were giving him some sal volatile. He would be all right soon. Of course it was a tremendous effort— such a tiny person, too!

Someone offered to go for the doctor, but Mrs. Wright said they would see how he was, and if he wasn't better in half-an-hour's time they'd send over to Dr. Winch.

Everyone was congratulating the landlord, and he was clasping hands and saying:

"A marvellous boy! a marvellous boy! I knew he would do it!"

The party gradually broke up.

I must now again revert to myself. I was enormously impressed by what I had seen and heard, and for the rest of the evening I could think of nothing

else. After dinner I went out for a stroll. It was early March, and unseasonably cold. When I got down to the bridge, over which the high-road runs across the open country to Tisehurst, large snow-flakes were falling. I stood there for some time, looking at our dim little river, and thinking of the landlord and Stephen. And as I gazed around me I began to wonder what it was about the snow-flakes which seemed to dovetail with certain subconscious movements going on within me.

And suddenly a phrase leapt into my mind. It was:

"Rotten cotton gloves!"

Rotten cotton gloves! What was the connection? The snow, the mood, something about Stephen's voice quoting "The Faerie Queene." Very slowly the thing began to unfold itself. And when I began to realise it all, I said to myself, "Yes, my friend, it was the *Faerie Queene* which gave the show away. The rest might have been possible. You were getting rather hard put to it!" The snow was falling heavily. It was Christmas-time— good Lord! I did not like to think how long ago. Thirty years? Forty years? My sister and I at Drury Lane pantomine. "Rotten cotton gloves!" Yes, that was it! I could remember nothing at all of the performance. But who was that great man they spoke of? The star attraction?— Some name like "The Great Borodin," the world's most famous humourist and ventriloquist. We were very excited, Phyllis and I, very small people then, not, surely, much older than Stephen himself. I could not remember the great Borodin, but I remembered that one phrase. There was a small lay figure which said most amusing things. It was called— No, I have forgotten. It was dressed in an Eton suit and it wore rather dilapidated-looking white cotton gloves. And every now and then, in the middle of a dialogue or discourse, it broke off, looked at its hands, and muttered:

"Rotten cotton gloves!"

It became a sort of catch-phrase in London in those days. On 'buses and trains people would murmur "Rotten cotton gloves!" A certain vague something about the way that Stephen recited Spenser's *Faerie Queen*.... Was it possible?

And then certain very definite aspects of the competition presented themselves to my mind's eye. It had all been very cleverly stage-managed. It must be observed that Stephen neither walked on nor walked off. He did not even stand. He hardly looked at the audience. And then the lighting was inexcusably bad. Even some of the lights in the central chandelier had unaccountably failed. And the landlord's party had chosen the darkest side of the stage. No one had spoken to the boy. No one had seen him arrive, and immediately after the competition he had gone straight to bed.

I tried to probe my memory for knowledge of "The Great Borodin," but at eight or nine one does not take great interest in these details. I know there was something.... I remember hearing my parents talking about it— some great scandal soon after I had seen him. He was disgraced, I am sure. I have a vague idea he was in some way well-connected. He was to marry a great lady, and then perhaps he eloped with a young barmaid? I cannot be certain. It was something like that. I know he disappeared from public life, for in after years, when people had been to similar performances I had heard our parents say:

"Ah, but you should have seen 'The Great Borodin.' "

These memories, the peculiar thrill of the competition, the cold air, the lazy snow-flakes drifting hither and thither, all excited me. I walked on further and further into the country trying to piece it all together. I liked the landlord, and I shared the popular dislike of Mr. Stourway.

After a time I returned, and making my way towards the north of the town, I started to walk quickly in the direction of "The Love-a-duck." If I hurried I should be there ten minutes or so before closing time.

When I entered the large bar-parlour the place was very crowded. I met old Hargreaves by the door. I'm afraid a good many of the rules of the society had been broken that evening. Old Hargreaves was not the only one who had had quite enough liquid refreshment. Everybody was in high spirits, and they were still all talking about the competition. I met Mr. Bean near the fireplace, and I said:

"Well, Mr. Bean, and have you heard how the boy is?"

"Oh, ay," he replied. "He soon got all right. Mrs. Wright says he were just a bit upset. He went off home not an hour since."

"Did you see him?"

"Eh? Oh, no, I didn't see'm. Mrs. Wright says he looked quite hisself."

The landlord was moving ponderously up and down behind the bar. I thought he looked tired and there were dark rims round his eyes. I moved up towards the bar, and he did not notice me. The noise of talking was so loud that one could speak in a normal voice without being heard. Everything had apparently gone off quite successfully. Mr. Stourway had sent along his cheque for five pounds and it was not reckoned that he would ever show his face in "The Love-a-duck" again. I waited.

At last I noticed that the landlord was quite alone. He was leaning against the serving-hatch, flicking some crumbs from his waistcoat, as though waiting for the moment of release. I took my glass and sidled up to him. I leant forward as though to speak. He glanced at me, and inclined his head with a bored movement. When his ear was within a reasonable distance, I said quietly:

"Rotten cotton gloves!"

I shall never forget the expression on the face of the landlord as he slowly raised his head. I was conscious of being a pinpoint in a vast perspective. His large, rather colourless eyes appeared to sweep the whole room. They were moreover charged with a perfectly controlled expression of surprise, and a kind of uncontrolled lustre of ironic humour. I had a feeling that if he laughed it would be the end of all things. He did not laugh; he looked lugubriously right through my face, and breathed heavily. Then he swayed slightly from side to side, and looking at my hat, said:

"I've got some cherry-brandy here you'd like. You must have a glass, Mr.—"

Now, I do not wish to appear to you either as a prig, a traitor, or a profiteer. I am indeed a very ordinary, perhaps over-human member of Tibbelsford society. If I have taken certain advantages of the landlord, you must at any rate give me the credit of being the only member of a large audience who had the right intuitions at the right moment. In all other respects you must acknowledge that I have treated him rather well.

In any case, I became prominent in the inner circle without undergoing the tortuous novitiateship of the casual stranger.

The landlord and I are the best of friends to-day, although we exchange no confidences. I can break all the rules of the masonic understanding without getting into trouble. Some of the others are amazed at the liberties I take.

And in these days, when licensing restrictions are so severe, when certain things are not to be got (officially), and when I see my friends stealing home to a bone-dry supper, I only have to creep into the bar of "The Love-a-duck" and whisper "Rotten cotton gloves!" and lo! all these forbidden luxuries are placed at my disposal! Can you blame me?

I have said that we exchange no confidences, and indeed I feel that that would be going too far, taking too great an advantage of my position. There is only one small point I would love to clear up, and I dare not ask. Presuming my theory to be right about "The Great Borodin"— which was he?

The landlord? Or the widow?

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12: The Abduction of the House-Boat

Arthur H. Adams

1872-1936

The Lone Hand. 1 Oct 1910

SHE was a widow, and therefore to be wooed.

And Harry Truscott and John Styles, being by nature courteous to the other sex, each besought her to bestow upon him her plump and not unresponsive hand and her income of per annum. Mrs. Silling regarded the two proposals, both of which occurred on the same day, as obviously to be expected; but, being a woman as well as a widow, she could not decide as to which would be the better bargain. She cordially approved of them both, and their differences of character only made the choice the more perplexing.

The assured and mature prosaicness of John Styles, the leading accountant of Sydney, promised a permanence of matrimonial content that was pleasing to her derelict soul. Had it not been for the defunct Mr. Silling, she would have eagerly accepted John. But her late husband had been of the heavy type that insisted upon steak and oysters for breakfast; and the heavy granite stone she had carefully placed above him had been a quite unnecessary precaution. Mr. Silling had a habit of staying where he was put. His widow felt that, after all, matrimony might be something more exciting than steak and oysters for breakfast. She thought that to marry John would be rather like going on two successive nights to the same play. Nay, going every night to the same play. Fate, embodied in a motor-car accident, had given her a second chance. It seemed like a flouting of Providence to order again the dinner she had already consumed. But a too sudden change of menu might upset her digestion ; and though champagne was for the moment alluring, stout, to which she had grown accustomed, might be the safer drink. And there was much in the steady sobriety of John Styles that appealed to her.

Of course, if she decided to risk a course of champagne, there was no doubt that in Harry Truscott, whose chief claim to fame was his possession of the "X," the fastest motor-launch in the harbor, she would get the most heady and sparkling quality. However, after champagne there is the headache. And this headache would be life-long. In brief, the choice lay between the stolidity of John and the volatility of Harry. And the balance was annoyingly even.

But the widow who hesitates is won. She had reached the persuadable stage; and between the two had got into a condition of plastic helplessness very dangerous, her doctor assured her, to one with her tendency towards stoutness. She frankly admitted to both rivals that she was quite prepared to consider seriously the question of remarrying. She appealed to each of them in turn to help her in her dilemma, and each professed himself willing.

At last Mrs. Silling's heart and digestion had been reduced to such a state of putty that she incontinently fled. She retired to the South Coast to meditate. And she forbade either suitor to write. Of course, Harry promptly telegraphed; but it is questionable whether his business ability really helped him. The telegraph form is too business-like for emotion; and the widow used none of the reply-paid forms that inundated her at Stanwell Park.

She had been gone a fortnight, however, when Harry received a telegram.

"Returning Sydney 9.30 a.m. Meet me Central Station. —Jane."

Harry's face lit up, but the triumph died away. He was glad, of course, but he felt a little sorry that the chase was finished and the excitement over. He heard that faint click of the cage-door that sounds its dreadful finality in the ears of every man the moment after he has been accepted. The uncertainty had gone out of his life. But he faced it like a man. He went and had a drink at the Australia.

Curiously enough at that moment John Styles approached the bar.

"I've got a wire," began Harry, beaming,

"So have I," said John Styles, beaming.

"She told you?"

"Yes." And John Styles produced his telegram. It was, word for word, the duplicate of Harry's. Both men put down their drinks untasted.

"I know a woman can't make up her mind," began John; "but I always thought a widow was different."

"Every woman is at heart a widow," sighed Harry. "I see. She means to make her choice on the station platform."

And then he had a mental illumination. Mrs. Silling was not lacking in guile. She knew that the rivals would show each other their telegrams; and

she inferred that one of the two would make every possible effort to prevent the other from being on the platform when the train arrived. The one who survived would be the better man. It was the woman's immemorial challenge to her knights, an ordeal of gallantry and valor. Her heart would go out to him who arrived alone on that station platform, even though it were over his rival's dead body. She had cunningly left the choice to them. And the sadness in Harry Truscott's soul departed. The chase was still on; he glowed to the lure of the uncertain. The cage-door was open yet!

"I suppose you'll be there?" he inquired, casually,

"Yes, alone," replied John stolidly.

"I see," said Harry. "All is fair in the war for a widow. By the way, I suppose you'll be sleeping in your houseboat in Middle Harbor to-night?''

"Yes; but I shall be up early. And you'll be out as usual in your launch this evening?"

"I was thinking of trying the "X" outside the Heads to-night."

"You might drop in at the houseboat," John smiled. "We're having a little celebration— male— to-night."

"Thanks, old chap. I'm afraid I can't spare the time; but I'll try and run round your way."

They had another, and parted friendly ; but each knew that the other would do everything possible in man to prevent him from meeting the 9.30 train from Stanwell Park on the morrow. It was war to the knife. The glove had been delicately dropped between them.

John Styles kept up his celebration in his little houseboat that night till midnight; but Harry Truscott did not appear. He had taken the precautions to overhaul his engine before setting out that evening, and had discovered a surprising number of faults in the machinery. These little defects had been carefully designed to ensure a break-down after the launch had started. Evidently some one hoped that the "X" would break down somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, and that its return by 9.30 would be problematical. Harry, chuckling, reflected that he had not given John Styles sufficient credit for thoroughness.

The job was a long and exasperating one. As soon as he had put one thing right, another defect revealed itself. It was midnight before Harry, black and shining with oil, had completed his overhaul of the machinery and satisfied himself that the "X" could be trusted for the work it was meant to do.

It was an overcast night, when Harry slipped his moorings in Mosman Bay and sped down towards the Heads. He turned the "X" up Middle Harbor, and reaching the Spit, took the precaution of putting out his lights. Then, at quarter speed, he slipped noiselessly under the shadow of the hill till there loomed vaguely out of the blackness a riding light. It was a houseboat.

Harry stopped to reconnoitre. Except for the riding light of the anchored houseboat it was in darkness, and not a sound came from it. Evidently John Styles, alone in his little house-boat, was dreaming of his widow. This surmise was justified as Harry gently came alongside; for into the stillness arose the faint regular melody of a snore.

Then Harry set to work. It was an easy matter to slip the moorings of the houseboat and attach a tow-line. Then, gently, he started off on his long tow. The little "X" lunged and swerved as it felt the tug of that unwieldy bulk; but Harry had carefully muffled his engine, and if the occupant inside the houseboat had wakened all he would have heard would have been the lapping of the water on her sides.

The knight had taken up his lady's glove; the battle was on! But it was slow work for the gallant little launch; and Harry spent some anxious hours before

his port hove in sight. In fact, it was just as dawn was breaking that the "X," with houseboat in tow, entered the bay near the Heads. He had carried his rival off to the Quarantine Station!

Once the houseboat was made safe to the jetty, Harry knew that John Styles would not be able to meet the fateful 9.30 train. For, two days before, a vessel had arrived from the East which had developed measles on board. Possibly it was because she carried an archdeacon and nine missionaries. The consequences to the passengers were more than inconvenient; for the authorities had sternly quarantined the passengers and crew at the station for a fortnight. And among them was a bridegroom who was to have been married to a Sydney girl on the morrow. So at that moment the atmosphere at the Quarantine Station was almost puce with the quantity of violent language from an incensed ship's load of passengers, held in bondage in sight of the delectable land. Had it not been for the nine missionaries and the archdeacon something would have caught fire. The missionaries could at least use Chinese to each other, which to the archdeacon's ear had all the objurgative qualities of swear-words; but even that relief was out of the archdiaconal reach. He merely went purple in the face after each meal, thus unduly rising the hopes of the other passengers that he was getting measles.

Harry's project was simply to tie the Styles houseboat up to the jetty, and slip silently away in the "X," to meet Jane and the 9.30. Already he fancied he heard the gentle music of the banns being proclaimed. As he slowly drew up to the jetty he made out, in the clear light of the dawn, a figure standing solitary at the end of the jetty. Evidently a Quarantine officer on the lookout to prevent any infringement of the regulations. Harry whistled in consternation, and no longer heard the lulling music of the banns. But the man on the jetty did not move. He stared uncomprehending at the approaching procession; but as Harry brought the launch gently alongside, the stranger mechanically descended the steps to the water and lent a hand to fend off the launch.

"Another ship with measles?" he gloomily asked.

"Yes," said Harry. "A bad case."

"Can't be any worse than a purple archdeacon who just glowers, or nine missionaries who talk gibberish," he replied. "Bring her along."

Evidently one of the incarcerated passengers from the measles ship. Together they made the houseboat fast; and Harry, with a friendly wave, backed away. And then the one undiscovered defect in the machinery made its presence felt. The engine refused to do any of the things that Harry successively ordered it to do.

John Styles was more painstaking than Harry had given him credit for.

And, while the "X" lay helpless a dozen fathoms from the jetty, Harry saw a female figure, young and beautiful even in her dressing-gown, with her hair in a pig-tail down her back, emerge from the cabin, and, with one startled look around, jump from the houseboat on to the wharf; and, with a little sob of content, into the arms of the waiting man!

It took Harry fully two minutes to grasp the fringe of the situation. John Styles had a lady on board— a young and beautiful lady who had evidently just risen from sleep, who was just as evidently dressed only in a dressing-gown and her night attire! But how did she know the quarantined passenger? And why was he waiting there for her? And, even if she was acquainted with him was it necessary for her to allow him to kiss her so rapidly?

And then another figure— evidently more attired— appeared on the deck of the houseboat. It was the thin and angular figure of an elderly lady. And she was evidently as amazed as Harry.

"Lilian!" she called in the thin and staccato voice of a gramophone, "who is that individual?"

"My fiancée," Lilian responded from her fiancée's arms.

"What? William?" the old lady shrilled.

"Let me introduce you," said Lilian with dignity, "Aunt, this is Mr. William Nulty, the man whom I was to have married to-morrow."

"Glad to meet you," said William, politely. "I can't thank you too much for having brought my bride to me in spite of all these confounded Quarantine regulations."

"Me?" said Lilian's aunt, "I— I don't know anything at all about it. We went to bed in Middle Harbor and we wake up— I don't know where! I don't believe we are awake!"

Her gaze moved wildly round. "It's that man!" she shrieked.

Harry knew now. He had abducted the wrong houseboat!

And— where was John Styles? In his ears he seemed to hear that individual's triumphant laughter mingled with the widow's mocking treble, It drowned for ever the faint far-off intonation of his wedding banns.

"That man?" cried Lilian gladly. "How can we ever thank him enough?"

"By chucking me a rope," said Harry. William Nulty chucked the rope, while his fiancée hastily returned with her aunt to the cabin.

Harry was waiting on the jetty when Lilian, radiant and fully clothed, and her aunt appeared to greet him.

"Yes," he easily admitted, "I saw in the papers that a wedding had to be postponed because the bridegroom, just arrived from the East, had been quarantined with the rest of the ship's passengers. So it occurred to me that

Miss Lilian would rather catch the measles than lose Mr, Nulty. The rest was easy."

"The wedding will be to-morrow," announced William.

"Here?" cried two surprised feminine voices; and then the bride: "But my wedding dress is in Sydney."

"I'll bring it to-night— and the license," said Harry. "But I'll have to wait till the night. I could easily slip out when it's dark. Then gloomily contemplating the engine of the "X," he added: "Anyway, it will take me all day getting the traces of John Styles out of my busted engine."

THE WEDDING was celebrated by the nine missionaries, who, with the bride and bridegroom, happened all to be Presbyterians. The archdeacon gave away the bride, and Harry was best man.

The honeymoon was spent on North Head, but was cut rather short owing to both bride and bridegroom contracting measles. Harry escaped; but his launch, in consequence of the discovery that he had broken quarantine by his night flight to Sydney for the wedding costume and the license, had been promptly confiscated by the quarantine officer. And that fortnight was rather a trying period for Harry, as Lilian's aunt, having proved impervious to measles— even to the German variety— had been tacitly committed to his care. He found, as he had found before in his intercourse with the fair sex, that she was Different— horribly Different.

The only solace to his imprisonment was a telephone message that he received from John Styles. The gallant knight had duly met the widow on the station platform. There she introduced him, with pride, to her fiancée, a business magnate of Melbourne, who had happened to stay at the same boarding-house at Stanwell Park.

There is but one more fact to record. Among the personal effects of William Nulty put ashore with him at the Quarantine Station, were several pounds of the best Japanese confetti. It was a windy day for the wedding, and the breeze carried the confetti up into the air and out over the Pacific. And for weeks afterwards solitary ships in mid-ocean found their decks bright with confetti. And the spangled shower was followed in every case by a severe attack of German measles.

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13: The Humorist

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

The Lone Hand. 1 Nov 1915

THERE was a great hammering at the street door in the early morning— an immense clamor, that began as a noise in a dream about the destruction of Messina. Messina had only been destroyed two days before.

The sounds of houses falling down, the swish of tidal waves, the cries of the injured, and the intermittent jangling of a bell, developed slowly into blows with a heavy fist upon the panels of the door, the clack-clack-clack of the knocker, and spasmodic hysterical outbursts of the old-fashioned bell in the basement. And then, suddenly, the row ceased. There was peace, and I turned over to dream some more awful details of the earthquake, pulling the bedclothes over my ears. It was bitterly cold.

But there was no peace.

Came a gentle tap-tap-tapping at the door of the sitting room. Then a pause. And then another louder tap, and a scared voice crying fearfully through the half-opened door—

"Mister— Mister— MISTER!"

It was the voice of my landlady, the good Mrs. Webb.

This aroused me. It was extraordinary. I owed Mrs. Webb, strangely enough, no rent. It had been paid the day before, out of the proceeds of the *Investigator* article—" Australian Meat at Smithfield." And Mrs. Webb was not of the sort or the age of landlady who knocks softly at the lodgers' door in the middle of the night. I got up. I got up and stumbled, shivering in my pyjamas, across the blackness and the furniture of the sitting room, and opened the outer door.

There was the dingy-faced Mrs. Webb in a faded dressing gown, her blue-roan hair falling scantily over her bottle shoulders, with a guttering candle in her hand. And in her countenance was written great fear.

"Oh Mister— Mister —there's a p'liceman down stairs!" she whimpered in awe and agony.

"A *policeman*!"

"Yuss— a *p'liceman*. 'E wants yer. Sez 'e *must* see yer— don't matter if you was a-bed. 'E's standin' in the 'all— 'e would push 'isself hin!"

Awe and apprehension came over me also. Big Ben had boomed three o'clock as I got out of bed— three o'clock on a winter's morning in London— and a domiciliary visit by the police at that uncomfortable hour, the biting cold, and the depressing resurrection aspect of Mrs. Webb were circumstances that might cause anyone to be apprehensive, and a little awe-stricken.

Had anything been found out about me? Did the Investigator people know that I had never been near Smithfield markets in the early morning when they sell the meat, and that the article was second-hand from Dolman of the *Melbourne Argus*, who had it, garbled, from Spink, the Victorian Trade Commissioner, who knew very little about it, being a butter expert. Could they summarily arrest me for that? Was it a criminal offence, in this country, to fake news-paper articles. False pretences? I thought of other sins too.

And then arose the sound of someone heavy coming upstairs in the dark, the stumbling clatter of a big boot that missed a step, and a grunt of pain that I recognised as expressive of a stricken shin-bone. Mrs. Webb turned, cringing, and held the candle up to light the stairway. There came into view, successively, a blue-black helmet with snow upon its roof, a red face with a tawny moustache across it, a pair of massive shoulders also snow-sprinkled, and then the whole mighty bulk of a big metropolitan policeman— No. 1, man's size—in his long-skirted winter great coat, belt about waist, and glowing bull's-eye lantern on the belt.

Mrs. Webb quailed visibly. I also quailed. I could feel my teeth chatter with the cold, and I know that I *looked* afraid.

"Mister Bateman, Sir?"

The "sir" cheered me. He would not have called me "sir" had he come to arrest me. He'd have said "Wilfred Bateman." I felt that, instinctively.

"Yes."

"I want yer to come with me, sir!"

Mrs. Webb squeaked in dismay. But I grew bold with the repeated "sir," and the respectful tone.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Murder!" he replied impressively.

Mrs. Webb screamed a strangling, gurgling scream, and fled down the stairs uttering strange, melancholy sounds. "Oh my Gawd!" I heard, as she stumbled into the hall.

"Come in," I faltered, stepping to the gas bracket and pulling down the regulator of the pilot light. The big policeman looked bigger in the light. His glowing red, fat face— serious enough, even though serious with an obvious effort— somehow comforted me. But murder!

I waited for him to speak. He drew off his black, woollen gloves, and fumbled at the breast buttons of the coat, his numbed fingers tangling in the festoon of the whistle chain. He produced his note-book, and paused.

"Y'd best put something on," he said kindly. I must have been blue with cold. The fire in the grate was out. It was autumn in the Arctic, right enough. I took my overcoat from its peg behind the door.

"Is this you?" he asked, holding out a man's visiting card to me.

I took it, and looked at it under the gas-light. Yes, it was one of mine. There was my name on it, and the address in Pimlico where we were —

Mr. Wilfred Bateman
No. 1 Charlwood Street, S.W.

I looked at the back. There was nothing written there.

"Yes, that's mine. But what about it?" I asked.

"Well— it's like this guvnor. I found a fellow dead in a, lane off Swallow Street— near Piccadilly— a bit after one o'clock this morning. 'E's fresh dead— arf a nour, or so, the doctor says— stabbed in the back. Thort 'e was drunk at first, an' 'umps 'im into Vine Street Station, w'ere 'e turns out to be a gonner. Searched 'im. Gold watch an' chain, gold an' silver money in 'is pockets, but not a scrap of paper, or a pocket book, to say 'oo 'e might 'ave been. Only this card, in 'is left 'and top waistcoat pocket. An' linen markin'— Y.J. At first we thought it was you 'oo was dead, but then we found th' markin' on 'is shirt an' singlet, an' ang'chef— embroidered on that, in silk— an' reckoned 'e must be Y.J. So the Inspector, 'e sends me round 'ere to find you. 'Maybe this Y.J's. a. friend of 'is,' 'e ses. P'raps you know 'im, sir? Any 'ow— sorry to trouble you— but 'e'd like you to come to the station, an' see if you know anything about 'im. Mind y'r not under arrest, y' know, sir," he added reassuringly. "Th' Inspector sez—'is compliments, an' 'ed be glad if you could assist 'im. So if you'll get dressed, we'll go along. Well— I don't mind a drop of whisky— it's a h—l of a night outside!"

I showed him the whisky bottle and some glasses, and went into the bedroom to dress. This was a queer business. I tried to call to mind any Y.J's. of my acquaintance while I dressed, but could not do so. However, we would soon see. There might be some sort of a journalistic scoop in it, too. It is a sorry disaster that does not blow the journalist any good.

We walked to Vine Street— up Belgrave Road, past Victoria Station, along Buckingham Palace Road, across St. James' Park, and up Regent Street to the Circus— and our upper surfaces were like the roofs of the houses with the whitening of the floury snow that lodged upon us. It eddied in softly floating flakes through the glare of the electric street lamps, and the trees in the Park bore great humpy tufts of it in their forks and in their branches. We passed up the dingy alleyway of Vine Street, and entered the police station at its upper end, which has contributed so much to the enjoyment of boat-race nights by Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates.

Here was a brusque and somewhat rude Inspector, who was clearly disposed to disbelieve my every statement. He took my name, and my address,

which he already had, wanted to know how my card came to be found upon the dead man, whether I knew him, how old I was, what I did for a living, why I left Australia, how long I'd been in London, how I had spent the previous evening, said I must know who Y. J. was, and certainly showed that he considered me to he a liar and a crook.

"It's your card," he said. "How did he get it? He couldn't have picked it up in the street— its quite clean. You must have given it to him. How, be careful, young fellow! This is a serious Job, this is. Don't make it any worse against yourself. Be straight-forward. Anyhow— come and have a look at him."

We went along a passage, flickeringly lit by a feeble gas Jet, to a room at its end, which obviously was, or had been, a large sized cell. Someone in the premises howled continuously. Someone else kicked upon a door.

"Turn up the gas, Jones," said the inspector to a thin man in plain clothes who accompanied us.

On the ground lay a shape covered by a brown rug. The Inspector pulled the rug off.

"There!" he said, "now don t you know him?" .

