PAST MASTERS 210

Bram Stoker
Henry James
Malcolm Jameson
O. Henry
Fulton Oursler
Max Afford
Sheridan Le Fanu
Sapper

and more

PAST MASTERS 210

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

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Contents

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1: At The Café Dundee

Albert Dorrington

1874-1953

Sydney Mail; 7 Dec 1932

BARTHOLOMEW looked hard at the girl before him and tried to recall her case without referring to the typewritten notes on the desk beside him. She had entered his private sanctum before the office-boy could call out her name: 'Miss Olivia Thane!'

He hastened to greet her, his muscular fingers closing in a friendly way about her slender hand. People who knew Bart Angell said he used two separate hand-grips— one for jewel thieves and runaway husbands, the other for women in distress. The one he gave Olivia Thane was sweetly reassuring. Her case leaped to his mind while he held her hand. It interested him more than he cared to admit.

She had been engaged to marry Brunton Kennerly more than a year before. Brunton had gone to Darwin with the intention of stocking some land he had acquired from the Government.

Brunton was fresh from school, athletic and ambitious in a political land-owning way. His land lay south of Daly Waters. There were a five-roomed bungalow on the property, a couple of drays, some bullocks, and other relics of its former owners' pioneering days. Olivia Thane and Brunton had arranged to be married at Darwin. The date had been fixed. And then Brunton had been found shot through the heart outside the homestead rail of a young settler named Arcos. Some stockmen from the Roper had found the body, and had promptly notified the police. White police and black-trackers had failed to bring Brunton's slayer to justice. A spirit of hush-hush had settled over, the crime.

Outside the Territory no one had heard of the killing. Of course, the. police were at fault and offered little or no information concerning local feeling in the matter.

Olivia was not more than twenty, with soft dark eyes that mirrored something of her mental agonies. Yet, despite her youth and gentleness of manner, Bart Angell diagnosed a slumbering wrath against the mysterious killer of her fiancé.

'Mr. Angell, I can't understand why Brunton's murderer was not brought to trial! He had no enemies,' she declared, covering her face for a moment. Her soft, inaudible sobbing disturbed for a moment the iron composure of Bart Angell. Above his desk was his own bold advertisement, known and approved by many a suffering client':—

UNLESS THEY ARE IN HEAVEN, BART ANGELL BRINGS MISSING PEOPLE HOME. TELL HIM YOUR TROUBLES. BAD PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE BART ANGELL.

Bart was fifty, iron-grey, with the vulture eye that could beam or grow moist at some unfortunate's story of cowardly neglect or bitter deception on the part of fleeing man or woman.

'Let us be brave, my dear Miss Thane,' he begged her. 'It is not always wise to probe these inscrutable acts of violence too closely. At first I was frankly unwilling to make the faintest thrust in the direction of the crime. Perhaps'— he paused to consider the lovely contours of Olivia's saddened face— 'perhaps, Miss Thane, my first conceptions were justified. But after a while it grew upon me that the truth of Brunton's— er— misadventure should be made manifest.'

Olivia looked up quickly.

'You have found out?' It came like the cry of a hurt child in that narrow, high-walled office.

Bart Angell studied his hands for a space, then stared long and sorrowfully at the ghost-faced girl opposite him.

'Found out and put in place,' he assured her without a gesture. Followed a nerve-stabbing silence.

'The Gulf gives up her secrets,' he intoned at last. It was as if the loud beating of Olivia's heart had penetrated him, disturbed the even flow of his words. 'The Gulf gives up her secrets,' he repeated, 'to those who watch and wait, Miss Thane. Somewhere the truth is always written in the sands.'

In the throbbing silence Olivia felt that here at last she was face to face with her little tragedy, a tragedy the vastness of the Northern Territory had threatened to engulf. And before her was the iron grey man who had made the desert speak. She stood up, swaying slightly, breathing like a prisoner before the verdict. His voice sounded far away.

'We must keep our courage, Miss Thane. Life is full of cruel surprises.'

'Is the second part more cruel than the first?'

He scanned her afresh.

'Daly Waters has returned the answer. Although I cannot measure your capacity for absorbing pain, or feel what you feel, I may say that the second part of your tragedy is not without its sting. The man who shot Brunton is in Sydney.'

The dark iris of Olivia's eyes blanched.

'In Sydney?'

Bart Angell nodded. 'Sounds strange, I confess, Miss Thane. But all the facts are to hand. It has been a long and conflicting investigation,' he confided after a pause, 'on account of the distance, the bad roads, and the weather. The difficulties encountered would have broken the heart of an ordinary inquiry

agent. There was the grave of Brunton the police had dug, but little or no information of the tragedy from old Sergeant Hannan, who had been in charge of the inquiry.

'My agent saw the two black-trackers, Combo and Paddy, who had worked with Hannan. They had nothing to say beyond the fact that a mob of cattle had passed over the ground about the time of the shooting and destroyed the tracks. Hannan had picked up the drovers at a place called Powell's Creek and subjected them to the usual cross-examination. Nothing came out of that lot.'

Bart Angell lit a cigarette, while a pleased grin suffused his tense, drawn face.

'We picked up the tracks of the slayer at Burketown, across to Normanton, and on to Cairns.

'We followed him aboard a fruit beat to Brisbane and down to Sydney.'

'Is he an old man?' Olivia's face was drained white as she waited for the answer.

Angell's lips tightened.

'You may soon see,' he declared, with the ghost of a smile, 'unless the unforeseen happens again. At the quay he managed to give us the slip.'

'You lost him?' Olivia flung out, with' her first show of impatience.

An odd smile touched Angell's lips.

'Not quite, Miss Thane. Sydney is not always an easy place in which to lose oneself, especially for one unused to its ins and outs. We located him at Manly, but the very breath of our man's body seemed to reach him. He was gone again before we could obtain even a camera shot of him.

'All this time,' Angell paused to remind Olivia, 'you were haunting this office for information and more information. I purposely withheld everything. To be quite honest, Miss Thane, it is never good policy to allow impatient clients to join a chase. I felt positive you would never refrain from denouncing arid attracting the attention of the police to the slayer of Brunton Kennerly.'

'It does not matter now,' Olivia, said with humility. 'We can deal with him piecemeal in our own way.'

Bart Angell smiled strangely. 'He is your bird, anyhow. And you'll find him in a very pretty cage. Probably the fool has realised by now that the Gulf was a much safer place for him than Sydney.'

'His address?' Olivia demanded, unable to control her rising impatience. The master of many mysteries leaned back in his chair like a head-hunter at peace after the long, successful trail.

'I am going to hand you this person's address, Miss Thane. My commission is complete.'

'And the proof of his identity?'

'Is contained in the notebook he took from Brunton's pocket after the shooting. It is still in his possession. For some unexplained reason he still clings to it. There is no doubt whatever of his identity. You may go to the proper authorities if you must. But it is doubtful if the notebook in his possession is sufficient evidence to start a prosecution in this country,' he warned her.

'I shall go to no one, Mr. Angell. Please give me his address.'

Bart Angell sat up. The warm glow of the successful head-hunter became the frozen stare of the public accountant. 'You will appreciate the very considerable expense we have incurred in this case, Miss Thane. One of the most difficult enterprises in the history of my bureau.' 'How much?' Olivia interrupted.

The eye that was not of the elated head-hunter explored Olivia's expensive jewellery, the diamond-studded wrist watch, the cluster of almost priceless pearls peeping from the folds of her furs. He coughed easily, drew a long memo from the drawer beside him, frowned, and placed it before her like one in need of instant nourishment and fees.

'Three hundred pounds!' she exclaimed softly.

'The Gulf is a far cry,' he sweetly reminded her. 'Half-a-dozen air journeys and two of our men badly touched with Gulf fever. I assure you, Miss Thane, I would not undertake a similar commission for ten times the money.'

From her handbag Olivia drew out a cheque-book, filled in the amount with a pen from the desk, crossed it, and placed it on the blotter beside him. Bart Angell scrutinised the figures, then placed the cheque in the drawer. From a pigeonhole he took an envelope, passed it to her in silence. On it was written—

PHILIP CHANNING
THE CAFÉ DUNDEE
PITT-STREET
SYDNEY.

'He is English!' Olivia stated almost bleakly. 'I imagined him to be a foreigner.'

'His name stands for nothing, Miss Thane. He is probably half foreigner. It does not matter; Philip Channing is your man. As a matter of precaution we'll send one of our men with you.'

'I'll go alone,' Olivia decided, with a set, white face. 'No man shall come between me and the murderer.'

Olivia walked slowly in the direction of the cafe. The place was familiar enough to her. For the moment it was regarded as a rendezvous for people with a flair for picturesque Australian backgrounds. An alleged stockrider with a whip was visible at the end of the palm and eucalyptus installed entrance

foyer. Inside the cafe itself the floor was covered with a layer of sand. The white ceiling and walls were decorated with picturesque incidents in the life of a bushman.

The tame stockrider within the foyer greeted Olivia's entrance with a single word of welcome. It was past midday in the slack period between two and three o'clock. A young waiter of doubtful nationality conducted her to a small table within a palm-sheltered recess. The recess smelt of heavy bad cigars, patchouli, and stale food. A mirror, set in the Moorish panel above, showed the faint scarlet of her cheeks, the almost ghostly brilliance of her eyes.

Almost mechanically she sat at the little table, while the slow young waiter fussed over the paper serviettes and glasses beside her. He was probably twenty years of age, clumsy of foot and hand, for he broke a wineglass in his nervous haste to produce the bill of fare. His apologies were profuse and uttered in the hoarse jargon of the Levant. Was this Philip Channing?

For several moments Olivia allowed herself to picture the huddled-up figure of Brunton near the sliprail at Daly Waters, blood oozing from the bullet-hole in his breast. The picture grew clearer as the heavy-footed young waiter brushed the splinters of broken glass into a copper tray. He seemed to forget her presence in his almost panic anxiety to hide the evidence of his clumsiness.

Not a born waiter, Olivia told herself.

He disappeared with the tray, returning with another glass. Then he stooped over her, his hot breath touching her cheek as she blindly stared at the menu. Slowly and with some difficulty she looked up into his face.

'What is your name?' she inquired steadily. A wan smile creased his dark features; his clumsy feet shuffled uneasily on the sandy floor.

'Jose Andreas, ma'mzelle. You tak'a leetle wine, ma'mzelle?' he almost begged. Her glance wandered again to the gilt-edged menu.

'There is a waiter here named Philip Channing. I would like to see him, Jose.' A coin slipped from her gloved hand into Jose's palm.

Again the wan smile as Jose hurried away to inform Philip Channing that a very noble lady desired the pleasure of his company.

A terrible silence seemed to brood over the deserted cafe, that almost suggested the murderous loneliness of the Gulf, wastelands. It was the trumpet call of her mission that stirred her to life. She must not miss this opportunity. The long shadow of the stockman slanted across the foyer, where the faint wintry sunlight seemed to enshrine him, adding to the illusion of her surroundings. It seemed incredible that here, in the heart of a great city, the slayer of Brunton could hide in security.

She heard a door close very softly at the end of the passage where Jose had disappeared. A current of air that was like a breath from a tomb stirred the

palms beside her. It was as if a door of the unseen had opened and shut. For an instant her brain grew dark. Something with velvet feet had approached her chair, was standing behind her chair. A desire to scream, to dart from the alcove, seized Olivia. Instead she sat frozen, not daring to look up, because he was speaking.

'The *signorina* has sent for me? How may I serve the *signorina*?'

Olivia related briefly what had happened, while the old veteran sat back with brows buckling, but inwardly amused.'

He moved round the small table and stood before her, a wine napkin draped over his left arm. He was not more than twenty, with blonde eyes and the face of a child. Olivia regarded him in stark amaze, doubt and anger striking for mastery in her overwrought mind. 'Your real name is not Philip Channing!' she found courage to say. 'You come from a farm at Daly Waters. Your true name is Arcos!'

In a flash the waiter's pose was gone. He was standing erect, eyes illumined, head flung back. Then for an instant the childish softness returned to his face, a softness that was guilty of a single tear.

'I beg the *signorina* to spare me!' he pleaded in a low tone. 'If I am caught in this place the hangman will do the rest. Your pity and consideration, therefore, *signorina*.'

Olivia's small hand lay clenched on the table. She had another mental picture of Brunton lying under the sliprail.

'You will understand, Signor Arcos, that I have taken infinite pains to seek you out. It was on the night of December the fifth you shot my fiancé— for no reason and without a chance to defend himself!'

He stared round-eyed, his limbs trembling slightly.

'The *signorina* overwhelms me! It is true I belong to Daly Waters, that my father and mother owned a farm and a few cattle. It is true also that I shot an Australian named Brunton Kennerly.'

'You coward!' He shrank away as if naked steel had touched him, but it was the action of one unafraid of steel.

'The *signorina* will never understand,' he said with difficulty. 'It is for that reason. I ask the *signorina*'s forgiveness.'

'You shot him from the shelter of the scrub!' she accused. 'He hadn't a chance!'

He was tall and slender as a girl, but some unknown pain had burnt his eyes. In her young life Olivia had dreamed of boys and things that lived in the shadow of their cross. In a single phrase, a glance almost, he conveyed something of his crucifixion. He was speaking in a voice that seemed to come from the northern solitudes.

'I found Brunton's grave the night after those blacks carried him to the resting place.... Some day you will see the white cross I put there. Some day,' he intoned with a painful effort, 'you will see another cross near by. It also marks the resting-place of a loved one, of the flower of all human beauty.'

'Your wife?' Olivia leaned forward. His gesture was an ample response. Olivia huddled back in her chair. She waited as women often will for the knife to strike again. His voice was steady enough now.

'While I was away, looking after some cattle at Pine Creek, my thoughts were full of the woman who had given up so much to share my poor life at Daly Waters.'

He paused at sound of the dressed-up stockrider's steps in the passage, as though in fear of being overheard. After the stock rider had settled in the doorway of the cafe he spoke again in rapid undertones.

'My wife's name was Zelia. She was but seventeen years of age. I thought of her day and night in the camp at Pine Creek, and I prayed that my mother at the homestead would not scold or bring bitterness into her life. The weather was hot and my mother's temper was not the best. She might not understand Zelia, and the heat of Daly Waters was often more than she could bear. I prayed, too, that Zelia would overcome her fear of the loneliness, for she had been bred in a gay city.

'But my prayers might have rested, signorina, had I known that she had discovered a protector in the Australian Brunton, who had come to Daly Waters with his money and smart clothes. I did not know, signorina, because there was trouble in my camp at Pine Creek— two horses poisoned through an accursed plant that grew on the edge of a gully. And then I was deserted by the black boy who had promised to help me with the cattle. Weeks after I returned to Daly Waters alone.'

He stood away from the little table, his boyish face disturbed by a paroxysm of coughing. He put up his hand as though a drop of blood had welled to his lips.

'Go on.' Olivia sat limply in her chair now, her beautiful face a death mask.

The blonde eyes of Arcos hardened to steel, although the tremor remained in his voice.

'A few miles from the homestead I met a swagman from Daly Waters, an old man who had helped me with some branding a year before Brunton's coming. He told me it was a pity Zelia was spending so much of her time with Brunton; even the blackfellows had noticed it, he said. He heard that the Australian cattle-owner was wearing her portrait next to his heart, that he wrote her letters when business took him to Port Darwin. Body of God! It was

the talk of the Gulf townships. The overlanders, the drovers, and blacks were jeering at mention of my name.'

Olivia stirred wearily in her chair. Her lips were ashen.

'And so, on the word of an old swagman, you took upon yourself to stalk these two, took upon yourself the foul—' Olivia's voice broke into a dry sob. She covered her face.

He stood over her for an instant, his face bloodless, his eyes drunk with misery. Then he tore a bundle of letters from his inner pocket, placed them beside her on the table. Followed a silence in which he heard the loud grind of traffic outside. It was a long time before her hand stole out to the bundle of letters; then, as if overcome by nausea and revolt, she thrust them aside. He sighed, nodded in swift understanding as he returned the letters to his pocket. But it was Olivia who spoke.

'You judged them guilty?' was all she said.

It was a long time before he answered. His chest heaved, his breath came, through his clenched teeth.

'Some day, *signorina*, you may want to see the letters when your mind has healed, and the anger has gone from your heart. I pray you have pity on those two. I pray you have pity on them and me!

'They said he was promised to a sweet girl in Sydney. And I could not understand why such a man should steal my love from me, the love that cried like a child in my heart when I shot her by the lagoon beyond my mother's farm!'

OLIVIA stood up, while the bush pictures in the wall seemed to spin around her. Reaching the outer space, she turned and looked back at his sobbing shoulders within the palm-sheltered recess.

'God forgive you!' she said slowly. 'I do not want to see his grave or the cross above the poor little woman who broke your heart and mine.'

A moment later she had swept past the stockman yawning in the doorway, had gained the street without interruption. Here the warm sunlight stayed on her ice-cold cheeks and hands. It was some time before she recovered herself. With half-seeing eyes and her mind grown numb from the shock of her interview with the young waiter from the Gulf, she hailed a taxi and drove to the headquarters of police.

Arriving, she entered the office of a district inspector. He glanced up from his desk with a curious nod of recognition as she entered. Pushing aside some papers, he indicated a chair beside him.

'Was just beginning to wonder whether you wanted any help with your Angell,' he said with a smile. Then he regarded her troubled face for several

moments. 'Nearly a month since you made your last report, Miss Thane. I hope you are going to like your work,' he added with kindly restraint.

He was nearly sixty and still fond of the game.

'I like it immensely, sir; but there are times when the Angells are a bit trying. And I've been treading so nice and softly, sir. He took me quite seriously. Never batted an eye when I handed him his costs.'

The inspector nodded briefly. Each hour brought dozens of more or less interesting problems to be solved, and there were times when the clever schemes of Sydney's restless criminals were apt to cloud his sixty-year-old brain.

'That fellow Bart Angell is a bad penny,' he stated, bringing his thoughts to bear again on Olivia's case. 'If I remember rightly, you undertook to impersonate the fiancée of a young stock-breeder who had been shot dead somewhere up north? You invented the whole story and took it to Mr. Bart Angell.

'After the usual preliminary fees and refreshers he agreed to solve the mystery surrounding your fiancé's death and put you in touch with the assassin.' The inspector leaned back in his chair. 'Well?'

Olivia nodded gravely.

'Angell found an actor named Philip Channing, who gave adequate reasons for shooting a fiancé I did not possess.'

'How much?'

'Three hundred pounds, sir.'

The inspector whistled softly.

'A very dark Angell indeed. And how they fall!'

Olivia related briefly what had happened, while the old veteran sat back with brows buckling, but inwardly amused.

'Good!' he broke out when she had finished. 'This lad Channing is evidently a finished artist, a born squire of dames and master of pure comedy. But let me say at once, Miss Thane, that although we're in a position to gaol the crowd I'm still guessing how Bart Angell attracts business— where he gets his clients.'

Although Olivia's eyes betrayed weariness after her recent ordeal her answer was to the point.

'He carries on a lot of straightforward inquiry work— divorce cases, letter-stealing, and the obtaining of keyhole evidence. He has a big clientele. But we are concerned with the poor pigeons, sir.'

The inspector favoured her with a sharp scrutiny.

'There are pigeons and pigeons, Miss Thane. Please make that point quite clear now.'

Olivia smiled a trifle sadly.

'The world is full of people, lovers and parents, who exist on make-believe, sir. They prefer the pleasant illusion to the raw facts of life. Bart Angell gets clients from the most unexpected quarters. Some time ago he met a wealthy brewer whose son had gone on a big-game hunt in Upper Nigeria.

'It was recently reported in the press that the boy had succumbed to an attack of sleeping sickness at; a place called Mabwana. The news was brought by his native carriers and cabled home. Exact details of the boy's end were not forthcoming, but the carriers maintained that he died at Mabwana.

'You will realise at once, sir, the agonies endured by the father of the boy until Bart Angell took up the case. He sent an agent to Nigeria, a clever rascal who mailed back the most comforting letters for the wealthy brewer's benefit.'

BART'S agent in Nigeria threw doubts on the story of the boy's death by quoting lengthy reports obtained from the various tribes in the vicinity of Mabwana. In a little while the agent was able to assure Sydney headquarters that the boy had just been heard of at a trading post fifty miles north of Ganda, on the river. The boy was rapidly regaining his health.

'Of course,' Olivia concluded wearily, 'the brewer is paying the piper and for a while, at least, is enjoying Angell's weekly bulletins from the African wilds.'

Although Olivia could dilate on Angell's dubious methods, she was still thinking of her encounter with Philip Channing at the Cafe Dundee, of his childlike eyes and sobbing shoulders. She was thinking of his story of the two graves within the Gulf solitudes.

The voice of the inspector dispelled her mental pictures.

'We'd better get busy on Angell, Miss Thane. We'll make him wish he was in Nigeria by the time he comes out. As for Channing, we'll put him away for a couple of years to give his imagination a rest. You've done well,' he added, patting her hand lightly. 'It's your first real scoop since you joined us. Keep it up; we need your cleverness and vision. Go home now— you need a rest. You'll hear from me soon.'

OLIVIA returned to her little flat, a feeling of weariness and depression overcoming her after her exciting labours.

It had all seemed so real, so convincing. She had few friends in life. Although her parents had left her comfortably provided for, her restless nature craved for work but of the beaten track. She had gone to the chief of police with a burning desire to distinguish herself in the hunting down of criminals. The district inspector had been very patient. One or two unimportant missions connected with women and children had been assigned her.

Her entry into the Angell case revealed an amazing series of frauds. Late that evening Bart Angell was arrested while enjoying a big Spanish cigar within the perfumed seclusion of the Café Dundee. Philip Channing was nowhere to be found. A fortnight later a disgusted inspector of police received the following note from Olivia Thane:—

'Dear Sir,—

I beg to resign my post as a member of the police. The work is really too trying for my nerves. Let me add another confession of feminine weakness. The artistic side of Philip Channing's nature has impressed me. He is not a criminal; he is merely a brilliant young actor fallen among thieves. I can vouch for him becoming a useful member of society. On Tuesday last we were married at a registry office.

'OLIVIA THANE.'

'Damn!' muttered the old inspector. 'I've lost the only real lady detective that ever entered this department.'

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2: The Revenge of Sydney Wilkens

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 19 Feb 1937

The "Corum" mentioned in the story is Bill Corum, then famous sports broadcaster, sportswriter, and columnist for the New York Evening Journal *and* Journal-American; *and hence friendly rival of Mark Hellinger.*

IF this story sounds a bit cockeyed, it will sound a bit cockeyed, and don't come running to me with any complaints. In fact, I hereby warn you, in all fairness, that it's one of the dizziest yarns that ever came my way. And that, you will admit, covers a multitude of columns.

It was related to me in one of the swankiest dairies of the East Fifties. Now this was one of those novel spots where you can pay the British war debt in one night without getting an edge on. And yet the waiters hold their noses so high that if it ever rained, they'd drown. What I was doing there in the first place, I haven't the faintest idea. But the bartender had been out in the back mixing some gin and cider and pouring it into champagne bottles, when the pest edged up to me. He was tall and broad, and he had a face that looked as though it had been caught in a revolving door recently. He slapped me on the back most heartily.

"Well, well, well," he yipped. "If it isn't old man Corum himself. What are you doing here, pally? I say, what are you doing here?"

I turned his way slowly. "I was just beginning to wonder," I replied vaguely.

"Say, he said suddenly, "could you use a good story?"

Now, when I hear those lovely words. I can forgive even a pest. So I promptly crawled into his vest pocket, and said "Sure."

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you a swell yarn about revenge, fella. But first I want to ask you something. Do you know Sidney Wilkens?"

Now what's in a name? Besides, there was that story. So?

"Do I know Sidney Wilkens?" I said. "Of course I know Sidney Wilkens. Good old Sid. Sure I know Sid."

"Well," he replied, "I'm Sidney Wilkens!"

"Whaddya know," I retorted with typical Hellinger wit. "How time does change a man. But the story. The revenge."

"I'm coming to that, Mr. Corum," he continued. "Just a minute. The story concerns myself and Joe Black. You know Joe, don't you?" He wasn't going to catch me the second time.

"Certainly," I murmured. "That's you, too. Am I right?"

"You are not," he replied affably. "Joe Black was my partner in the importing business. A greater guy never lived.

"Joe and I," he went on, "were pals since we were kids. When we got old enough, we started a little business together, and I don't mind telling you we prospered. We vowed never to marry, for fear it would split our partnership and friendship. You can understand that."

"To be sure," I agreed. I could also understand the end of the story.

"Well," he continued, "things went well until just before the war. It was about that time that I met Nellie."

"I was afraid of that," I ventured.

"Well, Nellie and I fell in love. It couldn't be helped. It was one of those wild, uncontrollable, passionate loves that are stopped by neither mountains nor mortgages. We went gaga."

Period. New paragraph.

"I tried to keep it from Joe, but after we were married, I guess my happiness gave me away. He guessed what happened."

Mr. Wilkins stopped to finish my bottle.

"From that point onward, he acted rather coolly toward me. Business went on as before, but something was lacking. We weren't the friends we once were. Yet, somehow, I didn't care. I had a gorgeous home, a lovely wife—"

"—And a baby," I concluded.

"Say!" Wilkens expostulated. "Who's telling this story? We had no baby."

"Pardon," I said. "My error. I must be thinking of another column."

He smiled in friendly fashion. "You fellows are all alike. Always impatient. Always jumping ahead. Bartender," he said, turning to the dairy maid, "another bottle of champagne for Mr. Corum."

I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "And charge it to Corum."

"Now," he said, "getting back to the story. Where was I? Oh, yes. I had a gorgeous home, a wife, and a car. And when we were married two years, Joe Black ran off. Absconded. Can y'ou beat it?"

"You mean," I said, "that your pal took the firm's money and left town?"

"Exactly. That dirty, low down heel ran away with everything but the bills. He left them for me. It was at that moment, when I saw how matters stood, that I determined to be revenged. A Wilkens never forgets, you know."

"I had imagined as much," I murmured.

"Well, I sold the house and car and put my wife in storage with my mother-in-law, and followed Joe Black. The first clue I got was in Buenos Aires. The police there said that he had left an hour before for Port Said.

"No sooner said than done. So I hopped the next boat, and when I reached Port Said I found he had crossed into India. I followed."

"Skip all that," I begged. "And tell me when you caught up with him."

He finished the bottle, and ordered another.

"In short," he continued, "I followed him all over the world. I used the fastest boats, trains, and planes trying to catch up with him, but I couldn't.

"After one solid year of chasing that mug, I gave up. I took a slow steamer home, and tried to figure out a way of building up the business again.

"Arriving in New York, I first got myself carefully plastered before going to my mother-in-law's house. Imagine my surprise when I walked in and found my wife in the arms of another man!"

"Horrible," I said.

"Well, sir, I fixed her all right. I sued for divorce immediately, and named her lover as co-respondent. My case was clear. I won the divorce. And here I am."

I passed a very weary hand over my forehead. This bird was slowly driving me daffy. I had to think a moment before I could even remember what story he had started out to tell.

"But," I murmured, "What about this guy Joe Black? Didn't you ever see him again? Is that the way your story ends? What about your revenge?"

"My revenge?" he whispered. "My revenge? Oh, you mean revenge. Well, I got that all right. That was simple."

"How?" I begged, all a-tremble.

"I just told you," he yelped. "The guy I found with my wife was Joe Black. And the poor simp married her!"

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3: The Caballero's Way

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910
Everybody's Magazine, July 1907
In: *Heart of the West*, 1911

This story is the origin of the Cisco Kid of movies and television (much revised from killer to hero).

THE CISCO KID had killed six men in more or less fair scrimmages, had murdered twice as many (mostly Mexicans), and had winged a larger number whom he modestly forbore to count. Therefore a woman loved him.

The Kid was twenty-five, looked twenty; and a careful insurance company would have estimated the probable time of his demise at, say, twenty-six. His habitat was anywhere between the Frio and the Rio Grande. He killed for the love of it— because he was quick-tempered— to avoid arrest— for his own amusement— any reason that came to his mind would suffice. He had escaped capture because he could shoot five-sixths of a second sooner than any sheriff or ranger in the service, and because he rode a speckled roan horse that knew every cow-path in the mesquite and pear thickets from San Antonio to Matamoras.

Tonia Perez, the girl who loved the Cisco Kid, was half Carmen, half Madonna, and the rest— oh, yes, a woman who is half Carmen and half Madonna can always be something more— the rest, let us say, was humming-bird. She lived in a grass-roofed *jacal* near a little Mexican settlement at the Lone Wolf Crossing of the Frio. With her lived a father or grandfather, a lineal Aztec, somewhat less than a thousand years old, who herded a hundred goats and lived in a continuous drunken dream from drinking *mescal*. Back of the *jacal* a tremendous forest of bristling pear, twenty feet high at its worst, crowded almost to its door. It was along the bewildering maze of this spinous thicket that the speckled roan would bring the Kid to see his girl. And once, clinging like a lizard to the ridge-pole, high up under the peaked grass roof, he had heard Tonia, with her Madonna face and Carmen beauty and humming-bird soul, parley with the sheriff's posse, denying knowledge of her man in her soft *melange* of Spanish and English.

One day the adjutant-general of the State, who is, *ex offico*, commander of the ranger forces, wrote some sarcastic lines to Captain Duval of Company X, stationed at Laredo, relative to the serene and undisturbed existence led by murderers and desperadoes in the said captain's territory.

The captain turned the colour of brick dust under his tan, and forwarded the letter, after adding a few comments, per ranger Private Bill Adamson, to

ranger Lieutenant Sandridge, camped at a water hole on the Nueces with a squad of five men in preservation of law and order.

Lieutenant Sandridge turned a beautiful *couleur de rose* through his ordinary strawberry complexion, tucked the letter in his hip pocket, and chewed off the ends of his gamboge moustache.

The next morning he saddled his horse and rode alone to the Mexican settlement at the Lone Wolf Crossing of the Frio, twenty miles away.

Six feet two, blond as a Viking, quiet as a deacon, dangerous as a machine gun, Sandridge moved among the *Jacales*, patiently seeking news of the Cisco Kid.

Far more than the law, the Mexicans dreaded the cold and certain vengeance of the lone rider that the ranger sought. It had been one of the Kid's pastimes to shoot Mexicans "to see them kick": if he demanded from them moribund Terpsichorean feats, simply that he might be entertained, what terrible and extreme penalties would be certain to follow should they anger him! One and all they lounged with upturned palms and shrugging shoulders, filling the air with "*quién sabes*" and denials of the Kid's acquaintance.

But there was a man named Fink who kept a store at the Crossing— a man of many nationalities, tongues, interests, and ways of thinking.

"No use to ask them Mexicans," he said to Sandridge. "They're afraid to tell. This *hombre* they call the Kid— Goodall is his name, ain't it?— he's been in my store once or twice. I have an idea you might run across him at— but I guess I don't keer to say, myself. I'm two seconds later in pulling a gun than I used to be, and the difference is worth thinking about. But this Kid's got a half-Mexican girl at the Crossing that he comes to see. She lives in that *jacal* a hundred yards down the arroyo at the edge of the pear. Maybe she— no, I don't suppose she would, but that *jacal* would be a good place to watch, anyway."

Sandridge rode down to the *jacal* of Perez. The sun was low, and the broad shade of the great pear thicket already covered the grass-thatched hut. The goats were enclosed for the night in a brush corral near by. A few kids walked the top of it, nibbling the chaparral leaves. The old Mexican lay upon a blanket on the grass, already in a stupor from his mescal, and dreaming, perhaps, of the nights when he and Pizarro touched glasses to their New World fortunes— so old his wrinkled face seemed to proclaim him to be. And in the door of the *jacal* stood Tonia. And Lieutenant Sandridge sat in his saddle staring at her like a gannet agape at a sailorman.

The Cisco Kid was a vain person, as all eminent and successful assassins are, and his bosom would have been ruffled had he known that at a simple

exchange of glances two persons, in whose minds he had been looming large, suddenly abandoned (at least for the time) all thought of him.

Never before had Tonia seen such a man as this. He seemed to be made of sunshine and blood-red tissue and clear weather. He seemed to illuminate the shadow of the pear when he smiled, as though the sun were rising again. The men she had known had been small and dark. Even the Kid, in spite of his achievements, was a stripling no larger than herself, with black, straight hair and a cold, marble face that chilled the noonday.

As for Tonia, though she sends description to the poorhouse, let her make a millionaire of your fancy. Her blue-black hair, smoothly divided in the middle and bound close to her head, and her large eyes full of the Latin melancholy, gave her the Madonna touch. Her motions and air spoke of the concealed fire and the desire to charm that she had inherited from the *gitanas* of the Basque province. As for the humming-bird part of her, that dwelt in her heart; you could not perceive it unless her bright red skirt and dark blue blouse gave you a symbolic hint of the vagarious bird.

The newly lighted sun-god asked for a drink of water. Tonia brought it from the red jar hanging under the brush shelter. Sandridge considered it necessary to dismount so as to lessen the trouble of her ministrations.

I play no spy; nor do I assume to master the thoughts of any human heart; but I assert, by the chronicler's right, that before a quarter of an hour had sped, Sandridge was teaching her how to plaint a six-strand rawhide stake-rope, and Tonia had explained to him that were it not for her little English book that the peripatetic *padre* had given her and the little crippled *chivo*, that she fed from a bottle, she would be very, very lonely indeed.

Which leads to a suspicion that the Kid's fences needed repairing, and that the adjutant-general's sarcasm had fallen upon unproductive soil.

In his camp by the water hole Lieutenant Sandridge announced and reiterated his intention of either causing the Cisco Kid to nibble the black loam of the Frio country prairies or of haling him before a judge and jury. That sounded business-like. Twice a week he rode over to the Lone Wolf Crossing of the Frio, and directed Tonia's slim, slightly lemon-tinted fingers among the intricacies of the slowly growing lariata. A six-strand plait is hard to learn and easy to teach.

The ranger knew that he might find the Kid there at any visit. He kept his armament ready, and had a frequent eye for the pear thicket at the rear of the *jacal*. Thus he might bring down the kite and the humming-bird with one stone.

While the sunny-haired ornithologist was pursuing his studies the Cisco Kid was also attending to his professional duties. He moodily shot up a saloon in a

small cow village on Quintana Creek, killed the town marshal (plugging him neatly in the centre of his tin badge), and then rode away, morose and unsatisfied. No true artist is uplifted by shooting an aged man carrying an old-style .38 bulldog.

On his way the Kid suddenly experienced the yearning that all men feel when wrong-doing loses its keen edge of delight. He yearned for the woman he loved to reassure him that she was his in spite of it. He wanted her to call his bloodthirstiness bravery and his cruelty devotion. He wanted Tonia to bring him water from the red jar under the brush shelter, and tell him how the *chivo* was thriving on the bottle.

The Kid turned the speckled roan's head up the ten-mile pear flat that stretches along the Arroyo Hondo until it ends at the Lone Wolf Crossing of the Frio. The roan whickered; for he had a sense of locality and direction equal to that of a belt-line street-car horse; and he knew he would soon be nibbling the rich mesquite grass at the end of a forty-foot stake-rope while Ulysses rested his head in Circe's straw-roofed hut.

More weird and lonesome than the journey of an Amazonian explorer is the ride of one through a Texas pear flat. With dismal monotony and startling variety the uncanny and multiform shapes of the cacti lift their twisted trunks, and fat, bristly hands to encumber the way. The demon plant, appearing to live without soil or rain, seems to taunt the parched traveller with its lush grey greenness. It warps itself a thousand times about what look to be open and inviting paths, only to lure the rider into blind and impassable spine-defended "bottoms of the bag," leaving him to retreat, if he can, with the points of the compass whirling in his head.

To be lost in the pear is to die almost the death of the thief on the cross, pierced by nails and with grotesque shapes of all the fiends hovering about.

But it was not so with the Kid and his mount. Winding, twisting, circling, tracing the most fantastic and bewildering trail ever picked out, the good roan lessened the distance to the Lone Wolf Crossing with every coil and turn that he made.

While they fared the Kid sang. He knew but one tune and sang it, as he knew but one code and lived it, and but one girl and loved her. He was a single-minded man of conventional ideas. He had a voice like a coyote with bronchitis, but whenever he chose to sing his song he sang it. It was a conventional song of the camps and trail, running at its beginning as near as may be to these words:

Don't you monkey with my Lulu girl
Or I'll tell you what I'll do—

and so on. The roan was inured to it, and did not mind.

But even the poorest singer will, after a certain time, gain his own consent to refrain from contributing to the world's noises. So the Kid, by the time he was within a mile or two of Tonia's *jacal*, had reluctantly allowed his song to die away— not because his vocal performance had become less charming to his own ears, but because his laryngeal muscles were aweary.

As though he were in a circus ring the speckled roan wheeled and danced through the labyrinth of pear until at length his rider knew by certain landmarks that the Lone Wolf Crossing was close at hand. Then, where the pear was thinner, he caught sight of the grass roof of the *jacal* and the hackberry tree on the edge of the arroyo. A few yards farther the Kid stopped the roan and gazed intently through the prickly openings. Then he dismounted, dropped the roan's reins, and proceeded on foot, stooping and silent, like an Indian. The roan, knowing his part, stood still, making no sound.

The Kid crept noiselessly to the very edge of the pear thicket and reconnoitred between the leaves of a clump of cactus.

Ten yards from his hiding-place, in the shade of the *jacal*, sat his Tonia calmly plaiting a rawhide lariat. So far she might surely escape condemnation; women have been known, from time to time, to engage in more mischievous occupations. But if all must be told, there is to be added that her head reposed against the broad and comfortable chest of a tall red-and-yellow man, and that his arm was about her, guiding her nimble fingers that required so many lessons at the intricate six-strand plait.

Sandridge glanced quickly at the dark mass of pear when he heard a slight squeaking sound that was not altogether unfamiliar. A gun- scabbard will make that sound when one grasps the handle of a six- shooter suddenly. But the sound was not repeated; and Tonia's fingers needed close attention.

And then, in the shadow of death, they began to talk of their love; and in the still July afternoon every word they uttered reached the ears of the Kid.

"Remember, then," said Tonia, "you must not come again until I send for you. Soon he will be here. A *vaquero* at the *tienda* said to-day he saw him on the Guadalupe three days ago. When he is that near he always comes. If he comes and finds you here he will kill you. So, for my sake, you must come no more until I send you the word."

"All right," said the stranger. "And then what?"

"And then," said the girl, "you must bring your men here and kill him. If not, he will kill you."

"He ain't a man to surrender, that's sure," said Sandridge. "It's kill or be killed for the officer that goes up against Mr. Cisco Kid."

"He must die," said the girl. "Otherwise there will not be any peace in the world for thee and me. He has killed many. Let him so die. Bring your men, and give him no chance to escape."

"You used to think right much of him," said Sandridge.

Tonia dropped the lariat, twisted herself around, and curved a lemon-tinted arm over the ranger's shoulder.

"But then," she murmured in liquid Spanish, "I had not beheld thee, thou great, red mountain of a man! And thou art kind and good, as well as strong. Could one choose him, knowing thee? Let him die; for then I will not be filled with fear by day and night lest he hurt thee or me."

"How can I know when he comes?" asked Sandridge.

"When he comes," said Tonia, "he remains two days, sometimes three. Gregorio, the small son of old Luisa, the *lavendera*, has a swift pony. I will write a letter to thee and send it by him, saying how it will be best to come upon him. By Gregorio will the letter come. And bring many men with thee, and have much care, oh, dear red one, for the rattlesnake is not quicker to strike than is '*El Chivato*,' as they call him, to send a ball from his /pistola/."

"The Kid's handy with his gun, sure enough," admitted Sandridge, "but when I come for him I shall come alone. I'll get him by myself or not at all. The Cap wrote one or two things to me that make me want to do the trick without any help. You let me know when Mr. Kid arrives, and I'll do the rest."

"I will send you the message by the boy Gregorio," said the girl. "I knew you were braver than that small slayer of men who never smiles. How could I ever have thought I cared for him?"

It was time for the ranger to ride back to his camp on the water hole. Before he mounted his horse he raised the slight form of Tonia with one arm high from the earth for a parting salute. The drowsy stillness of the torpid summer air still lay thick upon the dreaming afternoon. The smoke from the fire in the *jacal*, where the *frijoles* blubbered in the iron pot, rose straight as a plumb-line above the clay-daubed chimney. No sound or movement disturbed the serenity of the dense pear thicket ten yards away.

When the form of Sandridge had disappeared, loping his big dun down the steep banks of the Frio crossing, the Kid crept back to his own horse, mounted him, and rode back along the tortuous trail he had come.

But not far. He stopped and waited in the silent depths of the pear until half an hour had passed. And then Tonia heard the high, untrue notes of his unmusical singing coming nearer and nearer; and she ran to the edge of the pear to meet him.

The Kid seldom smiled; but he smiled and waved his hat when he saw her. He dismounted, and his girl sprang into his arms. The Kid looked at her fondly.

His thick, black hair clung to his head like a wrinkled mat. The meeting brought a slight ripple of some undercurrent of feeling to his smooth, dark face that was usually as motionless as a clay mask.

"How's my girl?" he asked, holding her close.

"Sick of waiting so long for you, dear one," she answered. "My eyes are dim with always gazing into that devil's pincushion through which you come. And I can see into it such a little way, too. But you are here, beloved one, and I will not scold. *Que mal muchacho*! not to come to see your *alma* more often. Go in and rest, and let me water your horse and stake him with the long rope. There is cool water in the jar for you."

The Kid kissed her affectionately.

"Not if the court knows itself do I let a lady stake my horse for me," said he. "But if you'll run in, *chica*, and throw a pot of coffee together while I attend to the *caballo*, I'll be a good deal obliged."

Besides his marksmanship the Kid had another attribute for which he admired himself greatly. He was *muy caballero*, as the Mexicans express it, where the ladies were concerned. For them he had always gentle words and consideration. He could not have spoken a harsh word to a woman. He might ruthlessly slay their husbands and brothers, but he could not have laid the weight of a finger in anger upon a woman. Wherefore many of that interesting division of humanity who had come under the spell of his politeness declared their disbelief in the stories circulated about Mr. Kid. One shouldn't believe everything one heard, they said. When confronted by their indignant men folk with proof of the *caballero's* deeds of infamy, they said maybe he had been driven to it, and that he knew how to treat a lady, anyhow.

Considering this extremely courteous idiosyncrasy of the Kid and the pride he took in it, one can perceive that the solution of the problem that was presented to him by what he saw and heard from his hiding- place in the pear that afternoon (at least as to one of the actors) must have been obscured by difficulties. And yet one could not think of the Kid overlooking little matters of that kind.

At the end of the short twilight they gathered around a supper of *frijoles*, goat steaks, canned peaches, and coffee, by the light of a lantern in the *jacal*. Afterward, the ancestor, his flock corralled, smoked a cigarette and became a mummy in a grey blanket. Tonia washed the few dishes while the Kid dried them with the flour-sacking towel. Her eyes shone; she chatted volubly of the inconsequent happenings of her small world since the Kid's last visit; it was as all his other home-comings had been.

Then outside Tonia swung in a grass hammock with her guitar and sang sad *canciones de amor*.

"Do you love me just the same, old girl?" asked the Kid, hunting for his cigarette papers.

"Always the same, little one," said Tonia, her dark eyes lingering upon him.

"I must go over to Fink's," said the Kid, rising, "for some tobacco. I thought I had another sack in my coat. I'll be back in a quarter of an hour."

"Hasten," said Tonia, "and tell me— how long shall I call you my own this time? Will you be gone again to-morrow, leaving me to grieve, or will you be longer with your Tonia?"

"Oh, I might stay two or three days this trip," said the Kid, yawning. "I've been on the dodge for a month, and I'd like to rest up."

He was gone half an hour for his tobacco. When he returned Tonia was still lying in the hammock.

"It's funny," said the Kid, "how I feel. I feel like there was somebody lying behind every bush and tree waiting to shoot me. I never had mullygrubs like them before. Maybe it's one of them presumptions. I've got half a notion to light out in the morning before day. The Guadalupe country is burning up about that old Dutchman I plugged down there."

"You are not afraid— no one could make my brave little one fear."

"Well, I haven't been usually regarded as a jack-rabbit when it comes to scrapping; but I don't want a posse smoking me out when I'm in your /jacal/. Somebody might get hurt that oughtn't to."

"Remain with your Tonia; no one will find you here."

The Kid looked keenly into the shadows up and down the arroyo and toward the dim lights of the Mexican village.

"I'll see how it looks later on," was his decision.

AT MIDNIGHT a horseman rode into the rangers' camp, blazing his way by noisy "halloes" to indicate a pacific mission. Sandridge and one or two others turned out to investigate the row. The rider announced himself to be Domingo Sales, from the Lone Wolf Crossing. he bore a letter for Senor Sandridge. Old Luisa, the *lavendera*, had persuaded him to bring it, he said, her son Gregorio being too ill of a fever to ride.

Sandridge lighted the camp lantern and read the letter. These were its words:

Dear One:

He has come. Hardly had you ridden away when he came out of the pear. When he first talked he said he would stay three days or more. Then as it grew later he was like a wolf or a fox,and walked about without rest, looking and listening. Soon he said he must leave before daylight when it is dark and stillest.

And then he seemed to suspect that I be not true to him. He looked at me so strange that I am frightened. I swear to him that I love him, his own Tonia. Last of all he said I must prove to him I am true. He thinks that even now men are waiting to kill him as he rides from my house. To escape he says he will dress in my clothes, my red skirt and the blue waist I wear and the brown mantilla over the head, and thus ride away. But before that he says that I must put on his clothes, his pantalones *and* camisa *and hat, and ride away on his horse from the* jacal *as far as the big road beyond the crossing and back again. This before he goes, so he can tell if I am true and if men are hidden to shoot him. It is a terrible thing. An hour before daybreak this is to be. Come, my dear one, and kill this man and take me for your Tonia. Do not try to take hold of him alive, but kill him quickly. Knowing all, you should do that. You must come long before the time and hide yourself in the little shed near the* jacal *where the wagon and saddles are kept. It is dark in there. He will wear my red skirt and blue waist and brown mantilla. I send you a hundred kisses. Come surely and shoot quickly and straight.*

Thine Own Tonia.

Sandridge quickly explained to his men the official part of the missive. The rangers protested against his going alone.

"I'll get him easy enough," said the lieutenant. "The girl's got him trapped. And don't even think he'll get the drop on me."

Sandridge saddled his horse and rode to the Lone Wolf Crossing. He tied his big dun in a clump of brush on the arroyo, took his Winchester from its scabbard, and carefully approached the Perez *jacal*. There was only the half of a high moon drifted over by ragged, milk-white gulf clouds.

The wagon-shed was an excellent place for ambush; and the ranger got inside it safely. In the black shadow of the brush shelter in front of the *jacal* he could see a horse tied and hear him impatiently pawing the hard-trodden earth.

He waited almost an hour before two figures came out of the *jacal*. One, in man's clothes, quickly mounted the horse and galloped past the wagon-shed toward the crossing and village. And then the other figure, in skirt, waist, and mantilla over its head, stepped out into the faint moonlight, gazing after the rider. Sandridge thought he would take his chance then before Tonia rode back. He fancied she might not care to see it.

"Throw up your hands," he ordered loudly, stepping out of the wagon-shed with his Winchester at his shoulder.

There was a quick turn of the figure, but no movement to obey, so the ranger pumped in the bullets— one— two— three— and then twice more; for

you never could be too sure of bringing down the Cisco Kid. There was no danger of missing at ten paces, even in that half moonlight.

The old ancestor, asleep on his blanket, was awakened by the shots. Listening further, he heard a great cry from some man in mortal distress or anguish, and rose up grumbling at the disturbing ways of moderns.

The tall, red ghost of a man burst into the *jacal*, reaching one hand, shaking like a *tule* reed, for the lantern hanging on its nail. The other spread a letter on the table.

"Look at this letter, Perez," cried the man. "Who wrote it?"

"*Ah, Dios*! it is Senor Sandridge," mumbled the old man, approaching. "*Pues, senor*, that letter was written by '*El Chivato*,' as he is called— by the man of Tonia. They say he is a bad man; I do not know. While Tonia slept he wrote the letter and sent it by this old hand of mine to Domingo Sales to be brought to you. Is there anything wrong in the letter? I am very old; and I did not know. *Valgame Dios*! it is a very foolish world; and there is nothing in the house to drink— nothing to drink."

Just then all that Sandridge could think of to do was to go outside and throw himself face downward in the dust by the side of his humming-bird, of whom not a feather fluttered. He was not a *caballero* by instinct, and he could not understand the niceties of revenge.

A mile away the rider who had ridden past the wagon-shed struck up a harsh, untuneful song, the words of which began:

"Don't you monkey with my Lulu girl
Or I'll tell you what I'll do—"

4: The Thrush in the Hedge

Joseph Hergesheimer

1880-1954

The Saturday Evening Post, 10 June 1916

HARRY BAGGS came walking slowly over the hills in the blue May dusk. He could now see below him the clustered roofs and tall slim stack of a town. His instinct was to avoid it, but he had tramped all day, his blurred energies were hardly capable of a detour, and he decided to settle near by for the night. About him the country rose and fell, clothed in emerald wheat and pale young corn, while trees filled the hollows with the shadowy purple of their darkening boughs. A robin piped a belated drowsy note; the air had the impalpable sweetness of beginning buds.

A vague pleasant melancholy enveloped him; the countryside swam indistinctly in his vision— he surrendered himself to inward sensations, drifting memories, unformulated regrets. He was twenty and had a short powerful body; a broad dusty patient face. His eyes were steady, light blue, and his jaw heavy but shapely. His dress— the forlorn trousers, the odd coat uncomfortably drawn across thick shoulders, and incongruous hat— held patently the stamp of his worldly position: he was a tramp.

He stopped, looking about. The road, white and hard, dipped suddenly down; on the right, windows glimmered, withdrawn behind shrubbery and orderly trees; on the left, a dark plowed field rose to a stiff company of pines and the sky. Harry Baggs stood turned in the latter direction, for he caught the faint odor of wood smoke; behind the field, a newly acquired instinct told him, a fire was burning in the open. This, now, probably meant that other wanderers— tramps— had found a place of temporary rest.

Without hesitation he climbed a low rail fence, found a narrow path trod in the soft loam and followed it over the brow into the hollow beyond. His surmise was correct— a fire smoldered in a red blur on the ground, a few relaxed forms gathered about the wavering smoke, and at their back were grouped four or five small huts.

Harry Baggs walked up to the fire, where, with a conventional sentence, he extended his legs to the low blaze. A man regarded him with a peering suspicious gaze; but any doubts were apparently laid, for the other silently resumed a somnolent indifference. His clothes were an amazing and unnecessary tangle of rags; his stubble of beard and broken black hat had an air of unreality, as though they were the stage properties of a stupid and conventional parody of a tramp.

Another, sitting with clasped knees beyond the fire, interrupted a monotonous whining recital to question Harry Baggs. "Where'd you come from?"

"Somewhere by Lancaster."

"Ever been here before?" And, when Baggs had said no: "Thought I hadn't seen you. Most of us here come back in the spring. It's a comfortable dump when it don't rain cold." He was uncommonly communicative. "The Nursery's here for them that want work; and if not nobody's to ask you reasons."

A third, in a grimy light overcoat, with a short bristling red mustache and morose countenance, said harshly: "Got any money?"

"Maybe two bits."

"Let's send him in for beer," the other proposed; and a new animation stirred the dilapidated one and the talker.

"You can go to hell!" Baggs responded without heat.

"That ain't no nice way to talk," the second proclaimed. "Peebles, here, meant that them who has divides with all that hasn't."

Peebles directed a hard animosity at Harry Baggs. His gaze flickered over the latter's heavy-set body and unmoved face. "Want your jaw slapped crooked?" he demanded with a degree of reservation.

"No," the boy placidly replied.

A stillness enveloped them, accentuated by the minute crackling of the disintegrating wood. The dark increased and the stars came out; the clip-clip of a horse's hoofs passed in the distance and night. Harry Baggs became flooded with sleep.

"I s'pose I can stay in one of these brownstones?" he queried, indicating the huts.

No one answered and he stumbled toward a small shelter. He was forced to bend, edge himself into the close damp interior, where he collapsed into instant unconsciousness on a heap of bagging. In the night he cried out, in a young strangely distressed voice; and later a drift of rain fell on the roof and ran in thin cold streams over his still body.

ii

HE WOKE late the following morning and emerged sluggishly into a sparkling rush of sunlight. The huts looked doubly mean in the pellucid day. They were built of discarded doors and variously painted fragments of lumber, with blistered and unpinned roofs of tin, in which rusted smokepipes had been crazily wired; strips of moldy matting hung over an entrance or so, but the others gaped unprotected. The clay before them was worn smooth and hard; a

replenished fire smoked within blackened bricks; a line, stretched from a dead stump to a loosely fixed post, supported some stained and meager red undergarb.

Harry Baggs recognized Peebles and the loquacious tramp at the edge of the clearing. The latter, clad in a grotesquely large and sorry suit of ministerial black, was emaciated and had a pinched bluish countenance. When he saw Baggs he moved forward with a quick uneven step.

"Say," he proceeded, "can you let me have something to get a soda-caffeine at a drug store? This ain't a stall; I got a fierce headache. Come out with a dime, will you? My bean always hurts, but to-day I'm near crazy."

Harry Baggs surveyed him for a moment, and then, without comment, produced the sum in question. The other turned immediately and rapidly disappeared toward the road.

"He's crazy, all right, to fill himself with that dope," Peebles observed; "it's turning him black. You look pretty healthy," he added. "You can work, and they're taking all the men they can get at the Nursery."

The boy was sharply conscious of a crawling emptiness— hunger. He had only fifteen cents; when that was gone he would be without resources. "I don't mind," he returned; "but I've got to eat first."

"Can't you stick till night?" his companion urged. "There's only half a day left now. If you go later there'll be nothing doing till tomorrow."

"All right," Harry Baggs assented.

The conviction seized him that this dull misery of hunger and dirt had settled upon him perpetually— there was no use in combating it; and, with an animal-like stoicism, he followed the other away from the road, out of the hollow, to where row upon row of young ornamental trees reached in mathematical perspective to broad sheds, glittering expanses of glass, a huddle of toolhouses, and office.

His conductor halted at a shed entrance and indicated a weather-bronzed individual.

"Him," he said. "And mind you come back when you're through; we all dish in together and live pretty good."

Harry Baggs spent the long brilliant afternoon burning bunches of condemned peach shoots. The smoke rolled up in a thick ceaseless cloud; he bore countless loads and fed them to the flames. The hungry crawling increased, then changed to a leaden nausea; but, accepting it as inevitable, he toiled dully on until the end of day, when he was given a dollar and promise of work to-morrow.

He saw, across a dingy street, a small grocery store, and purchased there coffee, bacon and a pound of dates. Then he returned across the Nursery to the hollow and huts. More men had arrived through the day, other fires were burning, and an acrid odor of scorched fat and boiling coffee rose in the delicate evening. A small group was passing about a flasklike bottle; a figure lay in a stupor on the clay; a mutter of voices, at once cautious and assertive, joined argument to complaint.

"Over this way," Peebles called as Harry Baggs approached. The former inspected the purchased articles, then cursed. "Ain't you got a bottle on you?"

But when the bacon had been crisped and the coffee turned into a steaming thick liquid, he was amply appreciative of the sustenance offered. They were shortly joined by Runnel, the individual with the bluish poisoned countenance, and the elaborately ragged tramp.

"Did you frighten any cooks out of their witses?" Peebles asked the last contemptuously. The other retorted unintelligibly in his appropriately hoarse voice. "Dake knocks on back doors," Peebles explained to Harry Baggs, "and then fixes to scare a nickel or grub from the women who open."

Quiet settled over the camp; the blue smoke of pipes and cigarettes merged imperceptibly into the dusk of evening. Harry Baggs was enveloped by a momentary contentment, born of the satisfaction of food, relaxation after toil; and, leaning his head back on clasped hands, he sang:

"I changed my name when I got free
To Mister, like the res'.
But now … Ol' Master's voice I hears
Across de river: 'Rome,
You damn ol' nigger, come and bring
Dat boat an' row me home!'"

His voice rolled out without effort, continuous as a flowing stream, grave and round as the deep tone of a temple bell. It increased in volume until the hollow vibrated; the sound, rather than coming from a single throat, seemed to dwell in the air, to be the harmony of evening made audible. The simple melody rose and fell; the simple words became portentous, burdened with the tragedy of vain longing, lost felicity. The dead past rose again like a colored mist over the sordid reality of the present; it drifted desirable and near across the hill; it soothed and mocked the heart— and dissolved.

The silence that followed the song was sharply broken by a thin querulous question; a tenuous bent figure stumbled across the open.

"Who's singing?" he demanded.

"That's French Janin," Peebles told Harry Baggs; "he's blind."

"I am," the latter responded— "Harry Baggs."

The man came closer, and Baggs saw that he was old and incredibly worn; his skin clung in dry yellow patches to his skull, the temples were bony caverns, and the pits of his eyes blank shadows. He felt forward with a siccated hand, on which veins were twisted like blue worsted over fleshless tendons, gripped Harry Baggs' shoulder, and lowered himself to the ground.

"Another song," he insisted; "like the last. Don't try any cheap show."

The boy responded immediately; his serious voice rolled out again in a spontaneous tide.

"'Hard times,'" Harry Baggs sang; "'hard times, come again no more.'"

The old man said: "You think you have a great voice, eh? All you have to do to take the great roles is open your mouth!"

"I hadn't thought of any of that," Baggs responded. "I sing because— well, it's just natural; no one has said much about it."

"You have had no teaching, that's plain. Your power leaks like an old rain barrel. What are you doing here?"

"Tramping."

Harry Baggs looked about, suddenly aware of the dark pit of being into which he had fallen. The fires died sullenly, deserted except for an occasional recumbent figure. Peebles had disappeared; Dake lay in his rags on the ground; Runnel rocked slowly, like a pendulum, in his ceaseless pain.

"Tramping to the devil!" he added.

"What started you?" French Janin asked.

"Jail," Harry Baggs answered.

"Of course you didn't take it," the blind man commented satirically; "or else you went in to cover some one else."

"I took it, all right— eighteen dollars." He was silent for a moment; then: "There was something I had to have and I didn't see any other way of getting it. I had to have it. My stepfather had money that he put away— didn't need. I wanted an accordion; I dreamed about it till I got ratty, lifted the money, and he put me in jail for a year.

"I had the accordion hid. I didn't tell them where, and when I got out I went right to it. I played some sounds, and— after all I'd done— they weren't any good. I broke it up— and left."

"You were right," Janin told him; "the accordion is an impossible instrument, a thing entirely vulgar. I know, for I am a musician, and played the violin at the Opéra Comique. You think I am lying; but you are young and life is strange. I can tell you this: I, Janin, once led the finale of Hamlet. I saw that the director was pale; I leaned forward and he gave me the baton. I knew music. There were five staves to conduct— at the Opéra Comique."

He turned his sightless face toward Harry Baggs.

"That means little to you," he spoke sharply; "you know nothing. You have never seen a gala audience on its feet; the roses— "

He broke off. His wasted palms rested on knees that resembled bones draped with maculate clothing; his sere head fell forward. Runnel paced away from the embers and returned. Harry Baggs looked, with doubt and wonderment, at the, ruined old man.

The mere word musician called up in him an inchoate longing, a desire for something far and undefined. He thought of great audiences, roses, the accompaniment of violins. Subconsciously he began to sing in a whisper that yet reached beyond the huts. He forgot his surroundings, the past without light, the future seemingly shorn of all prospect.

French Janin moved; he fumbled in precarious pockets and at last produced a small bottle; he removed the cork and tapped out on his palm a measure of white crystalline powder, which he gulped down. Then he struggled to his feet and wavered away through the night toward a shelter.

Harry Baggs imagined himself singing heroic measures; he finished, there was a tense pause, and then a thunderous acclamation. His spirit mounted up and up in a transport of emotional splendor; broken visions thronged his mind of sacrifice, renouncement, death. The fire expired and the night grew cold. His ecstasy sank; he became once more aware of the human wreckage about him, the detritus of which he was now a part.

iii

HE SPENT the next day moving crated plants to delivery trucks, where his broad shoulders were most serviceable, and in the evening returned to the camp, streaked with fine rich loam. French Janin was waiting for him and consumed part of Harry Baggs' unskilfully cooked supper. The old man was silent, though he seemed continually at the point of bursting into eager speech. However, he remained uncommunicative and followed the boy's movements with a blank speculative countenance. Finally he said abruptly:

"Sing that song over— about the 'damn ol' nigger.'"

Harry Baggs responded; and, at the end, Janin nodded.

"What I should have expected," he pronounced. "When I first heard you I thought: 'Here, perhaps, is a great voice, a voice for Paris;' but I was mistaken. You have some bigness— yes, good enough for street ballads, sentimental popularities; that is all."

An overwhelming depression settled upon Harry Baggs, a sense of irremediable loss. He had considered his voice a lever that might one day raise

him out of his misfortunes; he instinctively valued it to an extraordinary degree; it had resembled a precious bud, the possible opening of which would flood his being with its fragrant flowering. He gazed with a new dread at the temporary shelters and men about him, the huts and men that resembled each other so closely in their patched decay.

Until now, except in brief moments of depression, he had thought of himself as only a temporary part of this broken existence. But it was probable that he, too, was done— like Runnel, and Dake, who lived on the fear of women. He recalled with an oath his reception in the village of his birth on his return from jail: the veiled or open distrust of the adults; the sneering of the young; his barren search for employment. He had suffered inordinately in his narrow cell— fully paid, it had seemed, the price of his fault. But apparently he was wrong; the thing was to follow him through life— and he would live a long while—; condemning him, an outcast, to the company of his fellows.

His shoulders drooped, his face took on the relaxed sullenness of those about him; curiously, in an instant he seemed more bedraggled, more disreputable, hopeless.

French Janin continued:

"Your voice is good enough for the people who know nothing. Perhaps it will bring you money, singing at fairs in the street. I have a violin, a cheap thing without soul; but I can get a thin jingle out of it. Suppose we go out together, try our chance where there is a little crowd; it will be better than piggin' in the earth."

It would, Baggs thought, be easier than carrying heavy crates; subtly the idea of lessened labor appealed to him. He signified his assent and rolled over on his side, staring into nothingness.

French Janin went into the town the following day— he walked with a surprising facility and speed— to discover where they might find a gathering for their purpose. Harry Baggs loafed about the camp until the other returned with the failing of light.

"The sales about the country are all that get the people together now," he reported; "the parks are empty till July. There's to be one tomorrow about eight miles away; we'll try it."

He went to the shelter, where he secured a scarred violin, with roughly shaped pegs and lacking a string. He motioned Harry Baggs to follow him and proceeded to the brow of the field, where he settled down against a fence, picking disconsolately at the burring strings and attempting to tighten an ancient bow. Baggs dropped beside him. Below them night flooded the winding road and deepened under the hedges; a window showed palely alight; the stillness was intense.

"Now!" French Janin said.

The violin went home beneath his chin and he improvised a thin but adequate opening for Harry Baggs' song. The boy, for the first time in his existence, sang indifferently; his voice, merely big, lacked resonance; the song was robbed of all power to move or suggest.

Janin muttered unintelligibly; he was, Harry Baggs surmised, speaking his native language, obscurely complaining, accusing. They tried a second song: "Hard times, hard times, come again no more." There was not an accent of longing nor regret.

"That'll do," French Janin told him; "good enough for cows and chickens."

He rose and descended to the camp, a bowed unsubstantial figure in the gloom.

iv

THEY STARTED early to the sale. Janin, as always, walked swiftly, his violin wrapped in a cloth beneath his arm. Harry Baggs lounged sullenly at his side. The day was filled with a warm silvery mist, through which the sun mounted rayless, crisp and round. Along the road plum trees were in vivid pink bloom; the apple buds were opening, distilling palpable clouds of fragrance.

Baggs met the morning with a sullen lowered countenance, his gaze on the monotonous road. He made no reply to the blind man's infrequent remarks, and the latter, except for an occasional murmur, fell silent. At last Harry Baggs saw a group of men about the fence that divided a small lawn and neatly painted frame house from the public road. A porch was filled with a confusion of furniture, china was stacked on the grass, and a bed displayed at the side.

The sale had not yet begun; A youth, with a pencil and paper, was moving distractedly about, noting items; a prosperous-appearing individual, with a derby resting on the back of his neck, was arranging an open space about a small table. Beyond, a number of horses attached to dusty vehicles were hitched to the fence where they were constantly augmented by fresh arrivals.

"Here we are!" Baggs informed his companion. He directed Janin forward, where the latter unwrapped his violin. A visible curiosity held the prospective buyers; they turned and faced the two dilapidated men on the road. A joke ran from laughing mouth to mouth. Janin drew his bow across the frayed strings; Harry Baggs cleared the mist from his throat. As he sang, aware of an audience, a degree of feeling returned to his tones; the song swept with a throb to its climax:

" *'You damn ol' nigger, come and bring Dat boat an' row me home*!' "

There was scattered applause.

"Take your hat round," Janin whispered; and the boy opened the gate and moved, with his battered hat extended, from man to man.

Few gave; a careless quarter was added to a small number of pennies and nickels. Janin counted the sum with an unfamiliar oath.

"That other," he directed, and drew a second preliminary bar from his uncertain instrument.

"Here, you!" a strident voice called. "Shut your noise; the sale's going to commence."

French Janin lowered the violin.

"We must wait," he observed philosophically. "These things go on and on; people come and go."

He found a bank, where he sat, after stumbling through a gutter of stagnant water. Harry Baggs followed and filled a cheap ornate pipe. The voice of the auctioneer rose, tiresome and persistent, punctuated by bids, haggling over minute sums for the absurd flotsam of a small house keeping square of worn oilcloth, a miscellany of empty jars. A surprisingly passionate argument arose between bidders; personalities and threats emerged. Janin said:

"Listen! That is the world into which musicians are born; it is against such uproar we must oppose our delicate chords— on such hearts." His speech rambled into French and a melancholy silence.

"It's stopped for a little," Baggs reminded him.

Janin rose stiffly and the other guided him to their former place. The voice and violin rose, dominated a brief period, and the boy went among the throng, seeking newcomers. The mist thickened, drops of water shone on his ragged sleeves, and then a fine rain descended. The crowd filled the porch and lower floor, bulged apparently from door and windows. Harry Baggs made a motion to follow with his companion, but no one moved; there was no visible footing under cover. They stayed out stolidly in the wet, by an inadequate tree; and whenever chance offered Harry Baggs repeated his limited songs. A string of the violin broke; the others grew soggy, limp; the pegs would tighten no more and Janin was forced to give up his accompanying.

The activities shifted to a shed and barn, where a horse and three sorry cows and farming implements were sold. Janin and Harry Baggs followed, but there was no opportunity for further melody; larger sums were here involved; the concentration of the buyers grew painful. The boy's throat burned; it was strained, and his voice grew hoarse. Finally he declared shortly that he was going back to the shelter by the Nursery.

As they tramped over the rutted and muddy road, through a steadily increasing downpour, Harry Baggs counted the sum they had collected. It was two dollars and some odd pennies. Janin was closely attentive as the money passed through the other's fingers. He took it from Baggs' hand, re-counted it with an unfailing touch, and gave back a half.

The return, even to the younger's tireless being, seemed interminable. Harry Baggs tramped doggedly, making no effort to avoid the deepening pools. French Janin struggled at his heels, shifting the violin from place to place and muttering incoherently.

It was dark when they arrived at the huts; the fires were sodden mats of black ash; no one was visible. They stumbled from shelter to shelter, but found them full. One at last was discovered unoccupied; but they had no sooner entered than the reason was sharply borne upon them— the roof leaked to such an extent that the floor was an uneasy sheet of mud. However, there was literally nowhere else for them to go. Janin found a broken chair on which he balanced his bowed and shrunken form; Harry Baggs sat against the wall.

He dozed uneasily, and, wakened by the old man's babbling, cursed him bitterly. At last he fell asleep; but, brought suddenly back to consciousness by a hand gripping his shoulder, he started up in a blaze of wrath.

He shook off the hand and heard French Janin slip and fall against an insecure wall. The interior was absolutely black; Harry Baggs could see no more than his blind companion. The latter fumbled, at last regained a footing, and his voice fluctuated out of an apparent nothingness.

"There is something important for you to know," Janin proceeded.

"I lied to you about your voice— I, once a musician of the orchestra at the Opéra Comique. I meant to be cunning and take you round to the fairs, where we would make money; have you sing truck for people who know nothing. I let you sing to-day, in the rain, for a dollar— while I, Janin, fiddled.

"I am a *voyou*; there is nothing in English low enough. The thought of it has been eating at me like a rat." The disembodied words stopped, the old man strangled and coughed; then continued gasping: "Attention! You have a supreme barytone, a miracle! I heard all the great voices for twenty years, and know.

"At times there is a voice with perfect pitch, a true art and range; not many— they are cold. At times there is a singer with great heart, sympathy … mostly too sweet.

"But once, maybe, in fifty, sixty years, both are together. You are that— I make you amends."

The rain pounded fantastically on the roof a few inches above Harry Baggs' head and the water seeped coldly through his battered shoes; but, in the

violent rebirth of the vague glow he had lost a short while before, he gave no heed to his bodily discomfort. "A supreme barytone!" The walls of the hut, the hollow, dissolved before the sudden light of hope that enveloped him; all the dim dreams, the unformulated aspirations on which subconsciously his spirit had subsisted, returned.

"Can you be sure?" he demanded uncertainly.

"Absolutely! You are an artist, and life has wrung you out like a cloth— jail, hungry, outcast; yes, and nights with stars, and water shining; men like old Janin, dead men, begging on the roads— they are all in your voice, jumbled— serious barytone—" The high thin recital stopped, from exhaustion.

Harry Baggs was warm to the ends of his fingers. He wiped his wet brow with a wetter hand.

"That's fine," he said impotently; "fine!"

He could hear French Janin breathing stertorously; and, suddenly aware of the other's age, the misery of their situation, he asked:

"Don't you feel good?"

"I've been worse and better," he replied. "This is bad for your throat, after singing all day in the rain. Voyou!" he repeated of himself.

Silence enveloped them, broken by the creaking of the blind man's chair and the decreasing patter of the rain. Soon it stopped and Harry Baggs went outside; stars glimmered at the edges of shifting clouds, a sweet odor rose from the earth, a trailing scent of blossoming trees expanded.

He sang in a vibrant undertone a stave without words. An uneasy form joined him; it was Runnel.

"I b'lieve my head'll burst!" he complained.

"Leave that soda-caffeine be."

He would never forget Runnel with his everlasting pain; or Dake, who lived by scaring women…. Great audiences and roses, and the roar of applause. He heard it now.

v

HARRY BAGGS returned to the Nursery, where, with his visions, his sense of justification, he was happy among the fields of plants. There he was given work of a more permanent kind; he was put under a watchful eye in a group transplanting berry bushes, definitely reassigned to that labor to-morrow. He returned to the camp with a roll of tar paper and, after supper, covered the leaking roof of the shelter. French Janin sat with his blank face following the other's movements. Janin's countenance resembled a walnut, brown and worn in innumerable furrows; his neck was like a dry inadequate stem. As he glanced

at him the old man produced a familiar bottle and shook out what little powder, like finely ground glass, it contained. He greedily absorbed what there was and, petulantly exploring the empty container, flung it into the bushes. A nodding drowsiness overtook him, his head rolled forward, he sank slowly into a bowed amorphous heap. Harry Baggs roused him with difficulty.

"You don't want to sit like this," he said; "come up by the field, where it's fresher."

He lifted Janin to his feet, half carried him to the place under the fence. Harry Baggs was consumed by a desire to talk about the future— the future of his voice; he wanted to hear of the triumphs of other voices, of the great stages that they finally dominated. He wanted to know the most direct path there; he was willing that it should not be easy. "I'm as strong as an ox," he thought.

But he was unable to move French Janin from his stupor; in reply to his questions the blind man only muttered, begged to be let alone. Life was at such a low ebb in him that his breathing was imperceptible. Harry Baggs was afraid that he would die without a sound— leave him. He gave up his questioning and sang. He was swept to his feet by a great wave of feeling; with his head back, he sent the resonant volume of his tones toward the stars. Baggs stopped suddenly; stillness once more flooded the plowed hill and he raised imploring arms to the sky in a gust of longing.

"I want to sing!" he cried. "That's all— to sing."

Janin was brighter in the morning.

"You must have some exercises," he told the boy. "I'll get new strings for the violin; it'll do to give you the pitch."

At the day's end they went again to the hilltop. French Janin tightened and tuned his instrument.

"Now!" he measured, with poised bow. "Ah!" Both his voice and violin were tremulous, shrill; but they indicated the pitch of the desired note. "Ah!" the old man quavered, higher.

"Ah!" Harry Baggs boomed in his tremendous round tone.

They repeated the exercises until a slip of a new moon, like a wistful girl, sank and darkness hid the countryside. A palpitating chorus of frogs rose from the invisible streams. Somnolence again overtook Janin; the violin slipped into the fragrant grass by the fence, but his fingers still clutched the bow.

Pity for the other stirred Baggs' heart. He wondered what had ruined him, brought him— a man who had played in an opera house— here. A bony elbow showed bare through a torn sleeve— the blind man had no shirt; the soles of his shoes gaped, smelling evilly. Yet once he had played in an orchestra; he was

undoubtedly a musician. Life suddenly appeared grim, a sleepless menace awaiting the first opportune weakness by which to enter and destroy.

It occurred to Harry Baggs for the first time that against such a hidden unsuspected blight his sheer strength would avail him little. He had stolen money; that in itself held danger to his future, his voice. He had paid for it; that score was clear, but he must guard against such stupidities in the years to come. He had now a conscious single purpose— to sing. A new sense of security took the place of his doubts. He stirred Janin from his collapsed sleep, directed him toward their hut.

He returned eagerly in the evening to the vocal exercises. French Janin struggled to perform his part, but mostly Harry Baggs boomed out his Ahs! undirected. The other had been without his white powder for three days; his shredlike muscles twitched continually and at times he was unable to hold the violin. Finally:

"Can you go in to the post-office and ask for a package for me at general delivery?" he asked Harry Baggs. "I'm expecting medicine."

"That medicine of yours is bad as Runnel's dope. I've a mind to let it stay."

The other rose, stood swaying with pinching fingers, tremulous lips.

"I'm afraid I can't make it," he whimpered.

"Sit down," Harry Baggs told him abruptly; "I'll go. Too late now to try pulling you up. Whatever it is, it's got you."

It was warm, almost hot. He walked slowly down the road toward the town. On the left was a smooth lawn, with great stately trees, a long gray stone house beyond. A privet hedge, broken by a drive, closed in the withdrawn orderly habitation. A young moon bathed the scene in a diffused silver light; low cultivated voices sounded from a porch.

Harry Baggs stopped; he had never before seen such a concretely desirable place; it filled him with a longing, sharp like pain. Beyond the hedge lay a different world from this; he could not even guess its wide possession of ease, of knowledge, of facility for song. A voice laughed, gay and untroubled as a bird's note. He wanted to stay, seated obscurely on the bank, saturate himself with the still beauty; but the thought of French Janin waiting for the relief of his drug drove him on.

The maple trees that lined the quiet streets of the town were in full early leaf. Groups paced tranquilly over the brick ways; the houses stood in secure rows. A longing for safety, recognition, choked at Harry Baggs' throat. He wanted to stop at the corner, talk, move home to a shadowy cool porch. He hurried in his ragged clothes past the pools of light at the street crossings into the kinder gloom. At that moment he would have surrendered his voice for a place in the communal peace about him.

He reached the post-office and asked for a package addressed to Janin. The clerk delayed, regarded him with suspicion, but in the end surrendered a small precisely wrapped box. As he returned his mood changed; all he asked, he muttered bitterly, was a fair trial for his voice. He recognized obscurely that a singer's existence must be different from the constricted life of a country town; here were no stage, no audience, for the great harmonies he had imagined himself producing. He had that in his heart which would make mere security, content, forever impossible.

In the dilapidated camp French Janin eagerly clutched the box. He almost filled his palm with the crystalline powder and gulped it hastily. Its effect was produced slowly…. Janin waited rigidly for the release of the drug.

The evening following, under the fence on the hill, the blind man dozed while Harry Baggs exercised his voice.

"Good!" the former pronounced unexpectedly. "I know; heard all the great voices for twenty years; a violin in the Opera Comique. Once I led the finale of Hamlet. I saw the Director stop…. He handed me the baton. He died soon after, and that was the beginning of my bad luck. I should have been Director; but I was ignored, and came to America— Buenos Aires; then Washington, and— and morphia."

There was a long silence and then he spoke again with a new energy:

"I'm done, but you haven't started. You're bigger than ever I was; you'll go on and on. I, Janin, will train you; when you sing the great roles I'll sit in a box, wear diamond studs. Afterward, as we roll in a carriage down the Grandes Boulevards, the people in front of the cafés will applaud; the voice is appreciated in Paris."

"I have a lot to learn first," Baggs put in practically.

The old man recovered his violin. "Ah!" He drew the note tenuous but correct from the uncertain strings. "Ah!" Harry Baggs vociferated to the inattentive frogs, busy with their own chorus.

vi

THE PRACTICE proceeded with renewed vigor through the evenings that followed; then French Janin sank back into a torpor, varied by acute depression.

"I haven't got the life in me to teach you," he admitted to Harry Baggs. "I'll be dead before you get your chance; besides, you ought to be practising all day, and not digging round plants and singing a little in the evening. You've got the voice, but that's not enough; you've got to work at exercises all your life."

"I'm strong," Harry Baggs told him; "I can work more than most men."

"No, that won't do alone; you've got to go at it right, from the start; the method's got to be good. I'll be dead in some hospital or field when you'll be hardly starting. But remember it was Janin who found you, who dug you out of a set of tramps, gave you your first lessons." He changed. "Stay along with me, Harry," he begged; "take me with you. You're strong and'll never notice an old man. You will be making thousands some day. I will stop the morphia; perhaps I've got a good bit in me yet. Attention!" He raised the bow.

"No!" he cried, interrupting. "Breathe deep, below the chest. Control! Control! Hold the note steady, in the middle; don't force it into your head."

His determination scion expired. Tears crept from under his sunken lids. He reached furtively into his pocket, took morphia. The conviction seized Harry Baggs that nothing could be accomplished here. The other's dejection was communicated to him. Where could he find the money, the time for the necessary laborious years of preparation? He was without credentials, without clothes; there was no one to whom he could go but the old spent man beside him. They were adrift together outside life, as the huts they inhabited were outside the orderly town beyond the hill.

He rose, left Janin, and walked slowly along the fence to the road. The moon had increased in size and brilliancy; the apple trees had bloomed and their fallen petals glimmered on the ground. He thought of the house on the smooth sward, with its hedge and old trees; a sudden longing seized him to linger at its edge, absorb again the profound peaceful ease; and he quickened his pace until he was opposite the low gray façade.

He sat on the soft steep bank, turned on his elbow, gazing within. The same voices drifted from the porch, voices gay or placid, and contained laughter. A chair scraped. It was all very close to Harry Baggs— and in another world. There was a movement within the house; a window leaped into lighted existence and then went out against the wall. Immediately after, a faint pure harmony of strings drifted out to the hedge. It was so unexpected, so lovely, that Harry Baggs sat with suspended breath. The strings made a pattern of simple harmony; and then, without warning, a man's voice, almost like his own, began singing. The tones rose fluid and perfect, and changed with feeling. It seemed at first to be a man; and then, because of a diminuendo of the voice, a sense of distance not accounted for by his presence near the hedge, he knew that he heard a record of the actual singing.