But I didn't. I had never seen him in my life before. I didn't feel sorry that I hadn't known him. He didn't look like a man would like to have known— and I'm not particular. We none of us are in my trade. He was a Dago of some sort. He had on evening dress, and his clothes were disarrayed, and his collar and tie undone they had been looking at his wound— the doctor I suppose. There was a little slobber of blood upon his lips, and he had the queerest sort of grin on his face, which looked as if he had been suddenly frozen. He had a villainous countenance. He struck me as having probably been just the sort of man who would have done unto others with great readiness as be had been done by a few hours before. The look of him made you think that he had most likely got what he deserved. He wasn't the sort of man you feel very sorry for when he dies. I could have sworn that there were not a few people who were relieved by the demise of this unknown V. J. A beastly looking fellow.

Well then, unpleasantness began to fill my life, and to make it a burden. The uncivil Inspector got to work. He arrested me on suspicion. I was kept at Vine Street all night, and in the morning they took me to Marlborough Street Police Court, where I was remanded for a week. I spent that week in Brixton Prison. The detectives spent it searching my rooms, and scaring the life out of Mrs. Webb, and making asses of themselves generally. And they found that I hadn't come home until after one o'clock on the night of the murder, and I had to prove an alibi by showing that I was at a place in Hampstead that was not the sort of place I should have been at. And over that the nice girl whom I was engaged to broke off the engagement. Though, of course, I had gone to that

place solely in my journalistic capacity. All journalists have to go into shady places, and mix with evil sorts of people. That is one of the drawbacks of journalism.

They had my picture in the Daily Mirror, and I learned, later on, I had figured in the cable columns of the Australian press. That Dago remained a mystery for a week, and then two of his nieces turned up— one from Barcelona and one from Ostend and proved that he was Vincenzio Jacinto, a well-known Spanish anarchist of the active sort, a skilled Continental jewel thief, an assassin of some parts, and a wholly competent blackguard of the worst description. He was visiting London for the first time, in order to study the technicalities of the White Slave trade, with a view to starting in it himself upon new and somewhat original lines. But they did not find out who stabbed him. At any rate I was released. My prospective father-in-law was on the board of the Sydney Intelligence the paper which I represented in London— and did not like my alibi. He would have held the killing of Jacinto a lesser crime than having been shown up— "shown up" mind you —as being one to whom was extended the freedom of that house in Hampstead, so I got the sack from £400 a year and all expenses outside London, and the softest job I have ever been in.

Nor was this all. The Hampstead house was raided by the police and Madam paid two bludgers to lay in wait for me, one night, as I was going home to Pimlico by a short cut from South Kensington, and they gave me a pretty considerable dusting, which involved the loss of two teeth, the acquisition of a permanent lump on the bridge of my nose, and two black eyes. I had good cause to bless the murder of Vincenzio Jacinto, and an unsolveable problem as to how my card came to be in the possession of his villainous and discredited corpse to occupy such of my mental energies as were occasionally unemployed.

As for who killed him, I did not much care. But for three years I was worried and perplexed about the card the thing got on my nerves so much that I never had another card printed, and I don't carry them now. I am quite content to inflict the indignity upon myself of saying "My name's Bateman," whenever I go to call upon anyone whom I want to interview or borrow money, or get a job— or anything like that. Cards are dangerous, and there are too many funny people loose in this world.

AND AT LAST, three years after my moral reputation had been blasted, and the most unpleasant, worrying, and damnable experience of my life undergone, and my mind obsessed by a riddle without an answer, I found out that the whole affair was a joke— a joke, mind you. A *joke*.

I had left journalism, and was back in Australia again with what was really a better job than the one I lost over the *affaire* Jacinto

My girl had married a police-magistrate, and I was a commercial traveller and a misogynist. I travelled in Branthwaite's Indestructible Fencing, all over Australia, and sold a vast amount of it, for it was as good as it said it was with regard to fires, and rabbits, and white ants, and all the other virtues claimed for it by Branthwaite Bros., of Wolverhampton.

One Show time I was in Melbourne, stopping at Knox's. That is where the fellows who are in need of the B.I.F. put up mostly, so I always made a point of stopping there. I was getting to know all the pastoral princes of Australia by this time, and an assorted lot of the Cockies, and had friends everywhere between Cape York and Wilson's Promontory, and Byron Bay and Cockburn Sound. And they mostly stayed, or had drinks, at the famous old pub in Collins Street.

And there, one evening after the theatre, when I was sitting in the little smoking-room, who should walk in but Hilary Ambrose whom I was continually meeting in divers parts of Australia. He, too, sold one of the necessaries of pastoral existence— a sheep dip— all over the continent, and we were continually encountering one another in divers widely separated and unlikely places. We would find ourselves on opposite sides of the table in Mildura, or room-fellows in Longreach, or passengers in the same steamers up and down the coast. Sometimes our ways would lie together for hundreds of miles. Sometimes there were intervals of many months between our meetings. This occasion was our first encounter since we had parted at Mungindi half a year before, Ambrose going north, and I coming south through the Central Division of New South Wales.

Hilary Ambrose was the most curious man I have ever met, or ever expect or want to meet His curiousness began with his name, which was notably indescriptive of him. A man with such a Christian-name ought to look the part— he ought to be a jovial, reckless devil-may-care and you-be-damned sort of chap. You think of the name as suggestive of perpetual singing and laughter on the part of its possessor, don't you? And Ambrose— why, Brother Ambrose, to be sure. The jovial monk. If he had had the prefix Rev. attached to his cognomen, and you saw it on his luggage before you saw him, you would expect nothing less that a jolly fat priest of some broadminded and liberal denomination.

But he was not like that at all— he was a deplorable misfit to his name. He ought to have been called "Melanchthon Soberside" or some such designation of that kind. His aspect suggested an undertaker's mute attending the execution of his father with a summons for maintenance in his pocket, and a

bad liver under his black waistcoat, and people used to say of him in the street, "Here goes a blanky Wowser!" And as for the savor of the Man of God that went with his surname— well, he was just the most unregenerate and shameless man of sin, in his private life, that ever stood as justification for the wowser's phrase, "this sinful world."

But he was witty. His conversation fairly sparkled. He could see the funny part of things that wouldn't seem to you or I to be anything but of the solemnist and gloomiest description, or the most sordid or depressing. He could keep a table, or a smoking room, in roars of laughter, without ever a smile appearing on his own unhappy countenance. He could invert the simplest narration of the driest fact with a humor that was delightful and is utterly inexpressible. I don't know how to describe it. He would do it. But quite how, I could never grasp. He seemed to have a sort of sixth sense of humorous appreciation and expression that was like the blackfellow's marvellous tracking ability, or second sight. It was a little supernatural.

I was glad to see him, and we drank, and smoked and yarned far into the night. Somewhere about the time when the night-porter begins to sweep out the hall, and to say, "No more soda-water left, gents," he began to discourse on his sense of humor. He grew analytical of his peculiar mentality. He began to account for himself in a way that I had never heard him do before.

He had often told me that a sense of humor was better than a religion, and how the man who could laugh— laugh under any and every circumstance— was the man who ruled the world. He had many times delighted and puzzled me with his paradoxical aphorisms on his favorite topic of discourse. I had got to know a good deal of his philosophy. I had often seen the outcome of one of his queer practical jokes, which did not seem to be as maddening to the victim as it would have been if anyone else but Hilary Ambrose had perpetrated it. I had got to realise to some extent the lengths to which his extraordinary sense of the ridiculous would take him.

But to-night, as we sat before the fire in that snug little room, long after everybody in the hotel had gone to bed, and the rattle of the cables in the tramway system was stilled, and you could hear, through the shut doors, the swishing of the revolving street sweepers in Collins Street, he went deeper into the subject than ever before. I had asked him whether there was, in his opinion, any event or circumstance in the world that it was quite impossible for one, gifted as he was with a super sense of humor, to find amusement in.

"No, I don't think so," he said. "I don't think there is a single thing that I couldn't amuse myself over."

"Even physical pain?"

"Why— physical pain is one of the first sources of humor. Consider the speechless infant, how it is moved to mirth when it jabs a pin into a pug dog, or twists a kitten's tail."

"Yes— but physical pain that happens to one's self? Could you see any alleviating circumstances in the funniness of being burnt alive, or subjected to some of the more exquisite of, say, the Chinese methods of torture?"

"I do believe so," he said firmly. "I believe, at any rate, that the faith of the martyrs was really only, if you like, an unconscious sense of humor. They didn't know that they were laughing at the flames— but that's what they were doing. They didn't, perhaps, realise that, for instance, it was extraordinarily funny that the people who were inflicting pain and death upon them, would suppose they were doing them a bad turn— but their sub-consciousness realised it, and that's what kept 'em going."

"But suppose that you were bent on playing a practical joke, just to gratify your sense of humor, as you would gratify an appetite. Suppose, as an example, that you partly filed through some of the control wires of an aeroplane, and saw the aviator come smashing down. Would that be a joke?"

"Certainly it would— no end of a joke."

"Well I'm damned!" I said.

"Of course," he went on, "to a true humorist, there would be unbounded sources of amusement connected with the central funny idea of the flying man's thinking he was going to perch gently on the ground, and being so suddenly disappointed and undeceived. It would afford him exquisite enjoyment. I don't, of course, mean that his enjoyment would lie in the fact that the man had ceased to exist, or was very badly damaged. The incident would rather be amusing because the victim was so badly sucked in— but it's difficult to explain— to put in words. There isn't a proper language to express true humor."

I sat silent for a while, having another drink, and smoking. Ambrose stared gloomily at the fire. Presently he went on.

"But you know the consummation of the joke that you witness is not really the greatest reward for the thought or the energy you may have expended in bringing it about. There is a much finer and more subtle gratification in the joke whose result you do not see than in that which you do. You only see one outcome in the one you do see— in the other there may be a dozen. You can imagine each of them. You know that a certain effect must have been the result of the cause you planned— but the circumstances attending the result may have varied indefinitely, I well remember one little effort of my own that gave me the greatest gratification— it amuses me still. Shall I tell you of it?"

"Do."

He grinned cadaverously into the fire. The recollection of this particular pleasantry must have entertained him vastly, for he seldom smiled. All his laughing was done up his sleeve.

"It was just a lucky chance. I happened to be dining one evening, rather later than usual in the Roche. You remember old Pere Beguinot's little restaurant in Soho— Old Compton Street? At the table lower down was another fellow, with his back to me. He had finished, and he was scribbling with a pencil as I sat down, on a visiting card. Maybe writing an I.O.U. for old Beguinot? You can do that there— as I daresay you have found out— if the old man knows you.

"I was bending over my soup when he got up and walked past me towards the door, with a card in his hand. I did not see his face— I wish I had—it would have added greatly to the joke the recollection of that fellow's face but I believe he was a newspaper man.

"I finished my soup, and sat up, looking— looking for Fritz to bring along the *poulet roti*. And I caught sight of another card lying on the table beside the plate of the fellow who had just gone out. He must have pulled out two at once, and not noticed. Fritz came up with the chicken just then and I asked him to hand me the card. You remember the stolid Fritz— how he'd unquestioningly do anything you asked him, except bring you a second bottle of wine if he thought you'd had enough. He brought me the card.

"It hadn't a name on it that I knew I've forgotten what it was. It was something like yours, I fancy. However, that doesn't matter. I slipped it into my pocket.

"There's an old bachelor uncle of mine has rooms in the Albany, and I spent the evening there— with two other fellows and the old man— playing bridge. It was pretty late when I left— well after midnight. I came out into Piccadilly, and walked down towards the Circus, and turned up Swallow Street to get into Regent Street. My rooms were up at the back of Oxford Circus, behind Peter Robinson's.

"It was a cold, windy night, and it was snowing, and I had just filled my pipe and wanted to light it. But the wind was tearing down that crooked funnel of Swallow Street so hard that I couldn't keep a match alight, So, about half way up, I stepped in under an archway over a door, where there was a little shelter, and I put my foot on a body that was lying there. I thought it was a drunk— but when I came to light a match, and look, I found it was a 'deader'— a stiff, a chap who'd chucked his marble in. There was no mistake about it— he was as dead as Aaron. But quite freshly slaughtered, I should say. He was an ugly looking bounder with a grin on his face— I expect he appreciated the joke that had been played on him.

"Corpses don't worry me— but inquests do, and when I'd lit my pipe I was just going to go on my way, leaving the departed to the care of the next passer-by in Swallow Street.

"But it seemed a pity to neglect this opportunity of a little innocent amusement— and I suddenly thought of the fellow who'd left his card on the table. So I pulled it out, and put my hand inside the breast of his overcoat, and stuck the card in his waistcoat pocket. I could feel he was in evening dress.

"And I went home enjoying the joke all the way. Imagine it! You could take any man you liked and fit him to the situation! when the police want to all he knows about the dead man and his finish. Immense!"

If I had a gleam in my eye, he did not look round in time to notice it. If there was murder in my face, he did not see it. He did not hear the catch in my breath, the gulping in my throat.

"Now there's an instance, Bateman of the creation of a really humorous situation. Until, for the sheer love of the quaintness of it, you can devise, and enjoy alone such a subtle jest you are no true humorist. You are a dull dog, and a joke is not in you."

"Do you see the joke of this?" I asked as I leant over from my chair and punched his nose "Or of this?" as I kicked him where he lay in the fender. "Or this?" I emptied the coal scuttle over him.

He didn't. He had me fined ten pounds and his doctor's bill.

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14: Bubbles

Don Marquis

1878-1937

The Saturday Evening Post, 31 July 1920

TOMMY HAWKINS was not so sober that you could tell it on him. Certainly his friend Jack Dobson, calling on him one dreary winter evening— an evening of that winter before John Barleycorn cried maudlin tears into his glass and kissed America good-by— would never have guessed it from Tommy's occupation. Presenting himself at Tommy's door, and finding it unlocked, Jack had gone on in. A languid splashing guided him to the bathroom. In the tub sat Tommy with the water up to his shoulders, blowing soap bubbles.

"You darned old fool!" said Jack. "Aren't you ever going to grow up, Tommy?"

"Nope," said Tommy placidly. "What for?"

Sitting on a chair close by the bathtub was a shallow silver dish with a cake of soap and some reddish-colored suds in it. Tommy had bought the dish to give someone for a wedding present, and then had forgotten to send it.

"What makes the suds red?" asked Jack.

"I poured a lot of that nose-and-throat spray stuff into it,"' explained Tommy. ''It makes them prettier. Look!"

As a pipe he was using a piece of hollow brass curtain rod six or eight inches long and of about the diameter of a fat lead pencil. He soused this thing in the reddish suds and manufactured a bubble with elaborate care. With a graceful gesture of his wet arm he gently waved the rod until the bubble detached itself. It floated in the air for a moment, and the thin, reddish integument caught the light from the electric globe and gave forth a brief answering flash as of fire. Then the bubble suddenly and whimsically dashed itself against the wall and was no more, leaving a faint, damp, reddish trace upon the white plaster.

"Air current caught it," elucidated Tommy with the air of a circus proprietor showing off pet elephants. In his most facetious moments Tommy was wont to hide his childish soul beneath an exterior of serious dignity. "This old dump is full of air currents. They come in round the windows, come in round the doors, come right in through the walls. Damned annoying, too, for a scientist making experiments with bubbles— starts a bubble and never knows which way it's going to jump. I'm gonna complain to the management of this hotel."

"You're going to come out of that bathtub and get into your duds," said Jack. "That water's getting cool now, and between cold water and air currents you'll have pneumonia the first thing you know— you poor silly fish, you."

"Speaking of fish," said Tommy elliptically, "there's a bottle of cocktails on the mantel in the room there. Forgot it for a moment. Don't want to be inhospitable, but don't drink all of it."

"It's all gone,"' said Dobson a moment later.

"So?" said Tommy in surprise. "That's the way with cocktails. Here one minute and gone the next— like bubbles. Bubbles! Life's like that, Jack!" He made another bubble with great solemnity, watched it float and dart and burst. "Pouf!" he said. "Bubbles! Bubbles! Life's like that!"

"You're an original philosopher, you are," said Jack, seizing him by the shoulders. "You're about as original as a valentine. Douse yourself with cold water and rub yourself down and dress. Come out of it, kid, or you'll be sick."

"If I get sick," said Tommy, obeying, nevertheless, "I won't have to go to work to-morrow."

"Why aren't you working to-day?" asked his friend, working on him with a coarse towel.

"Day off," said Tommy.

"Day off!" rejoined Dobson. "Since when has the *Morning Despatch* been giving two days off a week to its reporters? You had your day off Tuesday, and this is Thursday."

"Is it?" said Tommy. "I always get Tuesday and Thursday mixed. Both begin with a T. Hey, Jack, how's that? Both begin with a T! End with a tea party! Good line, hey, Jack? Tuesday and Thursday both begin with a T and end with a tea party. I'm gonna write a play round that, Jack. Broadway success! Letters a foot high! Royalties for both of us! I won't forget you, Jack! You suggested the idea for the plot, Jack. Drag you out in front of the curtain with me when I make my speech. 'Author! Author!' yells the crowd. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' says I, 'here is the obscure and humble person who set in motion the train of thought that led to my writing this masterpiece. Such as he is, I introduce him to you.' "

"Shut up!" said Jack, and continued to lacerate Tommy's hide with the rough towel. "Hold still! Now go and get into your clothes."

And as Tommy began to dress he regarded that person darkly. "You're a brilliant wag, you are! It's a shame the way the copy readers down on the *Despatch* keep your best things out of print, you splattering super mud-hen of journalism, you! You'll wake up some morning without any more job than a Kaiser." And as Tommy threaded himself into the mystic maze of his garments Mr. Dobson continued to look at him and mutter disgustedly, "Bubbles!"

Not that he was afraid that Tommy would actually lose his job. If it had been possible for Tommy to lose his job that must have happened years before. But Tommy wrote a certain joyous type of story better than any other person in New York, and his facetiousness got him out of as many scrapes as it

got him into. He was thirty years old. At ninety he would still be experimenting with the visible world in a spirit of random eagerness, joshing everything in it, including himself. He looked exactly like the young gentleman pictured m a widely disseminated collar advertisement. He enjoyed looking that way, and occasionally he enjoyed talking as if he were exactly that kind of person. He loved to turn his ironic levity against the character he seemed to be, much as the mad wags who grace the column of F.P.A. delight in getting their sayings across accompanied by a gentle satirical fillip at all mad waggery.

"Speaking of bubbles," he suddenly chuckled as he carefully adjusted his tie in the collar that looked exactly like the one in the advertisement, "there's an old party in the next room that takes 'em more seriously than you do, Jack."

The old downtown hotel in which Tommy lived had once been a known and noted hostelry, and persons from Plumville, Pennsylvania, Griffin, Georgia, and Galva, Illinois, still stopped there when in New York, because their fathers and mothers had stopped there on their wedding journeys perhaps. It was not such a very long way from the Eden Musee, when there was an Eden Musee. Tommy's room had once formed part of a suite. The bathroom which adjoined it had belonged jointly to another room in the suite. But now these two rooms were always let separately. Still, however, the bathroom was a joint affair. When Tommy wished to bathe he must first insure privacy by hooking on the inside the door that led into the bedroom from the chamber beyond.

"Old party in the next room?" questioned Jack.

"Uh-huh," said Tommy, who had benefited by his cold sluicing and his rubdown. "I gave him a few bubbles for his very own— through the keyhole into his room, you know. Poked that brass red through and blew the bubble in his room. Detached it with a little jerk and let it float. Seemed more sociable, you know, to let him in on the fun. Never be stingy with your pleasures, Jack. Shows a mean spirit— a mean soul. Why not cheer the old party up with soap bubbles? Cost little, bubbles do. More than likely he's a stranger in New York. Unfriendly city, he thinks. Big city. Nobody thinks of him. Nobody cares for him. Away from home. Winter day. Melancholy. Well, I say, give him a bubble now and then. Shows some one is thinking of him. Shows the world isn't so thoughtless and gloomy after all. Neighborly sort of thing to do, Jack. Makes him think of his youth— home— mother's knee— all that kind of thing, Jack. Cheers him up. Sat in the tub there and got to thinking of him. Almost cried, Jack, when I thought how lonely the old man must be— got one of these old man's voices. Whiskers. Whiskers deduced from the voice. So I climbed out of the tub every ten or fifteen minutes all afternoon and gave the old man a bubble. Rain outside— fog, sleet. Dark indoors. Old man sits and thinks nobody loves him. Along comes a bubble. Old man gets happy. Laughs. Remembers his

infancy. Skies clear. You think I'm a selfish person, Jack? I'm not. I'm a Samaritan. Where will we eat?"

"You are a darned fool," said Jack. "You say he took them seriously? What do you mean? Did he like 'em?"

"Couldn't quite make out," said Tommy. "But they moved him. Gasped every now and then. Think he prayed. Emotion, Jack. Probably made him think of boyhood's happy days down on the farm. Heard him talking to himself. Think he cried. Went to bed anyhow with his clothes on and pulled the covers over his head. Looked through the keyhole and saw that. Gray whiskers sticking up and that's all. Deduced the whiskers from the voice, Jack. Let's give the old party a couple more bubbles and then go eat. It's been an hour since he's had one. Thinks I'm forgetting him, no doubt."

So they gave the old man a couple of bubbles, poking the brass rod through the keyhole of the door.

The result was startling and unexpected. First there came a gasp from the other room, a sort of whistling release of the breath, and an instant later a high, whining, nasal voice.

"Oh, God! God! Again! You meant it, then, God! You meant it!"

The two young men started back and looked at each other in wonderment. There was such a quivering agony, such an utter groveling terror in this voice from the room beyond that they were daunted.

"What's eating him?" asked Dobson, instinctively dropping his tones to a whisper.

"I don't know," said Tommy, temporarily subdued. "Sounds like that last one shell-shocked him when it exploded, doesn't it?"

But Tommy was subdued only for a moment.

As they went out into the corridor he giggled and remarked, 'Told you he took 'em seriously, Jack."

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"SERIOUSLY" was a word scarcely strong enough for the way in which the old party in the room beyond had taken it, though he had not, in fact, seen the bubble. He had only seen a puff of smoke coming apparently from nowhere, originating in the air itself, as it seemed to him, manifesting itself materialising itself out of nothing, and floating in front of the one eye which was peeping fearfully out of the huddled bedclothing which he had drawn over himself. He had lain quaking on the bed, waiting for this puff of smoke for an hour or more, hoping against hope that it would not come, praying and muttering,

knotting his bony hands in the whiskers that Tommy had seen sticking up from the coverings, twisting convulsively.

Tommy had whimsically filled the bubble, as he blew it, with smoke from his cigarette. He had in like manner, throughout the afternoon and early evening, filled all the bubbles that he had given the old man with cigarette or pipe smoke. The old party had not been bowled over by anything in Tommy's tobacco. He had not noticed that the smoke was tobacco smoke, for he had been smoking a pipe himself the greater part of the day, and had not aired out the room. It was neither bubbles nor tobacco that had flicked a raw spot on his soul. It was smoke.

iii

BUBBLES! They seemed to be in Tommy's brain. Perhaps it was the association of ideas that made him think of champagne. At any rate he declared that he must have some, and vetoed his friend's suggestion that they dine— as they frequently did— at one of the little Italian *table d'hôte* places in Greenwich Village.

"You're a bubble and I'm a bubble and the world is a bubble," Tommy was saying a little later as he watched the gas stirring in his golden drink.

They had gone to the genial old Brevoort, which was— but why tell persons who missed the Brevoort in its mellower days what they missed, and why cause anguished yearnings in the bosoms of those who knew it well?

"Tommy," said his friend, "don't, if you love me, hand out any more of your jejune poeticism or musical-comedy philosophy. I'll agree with you that the world is a bubble for the sake of argument, if you'll change the record. I want to eat, and nothing interferes with my pleasure in a meal so much as this line of pseudo-cerebration that you seem to have adopted lately."

"Bubbles seem trivial things, Jack," went on Tommy, altogether unperturbed. "But I have a theory that there aren't any trivial things. I like to think of the world balancing itself on a trivial thing. Look at the Kaiser, for instance. A madman. Well, let's say there's been a blood clot in his brain for years—a little trivial thing the size of a pin point, Jack. It hooks up with the wrong brain cell; it gets into the wrong channel, and— *pouf*! The world goes to war. A thousand million people are affected by it— by that one little clot of blood no bigger than a pin point that gets into the wrong channel. An atom! A planet balanced on an atom! A star pivoting on a molecule!"

"Have some soup," said his friend.

"Bubbles! Bubbles and butterflies!" continued Tommy. "Some day, Jack, I'm going to write a play in which a butterfly's wing brushes over an empire."

"No, you're not," said Jack. "You're just going to talk about it and think you're writing it and peddle the idea round to everybody you know, and then finally some wise guy is going to grab it off and really write it. You've been going to write a play ever since I knew you."

"Yes, I am; I'm really going to write that play."

"Well, Tommy," said Jack, looking round the chattels dining room, 'this is a hell of a place to do it in!"

"Meaning, of course,"' said Tommy serenely, "that it takes more than a butterfly to write a play about a butterfly."

"You get me,"' said his friend. And then after a pause he went on with sincerity in his manner: "You know I think you could write the play, Tommy. But unless you get to work on some of your ideas pretty soon, and buckle down to them in earnest, other people will continue to write your plays— and you will continue to josh them and yourself, and your friends will continue to think that you could write better plays if you would only do it. People aren't going to take you seriously, Tommy, till you begin to take yourself a little seriously. Why, you poor, futile, silly, misguided, dear old mutt, you! You don't even have sense enough— you don't have the moral continuity, if you follow me— to stay sore at a man that does you dirt! Now, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Tommy a little more seriously.

"Well, now, do you?" persisted his friend. "I don't say it's good Christian doctrine not to forgive people. It isn't. But I've seen people put things across on you, Tommy, and seen you laugh it off and let 'em be friends with you again inside of six weeks. I couldn't do it, and nine-tenths of the fellows we know couldn't do it; and in the way you do it, it shouldn't be done. You should at least remember, even if you do forgive; remember well enough not to get bit by the same dog again. With you, old kid, it's all a part of your being a butterfly and a bubble. It's no particular virtue in you. I wouldn't talk to you like a Dutch uncle if I didn't think you had it in you to make good. But you've got to be prodded."

"There's one fellow that did me dirt," said Tommy musingly, "that I've never taken to my bosom again."

"What did you do to him?" asked his friend. "Beat him to death with a butterfly's wing, Tommy, or blow him out of existence with a soap bubble?"'

"I've never done anything to him," said Tommy soberly. "And I don't think I ever would do anything to him. I just remember, that's all. If he ever gets his come-uppance, as they say in the rural districts, it won't be through any act of mine. Let life take revenge for me. I never will."