The voice, except for its resemblance to his own, did not absorb his attention; it was the song itself that thrilled and held him. He had never before heard music at once so clear and capable of such depths. He realized instinctively, with a tightening of his heart, that he was listening to one of the great songs of which Janin had spoken. It hung for a minute or more in his

hearing, thrilling every nerve, and then died away. It stopped actually, but its harmony rang in Harry Baggs' brain. Instantly it had become an essential, a permanent part of his being. It filled him with a violent sense of triumph, a richness of possession that gave birth to a new unconquerable pride.

He rose, waited for a short space; but nothing more followed. He was glad of that; he had no wish to blur the impressions of the first. Harry Baggs hurried up the road and crossed the field to where he had left French Janin. The latter was still sleeping, crumpled against the vegetation. Baggs grasped the thin shoulder, shook him into consciousness.

"I have just heard something," he said. "Listen! What is it?"

He sang without further preliminary, substituting a blank phrasing for uncomprehended words; but the melody swept without faltering to its conclusion. Janin answered irritably, disturbed by his rude awakening:

"The Serenade from Don Giovanni— Mozart. Well, what about it?"

"It's wonderful!" Harry Baggs declared. "Are there any more as great?"

"It is good," Janin agreed, his interest stirred; "but there are better— the *Dio Possente*, the *Brindisi* from Hamlet. Once I led the finale of Hamlet. I saw the Director—"

"I'll get every one," the boy interrupted.

"There are others now, newer— finer still, I'm told; but I don't know." Janin rose and steadied himself against the fence. "Give me a start. I've been getting confused lately; I don't seem to keep a direction like I could. From Don Giovanni: *'Deh vieni alla finestra'*— 'Come to the window' 's about it. I'm glad you're not a tenor; they're delicate and mean. But you are a fine boy, Harry; you'll take the old man up along with you!"

He talked in a rapid faint voice, like his breathing. Harry Baggs grasped his arm and led him down to their shanty. French Janin entered first, and immediately the other heard a thin complaint from within:

"Somebody's got that nice bed you made me."

Harry Baggs went into the hut and, stooping, shook a recumbent shape.

"Get out of the old man's place!" he commanded.

A string of muffled oaths responded.

"There's no reserved rooms here."

"Get out!" Baggs insisted.

The shape heaved up obscurely and the boy sent him reeling through the door. French Janin sank with weary relief on the straw and bagging. He grasped the thick young arm above him.

"We won't be long in this," he declared; "diamond studs!"

He fell asleep instantly, with his fingers caught in Harry Baggs' sleeve. The latter, with the supreme egotism of youth, of a single ambition, loosened the

hand and moved out of the narrow confinement of the shanty. He wanted space, the sky, into which to sing his imaginary triumphant songs.

vii

THE NEXT DAY moved toward its end without arresting incident. Janin and Harry Baggs had walked to the public road, where they stood leaning against the rail fence. The smoke from Baggs' pipe uprose in unbroken spheres; the evening was definitely hot. French Janin said:

"In the town to-day I asked about that house here at the bend. It seems he's got money; comes for a couple of months in the spring— just like us— and then goes to Europe like as not. Perhaps he knows a voice."

The blind man fell silent, contemplative.

"Trouble is," he broke out fretfully, "we've got nothing to sing. That about the 'damn old nigger' won't do. You ought to know something like the *Serenade*.

"Well," he added after a moment, "why not? I could teach you the words— it's Italian; you've nearly got the air. It's all wrong and backward; but this isn't the Conservatoire. You can forget it when you have started; sing exercises again."

"When can we begin?" Harry Baggs asked.

"We'll brush our clothes up best we can," Janin proceeded, absorbed in his planning, "and go up to the porch of an evening. 'Mr. Brinton'— that's his name— I'll say, 'I'm M. Janin, once of the orchestra at the Opera Comique, and I'd like you to listen to a pupil of mine. I've heard them all and this boy is better—' " He stopped; took morphia.

"Can't you stop that for a day?" Harry Baggs demanded desperately. "Can't you?"

He watched with bitter rebellion the inevitable slackening of the other's being, the obfuscation of his mind. Janin hung over the fence, with hardly more semblance of life than an incredibly tattered and empty garment.

"Come on, you old fool!" Baggs exclaimed, burning with impatience, balked desire; he half carried him brusquely to his bed.

Yet, under the old man's fluctuating tuition, he actually began the Serenade within twenty-four hours. "Deh vieni alla finestra," French Janin pronounced. "*Deh vieni*—" Harry Baggs struggled after him. His brow grew wet with the intensity of his effort; his tongue, it seemed to him, would never accomplish the desired syllables.

Janin made a determined effort to live without his drug; the abstinence emphasized his fragility and he was cold, even in the heart of the long sunny

day; but the effort stayed him with a flickering vitality, bred visions, renewed hopes of the future. He repeated the names of places, opera houses— the San Carlo, in Naples; the Scala— unknown to Harry Baggs, but which came to him with a strange vividness. The learning of the Serenade progressed slowly; French Janin forgot whole phrases, some of which returned to memory; one entire line he was forced to supply from imagination.

At last the boy could sing it with a degree of intelligence; Janin translated and reconstructed the scene, the characters.

"You ought to have some good clothes," he told Harry Baggs; he spoke again of the necessity of a diamond stud.

"Well, I haven't," the other stated shortly. "They'll have to listen to me without looking."

He borrowed a rusted razor and subjected himself to the pain of an awkward shaving; then inadequately washed his sole shirt and looped the frayed collar with a nondescript tie.

The night was immaculate; the moon, past the full, cast long segments of light and shadow across the countryside. Harry Baggs drew a deep breath:

"We might as well go."

French Janin objected; he wasn't ready; he wasn't quite sure of what he was going to say. Then:

"I haven't anything to show. Perhaps they will laugh at me— at Janin, of the Opéra Comique. I couldn't allow that."

"I'm going to sing," the boy reminded him; "if it's any good they won't laugh. If what you say's right they'll have to believe you."

"I feel bad to-night, too, in my legs."

"Get your violin."

A fresh difficulty arose: French Janin positively refused to play on his present instrument before a critical audience.

"It's as thin as a cat," he protested. "Do you want me to make a show of myself?"

"All right; I'll sing alone. Come on!"

Janin's legs were uncertain; he stumbled over the path to the road and stopped at the fence. He expressed fresh doubts, the hesitation of old age; but Harry Baggs silenced him, forced him on. A cold fear possessed the boy, which he resolutely suppressed: if Janin were wrong, his voice worthless, if they laughed, he was done. Opportunity, he felt, would never return. With his voice scorned, no impetus remained; he had no other interest in life, no other power that could subdue the slight inward flaw.

He saw this in a vivid flash of self-knowledge…. If he couldn't sing he would go down, lower than Janin; perhaps sink to the level of Dake.

"Come on!" he repeated grimly, assisting his companion over the luminous white road.

Janin got actually feebler as he progressed. He stopped, gasping, his sightless face congested.

"I'll have to take a little," he whispered, "just a taste. That puts life in me; it needs a good deal now to send me off."

He produced the familiar bottle and absorbed some powder. Its effect was unexpected— he straightened, walked with more ease; but it acted upon his mind with surprising force.

"I want to stop just a little," he proclaimed with such an air of decision that Harry Baggs followed him without protest to the fragrant bank. "You're a good fellow," Janin went on, seated; "and you're going to be a great artist. It'll take you among the best. But you will have a hard time for a while; you won't want anybody hanging on you. I'd only hurt your chances— a dirty old man, a drugtaker. I would go back to it, Harry; it's got me, like you said. People wouldn't have me round. I doubt if I'd be comfortable with them. They'd ask me why I wasn't Director."

"Come on," Baggs repeated for the third time; "it's getting late."

He lifted French Janin to his feet and forced him on. "You don't know life," the other continued. "You would get sick of me; you might get influenced to put me in a Home. I couldn't get my breath right there."

Harry Baggs forced him over the road, half conscious of the protesting words. The fear within him increased. Perhaps they wouldn't even listen to him; they might not be there.

His grip tightened on French Janin; he knew that at the first opportunity the old man would sink back into the oblivion of morphia.

"I've done all I could for you, Harry"— the other whimpered. "I've been some— good. Janin was the first to encourage you; don't expect too much."

"If I get anywhere, you did it," Harry Baggs told him.

"I'd like to see it all," French Janin said. "I know it so well. Who'd have thought"— a dull amazement crept into his voice— "that old Janin, the sot, did it?… And you'll remember."

They stopped opposite the entrance to the place they sought. Harry Baggs saw people on the porch; he recognized a man's voice that he had heard there before. On the right of the drive a thick maple tree cast a deep shadow, but beyond it a pool of clear moonlight extended to the house. He started forward, but Janin dragged him into the gloom of the maple.

"Sing here," he whispered in the boy's ear; "see, the window— *Deh vieni alla finestra.*"

Harry Baggs stood at the edge of the shadow; his throat seemed to thicken, his voice expire.

"No," he protested weakly; "you must speak first."

He felt the old man shaking under his hand and a sudden desperate calm overtook him.

He moved forward a little and sang the first phrase of the *Serenade.*

A murmur of attention, of surprised amusement, arose from the porch; then, as his voice gained in bigness, flowed rich and thrilling and without effort from his deep powerful lungs, the murmur died away. The song rose toward its end; Harry Baggs saw nothing but the window above him; he put all the accumulated feeling, the longing, of the past miserable years into his ending.

A silence followed, in which Harry Baggs stood with drooping head. Then an unrestrained patter of applause followed; figures advanced. French Janin gave the boy a sharp unexpected shove into the radiance beyond the tree.

"Go on and on," he breathed; "and never come back any more!"

He turned and shambled rapidly away into the shadows, the obscurity, that lined the road.

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5: Our Last Walk

Hugh Conway

Frederick John Fargus (1847-1885)

In: *Bound Together*, Vol. II, 1884

IF I WISHED TO TELL a love tale, I should begin this with the sweetest memories of my life, and relate when and where Walter Linton and I first met; should describe my pride and happiness when I knew that he wished me to become his wife. The love we bore each other through life— ay, even after life— may be made manifest as I write these lines, but it is not because I loved him I have this tale to tell. Other women have loved as I love, and have mourned as I mourn: my life, so far as the joy and grief of it go, is but the life of thousands.

Had Walter Linton, when first he asked me for the heart which was already his own, been but a poor, struggling man, I should have given him all as freely as I did then. If need had been, I could have waited patiently for years, or until fortune smiled upon him. Feeling this, I had no false sentiment as to sharing the worldly good that was his, although I was a penniless girl and brought nothing in my hands. Of course, kind friends around wondered why Walter did not choose a wife who would bring him wealth as well as love. Ah, no one could have given him more love than I could give him; that was all he wanted or asked for. He was twenty-three, and his own master; I was twenty, and utterly alone in this world. So we were married— just six weeks after that happy spring day on which he told me I was dearest to him.

Our home— a dear gray old house, full of pleasant corners— was Draycot Hall, Somersetshire, not far from the Mendip Hills. Walter had recently inherited the house and the estates of Draycot, and when we took possession of our kingdom, which was almost as new to Walter as it was to me, life seemed to hold all that could be desired. Walter's income was sufficient for the life of a quiet country gentleman— a life to which he settled down, and appeared to find every wish gratified in that happy existence. Shooting, fishing, and hunting gave him plenty of amusement, and the land, part of which he farmed himself, brought occupation and interest enough to make him feel that his life was not altogether an idle or useless one.

Then, to make our happiness complete, the children came— a girl, then one, two, three bonny boys. How merry and busy the old house grew with them, the sturdy rogues! How proud Walter was of them!

We were not very rich people. Compared to that of some of our county neighbors, our income was insignificant. Draycot Hall, although not such an imposing pile as the name might suggest, was by no means a small house; and, like all rambling old places, cost a good deal of money to keep up. Even when

we began life together we found, at the end of the year, that our expenditure and income nearly tallied, and as expenses increased with an increasing family, we felt that a few hundreds added to our revenue would be a very welcome addition. But in spite of this our lot was too happy for us to think of grumbling.

We sat one summer's evening on the lawn. The air was cooled by late fallen rain, and sweet with fragrance rising from the freshened flowers— for days were long and petals not yet closed. Our latest given child slept on my knee; and, as we watched the sun sink slowly down behind the Mendip Hills, my husband said:

"Helena, how shall we manage to start all these boys in life?"

I laughed at such a distant obligation. We were still young, and it seemed that so many years must pass before the baby on my knee would want a starting hand. I kissed the child's little white fingers.

"Why, Walter," I said, "you are looking a long, long way into the future."

"Yes, my girl; but days happy as ours pass very quickly. It will not seem so long before we shall be obliged to think about it. What shall we do then? We save no money even now, you know. By-and-by we must send these babies to school; after that they will want money to help them on in professions. How are we to do all this? Our income won't increase."

"We must try and economize," I answered, impressed by the really serious view he took.

"But how? As it is, we can scarcely make both ends meet. I am afraid I am selfish in living as I do. I have serious thought of going into some business and trying to make a fortune."

I begged, beseeched him to dismiss the wild idea. Were we not happy enough with all we now possessed? Why change our mode of life, which was so peaceful and sweet? Besides, in my heart of hearts I doubted if my good, easy-going Walter was quite fitted for a commercial career. He kissed me as I pleaded eloquently for a continuation of our present happiness, and for a time the subject dropped.

Yet I could see, from remarks he now and again made, that the thought lingered in his mind, and I began to fear lest, some day, he might put it into practical shape, when the anxieties attendant on money-making or money-losing might be ours.

It was some months after our conversation that old Reuben Dyke, a well-known character in the village of Draycot, came to the Hall. He wanted to see the master on important business, he said. This old Reuben was the greatest gossip of the place— the ale-house oracle— meddler in every one's business, and unsolicited adviser-in-general to the little world around him. He was a great authority among the villagers, many of whom would have backed his

opinion against the united wisdom of a Daniel and a Solomon. His talk and broad Somerset accent always amused us, and, it may be, insured him a better reception than his virtues merited.

To-day he entered the room with an indescribable look of mystery and secrecy on his shrewd old face. He carefully closed the door after him and bade us a respectful good-day. Then, drawing quite close to us, he spoke in guarded whispers.

"I be jest come, zur, to tell 'ee as ther' have a-bin a chap a staayin' at the Blue Boar vor the last two or dree daays. Mebby, zur, as you've a zeed un about— a darkish, picket-noased zort of a chap."

"Yes, I saw him," answered Walter. "What about him?"

"Now, look here, zur. None o' we couldn't at vust miake out what a wer' up to. He yent one o' them outrides, you zee. He werdn't lookin' aater shopkippers. He were a ferretin' about aater land. Zo we up and ax'd un what a farm a wer' aater, or if a did want to buy any land hereabouts? He laughed and zed, zes he, 'We be gwain to make a raailroad right up droo theese yer valley.' Zes I, 'I hoap my head won't yache till we do get a raailwaay on Mendip, vor that is a devilish poor country.' 'True,' zes he; 'but there be a lot o' coal jest under— along Havyat Green and Upper Langford.' Zes I, 'Zo I've a-heerd;' and then I zeed in a minute which waay the cat wer' jumpin'. He werdn't gwain to make nar a raailwaay; he wanted to zenk a coal-pit, and get howld o' zome land under false pretenses. Zo, if I wer' you, zur, and if I wer' Mr. Llewellyn, I should jest keep my eyes open; vor I shouldn't wonder if, one o' thease here daays, he won't be along and offer 'ee a hundred and fifty a yacre vor some o' your poorest land. But my advice to you, zur, is— doan't 'ee zell it— not vor double the money."

After this important communication, Reuben bowed himself out; retiring probably to the kitchen, in order that he might regale himself with meat and drink and our servants with the latest village gossip. Walter and I sat digesting his news.

"I wonder if there can be any truth in it," said Walter. "I'll go down to-morrow and see that fellow at the inn, and ask him pointblank about it."

But on the morrow the fellow at the inn was there no longer. He had departed and left no address. The landlord only knew him as plain Mr. Smith. We never saw or heard of him again— whatever his errand may have been, it was not revealed to us; but, nevertheless, old Reuben's conjecture as to the object of his sojourn at the Blue Boar quite unsettled Walter's mind. The thought that untold wealth might be lying under our very feet was always present to it, and at last he resolved to employ experts who were competent to give an opinion on the matter, and settle our hopes and doubts.

So, very soon, we were visited by Captain Thomas Davies, of Aberfellteg, and Captain Davies Thomas, of Cwmtygwyn, two gentlemen whose strangely accented English, redundant with such words as "Inteet" and "Inteet to coodness," was a source of great amusement and enjoyment to each of us. They inspected, diagnosed, experimented, and then reported. My poor dear love! shall I ever forget your excitement, your joy, as we perused together that glowing joint production? What wealth you dreamed of and counted up! Not, I know, that you wished for riches for your own sake— it was for the sake of wife and children that the desire of acquiring a large fortune obtained such a hold on you. Ah me! how certain, how clear and straightforward it all seemed! Had not the mining captains calculated, with an accuracy that seemed infallible, every ton of coal that lay hidden beneath our green fields? Did not their figures prove beyond dispute the profit each ton raised must bring? After every contingency had been guarded against, what read like Aladdin's wealth lay waiting for us to stoop down, take, and enjoy. Why should we not do so?

Then other gentlemen came to our quiet home— legal gentlemen— gentlemen who were called financiers— gentlemen learned, very learned, it seemed to me, in acreages, crops, and soils. Old safes were unlocked, old plans and musty deeds extracted from their recesses. I heard the word "Mortgage" frequently; and Walter told me he had resolved to share his promised wealth with no one. He would work the projected mines solely on his own account; but, in order to begin operations, money was needful; so he had arranged with the two financial gentlemen, Messrs. Leach and Vincent, of Bristol, that such sums of money as were necessary should be advanced to him upon the security of his estate. And these gentlemen applauded Walter's courageous resolution, and everything went so pleasantly.

Then the digging began!

Oh, how I hated it! From the very first I hated it! Not only did it spoil one of our prettiest fields— the one where the children gathered earliest cowslips— but it brought strange faces and rough forms to the quiet, sleepy little village. Men and women of a very different type to that of laborers round about. Slatternly untidy women and strong, surly men who knew not the traditions of the land. Men who were supposed to beat their wives once a week, and who, we knew, played havoc with our neighbors' costly preserves. Men who worked hard— very hard— and insisted upon that work being highly paid for— who spent so large a proportion of those hard-earned wages in drink, that the landlords of the opposition village inns actually shook hands in their unexpected prosperity; whilst our kind, old, easy-going rector fairly cried at the way in which his new and unwelcome parishioners were demoralizing the old ones, and old Reuben Dyke seemed to look almost patronizingly upon us, as

two deserving young people helped to fortune by his great sagacity and wisdom.

So it went on, month after month; yet I saw no signs of the advent of that promised wealth. So far as I could understand it, the seam of coal hit upon by those clever captains was a failure. It broke, or dipped, or something else; so the continuation had to be sought elsewhere. Thereupon Captains Thomas Davies and Davies Thomas came over again, inspected again, and reported so cheerfully that Walter's face lost that look of anxiety which I had lately seen upon it, and he pushed on the work more briskly than before.

Then they told me the right seam had been found— Walter was radiant. Out of the first money gained he would send Thomas Davies and Davies Thomas a hundred pounds apiece, as an extra recognition due to their skill and good counsel. Larger sums than before were furnished by our financial friends, who came to the Hall once or twice, and were, I thought, very rude and familiar in their manner. Machinery and engines were erected, more men engaged, and in time great black heaps began to accumulate, and grimy black faces met me at every turn. Our peaceful and beautiful home was so changed that I began almost to loathe what had once been the dearest spot on earth to me, and to long for change of air and scene.

Money seemed always being paid away— large sums that frightened me. But was I not only a woman, who knew nothing of business?

Yet all these grievances were nothing to the grief I felt at seeing the change in my darling's face. Every week I noticed an alteration. Gradually a cloud of care seemed settling down on his once gay nature, and I knew his mind was anxious and ill at ease. He grew thinner; his dark hair showed signs of premature grayness; his sleep was often restless and unfreshing. Though now, as he ever had been, kind and gentle to me, at times with others he was moody, silent, and evidently worried. All the brightness of youth appeared to be leaving him, so much so that my heart ached to see him, and I felt I could bear it no longer. I would learn the worst he had to tell me, claiming my right as a true wife to share trouble as well as joy with my husband.

The confidence I was resolved to claim came unasked for. One evening Walter returned home and threw himself into a chair, apparently utterly broken down. He covered his eyes with his hands and sobbed bitterly.

I knelt at his side and my arms were round him. Then he told me all— I need not give the details. The bare truth was this: After all the money spent, the coal raised was of such a poor quality that every ton sold was sold at a loss. And more money than I had ever imagined had been expended. Of course he had been cheated— I knew he was being cheated the moment I saw the faces of the men who had lent him the money he wanted; but there was no help for

it now. Messrs. Leach and Vincent claimed, for advances, costs and interest, the enormous sum of close upon ten thousand pounds. Walter had just come from Bristol, where these men carried on business, and after a stormy interview with them, had been informed that unless the amount was paid by Saturday, house, lands, and everything would be at once advertised for sale—and to-day was Wednesday!

I knew nothing of law; but, even to my ignorance, this sudden demand and swift procedure seemed unusual.

"But can they do it?" I asked.

"Yes, I am afraid they can. Months ago, when they made me a large advance, they gave me notice to pay the mortgage off. It was a mere matter of form, they said; but now they will act upon it. They are thorough-going rogues, and I believe have some scheme in their heads by which they fancy it possible to get absolute possession of the whole estate."

"But, Walter dear, the estate must be worth thousands more than that amount."

"Oh yes, I can get the money easily enough. But not in three days. It will cut me to the heart even to see it all advertised, although doubtless the sale may be stopped."

"Why not go to that nice old gentleman, Mr. Mainwaring?" I suggested. "You always call him your family solicitor. He will help you, I am sure."

"That is just what I intend doing. I shall go to London to-morrow, and show him exactly how I stand, and beg as a great favor that I may have the money at once. When I return I will give orders for all the men to be discharged and the machinery sold. There shall be an end of it before it makes an end of me."

I was almost hysterical with joy as I heard his last words.

"Oh, my love!" I cried. "It will all come right with us yet. We are after all only half ruined. We can let the Hall and go abroad for several years. Don't trouble about it any more. If you could only know how happy I am to think I shall have you back once again, all to myself as of old, you would be happy too. We will live in some quiet French or Swiss town, and be everything to one another again."

So I talked to him and comforted him, until he grew more composed, and, kissing me, owned that life was still worth having, even if shorn of half its wealth.

That night I slept more happily than I had slept for months.

The morning's post brought a letter from Leach and Vincent. It was couched in legal terms, and stated that unless the amount due was paid in notes or gold by Saturday at noon, they would take the threatened steps. Walter at once despatched a telegram, saying the money would be paid, and

requesting that the necessary release might be prepared in order to avoid any delay. Then he started for London, in quest of ten thousand pounds.

I had little fear as to the result of his expedition. I can read faces; and long ago I had read in Mr. Mainwaring's face the kindness of his disposition. I knew he was rich, and that his clients were also rich men; moreover, he had a high opinion of Walter, and held him in what might almost be termed affection. When he congratulated me upon my marriage, he told me, in unmistakable words, what he thought of my husband. So I was not surprised when, on the Friday evening, Walter returned with a semblance of the old joyous smile on his face; and, after locking a pocketful of bank-notes in the safe, sat down by me, and for the rest of the evening built airy castles, or rather cottages, full of peacefulness and love.

When I awoke next morn, my heart was light; trouble, it seemed, had been, but passed away so swiftly that its traces scarce remained. I threw the window open, and the fresh, sweet air of spring brought gladness on its wings. The honeysuckle, old and great, that clothed the wall beneath my window, just gave signs of breaking into blossom; leaning out, I plucked some sprays and pinned them in my dress. A thrush sung from a bush below; my heart kept echoing his notes of love and joy. What cared I for the money, or its loss? Should I not have my own love back again, and watch his face regain its old bright look of health and happiness? Passed by his side, and with our children round, would not my life be pleasant in some quaint old town of France? And we would live so carefully, and save money as years went on, until some day might bring us to the dear old Hall again. Unhappy?— no! few moments in my life had happier been than these.

And Walter was cheerful. He would soon be out of the clutches of his obliging friends. The shock was over. He had told me what had been gnawing at his heart for so long; he was now looking his troubles fairly in the face, and, as usually happens, found them not so terrible in aspect as he had imagined. He buttoned his bank-notes in his breast-pocket and started for the railway station. He felt better and stronger to-day, and, as the morning was so beautifully fine, was tempted to walk the five miles, instead of driving, as he usually did.

We were early risers, so he had plenty of time, and I thought the walk would do him good. Perhaps it was the feeling of newly restored confidence— perfect and true— which now existed between us that made his farewell to me that morning even more affectionate than it was wont to be— made him insist upon having all the children brought down, and taking many a kiss from those little rosy pursed-up lips— made him pause when he reached the furthest

point to which my eyes could follow him, and turning, waft me one more farewell.

I should have walked with him, at any rate, part of the way; but household duties had to be attended to; so, after watching his tall figure disappear at the turning of the drive, I reentered the house, hoping that the day would pass quickly, and hasten the evening which would bring him back again.

Months and months ago I had promised a friend, who sighed in far-away lands for English fields again, to make, this spring, a little collection of dried ferns and send it to her. The anxiety of the last few months had driven the promise from my mind, but as, this morning, I pictured our own projected emigration, my thoughts turned to my distant friend, and my broken promise came back to me. I determined that on the first opportunity I would make amends for my neglect.

Ferns, many of them scarce ones, grew plentifully in our pleasant country; but on the road that Walter must take on his way to the station they flourished in unusual abundance. I could obtain many varieties close at hand, but some few grew further off; so I asked Walter, if he should chance to meet with any specimens of these particular sorts, to pick a frond or two, which he could place between the leaves of the book he carried. I wanted, especially, a specimen of the Northern Shield Fern, which even here is not very common, growing as it does in little patches, sometimes miles apart. He laughed at my idle request, but promised to attend to it.

The day wore on, and the sun got low. It was time to send the dog-cart to meet the train. Long, long before the time had elapsed in which, by any chance, it could return, I was waiting at the window to welcome Walter home again. I waited and waited, until so many weary minutes crawled away that I was fain to conclude he had been detained in Bristol until the next and last train.

I nursed my disappointment, and killed the time as best I could. The hour when I might surely expect him came and passed. The train must be late. I opened the window, and waited and listened for the sound of his coming.

At last I heard the ring of the horse's hoofs, and saw the approaching dog-cart dimly by the light of the stars. I ran to the door, eager to greet my husband; but as the horse drew up on the gravel, I could see only one figure in the dog-cart— that of James, our groom. He told me that his master had come by neither train, so, after waiting, he had driven back alone.

I turned away, very miserable and sad at heart, but, strange to say, felt no fear of evil. Business had, of course, detained him. It seemed unkind not to have let me know in some way, but perhaps he could find no means of doing

so. There was not the slightest chance of his returning to-night, the distance being far too great for driving. I must wait until to-morrow.

It was only when I went to bed— alone, for almost the first time since we were married— that fear fell upon me, and fancy brought horrid ideas to my mind— that the possibility of evil having befallen my husband came to me. The large sum of money he carried, the lonely road, the black-faced colliers about the neighborhood— all combined to fill me with a nameless dread— a terror which I could scarcely put into thoughts, much less into words. Yet I strove with my fears, trying to strangle each one as it was born.

"I shall see him to-morrow. To-morrow I shall see him," I repeated over and over again; and as that morning at last dawned, I fell into a restless sleep.

But morning brought him not; noon brought him not— neither letter nor message. So my heart died within me; and taking a maid with me, I started for Bristol by the afternoon train. It was Sunday; the streets of the large town looked dreary and deserted as we passed through them. Knowing Mr. Leach's private address, we drove straight to his house. After some delay I was shown into a room.

By and by Mr. Leach entered, with his fat forefinger closed in a book of sermons, which, I felt instinctively, he had been engaged in reading for the benefit of his young vultures. His smooth face was full of gentle astonishment that any one should wish to confer with him on business matters on that particular evening in the week. As I looked at him and read through his mask of hypocrisy, I knew that the man was a rogue and capable of committing any crime. When he saw who his visitor was, his astonished look changed to one of annoyance. He closed his book entirely, laying it on the table with the edifying title turned toward me.

It seems childish to mention such trivial incidents; but during that terrible time every word, every detail, seems graven upon my memory in deep lines that will never be effaced.

"I have called, Mr. Leach— " I began.

"My dear Mrs. Linton, I know why you have called. But I am sorry to be obliged to say that your errand is useless— utterly useless. Mr. Linton made a promise he has not kept. He can not blame us for the steps we have taken."

"A promise not kept?" I echoed.

"Certainly not. He undertook to pay us a large sum of money yesterday. He has not been near us— I conclude he fa ill," he added, with an approach to a sneer.

I sunk back in the wildest grief. Then all my fears of the night, all my forebodings of the day, were true! I knew that never— never again should I look on Walter's face. He had been murdered— but by whom?

Mr. Leach endeavored, after the manner of his kind, to comfort me. He placed his fat hand in a soothing way upon my arm. This action restored my senses to me.

"My husband left me only yesterday morning with the money you claim in his pocket. I know it for certain. He was going straight to you. Where is he? Tell me?"

Mr. Leach gave a start of surprise, but said nothing. I waited for his answer.

"Where is he?" I reiterated. "Tell me!"

Mr. Leach placed his finger-tips together, and looked at me with an expression almost like placid amusement.

"Mrs. Linton," he said slowly, "I am a man of business, and have seen strange things in my time, so you mustn't be offended if I ask you a question. Mr. Linton had the money ready for us, you say. In what form was it?"

"In notes, sir," I replied. "He told me you declined taking anything else."

"Yes, yes— except gold. So we did. We are bound to be careful. Now, Mrs. Linton— mind, I mean no offense— do you know that your husband was much embarrassed?"

"I know he could pay all just debts— and unjust ones, too," I answered, with rising indignation.

"Yes, of course. All just and unjust debts. All unjust debts— very good. Now, do you think it possible— ten thousand is a lot of money— do you think it possible that Mr. Linton may have— well, in plain English, decamped with it?"

I heard no more. My face was flaming. I rose and, without another word, left the room. I was in the cab before Mr. Leach had recovered from his surprise, and in another minute was sobbing my poor heart out on the shoulder of my maid— a faithful, good girl who loved me.

I can not tell you of the next few days. The uncertainty of everything, yet, to me, the utter hopelessness. The dread of what any moment might make known to me. The searchers searching and hoping to find— what? For I knew that the success of their quest could only bring me the dead body of my darling— murdered, perhaps, for the sake of the money he carried. Yet hardest of all to bear was the knowledge that the sorrow manifested by those around me was only assumed out of respect to me; that no one believed Walter to be dead; that the wicked, cruel slander which had framed itself in Mr. Leach's mind had entered into the minds of others. I could read the thought in the faces of all who came near me during those days. I knew that the paid seekers performed their task with a smile on their lips— that the word went around among them that, in order to be successful, the search should be, not for a

dead, but for a living man, to find whom it was needful to look further away. How was it I did not go mad?

I cared nothing when some one told me that the property, house, and all were advertised for sale in a few weeks' time. I thought of nothing, saw nothing but the cold, still face of the one I loved. I wished for nothing now but to see his name cleared from the stain thrown upon it— a stain he would have heeded more than death; this done, I wished to die— that was all. The wild thought which had at first entered my head, that the men to whom he owed the money had taken it and made away with him, was at last dispelled; for proof was positive that Walter had not gone to Bristol on that fatal morning. The passengers from the station were too few, and Walter too well known not to have been noticed. Indeed, no ticket for the class by which he would certainly have traveled had been issued that day. No one had met him that morning, and he had disappeared without leaving a trace; for people told me that every inch of the country near had been scoured. But I knew they deceived me, and that the wicked thought was in every heart, although no one dared to speak it in words to me who knew him and loved him.

Mr. Mainwaring, whom I had almost forgotten in my grief, came down in the course of a few days. Unfit as I was for business, I was compelled to see him. The kind old man was in great distress and anxiety, but he was very good to me. He started when he saw that I had already put on mourning.

"It is dreadful," he said, with tears in his eyes, and taking both my hands in his. "Not that I care for the money so much— although, of course, I must make up any deficiency myself, having been guilty of such irregularity. It is dreadful to think that I, who tried to help Walter, must now strip his wife and children of their last shilling. I trusted him so that I let him have my client's money simply on his note-of-hand, bearing, of course, all responsibility myself. It was most irregular; but he was so urgent, and I wanted to help him. Poor girl! I will do what I can for you, but I am afraid it can be but little."

I begged him not to think of us, and thanked him again and again for his great kindness.

"I would, if only in my own interests, pay the money again and stop the sale; but no one has the power to mortgage the property to me. We do not even know that Walter is dead. It can not, can not be true, what every one seems to hint at?" he added, almost shamefacedly.

I burst into a flood of tears and almost fell at his feet.

"Not you, Mr. Mainwaring! Not you!" I sobbed out. "You, who knew him, and knew that dishonor was not in him! Let me think that one, at least, believes in my dead love. Would to God, for my sake, it were as people think, so that I might some day see him again."

The kind old friend raised me.

"No," he said; "I don't believe it. I have known him from a boy, and I knew his father before him. They lie who say Walter Linton could have done such a thing. But it is all very, very dreadful."

Mr. Mainwaring slept at Draycot Hall that night, but I could not bring myself to spend the evening in his company. We could but think or speak of one subject, and I felt I had no right to inflict my grief upon him. I should be better alone. I watched the children sink to sleep, and for some hours sat by their little white beds listening to their regular breathing. Then I kissed them all gently and very quickly, lest my hot tears, falling on their upturned faces, should awake them; and, near midnight, retired to what with me would wrongly be called rest. I locked the door of my room, undressed myself, and sat in my dressing-gown over the fire, for the night being damp and cold, my good maid had kindled a fire for me.

And there I sat, not seeking rest. I knew that sleep and I must be strangers for hours; that not until my strength was quite worn out would sad thoughts cease and change to sadder dreams; not till at last, from sheer fatigue they fell, would weary eyelids curtain tearful eyes. And so I sat, till slowly died the fire, and morning air stole chilly through the room— thinking of all the joy and sweetness of life so lately promised, all it gave me now. It seemed so hard to lose the one I loved— lost, as it were, in darkest night, with none to say where he had wandered.

"Oh!" I cried, "if I could see you once and say farewell, although your words came but from dying lips! I should not grieve so much, and for the sake of children dear to both might live, and even not go mad."

The wind had risen with the night, and gusts now and again bore heavy rain that beat against my window; whilst the tall trees round moaned as the gale went tearing through their boughs. The world seemed full of dismal sounds and grief, and I the saddest in the world. At last sleep conquered sorrow, so I threw myself down on the bed and slept. How long it was I slept I can not tell, for all the while I seemed awake and seeing fearful sights. Cruel voices whispered words that stabbed my heart, so that in dreams I longed for wakefulness. Then I awoke and heard the wind and rain, louder and fiercer, whilst the room looked strange as morning dawned in cheerless gray, and crept in through the half turned blind.

I felt dazed. For a moment I could scarcely realize where I was, or quite recall what had happened. I even turned, from force of habit, to see if Walter, who should be by my side, was also awake. Then, as I saw the vacant pillow by mine, all came back to me— came back with such a reflux of sorrow that, in my despair, I threw out my arms, and sobbing bitterly, called on the one who

could not hear me. My right hand lay as it had fallen, outside the coverlid, and, in a minute, I almost shrieked with horror and alarm; for I felt another hand seek it, touch it; and I experienced the sensation of fingers closing round my own. Hastily I tore my hand away from that clasp— if what held without restraining, made itself distinctly felt without offering resistance, can be called a clasp— and sprang from the bed. Courageous as I am by nature, I trembled like a leaf, and had it been dark when that unknown hand sought mine, my horror must have vented itself in screams. But the room was nearly light; so in a few moments I conquered that overpowering fright and looked around for the intruder. I peered into every nook in which one might possibly hide, but detected no one. The door was as firmly locked as I left it. I was alone, for no one could have entered either by door or window. Then I sat down and reasoned with myself on my folly. It was fancy from a mind upset and overwrought with grief. It was the lingering impression left by one of those dreams— those dreadful dreams which sleep had brought me! It was a pure delusion, a creation of my own, and I wondered if, as I feared at times, I was going out of my senses. Although I was able to persuade myself that this reasoning was correct, I dared not return to my bed, but, sitting once more in my chair, longed for broad daylight.

My thoughts soon wandered away from my recent fright, and took that path which they always followed. My arm dropped to my side, and my fingers relaxed themselves. And then, once more I felt that hand creep to mine, take it, and hold it. Again I felt the unmistakable sensation of fingers that closed round mine. I felt that there was no hand in mine that my hand could clasp in return, but the sensation of a palm against my palm— fingers twining my fingers— was indisputable. The sensation of pressure was there— faintly, it is true, but it was there. It was no fancy, no dream, this time. Whether mortal or not, a hand, or the semblance of a hand, was holding mine. Again the horror overcame me— again I strove to tear my hand away from this invisible clasp. My blood curdled as I found the result of my efforts failed on this second occasion— found that the fingers which fastened on my own could not be shaken off, do what I would. As I moved my hand, even so the hand that held it moved with it. If I clinched my own, I could yet feel the strange pressure of those unseen fingers. If I grasped my right hand in my left, there was still the sensation of another hand between my own. Do what I would, move how I would, that clasp, or phantom of a clasp, was ever on my hand. Yet I struggled with fear until the awful thought flashed through my brain that this was the aura, the forerunner of paralysis or epilepsy. Then I could bear it no longer. Whether that grasp was the result of bodily or mental ailment, I could bear it no longer— I felt my mind was going. I rushed to the door, tore it open, and

my screams rang through the house. Remember, I was but a woman, and alone.

As the sound of hurrying feet drew near, that hand or hand-clasp lying on my own quitted it. Then, as the strange sensation ceased, did I hear a mournful sound, like a sigh, or was it only the wind outside? Did the phantom fingers draw themselves away from mine soothingly, even, it seemed, reluctantly, or was that fancy too? As the servants with frightened looks drew near me, could that wild and joyful thought that flashed through my brain be more than the thought of a madwoman? What could it mean?

Except for this I was myself again. I had been frightened, I told all who came to me— frightened by dreams, by shadows, by solitude, and my own thoughts. No one wondered at it; what flesh and blood could stand, unmoved, the anxiety I had borne during the last week? I was over-wrought and suffering from sleeplessness, so Mr. Mainwaring insisted upon giving me an opiate. I swallowed it reluctantly, and my maid sat with me, until, in due time, dull sleep told of the potency and efficacy of the drug which I had been made to take.

This artificial sleep lasted without a break until late in the afternoon. Then I awoke refreshed, and in full possession of my senses. I arose and prayed, as I had never prayed before, that my hand might again feel that unseen touch which had nearly driven me mad in the night. "Will it come again? O, let it come again!" was the constant cry of my heart; and I longed ardently for the night, which, perhaps, might bring that hand seeking my own again. For incredible as it seems, I knew, when those fingers last left mine, that love had in part conquered death— that Walter had been with me. Now I feared nothing. Why should I fear? He had loved me living— he loved me now. Whether he came to me in body or in spirit, should he not be welcome? Oh, that he might come again!

And he came again. Mr. Mainwaring, who would not leave Draycot that day on account of the apparently strange state of my health, that evening insisted upon my taking a turn in the garden. I obeyed him, although every plant, every blossom around, seemed breathing sadness. I was too tired to walk for longer than a few minutes, but sat on my favorite seat, and watched the sun sink behind the hills. Even then and there— in broad daylight— I felt his hand seek my own, and my heart leaped with joy. I shunned or strove to avoid it no longer. I let my hand lie still, and again I felt the touch, or the spirit of the touch, of the one I loved. So naturally those fingers closed round mine; so familiar seemed that clasp to me, that could I have forgotten the last week, I might have closed my eyes, and, lying there with my hand in his, have thought I had only to open them to happiness once more. If I could but forget!