"I suppose you're right,"' said Dobson. "But who was this guy? And what did he do to you?"

iv

"HE WAS— and is— my uncle," said Tommy, "and he did about everything to me. Listen! You think I do nothing but flitter, flutter, frivol and flivver! And you may be right, and maybe I never will do anything else. Maybe I never will be anything but a kid.

"I was young when I was born. No, that's not one of my silly lines, Jack. I mean it seriously. I was young when I was born. I was born with a jolly disposition. But this uncle of mine took it out of me. I'll say he did! The reason I'm such a kid now, Jack, is because I had to grow up when I was about five years old, and I stayed grown up until I was seventeen or eighteen. I never had a chance to be a boy. If I showed any desire to be it was knocked out of me on the spot. And if I live two hundred years, and stay nineteen years old all that time, Jack, I won't any more than make up for the childhood I missed—that was stolen from me. Frivol? I could frivol a thousand years and not dull my appetite. I want froth, Jack: froth and bubbles!

"This old uncle of mine— he wasn't so old in years when I first knew him, but in his soul he was as old as the overseers who whipped the slaves that built Cheops' pyramid, and as sandy and as flinty— hated me as soon as he saw me. He hated me before he saw me. He would have hated me if he had never seen me, because I was young and happy and careless.

"I was that, when I went to live with him— young and happy and careless. I was five years old. He was my father's brother, Uncle Ezra was, and he beat my father out of money in his dirty, underhanded way. Oh, nothing illegal! At least, I suppose not. Uncle Ezra was too cautious to do anything that might be found out on him. There was nothing that my mother could prove, at any rate, and my father had been careless and had trusted him. When my father died my mother was ill. He gave us a home, Uncle Ezra did. She had to live somewhere; she had to have a roof over her head and attention of some sort. She had no near relations, and I had to be looked after.

"So she and I went into his house to live. It was to be temporary. We were to move as soon as she got better. But she did not live long. I don't remember her definitely as she was before we went to live with Uncle Ezra. I can only see her as she lay on a bed in a dark room before she died. It was a large wooden bed, with wooden slats and a straw mattress. I can see myself sitting on a chair by the head of the bed and talking to her. My feet did not reach to the floor by any means; they only reached to the chair rungs. I can't remember what she said or what I said. All I remember of her is that she had very bright eyes and that her arms were thin. I remember her arms, but not her face, except the

eyes. I suppose she used to reach her arms out to me. I think she must have been jolly at one time, too. There is a vague feeling, a remembrance, that before we went to Uncle Ezra's she was jolly, and that she and | laughed and played together in some place where there was red-clover bloom.

"One day when I was sitting on the chair, the door opened and Uncle Ezra came in. There was some man with him that was, I suppose, a doctor. I can recall Uncle Ezra's false grin and the way he put his hand on my head— to impress the doctor, I suppose— and the way I pulled away from him. For I felt that he disliked me, and I feared and hated him.

"Yes, Uncle Ezra gave us a home. I don't know how much you know about the rural districts, Jack. But when an Uncle Ezra in a country town gives someone a home he acquires merit. This was a little town in Pennsylvania that I'm talking about, and Uncle Ezra was a prominent citizen— deacon in the church and all that sort of thing. Truly rural drama stuff, Jack, but I can't help that— it's true. Uncle Ezra had a reputation for being stingy and mean. Giving us a home was a good card for him to play. My mother had a little money, and he stole that, too, when she died.

"I suppose he stole it legally. I don't know. It wasn't much. No one had any particular interest in looking out for me, and nobody would want to start anything in opposition to Uncle Ezra in that town if it could be helped anyhow. He didn't have the whole village and the whole of the farming country round about sewed up, all by himself, but he was one of the little group that did. There's a gang like that in every country town, I imagine. He was one of four or five big ducks in that little puddle— lent money, took mortgages and all that kind of thing you read about. I don't know how much he is worth now, counting what he has been stealing all his life. But it can't be a staggering sum. He's too cowardly to plunge or take a long chance. He steals and saves and grinds in a little way. He is too mean and. small and blind and limited in his intelligence to be a big, really successful crook, such as you will find in New York City.

"When my mother died, of course, I stayed with Uncle Ezra. I suppose everybody said how good it was of him to keep me, and that it showed a soft and kindly spot in his nature after all, and that he couldn't be so hard as he had the name of being. But I don't see what else could have been done with me, unless he had taken me out and dropped me in the mill pond like a blind cat. Sometimes I used to wish he had done that.

"It isn't hard to put a five-year-old kid in the wrong, so as to make it appear— even to the child himself— that he is bad and disobedient. Uncle Ezra began that way with me. I'm not going into details. This isn't a howl; it's merely an explanation. But he persecuted me in every way. He put me to work before

I should have known what work was— work too hard for me. He deviled me and he beat me, he clothed me like a beggar and he fed me like a dog, he robbed me of childhood and of boyhood. I won't go over the whole thing.

"I never had decent shoes, or a hat that wasn't a rag, and I never went to kid parties or anything, or even owned so much as an air rifle of my own. The only pair of skates I ever had, Jack, I made for myself out of two old files, with the help of the village blacksmith— and I got licked for that. Uncle Ezra said I had stolen the files and the straps. They belonged to him.

"But there's one thing I remember with more of anger than any other. He used to make me kneel down and pray every night before I went to bed, in his presence; and sometimes he would pray with me. He was a deacon in the church. There are plenty of them on the square— likely most of them are. But this one was the kind you used to see in the old-fashioned melodramas. Truly rural stuff, Jack. He used to be quite a shark at prayer himself, Uncle Ezra did. I can remember how he looked when he prayed, with his eyes shut and his Adam's apple bobbing up and down and the sound whining through his nose.

"The only person that was ever human to me was a woman I called Aunt Lizzie. I don't know really what relation she was to me; a distant cousin of Uncle Ezra's, I think. She was half blind and she was deaf, and he bullied her and made her do all the housework. She was bent nearly double with drudgery. He had given her a home, too. She didn't dare be very good to me. He might find it out, and then we both would catch it. She baked me some apple dumplings once on one of my birthdays. I was nine years old. And he said she had stolen the apples and flour from him; that he had not ordered her to make any apple dumplings, and it was theft; and he made me pray for her, and made her pray for herself, and he prayed for both of us in family prayers every day for a week.

"I was nearly eighteen when I ran away. I might have done it sooner, but I was small for my age, and I was cowed. I didn't dare to call my soul my own, and I had a reputation for being queer, too. For I used to grin and laugh at things no one else thought were funny— when Uncle Ezra wasn't round. I suppose people in that town thought it was odd that I could laugh at all. No one could understand how I had a laugh left in me. But when I was alone I used to laugh. I used to laugh at myself sometimes because I was so little and so queer. When I was seventeen I wasn't much bigger than a thirteen-year-old kid should be. I packed a lot of growing into the years between seventeen and twenty-one.

"When I ran away Aunt Lizzie gave me eighty-seven cents, all in nickels and pennies, and there were two or three of those old-fashioned two-cent pieces in it, too, that she had had for God knows how long. It was all she had. I don't

suppose he ever paid her anything at all, and the wonder was she had that much. I told her that when I got out into the world and made good I would come and get her, but she shivered all over with fright at the idea of daring to leave. I have sent her things from time to time in the last ten years— money, and dresses I have bought for her, and little things I thought she would like. But I don't know whether he let her have them or not. I never got any letter from her at all. I don't even know whether she can write, to tell the truth, and she wouldn't dare get one of the neighbors to write for her. But if I ever make any real money, Jack, I am going to go and get her, whether she dares to come away or not.

"Well, when I left, the thing I wanted to do was go to school. Uncle Ezra hadn't given me time to go to school much. But I tramped to a town where there was a little fresh-water college that had its own prep school attached, and I did the whole seven years of prep school and college in five years. You see, I had a lot of bounce in me. The minute I got away from Uncle Ezra the whole world brightened up for me. The clouds rolled by and life looked like one grand long joke, and I turned into a kid. I romped through that prep school and that college, and made my own living while I was doing it, and laughed all the time and loved the world and everything in it, and it came as easy to me as water comes to a duck. I came on down here to New York and was lucky enough to get a chance as a reporter, and I've been romping ever since.

"I don't want to do anything but romp. Of course, I want to write some good stuff some day, but I want to keep romping while I write it, and I want it to be stuff that has a romp in it, too. You say I romp so much I'm never serious. Well, I do have some serious moments, too. I have a dream that keeps coming to me. I dream that I'm back in that little town, and that I'm Uncle Ezra's slave again, and that I can't get away.

"Sometimes the dream takes the form of Uncle Ezra coming here to New York to get me, and I know that I've got to go back with him to that place, and I wake up sweating and crying like an eight-year-old kid. If he ever really came it would put a crimp into me, Jack.

"You say I'm a butterfly. And I say, yes, Jack, thank God I am! I used to be a grubworm, and now I'm a butterfly, praise heaven!

"Well, that's the guy I hold the grudge against, and that's why I'm fool enough to rush into every pleasure I can find. I don't know that I'll ever change. And as for the man, I don't ever want to sec him. I don't know that I'd ever do anything to him if I did— beat him to death with a butterfly's wing, or blow him up with a soap bubble, as you suggested. Let him alone. He'll punish himself. He is punished by being what he is. I wouldn't put a breath into the scale one way or the other— not even a puff of cigarette smoke."'

He blew a breath of cigarette smoke luxuriously out of his nose as he finished, and then he remarked, "'Let's go somewhere and dance."

"Nazimova is doing Ibsen uptown," suggested Jack, "and I have a couple of tickets. Let's go and see Ibsen Ib a little."

"Nope," said Tommy. "Ibsen's got too much sense. I want something silly. Me for a cabaret, or some kind of a hop garden."

v

BUT SOMETIMES in this ironical world it happens that we have already beaten a man to death with a butterfly's wing, slain him with a bubble, sent him whirling into the hereafter on a puff of smoke, even as we are saying that such a thing is foreign to our thoughts.

The old party in the room next to Tommy's at the hotel had arrived the day before, with an umbrella, a straw suitcase and a worried eye on either side his long, white, chalkish, pitted nose. He seemed chilly in spite of his large plum-colored overcoat, of a cut that has survived only in the rural districts. He wore a salient, assertive beard, that had once been sandy and was now almost white, but it was the only assertive thing about him. His manner was far from aggressive.

An hour after he had been shown to his room he appeared at the desk again and inquired timidly of the clerk, "There's a fire near here?"

"Little blaze in the next block. Doesn't amount to anything," said the clerk.

"I heard the— the engines," said the guest apologetically.

"Doesn't amount to anything,"' said the clerk again. And then, "Nervous about fire?"

The old party seemed startled.

"Who? Me? Why should I be nervous about fire? No! No! No!" He beat a sudden retreat. "I was just asking— just asking,"' he threw back over his shoulder.

"Old duck's scared of fire and ashamed to own it," mused the clerk, watching him out of the lobby.

The old party went back to his room, and there one of the first things He saw was a copy of the Bible lying on the bureau. There is an organisation which professes for its object the placing of a Bible in every hotel room in the land. The old party had his own Bible with him. As if reminded of it by the one on the bureau, he took it out of his suitcase and sat down and began to turn the leaves like a person familiar with the book— and like a person in need of comfort, as indeed he was.

There was a text in Matthew that he sought— where was it? Somewhere in the first part of Matthew's gospel— ah, here it is: The twelfth chapter and the thirty-first verse:

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men...."

There is a terrible reservation in the same verse. He kept his eyes from it, and read the first part over and over, forming the syllables with his lips, but not speaking aloud.

"All manner of sin—all manner of sin—"

And then, as if no longer able to avoid it, he yielded his consciousness to the latter clause of the verse :

'But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."

What was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Could what he had done be construed as that? Probably if one lied to God in his prayers, that was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost— one form of it. And had he been lying to God these last two weeks when he had said over and over again in his prayers that it was all a mistake? It hadn't been all a mistake, but the worst part of it had been a mistake.

He went out for his dinner that evening, but he was in again before ten o'clock. He could not have slept well. At two o'clock in the morning he appeared in front of the desk.

He had heard fire engines again.

"See here," said the night clerk, appraising him, as the day clerk had done, as a rube who had been seldom to the city and was nervous about fire, "you don't need to be worried. If anything should happen near here we'd get all the guests out in a jiffy."

The old party returned to his room. He was up early the next morning and down to breakfast before the dining room was open.

He did not look as if he had had much rest. The morning hours he devoted to reading his Bible in his room. Perhaps he found comfort in it. At noon he seemed a bit more cheerful. He asked the clerk the way to the Eden Musee, and was surprised to learn that that place of amusement had been closed for a year or two. The clerk recommended a moving-picture house round the corner. But it had begun to rain and snow and sleet all together; the sky was dark and the wind was rising; the old party elected not to go out after all.

He went back to his room once more, and his black fear and melancholy descended upon him again, and the old debate began to weave through his brain anew. For two weeks he had been fleeing from the debate and from himself. He had come to New York to get away from it, but it was no good. Just when he had made up his mind that God had forgiven him, and was

experiencing a momentary respite, some new doubt would assail him and the agony would begin again.

The old debate— he had burned the store, with the living quarters over it, to get the insurance money, after having removed a part of the insured goods, but he did not regard that as an overwhelming sin. It wasn't right, of course, in one way. And yet in another way it was merely sharp business practice, so he told himself. For a year before that, when one of his buildings had burned through accident, he had been forced to accept from the same insurance company less than was actually due him as a matter of equity. Therefore, to make money out of that company by a shrewd trick was in a way merely to get back his own again. It wasn't the sort of thing that a deacon in the church would care to have found out on him, of course. It was wrong in a sense. But it was the wrong that it had led to that worried him.

It was the old woman's death that worried him. He hadn't meant to burn her to death, God knows! He hadn't known she was in the building.

He had sent her on a week's visit to another town, to see a surprised cousin of his own, and it had been distinctly understood that she was not to return until Saturday. But some time on Friday evening she must have crept back home and gone to bed in her room. He had not known she was there.

"I didn't know! I didn't know!"

There were times when he gibbered the words to himself by the hour.

It was at midnight that he had set fire to the place. The old woman was deaf. Even when the flames began to crackle she could not have heard them. She had had no more chance than a rat in a trap. The old fool! It was her own fault! Why had she not obeyed him? Why had she come creeping back, like a deaf old half-blind tabby cat, to die in the flames? It was her own fault! When he thought of the way she had returned to kill herself there were moments when he cursed and hated her.

But had she killed herself? Back and forth swung the inner argument. At times he saw clearly enough that this incident joined on without a break to the texture of his whole miserable life; when he recognised that, though it might be an accident in a strictly literal sense that the old woman was dead, yet it was the sort of accident for which his previous existence had been a preparation. Even while he fiercely denied his guilt, or talked of it in a seizure of whining prayer that was essentially a lying denial, he knew that guilt there was.

Would he be forgiven? There were comforting passages in the Bible. He switched on the rather insufficient electric light, which was all the old hotel provided, for the day was too dark to read without that help, and turned the pages of the New Testament through and through again.

At three o'clock in the afternoon he was sitting on the edge of his bed, with the book open in front of him and his head bowed, almost dozing. His pipe, with which he had filled the room with the fumes of tobacco, had fallen to the floor. Perhaps it was weariness, but for a brief period his sharper sense of fear had been somewhat stilled again. Maybe it was going to be like this— a gradual easing off of the strain in answer to his prayers. He had asked God for an answer as to whether he should be forgiven, and God was answering in this way, so he told himself. God was going to let him get some sleep, and maybe when he woke everything would be all right again— bearable at least.

So he mused, half asleep.

And then all at once he sprang wide awake again, and his terror wakened with him. For suddenly in front of his half shut eyes, coming from nowhere in particular, there passed a puff of smoke!

What could it mean? He had asked God for an answer. He had been lulled for a moment almost into something like peace, and— now— this puff of smoke! Was it a sign? Was it God's answer?

He sat up on the edge of the bed, rigid, in a cold, still agony of superstitious fright. He dared not move or turn his head. He was afraid that he would see— something— if he looked behind him. He was afraid that he would in another moment hear something— a voice!

He closed his eyes. He prayed. He prayed aloud. His eyes once closed, he scarcely dared open them again. After some minutes he began to tell himself that perhaps he had been mistaken; perhaps he had not seen smoke at all. Perhaps even if he had seen smoke it was due to some explicable cause, and not meant for him.

He greatly dared. He opened his eyes. And drifting lazily above the white pillow at the head of the bed was another puff of smoke.

He rocked back and forth upon the bed, with his arms up as if to shield his head from a physical blow, and then he passed in a moment from the quakings of fear to a kind of still certainty of doom. God was angry at him. God was telling him so. God would send the devil for him. There was no further doubt. He would go to hell— to hell! To burn forever! Forever— even as the old woman had burned for a quarter of an hour. He began to search through the pages of the Bible again, not for words of comfort this time, but in a morbid ecstasy of despair, for phrases about hell, for verses that mentioned fire and flames.

He did not need the concordance. He knew his Bible well, and his fear helped him. Consciousness and subconsciousness joined to guide his fingers and eyes in the quest.

"Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming," he read in Isaiah, and he took it to himself.

"Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof," he read in Ezekiel.

He had a literal imagination, and he had a literal belief, and at every repetition of the word "fire" the flesh cringed and crawled on his bones. God! To burn! How it must hurt!

"And the God that answereth by fire, let him be God," met his eyes in the first book of Kings.

And it all meant him. Now and then over his shoulder would float another little puff of smoke; and once, lifting his head suddenly from poring over the book, he thought he saw something that moved and glinted like a traveling spark, and was gone.

He began to feel himself in hell already. This was the foretaste, that was all. Would he begin to burn even before he died? Did this smoke presage something of that kind? Would flames physically seize upon him, and would he burn, even as the old woman had burned?

Suddenly in his hysteria there came a revulsion— a revolt. Having reached the nethermost depths of despair, he began to move upward a little. His soul stirred and took a step and tried to climb. He began to pray once more. After all, the Good Book did promise mercy! He began to dare to pray again. And he prayed in a whisper that now and then broke into a whine— a strange prayer, characteristic of the man.

"Oh, God," he cried, "you promise forgiveness in that book there, and I'm gonna hold you to it! I'm gonna hold you to it! It's down there in black and white, your own words, God, and I'm gonna hold you to it! It's a contract, God, and you ain't the kind of a man, God, to go back on a contract that's down in black and white!"'

Thus he prayed, with a naive, unconscious blasphemy, And after long minutes of this sort of thing his soul dared take another step. A faint, far glimmering of hope came to him where he groveled. For he was groveling on the bed now, with the covers pulled up to his head and his hand upon the open Bible. He found the courage to peer from beneath the covers at intervals as he prayed and muttered, and minutes passed with no more smoke. Had the smoke ceased? The sound of his own murmuring voice began to reassure him. The smoke had certainly ceased. It had been twenty minutes since he had seen it— half an hour!

What could it mean? That God was hearkening to his prayer?

An hour went by, and still there was no more sign of smoke. He prayed feverishly, he gabbled, as if by the rapidity of his utterance and the repeated

strokes of his words he were beating back and holding at bay the smoke that was God's warning and the symbol of his displeasure. And the smoke had ceased to come! He was to be forgiven! He was winning! His prayers were winning for him! At least God was listening!

Yes, that must be it. God was listening now. The smoke had come as a warning; and he had, upon receiving this warning, repented. God had not meant, after all, that he was doomed irrevocably. God had meant that, to be forgiven, his repentance must be genuine, must be thorough— and it was thorough now. Now it was genuine! And the smoke had ceased! The smoke had been a sign, and he had heeded the sign, and now if he kept up his prayers and lived a good life in the future he was to be forgiven. He would not have to burn in hell after all.

The minutes passed, and he prayed steadily, and every minute that went by and brought no further sign of the smoke built up in him a little more hope, another grain of confidence.

An hour and a quarter, and he almost dared be sure that he was forgiven— but he was not quite sure. If he could only be quite sure! He wallowed on the bed, and his hand turned idly the pages of the Bible, lying outside on the coverlet.

More than an hour had gone by. Could he accept it as an indication that God had indeed heard him? He shifted himself upon the bed, and stared up at the ceiling through a chink in the covers as if through and beyond the ceiling he were interrogating heaven.

And lying so, there came a damp touch upon his hand, soft and chill and silent, as if it were delicately and ironically brushed by the kiss of Death. A sudden agony numbed his hand and arm. With the compulsion of hysteria, not to be resisted, his head lifted and he sat up and looked. Over the Bible and his hand that lay upon the open page there floated again a puff of smoke, and faintly staining his fingers and the paper itself was something moist and red. It stained his fingers and it marked with red for his straining sight this passage of Isaiah:

"The earth also shall disclose her blood."

It was then he cried out, "Oh, God! God! Again! You meant it, then, God! You meant it!"

vi

IT WAS nearly midnight when Tommy and his friend Dobson returned to the hotel. "Your paper's been trying to get you for an hour, Mr. Hawkins," said

the night clerk when they came in. "Story right in the next room to yours. Old party in there hanged himself."

"So?" said Tommy. "Ungrateful old guy, he is! I put in the afternoon trying to cheer him up a little."

"Did you know him?" asked the clerk.

"Nope," said Tommy, moving toward the elevator.

But a few moments later, confronted with the grotesque spectacle in the room upstairs, he said, "Yes— I— I know him. Jack! Jack! Get me out of here, Jack! It's Uncle Ezra, Jack! He's— he's come for me!"

As has been remarked before, sometimes even a bubble may be a mordant weapon.

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15: The Mayor's Lamps

John Kendrick Bangs

1862-1922

Harper's Magazine, Aug 1896

THE serpent had crept into Eden. The Perkins household for ten years had been little less than Paradise to its inmates, and then in a single night the reptile of political ambition had dragged his slimy length through those happy door-posts and sat grinning indecently at the inscription over the library mantel, a ribbon bearing the sentiment "Here Dwells Content" let into the tiles thereof. How it ever happened no man knoweth, but happen it did. Thaddeus was snatched from the arms of Peace and plunged headlong into the jaws of Political Warfare.

"They want me because they think I'm strong," he pleaded in extenuation of his acceptance of the nomination for Mayor of his town.

"But you ought to know better," returned Mrs. Perkins, failing to realize what possible misconstruction her lord and master might put upon the answer. "The idea of your meddling in politics when you've got twice as much work as you can do already! I think it's awful!"

"I didn't seek it," he said, after hesitating a moment; "they've— they've thrust it on me." Then he tried to be funny. "With me, public office is a public thrust."

"Is there any salary?" asked Mrs. Perkins, treating the jest with the contempt it merited.

"No," said Thaddeus. "Not a cent; but—"

"Not a cent?" cried Mrs. Perkins. "And you are going to give up all your career, or at least two years of it, and probably the best two years of your life, for—"

"Glory," said Thaddeus.

"Glory! Humph," said Mrs. Perkins. "I am not aware that Nations are talking of previous Mayors of Philipseburg. Mr. Jiggers's name is not a household word outside of this city, is it?"

Mr. Jiggers was the gentleman into whose shoes Thaddeus was seeking to place his feet— the incumbent of the mighty office to which he aspired.

"Who is the present Lord Mayor of London?" the lady continued.

"Haven't the slightest idea," murmured the standard-bearer of the Democratic party, hopelessly.

"Or Berlin, or Peking— or even of Chicago?" she went on.

"What has that got to do with it?" retorted the worm, turning a trifle.

"You spoke of glory— the glory of being Mayor of Philipseburg, a city of 30,000 inhabitants. This is going to send your name echoing from sea to sea,

reverberating through Europe, and thundering down through the ages to come; aud yet you admit that the glories of the Mayors of London with 4,000,000 souls, of Berlin, Chicago, and Peking, with millions more, are so slight that you can't remember their names— or even to have heard them, for that matter. Really, Thaddeus, I am surprised at you. "What you expect to get out of this besides nervous prostration I must confess I cannot see."

"Lamps," said Thaddeus, clutching like a drowning man at the one emolument of the coveted office.

Mrs. Perkins gazed at her husband anxiously. The answer was so unexpected and seemingly so absurd that she for a moment feared he had lost his mind. The notion that two years' service in so important an office as that of Mayor of Philipseburg received as its sole reward nothing but lamps was to her mind impossible.

"Is— is there anything the matter with you, dear?" she asked, going over to his side and placing her hand on his brow. "You don't seem feverish."

"Feverish?" snapped the leader of his party. "Who said anything about my being feverish?"

"Nobody, Teddy dear; but what you said about lamps made me think— made me think your mind was wandering a trifle."

"Oh— that!" laughed Perkins. "No, indeed— it's true. They always give the Mayor a pair of lamps. Some of them are very swell, too. You know those wrought-iron standards that Mr. Berkeley has in front of his place?"

"The ones at the driveway entrance, on the bowlders?"

"Yes."

"They're beauties. I've always admired those lamps very much."

"Well— they are the rewards of Mr. Berkeley's political virtue. I paid for them, and so did all the rest of the tax-payers. They are his Mayor's lamps, and if I'm elected I'll have a pair just like them, if I want them like that."

"Oh, I do hope you'll get in, Teddy," said the little woman, anxiously, after a reflective pause. "They'd look stunning on our gate-posts."

"I don't think I shall have them there," said Thaddeus. "Jiggers has the right idea, seems to me— he's put 'em on the newel-posts of his front porch steps."

"I don't suppose they'd give us the money and let us buy one handsome cloisonné lamp from Tiffany's, would they?" Mrs. Perkins asked.

"A cloisonné lamp on a gate-post?" laughed Perkins.

"Of course not," rejoined the lady. "You know I didn't mean any such thing. I saw a perfectly beautiful lamp in Tiffany's last Wednesday, and it would go so well in the parlor—"

"That wouldn't be possible, my dear," said Thaddeus, still smiling. "You don't quite catch the idea of those lamps. They've sort of like the red, white,

and blue lights in a drug-store window in intention. They are put up to show the public that that is where a political prescription for the body politic may be compounded. The public is responsible for the bills, and the public expects to use what little light can be extracted from them."

"Then all this generosity on the public's part is—"

"Merely that of the Indian who gives and takes back," said Thaddeus.

"And they must be out-of-doors?" asked Mrs. Perkins. "If I set the cloisonne lamp in the window, it wouldn't do?"

"No," said Thaddeus. "They must be out-of-doors."

"Well, I hope the nasty old public will stay there too, and not come traipsing all over my house," snapped Mrs. Perkins, indignantly.

And then for a little time the discussion of the Mayor's lamps stopped.

The campaign went on, and Thaddeus night after night was forced to go out to speak here and there and everywhere. One night he travelled five miles through mud and rain to address an organization of tax-payers, and found them assembled before the long mahogany counter of a beer-saloon, which was the "Hall" they had secured for the reception of the idol of their hopes; and among them it is safe to say there was not one who ever saw a tax bill, and not many who knew more about those luxuries of life than the delicious flunky, immortalized by Mr. Punch, who says to a brother flunky, "I say, Tummas, wot is taxes?" And he told them his principles and promised to do his best for them, and bade them good -night, and went away leaving them parched and dry and downcast. And then the other fellow came, and won their hearts and "set them up again." Another night he attended another meeting and lost a number of friends because he shone at both ends but not in the middle. If he had taken a glittering coin or two from his vest pocket in behalf of the noble working-men there assembled in great numbers and spirituous mood, they would have forgiven him his wit and patent-leather shoes—and so it went. Perkins was nightly hauled hither and yon by the man he called his "Hagenbeck," the manager of the wild animal he felt himself gradually degenerating into, and his wife and home and children saw less of him than of the unimportant floating voter whose mind was open to conviction, but could be reached only by way of the throat.

"Two o'clock last night; one o'clock the night before; I suppose it 'll be three before you are in to-night?" Mrs. Perkins said, ruefully.

"I do not know, my dear," replied Thaddeus. "There are five meetings on for to-night."

"Well, I think they ought to give you the lamps now," snapped Mrs. Perkins. "It seems to me this is when you need them most."

"True," said Thaddeus, sadly, for in his secret soul he was afraid he would be elected; and now that he saw what kind of people Mayors have to associate with, the glory of it did not seem to be worth the cost. "I'm a sort of Night-Mayor just at present, and those lamps would come in handy in the wee sma' hours." And he sighed and pined for the peaceful days of yore when he was content to walk his ways with no nation upon his shoulders.

"I never envied Atlas anyhow, " he confided to himself later, as he tossed about upon his bed and called himself names. "It always seemed to me that his revolving globe must rub the skin off his neck and back; but now, poor devil, with just one municipality hanging over me, I can appreciate more than ever the difficulties of his position— except that he doesn't have to make speeches to 'tax-payers.' Humph! Tax-payers! It's tax-makers. If I'd promised to go into all sorts of wilderness improvement for the sole and only purpose of putting these 'tax-payers' on the corporation at the expense of real laboring-men, I'd win in a canter."

"What is the matter, Thaddeus?" said Mrs. Perkins, coming in from the other room. "Can't you sleep?"

"Don't want to sleep, my dear," returned the candidate. "When I go to sleep I dream I'm addressing mass-meetings. I can't enjoy my rest unless I stay awake. Did your mother come to-day?"

"Yes— and, oh, she's so enthusiastic, Teddy!"

"At last! About me? You don't mean it."

"No— about the lamps. She says lamps are just what we need to complete the entrance. She thinks Mr. Berkeley's scheme of putting them on the stone posts is the best. There's more dignity about it. Putting them on the piazza steps, she says, looks ostentatious, and suggests a beer-saloon or a road-house."

"Well, my dear, that's about all politics seems to amount to," said the reformer. "If those lamps are to be a souvenir of the campaign, they ought to suggest road-houses and beer-saloons."

"They will not be souvenirs of a campaign," replied Mrs. Perkins, proudly. "They will be the outward and visible sign of my husband's merit; the emblem of victory."

"The red badge of triumph, eh?" smiled the candidate, wanly. "Well, my dear, have them where you please, and keep them well filled with alcohol, even if they do burn gas. They'll represent the tax-payers when they get that."

"You mustn't get so tired, Thaddeus dear," said the little woman, smoothing his forehead soothingly with her hand. "You seem unusually tired to-night."

"I am," said Thaddeus, shortly. "The debate wore me out."

"Did you debate? I thought you said you wouldn't."

"Well, I did. Everybody said I was afraid to meet Captain Haskins on the platform, so we had it out to-night over in the Tenth Ward. I talked for sixty-eight minutes, gave 'em my views, and then he got up."

"What did he say? Could he answer you?"

"No— but he won the day. All he said was: 'Well, boys, I'm not much of a talker,' but I'll say one thing—Perkins, while my adversary, is still my friend, and I'm proud of him. Now, if you'll all join me at the bar, we'll drink his health— on me.'" Thaddeus paused, and then he added, "I imagine they're cheering yet; at any rate, if I have as much health as they drink—on Haskins—I'll double discount old Methuselah in the matter of years."

The next morning at breakfast the pale and nervous standard-bearer was affectionately greeted by his mother-in-law.

"I've been thinking about those lamps all night," she said, after a few minutes. "The trouble about the gate-posts is that you have three gate-posts and only two lamps."

"Maybe they'd let us buy three lamps instead of two," suggested Mrs. Perkins.

"Well, we won't, even if they do let us," observed Perkins, with some irritation. He had just received a newspaper from a kind friend in Massachusetts with a comic biography and dissipated wood-cut of himself in it. "I'm not starting a concert-hall, and I'm not going to put a row of lamps along the front of my place."

"I quite agree with you," replied his mother-in-law. "It occurred to me we might put them, like hanging lanterns, on each of the chimneys. It would be odd."

Thaddeus muttered two syllables to himself, the latter of which sounded like M'dodd, but exactly what it was he said I can only guess. Then he added: "They won't go there. I can't get a gas-pipe up through those chimneys. It's as much as we can do to get the smoke up, much less a gas-pipe. Even if we got the gas-pipe through, it wouldn't do. A putty-blower would choke up the flues."

"Well, I don't know," said the mother-in-law, placidly. "It seems to me—"

A glance from Mrs. Perkins stopped the dear old lady. I think Mrs. Perkins's sympathetic disposition taught her that her husband was having a hard time being agreeable, and that further discussion of the lamp question was likely to prove disastrous.

Thaddeus was soon called for by his manager, and started out to meet the leading lights of the Hungarian and Italian quarters. The Germans had been made solid the day before, and as for the Irish, they were supposed to be with

Perkins on principle, because Perkins was not in accord politically with the existing administration.

"It's too bad he's so nervous," said his mother-in-law as he went out. "They say women are nervous, but I must say I don't think much of the endurance of men. How absurd he was when he spoke of the gas-pipe through the chimney!"

"Well, I suppose, my dear mother," said Mrs. Perkins, sadly— "I suppose he can't be bothered with little details like the lamps now. There are other questions to be considered."

"What is the exact issue?" asked the mother-in-law, interestedly.

"Well— the tariff, and— ah— and taxes, and— ah— money, and— ah— ah— I think the saloon question enters in somehow. I believe Mr. Haskins wants more of them, and Thaddeus says there are too many of them as it is. And now they are both investigating them, I fancy, because Teddy was in one the other day."

"We ought to help him a little," said the elder woman. "Let's just relieve him of the whole lamp question; decide where to put them, go to New York and pick them out, get estimates for the laying of the pipes, and surprise him by having them all ready to put up the day after election."

"Wouldn't it be fun!" cried Mrs. Perkins, delightedly. "He'll be so surprised— poor dear boy. I'll do it. I'll send down this morning for Mr. O'Hara to come up here and see how we can make the connection and where the trenches for the pipes can be laid. Mr. O'Hara is the best-known contractor in town, and I guess he's the man we want."

And immediately O'Hara was telephoned for to come up to Mr. Perkins's, and the fair conspirators were not aware of, and probably can never realize the importance politically of that act. Mr. O'Hara refused to come, but it was hinted about that Perkins had summoned him, and there was great joy among the rank and file, and woe among the better elements, for O'Hara was a boss, and a boss whose power was one of the things Thaddeus was trying to break, and the cohorts fancied that the apostle of purity had realized that without O'Hara reform was fallen into the pit. Furthermore, as cities of the third class, like Philipseburg, live conversationally on rumors and gossipings, it was not an hour before almost all Philipseburg, except Thaddeus Perkins himself and his manager, knew that the idol had bowed before the boss's hat, and that the boss had returned the grand message that he'd see Perkins in the Hudson River before he'd go to his damned mugwump temple; and in two hours they also knew it, for they heard in no uncertain terms from the secretary of the Municipal Club, a reform organization, which had been instrumental in securing Perkins's nomination, who demanded to know in an explicit yes or no

as to whether any such message had been sent. The denial was made, and then the lie was given; and many to this day wonder exactly where the truth lay. At any rate, votes were lost and few gained, and many a worthy friend of good government lost heart and bemoaned the degeneration of the gentleman into the politician.

Perkins, worn out, irritated by, if not angry at, what he termed the underhanded lying of the opposition, drove home for luncheon, and found his wife and her mother in a state of high dudgeon. They had been insulted.

"It was frightful the language that man used, Thaddeus," said Mrs. Perkins.

"He wouldn't have dared do it except by telephone," put in the mother-in-law, whose notions were somewhat old-fashioned. "I've always hated that machine. People can lie to you and you can't look 'em in the eye over it, and they can say things to your face with absolute opportunity."

The dear old lady meant impunity, but it must be remembered that she was excited.

"Well, I think he ought to be chastised," said Mrs. Perkins.

"Who? What are you talking about?" demanded Thaddeus.

"That nasty O'Hara man," said Mrs. Perkins. "He said 'he'd be damned' over the wire."

Thaddeus immediately became energetic. "He didn't blackguard you, did he?" he demanded.

"Yes, he did," said Mrs. Perkins, the water in her eyes affecting her voice so that it became mellifluous instead of merely melodious.

"But how?" persisted Perkins.

"Well— we— we— rang him up— it was only as a surprise, you know, dear— we rang him up—"

"You— you rang up— O'Hara?" cried Perkins, aghast. "It must have been a surprise."

"Yes, Teddy. We were going to settle the lamp question; we thought you were bothered enough with— well, with affairs of state—"

The candidate drew up proudly, but immediately became limp again as he realized the situation.

"And," Mrs. Perkins continued, "we thought we'd relieve you of the lamp question; and as Mr. O'Hara is a great contractor— the most noted in all Philipseburg— isn't he?"

"Yes, yes, yes! he is!" said Perkins, furiously; "but what of that?"

"Well, that's why we rang him up," said Mrs. Perkins, with a sigh of relief to find that she had selected the right man. "We wanted Mr. O'Hara to dig the trench for the pipes, and lay the pipes—"

"He's a great pipe-layer!" ejaculated Perkins, the professional humorist getting the better of the would-be statesman for a moment.

"Exactly." rejoined Mrs. Perkins, solemnly. "We'd heard that, and so we asked him to come up."

"But, my dear," cried Perkins, the candidate getting the upper hand again, "you didn't tell him you wanted him to put up my lamps? I'm not elected yet."

The agony of the moment for Perkins can he better imagined than portrayed.

"He didn't give us the chance," said the mother-in-law. "He merely swore."

Perkins drew a sigh of relief. He understood it all now, and in spite of the position in which he was placed he was glad. "Jove!" he said to himself, "it was a narrow escape. Suppose O'Hara had come! He'd have enjoyed laying pipes for a Mayor's lamps— two weeks before election."

And for the first time in weeks Perkins was faintly mirthful. The narrowness of his escape had made him hysterical, and he actually emitted a nervous laugh.

"That accounts for the rumor," he said to himself, and then his heart grew heavy again. "The rumor is true, and— Oh, well, this is what I get for dabbling in politics. If I ever get out of this alive, I vow by all the gods politics shall know me no more."

"It was all right— my asking O'Hara, Thaddeus?" asked Mrs. Perkins.

"Oh yes, certainly, my dear— perfectly right. O'Hara is indeed, as you thought, the most noted, not to say notorious, contractor in town, only he's not laying pipes just now. He's pulling wires."

"For telephones, I presume?" said the old lady, placidly.

"Well, in a way," replied Thaddeus. "There's a great deal of vocality about O'Hara's wires. But, Bess," he added, seriously, "just drop the lamps until we get 'em, and confine your telephoning to your intimate friends. An Irishman on a telephone in political times is apt to be a trifle— er— artless in his choice of words. If you must talk to one of 'em, remember to put in the lightning plug before you begin."

With which injunction the candidate departed to address the Mohawks, an independent political organization in the Second Ward, which was made up of thinking men who never endorsed a candidate without knowing why, and rarely before three o'clock of the afternoon of election day at that, by whom he was received with cheers and back-slapping and button-holings which convinced him that he was the most popular man on earth, though on election day—but election day has yet to be described. It came, and with it there came to Perkins a feeling very much like that which the small boy experiences on the day before Christmas. He has been good for two months, and he knows that

to-morrow the period of probation will be over and he can be as bad as he pleases for a little while anyhow.

"However it turns out, I can tell 'em all to go to the devil to-morrow," chuckled Thaddeus, rubbing his hands gleefully, as if consigning ninety per cent. of his fellow-citizens to his Satanic Majesty was his devoutest wish.

"I don't think you ought to forget the lamps, Thaddeus," observed the mother-in-law at breakfast. "Here it is election day and you haven't yet decided where they shall go. Now I really think—"

"Never mind the lamps, grandma," returned Thaddeus. "Let's talk of ballot-boxes to-day. To-morrow we can place the lamps."

"Very well, if you say so," said the old lady; "only I marvel at you latter-day boys. In my young days a small matter like that would have been settled long ago."

"Well, I'll compromise with you, grandma," said Thaddeus. "We won't wait until to-morrow. I'll decide the question to-night— I'm really too busy now to think of them."

"I shall be glad when we don't have to think about 'em," sighed Mrs. Perkins, pouring out the candidate's coffee. "They've really been a care to me. I don't like the idea of putting them on the porch, or on the gate-posts either. They'll have to be kept clean, and goodness knows I can't ask the girls to go out in the middle of winter to clean them if they are on the gate-posts."

"Mike will clean them," said Thaddeus.

Mrs. Perkins sniffed when Mike's name was mentioned. "I doubt it," she said. "He's been lots of good for two weeks."

"Mike has been lots of good for two weeks," echoed Thaddeus, with the accent on the *has*. "He's kept all the hired men in line, my dear."

"I've no doubt he's been of use politically, but from a domestic point of view he's been awful. He's been drunk for the last week."

"Well, my love," said the candidate, despairingly, "some member of the family had to do it, and I'd rather it was Mike than you or any of the children. Mike's geniality has shed a radiance about me among the hired men of this town that fills me with pride."

"I don't see, to go back to what I said in the very beginning, why we can't have the lamps indoors," returned Mrs. Perkins.

"I told you why not, my dear," said Perkins. "They are the perquisite of the Mayor, but for the benefit of the public, because the public pays for them."

"And hasn't the public, as you call it, taken possession of the inside of your house?" demanded the mother-in-law. "I found seven gentlemen sitting in the white and gold parlor only last night, and they hadn't wiped their feet either."

"You don't understand," faltered the standard-bearer. "That business isn't permanent. To-morrow I'll tell them to go round to the back door and ask the cook."

"Humph!" said the mother-in-law. "I'm surprised at you. For a few paltry votes you—"

Just here the front door bell rang, and the business of the day beginning stopped the conversation, which bade fair to become unpleasant.

NIGHT CAME. The votes were being counted, and at six o'clock Perkins was informed that everything was going his way.

"Get your place ready for a brass band and a serenade," his manager telephoned.

"I sha'n't!" ejaculated the candidate to himself— and he was right. He didn't have to. The band did not play in his front yard, for at eight o'clock the tide that had set in strong for Perkins turned. At ten, according to votes that had been counted, things were about even, and the ladies retired. At twelve, Perkins turned out the gas.

"That settles the lamp question, anyhow," he whispered to himself as he went up stairs, and then he went into Mrs. Perkins's room.

"Well, Bess," he said, "it's all over, and I've made up my mind as to where the lamps are to go."

"Good!" said the little woman. "On the gate-posts?"

"No, dear. In the parlor— the cloisonné lamps from Tiffany's."

"Why, I thought you said we couldn't—"

"Well, we can. Our lamps can go in there whether the public likes it or not. We are emancipated."

"But I don't understand," began Mrs. Perkins.

"Oh, it's simple," said Thaddeus, with a sigh of mingled relief and sadness. "It's simple enough. The other lamps are to be put— er— on Captain Haskins's place."

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16: The Secret of the Gorge

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 4, 11 Feb 1899

THE sombre shadow of the gorge we were riding through rather weighed upon our spirits. It may have been that, or perhaps the uncanny echo that waited on every word we uttered was the reason that we did not speak to each other.

It was in the Macdonnell Ranges, and we were following a gorge that seemed likely to lead us in the direction we wanted to go. Like many of the gorges of that region, the sides were more abrupt than are usually found I amongst the hilly country of Central Australia, and it seemed as though it would turn out a gorge that would carry us easily, through the particular range the rugged sides of which had frowned on us all the morning. It got narrower as we proceeded, and on either side were detached boulders that had fallen at one time or another from the sides. Sometimes they had rolled right to the middle of the gorge, and we had great difficulty in getting the pack-horses past.

'I hope we'll get out of this soon,' said Erskine to me in a low voice, 'We need not expect a bite of feed anywhere about here, and the horses did not have much between their ribs last night.'

I pulled out my watch, for the gorge was now so narrow and the sides so high that we could not see the sun. It was nearly three o'clock, and, like Erskine, I sincerely hoped that we would soon get on to less barren country. But it got rougher and rougher, until it seemed that our onward way would soon be blocked altogether, and we should have to retrace the long, weary way we had already come.

At last, our way seemed barred altogether, at least against progress with our horses, and we got off to examine the obstructions, and see if we could remove them. They certainly looked as though they had been placed there by artificial means, and, leaving the boy to look after the horses, Erskine and I clambered over the rocks and went on a few yards to see how it was ahead. For a short while it was no better; then it suddenly became clear, the gorge opened out, and evidently there was an improvement in the country. We looked about, but could see no tracks. Whoever had blocked up the passage had not been there lately.

We came back slowly, and came to the conclusion that by removing some of the worst boulders, which we might do by a lever, we could get the horses through one by one. But where to get a lever; the gorge was guiltless of timber, save for some gnarled shrubs. We looked up and down the gorge in vain, no timber was in sight anywhere.

I turned my attention to the boulders and saw something strange about the one immediately in front of us. It was locked in position by a good sized stone.

'Erskine,' I said, 'if we could shift that stone the boulder would roll away of itself.'

'By Jove, it's been done that way on purpose; fixed so that one man can shift the boulder if needed.'

'I don't quite see how one man could do it,' I replied.

Erskine regarded the stone with great earnestness. 'I think the slightest jar would shift that rock, and there's something about here to do it with.'

He began to search around, and the black boy and I followed his example. True enough we found a long, heavy sapling concealed amongst the rocks. Erskine poised it, and found that one man could manage it. He chose his position, and gave the stone chock a hard jarring thrust. It sprang out from under the boulder, and the rock released from the check rolled on one side of it's own weight. The first barrier was removed, but another and exactly similar one lay next.

'Hold on a minute,' I said, 'This is all very well, but what does it lead to? Whoever put these rocks in position did not want any visitors. How many men did it take to chock these boulders up?'

Erskine looked at them. 'Three could do it with good handspikes.'

'Shall we go ahead?'

'I think so, there are only two more.'

In five minutes they were shifted with the same ease as the first, and leading our horses through one by one we were soon riding on again. Very quickly the gorge developed into an open valley, and grass and timber began to put in an appearance. Still there were no. tracks nor signs of those who had blocked up the gorge. Presently a watercourse began to form, and when others came in it assumed the appearance of a good-sized creek. 'If we get water we ought to camp,' I said. 'Then we shall have a clear day ahead tomorrow.'

Erskine agreed, and within a mile we came upon a hole in the sandy bed of the creek in which there was a very good supply of water. Here with much satisfaction we turned out, but on Erskine's suggestion we did not put the bells on the horses, as we did not know whom we had for neighbors.

The night passed quietly, although we did not sleep very sound, but everything was all well, and we were away from camp soon after sunrise.

'How long do you think those stones have been there without being moved?' I said as we rode along.

'A good while,' answered Erskine. 'I doubt If they have been moved at all since they were fixed up.'

'How do you account for that?'

'Just as you suggested. The people who did It blocked the place against possible visitors. They may have another way out for themselves. I suppose they have found something good here and don't want to be disturbed. May be gold, may be rubies.'

'You think it was whites then who did it?'

'Certain. Did you ever know blacks do such a thing?'

We rode on for five miles, keeping a good look out. The country had-opened out considerably, and we were riding through a basin of open forest country which by the look of the ranges closing in ahead was not of any great extent. The creek, however, had rapidly attained a considerable size, and was well watered, but, strange to say no tracks of natives nor signs of recent encampments were anywhere visible. Soon rocky bars began to cross the bed of the creek, and the ranges, rough and rugged, loomed close ahead. There was no sign of a gap or gorge through which the creek could issue out of the pocket, and we were wondering what would become of it.

Suddenly and unexpectedly the question was answered. Erskine, who was ahead, pointed to a light like that of a plain visible ahead; then we saw the sheen of water, and the bed of the creek suddenly became shallow, and finally lost, and we found ourselves on the edge of the most dismal half-swamp, half-lake that I ever saw. The shore was mud and shallow water, a few tussocks of wiry reeds grew around, and a fringe of dead trees also bordered this marsh. The range rose abruptly on the opposite side about half a mile away, rugged, bare, and steep; and the marsh itself was about a mile long, encircled, excepting where the range formed on one side, by the ragged reeds and skeleton trees. From pleasant, open forest country we suddenly emerged on to the dismal shore of what seemed a marsh of death and decay.

'So that's what becomes of the creek,' I said. 'It drains into this lovely swamp.'

'Seems like it,' said Erskine. 'There's not much catchment area, so the soakage and evaporation account for any overflow; but I never came across a basin shut in like this one is without egress or ingress, except that gorge we came through.'

'And what's become of the men who blocked it up?' I said.

'Seem to have flown away. Devil a track of anything white or black have I seen yet.'

'Which way?' I asked.

'Doesn't matter; whichever way our horses heads are, I supposed. "Lay on, Macduff!" '

I followed the edge of the dreary swamp around, and Erskine droned behind, and drove the spare horses with the blackboy. Gradually we worked round the edge of the water to the range; but still saw nothing of any tracks or camp. Presently, on one of the dead trees standing at the edge of the sullen water I saw what looked like a rope depending from one of the upper boughs. I rode up to it, and, sure enough, it was a rope. But at the foot of the tree lay a dank heap of rottenness and bones.

We got off our horses and looked at it. It was the remains of a man, and a man who had been hanged. The rope had parted through weather and decay, and the wretched thing had fallen to the ground, and had lain there in the filthy ooze until only the bones and rotting rags remained to tell us that it had been a white man. The noose of the rope was still around the scattered vertebrae of the neck, and beyond that another knotted piece of rope told that the man's hands had been tied. The execution, murder, or whatever it was, had been carried out with due observance. It was no suicide.

The blackboy got a sheet of bark, and on it we put the remains, and removed them to drier ground. There seemed no article of any sort to determine who the poor thing was— no watch, knife, or even a belt buckle remained; only the skull grinned at us as if laughing at our attempts to find out who he was.

'This licks creation, ' said Erskine. 'What do you make of it?'

'Only that there's been some sort of a tragedy here, and that we'd better go round to the mountain, and then back up the creek and get a decent camp, and turn out. We'll have to spend a day or two here, and I'm hanged if I like this dismal swamp to camp alongside.'

'Right you are,' said Erskine. 'I don't like the place any better than you seem to do.'

We rode on round the edge of the lake to where it washed against the foot of the range, and progress was stopped, but, could see nothing to cast any light on the hanged man. Turning, we went back, and, retracing our way a short distance into favorable country, camped on the creek. It was still early in the afternoon, and after we had turned out and fixed our camp our talk naturally fell on the strange discoveries of the day.

'We might as well go and bury that unfortunate,' said Erskine, as the sun began to sink. 'It is not more than a mile straight across.'

I nodded acquiescence, and, with such tools as we could muster, we started on our mission, leaving Paddy the blackboy to mind camp. Presuming that the heap of bones and nameless substance of some sort that represented

defunct humanity was a white man and a Christian, we buried him with what maimed rites, we could remember, and then went back to camp.

'Where's Paddy?' said Erskine, looking round.

'Gone after 'possums, I suppose,' I answered, 'You never can trust a blackboy to stop in camp by himself.'

Sundown came, but Paddy did not appear. Erskine made up the fire and we had our meal as darkness fell, but still no sign of the boy. We were discussing his strange disappearance, when suddenly out of the darkness came a scared and frightened Paddy.

'Man come up!' was all he could say for some time. At last, when he had got his wind and had recovered a little courage, we got a curious story out of him.

He asserted that after we left to bury the hanged man, a strange white man had come to the camp. What the white man did or said we could not properly discover, but apparently he had frightened Paddy out of his senses, and he had cut and run for it. He stated that the man pursued him, but he got away and hid until dark; then he mustered up courage to return. The yarn was altogether wild and improbable, or at least would have been so but for our discovery of the body and the other singular surroundings we had happened on. That the boy had got a good fright was evident; but his story was so incoherent, that we could not well comprehend it.

He described the man as partly dressed in rags, with a wild demeanor, and eyes like a snake's.

'We'd better keep watch to-night,' said Erskine. 'Perhaps that genius will pay us a visit.'

We kept watch, but the night passed untroubled. Only the plover's melancholy cry came to us from the distant marsh.

In the morning Paddy showed us unmistakably the tracks of our visitor. We had no desire to move our camp, but the blackboy turned nearly white when we proposed leaving him alone in camp while we pursued our investigations round the other side of the lake. Finally Erskine volunteered to stop, for it certainly did not seem safe to leave the camp and horses unguarded, with an apparent lunatic knocking about. Paddy, it was evident , would have cleared out and planted as soon as we were out of sight, so I took him with me.

The end lake much resembled the one we had already gone round, but there was no human body about. When we got to the range, Paddy drew my attention to a cave, or what looked like the entrance to a cave, some distance up. I got off, and, telling Paddy to mind the horses, climbed up what appeared to be a well-beaten pain towards it. I reached the spot and looked in. It was dark, and to enter one would have to stoop considerably.

I was just about to go in, when a yell of fright from below startled me. I looked down. Paddy had scrambled on his horse and was in full flight, my nag racing after him, while, pursuing both was a half-naked figure, with long beard and hair, racing nearly as fast as the horses. I was about to descend when It struck me that the den of the creature must be in the cave and now that he was not likely to return for sometime it would be a good chance to examine it. Paddy would so to camp, and Erskine would dame back to look for me, if the lunatic did not account for both. I drew my revolver, and went into the cave. It was dark and evil-smelling, so I struck a match, and by its flickering light I saw that it was used as a habitation.