Even if I had not known in whose hand mine was resting, the caress those fingers gave me would have told me. I wondered why I feared and repulsed them at first. If only I could sometimes sit as I sat then, and know and feel that Walter was beside me, I thought that life might even be happy. So I turned my head toward him, and said, softly— so softly:

"Dearest love, you will come often and often, will you not? You will be always with me; then I shall not be unhappy."

He answered not, but I felt a change in the clasp of his hand, and I pondered as to what its meaning could be. Then I fancied that faintly, very faintly, that touch was endeavoring to make me understand something which my grosser earthly faculties failed to grasp— to direct, to lead me somewhere for some purpose. For it left me and came again, left and came again, till at last I learned its meaning.

Then and there I rose. "I come, my love," I said. And once more Walter Linton and his wife walked, as they had walked many a time before, hand-in-hand down the broad garden path; past the rustic lodge, covered with rosebuds and woodbine; through the gateway; out into the high road. I feared nothing: the hand of the one I loved was in mine, and guiding me whither he chose; moreover it was yet daylight, and I was not dreaming.

I even knew that Mr. Mainwaring followed us as we walked down the path. I saw him come to my side and look at me with wonder. I wanted no one to be near my husband and myself, so I waved him back imperiously. "Follow if you like," I said, "but do not speak to us." Perhaps he thought I was mad, perhaps that I was walking in my sleep, and, if so, feared to awake me. Any way, he followed us silently, and that was all I knew or cared about him, or about anything else. For were not my love and I walking, once more, hand-in-hand, and it was not in a dream?

Along and along the road, each side of which is beautiful with its green banks and hedges, and every inch of which we know, even keeping to that side we always choose because the flowers grow thickest there. How fresh and green everything looks this evening! The swallows are flying here and there. Every blade of grass is washed clean from dust by the heavy rain of the morning. No. I am not dreaming. I am walking with my husband. A nightingale breaks Into song near us, as we walk. We stop— who could help stopping to listen? Now its melody ceases, and Walter leads me on. It is like in the old days when we were first wed; before we thought or wished for more wealth. Those days when all the country round was fresh and new to me. Never did the wild-flowers, I think, look gayer than they look this evening, although they are closing fast. I would stop, my darling, and gather a bunch for the children; but they have so many flowers at home, and I fear to loose your hand for a

moment. Besides, you wish to lead me further yet; we have somewhere to go to this evening. I forget whither it was you told me, Walter. Is it to the lily-pond, to see if we can find any snow-white cups floating, buoyed up by the broad green leaves? Is it to climb the hill that lies in front of us, and see the very last of the glorious sun; to catch the crimson sparkle of its rays on the distant windows of our dear home? That sun which will rise to-morrow, and waken us both so early— for you will never leave me again, Walter— promise me, my darling— I have been so unhappy. Is it further yet? To the ruins of the gray old abbey where the poet's ivy grows so freely? Shall we wait there, as once before, and see the full moon shine through the rose of the east windows? Shall we wander arm-in-arm through the dim glades, laughing at the foolish monks who chose to live and die there, knowing not love, nor the sweetness of life when two share its joys and troubles? But our troubles are over now, are they not, dearest? No matter, lead me whither you will: I care not— you are with me, your hand is in mine, and I am happy. But wherever we go, we will walk back by moonlight, and then creep up quietly and kiss the children just once before we go to bed. To-morrow we will wake and love again. No, I am not dreaming. But why do you not speak to me and tell me where you have been— why you left me so long? Oh, how I have wept and waited for you! Dearest, you will never leave me again?

This is the spot you wished to lead me to— the place where the ferns grow? Ah, you remembered what I wanted. Are there any of that sort up there? Let us go and see, although the day is flying fast. Through the hazel bushes— deep, deep into the underwood— on and on— up and up— brambles and stones! I did not know it was so steep here. Hold my hand firmer and help me. More bushes, more undergrowth; and how the twilight fades! My darling, we shall find no ferns to-night. May we not go back and come again to-morrow? Yet on, and on! Love, where you lead I follow and fear not! Is not your hand in mine, and you will never leave me again! Still on! My darling, you have brought me to the very edge of a rock! Don't leave me here! Don't draw your hand from mine! Stay one minute— one moment longer! I can not see you; it is dark and cold! I can not feel you, and the world seems filling again with grief. Come back! Come back! Walter! Walter!

They told me I dreamed it— that I walked in my sleep. Clever and learned men said so, and I am only a woman, neither clever nor learned. Mr. Mainwaring, who had with great difficulty followed us— for I say "us," in spite of all that wisdom can urge— found me lying lifeless at the brink of the rocky depth to which Walter had led me, and where he had left me. Down below me lay something that I, thank God, never saw. They bore it home and told me it was all that was left of Walter Linton, my husband. But I knew better, for had

he not that evening walked hand-in-hand with me for miles? They told me, also, that he had fallen from the top of the rock— that it was not a great height, but high enough for the fall to kill him instantaneously— that most likely he was led to that fatal place, seeking some rare plant; as a root and withered leaves were clenched in his hand— that the notes he had placed in his pocket when he left his home were still there— that Draycot was still mine and his children's. But they believe me not when I tell them that my love, my husband, through the power of the love he bore me, could come from the dead— could take my hand In his and lead me with him, on and on, till he showed me where and how he died— till he saved those he loved from utter ruin and a life of penury— till, more than all, he cleared his own dear memory from stain and dishonor. Yet these things were!

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6: The Old Place

"Weeroona"

Mary Simpson, 1884-1952
Women's Mirror, 23 Dec 1924

Australian writer of many short pieces for The Bulletin *and its companion magazine* Women's Mirror, *usually gently humorous. She was born in rural Stawell, and after her father died the family, in difficult financial circumstances, moved to Melbourne, where she began her writing career. This included several one-act plays meant for amateur production. Her last work was published in 1940.*

IT is the last day at the old place. The auction is over, and the buyers are lingering idly with their arms full of hens and baskets filled with home-made preserves. Some are carrying away small articles of furniture while others are loading wagonettes with the heavier pieces. On a dray is the dining-table, upside down and packed with tin-ware, bound for a selection further out. With the table has been sold the red, ink-stained cover one sees its fringed ends flapping in the wind.

The auctioneer, a flabby man in need of shaving, standing with one foot on a chair, is settling accounts while cracking time-honored jokes with the smiling crowd. It has been quite a comedy altogether, an oasis of fun in the dull monotony of Ironbark, and the Ironbarkites have made the most of it. Not that they are unsympathetic— but a sale is a sale after all, and not an occasion for grief. It is our last day. The luggage is stacked by the kitchen door, and the buggy, ours no longer but lent by its new owner, stands ready to take it and us to the station.

Up and down the stone steps, worn into hollows by our feet, strangers pass, bear ing away our household gods. It seems an incomprehensible thing to see Mother's cruet and the blue cushions borne away thus without protest. Our more intimate neighbors are grouped about; Mrs. Shaw wagging her head in sympathy, and her daughter, Mrs. Barry, repeating over and over, "Well, well, well. So you're going to the metropylis, Mrs. Tremayne? Ah, it's just as well fer the children's sake." And Mother, looking strange and aloof in

her widow's black, echoes patiently "For the children's sake." But her sad eyes wander restlessly over the lost home yet again, taking in the swaying wattles and the blue, blue curve of the distant ranges. Soon her vision will be hedged about with build ings and long shabby streets in "the metropylis."

"More charnces fer the children in the metropylis," asserts Mrs. Barry. "They get a smartening-up there, an' an insight into business. An' no use you clingin' on to th' old place now that he—"

"No use, no use," echoes Mother again, her thoughts on the new-made grave not far off where he was.

And then old Smithers, with his hair sticking through his hat, hurries in through the big gate with his sons and starts to yard the cows— old Crumple Horn and Spotty, Baldy and Billy the bull, with the straggly, stupid calves. Smithers has bought them all, along with the "draughts" and the pony.

There follows confusion and dust.

Crumply and co. lumbering every way but the right one, their new owners sweating and chasing, cursing the calves all doubling and stampeding back toward the cow-sheds they know.

Then comes that stranger who holds the mortgage over the old place, and much talk 'twixt him and Mother. Tommy and Joe, stiff and uncomfortable in new black suits, stand and stare at the newcomer's son sitting high in the trap. Presently, when this dandy descends and throws a proprietorial air at the roof, Tommy falls upon him and rolls him in the stubble till his nose bleeds.

It is hateful, this leaving— even though it leads to the joys of city life. Leaving the barn, where we slithered from the topmost bag to the lower in lovely bumps, or plunged into heaps of sweet-smelling hay that pierced our scanty garments and scratched us sorely. Leaving the creek, with its leeches, its yabbies and blackfish. Leaving the echo that "cooee-ed" back at us from that underground tank wherein our faces were waveringly reflected. All these, dearly-loved yet lightly valued till now, seem to stretch out detaining fingers to hold us, now that we are leaving— the old place.

Inside the house a farewell cup of tea is being drunk and the sweet, sickly smell of Madeira cakes wafts out.

Mother, surrounded by neighbors, friendly yet curious, is dabbing at her eyes and fighting against hysteria. No wonder! This has been home since she came to it, a bride. Now, in the cemetery is father's new-made grave and she is leaving him.

Time enough, with the new owner chaffering over his rights and privileges, to have one more swing— one last, never-to-be forgotten swing. So away across the paddocks the children fly, the stubble flat tening and crackling beneath their boots— so different to the barefooted crossings of yesterday. And the swing, buoyant, a thing of magic , controlled by the supple limbs of the girls, rises high, higher, till it seems as though their flying figures must complete the circle and go right over the top. Valkyries riding the wind— glorious, exhilarating swinging! To know the swift, upward lift, the downward drive, to feel one's hair driven back from flushed cheeks—the delicious fear when our feet slip, the sense of power on struggling back to safety.

And then Freckles, the first-born, almost man-size in his first long pants, lurking in the busy shed trying to look indifferent. Freckles is not coming to the metropolis.

He is in pawn to the local store. He is to "work off" the account there. All is settled and agreed. Grimes has magnanimously accepted payment in service instead of cash.

And is Freckles willing? He was, it is said among the neighbors, until this last day, when he was to see the others off to the city. "Natural-like," says Mrs. Barry in the wrinkled ear of Mrs. Shaw, "he wants to see the sights."

But Mother knows better. Mother knows how her boy's heart is breaking under the stiff, white shirt— not for the city sights, but because of the parting. She knows the loneliness and longing that will be his portion while "working off the account." Let others say, Grimes among the number, that "it will make a man of him." Why should he be made a man of? Mother fiercely wants to know. Why should Freckles be made a man of when, despite long pants and a strap tie, he is only a boy and, to her, a baby still.

It seems as if, come to the pinch, she would sooner die than leave him. Yet there is the unpaid account.

"Such a pity their father speckeylated in the mines," remarks Mrs. Shaw of the wagging head to the company in general.

"See what's come of it, her a widdy-woman an' the childer faytherless!"

"Yes, yes," agree the others; "but its best for her to go—more chances in the city, more jobs for the young uns, an if this 'ere Freckles gets an insight inta the grocery at Grimes's— well, it'll be a help to his mother later on, an' a good arrangement."

And so it seems to them, not being called to sacrifice.

And out of sight, Mother and Freckles are parting. Freckles is "to be a good boy (as though he had ever been a bad one!) He is to be brave, as Mother herself is and at this she breaks down altogether and sobs in Freckles's clumsy, boyish embrace, his tears mingling with her own.

And then the unexpected—the wonderful blaze of light that illumines that last dark day. The appearance of Grimes himself, with his nose unwiped, a chew of tobacco in his jaws, handing Mother the account with "Paid in Full! scrawled across its total. Grimes, miser and usurer but with a streak of humanity somewhere still for the widow and fatherless: Grimes backing grumpily away from gratitude, but with moisture in his eye; Grimes who, this day has placed a hand of healing on a woman's breaking heart.

And Freckles, the reprieved, lapsing from incipient manhood into boyhood again, is turning somersaults of joy in the dust.

The neighbors, moving in slow processional gait, gather near. Horny hands are shaken; cheery words spoken. Mother is asked to send reports on our progress as town-folk. Someone is to send us wattle in the Spring; someone else a "settin' of aigs."

And presently a strange solemnity falls upon us. Freckles, always a lightning change artist, becoming momentarily a man in real earnest, takes Mother arm. Silently we all press closer, each resolved not to cry and just as certainly beginning to whimper— and so we turn our backs on the old place and take our first steps to the city.

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7: Evicting a Tenant

Val Jameson

fl 1898-1938

Mirror (Perth, WA) 18 May 1907

The author was in Gold Rush Western Australia in the late 1890s, and many of her stories recall, with a certain reminiscent fondness, the days when hopeful prospector and diggers and their families lived in humpies on their leases. Records show she married in Kalgoorlie in 1898. The last positive indication that she was alive was in 1938 in a brief New South Wales newspaper item reporting that she was "in poor health".

WHEN WE rented Doolan's camp, it was clearly explained by the agent that Doolan was not expected to return for a period of six months. I must say the place was a credit to Dinny's efforts to make it "homesome."

There was an irresistible, magnetism in Dinny's composition. Whatever he wished for, appeared with magical promptitude.

His determination to acquire poultry irustrated our honorable intentions to circumvent his designs. Animated balls of fluff tripped from a nest beneath the tank one sunny morning, chaperoned by a clucking, matronly hen.

Mrs. Casey, with due respect for the accomplished bull terriers, took up a fighting position in the frame-work of her door. With arms akimbo, she sent a broadside of voluble abuse at Dinny, who waited until her breath was spent, and then retaliated.

"I'll fight any woman with me tongue, so keep it goin', Mrs. Casey. There's no evidence in them chickens whatsoever. They belong to me. Nine points o' the law an' I'll prove it! I had a case of eggs sent up from Geraldton. They disappeared, mysteriously vanished, vamoosed. Couldn't account! for 'em, till I see 'em this very minute wallkin' out from under that tank. Your thief of a fowl wanted a family, an' stole my eggs! Come out 'ere, Jack an' Dave. I want yer to identify my Geraldton eggs."

"Fight your own battles," said Jack. "If I was the woman, I'd pelt yer with eggs, and ripe ones, too."

"Now, then, Mrs. Casey," clamored the voice outside, "there's yer fowl. Keep 'er off my premises if yer can! I won't harm her as she did mother tny Geraldton eggs, but look out for squalls, Mrs. Casey, if you dare to lay a finger on my Geraldton chickens. I'll take yer to court quick an' lively."

This subtle sophistry and conclusive threat apparently settled Mrs. Casey. The chickens were afterwards allowed to become attached to our camp.

Our dining room contained a cane lounge, three superior cane chairs, and a home-made table. Several hearthrugs and doormats lined the floors throughout. The chairs and made their appearance in the wake of a cyclone,

that caused a redistribution of property. The lounge detached itself from a travelling van-load of furniture, and was discovered by Dinny, who ran at top speed after the van, hailing the driver vociferously.

Failing to attract this worthy's attention. he brought the article home, as the only alternative to leaving it on the road. That is the history of the lounge as related to us. We found it a luxuriant acquisition, and were thankful for the silent resignation of its former owners. Dinny generally shared his possessions in camp, and revelled in hospitality.

Three months of contented domesticity flew over our heads, when, like a bolt from the blue, Doolan presented himself at the front door. We were seated at breakfast, when the brogue came rolling through the passage and started the pups into violent protest.

"Is Mister Mor-r-r-gan inside plase?"

Dinny pricked up his ears, perked his goatee at the ceiling, and rolled his eyes expressively at us.

"Who's there?"

"Doolan! "

"Come in, Doolan! Down, Bluff, Bounce! I'll wallop you!"

Dinny placed an easy chair for the visitor.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Doolan. My mates, Jack an' Dave Woodenhead, Mr. Doolan! Have a snack o' breakfast?"

While Dinny was doing the honors in his usual flourishing style, Doolan fixed a round, suspicious eye on him. He was a short, florid-faced man, with good-natured features, lacking one eye, but the remaining orb seemed to do extra service to supply the deficiency. His mouth broadened in a broad, good-humored smile in this early stage of acquaintance. Breakfast was declined on the plea of a prior meal at the hotel.

Conversation was difficult. An expectancy of disagreeable news chipped the edge of our customary affability, and guilty signs of nervousness betrayed our visitor's intentions.

"How's Ireland ? " asked Dinny, abruptly.

"Middlin'," replied Doolan, "so far as I seen it. The missus says the foinest country in the wurrld is Australia, an," he twirled his hat nervously between his knees, "I'm sorry to put yez to any inconvenience, but av coorse oi'm wantin' me camp!"

Dinny drew himself up with a business air, and shot his goatee at the landlord, emphasising his words by beating a closed fist on the table. " We don't intend to quit this camp, Doolan, till the six months, as agreed by the agent, has expired, so you'd better take your full time in Ireland."

Doolan's face crimsoned wrathfully.

"Ye've no signed agreement wid yers, an' there's nothing beyant a week's notice required."

"When you're dealing with me, Mr. Doolan," retorted Dinny, "you'll find a week's notice sheer waste of breath. I'm a man of the world, an' I won't be bounced out of this camp by 20 Doolans. Look," pointing at the walls, "at my artistic decarations."

Doolan's eye surveyed the pasted cuttings. Doolan's mouth opened to eject an oath.

"Decorations, begorra, an' all me foine wall papers buried under that trash ye call decoration! Anny kid wit a bucket an' paste, an' a rubbish tip ud do as much damage in half the time! Idjit!"

Dinny's pride in his handiwork, and disgust at Doolan's disapprobation, coupled with the opprobrious epithet, flung in his teeth, overbalanced prudence. Aiming his clenched fist direct at Doolan's aggressive eye, he said, " I'll give you 'idjit!' "

Doolan promptly retaliated, and the pair pommelled one another to a standstill. Then, mutually satisfied, they bathed their gory faces, and adjourned the argument.

The feud was renewed regularly evorv Monday morning. Doolan's verbal ammunition saluted our ears at daybreak. The exchange of hostilities between the pair provided entertainment for the neighbors. Doolan doubled the rent. Dinny retaliated by non-payment. His local reputation as an expert bush lawyer scared Doolan from legal proceedings.

When all other strategy had been exhausted, Doolan brought a ladder and tools, and commenced removing the roof. Dinny smiled indulgently, and drew a huge tarpaulin over the gap. Another fight eventuated on this occasion. While Doolan was damaging his own premises, a powerful willy swept him off the ladder, and flung a verandah post across his recumbent chest.

Dinny was credited with the attack, and was compelled to defend himself from the revengeful onslaught of the infuriated landlord.

After two months of unavailing siege punctuated by pugilistic duels, Doolan approached his tenant with a vanquished air, and a proposition to build a camp of exactly the same dimensions on an adjacent block of land.

Dinny critically surveyed the land, then yielded a grudging consent. We knew that the subjugation of Doolan was complete when we found him, at the dictation of his evicted tenant, meekly removing the kitchen stove from his own residence to accommodate our new abode.

8: The Baronets of Mertonbridge Hall

Sapper

H C McNeile, 1888-1937

In: *When Carruthers Laughed*, 1934

I DO not profess to explain what I am going to set down. I hold no positive opinion on things psychic, one way or the other. Men of unassailable integrity have given the world their experience on such matters, which are open for all to read, and my contribution can add nothing to the wealth of material already collected. Nevertheless, for what it is worth, I am committing it to paper. I do it for my own satisfaction only: for reasons which will be obvious these words must never see the light of day in print. Because they either tell of a coincidence so amazing as to be well-nigh incredible, or else Sir Bryan Mertonbridge, sixteenth Baronet, of Mertonbridge Hall, Sussex, is a cold-blooded murderer. And since his house parties for Goodwood are famous throughout the county, it were madness for a humble bank manager to bring such an accusation against him, when proof is impossible.

It happened four years ago, but let it not be thought that time has clouded my memory. The incidents of that night in June are as clear in my mind as if they had occurred yesterday. Sometimes I wake now with the woman's last dying scream ringing in my ears, and jumping out of bed I pace up and down; my room asking myself again and again the same old question. Was it a coincidence, or was it not?

The sea wrack started to blow over the Downs about eight o'clock on the evening when it took place. It came like a dense white wall, blotting out the surrounding landscape, and covering the windscreen with a film of moisture more difficult to see through than heavy rain. My destination was Brighton, but never dreaming that such a mist would come down on me I had left the main coast road, and had taken a narrow inland one that wound along the foot of the Downs, connecting up a few scattered farms and hamlets that still escaped the daily ordeal of the charge of the motor heavy brigade. The road was good but narrow, with a ditch on each side, so that caution was necessary, owing to the mist making the grass slippery. The trouble, however, was the bad visibility, and after a time my rate of progress was reduced to less than ten miles an hour. Another difficulty was due to indifferent signposting, the few that there were only showing the next village and no large town.

I had been creeping along for about a quarter of an hour when I came to four cross roads, and getting out of the car I approached the signpost, one arm of which fortunately indicated Worthing. Once on the main road things might be better, so I decided to take it. But having slightly overshot the mark, I had to

back the car, and it was then the mishap occurred. I reversed too far and the back wheels skidded into the ditch.

At first I thought nothing of it, but after repeated attempts to get her out, which only resulted in the wheels spinning round, I began to grow uneasy. And then came the final blow. There was a sharp click, and the wheels ceased to move though the engine was still running in gear. Either the cardan shaft or one arm of the back axle had broken. The car was helpless: it was now a question of being towed out.

I lit a cigarette and sized up the position. My map was a small-scale one, embracing the whole of England, and I knew the cross roads where I was would not be marked. The light was failing rapidly: worse still, the sea wrack was beginning to turn into genuine rain. My chances of finding a garage, even if I knew where to look for one, which could send out a breakdown gang at that hour, were remote. In fact, it was evident that the car at any rate would have to remain where it was till the morning. But I failed to see why I should keep it company. Sooner or later I must come to some habitation of sorts, where I. could be directed to an inn, or whose owner would perhaps put me up for the night. Anyway, I could not stop where I was, so leaving the car in the ditch I took the road for Worthing.

For twenty minutes I trudged along without meeting a soul or seeing the sign of a house. The rain was now pouring down, and having no mackintosh I was rapidly becoming wet to the skin. And then, just as I was beginning to despair of finding anything, the road jinked sharply to the right and I saw a pair of heavy iron gates in front of me. Beyond them was a small house— evidently the lodge of some big property.

It was in complete darkness, but at least it was something made of bricks and mortar, and pushing open one of the gates I approached it and knocked on the door. There was no answer, and after a while I realised it was empty. I went all round it in the hope of finding a window unlatched. Everything was tight shut: short of breaking a pane, there was no hope of getting in.

By that time the water was squelching in my shoes, and I was seriously cogitating as to whether it would not be worth while to smash a window, when it struck me that if this was a lodge, the big house must be fairly close at hand. So once again I started off up the drive: no one could refuse a dog shelter on such a night.

It was almost dark and, save for my footsteps on the gravel and the mournful dripping of the water from the trees, no sound broke the silence. I seemed to be in a world of my own, with nothing else living except the drenching rain. Was I never going to reach the house?

At length the trees bordering the drive stopped abruptly, and there loomed up ahead of me the outlines of a large mansion. But even as I quickened my pace my heart began to sink, for just as at the lodge I could see no light in any window. Surely, I reflected, this could not be empty too.

I found the front door. It was of oak, studded with iron bolts, and by the light of a match I saw a heavy old-fashioned bell-pull. For a few moments I hesitated: then, taking my courage in both hands, I gave it a sharp pull, only to jump nearly out of my skin the next second. For the bell rang just above my head, and the noise was deafening. Gradually it died away, and in the silence that followed I listened intently. If there was anyone in the house surely they must have heard it: to me the row had seemed enough to wake the dead. But the minutes passed and no one came; I realised that this house was empty too.

Cursing angrily, I turned away: there was nothing for it but to foot it back again. And then I saw a thing which pulled me up sharp: a small window to one side of the front door was open. I thought of that foul walk along the drive, and I made up my mind without more ado. Ten seconds later I was inside the house.

The room in which I found myself was a small cloak-room. Hats and coats hung on pegs around the walls: two shooting sticks and a bag of golf-clubs stood in one corner. So much I saw by the light of a match, but another more welcome object caught my eye— an electric-light switch. I had already made up my mind that should anyone appear I would make no attempt to conceal myself, but would say frankly who I was and my reasons for breaking in. And so I had no hesitation in turning on the light as I left and walked along a passage which led from the room. A door was at the end of it, and I pushed it open to find myself in a vast panelled hall.

Holding the door open to get the benefit of the light from the cloak-room I saw more switches beside me, and in a moment the place was brightly illuminated. It was even bigger than I had at first thought. At one end, opposite the front door, was a broad staircase, which branched both ways after the first flight. Facing me was a large open fireplace with logs arranged in it— logs which, to my joy, I saw were imitation ones fitted for an electric fire. In the middle stood a long refectory table, whilst all round the walls there hung paintings of men in the dress of bygone days. The family portrait gallery: evidently the house belonged to a man of ancient lineage. All that, however, could wait: my first necessity was to get moderately dry.

I fumed off some of the lights, and crossed to the fireplace, where I found the heat switch without difficulty. By this time I was sure that the house was empty, and, having returned to the cloak-room to get an overcoat, I took off my clothes and sat down in an armchair in front of the glowing logs. (I know

these small details seem irrelevant, but I am putting them down to prove that my recollection of that night is still perfect.)

The hall was in semi-darkness. Two suits of armour standing sentinel on each side of the staircase gleamed red in the light of the fire: an overhead cluster threw a pool of white radiance on the polished table in the centre. Outside the rain still beat down pitilessly, and as I looked at my steaming clothes I thanked Heaven for that open window. And after a while I began to feel drowsy. A leaden weight settled on my eyelids: my head dropped forward: I fell asleep.

Suddenly, as so often happens when one is beat, I was wide awake again. Something had disturbed me— some noise, and as I listened intently I heard it again. It was the sound of wheels on the drive outside, and of horses. It was as if a coach and four was being driven up to the door, but the strangeness of such a conveyance at that hour of the night did not strike me for the moment. I was far too occupied in trying to think what excuse I was going to make for my presence in such unconventional garb. And then, even as with a jangling of bits the vehicle pulled up by the front door, I realised to my amazement that my clothes had been removed.

I tried to puzzle it out— to collect myself, but before I could think what I was going to say the door was flung open and a great gust of wind came sweeping in, making the candles on the table gutter. Candles! Who had put candles there and turned out the electric light? And who had laid supper?

I looked again towards the door: a woman had come in, and my embarrassment increased. She swept towards the table, and stood there, one hand resting on it, staring straight in front of her. Of me she took no notice whatever, though it seemed inconceivable that she had not seen me. And then, as she remained there motionless, my amazement grew: her dress was that of the Stuart period.

The front door shut and a man came into the circle of light. Magnificently handsome, with clean-cut, aquiline features he was dressed as the typical cavalier of King Charles's time. And as he stood drawing off his driving gauntlets, I realised what had happened. He was the owner of the house and there had been a fancy dress ball. Still, I was glad I had a man to explain things to.

He threw his gloves into a chair and came straight towards me. And the words of explanation were trembling on my tongue when he knelt down almost at my feet and stretched out his hands towards the blaze. He seemed oblivious of my presence, but what was even more amazing was the fire itself. For now great flames roared up the chimney from giant logs that blazed fiercely.

I glanced again at the woman; she had not moved. But on her face had come an expression that baffled me. Her eyes were resting on the man's back, and in them was a strange blending of contempt and fear.

The man rose and turned towards her, and instantly the look vanished, to be replaced by one of bored indifference.

"Welcome, my love," he said with a bow, "to your future home." Was it my imagination, or was there a sneer in his voice?

"You honour me, Sir James," she answered with a deep curtsy. "From a material point of view it leaves nothing to be desired."

"Your Ladyship will perhaps deign to explain?"

"Is it necessary?" she said coldly. "The subject is tedious to a degree."

"Nevertheless," he remarked— and now there was no attempt to conceal the sneer, "I must insist on an explanation of your Ladyship's remark."

"Ladyship!" Her face was white, and her eyes, for a moment, blazed hatred. "Would to God I had no right to the title."

He shot his lace ruffles languidly. "Somewhat higher in the social scale, my love," he murmured, "than Mistress Palmer of Mincing Lane. The latter is worthy, no doubt— but a trifle bourgeois."

"Perhaps so." Her voice was low and shaking. "At any rate, it was honest and clean."

He yawned. "They tell me your father is a pillar of respectability. In fact, I gather there is a talk of his being made an alderman, whatever that obscure office signifies."

"You coward," she cried tensely. "How dare you sneer at a man whose shoes you are not worthy to shine."

He raised his eyebrows and began to laugh silently. "Charming, charming!" he remarked. "I find you vastly diverting, my love, when you are in ill-humour. I bear no malice to the admirable Palmer, whose goods I am told are of passing fair quality. But now that you have become my wife, I must beg you to remember that conditions have changed."

He reverently lifted a bottle, encrusted and cobwebby. "From the sun-kissed plains of France," he continued. "The only other man in England who has this vintage is His Grace of Wessex. Permit me."

She shook her head, and stood facing him, her hands clenched. "What made you marry me, Sir James?" she said in a low voice.

"My dear!" he murmured with simulated surprise. "You have but to look in yonder mirror for your answer."

"You lie!" she cried. "I have but to look to your bank for my answer."

For a moment his eyes narrowed: the shaft had gone home. Then, with an elaborate gesture that was in itself an insult, he lifted his glass to his lips.

"What perspicacity!" he murmured. "What deep insight into human nature! But surely, my dear Laura, you must have realised that a man in my position would hardly have married so far beneath him without some compensating advantage."

She turned white to the lips. "So at last you have admitted it," she said in a voice barely above a whisper. "Dear God! how I hate you."

"The point is immaterial," he cried harshly. "You are now Lady Mertonbridge: you will be good enough to comport yourself as such."

But she seemed hardly to have heard him: with her eyes fixed on the fire she went on almost as if talking to herself. And her voice was that of a dead woman. "Lady Mertonbridge! What a hideous mockery! Two days after that travesty of a service I found you kissing a common tavern wench. A week later you were away for two nights, and I overheard your man and my tirewoman laughing over it. Whose arms did you spend those nights in, Sir James? Which of your many mistresses? Or was it perchance Lady Rosa?"

He started violently and then controlled himself. "And what," he asked softly, "may you know of Lady Rosa?"

"There are things that reach even Mincing Lane, Sir James," she answered. "Even there your infatuation had been heard of and the barrier that stood between you— no money. I do not know her: I hope I never shall. But at any rate she has been saved a life that is worse than death."

"Your Ladyship is pleased to be melodramatic," he said angrily. "Shall I ring for your woman to prepare you for bed?"

"A moment. Sir James," she answered quietly. "This matter had best be settled now."

He paused, his hand already on the bell rope. "You do not imagine," she continued, "that after what you have admitted tonight, I should demean myself by continuing under your roof. Maybe you think that to be Lady Mertonbridge of Mertonbridge Hall is enough for an alderman's daughter. You are wrong. I admit my father was dazzled at the thought of such a match: I admit that I was deceived by your soft words and your flattery. But now, after just three weeks, the scales have dropped from my eyes: I know the truth. You married me for my money, and now you have tossed me aside like a worn-out glove. So be it: you shall have your money. That is nothing. But you will have it on my terms."

His face was masklike, though his eyes were smouldering dangerously. "And they are?"

"Tomorrow I return to my father. It is for you to make what excuse you like. Say," she added scornfully, "that an alderman's daughter felt herself unfitted for such an exalted position as that of your wife. If you choose to

divorce me— which would doubtless be possible with your influence— the money will stop. You may remember that that clause was inserted in the marriage settlement: a pity for you, was it not, that my father feels so strongly about divorce? So I shall remain, still your wife, and you will receive your money."

He still stood with his back to her, trying evidently to see how this new development affected him. And then she continued. "It will at any rate have the merit of saving Lady Rosa or some other poor woman from the hell that I have suffered. Even Sir James Mertonbridge cannot commit bigamy."

And at that he understood, and his expression became that of a devil incarnate. If he divorced her he lost the money: if he did not she remained his wife. But when he turned round his face was masklike as ever. "We will go further into this in the morning, Laura," he said quietly. "You are tired now, and I insist on your drinking a glass of wine."

Her strength seemed to have suddenly given out: she sat by the table, her head sunk on her outstretched arms. And even as I looked at her, with my heart full of pity, a dreadful change came over the face of the man who stood by her side. He had just seen the way out, and I stared at him fascinated, whilst my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

Quietly he crossed to a cabinet that stood against the wall, and from it he took a small exquisitely cut glass bottle. Then he looked at his wife: she was still sitting motionless. With the bottle in his hand he returned to the table: then standing with his back to her he poured half its contents into a glass which he filled with wine. "Drink, my love," he said softly, and I strove to shout and warn her. But no sound came: I could only sit and watch helplessly.

She stretched out her hand for the glass with a gesture of utter weariness: she drank. And on the man's face there dawned a look of triumph. Once again I tried to shout, to dash from my chair and seize the glass. But it was too late. For perhaps five seconds she stared at him: then she sprang to her feet, her features already writhing in agony. Through the great vaulted hall there rang out one piercing scream— "You murderer!"— ere she sank down, clutching at the table. And with that, power of movement returned to me and I rushed at the man, to find myself lying on the floor bathed in sweat.

I stared round foolishly: the electric lights were still shining above me. My clothes lay by the glowing logs: the refectory table was bare. The whole thing had been a dream.

Gradually I pulled myself together, though my hands still shook with the vividness of it. And then feverishly I began to get back into my clothes. They were not quite dry, but nothing would have induced me to spend another minute in that hall. The rain had ceased: the faint light of dawn was filtering

through the windows by the front door. And ten minutes later, having left everything exactly as I had found it, I was walking down the drive. Anything to get away from that haunted spot.

For hours I wandered aimlessly, my mind still obsessed with the nightmare, until at half-past seven I found myself opposite a garage where a sleepy-eyed lad was beginning to stir himself. He called the owner, who promised to go out himself and tow in my car. And then I crossed to the inn across the road and ordered breakfast.

It still seemed impossible to me that I had not actually witnessed that crime of years ago. In fact, the more I thought about it the more did I believe that I had done so: that for some strange reason my brain had been in such a condition that I had seen it re-enacted. They say that thought impressions can be left on matter: that there are people who can walk into a house where a murder has been committed hundreds of years before and reconstruct the crime. Had that been the case with me? I am not psychic: but perhaps my brain had been so attuned on that occasion that it had been receptive.

The landlord entered as I finished my meal, and proved communicative. "Mertonbridge Hall, sir? It's about a mile away."

So I had been walking round in circles since I left.

"Funny you should ask," he continued. "Mr. Parker— the butler— has only just left. He spent the night here, owing to the rain. The present baronet, sir? He's abroad at the moment. I gather things are a bit tight: same as with all of us. And Sir Bryan has always known how to spend his money. But if you're interested, sir, and you have nothing better to do you should go up to the Hall this afternoon. It's open to visitors between three and five every Tuesday, and Mr. Parker takes parties round."

And so at three o'clock I found myself once more walking up the drive. A motor-car passed me, full of Americans: another one stood at the front door. And, majestic in his morning coat, Mr. Parker received his visitors.

Fascinated I stared round the hall. There was the chair I had sat in: there was the cabinet from which Sir James had taken the poison. And then as my eyes glanced along the line of paintings I saw the man himself. He was the third from the end, and he was wearing the clothes I had seen him in in my dream.

Mr. Parker droned on: I heard not one word till the name Sir James caught my ear. "Sir James was the third baronet, ladies and gentlemen: there you see his portrait. And it was to him that occurred a terrible tragedy in this very 'all."

He paused impressively, marshalling us with his eye. "Coming 'ome with his bride he dismissed his servants, and sat down to supper at that hidentical table you see there in the middle of the room. Now Sir Humphrey— Sir James's

father— whose portrait is hanging next to him, was a great traveller. And he had collected, in the course of his wanderings, some rare hantiques, which I am about to show you."

I was standing by the cabinet before he reached it and he looked at me suspiciously. "You see that bottle, now containing nothing more 'armful than water. But in those days it was filled with a deadly poison, manufactured by the Borgias themselves. Now what 'appened is not exactly clear, but it seems that after Sir James had pointed out the beauties of the collection to his young bride, he left her for a while to go upstairs. Suddenly a scream rang out, and dashing down he found her dead on the floor. Distracted and 'eart-broken he gazed wildly round, and found the bottle on the table, 'alf empty. What had 'appened can only be guessed at. Not wishing to frighten her he had not told her that the bottle was filled with poison. And she, taking it out— it was specially made to taste good by them Borgias— must have thought it was some rare old liqueur. Anyway, she drank some: and there on the night of her 'ome coming she died."

So that was the story he had told— and got away with.

"Months after, when this grief had lessened," he continued, "Sir James married the Lady Rosa Ferrington, and their eldest son— Sir Thomas— you see 'anging next his father."

"I suppose," said a voice, "that it was an accident. No question about its being murder, was there?" They all stared at me, and I realised the voice was mine.

"The Baronets of Mertonbridge 'All do not murder their wives," said Mr. Parker icily, regarding me as if I was something a trifle more insignificant than a cockroach.

"This h'ain't the movies, young man," remarked a stout woman with a permanent sniff, indignantly following Mr. Parker's flock.

I could have laughed aloud: if only they had known what I knew. And after a while I slipped quietly away, and left them to it, doubtless confirming Mr. Parker's opinion of my position in the scheme of things, when he failed to receive my contribution for his trouble.

The months slipped past into years and, only naturally, the memory of that dream grew dim. And then one morning I saw in the papers an announcement that brought it back to my mind.

SIR BRYAN MERTONBRIDGE, BART., AND MISS J. TOMKINS.

"An engagement is announced between Sir Bryan Mertonbridge, Bart., of Mertonbridge Hall, Sussex, and Joan, elder daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. Tomkins, of Sydney, New South Wales."

And that, too, passed out of my head until the day I lunched with John Carmichael at his club— the day that I now look back on with a sort of horrified fascination. For I knew then what was going to happen, as surely as I knew that the sun was going to set. And yet— what could I have done?

He was sitting two tables away from us, magnificently handsome, with clean-cut aquiline features, and I knew the answer before I asked.

"That's Mertonbridge," said Carmichael. "Good looking, isn't he?"

"Not as good looking as the third baronet," I said, "though astoundingly like him."

"The third baronet! A bit before our time, old boy," he laughed.

"I have seen his portrait," I said briefly. "This fellow is engaged, isn't he?"

Carmichael nodded and lowered his voice. "Australian girl. The father rolls in it: wool or something. And it'll put Mertonbridge on his feet: he's absolutely in Queer Street. Up to his neck with money-lenders. It's that, of course, that made him do it, because— between ourselves— old Tomkins is a bit wild and woolly like his sheep, and the girl ain't a scream of beauty. Very worthy family and all that: pillars of the state, don't you know, but hardly what one would expect a Mertonbridge to marry into. What's the matter, old man: you're looking quite queer?"

"Nothing." I said, and my voice sounded strange to me. "By the way, wasn't there some other girl?"

"Yes: but it's not generally known. He and Lady Janet Pulborough have been crazy about one another for years. At one time there was a sort of engagement I believe, but old Storrington hasn't a bean, and if he had his daughter would see damned little of it. So it fell through. And it was then that Mertonbridge went abroad, and hooked the wool. By Jove! old boy, you're looking devilish funny. Are you certain there's nothing wrong?"

"Quite; thanks, Jack," I said. "I'll have a cup of coffee in the smoking-room."

Yes: I knew it then. I knew it, I say— and yet what could I do? That was six months ago, and you all saw it in the papers.