I had but glanced around when I was attacked and borne down by the spring of a large dog, who commenced to worry my throat. If It had not been for having my revolver in my hand I should never have got up again. As it was, I fired three shots into the brute before his grip relaxed, and I got up more or less damaged. I had no mood for further explorations. I staggered out weak and bleeding, and sat down to get my strength back. Then, after a while, I got up and went down and bathed my wounds in the lake.

ii

THE HURTS were painful, but neither deep nor dangerous, and a good washing would probably remove all possible venom of the dog's teeth, so when I had washed them I went out on the bank, and considered the position. It was possible that Erskine would learn from the terrified Paddy where I was, and come to look for me. It was equally possible that Paddy would be too frightened to say anything, or that the lunatic would be too much for both.

I reloaded my revolver, and determined to start and walk; I had great faith in Erskine as being an all-round man, but what effect an excited nigger, chased by an equally, or more, excited lunatic would have on his nerves, I could not say. Probably, he would shoot the pair of them on spec; but he might get taken by surprise, and fall a victim to the lunatic. Therefore, although not much enamored of walking, I started back for camp at the best pace my wounds allowed me.

I had gone about three miles, when to my great relief I saw Erskine coming along towards me leading my horse.

'What's up?' he asked when we met.

'Paddy came home like a madman, your horse galloping after him.'

'Anybody behind them?' I queried.

'No, not to my knowledge, but Paddy must have had the devil behind him to judge from his looks.'

'Well, he looked very much like the devil, but as far as I could see, he was a human devil.'

'You saw him then?'

'Yes. That's the only thing I did see, except when I went into the old scoundrel's camp the dog tackled me, and got me down.'

I showed him my wounded hands and arms.

'He'd got a dog, had he?' replied Erskine. 'What became of him?'

'I shot him.'

'Let's go back and look at the cave. The dog's dead, and there are two of us, so one can stop and look out for the madman.'

'And Paddy,' I said. 'Trust Paddy for looking after himself. You bet he's up a hollow log by this. time.'

I got on my horse and rode back to the range, and not feeling very adventurous after my encounter with the dog, I stopped below to guard the horses while Erskine entered the cave. He had been gone about twenty minutes when I heard him calling to me.

'Will you come up?' he said, 'or shall I come down to you; perhaps you're shaky still?'

He came quickly down to me.

'There's gold and rubies up there, a dead dog, and a dead female. You can account for the dead dog; but how about the dead woman?'

'How long has she been dead?'

'Goodness knows. She is a dried up mummy, and the gold and rubies are strewn all over her. You can tell she is a woman by the dress she wears. She's got up in state, and evidently the dog guarded her body while the lunatic went wandering about.'

'Here's the lunatic coming back,' I said.

Sure enough the desperate-looking wretch came back, wild-eyed as ever, but he would not approach us, but remained at a distance, crying out to us to know if we were white or not.

It was long before Erskine could get near him and tell him that we were willing to be friends, but at last he succeeded. Then the haggard spectre approached.

'Come,' he said, 'and I will show you my home.'

Muttering to himself he led the way to the cave, seemingly unconscious that we knew of it. I tied the horses up and followed. As soon as lie entered, his eyes, better accustomed than ours to the semi-dusk, detected the dead body of the dog. He gave a wild shriek —

'Plutus, you are dead; who has killed you?' looked round, and fell in an epileptic fit on the earth.

We did what we could for him, but that was little. Presently the convulsions subsided, and he fell into an unconscious state. Then Erskine and I looked round the cave. On a slab of granite lay, as he said, the body of a woman, shrivelled to a mummy. She was dressed in an old dress, and on her lifeless breast lay a little heap of gold nuggets and dust, and some dull, uncut rubies. Not the common water-worn ones of interior Australia, but stones which looked as though, like diamonds, they awaited the mechanic's art to blossom out in their full lustre.

A movement of the man recalled our attention to him. He was coming back to consciousness, and his eyes had regained their sanity. But the man seemed dying. He looked round at us several times as we wiped away the bloody ooze from his lips; then spoke slowly, and with difficulty, and the tale he told was this

'We came here, my mate and I— Franks was his name. I hanged him out there on a dead tree in the lake.'

'Hanged him?'

'Yes, I hanged him by myself, but first I had beaten him and stunned him. Never mind, I hanged him all right. Why did I hang him? Because the dead woman told him secrets she did not tell to me. We found the dead woman here, at least. Plutus, my dog, found her in this cave when he was hunting about. He found her, and always stayed with her. She was like this when we found her, the gold and rubies on her breast. After we had exhausted our wonder and surprise, we talked long about it; and decided that there were some ancient workings about, where some race of old had worked, and this woman was some dead priestess of theirs. Therefore, we must find these old workings. Then we blocked tip the passage,

'We looked for them for months, until we both got gloomy and tired, and then strange things happened. The ghosts of the dead came out of the lake, and told us how the flood in the past had overwhelmed them and their works. Franks fell to coming to the cavern and talking to the dead woman, and she told him things, but me she would never speak to. So I determined to kill him, and then for want of somebody else, she would speak to me. We fought, and I beat him senseless. Then I took him round the lake so that he could not come and speak to the dead woman, and hung him on the tree while his senses were dead; and Plutus I watched me and howled. But the woman never spoke to me, and I got so lonely that I tried to find the gorge to get out again and find the horses we had left. But I could never find it. The blacks must have closed it up somehow. Then I remember no more, only that I lived here with Plutus.'

This was the substance of his story, and Erskine and I had before us the strange evidence of the mummified corpse, the gold and rubies, and the

stagnant lagoon, besides the dead man and the dog. He never rallied, and our coining seemed to have snapped the thread of his mad life.

We buried him and the dog beside the body of his mate, whom he had murdered. As for the mummy, we left it in its sepulchre, the cave, as fittest. But I the rubies and gold we took. We searched throughout that strange basin, but found nothing more, and could only believe that there was some strange tincture of truth in the madman's yarn, and that some ancient race had lived and been entombed in that strange valley, and the rotting waters of the lake alone remained to mark their grave.

This happened in the early days of the overland line, and none, as far as I know, have found the place since.

17: The Fall of the House of Usher

Edgar Allan Poe

1809-1849

Burton's Gentleman's Magazine Sep 1839

In: *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, 1840

Legendary short story, which I have now read for the first time—TW

Son cœur est un luth suspendu;
Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.
—De Béranger.

DURING THE WHOLE of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was— but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me— upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain— upon the bleak walls— upon the vacant eye-like windows— upon a few rank sedges— and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees— with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life— the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart— an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it— I paused to think— what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for

sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down— but with a shudder even more thrilling than before— upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country— a letter from him— which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness— of a mental disorder which oppressed him— and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said— it was the apparent heart that went with his request— which allowed me no room for hesitation; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other— it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"— an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment— that of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition— for why should I not so term it?— served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy— a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity— an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn— a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the *studio* of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me— while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy— while I hesitated not to acknowledge how

familiar was all this— I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases, I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

Upon my entrance, Usher rose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality— of the constrained effort of the *ennuyé* man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity;— these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than

fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.

In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence— an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy— an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter, than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision— that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation— that leaden, self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him. He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy— a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms and the general manner of the narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. "I shall perish," said he, "I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect— in terror. In this unnerved, in this pitiable, condition I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, fear."

I learned, moreover, at intervals, and through broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth— in regard to an

influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated— an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit— an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence.

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin— to the severe and long-continued illness— indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution— of a tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth. "Her decease," he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, "would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers." While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread; and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me as my eyes followed her retreating steps. When a door, at length, closed upon her, my glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother; but he had buried his face in his hands, and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but on the closing in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed (as her brother told me at night with inexpressible agitation) to the prostrating power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain— that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together, or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality,

poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom.

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. His long improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber. From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vagueness at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why— from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me at least, in the circumstances then surrounding me, there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli.

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor.

I have just spoken of that morbid condition of the auditory nerve which rendered all music intolerable to the sufferer, with the exception of certain effects of stringed instruments. It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of the performances. But the fervid *facility* of his *impromptus* could not be so accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial

excitement. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily remembered. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it as he gave it, because, in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled "The Haunted Palace," ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus:—

In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion—
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair.

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow;
(This— all this— was in the olden
Time long ago);
And every gentle air that dallied,
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
A winged odor went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tunèd law;
Round about a throne, where sitting
(Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;

(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a rapid ghastly river,
Through the pale door,
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh— but smile no more.

I well remember that suggestions arising from this ballad, led us into a train of thought wherein there became manifest an opinion of Usher's which I mention not so much on account of its novelty (for other men have thought thus), as on account of the pertinacity with which he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable things. But, in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization. I lack words to express the full extent, or the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones— in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many *fungi* which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around— above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence— the evidence of the sentience— was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as he spoke), in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him— what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none.

Our books— the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid— were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works as the "*Ververt et Chartreuse*" of Gresset; the "*Belphegor*" of Machiavelli; the "*Heaven and Hell*" of Swedenborg; the "*Subterranean Voyage of Nicholas*

Klimm" by Holberg; the "*Chiromancy*" of Robert Flud, of Jean D'Indaginé, and of De la Chambre; the "*Journey into the Blue Distance*" of Tieck; and the "*City of the Sun*" of Campanella. One favorite volume was a small octavo edition of the "*Directorium Inquisitorium*," by the Dominican Eymeric de Gironne; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela, about the old African Satyrs and Œgipans, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic— the manual of a forgotten church— the *Vigiliæ Mortuorum Secundum Chorum Ecclesiæ Maguntinæ*.

I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight (previously to its final interment), in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building. The worldly reason, however, assigned for this singular proceeding, was one which I did not feel at liberty to dispute. The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the burial-ground of the family. I will not deny that when I called to mind the sinister countenance of the person whom I met upon the staircase, on the day of my arrival at the house, I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless, and by no means an unnatural, precaution.

At the request of Usher, I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges.

Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. A striking similitude between the brother

and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead— for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house.

And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue— but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified— that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.

It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch— while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room— of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed. But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber,

hearkened— I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me— to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste (for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night), and endeavored to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment.

I had taken but few turns in this manner, when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognized it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped, with a gentle touch, at my door, and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan— but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes— an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor. His air appalled me—but anything was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured, and I even welcomed his presence as a relief.

"And you have not seen it?" he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence— "you have not then seen it?— but, stay! you shall." Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.

The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity; for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind; and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the life-like velocity with which they flew careering from all points against each other, without passing away into the distance. I say that even their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this— yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars, nor was there any flashing forth of the lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.

"You must not— you shall not behold this!" said I, shuddering, to Usher, as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat. "These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon— or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. Let us close this casement;— the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen:— and so we will pass away this terrible night together."

The antique volume which I had taken up was the "*Mad Trist*" of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favorite of Usher's more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild overstrained air of vivacity with which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.

I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:

"And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest."

At the termination of this sentence I started and, for a moment, paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me)— it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story:

"But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the maliceful hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten—

Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win

And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard."

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement— for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound— the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.

Oppressed, as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of this second and most extraordinary coincidence, by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting, by any observation, the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question; although, assuredly, a strange alteration had, during the last few minutes, taken place in his demeanor. From a position fronting my own, he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber; and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast— yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea— for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. Having rapidly taken notice of all this, I resumed the narrative of Sir Launcelot, which thus proceeded:

"And now, the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound."

No sooner had these syllables passed my lips, than— as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver— I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled,

reverberation. Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

"Not hear it?— yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long— long— long— many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it— yet I dared not— oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!— I dared not— I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb*! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them— many, many days ago— yet I dared not—*I dared not speak*! And now— to-night— Ethelred— ha! ha!— the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield!— say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh! whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!"— here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul— "*Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door*!"

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust—but then without those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold— then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of

which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened— there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind— the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight— my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder— there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters— and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "*House of Usher*."

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18: A Vision of Venus

Otis Adelbert Kline

1891-1946

Amazing Stories, Dec 1933

For many years it was an s.f. convention that cloud-covered Venus was a planet of oceans...

DR. MORGAN, scientist and psychologist, stared fixedly into the crystal globe before him, as he sat in the study of his strange mountain observatory. For many years, he had been communicating with people on Mars and Venus by means of telepathy, and recording these communications.

Just now, he had established rapport with Lotan, a young plant hunter for the Imperial Government of Olba, the only nation on Venus which had aircraft. He was seeing with Lotan's eyes, hearing with his ears, precisely as if this earthly scientist were Lotan the Olban. The electrodes of his audio-photo thought recorder were clamped to his temples, and every thought, every sense impression of Lotan's was, for the time, Dr. Morgan's.

Lotan's little one-man flier was behaving badly. He had just come through a terrific storm in which he had lost his bearings. His navigating instruments were out of commission and his power mechanism was growing weaker. It would be necessary for him to land and make repairs, soon.

For many months he had sought the kadkor, that rare and valuable food fungus which had once been cultivated in Olba, but had been wiped out by a parasite. His sovereign had offered him the purple of nobility and a thousand kantols of land, if he would but bring him as many kadkor spores as would cover his thumb nail. But so far his quest had been fruitless.

Far below him the Ropok Ocean stretched its blue-green waters for miles in all directions— a vast expanse of sea and sky that teemed with life of a thousand varieties. There were creatures of striking fantastic beauty and of terrifying ugliness. A number of large, white birds, with red-tipped wings and long, sharply curved beaks, skimmed the water in search of food. Hideous flying reptiles, some with wing-spreads of more than sixty feet, soared quite near the flier, eyeing it curiously as if half minded to attack. They would scan the water until they saw such quarry as suited them, then, folding their webbed wings and dropping head first with terrific speed, would plunge beneath the waves, to emerge with their struggling prey and leisurely flap away.

The sea itself was even more crowded with life. And mightiest of all its creatures was the great ordzook, so immense that it could easily crush a large battleship with a single crunch of its huge jaws.

But these sights were no novelty to Lotan, the botanist. What he hoped to see, and that quickly, was land. Failing in this, he knew by the way the power mechanism was acting, that he would soon be compelled to settle to the surface of the Ropok probably to be devoured, ship and all, by some fearful marine monster.

Presently he caught sight of a tiny islet, and toward this he directed his limping ship with all the force of his will. For his little craft, which looked much like a small metal duck boat with a glass globe over the cockpit, was raised, lowered, or moved in any direction by a mechanism which amplified the power of telekinesis, that mysterious force emanating from the subjective mind, which enables earthly mediums to levitate ponderable objects without physical contact. It had no wings, rudder, propeller or gas chambers, and its only flying equipment, other than this remarkable mechanism, were two fore-and-aft safety parachutes, which would lower it gently in case the telekinetic power failed.

Normally the little craft could travel at a speed of five hundred miles an hour in the upper atmosphere, but now it glided very slowly, and moreover was settling toward the water alarmingly. Lotan exerted every iota of his mind power, and barely made the sloping, sandy beach when the mechanism failed completely.

As he sprang out of his little craft, Lotan's first care was for his power-mechanism. Fortunately the splicing of a wire which had snapped repaired the damage.

He looked about him. At his feet the sea was casting up bits of wreckage. It was evident that a ship had gone to pieces on the reef— the work of the recent storm. The body of a drowned sailor came in on a comber. But it did not reach the shore, for a huge pair of jaws emerged from the water, snapped, and it was gone. In the brief interval he recognized the naval uniform of Tyrhana, the most powerful maritime nation of Venus.

Then his attention was attracted by something else— tracks freshly made, leading from a large piece of wreckage across the soft sand and into the riotous tangle of vegetation that clothed the interior. They were small— undoubtedly the tracks of a woman or boy.

Lotan followed, resolved to try to rescue this marooned fellow-being, before taking off.

He plunged into a jungle that would have appeared grotesque to earthly eyes. The primitive plants of Venus, which bear no fruits, flowers nor seeds, but reproduce solely by subdivision, spores or spawn, assume many strange and unusual forms and colors. Pushing through a fringe of jointed, reed-like growths that rattled like skeletons as he passed, he entered a dense fern-

forest. Immense tree-ferns with rough trunks and palm-like leaf crowns, some of which were more than seventy feet in height, towered above many bushy varieties that were gigantic compared to the largest ferns of earthly jungles. Climbing ferns hung everywhere, like lianas. Creeping ferns made bright green patches on the ground. And dwarf, low-growing kinds barely raised their fronds above the violet-colored moss which carpeted the forest floor.

The trail was plain enough, as the little feet had sunk deeply into the moss and leaf-mould. It led over a fern-clothed rise to lower marshy ground, where fungus growths predominated. There were colossal toadstools, some of which reared their heads more than fifty feet above the ground, tremendous morels like titanic spear heads projecting from the earth, squat puff-balls that burst when touched, scattering clouds of tiny black spores, and grotesque funguses shaped like candelabra, corkscrews, organ pipes, stars, flued funnels and upraised human hands.

But Lotan gave no heed to these. To him they were quite commonplace.

As he hurried along the trail, there suddenly came from the tangle ahead a horrible peal of demoniacal laughter. It was quickly echoed by a dozen others coming from various points in the fungoid forest. He dashed forward, gripping his weapons, for he recognized the cry of the hahoe, that terrible carnivore of the Venerian jungles. It had discovered a victim and was summoning its fellows.

Like all Venerian gentlemen, Lotan wore a tork and scarbo belted to his waist. The tork was a rapid-fire weapon about two feet long, of blued steel. It was shaped much like a carpenter's level, and fired by means of explosive gas, discharging needle-like glass projectiles filled with a potent poison that would instantly paralyze man or beast. The scarbo was a cutting, thrusting weapon with a blade like that of a scimitar and basket hilt.

As he abruptly emerged into a little clearing, he saw a slender, golden-haired girl who wore the silver and purple of nobility, clinging to the cap of a tall fungus. Below her, snarling, snapping and leaping upward, were a half dozen hahoes, huge brutes somewhat like hyenas, but twice as large as any hyena that ever walked the earth, and far more hideous. They had no hair, but were covered with rough scales of black color, and mottled and spots of golden orange. Each beast had three horns, one projecting form either temple and one standing out between the eyes. Two of them were gnawing at the stem of the fungus, and had mad such headway that it seemed likely to topple at any moment.

With a reassuring shout to the frightened girl, Lotan whipped out his scarbo, and elevating the muzzle of his tork, pressed the firing button. Horrid death- yells from the hahoes followed the spitting of the tork, as the deadly

glass projectiles did their work. In less than a minute four of the brutes lay dead at the foot of the fungus, and the other two had fled.

But during that time, brief as it was, another flesh-eater of Venus, far more fearful than the hahoes, had seen the girl and marked her for its prey.

As Lotan looked upward, about to speak to the girl, she screamed in deadly terror, for a man-eating gnarsh had suddenly swooped downward from the clouds. Seizing her in its huge talons, it flapped swiftly away.

Lotan raised his tork, then lowered it with a cry of despair. For even though he might succeed in killing the flying monster without striking the girl, a fall from that dizzy height would mean sure death for her.

There was a bare possibility, however, that the gnarsh would not eat her until it reached its eyrie, which would be situated on some inaccessible mountain crag. As there were no mountains on the island, the monster would probably head for the mainland, and he could follow in his flier.

He accordingly turned, and dashed back to where his airship lay. Leaping into the cabin, he slammed the door. The little craft shot swiftly upward to a height of more than two thousand feet. Already the gnarsh was more than a mile away, flapping swiftly westward with its victim dangling limply.

Like an avenging arrow, the tiny craft hurtled after the flying monster. As he came up behind it, Lotan drew his scarbo, and opening the cabin door, leaned out.

Almost before the gnarsh knew of his presence, the botanist had flung an arm around the girl's slender waist. With two deft slashes of his keen blade, he cut the tendons that controlled the mighty talons. They relaxed, and with a choking cry of relief, he dragged her into the cabin. Turning his craft, he aimed his tork and sent a stream of deadly projectiles into the flying monster. Its membraneous wings crumpled, and it fell into the sea.

Unconscious of what he was doing, the plant-hunter kept his arm around the girl's waist— held her close. He slammed the door, and turning, looked into her eyes. In them he read gratitude— and something more that thrilled him immeasureably. With that brief look went the heart of Lotan. He was drawing her nearer, crushing her to him, unresisting, while the ship hurtled forward, when he remembered that she was of the nobility, and he only a botanist. The jewels that glittered on her garments would have ransomed a rogo [King]. And he was a poor man. He released her.

"You are of Tyrhana?" he asked.

"I am Mirim, daughter of Zand, Romojak [Admiral] of the Fleets of Tyrhana," he replied. "And you, my brave rescuer?"

"Lotan, plant hunter for His Imperial Majesty, Zinlo of Olba," he replied. "My navigating instruments are out of commission, but when we strike the

shore line, which we are sure to do by proceeding westward, I can find the way to Tyrhana and take you home."

"Home," she said, and there was a sob in her voice. "I have no home, now. My mother died when I was born. My father went down with his ship in the great storm that cast me on that terrible island. Now I return to the loneliness of a great castle filled with slaves." Burying her face in her hands, she burst into tears.

His arm encircled her grief-shaken body, and his hand stroked her soft, golden hair.

"Mirim, I—" he began, then stopped resolutely. The gulf between them was too great. Now if he had but found the kadkor and won the reward, he would be her equal— could ask her hand in marriage. He gasped, as that which had been in the back of his mind, endeavoring to fight its way into his objective consciousness, suddenly occurred to him. He had seen the kadkor. It had been a kadkor that Mirim had climbed to escape from he hahoes. But in the excitement of the moment his mind had only registered the fact subjectively. Back there on that tiny islet, now several hundred kants away, was the object of his quest. but he did not know its bearings, and had not even a compass to guide him. He might search a lifetime and not find that islet again.

Presently the girl ceased her sobbing, sat up and began to adjust her disheveled garments. She detached her belt pouch and handed it to him.

"Will you empty this for me, please? she asked. "It came open and got filled with some horrid gray spores."

Lotan looked at the spores, and his heart gave a great leap of joy, for they were the spores of the kadkor, scraped from the gills of the fungus by her open belt pouch as the girl had been dragged aloft.

"I'll keep these, if you don't mind," he said, "for to me they are worth the purple, and a thousand kantols of land. Moreover, they give me the courage to say that which has lain in my heart since first I looked into your eyes. I love you, Mirim. Will you be my wife?"

"Take me, Lotan," was all she said, but her lips against his told him all.

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19: Louis XIV and the Bodger

Ernest O'Ferrall (as by "Kodak")

1881-1925

The Lone Hand, 1 April 1912

The Bodger, the overbearing boarding-house resident, featured in a number of the author's short stories

WHEN the worried little landlady came into the dining-room, she found most of the food-mutinous lodgers listening to the tea-salesman, who was reading aloud part of an evening paper article on the gluttony of King Louis XIV Of France: "His Majesty," proclaimed the seller of inferior tea, "had as many as 1500 men to cook for him and to wait at his banquets. Here is a menu of one of his ordinary dinners: One broth made of two fowls, and one of four partridges and cabbages; one additional soup made of six pigeons, and one of cocks' eombs; two further soups, one of fowl and one of partridge; a 20 lb. side of veal and twelve pigeons; a fricassee of six chickens and two hashed partridges; three roast partridges, six braised pigeons, two roast turkeys, three truffled hens, two fat capons, nine chickens, nine pigeons, two young chickens, six partridges and four pigeons. The dessert consisted of two china bowls of raw fruit, two of jam, and two of compôte. No doubt the King did not eat all this—"

"I should *think* not!" breathed the limp landlady.

"Go on!" cried the audience triumphantly.

"—but he certainly more than touched it, as shown by his supper menu of the same day, which consisted of two capons, twelve pigeons, one partridge with parmesan, four more pigeons, six chickens, 8 lb. veal, one pheasant, three partridges, three fat hens, four young chickens. And on that particular day the King did not find the supper sufficient to satisfy his Royal appetite, and called for more!"

(Applause and laughter from the other lodgers interrupted the recital. The landlady gave an exhausted cry.)

The tea salesman continued gaily.

"Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes! And called for *more*! The following had to be added to the menu: Four partridges in sauce, roast pie of two fat chickens, two capons, two woodcocks, two teals and five partridges!"

"Anything more?" asked the Post Office lady in the proper high-pitched telephone voice.

"Just another line or two: "*Hors-d'oeuvres* are not mentioned, but they included such things as black pudding, sausages and truffled pies."

"Goodness me!" chirped the Post Office female with a bitter little laugh; "a king can order just what he likes, can't he?"

The old landlady, who had been taking the count, burst into the deliberations with a perfect shout of indignation. "I don't believe a word of it! I don't believe poor Edward could have eaten a quarter of that lot! The idea of saying his Majesty!"

Her voice was drowned in a storm of mirth. The lodgers flung themselves in their chairs, shrieking and cackling like a flock of kookaburras. The Post Office lady's staccato shrieks and the wild brays of Lempson, the armed lodger, rang high above the tempest. The dazed old lady, with her lower jaw slack, sat back in her chair and gazed helplessly at her disorderly drove.

In the midst of the din, a stout, middle-aged man with a flowing beard rose in his place, and glaring angrily about him, shouted in thunderous tones, "ORDER! SILENCE!!"

The careless lodgers gradually became aware that they had incurred someone's high displeasure. As quickly as possible they straightened up, and with flushed faces and bright eyes looked towards the bearded figure of vengeance.

"What's the matter, Mr. Bodger?" came from all sides.

"I never saw such an exhibition of bad manners in my life!" puffed Bodger, swollen and bristling with indignation.

The table was up in arms immediately against this censor of conduct.

"How ridiculous!" shrilled the Post Office lady.

"Rot!" grunted the tea-traveller.

"Mustn't we laugh at all?"

"Some people can never see a joke!"

"Like his confounded cheek!"

Bodger raised his hand like an arch-bishop. "Blackguardism!" he roared. "Going on like a pack of larrikins!"

This was too much for the Post Office lady. She became slightly hysterical, fell back in her chair, and started to laugh low, mirthless laughs. The other lodgers grew sullen, and muttered resentfully.

The tea-salesman, affecting an attitude of cold and lofty scorn, flung his paper on the table, and called out, "Mr. Bodger, perhaps you would be good enough to explain to Mrs. Tribbens that the article refers to Louis XIV., of France, *not* to the late King Edward VII?"

"I will explain nothing, sir!" fiercely retorted Bodger. "You have treated this lady in a blackguardly manner, and, as a gentleman"

The Post Office lady here giggled.

"*Who* says I'm not a gentleman?" roared Bodger. "WHO says I'm not?"

"Oh!" cried the Post Office lady, on the verge of tears. "Oh, *please* don't mind *me*!" Stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, she wept a little and giggled some more.

Young Lempson, who admired the hysterical one, thought it was up to him. "Look here, Mr. Bodger, you mustn't try to bully Miss Gumiuer, you know!"

Bodger turned on him like a large dog. "Mind your own business! *I* know how to conduct myself, thank God!"

Lempson, very flushed and angry, subsided with a mumbled observation, which highly amused the young iron-monger on his left.

"What is all the excitement over?" drawled the golden-haired flower-shop girl. "Anybody might have made the same mistake that Mrs. Tribbens made. *I* never heard about that greedy king's dinners before, and I don't wonder at poor Mrs. Tribbens saying she doesn't believe any man could eat so much."

The company joyously pointed out to the flower-shop girl that she had got hold of the wrong end of the stick as usual. "She thought it was King Edward," they chanted together.

"Oh!" said the flower-shop girl, and fixed her eyes on the ruins of the inferior pudding.

The plaintive voice of the landlady was heard. "I'm sure I don't want any unpleasantness on my account; but I look to be treated with respect at my own table, and I *must* say—"

(Hasty expressions of loyalty from all sides interrupted her speech at this point.)

"But I *must* say that such readings about food at meal-time seem very personal *indeed*, seeing that I have to provide for you all, though goodness knows the prices of things are really terrible just now."

"I didn't *mean* to be personal, Mrs. Tribbens!" muttered the tea-salesman in a shamefaced way.

Bodger the ever-ready sprang to his feet. "Silence!" he roared.

"Oh, shut up!" howled the tea-salesman. "D'ye think I'm going to take orders from *you*? Mind your own business!"

The lodgers— always easily excited— supplied a mild uproar, above which heated exchanges were audible.

"This is my business, sir!"

"Oh, no, it isn't your business! You merely think it is!"

"Don't you give me any of your damned impudence!"

"Oh, rats! What right have you got to boss people, anyhow? You don't run the house!"

"—promise you a damned good flogging!"

"—damned old bully!"

"—get any more of your larrikinism, by the Lord, I'll teach you how to treat a lady!"

Then, in the heat and dust of argument, the shell burst which exploded the magazine. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, Bodger, talk sense, and be honest! You've been growling about the food yourself for weeks!"

"YES!" thundered the chorus. "YES! SO HE HAS!"

A frightful calm descended on the scene. Bodger went down beneath the blow; that is to say, he sank slowly into his chair, grasping at his whiskers as the drowning man is alleged to clutch at the always convenient straw.

The tragic figure of the landlady rose in the half-darkness and peered about.

"Who has been saying things behind my back?" trumpeted the shadow accusatively. To everyone's great relief, she went on without waiting for an answer. "If you do not think my food good enough, Mr. Bodger, I will thank you to tell me so, and not go complaining to the other lodgers, and setting them against me, Mr. Bodger, because I am a poor woman, and the more people I have talking behind my back the less people will say to my face. So you see, Mr. Bodger—"

"One moment, Ma'am," boomed Bodger. "I must at least tell you that I am not the only person who has been complaining about the food."

"What!" shrilled the landlady. "Have you set them all against me already! Do you mean to stand there and tell me, after scolding Mr. Peekin for reading out about that greedy king, that you've been talking behind my back? Oh, Mr. Bodger!!"

Bodger started to choke. "I didn't set anyone against you! Damn it all, I didn't need to! Everyone's been saying that the food hasn't been fit to give to a dog!"

Tremendous sensation. Panic-stricken lodgers fell about in their chairs and cried out passionately that it wasn't true. Bodger was denounced by all and ordered to withdraw the libellous statement. They had never said a word against the food!

When Bodger realised that they had turned against him in face of the enemy, and were ordering him to humiliate himself, he went purple, and exploded. "Humbug!" he shouted. "Why don't you have the courage to admit you've been running down the woman's food? BAH!"

"We never said a *word* against it!" they thundered over and over again.

Bodger shouted against them, and tried to obtain silence by making ecclesiastical gestures. But it was no use, and he had to sit down. Then the tumult and the shouting died, and the landlady rose...

"To think that I have been feeding a snake in the grass!" she intoned. "A snake in the grass that talks behind my back, and poisons the minds of people by telling them the food isn't fit to give to a dog! Three meals and a bed to a viper, and his boots cleaned for him into the bargain, all for twenty-two and sixpence a week! What is the answer to *that*?"

It sounded like an unusually difficult problem in mathematics. None of the silent lodgers suggested a method of working it out. However, the snake in the grass upreared himself, and made ready to strike.

"Don't call me a viper again, Ma'am— or a snake in the grass, either! I tell you I haven't been poisoning the minds of your damned people! But I'll tell you what you've been doing! You've been poisoning their stomachs!"

(Uproar.)

"Oh, how *atrociously* vulgar!" wailed Miss Gummer, distractedly, above the noise. "Such *language*!" She gazed imploringly into Lempson's eyes. It was an appeal which he felt bound to respond to. Leaping to his feet, he shouted, with a magnificent show of indignation. "Mr. Bodger! Please remember *there are ladies present*!"

All the male boarders took up the cry. "*Ladies present*!" they shouted sternly. "*Ladies present*, Bodger!"

"God bless my soul!" stuttered Bodger. "Can't a man say—"

"Silence !" shouted Lempson. "Remember *there are ladies present*! Be a gentleman!"

"Dammit, I won't be muzzled by a pup! I *will* talk plainly, and say what I like!"

"Behind people's backs— like a viper!" added the landlady, timing her acid remark with beautiful precision.

"Such *words*!" moaned Miss Gummer.

"He says anything at all when he's angry," complained Mrs. Tribbens. "I wouldn't have believed it if anyone had told me he was a snake in the grass ready to ride roughshod over people's feelings and poison their minds, and say things that weren't true! The of saying that I— I poisoned people's—"

"People's STOMACHS!" howled Bodger. "I will say it. Don't shout at me! I tell you there's nothing else a sensible man can call it. It's perfectly true— you know that she has been poisoning your stomachs!" (Dissent.)

"Yes, and that you've been saying so *for weeks*!" (Uproar.) "Yes, behind her back, you've been saying it!" (Deafening denials.), "Well, if you say you haven't, you're a pack of damned cowardly hags and humbugs!" (Shrieks.)

Lempson, white with suppressed passion, was pointing an accusative finger straight at Bodger's vest when the tea salesman, who had been out of the room, slipped unobtrusively into his seat.

"You have disgraced yourself, sir," Lempson was stuttering. "No gentleman would use such expressions such as you have used here to-night in the presence of ladies!"

Bodger leaped to his feet and shouted: "You're an ignorant whelp!" His hand clutched the loaf of bread. "Another such remark, and—"

"Don't take the whole loaf away, Mr. Bodger! Don't take the food from the table!"

The gabbling ceased instantly. All hands— Bodger included— turned in amazement, and found the tea salesman smiling in a sickly way. There was an instant of complete silence while they passed through the centre of the conversational typhoon.

"WHAT'S THAT ?"

"You musn't take the loaf, sir. It— it isn't fair when your overcoat pockets are full of scraps!"

"Don't tell me he's been taking the food from the tabled" wailed the landlady. "*Don't* tell me that!"

The flower-shop girl turned up her eyes. "Oh, he's been taking food from the table!"

"I HAVEN'T!" yelled Bodger, quite beside himself. "Bring me my coat! Bring me my coat, and I'll show you all that he's a liar! Then I'll flog him within an inch of his life! MY COAT!!"

The lodgers started to murmur threateningly like stage rabble when the tumbrels are approaching. Flat feet charged down the hall and back again. The door opened, and the wooden-faced serving-maid entered precipitately with an old-fashioned overcoat in her arms. Bodger snatched the garment, and held it up before the room. "Here we are now! Watch this, and then let me at him!" With a rapid movement, he threw the coat over, caught the tail of it, and shook it vigorously. *A perfect avalanche of bread poured out of the pockets*.

A long-drawn, horror-stricken "OH-OH!" went up from the company as the useless rubbish clattered on the plates and rolled on the floor.

"There!" cried the tea-salesman judicially; but his eyes had an apprehensive look, and his lips were twitching. Bodger, inflated with rage, and with his whiskers bristling, was regarding him murderously, while he groped blindly amongst the cutlery for a suitable weapon. The tragedy was about to happen.

To an accompaniment of stifled screams, the tea-salesman rose jerkily from his chair. "Mind— what— you're about!" he gasped. "Don't you— strike—"

The heavy loaf of bread hit him violently on the last button of his waistcoat, thereby completely shutting off further conversation. He fell back, limp and

breathless in his chair, a vast white smudge of flour like a target on his black vest. The projectile fell with a thump on the floor and rolled under the table.

"*Mr. Bodger*!" squeaked the landlady querulously. "What are you *doing*, Mr. Bodger?"

But Mr. Bodger didn't answer. He was making a tremendous dumb oration to his fallen enemy— either that or pronouncing a frightful soundless curse on him. No one could decide exactly what it was; but it was mysterious and terrifying. First he shook his clenched fist in the air, and made words with his whiskers; then he flung both arms outwards with a passionate gesture, and noiselessly consigned him to the Devil; finally, looking up to the ceiling so that his vibrating whiskers seemed to be balancing precariously on his chin, he reached up taloned hands and carefully scratched opposite sides of an invisible column, chewing, meanwhile, great mouthfuls of atmosphere. In Biblical costume, he would have been invaluable to any artist as Moses in an ecstatic moment.

The paralysed company watched him as though he were engaged in some perilous supernatural experiment. Of a sudden he shocked and startled them by dropping his arms to his sides with a loud plop. "BAH !" he yelled to the ceiling, and, stumbling out, shut the door with a crash.

The lodgers listened intently to his retreating footsteps, and when satisfied that he had gone right out of the house, sighed together tremulously.

The old landlady sniffed hysterically.

"Such goings-on!" she sobbed.

Miss Gummer, like a true heroine, dabbed resolutely at her red eyes, and leant across the table towards the stricken tea-salesman. "Are you hurt, Mr. Peekin? Are you sure you're not hurt?"

Everyone leant forward breathless.

Peekin moistened his lips, "Oh, no," he mumbled. "I'm— I'm all right, thanks. He merely gave me a nasty knock in the— Oh, it only struck my *chest*, you know!"

All the ladies sighed gratefully in chorus.

"Such a *gentleman*!" murmured the tea-room girl admiringly. "Now that's what *I* call a *real gentleman*!"

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20: The Gloaming Ghosts

George Barr McCutcheon

1866-1928

The London Magazine, Jan 1922

GLOAMING had been the home of the Gloames for two centuries at least. Late in the seventeenth century one of the forebears acquired the picturesque acres in Virginia and they have not been without a Gloame as master since that time. At the time when the incidents to be related in this story transpired, Colonel Cassady Gloame was the owner of the famous old estate and he was lord of the countryside. The power of the ancient Gloames was not confined to the rural parts of that vast district in southern Virginia; it was dominant in the county seats for miles around. But that is neither here nor there. The reader knows the traditional influence of every old Virginia family. It is like the royal household of an eastern monarchy. It leads, dominates, and sets the pace for all its little universe. No one cares to learn that the Gloames were the first family of them all; it does not matter especially that old Sir Henry settled there nearly a hundred years before the Revolution; it is simple history that some of the Gloames who followed after him fought like tigers for the country in one war and just as hard against it in another. Let it be understood that Gloaming was two centuries old and that there was no fairer, prouder name in all Virginia than that which had been handed down to Colonel Cassady Gloame, the last of the race.

The rambling old house that faced the river was known from one end of the state to the other, not only for its age, but for its hospitality. The Gloames, whether wild or sedate, had always been famous for the warmth of their hearts. The blood was blue and the hearts were true, is what the world said of the Gloames. The years had made but little change in the seat of the Gloames. The mansion, except for the repairs that time demanded, was virtually the same as in the days of old Sir Henry. Nine generations of Gloames had begun life in the picturesque old house and it had been the pride of each. It had borne good Americans and blue Virginians. The architecture, like its children, seemed perennial. Time made few inroads upon the character of its lines. Its furnishings and its treasures were almost as antique. Decrepit age alone was responsible for the retirement of historic bits of furniture. The plate was as old as the hills, the service as venerable. Gloaming looked to be the great-great-grand-parent of every other habitation in the valley.

Colonel Cassady Gloame was the last of the long and illustrious race. He was going to the grave childless; the name would end with him. True, he would doubtless leave a widow, but what is a widow when one figures on the perpetuation of a name? The Colonel was far past sixty, his wife barely twenty-

five. He loved her devotedly and it is only just to say that she esteemed him more highly than any other man in all the world. But there would be no children.

Mrs. Gloame, beautiful, cultured, gay as a butterfly, was the daughter of Judge Garrison of New York. She had been married for five years and she was not yet tired of the yoke. Her youth was cheerfully, loyally given over to the task of making age a joy instead of a burden to this gallant old Virginian. She was a veritable queen in this little Virginia kingdom. Though she was from the North, they loved her in the South; they loved her for the same reason that inspired old Colonel Gloame to give his heart and honour to her keeping—because they could not help it.

The Christmas holidays were always a season of great merriment at Gloaming. There never had been a Christmas Eve without festivities in the good old home of the Gloames. Sometimes, in the long array of years, there may have been sorrow and grief and trouble in the hearts of the inmates, but all such was dissipated when the Christmas bells began to ring. Even that terrible tragedy in the winter of 1769 lifted its shadow long enough to permit the usual happiness to shine through all the last week of the dying year.

There was always a genial house party in holiday times, and Gloaming rang free with the pleasures of the light-hearted. The Colonel himself was the merriest of the merry-makers, second only in enthusiasm to the sunny young wife from the North. The night of December 24, 1897, found the old mansion crowded with guests, most of whom were spending the week with the Gloames. There had been dancing and music and games, and eleven o'clock brought fatigue for even the liveliest of the guests. It was then that pretty Louise Kelly, of the Major Kellys of Richmond, peremptorily commanded the Colonel to tell the oft-told tale of the Gloaming Ghosts.

"Come to order," she cried to the guests in the double parlours. "Colonel Gloame is going to tell us about those dear old ghosts."

"Now, my dear Louise, I've told that story times without number to every soul in this house," remonstrated the Colonel. "You, to my certain knowledge have been an attentive listener for one hundred and nine times. Even though it brings upon my head the weight of your wrath, I must positively decline to—"

"You have nothing to say about it, Colonel Gloame," declared Miss Kelly definitely. "The first thing required of a soldier is duty. It is your duty to obey when commanded by the officer of the night. In the first place, you've not told the story to every one here. Lieutenant King has just confessed that he never has heard of the Gloaming Ghosts and, furthermore, he laughed when I told him that you boasted of real, live ghosts more than a hundred years old."

"Oh, we are very proud of our ghosts, Lieutenant King," cried Mrs. Gloame.

"I imagined that people lived in some terror of ghosts," ventured King, a young West Pointer.

"You couldn't drag the Colonel into the south wing up-stairs with a whole regiment of cavalry horses," said old Mr. Gordon, the Colonel's best friend.

"Tush," remonstrated the Colonel.

"There's a real ghost, a white lady who walks on air, who spends her time in the room whose windows look out over the low lands along the river," piped up little Miss Gordon, a grand-daughter in very short dresses.

"How romantic," laughed the Lieutenant.

The Colonel, despite his customary remonstrances, would not have missed telling the story for worlds. He liked to be coaxed. He was in his element when the score or more of eager guests, old and young, crowded into the room about him and implored him to go on with the tale.

"It's a mighty threadbare sort of a ghost we have here, my dear Lieutenant," he admitted at last, and there was a sigh of contentment from the lips of many. They knew the story would be forthcoming. "Poor old thing, I've told about her so often I'm afraid she'll refuse to come and visit us any more."

At this juncture, young Mr. Gates Garrison strolled leisurely into the room, coming from the dining-room where he had lingered with the apples and cider and doughnuts. He was a tall, fair young fellow of twenty-four, a year younger than his sister, the pretty Mrs. Gloame, and a senior in Columbia College. The Colonel stood with his back to the blazing grate, confronting the crowd of eager listeners, who had dragged chairs and settees and cushions from all parts of the house to prepare the auditorium.

"Come here, Gates, and hear the ghost story," cried his sister, making room between herself and Miss Kelly.

"Same old story?" inquired the law student, stifling a yawn.

"Of course; come and sit between us."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of ghosts," replied Gates indifferently.

Miss Kelly looked daggers through her tender blue eyes.

"I wonder what that boy has on his mind?" murmured Mrs. Gloame anxiously.

"Nothing," responded Miss Kelly, sweetly. But the Colonel was beginning.

"Whatever you may think of this story," he began, "I can assure you that there is a very deep mystery attached to Gloaming and as I cannot offer the faintest explanation except to call your attention to the supernatural conditions which exist, I am obliged to admit that I, for one, firmly believe the house is haunted. For several generations the Gloame family, to an individual, has believed in the ghost of the south wing and our faith cannot be shaken. We have the evidence of our ears, our eyes, and of all who have undertaken to

explode the theory. I'll be just as brief as possible, Major Harper, so you need not look at your wife's watch. My great-great-grandfather, Godfrey Gloame, was born in this house and he brought a beautiful bride here when he was married twenty-five years afterward. He was, as are all the Gloames, a Virginian of the old type, and he was a fire-eater, so the family records say. When he was married it was to a young lady of wealth and position in the North— a very gay and, if I must say it, a particularly— ah!— unsatisfactory mistress of a home."

"What could you expect of a Yankee wife?" asked young Garrison, tantalisingly.

"They were different in those days," responded the grey old narrator, with a smile for his wife. "My great-great-grandmother was a beautiful woman, and she was well aware of that fact. Her husband was a jealous devil, as unreasonable as a jackass, and as stubborn as an ox. To make a long story short, after they had been married five years and had seen enough of the connubial hell to drive them both out of mind, he took a sudden fancy that she was false to him. A young Virginian, in fact, the very man who stood up with him at the wedding, was a frequent visitor at this house and was a decided favourite with my maternal ancestor. Godfrey went to drinking rather heavily, simply because he found it impossible to discover anything wrong in his wife's conduct— I may say that he had watched her, too, ladies and gentlemen. Being too honourable to accuse her of infidelity without having actual proof, he suffered in silence and his cups, all the time allowing the gap between them to grow wider and wider. One night he came home from Richmond late and saw his friend, Harry Heminway, leaving the place on horseback. Inflamed by jealousy, and drink, too, I reckon, he dashed up to his wife's room. I do not know what followed, for no one ever knew, but the next mornin' they found her dead on the bed, her throat cut from ear to ear in a most dreadful manner. He was dead on the floor, the same knife sticking in his breast. Their son, my great-grand-father, the famous General George W. Gloame, then a child of three, was lying on the bed with his mother, asleep."

"What beautiful nerves that kid must have had," muttered Gates.

"And did they never hang the murderer?" asked Lieutenant King.

"Good heavens, no! Didn't I say he had jabbed the knife into his own heart? How could they hang him? Well, all this happened in that room at the far end of the south wing— it's always locked now and has been for a hundred and thirty years. The furniture stands just as it was when that pair occupied the apartment. Now comes the strange part of the story."

"Ugh!" interrupted Miss Kelly, with a shudder. "Just hear how the wind whistles around the house. It positively gives me the shivers."

"Well, within a week after the murder queer things began to happen in that room," the Colonel went on. "Odd noises were to be heard, muffled screams came from behind the closed doors, and finally the people who lived here saw the white, ghostly form of my great-great-grandmother moving about in the room and in the halls. Ever since that time her spirit can be seen up there, for it comes around once in a while to see if anybody desecrates the room by trying to sleep in it. With my own eyes I have seen it— dozens of times. Since my marriage it has not been here, but I expect it almost any night."

George Washington appeared suddenly in the hall door and his stentorian though eminently respectable tones startled the entire assemblage, the Colonel included. There were a dozen little feminine shrieks and more than one man caught his breath sharply. George Washington was the butler at Gloaming.

"Majah Harpeh's kerridge, *sah*," he announced obsequiously.

"Oh, I'm so glad," gasped Miss Kelly, mightily relieved. Then, in confusion: "I mean, Mrs. Harper, that I'm glad it isn't the ghost, you know."

Half an hour later the parlours were deserted, except for the presence of a tall young man with a far-away, dissatisfied look in his eyes. In all the spare bed chambers guests were preparing for bed. Young Garrison had said good night to all of them and remained below stairs to commune with himself at the midnight hour.

For many minutes he sat before the fireplace, staring moodily at the flames. Gates Garrison admitted reluctantly that it was all very nice at Gloaming, that it was "a bully place to spend the holidays and all that, you know," but for a very well-defined reason he was wishing they were over and he was back in New York once more. He was in love. It is not unusual for a young man of his age to be desperately in love and it is by no means unusual that he should be in love with the most impossible of persons. Gates Garrison's affections at this period of his life were the property in fee simple of a very pretty and decidedly popular member of the chorus at Weber & Field's. After convincing himself that he was quite alone in the huge old parlour, the hopeless Mr. Garrison guiltily drew from the inside pocket of his coat a thick and scrawly letter. Then he did things to this letter that in after years he would blush to acknowledge, if they remained a part of his memory. He kissed the scribble— undeniably. Then, with rapt eyes, he reread the lengthy missive from "Dolly." It had come in the morning mail and he had read it a dozen times. The reader is left to conjecture just what the letter contained. Mr. Garrison's thoughts were running something like this:

"Lord, if my sister knew about you, Dolly, she'd have so many fits that you couldn't count them. They think I'm an absolute stick when it comes to girls. If they only knew! What the deuce did I do with that photograph— ah, here it is. Inside vest pocket, left-hand side— just where it belongs."

He pulled a small photograph from his vest pocket and sat gazing at it rapturously. It was the portrait of the fair Dolly in tights. After a long scrutiny of this rather picturesque product of nature and the photographer, he arose and, with a sigh, turned off all the lights in the room, still holding the picture in his hand. The fire in the grate was now the only means of illumination in the parlour and the halls were dark. Reconsidering his impulse to go to bed, he threw himself in a chair before the grate, his elbow resting on the mahogany table at its right. There he devoted himself to— dreams. A wave of cold air crossing his back brought him from dreamland.

"Some one must have left a door open," he grumbled. He looked up and down the hall and then resumed his seat before the fire. A moment later the chilly draft struck him again. "Confound it! There's a devil of a draft from somewhere. It goes clean through me. Must be a crack in the floor. That's the trouble with these shacks that somebody's grandfather built before the flood." He vigorously poked up the fire and drew his chair a little closer to the circle of warmth.

Had he turned his head for an instant as he sat down he could have seen that he was not alone in the room. A tall, shadowy woman in white was standing in the hall door, looking pensively in upon him. For a full minute she stood there, hesitating between modesty and curiosity, and then turned as if to glide away.

Reconsidering, she smiled defiantly and more or less nervously, and then turned back into the room. Of course, he did not hear her as she approached. The mere fact that her filmy white dress was of the fashion in vogue before the Revolution should prove her identity to the reader. She was the Gloaming Ghost.

Gates Garrison was softly, tenderly addressing the photograph of the airy but not ethereal Dolly. The words were not for the ears of others. Even the infatuated lover would have despised the strain of softness in his tones had he known there was a hearer.

"If you could but speak to me," he was saying to the picture, "you'd make me happy, I know. You'd tell me that you love me. You'd tell me that you hate that meddlesome old man Ellison. You've got it just as bad as I have, haven't you, Dolly?"

"What a real woman she seems to be," exclaimed a soft silvery voice at his shoulder. Garrison whirled and looked up into the beautiful face of the ghost.

"Great Heaven!" he gasped, struggling to his feet, his eyes riveted to the face of the wraith.

"Only a part of it, my dear sir," corrected the ghost, with a rare smile in which courage struggled with diffidence. "Dear me, why do you stare at me so rudely?"

She was standing directly before him now, tall and straight. He was hanging to the mantelpiece, almost speechless.

"Who— what in Heaven's name are you?" he cried.

"Why, don't you know me? I am Mrs. Godfrey Gloame," she replied, a touch of resentment in her voice.

"The— the ghost?"

"That's what they call me," she admitted sadly. "It's such a horrid thing to be called, too. In reality, I'm merely a visitor from another world. There are many more of my kind in this room at this instant, sir, but you cannot see them. They are visible to me, however. If it interests you in the least, I can tell you that you are surrounded by ghosts. Please don't run! They can not hurt you. Why should they, even if they could? What a big, strong man you are to be afraid of such perfectly harmless, docile beings as we. Over in that corner, looking from the window, stands my daughter-in-law, Mrs. George Gloame. I saw her husband, my son, sitting in the hallway as I came through. Judging from their attitudes, they've had another of those horrid quarrels. I hope you'll pardon me for disturbing you. You looked so lonely I couldn't resist the desire to come in and see. you as I was passing."

Gates was regaining his composure rapidly. The first uncanny shock was wearing off and he was confessing to himself that there was nothing to fear in the spectral bit of loveliness.

"I— I'm sure I appreciate the honour," he said, bowing low.

"Permit me to introduce myself," she went on, and he marvelled at her charm of manner. "I am the great-great-grandmother of Cassady Gloame, and the daughter of Van Rensselaer Brevoort, of New York. He is a millionaire."

"He must be a pretty old millionaire by this time, isn't he?"

"Oh, poor papa has been dead for a hundred and one years."

"Indeed? He isn't here, is he? I'm getting so I don't mind you in the least but I'd rather not meet any male— er— ghosts, if you please." Mrs. Godfrey Gloame laughed unrestrainedly.

"Don't you know that we are nothing but spectral air?" she cried derisively.

"Ah, since you speak of it, I did feel your draft when you came in," he said. "But, if you will pardon me, Mrs. Gloame, there is something uncanny about you just the same. You'll admit that, I'm sure. How would you have felt when you were in the flesh to have had a horrible ghost suddenly walk in upon you?"

"Oh, I am horrible, am I?" she said as she leaned toward him with an entrancing smile.

"Heavens, no!" he retracted. "You are a marvel of beauty. I don't wonder that your husband was jealous." She did not appear to have heard the last remark.

"How I used to live in terror of ghosts," she cried, looking about apprehensively. "Would you believe it, sir, up to the time I was married I could not bear the thought of being left alone in the house for a single minute of the night. The darkness, the mystic flicker of the lights, the stillness seemed to swarm with spirits— Oh, you don't know how I suffered with the fear of them."

"And after you got married— what then?"

"I soon had material spirits to contend with."

"How so?"

"That is an extremely personal inquiry, sir."

"I beg pardon if I have overstepped the bounds of politeness."

"I may as well tell you that my husband drank terribly. It's all over the country anyhow, I hear."

"The Gloame pedigree says that you drove him to it."

"I know that is what the Gloames claim, but it is a shameless slander. My poor, dear husband has told me since that he was wrong and he would give all he has on earth to set me aright in that hateful old pedigree. The poor fellow killed himself, you doubtless know. I was never so shocked in my life as when I heard that he had committed such a brutal act." Mrs. Gloame was looking sadly, reminiscently into the fire and there was a trace of tears in her voice.