DREADFUL TRAGEDY
AT MERTONBRIDGE HALL

A shocking tragedy occurred last night at Mertonbridge Hall, the Sussex seat of Sir Bryan Mertonbridge, Bart. It will be recalled that his wedding three weeks ago to Miss Joan Tomkins was one of the events of the season. It appears that the happy pair returned from their honeymoon yesterday afternoon, and that after dinner Sir Bryan, who is a noted traveller, was showing his bride some of the trophies he had collected in the course of his wanderings. Amongst them were some native darts, the tips of which are soaked in a deadly poison. He warned her particularly to be careful, and then a sudden call to the telephone

took him from the room. While he was at the instrument, a piercing scream rang out, and dashing back he found the unfortunate lady writhing on the floor. Half a minute later she died in her husband's arms.

What happened is only too clear. By some terrible mischance Lady Mertonbridge must have pricked her hand with one of the darts: the mark could be seen. And the poison, which is a native secret, did its deadly work. The sympathy of everybody will go out to the bereaved husband, who is quite prostrate with grief.

"An amazing coincidence is the fact that an almost similar tragedy occurred to one of Sir Bryan's ancestors— the third baronet.

Coincidence! All day long Mr. Parker's words have been ringing in my head— "The Baronets of Mertonbridge Hall do not murder their wives."

I wonder.

———————

9: The Crystal Cup

Bram Stoker

1847-1912

London Society, Sep 1872

Bram Stoker's debut as an author: this short story was his first fiction ever published. His most famous work, Dracula, appeared in 1897

1. The Dream-Birth

THE BLUE WATERS touch the walls of the palace; I can hear their soft, lapping wash against the marble whenever I listen. Far out at sea I can see the waves glancing in the sunlight, ever-smiling, ever-glancing, ever-sunny. Happy waves!— happy in your gladness, thrice happy that ye are free!

I rise from my work and spring up the wall till I reach the embrasure. I grasp the corner of the stonework and draw myself up till I crouch in the wide window. Sea, sea, out away as far as my vision extends. There I gaze till my eyes grow dim; and in the dimness of my eyes my spirit finds its sight. My soul flies on the wings of memory away beyond the blue, smiling sea-away beyond the glancing waves and the gleaming sails, to the land I call my home. As the minutes roll by, my actual eyesight seems to be restored, and I look round me in my old birth-house. The rude simplicity of the dwelling comes back to me as something new. There I see my old books and manuscripts and pictures, and there, away on their old shelves, high up above the door, I see my first rude efforts in art.

How poor they seem to me now! And yet, were I free, I would not give the smallest of them for all I now possess. Possess? How I dream.

The dream calls me back to waking life. I spring down from my window-seat and work away frantically, for every line I draw on paper, every new form that springs on the plaster, brings me nearer freedom. I will make a vase whose beauty will put to shame the glorious works of Greece in her golden prime! Surely a love like mine and a hope like mine must in time make some form of beauty spring to life! When He beholds it he will exclaim with rapture, and will order my instant freedom. I can forget my hate, and the deep debt of revenge which I owe him when I think of liberty— even from his hands. Ah! then on the wings of the morning shall I fly beyond the sea to my home-her home— and clasp her to my arms, never more to be separated!

But, oh Spirit of Day! if she should be— No, no, I cannot think of it, or I shall go mad. Oh Time, Time! maker and destroyer of men's fortunes, why hasten so fast for others whilst thou laggest so slowly for me? Even now my home may have become desolate, and she— my bride of an hour— may sleep calmly in

the cold earth. Oh this suspense will drive me mad! Work, work! Freedom is before me; Aurora is the reward of my labour!

So I rush to my work; but to my brain and hand, heated alike, no fire or no strength descends. Half mad with despair, I beat myself against the walls of my prison, and then climb into the embrasure, and once more gaze upon the ocean, but find there no hope. And so I stay till night, casting its pall of blackness over nature, puts the possibility of effort away from me for yet another day.

So my days go on, and grow to weeks and months. So will they grow to years, should life so long remain an unwelcome guest within me; for what is man without hope? and is not hope nigh dead within this weary breast?

LAST NIGHT, in my dreams, there came, like an inspiration from the Day-Spirit, a design for my vase.

All day my yearning for freedom— for Aurora, or news of her— had increased tenfold, and my heart and brain were on fire. Madly I beat myself, like a caged bird, against my prison-bars. Madly I leaped to my window-seat, and gazed with bursting eyeballs out on the free, open sea. And there I sat till my passion had worn itself out; and then I slept, and dreamed of thee, Aurora— of thee and freedom. In my ears I heard again the old song we used to sing together, when as children we wandered on the beach; when, as lovers, we saw the sun sink in the ocean, and I would see its glory doubled as it shone in thine eyes, and was mellowed against thy cheek; and when, as my bride, you clung to me as my arms went round you on that desert tongue of land whence rushed that band of sea-robbers that tore me away. Oh! how my heart curses those men— not men, but fiends! But one solitary gleam of joy remains from that dread encounter,— that my struggle stayed those hell-hounds, and that, ere I was stricken down, this right hand sent one of them to his home. My spirit rises as I think of that blow that saved thee from a life worse than death. With the thought I feel my cheeks burning, and my forehead swelling with mighty veins. My eyes burn, and I rush wildly round my prison-house, 'Oh! for one of my enemies, that I might dash out his brains against these marble walls, and trample his heart out as he lay before me!' These walls would spare him not. They are pitiless, alas! I know too well. 'Oh, cruel mockery of kindness, to make a palace a prison, and to taunt a captive's aching heart with forms of beauty and sculptured marble!' Wondrous, indeed, are these sculptured walls! Men call them passing fair; but oh, Aurora! with thy beauty ever before my eyes, what form that men call lovely can be fair to me? Like him who gazes sun-wards, and then sees no light on earth, from the glory that dyes his iris, so

thy beauty or its memory has turned the fairest things of earth to blackness and deformity.

In my dream last night, when in my ears came softly, like music stealing across the waters from afar, the old song we used to sing together, then to my brain, like a ray of light, came an idea whose grandeur for a moment struck me dumb. Before my eyes grew a vase of such beauty that I knew my hope was born to life, and that the Great Spirit had placed my foot on the ladder that leads from this my palace-dungeon to freedom and to thee. Today I have got a block of crystal— for only in such pellucid substance can I body forth my dream— and have commenced my work.

I found at first that my hand had lost its cunning, and I was beginning to despair, when, like the memory of a dream, there came back in my ears the strains of the old song. I sang it softly to myself, and as I did so I grew calmer; but oh! how differently the song sounded to me when thy voice, Aurora, rose not in unison with my own! But what avails pining? To work! To work! Every touch of my chisel will bring me nearer thee.

MY VASE is daily growing nearer to completion. I sing as I work, and my constant song is the one I love so well. I can hear the echo of my voice in the vase; and as I end, the wailing song note is prolonged in sweet, sad music in the crystal cup. I listen, ear down, and sometimes I weep as I listen, so sadly comes the echo to my song. Imperfect though it be, my voice makes sweet music, and its echo in the cup guides my hand towards perfection as I work. Would that thy voice rose and fell with mine, Aurora, and then the world would behold a vase of such beauty as never before woke up the slumbering fires of mans love for what is fair; for if I do such work in sadness, imperfect as I am in my solitude and sorrow, what would I do in joy, perfect when with thee? I know that my work is good as an artist, and I feel that it is as a man; and the cup itself, as it daily grows in beauty, gives back a clearer echo. Oh! if I worked in joy how gladly would it give back our voices! Then would we hear an echo and music such as mortals seldom hear; but now the echo, like my song, seems imperfect. I grow daily weaker; but still I work on— work with my whole soul— for am I not working for freedom and for thee?

MY WORK is nearly done. Day by day, hour by hour, the vase grows more finished. Ever clearer comes the echo whilst I sing; ever softer, ever more sad and heart-rending comes the echo of the wail at the end of the song. Day by day I grow weaker and weaker; still I work on with all my soul. At night the thought comes to me, whilst I think of thee, that I will never see thee more—

that I breathe out my life into the crystal cup, and that it will last there when I am gone.

So beautiful has it become, so much do I love it, that I could gladly die to be maker of such a work, were it not for thee— for my love for thee, and my hope of thee, and my fear for thee, and my anguish for thy grief when thou knowest I am gone.

MY WORK requires but few more touches. My life is slowly ebbing away, and I feel that with my last touch my life will pass out for ever into the cup. Till that touch is given I must not die— I will not die. My hate has passed away. So great are my wrongs that revenge of mine would be too small a compensation for my woe. I leave revenge to a juster and a mightier than I. Thee, oh Aurora, I will await in the land of flowers, where thou and I will wander, never more to part, never more! Ah, never more! Farewell, Aurora— Aurora— Aurora!

2. The Feast Of Beauty

THE FEAST OF BEAUTY approaches rapidly, yet hardly so fast as my royal master wishes. He seems to have no other thought than to have this feast greater and better than any ever held before. Five summers ago his Feast of Beauty was nobler than all held in his sires reign together; yet scarcely was it over, and the rewards given to the victors, when he conceived the giant project whose success is to be tested when the moon reaches her full. It was boldly chosen and boldly done; chosen and done as boldly as the project of a monarch should be. But still I cannot think that it will end well. This yearning after completeness must be unsatisfied in the end— this desire that makes a monarch fling his kingly justice to the winds, and strive to reach his Mecca over a desert of blighted hopes and lost lives. But hush! I must not dare to think ill of my master or his deeds; and besides, walls have ears. I must leave alone these dangerous topics, and confine my thoughts within proper bounds.

The moon is waxing quickly, and with its fulness comes the Feast of Beauty, whose success as a whole rests almost solely on my watchfulness and care; for if the ruler of the feast should fail in his duty, who could fill the void? Let me see what arts are represented, and what works compete. All the arts will have trophies: poetry in its various forms, and prose-writing; sculpture with carving in various metals, and glass, and wood, and ivory, and engraving gems, and setting jewels; painting on canvas, and glass, and wood, and stone and metal; music, vocal and instrumental; and dancing. If that woman will but sing, we will have a real triumph of music; but she appears sickly too. All our best artists

either get ill or die, although we promise them freedom or rewards or both if they succeed.

Surely never yet was a Feast of Beauty so fair or so richly dowered as this which the full moon shall behold and hear; but ah! the crowning glory of the feast will be the crystal cup. Never yet have these eyes beheld such a form of beauty, such a wondrous mingling of substance and light. Surely some magic power must have helped to draw such loveliness from a cold block of crystal. I must be careful that no harm happens the vase. To-day when I touched it, it gave forth such a ringing sound that my heart jumped with fear lest it should sustain any injury. Henceforth, till I deliver it up to my master, no hand but my own shall touch it lest any harm should happen to it.

Strange story has that cup. Born to life in the cell of a captive torn from his artist home beyond the sea, to enhance the splendour of a feast by his labour— seen at work by spies, and traced and followed till a chance— cruel chance for him— gave him into the hands of the emissaries of my master. He too, poor moth, fluttered about the flame: the name of freedom spurred him on to exertion till he wore away his life. The beauty of that cup was dearly bought for him. Many a man would forget his captivity whilst he worked at such a piece of loveliness; but he appeared to have some sorrow at his heart, some sorrow so great that it quenched his pride.

How he used to rave at first! How he used to rush about his chamber, and then climb into the embrasure of his window, and gaze out away over the sea! Poor captive! perhaps over the sea some one waited for his coming who was dearer to him than many cups, even many cups as beautiful as this, if such could be on earth.... Well, well, we must all die soon or late, and who dies first escapes the more sorrow, perhaps, who knows? How, when he had commenced the cup, he used to sing all day long, from the moment the sun shot its first fiery arrow into the retreating hosts of night-clouds, till the shades of evening advancing drove the lingering sunbeams into the west— and always the same song!

How he used to sing, all alone! Yet sometimes I could almost imagine I heard not one voice from his chamber, but two.... No more will it echo again from the wall of a dungeon, or from a hillside in free air. No more will his eyes behold the beauty of his crystal cup.

It was well he lived to finish it. Often and often have I trembled to think of his death, as I saw him day by day grow weaker as he worked at the unfinished vase. Must his eyes never more behold the beauty that was born of his soul? Oh, never more! Oh Death, grim King of Terrors, how mighty is thy sceptre! All-powerful is the wave of thy hand that summons us in turn to thy kingdom away beyond the poles!

Would that thou, poor captive, hadst lived to behold thy triumph, for victory will be thine at the Feast of Beauty such as man never before achieved. Then thou mightst have heard the shout that hails the victor in the contest, and the plaudits that greet him as he passes out, a free man, through the palace gates. But now thy cup will come to light amid the smiles of beauty and rank and power, whilst thou liest there in thy lonely chamber, cold as the marble of its walls.

And, after all, the feast will be imperfect, since the victors cannot all be crowned. I must ask my master's direction as to how a blank place of a competitor, should he prove a victor, is to be filled up. So late? I must see him ere the noontide hour of rest be past.

GREAT SPIRIT! how I trembled as my master answered my question!

I found him in his chamber, as usual in the noontide. He was lying on his couch disrobed, half-sleeping; and the drowsy zephyr, scented with rich odours from the garden, wafted through the windows at either side by the fans, lulled him to complete repose. The darkened chamber was cool and silent. From the vestibule came the murmuring of many fountains, and the pleasant splash of falling waters. 'Oh, happy,' said I, in my heart, 'oh, happy great King, that has such pleasures to enjoy!' The breeze from the fans swept over the strings of the AEolian harps, and a sweet, confused, happy melody arose like the murmuring of children's voices singing afar off in the valleys, and floating on the wind.

As I entered the chamber softly, with muffled foot-fall and pent-in breath, I felt a kind of awe stealing over me. To me who was born and have dwelt all my life within the precincts of the court— to me who talk daily with my royal master, and take his minutest directions as to the coming feast— to me who had all my life looked up to my king as to a spirit, and had venerated him as more than mortal— came a feeling of almost horror; for my master looked then, in his quiet chamber, half-sleeping amid the drowsy music of the harps and fountains, more like a common man than a God. As the thought came to me I shuddered in affright, for it seemed to me that I had been guilty of sacrilege. So much had my veneration for my royal master become a part of my nature, that but to think of him as another man seemed like the anarchy of my own soul.

I came beside the couch, and watched him in silence. He seemed to be half-listening to the fitful music; and as the melody swelled and died away his chest rose and fell as he breathed in unison with the sound.

After a moment or two he appeared to become conscious of the presence of some one in the room, although by no motion of his face could I see that he

heard any sound, and his eyes were shut. He opened his eyes, and, seeing me, asked, 'Was all right about the Feast of Beauty?' for that is the subject ever nearest to his thoughts. I answered that all was well, but that I had come to ask his royal pleasure as to how a vacant place amongst the competitors was to be filled up. He asked, 'How vacant?' and on my telling him, 'from death,' he asked again, quickly, 'Was the work finished?' When I told him that it was, he lay back again on his couch with a sigh of relief, for he had half arisen in his anxiety as he asked the question. Then he said, after a minute, 'All the competitors must be present at the feast.' 'All?' said I. 'All,' he answered again, 'alive or dead; for the old custom must be preserved, and the victors crowned.' He stayed still for a minute more, and then said, slowly, 'Victors or martyrs.' And I could see that the kingly spirit was coming back to him.

Again he went on. 'This will be my last Feast of Beauty; and all the captives shall be set free. Too much sorrow has sprung already from my ambition. Too much injustice has soiled the name of king.'

He said no more, but lay still and closed his eyes. I could see by the working of his hands and the heaving of his chest that some violent emotion troubled him, and the thought arose, 'He is a man, but he is yet a king; and, though a king as he is, still happiness is not for him. Great Spirit of Justice! thou metest out his pleasures and his woes to man, to king and slave alike! Thou lovest best to whom thou givest peace!'

Gradually my master grew more calm, and at length sunk into a gentle slumber; but even in his sleep he breathed in unison with the swelling murmur of the harps.

'To each is given,' said I gently, 'something in common with the world of actual things. Thy life, oh King, is bound by chains of sympathy to the voice of Truth, which is Music! Tremble, lest in the presence of a master-strain thou shouldst feel thy littleness, and die!' and I softly left the room.

3. The Story of the Moonbeam

SLOWLY I creep along the bosom of the waters.

Sometimes I look back as I rise upon a billow, and see behind me many of my kin sitting each upon a wave-summit as upon a throne. So I go on for long, a power that I wist not forcing me onward, without will or purpose of mine.

At length, as I rise upon a mimic wave, I see afar a hazy light that springs from a vast palace, through whose countless windows flame lamps and torches. But at the first view, as if my coming had been the signal, the lights disappear in an instant.

Impatiently I await what may happen; and as I rise with each heart-beat of the sea, I look forward to where the torches had gleamed. Can it be a deed of darkness that shuns the light?

THE TIME has come when I can behold the palace without waiting to mount upon the waves. It is built of white marble, and rises steep from the brine. Its sea-front is glorious with columns and statues; and from the portals the marble steps sweep down, broad and wide to the waters, and below them, down as deep as I can see.

No sound is heard, no light is seen. A solemn silence abounds, a perfect calm.

Slowly I climb the palace walls, my brethren following as soldiers up a breach. I slide along the roofs, and as I look behind me walls and roofs are glistening as with silver. At length I meet with something smooth and hard and translucent; but through it I pass and enter a vast hall, where for an instant I hang in mid-air and wonder.

My coming has been the signal for such a burst of harmony as brings back to my memory the music of the spheres as they rush through space; and in the full-swelling anthem of welcome I feel that I am indeed a sun-spirit, a child of light, and that this is homage to my master.

I look upon the face of a great monarch, who sits at the head of a banquet-table. He has turned his head upwards and backwards, and looks as if he had been awaiting my approach. He rises and fronts me with the ringing out of the welcome-song, and all the others in the great hall turn towards me as well. I can see their eyes gleaming. Down along the immense table, laden with plate and glass and flowers, they stand holding each a cup of ruby wine, with which they pledge the monarch when the song is ended, as they drink success to him and to the 'Feast of Beauty.'

I survey the hall. An immense chamber, with marble walls covered with bas-reliefs and frescoes and sculptured figures, and panelled by great columns that rise along the surface and support a dome-ceiling painted wondrously; in its centre the glass lantern by which I entered.

On the walls are hung pictures of various forms and sizes, and down the centre of the table stretches a raised platform on which are placed works of art of various kinds.

At one side of the hall is a dais on which sit persons of both sexes with noble faces and lordly brows, but all wearing the same expression— care tempered by hope. All these hold scrolls in their hands.

At the other side of the hall is a similar dais, on which sit others fairer to earthly view, less spiritual and more marked by surface-passion. They hold

music-scores. All these look more joyous than those on the other platform, all save one, a woman, who sits with downcast face and dejected mien, as of one without hope. As my light falls at her feet she looks up, and I feel happy. The sympathy between us has called a faint gleam of hope to cheer that poor pale face.

Many are the forms of art that rise above the banquet-table, and all are lovely to behold. I look on all with pleasure one by one, till I see the last of them at the end of the table away from the monarch, and then all the others seem as nothing to me. What is this that makes other forms of beauty seem as nought when compared with it, when brought within the radius of its lustre? A crystal cup, wrought with such wondrous skill that light seems to lose its individual glory as it shines upon it and is merged in its beauty. '0h Universal Mother, let me enter there. Let my life be merged in its beauty, and no more will I regret my sun-strength hidden deep in the chasms of my moon-mother. Let me live there and perish there, and I will be joyous whilst it lasts, and content to pass into the great vortex of nothingness to be born again when the glory of the cup has fled.'

Can it be that my wish is granted, that I have entered the cup and become a part of its beauty? 'Great Mother, I thank thee.'

Has the cup life? or is it merely its wondrous perfectness that makes it tremble, like a beating heart, in unison with the ebb and flow, the great wave-pulse of nature? To me it feels as if it had life.

I look through the crystal walls and see at the end of the table, isolated from all others, the figure of a man seated. Are those cords that bind his limbs? How suits that crown of laurel those wide, dim eyes, and that pallid hue? It is passing strange. This Feast of Beauty holds some dread secrets, and sees some wondrous sights.

I hear a voice of strange, rich sweetness, yet wavering— the voice of one almost a king by nature. He is standing up; I see him through my palace-wall. He calls a name and sits down again.

Again I hear a voice from the platform of scrolls, the Throne of Brows; and again I look and behold a man who stands trembling yet flushed, as though the morning light shone bright upon his soul. He reads in cadenced measure a song in praise of my moon-mother, the Feast of Beauty, and the king. As he speaks, he trembles no more, but seems inspired, and his voice rises to a tone of power and grandeur, and rings back from walls and dome. I hear his words distinctly, though saddened in tone, in the echo from my crystal home. He concludes and sits down, half-fainting, amid a whirlwind of applause, every note, every beat of which is echoed as the words had been.

Again the monarch rises and calls 'Aurora,' that she may sing for freedom. The name echoes in the cup with a sweet, sad sound. So sad, so despairing seems the echo, that the hall seems to darken and the scene to grow dim.

'Can a sun-spirit mourn, or a crystal vessel weep?'

She, the dejected one, rises from her seat on the Throne of Sound, and all eyes turn upon her save those of the pale one, laurel-crowned. Thrice she essays to begin, and thrice nought comes from her lips but a dry, husky sigh, till an old man who has been moving round the hall settling all things, cries out, in fear lest she should fail, 'Freedom!'

The word is re-echoed from the cup. She hears the sound, turns towards it and begins.

Oh, the melody of that voice! And yet it is not perfect alone; for after the first note comes an echo from the cup that swells in unison with the voice, and the two sounds together, seem as if one strain came ringing sweet from the lips of the All-Father himself. So sweet it is, that all throughout the hall sit spell-bound, and scarcely dare to breathe.

In the pause after the first verses of the song, I hear the voice of the old man speaking to a comrade, but his words are unheard by any other, 'Look at the king. His spirit seems lost in a trance of melody. Ah! I fear me some evil: the nearer the music approaches to perfection the more rapt he becomes. I dread lest a perfect note shall prove his death-call.' His voice dies away as the singer commences the last verse.

Sad and plaintive is the song; full of feeling and tender love, but love overshadowed by grief and despair. As it goes on the voice of the singer grows sweeter and more thrilling, more real; and the cup, my crystal time-home, vibrates more and more as it gives back the echo. The monarch looks like one entranced, and no movement is within the hall.... The song dies away in a wild wail that seems to tear the heart of the singer in twain; and the cup vibrates still more as it gives back the echo. As the note, long-swelling, reaches its highest, the cup, the Crystal Cup, my wondrous home, the gift of the All-Father, shivers into millions of atoms, and passes away.

Ere I am lost in the great vortex I see the singer throw up her arms and fall, freed at last, and the King sitting, glory-faced, but pallid with the hue of Death.

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10: The Other Twin

Edwin Pugh

1874-1930

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IT WAS the hour of siesta. Santa Plaza lay blistering, sweltering, in the white-hot glare of the noontide sun. The dust lay thick on the roads and terraces, the copings and the roofs of the houses, like untrodden snow. The sea shone like a shield of brass reflecting a brassy sky. There was not the least sign of movement anywhere.

Then Franker, the Englishman, came limping along the Lido, sat down in the shadow of the old sea-wall, and examined with grave solicitude a swollen and blistered foot swathed in filthy, blood-stained rags.

This Franker had once been a well-known figure in all the ports of those far-off southern seas. It was whispered that in the long ago he had been a gentleman. Now he was just the sport of circumstance, a jack of all trades, so long as they were indifferent honest; sailorman, stock-rider, storekeeper, croupier, crimp, anything that happened along in his hour of need. But lately he had disappeared from his old haunts, and it was unlikely that any of his old acquaintances would have recognised in that ragged and gaunt, unwashed and black-bearded wastrel on the beach the spruce adventurer of former days.

He had the look of a hunted creature. There was fear in his eyes. Even as he sat there nursing his aching foot, parched and hungry, haggard and weary, his head was perpetually turning from side to side, and ever and again he looked over his shoulder, to left and right, as if he were in dread expectation that at any moment some enemy might creep upon him unawares. And, indeed, he was in parlous case. For he had killed a man, not in itself an exceptional incident of course— only in this instance the man was one of twins, and the other twin had vowed a vendetta against him.

These twins were named Bibi and Bobo, and the extraordinary likeness between them was accentuated by their habit of always dressing alike, talking alike, thinking alike. There were some who said that they could distinguish one twin from the other, but these were foolish, vainglorious men. The thing was manifestly impossible. Even Franker did not know whether it was Bibi or Bobo he had killed.

It happened in a gambling den in Suranim, up country. They were playing the childish game of boule, and some silly dispute had arisen. Franker had lost his temper, and knocked one of the twins down. For once in a way the other twin had not been present, or most assuredly Franker would have been chived in the back before he could turn round. As it was, he saw his fallen adversary rise slowly, slowly draw a red smear across his face with the back of his hand,

and then quicken on a sudden into antic activity. There was the flash of a knife. Franker dodged. The other men stood back to watch the fun— not to see fair play. Fair play was a jewel of little value in the estimation of that crew. A moment Franker hesitated, then whipped out his gun and fired point-blank at the twin. He dropped dead. Before the smoke had cleared away or the echoes of the report had subsided into stillness, Franker had left the gambling-house and was running for his life into the wilderness.

There, for three days, he lost himself. That was his idea: to lose himself. He wanted to be lost, utterly lost to the world. For he knew that so long as the other twin lived his own chances of living were reduced to the last recurring decimal. Bibi or Bobo— whichever it was— would never rest until he had wrought vengeance on his brother's murderer. Though it wasn't a murder, of course, but a duel in which each had taken the same risk of death. If Franker had not killed Bibi or Bobo, Bibi or Bobo would have killed him. He wished he knew which of the twins it was he had killed. So idiotic not to know. So confusing. It made your head ache, wondering. And in your sleep you dreamed of horrible, two-headed monsters coming at you crabwise, with arms and legs all round them.

On the third day of his sojourn in the wilderness the other twin had very nearly caught him napping. He had sunk down exhausted in a sandy hollow fringed with palms, and for a moment closed his eyes. And in that moment the redness of his lowered eyelids had been suddenly clouded by a shadow. In an instant he was on his feet, wide awake again. And there was the figure of the other twin in the act of flinging itself upon him. He fired an aimless shot at that black apparition, then bolted.

And all that day and all that night he had wound and wound an intorted course through virgin forest, hoping thus to shake off his pursuer. And all that day and all that night he had known that his pursuer followed him, shadowed him, stalked him, with a merciless delight in that persecution born of an insatiate hate.

Next day Franker, having doubled on his tracks, found himself on a quayside, and had shipped as a forecastle hand on an old iron hooker bound for the Caribs with a mixed cargo. He never knew or cared what that mixed cargo consisted of. He was too busy sleeping, when he wasn't too sore from being kicked into wakefulness, to bother about trivial details. He could have left the ship at the first of the Caribs, but an island is a prison, and his yearning was for wide free spaces where a man can at least get a run for his money. So he had returned on the hooker, and had been paid off with the lurid compliments of the purser, and was once more adrift.

But the story of his wanderings and adventures over the greater part of the southern hemisphere would fill many books. Months passed, a year passed, two years, and all the while Franker was dogged by the avenger. Ever and again, just when he thought that he had at last shaken off that deadly pursuit, the other twin turned up again. And gradually it was borne in upon him that the other twin might have killed him long since had he wished. He had had numberless opportunities, and had not taken them. This puzzled Franker a bit, and then he hit upon the truth. There is more joy in the hunting than in the killing. There is more cat-like satisfaction in the slow torture of its victim than in the crunching up of its dead bones. He began to think of the other twin as a cat-like creature, exercising a cruelty of the mind far more subtle and devilish than any mere crude cruelty of tooth and claw. When the avenger tired of the sport, then he would strike. And not till then. Meanwhile, Franker was condemned to a daily round of unremitting vigilance, ceaseless watchfulness, unending apprehension.

He had been a big man, strong and fearless, with bold eyes and the voice of a bull. Now he had become a shuffling, whimpering, trembling thing of nerves and tears, who dared look no one in the face lest it should be the face of his enemy. In the old days, with no other resources than his health and vigour, bodily and mental, he had used to take chances with an overbearing recklessness, and thrust and curse his way through the mob of other roustabouts like unto himself, with whom he had fought for the means of existence. And he had been— he realised that now— quite happy then. There were times when he told himself that he would stand fast against his pursuer, force him into the open, then turn upon him and rend him, and so make an end of this long-drawn-out agony. But when the moment came his wits fled, he was distraught and afraid, he could think only of flight.

It was now a full fortnight since he had seen Bibi— or Bobo. But there had been other fortnights during which he had not seen him. And always, inevitably, he had reappeared. So would he reappear again.

Franker gazed out from the shadow of the old seawall across the glittering, limitless sea, and wished that he might drown himself in its depths. But he was not yet quite mad enough for that. Though life had become as a nightmare to him, and death as the awakening to the cool, calm peace of dawn; though life offered nothing but torment, and death offered surcease of pain, he still clung to life. It was in the nature of his being to cling to life. He was not of the stuff that gives in.

But if only he could rest awhile! If only he could lie still in some sheltered place, safe from his enemy, and thus regain his old control over his faculties, recuperate his strength!

At the western end of the Lido, where the coast swept in a wide curve to the lighthouse and the harbour, there was a long white wall. And as he remembered what that wall enclosed, what it signified, Franker had an inspiration. His face was suddenly irradiated. He laughed aloud. What a fool!— God in Heaven!— what a fool he had been not to think of that before! He rose on tremulous legs and began to shamble along the beach towards that far-off haven of refuge.

The prison official, in his gaudy livery of gold and scarlet and his immense cocked hat, conducted him to the chief inspector's office.

"Yes?"

Franker desired to be sworn. He had a crime to confess: it had troubled his conscience for years.

"Yes?"

An affair of opium smuggling, ship's papers forged, and customs burked. It was a true story enough, only Franker himself had not been implicated in it. The police had been so long on the track of that crime they had given it up as hopeless. And now here there was the chief criminal, a fine fat bird, dropping into the net of his own free will. The chief inspector rubbed his dry palms together as he thought of the luscious report he would send to the magistracy.

Then he committed Franker to the custody of another prison official, less gaudy than the first, and Franker was led away to the cell.

This was a big, bare, barn-like place of stone, that sometimes contained as many as twenty prisoners huddled indiscriminately together. But just now crime was slack. Franker had the whole cell to himself.

As the gaoler slammed the door on him he fell on his knees with a weeping face, and offered up thanks for this blessed refuge, this safe harbour of retreat from his relentless enemy, this sanctuary. Here, at last, he was free from the fear of pursuit. Here, during the year or two of his imprisonment, he could rest and sleep, rest his mind and find his sleep that sweet relief from the tortures of the last two years which would gradually restore him again to health and sanity.

Even as he prayed he toppled down face forward and lay there quite still, breathing softly, evenly, in peaceful slumber.

The light was fading, there was a red stain of sunset on the wall when he awoke. It was a rattling and clanging of bolts and chains that had roused him. He sat up, blinking stupidly, at first not knowing where he was. Then, as he remembered, he shed tears of joy again, and clasped his hands together in an access of delight.

The sounds drew nearer. The heavy, barred door of the prison chamber was flung open. He saw the burly figure of a gaoler over-shadowing another

smaller figure that seemed to be precipitated from behind into the misty vastness of the cell. It fell head-long at Franker's feet, and lay there stirring feebly like a wounded beetle.

Franker watched his writhings ... and a slow, cold horror grew upon him.

His fellow-prisoner raised himself on all fours, then sat up and squatted there, cross-legged, like a Chinese bonze.

It was Bibi— or Bobo.

Franker uttered a cry.

"And hast thou found me, O mine enemy!"

The other twin had leapt to his feet. He shrank back, crouching, snarling, spitting like a cat. The moment for the happy dispatch was come at last. He drew his knife and fingered its keen blade lovingly, then came mincing on tiptoe towards Franker.

As Franker's hands closed round his throat he drove the blade deep into Franker's breast.

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11: The Thing That Wept

Charles Fulton Oursler

1893-1952

The Thrill Book, April 1919

Better known as Fulton Oursler, this author wrote his detective novels as "Anthony Abbott".

WHEN Joe Blunt was apprenticed to his Uncle Jacob, who was an undertaker, he had never seen a corpse.

This is not so surprising, when it is considered that Joe was bom on a farm and had never been more than ten miles away from it since he was bom. There were many other things Joe had never seen besides a corpse. He had never been to a movingpicture show, did not know how to talk through a telephone, and did not believe in air planes. His folks were old-fashioned and did not hold to giving a boy too much rope. So on the farm he remained until he was sixteen years old and too lazy for plowing.

Then his father bundled him on the train, and Jacob Blunt, the uncle and undertaker, met him when he got off at the city station. On his way to the embalming establishment, which was far up in the residential district, Uncle Jacob pointed out a thousand wonders to the pop-eyed Joe.

They arrived at Uncle Jacob's funeral parlors about noon. In the dining room, which immediately adoined the chapel, they ate a cold meal, and then Uncle Jacob got down to business.

He explained carefully to Joe the nature and scope of the undertaking profession. A point on which he laid particular emphasis was that it was a sure business; everybody had to die at some time or other, and the mortician had a first mortgage on the insurance. He winked an eye as he hinted that the profits were high. He sketched, with some detail, the process of embalming, so that Joe would have an idea of the land of work he was to do. Then he took Joe into a darkened room at the rear and showed him a body.

When Joe recovered consciousness Uncle Jacob remonstrated with him gravely on his weakness, but seemed reassured when Joe confessed it was his first sight of a dead man. The uncle then continued with bis elucidation of first principles. He took Joe into the front office, where he had an elegant coffin near the window, flanked with palms.

He showed Joe the telephone, and carefully impressed on him what he was to do when the telephone rang in Uncle Jacob's absence. He was to take the name of the person calling and the address, and write it on a pad. Through the remainder of the afternoon Joe answered telephone calls, and finally Uncle Jacob said he would do. Then they had supper.

Immediately after the meal Uncle Jacob announced that be was going out and would leave Joe in charge for an hour or so. Joe requested that he lock the door on the dead man before he left, but Uncle Jacob only gave him a reproachful scowl, and, with parting cautions and instructions, went out.

Joe drew his chair as near the front door as he could. In all undertaking parlors the light is burned low as a business principle. Joe wished it were brighter. After a while the ticking of the desk clock grew monotonous. The cracking of the furniture made Joe jump and start. He fidgeted in his chair; he whistled and stopped in the middle of the tune; he got up and walked around the office. Every second or so he glanced at the half-open door in the rear. Finally, with a burst of bravado, he walked to the door and looked in. He got a second glimpse of the body in there, and with a howl sprang back to his post at the door.

Just then the telephone rang. Still shaking, Joe forced himself to answer it, and blundered through the conversation desperately. When it was over he set the receiver on the desk with a gasp. Apprehensively he gazed over his shoulder. He was convinced the dead man there might come out after him at any moment. The silence was startling.

A low sound reached Joe's ear. It was soft, like the purring of a cat. He glanced rapidly around, trying to find from where it came. With a bound he dropped to the floor, looking under the chairs, under the desk, under the coffin, for the cat. The soft, purring sound continued. But he saw no cat Then, with a sinking of the heart, he remembered a casual remark of Uncle Jacob— that undertakers never kept cats; they wouldn't do around dead people.

Dizzily Joe rose to his feet. The purring noise was growing louder. It rose to a high-pitched whine, and it twisted and worried itself as if it were some lost thing in pain. Joe could stand it no longer. He scrambled awkwardly to the door, flung it open, and rushed out into the street. He almost fell into the arms of a policeman.

"What's a matter?" demanded the offended guard¬ ian of the peace.

"Somethin'— in thereI" cried Joe. "It's ha'nted!"

"Get out of here!" snapped the policeman. "Don't try to kid me!"

He brushed past the panting Joe and strode in the door. For a moment he paused, then walked up to the desk. He rearranged something, and then reappeared, glowering, in the doorway.

"Say, you!" he growled. "Whadidja leave yer receiver off the hook fer? That was Central jazzing yer buzzer— ya poor fish!"

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12: At Dead Dingo

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

The Australian Star (Sydney) 25 Oct 1899

Henry Lawson was one of the writers who found rich material in the people of the Australian "bush". And here I find the word "deener", slang meaning a shilling, which I have always been told derives from Australian soldiers in World War 1's middle eastern front, from "dinar" because the two coins were much the same size and value. But here we have it being used a decade and a half earlier, already well established in Australia...

IT WAS BLAZING hot outside and smothering hot inside the weather-board and iron shanty at Dead Dingo, a place on the Cleared Road, where there was a pub. and a police-station, and which was sometimes called 'Roasted', and other times 'Potted Dingo'— nicknames suggested by the everlasting drought and the vicinity of the one-pub township of Tinned Dog.

From the front verandah the scene was straight-cleared road, running right and left to Out-Back, and to Bourke (and ankle-deep in the red sand dust for perhaps a hundred miles); the rest blue-grey bush, dust, and the heat-wave blazing across every object.

There were only four in the bar-room, though it was New Year's Day. There weren't many more in the county. The girl sat behind the bar— the coolest place in the shanty— reading 'Deadwood Dick'. On a worn and torn and battered horse-hair sofa, which had seen cooler places and better days, lay an awful and healthy example, a bearded swagman, with his arms twisted over his head and his face to the wall, sleeping off the death of the dead drunk. Bill and Jim— shearer and rouseabout— sat at a table playing cards. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and they had been gambling since nine— and the greater part of the night before— so they were, probably, in a worse condition morally (and perhaps physically) than the drunken swagman on the sofa.

Close under the bar, in a dangerous place for his legs and tail, lay a sheep-dog with a chain attached to his collar and wound round his neck.

Presently a thump on the table, and Bill, unlucky gambler, rose with an oath that would have been savage if it hadn't been drawled.

'Stumped?' inquired Jim.

'Not a blanky, lurid deener!' drawled Bill.

Jim drew his reluctant hands from the cards, his eyes went slowly and hopelessly round the room and out the door. There was something in the eyes of both, except when on the card-table, of the look of a man waking in a strange place.

'Got anything?' asked Jim, fingering the cards again.

Bill sucked in his cheeks, collecting the saliva with difficulty, and spat out on to the verandah floor.

'That's all I got,' he drawled. 'It's gone now.'

Jim leaned back in his chair, twisted, yawned, and caught sight of the dog.

'That there dog yours?' he asked, brightening.

They had evidently been strangers the day before, or as strange to each other as Bushmen can be.

Bill scratched behind his ear, and blinked at the dog. The dog woke suddenly to a flea fact.

'Yes,' drawled Bill, 'he's mine.'

'Well, I'm going Out-Back, and I want a dog,' said Jim, gathering the cards briskly. 'Half a quid agin the dog?'

'Half a quid be——!' drawled Bill. 'Call it a quid?'

'Half a blanky quid!'

'A gory, lurid quid!' drawled Bill desperately, and he stooped over his swag.

But Jim's hands were itching in a ghastly way over the cards.

'Alright. Call it a —— quid.'

The drunkard on the sofa stirred, showed signs of waking, but died again. Remember this, it might come in useful.

Bill sat down to the table once more.

Jim rose first, winner of the dog. He stretched, yawned 'Ah, well!' and shouted drinks. Then he shouldered his swag, stirred the dog up with his foot, unwound the chain, said 'Ah, well— so long!' and drifted out and along the road toward Out-Back, the dog following with head and tail down.

Bill scored another drink on account of girl-pity for bad luck, shouldered his swag, said, 'So long, Mary!' and drifted out and along the road towards Tinned Dog, on the Bourke side.

A LONG, DROWSY, half hour passed— the sort of half hour that is as long as an hour in the places where days are as long as years, and years hold about as much as days do in other places.

The man on the sofa woke with a start, and looked scared and wild for a moment; then he brought his dusty broken boots to the floor, rested his elbows on his knees, took his unfortunate head between his hands, and came back to life gradually.

He lifted his head, looked at the girl across the top of the bar, and formed with his lips, rather than spoke, the words—

'Put up a drink?' *****

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** 'Chalk it up'.*

She shook her head tightly and went on reading.

He staggered up, and, leaning on the bar, made desperate distress signals with hand, eyes, and mouth.

'No!' she snapped. 'I means no when I says no! You've had too many last drinks already, and the boss says you ain't to have another. If you swear again, or bother me, I'll call him.'

He hung sullenly on the counter for a while, then lurched to his swag, and shouldered it hopelessly and wearily. Then he blinked round, whistled, waited a moment, went on to the front verandah, peered round, through the heat, with bloodshot eyes, and whistled again. He turned and started through to the back-door.

'What the devil do you want now?' demanded the girl, interrupted in her reading for the third time by him. 'Stampin' all over the house. You can't go through there! It's privit! I do wish to goodness you'd git!'

'Where the blazes is that there dog o' mine got to?' he muttered. 'Did you see a dog?'

'No! What do I want with your dog?'

He whistled out in front again, and round each corner. Then he came back with a decided step and tone.

'Look here! that there dog was lyin' there agin the wall when I went to sleep. He wouldn't stir from me, or my swag, in a year, if he wasn't dragged. He's been blanky well touched [*stolen*], and I wouldn'ter lost him for a fiver. Are you sure you ain't seen a dog?' then suddenly, as the thought struck him: 'Where's them two chaps that was playin' cards when I wenter sleep?'

'Why!' exclaimed the girl, without thinking, 'there was a dog, now I come to think of it, but I thought it belonged to one of them chaps. Anyway, they played for it, and the other chap won it and took it away.'

He stared at her blankly, with thunder gathering in the blankness.

'What sort of a dog was it?'

Dog described; the chain round the neck settled it.

He scowled at her darkly.

'Now, look here,' he said; 'you've allowed gamblin' in this bar— your boss has. You've got no right to let spielers gamble away a man's dog. Is a customer to lose his dog every time he has a doze to suit your boss? I'll go straight across to the police camp and put you away, and I don't care if you lose your licence. I ain't goin' to lose my dog. I wouldn'ter taken a ten-pound note for that blanky dog! I—'

She was filling a pewter hastily.

'Here! for God's sake have a drink an' stop yer row.'

He drank with satisfaction. Then he hung on the bar with one elbow and scowled out the door.

'Which blanky way did them chaps go?' he growled.

'The one that took the dog went towards Tinned Dog.'

'And I'll haveter go all the blanky way back after him, and most likely lose me shed! Here!' jerking the empty pewter across the bar, 'fill that up again; I'm narked properly, I am, and I'll take twenty-four blanky hours to cool down now. I wouldn'ter lost that dog for twenty quid.'

He drank again with deeper satisfaction, then he shuffled out, muttering, swearing, and threatening louder every step, and took the track to Tinned Dog.

NOW the man, girl, or woman, who told me this yarn has never quite settled it in his or her mind as to who really owned the dog.

I leave it to you.

13: The Derelict

C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

1865-1944

Pearson's Magazine, August 1900

"YOU are my skipper now," said Mr. Horrocks, "and I've got to call you 'sir'."

"Of course, you must when we're on board here," said Clayton, the new captain of the *Ambleside.* "Discipline's discipline, and neither you nor I, Purser, are big enough to override it. But I don't know that we shall be any the worse friends for that. True, when we were on the old *Birmingham*, you as Purser and I as chief mate, our relative positions were somewhat different, but now even if I have taken a step above you, we can still be friends."

The Purser laughed. "I don't see why not," he said. "The billet was a long time coming to you, but that shouldn't make you uppish."

Clayton shook his head.

"No, indeed," he replied, then after a pause, he added: "Horrocks, if you only knew how I have longed to find myself in command of a big liner, I believe even you'd be astonished. A chief officer's nobody, even if he is R. N. R.; a Captain's somebody; and I've had that drilled into me every hour I've been ashore since I was married. And, of course, there's increase of pay."

"Well," said the stout Purser drily, "I hope the berth comes up to your expectations. You've no watch to keep like you had when you were chief officer, but you'll find yourself voluntarily keeping both watches out of sheer nervousness. You'd no truck with passengers before, but you'll see presently what a joy and a blessing they can be when they are in the mood. A passenger who gave me a tract when he boarded the boat has been at me already about you.

"He said, did I think it safe to cross with a Captain who'd never commanded the boat before? Would you know the road? If you failed to find New York Harbor, would you at least strike Boston? He didn't want to be dumped down in St. Johns, as he'd heard was often the habit of new and inexperienced captains, because Newfoundland was foggy, and the smell of fish made him ill. And did I think you'd keep the engines from breaking down? He'd heard that young captains were very careless about engines; they left too much to the engineers."

"You'd better tell the old chief that."

"I did, but he seemed to see nothing funny in it. I said I was going to bring that passenger down to call on him in the engine-room, and leave a few tracts. He said if I did, he'd set on a greaser to tip a can of warm oil over him and spoil his clothes. And in the meanwhile he gave me a lecture on the inefficiencies of

the mess-room steward. I'm afraid there's varra sma' sense o' humor about McDraw."

"They say he's the most careful engineer in the Western Ocean trade," said Clayton, with a sigh, "and that's principally what I care about. He won't press engines much, and so he's missed a lot of promotion, and was passed over for the newer boats, but he's never had a breakdown yet, and won't if grandmothering his engines will do it."

"Well, that's a comforting thing for you to go upon as a groundwork, anyway."

"I want all the backing up I can get now. Purser. I'm never going to return to what I was. And if anything happens to the boat— well, I'm not going back to shore to get sacked. You know what I mean."

"Pooh," said the stout man. " 'All saved except the Skipper, who went down on the bridge,' is melodramatic and out of fashion. Our company isn't one of those mean Jew companies that just run tramps, and blacklist a skipper if a Dago pilot scrapes her over a sandbar. They stick by you honestly enough if you come foul of an accident just by luck, and not through any glaring fault of your own."

Captain Clayton laughed. "I've a sort of memory that you got Irishman's promotion for a bit of a mistake just recently. You used to be on the *Birmingham* which was the best they'd got. And now you're with me on the *Ambleside* which is the smallest boat on the line, and— well, I'm a lucky man to get such a right good purser."

"Thanks. You keep the old packet going nicely, with the blue ensign wagging out behind her, and I'll see she's popular and comfortable inside, and we'll soon work up the line to the *Birmingham* again, yes, and past her. I'm a man that's made it my business to be liked by passengers, and they'll come to whatever ship I'm on whenever they want to cross. You must do the same, sir. That's the way for us to get on in this trade, always supposing we handle the press ashore correctly."

The Doctor came in then, and they went round the ship for inspection, and, when that was over, Mr. Horrocks thought he would go and cheer them up in the smoke-room a bit, and let those that did not know it quite understand what lucky people they were to be on board of the *Ambleside*. But on the way there, the tract man once more waylaid him.

"Oh, Purser," said he, "did you read that booklet I gave you yesterday?"

"Haven't had a chance yet, Mr. Steinberg. And, besides, I lent it for the time being to the chief engineer, and he hasn't returned it."

"Ah," said he, and brought another from his pocket. "Then read that in the meantime. You'll find it will give you inward comfort. Oh, and wait a minute

before you go. There's another point I want to ask your advice upon. I see by the route chart you supply, that the steam-lane we're on now differs from the homeward track."

"Well, Mr. Steinberg, I'm no navigator, but I believe that that's a bed-rock fact. The homeward route's about twenty or thirty miles away from where we are now."

"That's rather a long distance, isn't it?"— he tapped the Purser's arm confidentially— But I must tell you that I am a strong swimmer, and it is my intention to take one of the life-belts from my stateroom when I make the attempt."

"Thoughtful of you."

"Of course, if there is anything extra to pay for the life-belt, Purser, I should be pleased to settle it with you now."

Mr. Horrocks was beginning to think that Steinberg was one of those people who can do with a bit of care. "Not at all, my dear sir. The fees for life-belts are always the perquisite of your bedroom steward. Pay him before you start on your swim. When do you think of leaving us?"

The man looked at the Purser sharply. Mr. Horrocks bit the end of a cigar, and blew through it carefully. "Got a match?" he asked.

"No,'' said Steinberg, and dropped his suspicion. "When do I think of leaving this boat? Well, that I can't tell you. But I've got a notion in my mind that she isn't safe, and I want to swim off to one of the homegoing boats, and get back to England again. I've spoken about it to Levison. He says it's quite the proper thing to do. You see, I'm a life-governor of the Porter Mines, and it's due to myself that I should take care of myself."

"You are acting most naturally," said the Purser, and made a mental note that Mr. Steinberg should be watched with remarkable accuracy.

The intending suicide on Atlantic liners is a much more common personage than the general public suppose. The sea and its mystery have the effect of developing the latent madness in some folks into active mischief, and many a man who is sane enough, and entirely capable ashore, becomes on shipboard a wholly irresponsible maniac.

As it is practically impossible to guarantee that nobody shall jump overboard unless you keep the whole passenger list in irons, steamer officers are apt to take suicides as they come, and confine their energies to keeping details out of the papers as far as may be. But if they do gather a hint that a passenger is contemplating a jump over the side, they tell off men to watch him even at the risk of overworking several already fully-strained departments.

Steinberg tapped the Purser's arm confidentially. "Oh, I say, Mr. Horrocks, you won't mention what I've told you to the other passengers?"

"No, sir."

"Because, you see, if I gave a lead, they'd guess the reason, and all be trooping after me, and the other steamer we swam to might make a difficulty about taking in so large a crowd."

"Great Washington! what a head you must have to think out all these details! Now, myself, I should never have foreseen a complication like that."

He sniggered, "Well, to tell the truth, I oughtn't to claim all the credit. It was Levison's idea. Levison said: 'Look here, old man, go off on your swim if you think it advisable, but don't talk too much about it, or else the ship people will stop you.' 'Why should they?' said I. 'Why, don't you see, if you give a lead, all the other passengers would want to follow, and then the Captain would stop the lot of you? It would never do for him to go into New York with no passengers at all. It would ruin his credit.' "

"Cute man, Levison."

"Yes, isn't he?"

"Levison coming with you?"

"Oh, no. You see, he suffers from cold feet, and he thinks a twenty-mile swim might give him a chill.''

"It would. But say— is Levison some relative or partner of yours? Is he sort of companioning you anyway?"

"Well, you know, not officially. But he's very anxious about me because I'm a life-governor of the Porter Mines, and so, of course, I've got to be taken care of. They're very much sought-after things, those life-governorships."

"Shouldn't wonder. Levison in that line of business at all?''

Mr. Steinberg drew himself up. "Rather not. He's merely a director, and that's a very different thing. He'll not be made a governor till there's another vacancy, and that's not likely to happen during his time. All the present life-governors of the Porter Mines are younger and more healthy men than Levison. He eats too much. I'm always telling him so. And, besides, he will drink champagne."

"You don't?"

"Always stick to port and lithia water, mixed half and half. You get all the fun of the port and none of the gout."

"Look here, Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser, wagging a thick finger at him, ''you're a man of ideas, and I want to steal some of them. Where do you sit in the saloon? Oh, I remember; down at the end of the Doc's table. Well, will you do me a big favour and shift and I'll find you a seat at mine?"

"Purser," said he, rubbing his hands, "you honour me. I shall be delighted."

Mr. Horrocks left him there, slipped round some of the houses till he was out of sight, and gave the deck steward and quartermaster strict orders to

keep an eye on the man and see he did not get over the side. And then he went down below and sent about a few other instructions that might be conducive to Mr. Steinberg's health and welfare.

A Purser like Mr. Horrocks does not have a lunatic next him at meals from choice, but it appeared to him that this one had got to be looked after. It came to his memory that the Porter Mines were a remarkably big concern, and if one of their life-governors got into the water off the *Ambleside*, there would be a nasty splash ashore, as well as in the Atlantic.

Such little episodes are apt to reflect discredit upon a steamship line, and directors are not in the habit of favouring pursers who are so unfortunate as to lose passengers under such circumstances. It therefore behooved him to exercise care in the present instance, not only for the passenger's sake but for his own as well.

It was not for himself as Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, that he feared. As that official, his wants were small, and his private income covered them easily. But he was a man with an alias; a man who led a double existence. Throughout all his life he had carried an infinite tenderness for those wretched children of the slums in which Liverpool is so prolific, and of late he had contrived to found an Institution in a village near Chester for their maintenance and relief. It pleased him to pose as a portly local philanthropist. Down there he was Mr. Rocks, of Rocks Orphanage, a somewhat pompous personage, who was very different from the affable Purser in the Town S.S. Co.'s employ.

It was lest the power to continue being Mr. Rocks should be taken away from him, that he was so anxious.

So he thought it useful to have Mr. Steinberg near him so as to be kept posted up in his latest views; and also, it was beginning to dawn on him, that Levison's conversation was bad for his morals. He could not quite decide whether persuading a cheerful lunatic to drown himself was actual murder, but considered that anyway it was something uncommonly near it, and stood by to trample on Mr. Levison's toes in a way that would have made that diplomatist nervous if only he could have known it.

They were mostly old travellers at the Purser's table, as was only natural, and knowing that they would soon guess what was up if he did not tell them, he affected the confidential, and let them know the delicate state of Steinberg's health, and so persuaded them all to bear a hand.

The Doctor got to hear about it from one of these, and came to Mr. Horrocks, and said he supposed he'd better take over Steinberg into his own charge, rather hinting that the Purser might find him above his capacity to deal with.

There was a smouldering enmity between Mr. Horrocks and Dr. O'Neill, and as the Purser detected in this proposal a scheme on the Doctor's part to make fees out of a profitable patient, he replied curtly enough that he felt himself quite competent to manage this dangerous passenger.

The men at the Purser's table entered into the spirit of the thing with zest. They were busy commercial men, all of them, who did, perhaps, their six crossings a year, and to whom an Atlantic voyage was holiday and time for relaxation. So they were quite open for a frolic.

But at the same time, the talk as a whole tended towards the gruesome. Steinberg, it seemed, had made a study from his youth up of the literature of Atlantic disaster, and as the others were willing to humor him they had the full history of all the accidents which actually had happened, which might have happened, and which could not possibly have happened since ever the seas were first poured out. They had some fine active liars amongst them at the Purser's table, and they competed for the palm with spirit,

"Yes, but look here," Steinberg would begin every now and again, "with inexperienced Captains like—"

And then Mr. Horrocks would say "S-s-sh!" and the table would cough, and Steinberg would collect himself, and wink at the Purser, and go on pleasantly. He only wanted a little humouring to keep him straight, and when someone suggested that it was cruel of the Purser to play with the fellow's infirmity, he bade the objector look at the other alternative. "I might have locked him up in his room, and then we'd have had a howling, scrabbling lunatic disturbing half the ship, and he would probably have ended up by choking himself painfully to death with the soap. Sounds a bit unlikely, doesn't it? But I knew that soap trick actually done once by a Third Class, and saw the beggar when he was stiff, and I can tell you he wasn't pleasant to look at.''

But with all the badinage, there was one thing the diners at the Purser's table were quite solid on, and that was the strength of modern ships, and the *Ambleside* in particular. Short of trying to hit the Tuskar Rock out of the water, or having them rammed fairly on the broadside, you could not sink them they said.

"Remember how the 'What's-her-name' went ker-smash full speed into that iceberg?" said Van Sciach. "Lost a few feet off her bows, and a man that I know that was in the smoking-room got a poker hand so mixed up by the shock that he showed four queens, and won the biggest jack-pot of the voyage. But there was no serious damage done, except that she steamed into a port a day late, and the company had to stand another three meals gratis."

"Iceberg's nothing," said Bisbee. "Remember the Blue Cross boat working in for her wharf the other day in the East River? She'd a bit too much way on,

and didn't answer her helm quick enough, and she sliced off the comer of that quay as though it was so much margarine. Did she sink? No, sir. Didn't crumple a plate. Scarcely so much as scratched her paint. 'N't that so, Horrocks?"

"Gospel," said the Purser. "The Lord help anything that gets in front of one of these packets when she's got a move on her."

"Yes, that's all right,'' said Steinberg, "But you've all missed out the thing that's going to make the biggest steamer smash of this century. How about an old wooden timber-ship, packed with lumber, dismasted, and lying square across your track, and just awash? Given it was an ordinarily black night with no moon out to shine on her, no mortal look-out could see her till she was hit, and then that's the time where the steamer's big momentum the Purser was telling us about would come in. She couldn't cut through that loosely packed mass of wood same as she could through ice or a granite wall, and it would just rasp off half her bottom before it was done with her, and then she'll sink before the crew had time to fight for the boats."

''Skittles," said the Purser. "She'd cut through it like a box of matches."

Steinberg nodded his head. ''So you say. But it's got to be proved. And it's my belief that the *Ambleside* will test it." He leaned forward and wagged his finger solemnly at the table. "Do you know, I've dreamed every night since I've been on board that she would smash into a timber-laden derelict this trip, and that's why I've been so anxious to leave her."

"Why be in such a hurry?" asked the Purser. "You'll find it much more comfortable to go off in one of the life-boats when the time comes. If you'll say which boat you'll choose, I'll see she's stored with a few bottles of port and a case of lithia water."

"And it'll be a sight more sociable," said Van Sciach, "than cruising in the Atlantic by yourself."

"Ah, but you haven't foreseen," said Steinberg, "like I did in my dream, what a rush there'll be for those boats."

"Guess you dreamed wrong all the way there, sir. This packet isn't German, nor is she French." He turned and grinned at Mr. Horrocks. "You can tell that by the grub. But, on the other hand, passengers hold an option on the life-boats. And if by chance they are wanted, Horrocks and the rest of the ship's company will see us all nicely tucked into the best, with a feeding-bottle and a clean pair of cuffs for each passenger, and then if they've time and there are boats left, they start fixing for themselves. But not before. That's American and English fashion, Mr. Steinberg, and don't you forget it. I guess it's pious thoughts like those that help down every meal that I have on these boats. Otherwise some of the grub might stick in my throat."

They switched off then to talk of food and accommodation on the Hamburg and Havre boats, and followed the general theory of the Western Ocean that those companies do treat their passengers considerably better than the English think needful. But Mr. Horrocks was not going to be drawn too much.

''All right," he said, "go by the Germans if you like them best. But please remember that we contract to feed and carry you all the way across, and they only guarantee to do it as far as they go. And I guess they save by now and again only going half-way."

"Gentlemen," said Bisbee, "the Purser! May nothing ever choke him!" Which toast they all drank very pleasantly.

Then happened one of those strange coincidences which look so unlikely, but which life is so constantly yielding up.

"I dreamed last night—" Steinberg was beginning again, but what he dreamed they had to guess. Probably everybody who had been within earshot of his previous talk did guess too, and got a bad shock to the nerves. On a sudden, all the glass and silver and crockery shot along the tables of the saloon as though it was alive; the paint shelled off from the deck above and fell in little flickering clouds; and from the night outside, and from all through the ship, there came noise enough to supply a battle.

ii

FOR THE moment the passengers were dazed, and made feeble grabs at their plates and glasses, or instinctively picked off the food that had fallen on to their clothes. But this was all the affair of a moment; and when that moment ended, there were screams, and yells, and shouts, and curses, and all the makings of a very ugly panic. All got out of their swivel chairs, and half of the people in the saloon commenced to rush for the companionways.

Now, at the first alarm, the Purser had instinctively turned his head, and was just in time to see Captain Clayton leave his chair as though the shock of the cascading dishes had shot him out, and disappear up the companion with the speed of the quick man in the pantomime. He had gone to take charge on deck, and Mr. Horrocks was left in command below. So the stout man strode smartly across, and got on the bottom step of the companion before the rush had fairly started, then put his hands in his pockets and cocked his big, good-humoured head on one side and laughed. He was full in the glare of the electric lights, and all the passengers looked up and saw his portly figure, as he intended they should; and the rush broke and presently stopped.

Then they began to ask questions.

"What's happened?" there any immediate danger?" "How long before we sink?" "Shall I go to my room and get some things together?" "Are they sending up rockets yet— the Captain ought to be made to, if he hasn't." "Will the stewards provision the boats, or ought we to put stuff in our pockets?"

"My dear good people," said the Purser, "I'm sorry you've had a bit of a shock, but there's not the smallest danger, believe me. If there had been I should have been told officially long before this. But as things are, I do wish you'd go back to the tables."

"I want to go on deck first," said someone.

"I daresay. And there you'd stay for half an hour watching the rain, and then come down again to finish your dinner and complain that it was bitterly cold. Now, please do consider my feelings. When passengers complain about their meals I'm the man who's harrowed."

There was a bit of a worried laugh at that, and a long lean Yankee drummer from the Doctor's table backed up Mr. Horrocks capitally.

"Yes, that's all very well, Purser, but you don't simmer some of us down like that. I had a glass of claret flung over my nice clean shirt, and what I want to know is, will your company pay the laundry bill?"

There was another laugh at that, and the passengers began to settle back in their places.

"Sir, I'd like to have your answer," said the drummer.

"If you forward your application in writing, it will receive full consideration within the next ten years," said the Purser, and the passengers roared.

It was poor enough wit, but their nerves were a bit raw just then, and anything tickled them. If the Purser could joke, surely the danger could not be great. Jennings, the chief steward, backed him up finely. He got his crew in hand again— they had been just as scared as everybody else— and they set about putting things shipshape on the tables.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Horrocks, "there have been a lot of bottles split, and the boat is fined for being careless. If you'd kindly give your orders to the stewards?"

Half-a-dozen voices shouted out the obvious retort. "Better simplify matters and serve out champagne all round. That's what we take just now if there's going to be free wine." They were getting their coolness back finely now.

Van Sciach rubbed the Purser's fat shoulder as he was going back to his place. "It's a bad smash," he murmured, ''isn't it? You can tell she's down by the head already. Look at the slant of the floor."

"I know no more than you. The Skipper will send if we're wanted. Don't let them talk about it here more than you can help."

''Oh, I'm not going to make a fool of myself," said Van Sciach.

Mr. Horrocks had given the wink to the chief steward to go and quieten down the Second Class passengers, and if the chief steward's methods were likely to be a trifle rough, well, so much the worse for the Second Class. The main thing was to keep them from stampeding. Anyway, if they complained ashore it would not matter seriously. Second Classes seldom amount to much, even with the newspaper men. As for the Thirds, well, any officer or quarter-master on deck would know enough to keep them from coming up till they were invited.

But the First saloon was the critical place from the Company's point of view, and the Purser knew he had his work cut out to keep them quiet, and at the same time pleased with themselves. But with his cool assurance, and his fine brazen affability, he shamed and humoured them out of any tendency to panic.

Presently a quartermaster came, and stood for a moment at the foot of the companionway nursing his cap and fingering a scrap of paper.

A steward was on to him in the instant. "The Purser, you want? He's there.''

The fellow came across to Mr. Horrocks quickly enough. "The Captain sent this, sir."

Of course the saloon could not hear what he said; but it did not take much art to guess that the man had come down to deliver verdict as to whether the ship was to sink or swim, and they would have been more than human if they had stifled their curiosity. And as it was, the chatter snapped off as short as one might break a wine-glass stem.

It did not take the Purser long to read Clayton's scrawl.

"That was a derelict we hit, and it splayed old Harry. We smashed clean through her, and it looks as if she's smashed off half our bottom. Keep the passengers quiet. I've got boats swung out ready. But I'm not going to let them leave her while there's a chance she can swim. It's life and death for me, this, so keep them quiet and down below."

The note was not signed, and you may say it could have been more clearly put. But it told Mr. Horrocks what he was wanted to do, and he did it without another thought. Each of all that large mob of passengers was watching him with eyes that had a whole life behind them, and so there was no room for him to make a mistake. He knew words alone would not satisfy them. So he folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book, and delivered himself of a really good sigh of relief, right from the bottom of his ample waistcoat.

''Well, that's all right," he said. "There's no big damage done. But you may thank your stars, ladies and gentlemen, you're on a strong, well-found steamer, and have a Skipper like Captain Clayton. We've hit a derelict," he

explained, and told them what that was, and how the whole thing had occurred, spinning out the yarn purposely. "And there's only one thing the Captain wants you to do," he finished up, "and that is to let him and the crew have the deck to themselves to-night. The men are working at getting things shipshape again, and it's a dark, rainy night, full of wind, and, if passengers were about outside, there's a chance they might get injured. Now, I should suggest that we get up a scratch concert right here in the saloon, and, if the ladies don't object, we'll break through the usual rule, and make it a smoking concert."

Steinberg, whom, to tell the truth, he had forgotten, tapped him on the arm.

"Purser," he murmured, "you'll excuse my staying, won't you? I think I'd like to be off now. I'll square up with my bedroom steward for that life-belt."

"Why so much hurry?" said Mr. Horrocks. "There isn't the least use in going just now." He shut his eyes and pretended to work out a sum. "No, not the least use. The Blue Cross homeward boat is the only one in this neighbourhood, and she isn't due for another eight hours yet. If you went off now you'd only have to wait about for her."

"Sure? You aren't humbugging me?"

"Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser stiffly, "it's my duty, as an officer of this boat, to give information to passengers when it's asked for. And I know my place too well to tell them anything that won't be of use to them."

"My dear Horrocks, believe me, I didn't mean to be in the least offensive."

"All right, then. Let's say no more about it."

"Only, you see, I know my scheme for leaving this steamer is a little out of the ordinary, and once or twice I've not been quite sure whether you liked it."

"My dear sir, your wishes are most natural."

"I really think so. You see, I dreamed of this collision every night since we left Liverpool, and here it is. And I dreamed of the horrible scramble there'll be for the boats when she sinks. So naturally I want to have swum a good distance away before the rush comes."

"Want the Purser?" said a steward. "He's over there at the end of that table." And up came another quartermaster with a second note from Captain Clayton.

"Send stewards to provision boats. Keep passengers below. There's a bad sea running; it will he a poor chance."

"All right" said Mr. Horrocks. "Hand that to Mr. Jennings and ask him to attend to it for me. Now, you stewards, be quick and have those tables cleared, and then get out of the saloon."

Probably no man ever had much more keen curiosity to slip out on deck and see how things exactly were than Mr. Horrocks had just then; but he did not see his way to it. It was his duty to keep the passengers well in hand, and so far he had succeeded; but he did not flatter himself that they would keep good if he did not stay too to humor them.

It was not exactly that he dreaded getting drowned; that detail did not occur to him once. But, as most men's minds do on these occasions, Mr. Horrocks' thoughts went off to his orphanage in Cheshire. By an odd inversion of thought, the personal danger of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, did not worry him in the least, but the thought that Mr. Rocks, of the Institution, might be cut off from his usefulness and glory, made him wince and curse luck and Captain Clayton under his breath with unbenevolent point and vigour.

It was Captain Clayton who made him nervous. It was a case, as Clayton said, of life and death to him, and certainly it was of professional life and death. Let him lose this boat, and he would never get another sea billet as long as he lived. The Firm would blacklist him to all eternity, and so for that matter would Lloyd's. And so, where an older captain, with more standing to fall back upon, would say, "Out boats, leave her," Mr. Horrocks knew that Clayton would hang on a lot longer than he ought to, and probably make a dreadful disaster of it.

It did not take much knowledge even for those below to see that the steamer was in a bad way. The floor listed till the after-end of the saloon stood up above the forward-end like a mountain back above a valley. The forecastle head must have been pretty nearly under water. They knew that everything must be holding by one slender bulkhead, and if that gave, down she would go like a stone. Then might come Steinberg's "terrible rush for the boats" unless Mr. Horrocks was careful, and the thought of the disgrace of that — from the professional point of view of a Purser— made him hot with foreboding.

However, when all was said and done, Captain Clayton was the man in supreme command, and in moments like these there was no room for argument. Sink or swim, the responsibility was the Captain's, and the Purser recognized his limitations and set himself to his task of keeping the passengers cool and satisfied to the best of his art. If word was given, he had all arrangements ready in his mind for drafting them out in batches for the boats without hurry, bustle, or panic; and, on the other hand, if the danger did not come to that climax, he was doing his best to keep them amused and satisfied, and to prevent them from making ugly demonstrations in the papers when they got ashore, which might do harm to the Town S.S. Company.

So whilst the executive on deck worked for the lives of all by shoring up the plates and stringers of the buckling bulkhead, Mr. Horrocks in the First saloon

played the genial master of ceremonies, and organized a scratch concert in aid of the Sailors' Orphan Home.

The usual bed hour slipped by and was ignored. People think little of temporary rest when they expect shortly to be drowned. But when three o'clock passed, and there was no further message, Mr. Horrocks began to remember that to keep his passengers up any longer would be an open confession that the boat was in danger, and that presently they would see this, and, being very tired, would probably grow nervous and troublesome.

So in his pleasant way he announced that the evening was at an end, and the passengers went to their rooms; and although there was little undressing that night, there was no trouble, and no more questioning.

In Mr. Horrock's own words: "At an awkward time like this, First Class passengers are the most reasonable people imaginable, if only you treat them right. But, of course, they want a man over them who does understand how they should be handled. They take it for granted that the ship's officers are doing their best, and they don't handicap matters by interference— once they have simmered down. It's the Third Class crowd you can't trust, and to make sure of them at times like these, we clap on the hatches, and leave them shut up below to scrap and squall as they please. They can't expect too much individual attention on a £3 fare, with everything found."

The Purser got out on deck at last, and had a chance to see for himself how things were. A couple of big cargo lights were slung up forward to help the deck-hands at their work, and he went and stood in the glare of one of these so that Captain Clayton could see him. Presently he did this, and called for Mr. Horrocks to come to him on the upper bridge.

"She seems to be keeping afloat, sir," said the Purser.

"There's about twenty-five feet of her gone below the water line forward, and everything depends on the bulkhead. She's full of water up to there. We shored it up from inside as well as we could, and with luck it may stand. But if a breeze springs up, or if we meet anything of a sea, she'll go to everlasting glory."

"I've kept my passengers quiet. Saw them all turned in before I came on deck."

"Good man. I suppose most skippers would have had them off boat-cruising before this.''

The Purser said nothing. He knew his place, and was not going to take off any weight that belonged elsewhere on to his own shoulders.

Clayton deduced all this clearly enough. "Hang it," he blurted out, "a man does owe himself some consideration. I'm not going to leave my own women-kind to starve without a fight for it. If I take her in, there'll be nothing said."

"No, sir."

"Curse you, Horrocks, don't let off parrot answer like that. I tell you if I'd been on deck instead of at dinner it wouldn't have made any difference. The officers on the bridge, and the look-outs forward weren't looking ahead at all when it happened. And for why? Because out of the rain and the mist and the night there suddenly loomed out an old bark making straight for our broadside. She wasn't showing any lights, and they seemed all asleep aboard of her. Her people hardly woke to our whistle, and either they thought they'd clear us, or they were too much asleep to change her course. She crept on us like a big grey ghost, and if she'd hit us in the broadside, even with her slow pace, she'd have cut us almost in two.

"I guess every man on deck watched her with bulging eyes, and in the end she cleared us by so little that her foreyard scraped the rail stanchions off our after turtle back. It was at that precise moment that we flogged into the old timber drogher that's so precious nearly done for us. There's a nice healthy piece of luck for you! It seems as though the devil himself intended to sink us whether or no just then, and only got bilked by Providence and a firm of God-fearing Clydeside shipbuilders."

"It should like this to have happened to one of the other Lines."

"You've to take what's given you. By Jove! I very nearly had a mutiny here at first. The officers and the deckhands seemed to take it for granted I should leave her. Someone was even brute enough to remind me that there were 800 people on board of her, and that I was responsible for the lives of all of them, and looked like murdering the lot. But if she swims long enough, I'll surprise some of them yet, and if she doesn't—"

"Man overboard!" came a shout from one of the decks below.

"Away aft there."

"On the port quarter."

Captain Clayton ran over to the port side of the bridge. The Purser went at his heels.

"There he is, right in the glare of that light!"

"He's got a life-belt on!"

"He's swimming away from the ship!"

The Captain had given sharp orders to the fourth officer who was with him on the bridge, and the fourth officer had repeated them with prompt speed. Mr. Horrocks guessed on the instant who the man overboard was, when he heard the word "life-belt," but he said nothing. He did not particularly want to confess that Mr. Steinberg had been too sharp for him. A boat's crew came running up, and one of the slung-out life-boats screamed quickly down towards the water. She unhooked, shoved off, and the oars straddled out. An

officer stood up at the tiller in the stem, a man stood up with a boat-hook forward. The seas hustled her about like a cork.

It was all done with discipline and precision. The chief officer ran down aft, caught sight of the man in the water, and directed the boat with a lusty voice. No one else shouted: they had been ordered to keep silence. The bowman jammed in his boat-hook shrewdly, and the swimmer protested as he was dragged in over the gunwale.

Then the boat came back alongside, hooked on, and was hauled up. "Smartly done," said Captain Clayton. "Pass that man below to the Doctor." And then he turned, keenly enough, to the carpenter, who had brought him a report from the holds.

Mr. Horrocks slipped away then, and Steinberg met him with a storm of reproaches. He was not a bit tamed by his swim. Most uncalled-for, he said, was the interference with his personal movements. But all he got out of the Purser was "Captain's orders, sir," and then was escorted down into one of the rooms aft, which was officially called the hospital, and which the Doctor used as his personal suite, the lucky dog.

The *Ambleside*'s Doctor had his failings, or he would not have been aged fifty and still at sea; but he knew how to deal with a case like this. "Tut, tut," he said. "You've been swimming in the water at this temperature? Most injudicious, sir, unless you oiled your body first to keep out the cold, and I'll lay two sovereigns to a brick you forgot that."

"Tell, to tell the truth, I did," said Steinberg.

"Then it's lucky you came back to me, or you'd have had a chill for certainty, with pneumonia to follow. All people do who swim in . the Atlantic at this time of the year if they aren't well rubbed with oil. Here, try one of my patent drinks, and see if that doesn't warm you."

Steinberg took it like a lamb, and in two minutes he was snoring.

"He'll stay like that," said the Doctor, "for twenty-five hours. You see my way of treating suicidal lunatics differs somewhat from yours. Purser. I like to make sure of them."

"Your beans," said Mr. Horrocks, and went forward again about his business. He felt very sore that the Doctor had scored over him in this matter of Mr. Steinberg.

They got steam on the *Ambleside* next morning, and went on towards New York at a slow half speed. The weather was not exactly kind to them; it blew fresh out of the northwest, and there was an ugly sea running, and it was the Purser's private impression that they risked foundering every mile they ran.

But all the damage was below the water line, where it did not show, and when passengers came out on deck again next morning, everything so far as

they could see was just the same as it always had been. Of course boats were swung outboard, but they hung high above the awning deck, and did not show especially, and the newly filled water beakers, and the food in their lockers were also comfortably out of sight. The Purser organized athletic sports that day, and a deck quoit championship, and they had about the most exciting auction sweep on the run that he ever remembered playing auctioneer at.

Mr. Horrocks did also another thing that pleased him. He got hold of Levison and asked him to give £200 towards an institution known as "Rocks' Orphanage."

The man seemed a bit surprised at first, and was inclined to bully.

"Are you mad?'' he asked.

"No, sir," said the Purser drily; "But Steinberg is. Do you want any further information?"

It seemed he did not, and he handed over the money at once, and kept out of the stout Purser's sight for the rest of the trip. Of course that was small enough fine for attempted murder, but Mr. Horrocks did not want to be too hard on the wretch— and have him refusing to give anything. He pictured to himself the good the money would do to Rocks' Orphanage, and the pleasure he himself would have (as Mr. Rocks, the philanthropist) in making the gift.

Thanks to the skill of Mr. Horrocks, the *Ambleside*'s passengers were all a happy and contented family for the rest of the trip, and if they did come into New York three days overdue, they did not specially mind. The old boat had to be nursed delicately. She surged along with her nose in the water, and with her propeller racing as it did, she showed the pace of a dumb-barge. She carried three-quarters of her rudder in the air, and she sheered about more or less as she chose. But, what was most to the point, she kept afloat, and the other incidentals did not matter.

They got a tug to straighten her up a bit in the steering off Sandy Hook, and when they came up to the wharf, Clayton shoved her in stem first till she grounded, as there was not water enough to let her go in bows first at all.

They were long overdue, of course, and there was a lot of excitement ashore, and, in the words of Mr. Horrocks, "there were enough reporters on the wharf to populate an entire suburb in the hot place where they'll eventually go to when they die." But he was ready for these gentlemen of the nimble pencil, and he had the whole crew of them down below, and most of the champagne that was left in the ship was set on the table.

"Business first, certainly, gentlemen. But your first and obvious business is to drink to the health of our arrival," which they did to the tune of about a magnum apiece.

Afterwards, well, the Purser had got a nice compact yarn nicely typed out and duplicated, and that was all he had to tell. He refused to make any further statement, and those newspaper men would have been more than human if they had rejected all the ready-made copy.

Mr. Horrocks had made up a most thrilling story. "Splendid ship. No real danger thanks to the masterly way in which Captain Clayton had handled her. Clayton thoroughly deserving the purse of £300 the passengers presented. Had it been a boat of any of the other Lines which sacrifice strength and construction to speed, undoubtedly all hands would have been drowned."

"But there's nothing about yourself here. Purser," said one of the newspaper men.

"Well, boys, if you will have it, there's just this paragraph more.'' And he distributed round the duplicated sheets.

"The passengers speak very highly of the kindness and attention they received from Mr. Eli Horrocks, the Purser, and we understand that there is a movement on foot to present him with a substantial testimonial."

"There," he said, "now you have that, and you have the general account, and you have the three 'Accounts from a Passenger,' which I wrote for you to take your choice from, and I guess you have as good a 'story' as any paper could want to print."

They went off satisfied with that, and Mr. Horrocks intended to go ashore and make his report to the office. But somehow his eyes got shut, and he went to sleep with his head on the saloon table, and there he stayed for eight solid hours.

The passengers were ashore now, and the ship's honour and credit had been cared for as tenderly as might be; and now that the strain was gone, there were a good many men on the *Ambleside* who were thoroughly worn out.

But there was a pleasant smile on the large plump face of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, as he slept with his head on the First saloon table. He dreamed sweetly of the philanthropic triumphs of that good man Mr. Bocks, who was so much admired by the public in a certain Cheshire village, and who knew nothing whatever about the sea and steamboats. And a tear or two of pity and gladness found their way out through his eyelids and gleamed on his eyelashes as he pictured to himself the additional waifs from the slums who could be helped with the £200 which had been so skilfully extracted from Mr. Steinberg's friend, and would-be-murderer, Mr. Levison.

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15: Longstaff's Marriage

Henry James

1843–1916

Scribner's Monthly August 1878

FORTY YEARS ago that traditional and anecdotical liberty of young American women which is notoriously the envy and despair of their foreign sisters was not so firmly established as at the present hour; yet it was sufficiently recognized to make it no scandal that so pretty a girl as Diana Belfield should start for the grand tour of Europe under no more imposing protection than that of her cousin and intimate friend, Miss Agatha Josling. She had, from the European point of view, beauty enough to make her enterprise perilous— the beauty foreshadowed in her name, which might have been given in provision of her tall light figure, her nobly poised head weighted with a coronal of auburn braids, her frank quick glance, and her rapid gliding step. She used often to walk about with a big dog, who had the habit of bounding at her side and tossing his head against her outstretched hand; and she had, moreover, a trick of carrying her long parasol always folded, for she was not afraid of the sunshine, across her shoulder, in the fashion of a soldier's musket on a march. Thus equipped, she looked wonderfully like that charming antique statue of the goddess of the chase which we encounter in various replicas in half the museums of the world. You half expected to see a sandal-shod foot peep out beneath her fluttering robe. It was with this tread of the wakeful huntress that she stepped upon the old sailing-vessel which was to bear her to foreign lands. Behind her with a great many shawls and satchels, came her little kinswoman, with quite another *démarche*. Agatha Josling was not a beauty, but she was the most judicious and most devoted of companions. These two persons had been united by the death of Diana's mother, when the latter young lady took possession of her patrimony. The first use she made of her inheritance was to divide it with Agatha, who had not a penny of her own; the next was to purchase a letter of credit upon a European banker. The cousins had contracted a classical friendship— they had determined to be all in all to each other like the Ladies of Llangollen. Only, though their friendship was exclusive, their Llangollen was to be comprehensive. They would tread the pavements of historic cities and wander through the aisles of Gothic cathedrals, wind on tinkling mules through mountain gorges and sit among dark eyed peasants on the shores of blue lakes. It may seem singular that a beautiful girl with a pretty fortune should have been left to seek the supreme satisfaction of life in friendship tempered by sight-seeing; but Diana herself considered this pastime no beggarly alternative. Though she never told it herself, her biographer may do so; she had had, in vulgar parlance, a hundred offers. To say that she had

declined them is to say too little; they had filled her with contempt. They had come from honorable and amiable men, and it was not her suitors in themselves that she contemned; it was simply the idea of marrying. She found it insupportable; a fact which completes her analogy with the mythic divinity to whom I have likened her. She was passionately single, fiercely virginal; and in the straight-glancing gray eye which provoked men to admire, there was a certain silvery ray which forbade them to hope. The fabled Diana took a fancy to a beautiful shepherd, but the real one had not yet found, sleeping or waking, her Endymion.