"But, my dear madam, didn't he begin by slaying you?" exclaimed Gates in surprise.

"To be sure, he did destroy me first or I might have kept him from committing the awful crime of suicide," she said, despondently.

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"BUT murder is so much worse than suicide," expostulated Garrison. "We hang men for murder, you know."

"I've a notion that it would be difficult to hang them for suicide. But you are quite wrong in your estimation of the crime. You do not know what it is to be murdered, I presume."

"Well, hardly."

"Nor what it is to commit suicide? Well, let me advise you, judging from what I know of the hereafter, get murdered in preference to committing

suicide. I'd even suggest that you commit murder, if you are determined to do anything rash."

"And be hanged for it!" laughed Gates.

"You can be hanged or be d——d, just as you like," she said meaningly. "I wish you could talk to my husband if you are thinking of doing anything of the kind. I'm sure your young love affairs must be getting to the suicide stage by this time."

"But I don't want to kill anybody, much less myself. Oh, I beg your pardon," he cried suddenly. "Pray have a chair, Mrs. Gloame. It was unpardonable in me to let you remain standing so long. I've been a trifle knocked out, I mean disconcerted. That's my only excuse."

"You are not expected to know anything about ghost etiquette," she said sweetly, dropping into a chair at the side of the table farthest from the fire. Garrison had some fear that her vapoury figure might sink through the chair, but he was agreeably surprised to find that it did not. Mrs. Gloame leaned back with a sigh of contentment and deliberately crossed her pretty feet on the fender.

"Won't you sit nearer to the fire?" lie asked. "It's very cold tonight and you must be chilled to the bone. You are not dressed for cold weather." She was attired in a low-necked and sleeveless gown.

"I'm not at all cold and, besides, I did not bring my bones with me." He resumed his seat at the opposite side of the table. "Have you come far tonight?"

"From the graveyard a mile down the river. It is a beautiful cemetery, isn't it?"

"I am quite a stranger in these parts. Besides, I'm not partial to graveyards."

"Oh, dear me," she cried, in confusion. "The idea of my sitting here talking to a total stranger all this time. You must think me extremely bold."

"I am the bold one, madam. It's my first experience, you know, and I think I'm doing pretty well, don't you? By the way, Mrs. Gloame, my name is Gates Garrison, of New York, and my sister is the present Mrs. Gloame."

"The pretty young thing with the old Gloame husband?"

"Can't say she's pretty, you. know. She's my sister."

"I passed her in the hall tonight."

"The *dev*— the deuce you did!" cried Gates, coming to his feet in alarm. "Then she must be lying out there in a dead faint." He was starting for the door when she recalled him.

"Oh, she did not see me. She merely shivered and asked a servant to close the door. An ill wind seems to be a north wind, so far as ghosts are concerned,"

she concluded pathetically. "So you are from New York. Dear New York; I haven't been there in a hundred and thirty-five years, I dare say. One in my position rather loses count of the years, you know. I suppose the place is greatly changed. And your lady-love lives there, too, I see."

"My lady-love?" demanded Gates, taken back.

"Yes, the girl who is so well dressed from her shoulders up," with a tantalising smile.

"You mean— this?" he asked, turning a fiery red as he tried to slip the picture of Dolly under a book.

"Let me see it, please. Who is she?" He was ashamed, but he held out the picture. A poorly disguised look of disgust crossed the startled features of Mrs. Godfrey Gloame.

"She's— a friend of the Colonel's," said Gates promptly.

"I should think his wife would do well to be on her guard. This is the first time I ever saw such a costume. In my day a woman would not have dared to do such a thing. Don't you know her?"

"Oh, casually," answered he, looking away.

"I'm glad to hear that. She is nothing to you, then?"

He shook his head in fine disdain.

"I don't care much for you men in these days, Mr. Garrison," she said.

"You're not complimentary."

"When I compare the men of my day— men like Godfrey— with the men of today, I thank Heaven I had the honour to be killed by a gentleman. You don't know how many unhappy wives I meet in the cemetery."

"Well, there are no women like you in this day, either. You are beautiful, glorious," he cried, leaning toward her eagerly. She shrank back with a laugh, holding her hands between his face and her own.

"How lovely," she sighed. "But keep away, please."

"Well, I should say," he exclaimed, his teeth almost chattering, so cold was the air that fanned his face. "I never got such a frost from a woman in all my life."

"If my husband had heard your words of flattery he would have created a terrible disturbance. He was fearfully jealous— a perfect devil when the spell came over him."

"A devil then and a devil now, I may infer."

"Oh, no; you do him an injustice. Godfrey really was an angel, and if he had not killed himself I think he would not now be in such an uncertain position. He is still on probation, you see."

"Between two fires, as it were."

"I think not. The last time I saw him he was shivering."

"I don't wonder," said Gates, ruefully, recalling the chill of a moment since. "Does he ever come here?"

"Not often. There are so many unpleasant associations, he says. It was here that the funeral took place and he has expressed very strong exceptions to the sermon of a minister who alluded to him as an unfortunate victim of his own folly. The idea! It would have been folly, indeed, for Godfrey to have lived after I was dead. Every woman in Virginia would have been crazy to marry him. And then one of the pall-bearers did not suit him. He had cheated Godfrey in a horse trade, I think."

"I should like to have known Godfrey Gloame."

"You would have admired him. He was the best pistol shot, the bravest man in all Virginia. Three times he fought duels, coming off victorious each time. He would have been an ideal husband if he had not been so indolent, so dissipated, and so absurdly jealous of Harry Heminway. I shall never forgive him for killing me on account of poor Harry."

"Is that why he killed you?" asked Gates eagerly.

"He said so at the time, but he was sorry for it afterward. That is usually the way with jealous men."

"Whew!" exclaimed the man, starting up. "There's another draft, didn't you feel it?"

"It is my husband coming, I know his footstep," she said delightedly, looking toward the door.

"Holy smoke!" cried Gates, in alarm.

"Don't let him hear you speak of smoke. He is very touchy about it just now. Ah, come in, Godfrey, dear."

She crossed to the door to meet the tall, grey young man in the eighteenth century costume, Garrison looking on with open mouth, and rising hair.

Godfrey Gloame was a handsome fellow, albeit he was as transparent as glass. His hair was powdered with all the care of a dandy and his garments hung properly upon his frame. He kissed his wife and then glared at young Mr. Garrison.

"Who is this man, Beatrice?" he demanded, his hand going to his sword hilt. Mrs. Gloame caught the hand and there was passionate entreaty in her eyes. "Speak, woman! What are you doing here with him at this time of night?"

"Now, don't he cross, Godfrey," she pleaded. "It's only Mr. Garrison."

"And who the devil is Mr. Garrison?"

"What a very disagreeable ghost," muttered Gates, remembering that ghosts are harmless.

Mrs. Gloame led the unruly Godfrey up to the table and, in a delightfully old-fashioned way, introduced the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Garrison is the brother of my successor, the present mistress of Gloaming," she said.

"And a devilish pretty woman, too. I've seen her frequently. By the way, I stopped in her bedchamber as I came through. But that's neither here or there. What are you doing here with this young whipper-snapper, Beatrice?"

"Let me explain, Mr. Gloame," began Gates hastily.

"I desire no explanation from you, *sah*," interposed Godfrey, towering with dignity. "You would explain just as all men do under like circumstances. Beatrice, I demand satisfaction."

"Be rational, Godfrey, for once in your life. It is beneath my dignity to respond to your insult," said Mrs. Gloame proudly.

"Good for you, Mrs. Gloame," cried Garrison approvingly. "You would be a bully actress."

"*Sah*, you insult my wife by that remark," roared Godfrey Gloame, and this time the sword was unsheathed.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you, old chap," said Gates bravely. "You're nothing but wind, you know. Be calm and have a chair by the fire. Your wife says you have chills."

"I do not require an invitation to sit down in my own house, *sah*. I am Godfrey Gloame, *sah*, of Gloaming, *sah*."

"You mean you were— you are now his shade," said Gates. "Ah, that's the word I've been trying to think of— shade! You are shades— that's it— shades, not ghosts. Yes, Mr. Gloame, I've heard all about your taking off and I am sure that you were a bit too hasty. You had no license to be jealous of your wife— she assures me of it, and from what I've seen of her I'd be willing to believe anything she says."

"Ah, too true, too true! I always was and always will be a fool. It was she who should have slain me. Will you ever forgive me, Beatrice, forgive me fully?" said Godfrey, in deep penitence.

"I can forgive everything but the fact that you were so shockingly drunk the night you killed us," said she, taking his hands in hers.

"Oh, that was an awful spree! My head aches to think of it."

"It was not the murder I condemn so much as the condition you were in when you did it," she complained. "Mr. Garrison, you do not know how humiliating it is to be killed by a man who is too drunk to know where the jugular vein is located. My neck was slashed— oh, shockingly!"

"Yes, my dear *sah*, if I must admit it, I did it in a most bungling mannah," admitted her husband. "Usually I am very careful in matters of importance, and I am only able to attribute the really indecent butchery to the last few sups I

took from General Bannard's demijohn. My hand was very unsteady, wasn't it, dearest?"

"Miserably so. See, Mr. Garrison, on my neck you can see the five scars, indications of his ruthlessness. One stroke should have been sufficient, a doctor told me afterwards. This one, the last,— do you see it? Well, it was the only capable stroke of them all. Just think of having to go through eternity with these awful scars on my neck. And it was beautiful, too, wasn't it, Godfrey?"

Garrison thought it must have been the prettiest neck ever given to woman.

"Divine!" cried Mr. Gloame warmly. "My dear *sah*, there never lived a woman who had the arms, the neck, and shoulders that my wife possessed. I speak reservedly, too, *sah*, for since my demise I have seen thousands. A shade has some privileges, you know."

"Godfrey Gloame!" cried his wife, suspiciously. "What have you been doing? Have you been snooping into the privacy of—"

"Now, my dear girl, do not be too hasty in your conclusions. You'll observe, Mr. Garrison, that I am not the only jealous one. I have merely seen some shoulders. Very ordinary ones, too, I'll say. Oh, I am again reminded that I want an explanation for your damnably improper conduct tonight, madam. This thing of meeting a man here at twelve o'clock is—"

"Goodness!" cried Mrs. Gloame anxiously. "It is not twelve, is it! I must hasten away by a quarter after twelve."

"It lacks considerable of that hour," said Gates. Turning to Godfrey Gloame, who was leaning against the mantel, he went on to explain: "You see, sir, I was reading here and your wife dropped in— blew in, I might say— all without my knowledge, very much as you did. She had had no invitation, we had made no date— I mean arrangement— and I was paralysed at first. Your wife is a perfect stranger to me. There is a disparity in our ages that ought to protect her. I am twenty-four and she is at least a hundred and fifty."

"Sir! I am but twenty-five!" exclaimed Mrs. Gloame indignantly.

"Madam, I must remind you that you have a great-great-grandson in Colonel Gloame the present, who, by the way, is very proud of his ancestry. But pardon my jesting, please. Would you like a little brandy or a glass of wine? It is a cold night, even for shades. Let me prepare a toddy— it won't take a minute, and I know how to get up a cracker-jack. New thing in all of the New York clubs."

After a moment of indecision the two Gloames sank into chairs beside the table. Godfrey waved his hand pleasantly, courteously, to the young New Yorker.

"My dear *sah*," he said, "your explanation of this rather unaccountable situation is entirely acceptable. I see the position clearly, just as it is, and I humbly apologise for afflicting you with an insinuation. Beatrice, I crave your forgiveness again. Your proffer of the toddy, Mr. Garrison, is timely and I should be happy to place my approval upon your particular concoction."

"Godfrey," cried his wife in distress, "you swore you would never drink another drop."

"But this shall be the last," he pleaded, "so help me— so help me— Moses."

Garrison set to work with the Colonel's decanters, concocting a brew over the spirit lamp, the two wraiths looking on in silent admiration.

"How like you Mr. Garrison is, Godfrey," said Mrs. Gloame.

"Except the water, my dear," agreed Godfrey, taking it for granted that she referred to his ability to mix drinks. "Do you use the water to cleanse the goblet, Mr. Garrison?"

"Chief ingredient, Mr. Gloame," explained Gates, and Godfrey's heart sank heavily.

"By the way, have a cigarette while I am busy with this."

He tossed his cigarette case to Godfrey, who inspected it and the contents curiously.

"Are they to smoke, *sah*?"

"Certainly, light up, if Mrs. Gloame doesn't object."

"It used to be we had nothing but tobacco to smoke," said Godfrey Gloame, lighting a cigarette from a coal in the grate.

"Will it make him ill?" asked Mrs. Gloame. "He has a very frail stomach."

"I think the smoke will mix very nicely with his stomach," said Gates. "For want of something better to say, I'll ask you how you spent the summer."

"For my part, I stayed at home with the old complaint: nothing to wear," said Mrs. Gloame. "I am curious to know where my husband was, however."

"Well, I didn't need anything to wear," said he, naively. "My summer was spent a long way from heaven, and I have just this much to say to you mortals: you did not know what you were talking about when you said that the past summer was hotter than— excuse me, Beatrice; I almost uttered a word that I never use in the presence of a lady."

"You don't mean to say you have gone to— to— oh, you poor boy!" cried Mrs. Gloame, throwing her arms about her husband's neck.

"Not yet, dearest," said Godfrey consolingly. "I was merely spending a season with an old friend, Harry Heminway. He asked about you and I told him you were so far above him that he ought to be ashamed to utter your name. Ah, Mr. Garrison has finished the toddy."

Garrison ceremoniously filled the goblets and handed them to his guests. Godfrey Gloame arose grandly, holding his glass aloft.

"Well, Mr. Garrison," he said, "I can only say to you that I am glad to have met you and that I am sincerely sorry we have not been friends before. You have given us a very pleasant evening, quite unexpectedly, and I drink to your very good health." "Hold, sir!" cried Gates. "I am sure you will allow me to suggest an amendment. Let us drink to the everlasting joy of the fair woman who is your wife. May her shadow never grow less."

"Thank you," said she, "I bid you drink, gentlemen, and share the joy with me. Ah!" as she set the goblet down, "that is delicious."

"Superb!" cried her husband. "My dear *sah*, it thrills me, it sends a warmth through me that I have not experienced in a hundred and thirty-five years. How long do you expect to remain at Gloaming?"

"One week longer."

"I shall come again if you will but prepare another like this."

"You swore that this would be your last, Godfrey; are you as vacillating as ever!" cried his wife.

"I— oh, dearest, a few of these won't hurt me— you know they won't," came earnestly from the other wraith.

"If you touch another I shall despise you forever and forever," she cried firmly. "Take your choice, Godfrey Gloame."

"It's plain that I am doomed to eternal punishment, whichever way you put it," mourned poor Godfrey. "Take away the glasses, Mr. Garrison. I'll no more of it if my wife so disposes."

"Noble fellow," said Gates. "Have another cigarette!"

"Stay! I have heard that they are worse than liquor," objected Mrs. Gloame.

"I don't know but you are right," supplemented Gates.

"But I must have some sort of a vice, dear," pleaded poor Godfrey.

"Vice may be fashionable on earth, but if that's the case it was fashion that ruined us, you'll remember, Godfrey," she reminded him.

"That's worth thinking about," mused Garrison. "There is something deep in that observation. You spooks are—"

"'Spooks!" cried the Gloames, arising in deep resentment.

"I mean shades," apologised Gates. "You do say—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Godfrey, nervously, "but can you tell me what time it is?"

"Ten minutes after twelve, sir." "Oh, we must be going," cried Mrs. Gloame.

"What's the rush?" demanded Gates.

"We cannot stay out after twelve-fifteen, *sah*. We get an extra fifteen minutes on Christmas Eve, you know," explained Godfrey.

"We are led to believe that you stay out till the cock crows," said Gates.

"Oh, these absurd superstitions," cried Mrs. Gloame merrily. "How ignorant the people are. Are you going my way, Godfrey?"

"Yes, dear, and I care not what the direction may be. Good-night, Mr. Garrison."

"Good-night," added the beautiful Mrs. Gloame," and a Merry Christmas. I sincerely hope we have not annoyed you."

"I have never enjoyed anything so hugely. No one will believe me when I tell this story at the club. Merry Christmas to both of you. You'll come again, won't you?"

They were at the door and looking back at him.

"If you care to come to the room in the south wing, you will find me there at most any time, Mr. Garrison," was her parting invitation. Gates was positive he heard Godfrey swear softly as they glided away in the darkness.

And no one did believe him when he told the story at the club.

21: The Umbrosa Burglary

R. C. Lehmann

1856-1929

Punch, 4 Nov 1893 (as by "Cunnin Toil")

In: *The Adventures of Picklock Holes*, 1901

An adventure of The Great Detective Picklock Holes, narrated by his friend Potson… Yes, another Sherlock Holmes parody. The author was for many years a major contributor to Punch*, and also founded* Granta *magazine.*

DURING one of my short summer holidays I happened to be spending a few days at the delightful riverside residence of my friend James Silver, the extent of whose hospitality is only to be measured by the excellence of the fare that he sets before his guests, or by the varied amusements that he provides for them. The beauties of Umbrosa (for that is the attractive name of his house) are known to all those who during the summer months pass up (or down) the winding reaches of the Upper Thames. It was there that I witnessed a series of startling events which threw the whole county into a temporary turmoil. Had it not been for the unparalleled coolness and sagacity of Picklock Holes the results might have been fraught with disaster to many distinguished families, but the acumen of Holes saved the situation and the family plate, and restored the peace of mind of one of the best fellows in the world.

The party at Umbrosa consisted of the various members of the Silver family, including, besides Mr. and Mrs. Silver, three high-spirited and unmarried youths and two charming girls. Picklock Holes was of course one of the guests. In fact, it had long since come to be an understood thing that wherever I went Holes should accompany me in the character of a professional detective on the lookout for business; and James Silver, though he may have at first resented the calm unmuscularity of my marvellous friend's immovable face, would have been the last man in the world to spoil any chance of sport or excitement by refraining from offering a cordial invitation to Holes. The party was completed by Peter Bowman, a lad of eighteen, who to an extraordinary capacity for mischief added an imperturbable cheerfulness of manner. He was generally known as Shockheaded Peter, in allusion to the brush-like appearance of his delicate auburn hair, but his intimate friends sometimes addressed him as Venus, a nickname which he thoroughly deserved by the almost classic irregularity of his Saxon features.

We were all sitting, I remember, on the riverbank, watching the countless craft go past, and enjoying that pleasant industrious indolence which is one of the chief charms of life on the Thames. A punt had just skimmed by, propelled by an athletic young fellow in boating costume. Suddenly Holes spoke.

"It is strange," he said, "that the man should be still at large."

"What man? Where? How?" we all exclaimed breathlessly.

"The young puntsman," said Holes, with an almost aggravating coolness. "He is a bigamist, and has murdered his great aunt."

"It cannot be," said Mr. Silver, with evident distress. "I know the lad well, and a better fellow never breathed."

"I speak the truth," said Holes, unemotionally. "The induction is perfect. He is wearing a red tie. That tie was not always red. It was, therefore, stained by something. Blood is red. It was, therefore, stained by blood. Now it is well known that the blood of great aunts is of a lighter shade, and the colour of that tie has a lighter shade. The blood that stained it was, therefore, the blood of his great aunt. As for the bigamy, you will have noticed that as he passed he blew two rings of cigarette smoke, and they both floated in the air at the same time. A ring is a symbol of matrimony. Two rings together mean bigamy. He is, therefore, a bigamist."

For a moment we were silent, struck with horror at this dreadful, this convincing revelation of criminal infamy. Then I broke out:

"Holes," I said, "you deserve the thanks of the whole community. You will of course communicate with the police."

"No," said Holes, "they are fools, and I do not care to mix myself up with them. Besides, I have other fish to fry."

Saying this, he led me to a secluded part of the grounds, and whispered in my ear.

"Not a word of what I am about to tell you. There will be a burglary here to-night."

"But Holes," I said, startled in spite of myself at the calm omniscience of my friend, "had we not better do something; arm the servants, warn the police, bolt the doors and bar the windows, and sit up with blunderbusses— anything would be better than this state of dreadful expectancy. May I not tell Mr. Silver?"

"Potson, you are amiable, but you will never learn my methods." And with that enigmatic reply I had to be content in the meantime.

The evening had passed as pleasantly as evenings at Umbrosa always pass. There had been music; the Umbrosa choir, composed of members of the family and guests, had performed in the drawing-room, and Peter had drawn tears from the eyes of every one by his touching rendering of the well-known songs of "The Dutiful Son" and "The Cartridge-bearer." Shortly afterwards, the ladies retired to bed, and the gentlemen, after the customary interval in the smoking-room, followed. We were in high good-humour, and had made many plans for the morrow. Only Holes seemed preoccupied.

I had been sleeping for about an hour, when I was suddenly awakened with a start. In the passage outside I heard the voices of the youngest Silver boy and of Peter.

"Peter, old chap," said Johnny Silver, "I believe there's burglars in the house. Isn't it a lark?"

"Ripping," said Peter. "Have you told your people?"

"Oh, it's no use waking the governor and the mater; we'll do the job ourselves. I told the girls, and they've all locked themselves in and got under their beds, so they're safe. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on then."

With that they went along the passage and down the stairs. My mind was made up, and my trousers and boots were on in less time than it takes to tell it. I went to Holes's room and entered. He was lying on his bed, fully awake, dressed in his best detective suit, with his fingers meditatively extended, and touching one another.

"They're here," I said.

"Who?"

"The burglars."

"As I thought," said Holes, selecting his best basket-hiked life-preserver from a heap in the middle of the room. "Follow me silently."

I did so. No sooner had we reached the landing, however, than the silence was broken by a series of blood-curdling screams.

"Good heavens!" was all I could say.

"Hush," said Holes. I obeyed him. The screams subsided, and I heard the voices of my two young friends, evidently in great triumph.

"Lie still, you brute," said Peter, "or I'll punch your blooming head. Give the rope another twist, Johnny. That's it. Now you cut and tell your governor and old Holes that we've nabbed the beggar."

By this time the household was thoroughly roused. Agitated females and inquisitive males streamed downstairs. Lights were lit, and a remarkable sight met our eyes. In the middle of the drawing-room lay an undersized burglar, securely bound, with Peter sitting on his head.

"Johnny and I collared the beggar," said Peter, "and bowled him over. Thanks, I think I could do a ginger-beer."

The man was of course tried and convicted, and Holes received the thanks of the County Council.

"That fellow," said the great detective to me, "was the best and cleverest of my tame team of country-house burglars. Through him and his associates I have fostered and foiled more thefts than I care to count. Those infernal boys

nearly spoilt everything. Potson, take my advice, never attempt a master-stroke in a houseful of boys. They can't understand scientific induction. Had they not interfered I should have caught the fellow myself. He had wired to tell me where I should find him."

22: The Italian

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

In: *Dilemmas*, 1934

"I AM sorry, Mrs. Quintash," said Police-Inspector Grant. "Our presence is, of course, very distressing, but your parlourmaid, Martha, acted very sensibly when she called us in. You will be free of us all the sooner."

"I don't blame her at all," answered Doria Quintash.

Grant was a large, kindly, middle-aged man, with a dread of emotional scenes which not even his long experience had been able to remove. He was very grateful to Mrs. Quintash for the steadiness of her voice and the quietude of her manner. She was a young woman, trim and complete even at this moment. She might be beautiful, the inspector conjectured, to those who liked something a bit foreign. For himself he preferred the English type, fair, and a trifle buxom perhaps. Doria Quintash had a clear pale face, which at this hour seemed to be owned and occupied by a big, clear pair of eyes black as night, rather full, red lips, and black, shining hair most neatly parted in the middle and sweeping down in great curves to hide all but the lobes of the ears. She was seated at a gilt table covered with a red silk cloth fringed with little red balls; and in front of her was a cup of tea and a plate of buttered toast.

"Whilst you go on with your breakfast, Mrs. Quintash," said the inspector, "I'll read out to you the report I'm making, and by the time I've finished I expect our surgeon will have done."

"Certainly— whatever is usual," Doria Quintash answered. It was quite a surprise to the inspector that there was no trace of a strange accent in her voice. Foreign she looked but English she spoke. "Won't you sit down, Inspector, before you begin?"

"Oh, thank you."

The inspector looked uneasily about the room for a piece of furniture which would bear his weight. It was a drawing-room as he thought a drawing-room ought to be— at once florid and musty, a place with a suite of ebony and gold furniture upholstered in blue satin, a cabinet of ebony and gold painted with staring posies of flowers, little gimcracky tables, a thick Axminster carpet, and a big marble vase in one of the front windows. It was to the inspector nice, a room which a self-respecting person had but didn't use. Only there was not much for a self-respecting person of sixteen stone to sit upon. However, the inspector drew forward a spindle-legged cane chair and lowered himself gingerly on to the edge of it.

"At five minutes past eight a.m.," he read from his notebook, "Martha Green, house-parlourmaid to Mr. Anthony Quintash, the famous explorer, rang

up the police station and said that on taking, as per usual, a cup of tea into her employer's bedroom, at eight o'clock, she found him dead, and a book which he had been reading and the bedclothes spattered with blood. The bedside lamp was still burning. Martha Green at once proceeded to the hall where a fixed telephone is installed, and called up the district police-station. I had just come on duty, and instructing Martha Green to see that the room was not entered or touched, I warned the police surgeon, Mr. Graham Buckland, and in company with him repaired to 15A, Ryde Street, Queen's Gate, where the tragedy had occurred. On arriving I found that Martha Green had waked up Mrs. Quintash, who had been sleeping in a room divided from her husband's by a bathroom, and up to that moment was unaware of the catastrophe.

"Anthony Quintash's room was in the front of the house upon the third floor, and his bed stood with its head against the outer wall in the angle of the room. Quintash was lying upon his left side with his face to the wall. A thin, sharp stiletto was driven into his heart, and a book was lying tumbled upon the bedclothes. There was very little blood, and that already dry, both upon the sheets and the page of the book. Upon examination some writing in pencil was found upon the border of the last page of the book, which had been cut. The writing was without doubt in Quintash's hand, although it was weak and faltering and a trifle blurred. But it was easily decipherable. It ran:

" 'No one is to blame. I fell asleep and tossed over on to my side. My fault.— Tony.' "

At this point Inspector Grant interrupted his report to ask:

"You heard no cry, Mrs. Quintash?"

"None," Doria answered. "I don't think I could have heard if Tony had cried out. There's always a certain amount of noise from cars and lorries on the Knightsbridge road at night."

Grant nodded.

"This Street runs up to Knightsbridge, doesn't it? Yes. And there's all the Covent Garden traffic. Besides, I expect Mr. Quintash realized that his injury was fatal and preserved his strength to write those sentences."