Thanks to this defensive eyebeam, the dangerous side of our heroine's enterprise was slow to define itself thanks, too, to the exquisite propriety of her companion. Agatha Josling had an almost Quakerish purity and dignity; a bristling dragon could not have been a better safeguard than this glossy, gray-breasted dove. Money, too, is a protection, and Diana had money enough to purchase privacy. She travelled largely, and saw all the churches and pictures, the castles and cottages, included in the list which had been drawn up by the two friends in evening talks at home, between two wax candles. In the evening they used to read aloud to each other from *Corinne* and *Childe Harold*, and they kept a diary in common, at which they "collaborated," like French playwrights, and which was studded with quotations from the authors I have mentioned. This lasted a year, at the end of which they found themselves a trifle weary. A snug posting-carriage was a delightful habitation, but looking at miles of pictures was very fatiguing to the back. Buying souvenirs and trinkets under foreign arcades was a most absorbing occupation; but inns were dreadfully apt to be draughty, and bottles of hot water for application to the feet, had a disagreeable way of growing lukewarm. For these and other reasons our heroines determined to take a winter's rest, and for this purpose they betook themselves to the charming town of Nice, which was then but in the infancy of its fame. It was simply one of the hundred hamlets of the Riviera— a place where the blue waves broke on an almost empty strand and the olive-trees sprouted at the doors of the inns. In those days Nice was Italian, and the "Promenade des Anglais" existed only in an embryonic form. Exist, however, it did, practically, and British invalids, in moderate numbers, might have been seen taking the January sunshine beneath London umbrellas before the many-twinkling sea. Our young Americans quietly took their place in this harmless society. They drove along the coast, through the strange, dark, huddled fishing villages, and they rode on donkeys among the bosky hills. They painted in water-colors and hired a piano; they subscribed to the circulating library, and took lessons in the language of Silvio Pellico from an old lady with

very fine eyes, who wore an enormous brooch of cracked malachite, and gave herself out as the widow of a Roman exile.

They used to go and sit by the sea, each provided with a volume from the circulating library; but they never did much with their books. The sunshine made the page too dazzling, and the people who strolled up and down before them were more entertaining than the ladies and gentlemen in the novels. They looked at them constantly from under their umbrellas; they learned to know them all by sight. Many of their fellow-visitors were invalids— mild, slow-moving consumptives. But for the fact that women enjoy the exercise of pity, I should have said that these pale promenaders were a saddening spectacle. In several of them, however, our friends took a personal interest; they watched them from day to day; they noticed their changing color; they had their ideas about who was getting better and who was getting worse. They did little, however, in the way of making acquaintances— partly because pulmonary sufferers are no great talkers, and partly because this was also Diana's disposition. She said to her friend that they had not come to Europe to pay morning-calls; they had left their best bonnets and card-cases behind them. At the bottom of her reserve was the apprehension that she should be "admired;" which was not fatuity, but simply an induction from an embarrassing experience. She had seen in Europe, for the first time, certain horrid men— polished adventurers with offensive looks and mercenary thoughts; and she had a wholesome fear that one of these gentlemen might approach her through some accidental breach in her reserve. Agatha Josling, who had neither in reminiscence nor in prospect the same reasons for turning her graceful back, would have been glad to extend the circle of their acquaintance, and would even have consented to put on her best bonnet for the purpose. But she had to content herself with an occasional murmur of small-talk, on a bench before the sea, with two or three English ladies of the botanising class; jovial little spinsters who wore stout boots, gauntlets, and "uglies," and in pursuit of wayside flowers scrambled into places where the first-mentioned articles were uncompromisingly visible. For the rest, Agatha contented herself with spinning suppositions about the people she never spoke to. She framed a great deal of hypothetic gossip, invented theories and explanations— generally of the most charitable quality. Her companion took no part in these harmless devisings, except to listen to them with an indolent smile. She seldom honored her fellow-mortals with finding apologies for them, and if they wished her to read their history they must write it out in the largest letters.

There was one person at Nice upon whose biography, if it had been laid before her in this fashion, she probably would have bestowed a certain amount of attention. Agatha had noticed the gentleman first; or Agatha, at

least, had first spoken of him. He was young and he looked interesting; Agatha had indulged in a good deal of wondering as to whether or no he belonged to the invalid category. She preferred to believe that one of his lungs was "affected;" it certainly made him more interesting. He used to stroll about by himself and sit for a long time in the sun, with a book peeping out of his pocket. This book he never opened; he was always staring at the sea. I say always, but my phrase demands an immediate modification; he looked at the sea, whenever he was not looking at Diana Belfield. He was tall and fair, slight, and, as Agatha Josling said, aristocratic-looking. He dressed with a certain careless elegance which Agatha a deemed picturesque; she declared one day that he reminded her of a love-sick prince. She learned eventually from one of the botanising spinsters that he was not a prince, that he was simply an English gentleman, Mr. Reginald Longstaff. There remained the possibility that he was love sick; but this point could not be so easily settled. Agatha's informant had assured her, however, that if they were not princes, the Longstaffs, who came from a part of the country in which she had visited, and owned great estates there, had a pedigree which many princes might envy. It was one of the oldest and the best of English names, they were one of the innumerable untitled country families who held their heads as high as the highest. This poor Mr. Longstaff was a beautiful specimen of a young English gentleman; he looked so gentle, yet so brave; so modest, yet so cultivated! The ladies spoke of him habitually as "poor" Mr. Longstaff, for they now took for granted that there was something the matter with him. At last Agatha Josling discovered what it was, and made a solemn proclamation of the same. The matter with poor Mr. Longstaff was simply that he was in love with Diana! It was certainly natural to suppose he was in love with some one, and, as Agatha said, it could not possibly be with herself. Mr. Longstaff was pale and slightly dishevelled; he never spoke to any one, he was evidently preoccupied, and his mild, candid face was a sufficient proof that the weight on his heart was not a bad conscience. What could it be, then but an unrequited passion? It was, however, equally pertinent to inquire why Mr. Longstaff took no steps to bring about a requital.

"Why in the world does he not ask to be introduced to you?" Agatha Josling demanded of her companion.

Diana replied, quite without eagerness, that it was plainly because he had nothing to say to her; and she declared with a trifle more emphasis that she was in capable of proposing to him a topic of conversation. She added that she thought they had gossiped enough about the poor man, and that if by any chance he should have the bad taste to speak to them, she would certainly go away and leave him alone with Miss Josling. It is true, however, that at an

earlier period she had let fall the remark that he was quite the most "distinguished" person at Nice; and afterwards, though she was never the first to allude to him, she had more than once let her companion pursue the theme for some time without reminding her of its futility. The one person to whom Mr. Longstaff was observed to speak was an elderly man of foreign aspect, who approached him occasionally in the most deferential manner, and whom Agatha Josling supposed to be his servant. This individual was apparently an Italian; he had an obsequious attitude, a pair of grizzled whiskers, an insinuating smile. He seemed to come to Mr. Longstaff for orders; presently he went away to execute them, and Agatha noticed that on retiring he always managed to pass in front of her companion, on whom he fixed his respectful, but penetrating gaze. "He knows the secret," she always said, with gentle jocoseness; "he knows what is the matter with his master, and he wants to see whether he approves of you. Old servants never want their masters to marry, and I think this worthy man is rather afraid of you. At any rate, the way he stares at you tells the whole story."

"Every one stares at me!" said Diana, wearily. "A cat may look at a king."

As the weeks went by Agatha Josling quite made up her mind that Mr. Longstaff's complaint was pulmonary. The poor young man's invalid character was now quite apparent; he could hardly hold up his head or drag one foot after the other; his servant was always near him to give him an arm or to hand him an extra overcoat. No one indeed knew with certainty that he was consumptive but Agatha agreed with the lady who had given the information about his pedigree, that this fact was in itself extremely suspicious; for, as the little Englishwoman forcibly remarked, unless he were ill, why should he make such a mystery of it? Consumption declaring itself in a young man of family and fortune was particularly sad; such people often had diplomatic reasons for pretending to enjoy excellent health. It kept the legacy-hunters and the hungry next-of-kin from worrying them to death. Agatha observed that this poor gentleman's last hours seemed likely to be only too lonely. She felt very much like offering to nurse him, for, being no relation, he could not accuse her of mercenary motives. From time to time he got up from the bench where he habitually sat, and strolled slowly past the two friends. Every time that he came near them Agatha had a singular feeling— a conviction that now he was really going to speak to them. He would speak with the gravest courtesy— she could not fancy him speaking otherwise. He began, at a distance, by fixing his grave, soft eyes on Diana, and as he advanced you would have said that he was coming straight up to her with some tremulous compliment. But as he drew nearer his intentness seemed to falter; he strolled more slowly, he looked away at the sea, and he passed in front of her without having the courage to

let his eyes rest upon her. Then he passed back again in the same fashion, sank down upon his bench, fatigued apparently by his aimless stroll, and fell into a melancholy reverie. To enumerate these accidents is to attribute to his behavior a certain aggressiveness which it was far from possessing; there was something scrupulous and subdued in his manner which made it perfectly discreet, and it may be affirmed that not a single idler on the sunny shore suspected his speechless "attentions."

"I wonder why it doesn't annoy us more that he should look at us so much," said Agatha Josling one day.

"That who should look at us?" asked Diana, not at all affectedly.

Agatha fixed her eyes for a moment on her friend, and then said gently—

"Mr. Longstaff. Now, don't say, 'Who is Mr. Longstaff?'" she added.

"I have yet to learn, really," said Diana, "that the person you appear to mean does look at us. I have never caught him in the act."

"That is because whenever you turn your eyes towards him he looks away. He is afraid to meet them. But I see him."

These words were exchanged one day as the two friends sat as usual before the twinkling sea; and beyond them, as usual, lounged Reginald Longstaff. Diana bent her head faintly forward and glanced towards him. He was looking full at her, and their eyes met, apparently for the first time. Diana dropped her own upon her book again, and then, after a silence of some moments, "It does annoy me," she said. Presently she added that she would go home and write a letter, and, though she had never taken a step in Europe without having Agatha by her side, Miss Josling now allowed her to depart unattended. "You won't mind going alone?" Agatha had asked. "It is but three minutes, you know."

Diana replied that she preferred to go alone, and she moved away, with her parasol over her shoulder.

Agatha Josling had a particular reason for this variation from their maidenly custom. She felt a sudden conviction that if she were left alone Mr. Longstaff would come and speak to her, and say something very important, and she accommodated herself to this conviction without the sense of doing anything immodest. There was something solemn about it; it was a sort of presentiment; but it did not frighten her; it only made her feel very kind and appreciative. It is true that when at the end of ten minutes (they had seemed rather long), she saw the young man rise from his seat and slowly come towards her, she was conscious of a certain trepidation. Mr. Longstaff drew near; at last he was close to her; he stopped and stood looking at her. She had averted her head, so as not to appear to expect him; but now she looked round again, and he very gravely lifted his hat.

"May I take the liberty of sitting down?" he asked.

Agatha bowed in silence and, to make room for him moved a certain blue shawl of Diana's, which was lying on the bench. He slowly sank into the place, and then said very gently—

"I have ventured to speak to you, because I have something particular to say." His voice trembled, and he was extremely pale. His eyes, which Agatha thought very handsome, had a remarkable expression.

"I am afraid you are ill," she said, with great kindness. "I have often noticed you and pitied you."

"I thought you did, a little," the young man answered. "That is why I made up my mind to speak to you."

"You are getting worse," said Agatha, softly.

"Yes, I am getting worse; I am dying. I am perfectly conscious of it; I have no illusions. I am weaker every day; I shall last but a few weeks." This was said very simply; sadly, but not lugubriously.

But Agatha felt almost awe-stricken; there stirred in her heart a delicate sense of sisterhood with this beautiful young man who sat there and talked so submissively of death.

"Can nothing be done?" she said.

He shook his head and smiled a little. "Nothing but to try and get what pleasure I can from this little remnant of life."

Though he smiled she felt that he was very serious; that he was, indeed, deeply agitated, and trying to master his emotion.

"I am afraid you get very little pleasure," Agatha rejoined. "You seem entirely alone."

"I am entirely alone. I have no family— no near relations. I am absolutely alone."

Agatha rested her eyes on him compassionately, and then—

"You ought to have spoken to us," she said.

He sat looking at her; he had taken off his hat; he was slowly passing his hand over his forehead. "You see I do— at last!"

"You wanted to before?"

"Very often."

"I thought so!" said Agatha, with a candour which was in itself a dignity.

"But I couldn't," said Mr. Longstaff. "I never saw you alone."

Before she knew it Agatha was blushing a little; for, to the ear, simply, his words implied that it was to her only he would have addressed himself for the pleasure he had coveted. But the next instant she had become conscious that what he meant was simply that he admired her companion so much that he was afraid of her, and that, daring to speak to herself, he thought her a much

less formidable and less interesting personage. Her blush immediately faded; for there was no resentment to keep the color in her cheek; and there was no resentment still when she perceived that, though her neighbor was looking straight at her, with his inspired, expanded eyes, he was thinking too much of Diana to have noticed this little play of confusion.

"Yes, it's very true," she said. "It is the first time my friend has left me."

"She is very beautiful," said Mr. Longstaff.

"Very beautiful— and as good as she is beautiful."

"Yes, yes," he rejoined, solemnly. "I am sure of that. I *know* it!"

"I know it even better than you," said Agatha, smiling a little.

"Then you will have all the more patience with what I want to say to you. It is very strange; it will make you think, at first, that I am perhaps out of my mind. But I am not, I am thoroughly reasonable. You will see." Then he paused a moment; his voice had begun to tremble again.

"I know what you are going to say," said Agatha, very gently. "You are in love with my friend."

Mr. Longstaff gave her a look of devoted gratitude; he lifted up the edge of the blue shawl which he had often seen Diana wear, and pressed it to his lips.

"I am extremely grateful!" he exclaimed. "You don't think me crazy, then?"

"If you are crazy, there have been a great many madmen!" said Agatha.

"Of course there have been a great many. I have said that to myself, and it has helped me. They have gained nothing but the pleasure of their love, and I therefore, in gaining nothing and having nothing, am not worse off than the rest. But they had more than I, didn't they? You see I have had absolutely nothing— not even a glance," he went on. "I have never even seen her look at me. I have not only never spoken to her, but I have never been near enough to speak to her. This is all I have ever had— to lay my hand on something she has worn, and yet for the past month I have thought of her night and day. Sitting over there, a hundred rods away, simply because she was sitting in this place, in the same sunshine, looking out on the same sea: that was happiness enough for me. I am dying, but for the last five weeks that has kept me alive. It was for that I got up every day and came out here; but for that, I should have stayed at home and never have got up again. I have never sought to be presented to her, because I didn't wish to trouble her for nothing. It seemed to me it would be an impertinence to tell her of my admiration. I have nothing to offer her— I am but the shadow of a living man, and if I were to say to her, 'Madam, I love you,' she could only answer, 'Well, sir, what then?' Nothing— nothing! To speak to her of what I felt seemed only to open the lid of a grave in her face. It was more delicate not to do that; so I kept my distance and said nothing. Even this, as I say, has been a happiness, but it has been a happiness that has tired me

out. This is the last of it. I must give up and make an end!" And he stopped, panting a little, and apparently exhausted with his eloquence.

Agatha had always heard of love at first sight; she had read of it in poems and romances, but she had never been so near to it as this. It seemed to her wonderfully beautiful, and she believed in it devoutly. It made Mr. Longstaff brilliantly interesting; it cast a glory over the details of his face and person, and the pleading inflections of his voice. The little English ladies had been right; he was certainly a perfect gentleman. She could trust him.

"Perhaps if you stay at home a while you will get better," she said, soothingly.

Her tone seemed to him such an indication that she accepted the propriety and naturalness of his passion that he put out his hand, and for an instant laid it on her own.

"I knew you were reasonable— I knew I could talk to you. But I shall not get well. All the great doctors say so, and I believe them. If the passionate desire to get well for a particular purpose could work a miracle and cure a mortal disease, I should have seen the miracle two months ago. To get well and have a right to speak to your friend— that was my passionate desire. But I am worse than ever; I am very weak, and I shall not be able to come out any more. It seemed to me today that I should never see you again, and yet I wanted so much to be able to tell you this! It made me very unhappy. What a wonderful chance it is that she went away! I must be grateful; if Heaven doesn't grant my great prayers it grants my small ones. I beg you to render me this service. Tell her what I have told you. Not now— not till I am gone. Don't trouble her with it while I am in life. Please promise me that. But when I am dead it will seem less importunate, because then you can speak of me in the past. It will be like a story. My servant will come and tell you. Then please say to her—'You were his last thought, and it was his last wish that you should know it.'" He slowly got up and put out his hand; his servant, who had been standing at a distance, came forward with obsequious solemnity as if it were part of his duty to adapt his deportment to the tone of his master's conversation. Agatha Josling took the young man's hand, and he stood and looked at her a moment longer. She too had risen to her feet; she was much impressed.

"You won't tell her until *after*—?" he said pleadingly. She shook her head. "And then you will tell her faithfully?" She nodded, he pressed her hand, and then, having raised his hat, he took his servant's arm, and slowly moved away

Agatha kept her word; she said nothing to Diana about her interview. The young Americans came out and sat upon the shore the next day, and the next, and the next, and Agatha watched intently for Mr. Longstaff's reappearance. But she watched in vain; day after day he was absent, and his absence

confirmed his sad prediction She thought all this a wonderful thing to happen to a woman, and as she glanced askance at her beautiful companion, she was almost irritated at seeing her sit there so careless and serene, while a poor young man was dying, as one might say, of love for her. At moments she wondered whether, in spite of her promise, it were not her Christian duty to tell Diana his story, and give her the chance to go to him. But it occurred to Agatha, who knew very well that her companion had a certain stately pride in which she herself was deficient that even if she were told of his condition Diana might decline to do anything; and this she felt to be a very painful thing to see. Besides, she had promised, and she always kept her promises. But her thoughts were constantly with Mr. Longstaff and the romance of the affair. This made her melancholy, and she talked much less than usual. Suddenly she was aroused from a reverie by hearing Diana express a careless curiosity as to what had become of the solitary young man who used to sit on the neighboring bench and do them the honor to stare at them.

For almost the first time in her life Agatha Josling deliberately dissembled.

"He has either gone away, or he has taken to his bed. I am sure he is dying, alone, in some wretched mercenary lodging."

"I prefer to believe something more cheerful," said Diana. "I believe he is gone to Paris and is eating a beautiful dinner at a great restaurant.

Agatha for a moment said nothing, and then—

"I don't think you care what becomes of him," she ventured to observe.

"My dear child, why should I care?" Diana demanded.

And Agatha Josling was forced to admit that there really was no particular reason. But the event contradicted her. Three days afterwards she took a long drive with her friend, from which they returned only as dusk was closing in. As they descended from the carriage at the door of their lodging she observed a figure standing in the street, slightly apart, which even in the early darkness had an air of familiarity. A second glance assured her that Mr. Longstaff's servant was hovering there in the hope of catching her attention. She immediately determined to give him a liberal measure of it. Diana left the vehicle and passed into the house, while the coachman fortunately asked for orders for the morrow. Agatha briefly gave such as were necessary, and then, before going in, turned to the hovering figure. It approached on tiptoe, hat in hand, and shaking its head very sadly. The old man wore an air of animated affliction which indicated that Mr. Longstaff was a generous master, and he proceeded to address Miss Josling in that macaronic French which is usually at the command of Italian domestics who have seen the world.

"I stole away from my dear gentleman's bedside on purpose to have ten words with you. The old woman at the fruit-stall opposite told me that you had

gone to drive, so I waited; but it seemed to me a thousand years till you returned!"

"But you have not left your master alone?" said Agatha.

"He has two Sisters of Charity— heaven reward them! They watch with him night and day. He is very low, *pauvre cher homme!*" And the old man looked at the little lady with that clear, human, sympathetic glance, with which Italians of all classes bridge over the social gulf. Agatha felt that he knew his master's secret, and that she might discuss it with him freely.

"Is he dying?" she asked.

"That's the question, dear lady! He is very low. The doctors have given him up; but the doctors don't know his malady. They have felt his dear body all over, they have sounded his lungs, and looked at his tongue and counted his pulse; they know what he eats and drinks— it's soon told! But they haven't seen his *mind* dear lady. I have; and so far I am a better doctor than they. I know his secret— I know that he loves the beautiful girl above!" and the old man pointed to the upper windows of the house.

"Has your master taken you into his confidence?" Agatha demanded.

He hesitated a moment; then shaking his head a little and laying his hand on his heart—

"Ah, dear lady," he said, "the point is whether I have taken him into mine. I have not, I confess; he is too far gone. But I have determined to be his doctor and to try a remedy the others have never thought of. Will you help me?"

"If I can," said Agatha. "What is your remedy?"

The old man pointed to the upper windows of the house again.

"Your lovely friend! Bring her to his bedside."

"If he is dying," said Agatha, "how would that help him?"

"He is dying for want of it. That's my idea at least, and I think it's worth trying. If a young man loves a beautiful woman, and having never so much as touched the tip of her glove, falls into a mortal illness and wastes away, it requires no great wit to see that his illness doesn't come from his having indulged himself too grossly. It comes rather from the opposite cause! If he sinks when she's away, perhaps he will come up when she's there. At any rate, that's my theory; and any theory is good that will save a dying man. Let the young lady come and stand a moment by his bed, and lay her hand upon his. We shall see what happens. If he gets well it's worth while; if he doesn't, there is no harm done. A young lady risks nothing in going to see a poor gentleman who lies in a stupor between two holy women."

Agatha was much impressed with this picturesque reasoning, but she answered that it was quite impossible that her beautiful friend should go upon this pious errand without a special invitation from Mr. Longstaff. Even should

he beg Diana to come to him, Agatha was by no means sure her companion would go; but it was very certain she would not take such an extraordinary step at the mere suggestion of a servant.

"But you, dear lady, have the happiness not to be a servant," the old man rejoined. "Let the suggestion be yours."

"From me it could come with no force, for what am I supposed to know about your poor master?"

"You have not told your friend what my dear master told you the other day?"

Agatha answered this question by another question.

"Did he tell you what he had told me?"

The old man tapped his forehead an instant and smiled.

"A good servant, you know, dear lady, needs never to be told things! If you have not repeated my master's words to the signorina, I beg you very earnestly to do so. I am afraid she is rather cold."

Agatha glanced a moment at the upper windows, and then she gave a silent nod. She wondered greatly to find herself discussing Diana's character with this aged menial; but the situation was so strange and romantic that one's old landmarks of propriety were quite obliterated, and it seemed natural that an Italian *valet de chambre* should be as frank and familiar as a servant in an old-fashioned comedy.

"If it is necessary that my dear master shall send for the young lady," Mr. Longstaff's domestic resumed, "I think I can promise you that he will. Let me urge you, meanwhile, to talk to her. If she is cold, warm her up! Prepare her to find him very interesting. If you could see him, poor gentleman, lying there as still and handsome as if he were his own monument in a *campo santo*, I think he would interest you."

This seemed to Agatha a very touching image, but it occurred to her that her interview with Mr. Longstaff's representative, now unduly prolonged, was assuming a nocturnal character. She abruptly brought it to a close, after having assured her interlocutor that she would reflect upon what he had told her; and she rejoined her companion in the deepest agitation. Late that evening her agitation broke out. She went into Diana's room where she found this young lady standing white-robed before her mirror, with her auburn tresses rippling down to her knees; and then, taking her two hands, she told the story of the young Englishman's passion, told of his coming to talk to her that day that Diana had left her alone on the bench by the sea, and of his venerable valet having, a couple of hours before, sought speech of her on the same subject. Diana listened, at first with a rosy flush, and then with a cold, an almost cruel, frown.

"Take pity upon him," said Agatha Josling— "take pity upon him, and go and see him."

"I don't understand," said her companion, "and it seems to me very disagreeable. What is Mr. Longstaff to me?" But before they separated Agatha had persuaded her to say that, if a message really should come from the young man's death-bed, she would not refuse him the light of her presence.

The message really came, brought of course by the invalid's zealous chamberlain. He reappeared on the morrow, announcing that his master humbly begged for the honor of ten minutes' conversation with the two ladies. They consented to follow him, and he led the way to Mr. Longstaff's apartments. Diana still wore her irritated brow, but it made her look more than ever like the easily-startled goddess of the chase. Under the old man's guidance they passed through a low green door in a yellow wall, across a tangled garden full of orange trees and winter roses, and into a white-wainscoted saloon, where they were presently left alone before a great classic Empire clock, perched upon a frigid southern chimney-place. They waited, however, but a few moments; the door of an adjoining room opened, and the Sisters of Charity, in white-winged hoods and with their hands thrust into the loose sleeves of the opposite arm, came forth and stood with downcast eyes on either side of the threshold. Then the old servant appeared between them, and beckoned to the two young girls to advance. The latter complied with a certain hesitation, and he led them into the chamber of the dying man. Here, pointing to the bed, he silently left them and withdrew; not closing, however, the door of communication of the saloon, where he took up his station with the Sisters of Charity.

Diana and her companion stood together in the middle of the darker room, waiting for an invitation to approach their summoner. He lay in his bed, propped up on pillows, with his arms outside the counterpane. For a moment he simply gazed at them; he was as white as the sheet that covered him, and he certainly looked like a dying man. But he had the strength to bend forward, and to speak in a soft distinct voice.

"Would you be so kind as to come nearer?" said Mr. Longstaff.

Agatha Josling gently pushed her friend forward, but she followed her to the bedside. Diana stood there, her frown had melted away; and the young man sank back upon his pillows and looked at her. A faint color came into his face, and he clasped his two hands together on his breast. For some moments he simply gazed at the beautiful girl before him. It was an awkward situation for her, and Agatha expected her at any moment to turn away in disgust. But, slowly, her look of proud compulsion, of mechanical compliance, was exchanged for something more patient and pitying. The young Englishman's

face expressed a kind of spiritual ecstasy which, it was impossible not to feel, gave a peculiar sanctity to the occasion.

"It was very generous of you to come," he said at last. "I hardly ventured to hope you would. I suppose you know— I suppose your friend, who listened to me so kindly, has told you?"

"Yes, she knows," murmured Agatha— "she knows."

"I did not intend you should know until after my death," he went on; "but"— and he paused a moment and shook his clasped hands together— "I couldn't wait! And when I felt that I couldn't wait, a new idea, a new desire, came into my mind." He was silent again for an instant, still looking with worshipful entreaty at Diana. The color in his face deepened. "It is something that you may do for me. You will think it a most extraordinary request; but in my position a man grows bold. Dear lady, will you marry me?"

"Oh dear!" cried Agatha Josling, just audibly. Her companion said nothing— her attitude seemed to say that in this remarkable situation one thing was no more surprising than another. But she paid Mr. Longstaff's proposal the respect of slowly seating herself in a chair which had been placed near his bed; here she rested in maidenly majesty, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"It will help me to die happy, since die I must!" the young man continued. "It will enable me to do something for you— the only thing I can do. I have property— lands, houses, a great many beautiful things— things I have loved and am very sorry to be leaving behind me. Lying here helpless and hopeless through so many days, the thought has come to me of what a bliss it would be to know that they should rest in your hands. If you were my wife, they would rest there safely. You might be spared much annoyance; and it is not only that. It is a fancy I have beyond that. It would be the feeling of it! I am fond of life. I don't want to die; but since I must die, it would be a happiness to have got just this out of life—this joining of our hands before a priest. You could go away then. For you it would make no change— it would be no burden. But I should have a few hours in which to lie and think of my happiness."

There was something in the young man's tone so simple and sincere, so tender and urgent, that Agatha Josling was touched to tears. She turned away to hide them, and went on tiptoe to the window, where she silently let them flow. Diana apparently was not unmoved. She raised her eyes and let them rest kindly on those of Mr. Longstaff, who continued softly to urge his proposal. "It would be a great charity," he said, "a great condescension, and it can produce no consequence to you that you could regret. It can only give you a larger liberty. You know very little about me, but I have a feeling that, so far as belief goes, you can believe me, and that is all I ask of you. I don't ask you to love me— that takes time. It is something I can't pretend to. It is only to

consent to the form, the ceremony. I have seen the English clergyman, he says he will perform it. He will tell you, besides, all about me— that I am an English gentleman, and that the name I offer you is one of the best in the world."

It was strange to hear a dying man lie there and argue his point so reasonably and consistently; but now, apparently, his argument was finished. There was a deep silence, and Agatha thought it would be discreet on her own part to retire. She moved quietly into the adjoining room, where the two Sisters of Charity still stood with their hands in their sleeves, and the old Italian valet was taking snuff with a melancholy gesture, like a baffled diplomatist. Agatha turned her back to these people, and, approaching a window again, stood looking out into the garden upon the orange trees and the winter roses. It seemed to her that she had been listening to the most beautiful, most romantic, and most eloquent of declarations. How could Diana be insensible to it? She earnestly hoped her companion would consent to the solemn and interesting ceremony proposed by Mr. Longstaff, and though her delicacy had prompted her to withdraw, it permitted her to listen eagerly to what Diana should say. Then (as she heard nothing) it was eclipsed by the desire to go back and whisper, with a sympathetic kiss, a word of counsel. She glanced round again at the Sisters of Charity, who appeared to have perceived that the moment was a critical one. One of them detached herself, and, as Agatha returned, followed her a few steps into the room. Diana had got up from her chair. She was looking about her uneasily— she grasped at Agatha's hand. Reginald Longstaff lay there with his wasted face and his brilliant eyes, looking at them both. Agatha took her friend's two hands in both her own.

"It is very little to do, dearest," she murmured, "and it will make him very happy."

The young man appeared to have heard her, and he repeated her words in a tone of intense entreaty.

"It is very little to do, dearest!"

Diana looked round at him an instant. Then, for an instant, she covered her face with her two hands. Removing them, but holding them still against her cheeks, she looked at her companion with eyes that Agatha always remembered— eyes through which a thin gleam of mockery flashed from the seriousness of her face.

"Suppose, after all, he should not die?" she murmured.

Longstaff heard it; he gave a long soft moan, and turned away. The Sister immediately approached his bed, on the other side, dropped on her knees and bent over him, while he leaned his head against the great white cape upon which her crucifix was displayed. Diana stood a moment longer, looking at him; then, gathering her shawl together with a great dignity, she slowly walked out

of the room. Agatha could do nothing but follow her. The old Italian, holding the door open for them to pass out, made them an exaggerated obeisance.

In the garden Diana paused, with a flush in her cheek, and said—

"If he could die with it, he could die without it!" But beyond the garden gate, in the empty sunny street, she suddenly burst into tears.

Agatha made no reproaches, no comments, but her companion, during the rest of the day, spoke of Mr. Longstaff several times with an almost passionate indignation. She pronounced his conduct indelicate, egotistic, impertinent; she declared that the scene had been revolting. Agatha, for the moment, remained silent, but the next day she attempted to make some vague apology for the poor young man. Then Diana, with passionate emphasis, begged her to be so good as never to mention his name again; and she added that this disgusting incident had put her completely out of humour with Nice, from which place they would immediately take their departure. That they did without delay; they began to travel again Agatha heard no more of Reginald Longstaff; the English ladies who had been her original source of information with regard to him had now left Nice; otherwise she would have written to them for news. That is, she would have thought of writing to them; I suspect that, on the whole, she would have denied herself this satisfaction, on the ground of loyalty to her friend. Agatha, at any rate, could only drop a tear, at solitary hours, upon the young man's unanswered prayer and early death. It must be confessed, however, that sometimes, as the weeks elapsed, a certain faint displeasure mingled itself with her sympathy— a wish that, roughly speaking, poor Mr. Longstaff had left them alone. Since that strange interview at his bedside things had not gone well, the charm of their earlier wanderings seemed broken. Agatha said to herself that, really, if she were superstitious, she might fancy that Diana's conduct on this occasion had brought them under an evil spell. It was no superstition, certainly, to think that this young lady had lost a certain generous mildness of temper. She was impatient absent-minded, indifferent, capricious. She expressed unaccountable opinions and proposed unnatural plans. It is true that disagreeable things were constantly happening to them— things which would have taxed the most unruffled spirit. Their post-horses broke down, their postilions were impertinent, their luggage went astray, their servants betrayed them. The heavens themselves seemed to join in the conspiracy, and for days together were dark and ungenerous, treating them only to wailing winds and watery clouds. It was, in a large measure, in the light of after years that Agatha judged this period; but even at the time she felt it to be depressing, uncomfortable, unnatural. Diana apparently shared her opinion of it, though she never openly avowed it. She took refuge in a kind of haughty silence, and whenever a new disaster came to her knowledge she

simply greeted it with a bitter smile— a smile which Agatha always interpreted as an ironical reflection on poor, fantastic, obtrusive Mr. Longstaff, who, through some mysterious action upon the machinery of nature, had turned the tide of their fortunes. At the end of the summer, suddenly, Diana proposed they should go home, speaking of it in the tone of a person who gives up a hopeless struggle. Agatha assented, and the two ladies returned to America, much to the relief of Miss Josling, who had an uncomfortable sense that there was something unexpressed and unregulated between them, which gave their intercourse a resemblance to a sultry morning. But at home they separated very tenderly, for Agatha had to go into the country and devote herself to her nearer kinsfolk. These good people, after her long absence, were exacting, so that for two years she saw nothing of her late companion.

She often, however, heard from her, and Diana figured in the town-talk that was occasionally wafted to her rural home. She sometimes figured strangely— as a rattling coquette who carried on flirtations by the hundred and broke hearts by the dozen. This had not been Diana's former character, and Agatha found matter for meditation in the change. But the young lady's own letters said little of her admirers and displayed no trophies. They came very fitfully— sometimes at the rate of a dozen a month and sometimes not at all; but they were usually of a serious and abstract cast, and contained the author's opinions upon life, death, religion immortality. Mistress of her actions and of a pretty fortune, it might have been expected that news would come in trustworthy form of Diana's having at last accepted one of her rumored lovers. Such news in fact came, and it was apparently trustworthy, inasmuch as it proceeded from the young lady herself. She wrote to Agatha that she was to be married, and Agatha immediately congratulated her upon her happiness. Then Diana wrote back that though she was to be married she was not at all happy; and she shortly afterwards added that she was neither happy nor to be married. She had broken off her projected union, and her felicity was smaller than ever. Poor Agatha was sorely perplexed, and she found it a comfort that, a month after this, her friend should have sent her a peremptory summons to come to her. She immediately obeyed.

Arriving, after a long journey, at the dwelling of her young hostess, she saw Diana at the farther end of the drawing-room, with her back turned, looking out of the window. She was evidently watching for Agatha but Miss Josling had come in, by accident, through a private entrance which was not visible from the window. She gently approached her friend, and then Diana turned. She had her two hands laid upon her cheeks, and her eyes were sad; her face and attitude suggested something that Agatha had seen before and kept the

memory of. While she kissed her, Agatha remembered that it was just so she had stood for that last moment before poor Mr. Longstaff.

"Will you come abroad with me again?" Diana asked. "I am very ill."

"Dearest, what is the matter?" said Agatha.

"I don't know; I believe I am dying. They tell me this place is bad for me; that I must have another climate; that I must move about. Will you take care of me? I shall be very easy to take care of now."

Agatha, for all answer, embraced her afresh, and as soon after this as possible the two friends embarked again for Europe. Miss Josling had thrown herself the more freely into this scheme, as her companion's appearance seemed a striking confirmation of her words. Not, indeed, that she looked as if she were dying; but in the two years that had elapsed since their separation she had wasted and faded. She looked more than two years older, and the brilliancy of her beauty was dimmed.

She was pale and languid, and she moved more slowly than when she seemed a goddess treading the forest leaves. The beautiful statue had grown human and taken on some of the imperfections of humanity. And yet the doctors by no means affirmed that she had a mortal malady, and when one of them was asked by an inquisitive matron why he had recommended this young lady to cross the seas, he replied with a smile that it was a principle in his system to prescribe the remedies that his patients greatly desired.

At present the fair travellers had no misadventures. The broken charm had renewed itself; the heavens smiled upon them, and their postilions treated them like princesses. Diana, too, had completely recovered her native serenity; she was the gentlest, the most docile, the most reasonable of women. She was silent and subdued, as was natural in an invalid; though in one important particular her demeanor was certainly at variance with the idea of debility. She had much more taste for motion than for rest, and constant change of place became the law of her days. She wished to see all the places that she had not seen before, and all the old ones over again.

"If I am really dying," she said, smiling softly, "I must leave my farewell cards everywhere." So she passed her days in a great open carriage, leaning back in it and looking, right and left, at everything she passed. On her former journey to Europe she had seen but little of England, and now she determined to visit the whole of this famous island. She rolled for weeks through the beautiful English landscape, past meadows and hedgerows, over the avenues of great estates and under the walls of castles and abbeys. For the English parks and manors, the "Halls" and "Courts," she had an especial admiration, and into the grounds of such as were open to appreciative tourists she made a point of penetrating. Here she stayed her carriage beneath the oaks and

beeches, and sat for an hour at a time listening to nightingales and watching browsing deer. She never failed to visit a residence that lay on her road, and as soon as she arrived at a town she inquired punctiliously whether there were any fine country-seats in the neighborhood. In this delightful fashion she spent a whole summer. Through the autumn she continued to wander restlessly; she visited, on the Continent, a hundred watering-places and travellers' resorts. The beginning of the winter found her in Rome, where she confessed to being very tired and prepared to seek repose.

"I am weary, weary," she said to her companion. "I didn't know how weary I was. I feel like sinking down in this City of Rest, and resting here for ever."

She took a lodging in an old palace, where her chamber was hung with ancient tapestries, and her drawing-room decorated with the arms of a pope. Here, giving way to her fatigue, she ceased to wander. The only thing she did was to go every day to St Peter's. She went nowhere else. She sat at her window all day with a big book in her lap, which she never read looking out into a Roman garden at a fountain plashing into a weedy alcove, and half a dozen nymphs in mottled marble. Sometimes she told her companion that she was happier this way than she had ever been— in this way, and in going to St Peter's. In the great church she often spent the whole afternoon. She had a servant behind her, carrying a stool; he placed her stool against a marble pilaster, and she sat there for a long time, looking up into the airy hollow of the dome and over the vast peopled pavement. She noticed every one who passed her; but Agatha, lingering beside her, felt less at liberty, she hardly knew why, to make remarks about the people around them than she had felt when they sat upon the shore at Nice.