He looked again at his report.

"Mr. Quintash, I understand, used that stiletto as a paper-knife regularly, in spite of remonstrances from both you and Martha," he continued.

"Yes, we both thought it dangerous," replied Doria. "I used to put it away the moment Tony went off upon his travels, but it was always lying upon his writing-table the day after he had returned. He had a reason, of course."

Grant looked up.

"Oh! Might I hear it?"

"He read a good many foreign scientific books. I don't know whether you're familiar with the look of them, Mr. Grant. They are heavy books with paper covers and thick uncut pages which do want a lot of cutting."

"Yes, I see. I was puzzled about that paper-knife, Mrs. Quintash, and I was afraid that the coroner might be so too—"

"The coroner?"

Doria Quintash was the puzzled one of the two now. Her forehead set in a frown.

"Do you mean to say that I must have all the publicity of an inquest?" she asked, and there was just a shade of resentment in her voice.

"I don't say that," the inspector hurried to say. "The coroner may issue a certificate right away, as soon as he gets our surgeon's report. I don't see why he shouldn't. But he has to be informed."

"It depends on the surgeon?"

"A good deal. But I hear him coming, Mrs. Quintash."

The police surgeon was a long, thin, shambling man with a grizzled moustache and an aquiline face. He stared for a few moments at Doria Quintash, at a loss to reconcile this young widow who seemed to have stepped straight out from the canvas of an old Italian master with the characterless jumble of tawdry, expensive furniture which cluttered up her drawing-room. If the room had a distinctive feature at all, it was a complete absence of taste, and here she sat at her ease in it.

"Mr. Graham Buckland," said the inspector, introducing him. The surgeon bowed. He carried a parcel under his arm. He spoke with sympathy.

"I think if we could get hold of your doctor now, Mrs. Quintash, we could between us simplify matters for you."

Doria Quintash shook her head, she glanced at him aslant and a little wistful smile glimmered for a second at the corners of her lips.

"We haven't got a doctor," she answered. She was still saying "We" as if her husband was alive. "I moved into this house whilst Tony was away in Brazil, not a year ago, and we were both of us never ill."

The answer disturbed Graham Buckland. He edged away on his long, loose legs to the window which was not covered by the marble vase, and stood with his back to the room. It was somehow outrageous and futile that the man who had burst out of the jungle into Bahia with the remnants of his expedition after a two years' successful search for a lost city of the fourteenth century should come so soon to so unnecessary an end in a dull, flat row of houses, with great porticoes much too big for them, in a side-street of Queen's Gate.

"Then I must put my one question directly to you, Mrs. Quintash."

"Yes?"

"Quintash's death is perfectly explained by the words he wrote in the book," Graham Buckland said bluntly. He had got to get his point clear, and though bluntness sounded cruel, it was, like the surgeon's knife, the kinder on that account. "That stiletto might certainly have caused his death just in that way, and probably did. The smallness of the wound, and the slight loss of blood, would have given him the time to scrawl his message, and probably did. But I was at the great reception last night."

Behind him a chair was suddenly pushed back and knocked against a table.

"Oh, not so much of a coincidence, Mrs. Quintash. When I was a younger man I did a good deal of mountain climbing in odd corners of the world, and I've always taken a great interest in the proceedings of the great Society. Last night was not one to be missed. You were there, weren't you? At the end of the third row."

For a quarter of a minute he waited, and then the answer came, quiet and even and controlled.

"Yes. I was there, of course. And I was at the end of the third row."

"Then perhaps you may have noticed what I noticed."

It had been the night of the season. The big lecture theatre had been crowded. Anthony Quintash had broken silence for the first time since his return and had told a moving story of his long search; the hopes and fears, the elations and disheartenments which had attended it; the discovery of the earthquake-riven, empty city hidden in the foothills of the Andes; the gradual diminution by fever and snake-bite and attack of his company; the death of his young partner and friend, Julian Devenish, by the upsetting of a canoe in a rapid. The photography had been marvellous; the diction of the lecture enthralling; the subsequent presentation of the Society's gold medal had been the opportunity for a demonstration of quite unusual enthusiasm.

"But through it all I seemed to hear," Graham Buckland continued, "a quite tragic note of disillusionment. Do you remember when he threw the portrait of Julian Devenish on the screen, that young, eager friend with the fine face marred by the deep scar from the corner of the eye to the jaw— do you remember his words? 'Was it worth while? What have we done? Added a footnote to *The Golden Bough*, perhaps. Was that worth the loss of so loyal and ardent a spirit as Julian Devenish? I wonder.' On that note of depression he ended, Mrs. Quintash, and my one little doubt is whether Quintash's iron nerve had not at last given way. He was forty-two— young as the world goes now— yes. But he had lived a dozen lives; he carried, as I know now, the scars of a dozen hairbreadth escapes. And I just wonder— you, of course, will know, where I only wonder— whether something had cracked within him,

whether"— and here the surgeon's voice hesitated— "whether in a moment of revulsion after his great triumph, he suddenly took his own life last night."

He heard a gasp and turned round. Mrs. Quintash was gazing at him with parted lips and a flush of colour in her face. Her great eyes were wide open and curiously bright.

"I never thought of that," she cried, and she added: "I am sure that Tony never did."

The surgeon inclined his head.

"It is for you to say."

"I say 'No.'"

Inspector Grant had been turning over the pages of his report a trifle impatiently. He was against speculations in the air. He liked facts on the ground.

"There's one final point, Mrs. Quintash," he said. "You and your husband had supper here when you returned."

"Yes. We dined early before the lecture and I gave orders that something cold should be left for us."

"Martha didn't stay up for you?"

"Oh, no. We didn't get back until after eleven. Martha had gone to bed."

"Quite, quite," said Inspector Grant. "But the dining-room is still as you left it; and though there are two plates used, there are three glasses used."

Mrs. Quintash turned her face to the inspector, and the enigmatic trifle of a smile shone for the fraction of a second in the sideways glance of her eyes and the curl at the corners of her lips.

"A friend of ours took me to the lecture and drove us both back home after it. He came in. He wouldn't stay for supper, but he had a glass of champagne"— the surgeon felt that that was all wrong; it should have been a glass of Chianti— "before he went away."

"And the name of this friend?" continued Inspector Grant, moistening the tip of his pencil with his tongue.

Dona Quintash moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Mr. Cleveland Hill," she answered. "But he is just a friend of ours. He can tell you nothing more."

"I am sure," replied the inspector. "But I've got to make a report. If I could see him for a moment, and write down that I've seen him, you get rid of us then altogether, Mrs. Quintash."

The inspector smiled invitingly and waited.

"He lives in Mount Street," Doria Quintash answered. "I have his telephone number somewhere," and she half-rose from her chair.

But Grant was already on his feet.

"He will be in the book, no doubt. You haven't an extension here? No. We'll go down and get on to him from the hall. This is a distressing business for you, Mrs. Quintash."

"But we'll spare you all we can," the surgeon added, tucking the parcel under his arm.

The two men went downstairs. The telephone was fixed on the wall of the passage to the front door, with the directory on a sloping shelf beneath it. The inspector went straight to it. Graham Buckland opened a door upon the right hand. It led into a dining-room at the front of the house. On the threshold he stopped, looking about the room. On the white tablecloth stood the two plates with the remnants of the cold supper upon them. Quintash had sat at the end of the table and carved the ham. There was the gold medal open in its case beside his plate. At the side here Mrs. Quintash had sat— there was the fragment of lace from her gown caught in the joint of her chair— as if, perhaps, she had risen in a hurry. Her plate was pushed forward and the salt-cellar was upset. Graham Buckland drew the plate back to its natural position and suddenly stooped over the tablecloth. He remained in that position and then suddenly stood erect and with his face upturned towards the ceiling. At once he moved back into the passage. He heard the inspector speaking into the mouthpiece.

"It will be better if you heard it all here, sir. Yes, sir, it's serious...No, Mrs. Quintash is quite well...No, she can't come for the moment to the telephone..." and Graham Buckland tapped him on the shoulder. "Just a moment, sir."

He covered the mouthpiece with his hand, and Buckland asked in a low voice:

"You left all the doors of the bedroom locked?"

"Yes. I've got the keys."

Grant pulled them out of his pocket and the surgeon glanced at them disparagingly.

"Any sort of door key I should think would open those locks," he said. "However—"

He shrugged his shoulders, and whilst Inspector Grant continued to assure Mr. Cleveland Hill that there was nothing the matter with Mrs. Quintash and that the sooner he threw on his clothes and came to Queen's Gate the quicker he would know what was up, he returned into the dining-room and carefully replaced the plate which he had touched on the spot where he had found it. There was the empty champagne bottle— yes— a glass at the side of each chair— yes, and the third glass at the end of the table where Mr. Cleveland Hill had stood. The surgeon drifted out of the room.

The inspector was hanging up the receiver at last.

"Fairly frantic, that young man, Mr. Buckland. There's one, I reckon, who won't grieve very deeply over the loss to science of Mr. Anthony Quintash."

"That room behind the dining-room is Quintash's study, I suppose— " said Buckland.

"Yes, but there's nothing there, Mr. Buckland. I had a look round when you were making your examination upstairs." Nevertheless, Buckland drifted along the passage and went into the study. Very methodically he looked round the room, taking it by portions. Grant followed him.

"Nothing to see here, Mr. Buckland. This is where that stiletto lay, as a rule, according to Martha. On this big table under the window, on the right of the blotting-pad..." and suddenly the telephone-bell rang. Grant ran out of the room, crying aloud so that he could be heard at once in the kitchen below and in the drawing-room upstairs. "All right, all right. I'll answer it." And the moment he had gone Graham Buckland very quickly and very silently closed the study door, shutting himself in alone.

Outside in the hall, William Grant listened and replied:

"No, sir, this isn't Mrs. Quintash...No, sir, I can't disturb her now. No, no, no, she's really quite well. But it would be very much better if you came here at the quickest...It's impossible to explain over the telephone...Oh, you're dressing. Then we'll expect you in a few minutes...Good!...Oh, very well, sir, if you insist...yes, we are the police."

Inspector Grant was a little exasperated. "That lad doesn't sound too bright to me," he grumbled. "You only hurt yourself if you go off the deep end over the telephone. The telephone's no spring-board."

He turned round to share his dissatisfaction with the surgeon and saw him coming out of the study, dusting his fingers.

"Mr. Buckland, you've left that parcel behind in the study."

"No, I put it on the sideboard in the dining-room. I want to have a look at it now."

But he seemed in no hurry, once he was back in the dining-room. He stood with his nose up in the air as if he could smell some secret.

"I wonder what happened in this room last night," he said, slowly and seriously; and Inspector Grant was startled.

But he knew the surgeon for an astute and reasonable man. Graham Buckland did not go off the deep end, either at a telephone or away from it.

"This young man can tell us if anything happened here," said Grant.

"Can he? I wonder," Buckland answered.

He took his parcel then and opened it.

"Here's the stiletto." It was wrapped in a piece of medical gauze, and he handed it to Grant. "You had better take charge of it— but carefully, for it's as

sharp as a razor. It'll have to go to the laboratory, of course, but it's the book which interests me. Have a look at it. Grant."

He had the book wrapped up too, but he sat himself down in a chair by the window, and turned back the gauze. It was a biggish book of quarto size with a paper cover and thick leaves, and it was written in French. Whilst Grant stooped down, Buckland set the book on his knees.

"*Travels in the Sus Country*— that's the title, and— look at the date at the bottom of the title-page— it was published seven years ago."

He turned the title-page and came to the fly-leaf.

"And Anthony Quintash bought it seven years ago. There's his name and the date written, and, as you see, half of the pages uncut. Doesn't it seem a little odd to you that he didn't read it when he bought it?"

Inspector Grant pushed out a lower lip and thought the question over.

"No," he said at length. "I think a lot of people buy books which they think they'll read one day and set 'em up on their shelves and never look at 'em again."

Buckland caught him up at once.

"But Quintash did look at this book again, and last night. I'm not sure that that isn't more curious still. You see, when this book was written very little was known about the Sus Country. Long after Lyautey had Morocco well in hand, this strip in the South beyond the Atlas was dangerous and unexplored. But it's better known now. There are more recent, more knowledgeable books about the Sus Country than this. Isn't it odd that Quintash should have taken up to bed to read for the first time a book already quite out of date?"

But William Grant dug his toes in. He distrusted finely drawn speculations in police work. They led you astray for one thing. Juries made short work of them for another.

"No," he said stubbornly. "Perhaps that book's literature."

The surgeon laughed.

"You've got an answer for everything, Grant," he said.

"But you've got a hunch, Mr. Buckland," Grant returned uncomfortably. "And I don't like it. For I've known your hunches to be better than my answers."

"Let's hope it isn't so in this case!" said the surgeon. "But here's Mr. Cleveland Hill, I take it, and he may have something to tell us."

A powerful two-seater sports car swung round the corner from Knightsbridge and stopped with a smooth precipitation in front of the door. A young man, tanned on the golf-links and trained to the prize-fighter's ounce, burst from it like a bullet and hammered with the knocker until the house

shook. Inspector Grant opened the door, and at the sight of his uniform the young man staggered back against the rail.

"Good God, what has happened?" he cried.

"If you want the street to hear, I can tell you now, Mr. Cleveland Hill," said the inspector. "But I should prefer you to come in."

Mr. Hill pushed into the hall with an apology:

"I beg your pardon. I'm a fool."

The inspector shut the door and ushered the young man into the dining-room.

"Our surgeon, Mr. Graham Buckland."

"Surgeon?"

"Yes, Mr. Hill. Will you sit down, please!" The inspector turned to his note-book. "At eight o'clock this morning, as per usual, Martha Green, house-parlourmaid, took a cup of tea into Mr. Quintash's bedroom," and he continued to read until the simple facts of the explorer's death were complete. At the end of the story Cleveland Hill sprang to his feet.

"Where's Doria?" he cried. "I mean, Mrs. Quintash."

"She is upstairs, sir."

"Alone?"

"For the moment."

"I'll go up to her," and he turned towards the door, but Inspector Grant was in the way.

"One moment, sir."

Mr. Cleveland Hill stared at the big officer as if he were the obtusest thing in the world.

"But you can't let her stay up there alone. It's inhuman." He turned to the surgeon. "You've seen Mrs. Quintash? I had a picture upon the wall of my nursery with just her sensitive face and just her hint of a smile."

"An oleograph of the Mona Lisa, I expect," said Mr. Buckland with a nod.

"That's it. Well, you can see. I've known her all my life. She's got to have sympathy..."

"We only want to ask you a question or two," the surgeon interrupted. "For instance, you drank out of that glass last night?"

The young man controlled himself with an effort.

"Yes, I did. I drove Quintash and Doria home here and came in with them, and I had a glass of champagne."

"But you didn't stay for supper."

"No." Mr. Cleveland Hill's face fell. He was a very open young man. "They didn't ask me," he explained, and then corrected himself. "At least, Doria did, but Quintash was against it. You know Quintash was a very queer fellow.

Running away to Brazil and places like that when you have a wife like Mrs. Quintash, eh? But last night he made quite a little speech, kind, you know, and warm-hearted. It was to be the greatest night of his life— that sort of thing. He had been presented with his Society's gold medal and he wanted to complete the evening with a private little presentation to his wife."

"What!"

And suddenly the surgeon was on his feet with the strangest expression upon his face.

"Yes. Queer, wasn't it? Doria couldn't make head or tail of it. I don't think she half liked it, you know. It wasn't after all very civil to me, was it? He had only got to say good evening and I should have gone away without any of that play-acting."

"I see. You think he was just staging an excuse to get rid of you."

"Well, it looked a bit like it, didn't it?" said Mr. Cleveland Hill. "Is that all?"

"As far as I am concerned," said Buckland.

"The same here," the inspector added pleasantly. "We had to make sure with an accident of this kind that everything was normal, of course."

He held open the door and Mr. Cleveland Hill was half-way up the stairs in a flash. The police-surgeon shot a queer glance at the inspector. "So you think that everything's quite normal. We'll just wait a second until the gentleman upstairs is deep in his oleographic Italy— floating between high black houses on a canal of Venice, or gazing at the moon in a dark garden of Florence. Mona Lisa! She is uncommon like the Gioconda, but I don't think the Gioconda could have put up with the drawing-room furniture."

All the while he was talking, Graham Buckland was wrapping up the travel book in its gauze.

"I am going to borrow this from you for a day. You can trust it to me."

He went to the door and listened. "It's all right, I think. Let me have the key of the bedroom door again. Right! Swiss guides used to have an idea that if you made a noise on a dangerous snow slope, you might bring an avalanche down. Just see what a good climber I was."

The surgeon slipped up the stairs like a shadow. He heard a murmur of voices in the drawing-room and went up to the next floor. He was more careful than ever, and the voices were still murmuring in the drawing-room when he got down again to the ground floor.

"All right," he said, and he handed the key of Anthony Quintash's bedroom back to Inspector Grant. "You can leave all the doors open now, for all that I have to say. Quintash, of course— the usual proper dignities. He needn't be moved from his room. I shall see the coroner this morning, but I'll tell you something." He drew the inspector into the dining-room and closed the door.

"The coroner will not give a certificate. You can take that from me."

The inspector was disappointed.

"There will have to be a public inquest?" he asked.

"There will, and it won't end with the inquest," Buckland said grimly. He picked up the book which Anthony Quintash had been reading and tucked it under his arm. "Can I find you late tonight if I want you? At your house, eh? I've got the address. You're unhappy? Yes. You hoped it was just an accident? Normal was your word. Well, you may be right. But I think we are up against as grim and strange a crime as you and I have ever known;" and with that the surgeon let himself out into the respectable area of Queen's Gate.

At half-past eleven that night Inspector Grant was smoking a final pipe in the parlour of his little house in the Brixton Road. He was uneasy, for he had never seen Graham Buckland, in all the years of their common experience, thrown so markedly out of his stride. The inspector looked at the clock upon his mantelshelf. "He won't come now," he said at one moment. "He'd have sent me a message if he wasn't coming," at the next, and as the hands pointed to a quarter to twelve, a stick was stretched out from the steps at the front door and tapped upon the bow-window. Grant opened the door to a very tired and exhausted surgeon of police.

"Give me a drink first," said Graham Buckland, and he toppled into an arm-chair. "It's a case for a warrant on a charge of murder."

Grant mixed a stiff whisky-and-soda for his guest and watched him drink it. Then he sat down opposite him and said quietly:

"Let me hear!"

"I was puzzled over that book from the beginning," Buckland explained. "Partly for the reasons I gave you, partly too because that bloodstained page looked to me a little used. I put that together with the disheartened tone Quintash had employed last night in his lecture, and I was honestly inclined to suspect that he had deliberately committed suicide and had written that message to deceive everybody into the belief that he had died by accident. Personally, I should have been prepared to help him out, but I had got to be sure about it. A small bunch of keys was lying with his watch on the table by his bed, and I took that bunch away with me, thinking that some paper or another in a locked drawer might put me wise. There was one rather elaborate small key of Italian workmanship which particularly caught my eye. With that bunch in my pocket I came down to the drawing-room, and I had no sooner put my suspicion of suicide into words, than it was badly shaken. Do you remember what Mrs. Quintash did? She gave a gasp and said: 'Oh, I never thought of that.' Well, that might just mean, 'I never dreamed he would do a thing like

that.' But it might also mean, and I had an unpleasant hunch that it did mean, 'That would have been a better explanation, if I had thought of it.'

"Mere guess-work? Yes, but wait. We went downstairs and whilst you were telephoning to young Cleveland Hill, I went into the dining-room. Did you notice that the plate in front of Mrs. Quintash's chair had been pushed forward and the salt-cellar upset? You did, and thought no more about it than I did. But I moved the plate back to its original place, and I saw that it covered four little sets of marks in the tablecloth— not exactly rents, but threads in the linen had been torn, the nap fluffed up a little, and the cloth pricked. And these four sets were the corners of a small square and they were quite fresh. It seemed to me that at some time during supper a small square box mounted on metal claws had been placed on the table in front of Mrs. Quintash and that she had sprung up and pushed her plate violently away from her, upsetting the salt-cellar and whatever it was which had been placed in front of her.

"I looked round the room and could see nothing which offered any explanation. So I went along the passage to the study."

"And I followed you," said Inspector Grant.

"But you were called to the telephone by that ebullient young gentleman, Mr. Cleveland Hill," Graham Buckland continued. "By that time I had spotted something which might account for the marks, a square steel box of old make mounted on claw feet, standing on the top of a high bookshelf. I jumped on to a chair and took it down. The small Italian key upon Quintash's bunch slipped exactly into the lock. I opened the box. It was about the height of a spirit case and, like a spirit case, the front fell down with the raising of the lid. I was looking at a human face about the size of a small melon, a face with every feature intact and there was hair upon the scalp. The only real disfigurement was that the lips were bloated and there were holes in them as though they had been skewered together. After the first jar, I remembered Quintash had been in Brazil. To reduce the head of the enemy you have killed to the size of an orange without spoiling the features is a secret of the Indians on the Amazon. You put it up on the mantelpiece, as it were, as a memento, and if you feel down and out, why, you have something to cheer you up again. A good many people have brought one of these heads home as a curiosity. But something puzzled me about this one. It didn't look native," and Inspector Grant sat back in his chair with a gasp. He looked round his sitting-room, comforting himself with the knowledge that he was in the Brixton Road with taxis and late omnibuses roaring past his door.

"The face was dark, of course, dark as an Indian's, but then it had been kippered. It had been hung up by the lips and smoked, but it didn't look native. No! I took it up in my hands and I got the shock of my life. Upon my soul, I

almost dropped it. I feel myself tingling now. For a great scar ran down from the corner of the eye to the jaw. I was looking at the head of Quintash's young friend, Julian Devenish. The loyal and devoted partner to whom Quintash had paid so pathetic a tribute in his lecture. You see, I had to revise my opinion of Quintash. What was he? A hypocrite? A man who hated Devenish and when he was dead treated him with the same horrible indignity which an Indian would use towards his enemy? I replaced the head in the box and the box again on the bookshelf. I went back to the dining-room with my brain in a whirl, and five minutes afterwards young Cleveland Hill gave the whole show away. Quintash wouldn't let him stay for supper— not he. He meant to complete his day. He had been presented with a gold medal and he meant to make a presentation to his wife. What he presented her with was Julian Devenish's head, exact in every feature but the lips— eyes, skull, nose, scar, everything, but reduced to the size of a small melon which you could hold in your hand. The end of a perfect day, what?"

"But that's devilish," Grant exclaimed, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Even if there were provocation."

"Was there provocation?" Buckland resumed. "Was Julian Devenish Doria Quintash's lover? Was this Quintash's revenge? And if so— that was the question I was stubbing my toes against— what was Doria Quintash's reaction last night? Do you see, Grant? I fell back upon my first idea— modified. The book held the secret and I had got to tear it out of it."

"What did you do?" Grant asked, leaning forward eagerly in his chair, and Graham Buckland resumed his narrative.

"I looked up an old copy of Who's Who and I found that at the time this French book was published, Quintash was living near to Farnham. I drove down to Farnham and found the house, smothered in roses and surrounded by a garden— a haunt of peace on a country road. Then after a few inquiries I found the doctor who had attended them. He was a tall, lean man, who seemed to think that the world was a ridiculous joke and went off into great fits of laughter over catastrophes and disasters, a Dr. Sturgis.

" 'And what do you want to see me about, Mr. Buckland?' he asked.

" 'About this,' I answered, and I held the book out to him.

" 'Where in the world did you get that?' he continued, in surprise. I saw in the evening paper that Quintash had died.'

" 'So you know the book?' said I.

" 'Know it? I should think I do. I attended Quintash after his accident.'

" 'Accident?' I cried.

" 'Yes. He took that book to bed with him and a sharp knife to cut the leaves, and he fell asleep and rolled over on his side and wounded himself.'

" 'And when was that?'

"Dr. Sturgis searched in a little safe and fetched out a case-book.

" 'That's the time. Seven years ago.' To Dr. Sturgis it was the funniest episode. 'He thought he was going to die— he wasn't near dying really— and he wrote that message on the margin. "It's all my fault, etc."'

" 'To save his wife any difficulties if he did die, I suppose,' I said, and Sturgis roared with amusement.

" 'I'm sorry, but you'll have to do that bit over again, Mr. Buckland. It won't do,' said Sturgis. And then out the truth came. Quintash and his wife hated one another like cat and dog. There was a young fellow, called Julian Devenish, who had just made a little name for himself by a journey in Arabia. He was always about the place, adored her. I made a remark about her striking appearance and I was afraid Dr. Sturgis was going to roll out of his chair on to the floor, so diverting he found it.

" 'Oh, yes, the Mona Lisa stunt. She had the sideways glance all right— if a young man was around— but that's all. She was a common little trollop.' And Sturgis added, and, my dear Grant, I beg you to notice the addition, 'The only Italian in that menage was Anthony Quintash. He was small, supple, vindictive, patient and proud. Remember him! Dress him up in a doublet and hose. He came straight out of the Cinquecento, didn't he? He wrote those lines on the margin of his book, because if he died he wasn't going to have his neighbours think that he'd killed himself out of jealousy or unhappiness. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Anthony Quintash was waiting his turn. He could even find enjoyment in waiting. Sooner or later, in his own good time, at the artistically perfect moment, he meant to tread a measure with his Mona Lisa.'

"Thus spoke Dr. Sturgis, and last night Quintash trod his measure with his Mona Lisa. He had been received with acclamation, he had been presented with his gold medal. She, indifferent to him and confident in her own attractions, was stringing along a new lover. Imagine the moment if you can when Anthony Quintash placed in front of her, no doubt with a thousand ceremonious and courtly words, the head of her old lover, reduced to the compass of an eight-day clock. No wonder she pushed her plate away and upset the salt. How shall we explain her? Panic? Horror? Fear? Hatred? Wouldn't that be the order? But she rememberes that accident seven years ago, and when Quintash is asleep, she stages it more effectively in the dead of the night."

Graham Buckland rose to his feet.

"I am going home. The rest is for you."

Inspector Grant knocked his pipe out against the firebars.

"Yes," he said heavily. "The steel box is on the top of the bookshelf in the library? And I have the book of travels? And the name of the doctor at Farnham is Sturgis? Yes, I'll take action. You'll want a taxi?"

"Please!"

Inspector Grant came out on to the steps of his house with the surgeon, and hailed a passing taxi.

"Good night, Mr. Buckland." He looked up and down the street with its vista of little villas lit and ensured by the rows of street-lamps linked as far as the eye could see.

"I've at times, Mr. Buckland," he said, "felt an urge to see the world, but upon my word, there's something to be said for the Brixton Road."

End