One day Agatha left her and strolled about the church by herself. The ecclesiastical life of Rome had not shrunken to its present smallness, and in one corner or another of St Peter's there was always some occasion of worship. Agatha found plenty of entertainment, and was absent for half an hour. When she came back she found her companion's place deserted, and she sat down on the empty stool to await her reappearance. Some time elapsed, and then she wandered away in quest of her. She found her at last, near one of the side-altars; but she was not alone. A gentleman stood before her whom she appeared just to have encountered. Her face was very pale, and its expression led Agatha to look straightway at the stranger. Then she saw he was no stranger; he was Reginald Longstaff! He, too, evidently had been much startled, but he was already recovering himself. He stood very gravely an instant longer; then he silently bowed to the two ladies and turned away.

Agatha felt at first as if she had seen a ghost; but the impression was immediately corrected by the fact that Mr. Longstaff's aspect was very much

less ghostly than it had been in life. He looked like a strong man he held himself upright, and had a handsome color. What Agatha saw in Diana's face was not surprise; it was a pale radiance which she waited a moment to give a name to. Diana put out her hand and laid it in her arm, and her touch helped Agatha to know what it was that her face expressed. Then she felt too that this knowledge itself was not a surprise; she seemed to have been waiting for it. She looked at her friend again, and Diana was beautiful. Diana blushed and became more beautiful yet. Agatha led her back to her seat near the marble pilaster.

"So you were right," Agatha said presently. "He would, after all, have got well!"

Diana would not sit down; she motioned to her servant to bring away the stool, and continued to move towards the door. She said nothing until she stood without, in the great square, between the colonnades and fountains. Then she spoke.

"I am right now, but I was wrong, then. He got well because I refused him. I gave him a hurt that cured him."

That evening, beneath the Roman lamps in the great drawing-room of the arms of the pope, a remarkable conversation took place between the two friends. Diana wept and hid her face; but her tears and her shame were gratuitous. Agatha felt, as I have said, that she had already guessed all the unexplained, and it was needless for her companion to tell her that, three weeks after she had refused Reginald Longstaff, she insanely loved him. It was needless that Diana should confess that his image had never been out of her mind, that she believed he was still among the living, and that she had come back to Europe with a desperate hope of meeting him. It was in this hope that she had wandered from town to town and looked at every one who passed her; and it was in this hope that she had lingered in so many English parks. She knew her love was very strange; she could only say it had consumed her. It had all come upon her afterwards— in retrospect, in meditation. Or rather, she supposed, it had been there always, since she first saw him, and the revulsion from displeasure to pity, after she left his bedside, had brought it out. And with it came the faith that he had indeed got well, both of his malady and of his own passion. This was her punishment! And then she spoke with a divine simplicity which Agatha, weeping a little too, wished that, if this belief of Diana's were true, the young man might have heard. "I am so glad he is well and strong. And that he looks so handsome and so good!" And she presently added, "Of course he has got well only to hate me. He wishes never to see me again. Very good. I have had my wish; I have seen him once more. That was what I wanted, and I can die content."

It seemed in fact as if she were going to die. She went no more to St Peter's, and exposed herself to no more encounters with Mr. Longstaff. She sat at her window and looked out at the freckled dryads and the cypresses, or wandered about her quarter of the palace with a vaguely-smiling resignation. Agatha watched her with a sadness that was less submissive. This too was something that she had heard of, that she had read of in poetry and fable, but that she had never supposed she should see— her companion was dying of love! Agatha thought of many things, and made up her mind upon several. The first of these latter was to send for the doctor. This personage came, and Diana let him look at her through his spectacles and hold her white wrist. He announced that she was ill, and she smiled and said she knew it; and then he gave her a little phial of gold-colored fluid, which he bade her to drink. He recommended her to remain in Rome, as the climate exactly suited her complaint. Agatha's second desire was to see Mr. Longstaff, who had appealed to her, she reflected, in the day of his own tribulation, and whom she therefore had a right to approach at present. She found it impossible to believe, too, that the passion which led him to take that extraordinary step at Nice was extinct such passions as that never died. If he had made no further attempt to see Diana, it was because he believed that she was still as cold as when she turned away from his death-bed. It must be added, moreover, that Agatha felt a lawful curiosity to learn how from that death-bed he had risen again into blooming manhood. This last point there was no theory to explain.

Agatha went to St Peter's, feeling sure that sooner or later she should encounter him there. At the end of a week she perceived him, and seeing her, he immediately came and spoke to her. As Diana had said, he was now extremely handsome, and he looked particularly good. He was a quiet, blooming, gallant young English gentleman. He seemed much embarrassed, but his manner to Agatha expressed the highest consideration.

"You must think me a dreadful impostor," he said, very gravely. "But I *was* dying— or I believed I was."

"And by what miracle did you recover?"

He was silent a moment, and then he said—

"I suppose it was by the miracle of wounded pride!" She noticed that he asked nothing about Diana; and presently she felt that he knew she was thinking of this. "The strangest part of it," he added, "was, that when my strength came back to me, what had gone before had become as a simple dream. And what happened to me here the other day," he went on, "failed to make it a reality again!"

Agatha looked at him a moment in silence, and saw again that he was handsome and kind; and then dropping a sigh over the wonderful mystery of things, she turned sadly away. That evening Diana said to her—

"I know that you have seen him!"

Agatha came to her and kissed her.

"And I am nothing to him now?"

"My own dearest—" murmured Agatha.

Diana had drunk the little phial of gold-colored liquid; but after this she ceased to wander about the palace; she never left her room. The old doctor was with her constantly now, and he continued to say that the air of Rome was very good for her complaint. Agatha watched her in helpless sadness; she saw her fading and sinking, and yet she was unable to comfort her. She tried once to comfort her by saying hard things about Mr. Longstaff, by pointing out that he had not been honorable; rising herein to a sublime hypocrisy, for on that last occasion at St Peter's the poor girl had felt that she herself admired him as much as ever— that the timid little flame which was kindled at Nice was beginning to shoot up again. Agatha saw nothing but his good looks and his kind manner.

"What did he want— what did he mean, after all?" she pretended to murmur, leaning over Diana's sofa. "Why should he have been wounded at what you said? It would have been part of the bargain that he should not get well. Did he mean to take an unfair advantage— to make you his wife under false pretenses? When you put your finger on the weak spot, why should he resent it? No, it was not honorable."

Diana smiled sadly; she had no false shame now, and she spoke of this thing as if it concerned another person.

"He would have counted on my forgiving him!" she said. A little while after this she began to sink more rapidly. Then she called her friend to her, and said simply, "Send for him!" And as Agatha looked perplexed and distressed, she added, "I know he is still in Rome."

Agatha at first was at a loss where to find him, but among the benefits of the papal dispensation was the fact that the pontifical police could instantly help you to lay your hand upon any sojourner in the Eternal City. Mr. Longstaff had a passport in detention by the government, and this document formed a basis of instruction to the servant whom Agatha sent to interrogate the authorities. The servant came back with the news that he had seen the distinguished stranger, who would wait upon the ladies at the hour they proposed. When this hour came and Mr. Longstaff was announced, Diana said to her companion that she must remain with her. It was an afternoon in spring; the high windows into the ancient garden were open, and the room was

adorned with great sheaves and stacks of the abundant Roman flowers. Diana sat in a deep arm-chair.

It was certainly a difficult position for Reginald Longstaff. He stopped on the threshold and looked a while at the woman to whom he had made his extraordinary offer; then, pale and agitated, he advanced rapidly towards her. He was evidently shocked at the state in which he found her; he took her hand, and, bending over it, raised it to his lips. She fixed her eyes on him a little, and she smiled a little.

"It is I who am dying now," she said. "And now I want to ask something of *you*— to ask what you asked of me."

He stared, and a deep flush of color came into his face; he hesitated for an appreciable moment. Then lowering his head with a movement of assent, he kissed her hand again.

"Come back tomorrow," she said; "that is all I ask of you."

He looked at her again for a while in silence; then he abruptly turned and left her. She sent for the English clergyman and told him that she was a dying woman, and that she wished the marriage service to be read beside her couch. The clergyman, too, looked at her in much surprise; but he consented to humour so tenderly romantic a whim, and made an appointment for the afternoon of the morrow. Diana was very tranquil. She sat motionless, with her hands clasped and her eyes closed. Agatha wandered about, arranging and rearranging the flowers. On the morrow she encountered Mr. Longstaff in one of the outer rooms: he had come before his time. She made this objection to his being admitted; but he answered that he knew he was early, and had come with intention; he wished to spend the intervening hour with his prospective bride. So he went in and sat down by her couch again, and Agatha, leaving them alone, never knew what passed between them. At the end of the hour the clergyman arrived, and read the marriage service to them, pronouncing the nuptial blessing, while Agatha stood by as witness. Mr. Longstaff went through all this with a solemn, inscrutable face, and Agatha, observing him, said to herself that one must at least do him the justice to admit that he was performing punctiliously what honor demanded. When the clergyman had gone he asked Diana when he might see her again.

"Never!" she said, with her strange smile. And she added— "I shall not live long now."

He kissed her face, but he was obliged to leave her. He gave Agatha an anxious look, as if he wished to say something to her, but she preferred not to listen to him. After this Diana sank rapidly. The next day Reginald Longstaff came back and insisted upon seeing Agatha.

"Why should she die?" he asked. "I want her to live."

"Have you forgiven her?" said Agatha.

"She saved me!" he cried.

Diana consented to see him once more; there were two doctors in attendance now, and they also had consented. He knelt down beside her bed and asked her to live. But she feebly shook her head.

"It would be wrong of me," she said.

Later, when he came back once more, Agatha told him she was gone. He stood wondering, with tears in his eyes.

"I don't understand," he said. "Did she love me or not?"

"She loved you," said Agatha, "more than she believed you could now love her; and it seemed to her that, when she had had her moment of happiness, to leave you at liberty was the tenderest way she could show it!"

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15: The Goddess' Legacy

Malcolm Jameson

1891-1945

Unkown, Oct 1942

WHEN man bites dog, they say, that's news. It's news, too, when a waiter tips his customer. I saw that done not long ago— quite surreptitiously to be sure— in the dining room of the Hotel Angleterre in Athens. To say that I was amazed would be to put it mildly, for I knew both men and the thing was impossible. It was not that Herr Scheer took the gold— for gold it was, strangely enough— but that Mike Pappadopoulos should have offered it. I would have thought that Mike would let himself be torn apart by wild horses before trafficking with the enemy. But there it was; I couldn't blink it. The fierce old patriot must have broken under the train of sustained tyranny. No other explanation of the bribe was tenable. For bribe I took it to be, and wondered what extremity had driven the old Greek to the necessity of giving it.

The part played by Herr Scheer in the furtive transaction was no mystery at all. He was simply a murderous, blood-sucking leech of the type all too frequent in Europe these days. I had known him for some time as the traveling representative of an optical house in Berlin and as such had often had business dealings with Him. But with the coming of the troops of the occupation forces he promptly dropped the mask and showed himself in his true colors. Anton Scheer had been the advance man of the dreaded Gestapo. It was from his long prepared secret lists that hundreds of victims for arrest and spoilation were selected, and from those same lists that the few Hellenic Quislings were appointed to puppet administrative posts. Now that he was the resident chief of Hitler's secret operatives, his cruelty and rapacity knew no bounds. It was also common knowledge that his zeal for his beloved Fuehrer and Fatherland was not untinged by keen self-interest. In other words, Herr Scheer could be "had." Enough money, discreetly conveyed, would unlock the tightest prison gates.

No, the sight of Scheer's curt nod and the clutching hand below the table top was no surprise to me. It was in character. My astonishment arose from the fact that old Mike had paid.

THE first time I ever saw Mike was on the Acropolis one bright moonlight night about four years ago— shortly after my company had made me their Near Eastern manager with headquarters at Athens. As any American would

have done, I visited the ancient rock at the first opportunity and promptly fell under the spell of the magnificent ruins atop it. Thereafter I became a frequent visitor, and soon learned that the best condition under which to view the old temples was when the moon was up. On such nights the shattered colonnades of the Parthenon stand forth in all their noble grandeur, the chips and scars mercifully softened by the silvery light. And it was on such a night that Mike first spoke to me.

I was prowling about in the ruined temple of Athena when I came upon him. He was standing rigid, as if in a trance, gazing fixedly upward into nothingness. It was in the naos, or inner sanctum, and where he stood was before the spot where tradition had it Phidias' superb ivory and gold figure of the goddess once sat enthroned. By the mild light of the moon I could see that there were several baskets on the pavement at his feet and they seemed to be filled with olives. There was a tray, too, in which were folded cloths of what I took to be embroideries. I paused and looked at him a moment, but in his rapt state he did not notice me. I was but a few feet from him, but not wishing to disturb him, I passed on.

After a brief stroll through the remainder of the interior, I went outside and climbed onto a segment of a fallen column. There I sat for a while, drinking in the splendor of the night and marveling at the perfection of the lines of everything about me. I must have fallen into a deep reverie which lasted longer than I was aware, for when I was aroused again the entire aspect of the ruins had changed, owing to the shifting shadows of the moonlight. I started, then observed that the man I had seen inside the temple was standing beside me and his baskets sitting on the ground nearby.

"You are not one of us," he was saying, and I suddenly knew that it was his voice that had awakened me from my vivid waking dream, "yet you seem, to see— the power, the sublimity and the glory of it all—"

"Who could fail to?" I asked, looking back at the noble facade, broken though it was.

The simplicity and purity of its lines should have moved the crudest savage. And yet I was startled to realize that I had not been thinking in terms of aesthetic values at all, but dreaming of quite other things. I had been dreaming of a long past time when the rocky summit was dazzlingly crowned with snowy white new marble structures and thronged with gayly dressed people and armored warriors. It is true that in the picture I saw the delicately carved and unbroken cornices and the rich friezes and pediments studded-with perfect statuary set off by backgrounds of magnificent reds, deep blues and gold. But it was on the people that I was intent. I saw wealthy aristocrats march by with slaves bearing heaped-up platters in their train. Those fruits of the field I knew

were being brought as offerings to their divine patroness and protector. Eager young men in bright armor were there, too, swarming into the temple for blessings and inspiration to victory in the campaign they were about to begin. Then, so real was my illusion, I was about to follow them into the sacred edifice to see what ritual the priests of Athena followed, when the words of the enigmatic Greek broke the train of my reverie.

"She, Pallas," he said, with his strange dark eyes fastened upon me as if he read my every thought, "is the kindest and wisest of them all. Under her strong aegis none can hurt us. It was against that shield that Xerxes and his Persian hordes beat in vain. She is, and always will be, the guardian of this city and all the cities of Hellas."

"Is?" I said, cynically. The thought that just flitted through my mind that, whatever Athena's power may have been once, it had long since gone. Since the repulse of the Persians, Greece had been overrun many times— first by the Romans, then the plundering Goths, and finally the Turks. It was centuries before the last of them was dislodged.

"Yes, is," he said fiercely. "She sleeps, it is true, but her power is not gone. You yourself shall see it. I promise you."

"You are a pagan?" I asked. An hour earlier I would have thought that too fantastic a question to put to anyone in these modern times, but it did not ruffle him.

"I am," he said simply.

I looked away from him and at the ruined temple standing in the mellow light of the moon. A queer duck, I thought, perhaps a little cracked. Then I turned to ask him another question. Were the baskets he had with him filled with his own offerings? His delusion might be that complete. But when I looked at where he had been he was not there. Nor were his baskets. He was gone. And the hour being late. I slid from the stone and made my way to the grand stairway that led to the sleeping city below.

THE next day a cable sent me to Smyrna and thence to Stamboul. I was gone for weeks and when I came back to Athens a full moon again rode in the sky. That night I revisited the Parthenon and again saw the mysterious man with his baskets of olives and fruits, but he ignored my presence. Again he took them into the naos and, as before, brought them out again. That, I argued, was an unusual procedure if the contents of the baskets were meant as offerings.

A day or so later I had a partial answer to that. While strolling through a crowded market street, I came upon a booth presided over by the man of the Parthenon. On its counters various products of the country were offered for sale. The embroidery and lace displayed were exceptionally fine and I bought

several pieces of it. He took the money without a word or flicker of recognition.

For a few minutes I stood hesitant, then walked away with a peculiar crawly feeling of the skin. There was something distinctly uncanny about the market stall and the queer man who tended it. Though the choicest fruits and the finest needle-work of the street were for sale there, few persons stopped to look and fewer still to buy. I watched them pass with expressionless faces and unseeing eyes, as if they did not see the place. Two priests came striding down the street, and, when they approached the stall, they plucked up the edges of their habits and walked softly by with averted faces as if fearful of contamination.

The peddler himself— the man of the Parthenon— had something about him that was singularly disturbing to the peace of mind. I cannot say what that was unless it was the impression he gave of utter and infinite age. Or, perhaps, agelessness. Absurd as the statement may seem, I would not venture to guess his age within a century or so— or a millennium or so for that matter. That was odd, too, for in most of the details of his appearance he might have been a well-knit, hale man of about forty. It was the profound wisdom that one saw in his weary eyes that bespoke great age. He had the look of one who had lived for eons and had long ago tired of it.

Bewildered, I left, carrying my parcel hugged to me tightly. Down the street a little way I encountered a local man I knew and asked him about the proprietor of the market stall, but he shook his head. He did not know whom I meant. Nor did any others of the several I asked. It was not until I got to the hotel and asked the ancient concierge about him that I found one who knew the man I meant. Even he looked uneasily about before he spoke, as if it was a matter to be whispered, not to be blurted out.

"You are favored," he said, cryptically. "Not many know Mike of the Parthenon. I do not, except that he is not what he seems to be. My grandfather knew him well, but then my grandfather was a silent man. I do not know what Mike's real name is or what is his story."

That was all I could draw from him. Needless to say, that little whetted my curiosity to the utmost and there were few moonlit nights after that I failed to spend part of the night on the Acropolis. The enigmatic Mike was always to be found there, and gradually he became used to my presence and occasionally spoke. I was careful not to say or think anything that might offend him, and little by little his discourse grew less guarded and more fluent. In the end there were times when words would burst forth from him in a fervid torrent.

The talk was never about himself, but of Pallas Athena and her lovely temple, or of her subjects and their vicissitudes. Night after night I listened

eagerly, inexplicably aware that I was hearing things only partially guessed by archaeologists, and that often wrongly. He told me of the earlier temple on whose site the present Parthenon had been constructed; of the labors of the multitudes of slaves in quarries and in transportation to make the later building possible. From him I learned which of the groups had been designed by Phidias and which by others, and of the perfect craftsmanship of the sculptors Agoracritus and Alcomenes. He described also the long missing sculptures pilfered or destroyed by vandals.

Whenever he touched on that theme his tone took on a vindictive bitterness of the most intense sort. The man he hated most heartily was the Venetian, Morosini, who had bombarded the Parthenon with artillery in the year 1687. That act alone would have incurred Mike's undying hatred, but Morosini compounded it with what he viewed as sacrilege. In an attempt to rob the building of one of its pediment statuary groups, he had his soldiers rig for the job of lowering the marbles. But in their clumsiness they dropped the goddess' own chariot and shattered it to bits on the pavement below. Mike hinted darkly that for that impiety Morosini had died horribly some time after.

He also spoke rancorously of the many misuses made of the building by temporary conquerors of Greece. One of the emperors, Constantine, had converted the pagan shrine into a church dedicated to St. Sophia. Later the Turks transformed it into a mosque. As a self-appointed apostle of Athena, Mike detested Christian and Moslem alike, but it was the Turkish embellishment to the Parthenon that angered him most. They had defiled its classic lines by erecting a tawdry minaret— an offense even more grave than their later use of the building as a powder magazine. He assured me that its architect, even as Morosini was to do later, had faced frightful retribution for the deed. I was left to infer that Athena, or her agent, had performed the executions.

All that and more he told me. I took it for the most part in silence. I marveled at the extent of his historical knowledge, but wondered that he should be so wholesouledly devoted to a goddess long enough dead to have degenerated to the status of a mere myth, useful only to poets and their ilk. At times I came near to twitting him on Athena's many failures to protect her people— her vaunted protection seemed to me to have failed lamentably during the last twenty centuries. But I forbore. I had come to like the man and did not want to wound him. It was not until the blackening war clouds over the Balkans actually broke and the neo-Roman legions began hammering at the north-west border that I ventured to murmur something about the time having come for Athena to rouse herself and show her power.

"Bah!" he snorted. "For those yelping jackals? They attack only because they think the prey is sick. They do not matter. It is those who will come later that are terrible. It is with those she will deal."

THE situation worsened fast and soon my business troubles prevented me from spending much time outside my office. Romania was betrayed, and Bulgaria. The Nazis were overrunning Serbia. "Then came the day when the panzer armies rolled into Greece. They were not stopped on the slopes of Mike's revered Olympus, nor yet at the historic pass of Thermopylae. I thought of the queer pagan and wondered whether even the thunderbolts of mighty Zeus himself could prevail, even if faith could reanimate him. No, Zeus, Athena— all the old gods— they might still live in a few solitary hearts, but they had lost their potency.

Athens fell. The Nazi juggernaut crushed it, then rolled on to other conquests. They left behind them regiments of black-shirted scavengers to pick the bones. They left, too, their own minions— such as Herr Scheer and his storm troopers— to do their own peculiarly discreditable work. All of that was bad, but the crowning insult came when the invaders flaunted their arrogant banner of the hooked cross above Mike's beloved Parthenon. The Acropolis was closed to all civilians; moreover, the hungry harpies denuded the market of all its edibles and any other thing of value. Mike's shop was looted and wrecked. His temple was defiled. Mike's occupation was gone.

It must have been a month after that before I saw him again. That was when he appeared as a waiter in the dining room at the hotel, and I learned that he went by the name of Pappadopoulos. He chose to ignore me, but I watched him with interest, since I knew the implacable hatred in his heart toward all the fat and greedy exploiters he served. Yet he went about his work with all the unctuous suavity of his adopted calling, and the serene composure of his bearing was almost incredible. I could not help but admire the man. There are few who can bear themselves well when their most precious bubble bursts— when their dearest vision proves to be but a barren mirage. That, I knew, had happened to Mike. Greece groaned miserably under the heel of a new oppressor, yet the long-ago gods lay inert in their graves. It was pathetic.

And then that monstrous thing happened. One night he leaned over Herr Scheer's shoulder and whispered something. Then the rest, as I have related— Scheer's cold acknowledgment, the passage of the bribe. It was astounding.

I pretended not to see. I turned away and busied myself with the food on my plate. But before I did I saw that at least one other than me had also seen. That one was a Major Ciccotto, an officer of the local garrison whose power far exceeded the nominal rank he held. It was Ciccotto who had earned eternal

infamy by his ruthless seizures of food. His raiding of the people's granaries had turned Greece into a land of gaunt, fear-ridden, starving people. At that moment it is hard to say which I loathed most— the cruel Scheer, or the rapacious Italian. But he had seen. The greedy glitter in his piggish eyes was the confirmation of that. I arose and left the room, over-whelmed with disgust.

A few hours after that I encountered Mike in an upper corridor of the hotel. He was carrying a tray of empty dishes and I stopped him.

"You had better be more careful," I warned. "I saw gold pass tonight. Others may have seen, too. With all these harpies about, you know— "

"I hope so," he said, with a queer, grim smile. If he had been a man less intense, I am sure it would have been a grin. And with that astonishing reply he pushed past me and went on down the hall.

I fairly gasped, for to openly display real money in the Angleterre's dining room was comparable to exposing a crippled lamb to the sight of a pack of hungry wolves. Except for me, every man present was a predatory agent of one or the other of the Axis powers. I shuddered for Mike's personal safety.

My misgivings were amply justified the very next day. Mike was absent from his usual station in the dining room. So was Scheer. But the next day Mike showed up, looking considerably the worse for wear. His lips were badly swollen and cut, one eye blackened, and there were other signs of having been severely manhandled. But he waited on his customers with his usual outward serenity. It was beyond my understanding. I took a furtive look at the nearby table where Ciccotto sat. He was watching Mike eagerly, and presently I saw him beckon him to his table,

Mike went as meekly, I thought, as a lamb to the slaughter. In obedience to the major's imperative gesture, Mike stooped to listen. There was a moment of urgent whispering, then Mike nodded and went away. He came back in a few minutes, made a pretense of brushing crumbs from the table, and I saw his hand slip into his pocket and out again. Again a few gleaming gold coins changed hands! It was utterly baffling. I tried not to think of it any more.

BUSINESS took me away from Athens for several days and when I came back I had to go consult with my firm's banker. Jimmy Duquesne was his name; he was an old friend and one who could be counted on for an unlimited amount of off-the-record gossip. When we had finished our commercial transactions he led me to a back room where we sat down over cups of coffee.

"These totalitarians," he sighed, wagging his head, "what a nose for loot they have! It's incredible. You know how scarce gold is— has been for years— in Europe. Well, I'm swamped with it."

I lifted my eyebrows. What he had just said was strangely interesting. But I made no comment.

"Three days ago," he went on, "that unspeakable butcher Scheer came in. He had two bagfuls of it, all he could carry. He cleaned me out of paper marks and drachmae. Naturally, I had to give him literally bales of the worthless stuff in exchange. Then yesterday in walks that skunk Ciccotto with another lot of it. I could not possibly pay him off with what I had in the vaults, but, luckily, he was content with a draft on our Milan branch for the required number of lira. Now where do you suppose they found the stuff?"

"I wouldn't know," I answered, quite truthfully, though I could guess where a little of it came from. "Was it in bullion or coin?"

"Coin," he exclaimed, "and what coin! Much of it must be museum pieces worth I don't know how much. There was everything from a Roman aureus to modern Turkish pounds— medieval ducats, crowns, guilder— I don't know the name of half of them. I bought solely on the basis of weight."

He broke off and flicked the ash from his cigar with a worried look.

"Well?" I knew there was bound to be a sequel. No bank under the fiscal control of Nazidom could have a hundred-weight of metallic gold in its vaults without repercussions.

"All day today," he said dismally, "I have been overrun by secret agents— Gestapo and Ovra men. They want to know all about the gold. Where it came from, who brought it, what they said, what I paid— everything. The inner circles, it appears, are running wild."

"They would," I said grimly. "They want their share."

"Perhaps," he said, thoughtfully. "But there is more to it than that. You see, both Scheer and Ciccotto have disappeared. Without a trace!"

Things happened fast after that. Big planes dropped down daily, bearing fresh inquisitors from Belgrade, Bucharest, Vienna, even from Berlin. New contingents of Gestapo men, high-ranking army officers, and other mysterious persons swarmed out of them and descended upon the bank demanding information. Others of their stamp kept coming from Italy, also bent on the combined purpose of plunder and finding their missing predecessors. For each batch of operatives who had come before had disappeared shortly after their arrival. It was eerie. All Athens held its breath.

There were no clues, no bodies found, nothing. Men came simply to disappear. Others trailed them to find out why, only to disappear themselves. Savage reprisals were taken. Greeks were rounded up by the thousands and herded into prisons and camps, charged with being Communists, Jews or traitors. A tight curfew was imposed and severer food restrictions made on an already starved people. Yet the disappearances went on. Hundreds of

Himmler's men vanished like so many extinguished candle flames. The Italian garrisons were denuded of their officers. Athens was an unhealthy place for invaders, apparently. The Germans wanted to know why, but no one broke. The conquerors were up against a blank wall.

"I wonder how long Adolf and Benito can stand the strain?" remarked Duquesne one day. "According to my computations half a thousand of their smartest, and most unscrupulous gumshoe men have faded from the picture. It is a deep well that has no bottom."

Evidently the Powers That Be came to the same conclusion. An abrupt change of policy toward Greece took place. The curfew and food restrictions were lifted and the jails emptied. A benevolent old Italian general was sent to be governor and the severity of the occupation was relaxed in many ways. Gestapo men and Ovra agents were still to be seen, but the grapevine had it that those few had strict orders to forget about their missing predecessors, and also to forget all about gold, whether for personal account or for the coffers of "the party."

Oddly, the wave of disappearances promptly ceased.

MIKE of the Parthenon coughed discreetly and I looked up. He was standing by my side in his usual obsequious way and with a napkin folded across his arm.

"They have hauled the swastika down and opened the Acropolis again," he said, and there was a gleam of exultation in his eyes, "did you know? You see, the shield of Athena still protects."

"So it appears," I said. Then I recalled that there was to be a moon that night. "Shall I meet you in the Parthenon later?"

"No," he said; "At another place. You almost came to believe. Then you scoffed. I want to show you with your own eyes. Meet me at the end of the street in an hour."

I found him at the place appointed. He was half-hidden behind a low stone wall. Nearby was tethered a pair of donkeys. We mounted those and rode off. In a little while we were following a twisty hill trail skirting the shoulders of Mount Lycabettus. The country grew more rugged as we progressed, until at last we came to a low cliff that blocked our way. There we dismounted and he led me through the brush and along a path I would never have found by myself, We had not gone a great way when we turned abruptly into a clump of shrubbery hugging the cliff side. He drew back an armful of the tangled branches and uncovered a dark and gaping hole.

"Crawl in," he said.

I hesitated. It was a small hole, hardly thirty inches high by about as wide. Many persons had already disappeared— non-Greeks all— and here I was alone with a man who many would have thought demented. But my curiosity overcame my fears. I dropped to all fours and crawled into the black cave. I could hear him scuffling along behind me, and once or twice he warned me to watch out for my head where the ceiling was low or where we were about to make a turn.

After a dozen yards of such progress, the winding passage widened and I could no longer feel the brush of the rocky roof against my back.

"You can stand up now," he said, and flashed on a torch.

The place we were in appeared to be a sort of antechamber to the cave. Tortuous passages ran off from it in all directions, each floored with soft white sand. He beckoned me to follow and preceded me down one of them. It ended blind, but just before it ended I came upon a shallow hole dug out of the sand. A few gold coins of antique vintage lay scattered around it.

"That is where Scheer got his first gold. He made me show him where it was."

Then he wheeled and led me past several other wing passages. He flashed a light down one.

"Same story here— Ciccotto's gold find. He threatened to have me shot unless I told him."

He hurried on. In another divergent tunnel he showed me four leather bags neatly packed with gold coins. They were sitting on the sand and a short spade beside them. Footprints led away toward deeper recesses.

"They came back looking for more," he explained. "I think they went farther into the cave to scout out other deposits." He said it with a ghastly chuckle that chilled the soul.

"And got lost?" I asked. Some caves are like that. I pictured rotting corpses and whitening bones deeper within the labyrinth.

"Lost!" he cackled. "Yes. They are lost. Lost forever."

"I am a poor guesser," I said, sitting down on the sand and looking straight at him. "If your purpose in bringing me here was to explain something, explain it."

"I brought you to convince you," he said, with immense dignity, "that the shield of Athena still protects. These baubles"— and he indicated the packed bags of gold with a contemptuous gesture of the hand— "are only bait. The gods have always been wise enough to know that the only kind of men whom they need fear are the greedy ones. And it is by their own greed that the gods slay them. Shortly I will show you what happened to the German Scheer and the Italian and all the others who followed them.

"It was an easy matter to lure them here. I had only to pretend to be in distress— I told them I had an aged aunt in prison charged with harboring a wounded British soldier. I offered money for a favorable consideration of her case. Scheer said it would take much money. I gave him gold. He wanted more. They took me to the police station and submitted me to much abuse. At length I agreed to show him where I got my money. It was from an old temple treasure, I told him, buried in a cave. I showed him the way in and the way back. He left that first night because he had all he could carry. I knew he would go back for more. I knew, too, that he would not be content with merely what I had shown him. He would search the whole cave. The Italian Ciccotto behaved exactly in the same way. It was very simple."

"But of so many," I asked, "why did not some come back?"

"The legacy of Athena, of which I am the earthly executor, has extraordinary properties. There are vast fortunes buried in these caves— things so valuable that once men look upon them they cannot leave. Come!"

Mike led me into a transverse passage for a long way. As we proceeded it was unnecessary for him to use his electric light, for the cavern was bathed in a soft and mysterious luminosity of a faintly rose hue. He turned into a doorway on the right.

"This room is no longer used," he said.

I looked in. It was a huge semicircular room much along the lines of a Grecian theater. Directly opposite the door was an empty raised stage or dais. Between it and the doorway the amphitheater sloped upward. But the room was not empty. It was crammed with statuary.

"Examine them," Mike directed.

You have seen habitat groups in museums? It was something like that, except that the figures here were of mixed nationalities— all ancient.

There were hooded Egyptians, and many Romans— some togaed, others encased in armor. The figures were of stone, cleverly and perfectly carved, but were dressed in the habiliments of living men of the era. The figures must have stood where they were for many centuries, for many were nude, moldy fragments of their former clothing lying at their feet. Much of the armor was encrusted with rust and scale, though here and there a golden casque bespoke an aristocrat. The faces all had one thing in common: the features were frightfully distorted as if in an ecstasy of horror.

"Come," he said. "I will show you another room— more modern."

It was a duplication of the first, except the type of statue had changed. Here stood big-muscled, athletic figures of men, all beautifully executed in white marble. Over their shoulders heavy animal skins were flung, and there were other skins wrapped about their middles. There were many Turks there,

too, and soldiers of a type I took to be Janizaries. As before, the stony faces registered utter terror. Many of the figures had their arms thrown halfway up, as if the sculptor had caught them in the act of warding off some fiendish thing that threatened them.

Mike led me through the throng of statuary much as one would tread a sidewalk mob when the persons in it are intent on studying a bulletin pasted on a wall. For it was noteworthy that all the figures had their faces turned the same way and their stony eyes fixed on a spot in midair some yards above the empty dais. He stopped one and tapped it on the shoulder.

"This one was Morosini," he said, with cold venom, "the chief ravager of her shrine. But we must go. There is one other room to see."

I was brimming with questions, for nothing shown me yet had shed much light on the mystery of the recent disappearances. Where had the gold come from— especially the modern coins? Who had executed the vast assemblage of life-sized figures, and why were they entombed in this hidden and unknown spot? Were any of the more recently missing Gestapo men still alive?

"The modern gold," he said promptly, as if I had asked the questions out loud, "is the tribute of the faithful. I and those before me have long sold the offerings of the peasants who still have faith— you saw my market booth. Its profits buried here. The other questions will answer themselves soon."

He lapsed into silence and took me back in the direction whence we had come. Presently we came to the passage by which we had entered and he turned deeper into the cave. I saw that loose gold was scattered along the path, a tempting lead to go further.

Suddenly Mike stopped before an open door.

"The other rooms were abandoned long ago," he said. "They became too full. It is in this one that Athena presides during the intervals when she is awake. Her sleeping compartment is in the rear, but that is forbidden to mortal man. Here, put on these."

He handed me a pair of peculiar-looking binocu lars, and I noticed he had a similar pair for him self. They were a sort of cross between prismatic binoculars and spectacles, for the lenses were blanked off and there were hangers to hook over the ears. I found when I put them on that I could see perfectly well, but the images came to me through artificially widened eye-spacing, giving me a keener perception of depth. They were quite as satisfactory as straight vision, but I could not help wondering why he insisted on my wearing them.

"Now," he directed, "take my hand and walk backward."

We backed into the remaining hall. We had gone only seven strides until I stopped with a gasp. I had passed and was now facing a portrait statue of a German Gestapo man I knew! The marble figure stood rigidly with the

contorted expression of stark horror on his chiseled features I had seen elsewhere. His clothing was modern to the minute. I had seen the man and in those very clothes not three weeks before. It was a figure of one of the missing men, dressed in that man's clothes!

We went on. I passed a replica of an Italian major, more Gestapo replicas. At length Mike jerked me to a halt.

"Here is Scheer," he said. It was. Except for the fact he was in marble and not in the flesh and that his horrified expression differed from the one of smug arrogance I had been accustomed to, there was no whit of difference.

"Now," said Mike, "turn around."

I turned. The dais before me was not empty as the others had been. Upon it was a colossal throne-chair— at least twenty feet in height. Over the back of it a cloak of cloth-of-gold was thrown and atop it perched a huge, solemnly blinking owl and beside him a snow-white cock. A slender silver lance of some fifty feet in length leaned against the chair, a coiled serpent lay on the step before it. On the right side of the chair an immense golden shield stood. It was adorned with intricate carvings and I started to take off the glasses I wore in order to study its detail better.

"Don't, you fool!" said Mike, harshly, gripping my wrist with fingers of steel. "Do you want to be like the others? That is the aegis— the shield of Pallas. You cannot bear the naked sight of it— use your mirrors, man!"

I did not quite understand, and then, as I looked again, I did.

In the midst of the shield, where another shield would have a boss, there was a head. My blood chilled at the sight of it and I felt goose flesh pop out all over me. My hair lifted and I knew that my face was as twisted in the same horrified contortions as those of the cold figures all about. For the face of the head on the shield was indescribably hideous— horrid fangs protruded from a misshapen and lipless mouth— wild eyes filled with living hatred and immeasurable fury glared out from beneath frightening eyebrows— and all about the vile face the writhing hair of the head twisted and untwisted. But it was not hair, but a mass of hissing snakes.

I wanted to scream, to faint, to die. The sight was intolerable— no man could bear it. A blessed blackness blotted out my vision. I realized I had gone blind, but I was grateful for it. That did not matter, for I had clutched at myself and found reassurance— my flesh was still warm and yielding— I had not been turned to stone. For at that moment I knew what it was that I had gazed upon, and how I had been saved. It was by looking through the prismatic mirrors, even as Perseus had when he severed that frightful head from its former body. I had forgotten until then that he had gratefully presented the bloody, writhing trophy to his patroness and that she had set it in her shield.

"Medusa," I murmured, half hysterically, "the Gorgon, Medusa."

"Yes," said Mike of the Parthenon, grabbing me firmly by the arm and leading me way. "It still has power. Her aegis is impregnable— "

I heard no more. Even the memory of that hideous sight was unbearable.

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16: The White Cat of Drumgunniol

Sheridan Le Fanu

1814-1873

All the Year Round, 2 April 1870 (uncredited)

THERE IS A FAMOUS story of a white cat, with which we all become acquainted in the nursery. I am going to tell a story of a white cat very different from the amiable and enchanted princess who took that disguise for a season. The white cat of which I speak was a more sinister animal.

The traveller from Limerick toward Dublin, after passing the hills of Killaloe upon the left, as Keeper Mountain rises high in view, finds himself gradually hemmed in, up the right, by a range of lower hills. An undulating plain that dips gradually to a lower level than that of the road interposes, and some scattered hedgerows relieve its somewhat wild and melancholy character.

One of the few human habitations that send up their films of turf-smoke from that lonely plain, is the loosely-thatched, earth-built dwelling of a "strong farmer," as the more prosperous of the tenant-farming classes are termed in Munster. It stands in a clump of trees near the edge of a wandering stream, about half-way between the mountains and the Dublin road, and had been for generations tenanted by people named Donovan.

In a distant place, desirous of studying some Irish records which had fallen into my hands, and inquiring for a teacher capable of instructing me in the Irish language, a Mr. Donovan, dreamy, harmless, and learned, was recommended to me for the purpose.

I found that he had been educated as a Sizar in Trinity College, Dublin. He now supported himself by teaching, and the special direction of my studies, I suppose, flattered his national partialities, for he unbosomed himself of much of his long-reserved thoughts, and recollections about his country and his early days. It was he who told me this story, and I mean to repeat it, as nearly as I can, in his own words.

I have myself seen the old farm-house, with its orchard of huge mossgrown apple trees. I have looked round on the peculiar landscape; the roofless, ivied tower, that two hundred years before had afforded a refuge from raid and rapparee, and which still occupies its old place in the angle of the haggard; the bush-grown "liss," that scarcely a hundred and fifty steps away records the labours of a bygone race; the dark and towering outline of old Keeper in the background; and the lonely range of furze and heath-clad hills that form a nearer barrier, with many a line of grey rock and clump of dwarf oak or birch. The pervading sense of loneliness made it a scene not unsuited for a wild and unearthly story. And I could quite fancy how, seen in the grey of a wintry morning, shrouded far and wide in snow, or in the melancholy glory of an

autumnal sunset, or in the chill splendour of a moonlight night, it might have helped to tone a dreamy mind like honest Dan Donovan's to superstition and a proneness to the illusions of fancy. It is certain, however, that I never anywhere met with a more simple-minded creature, or one on whose good faith I could more entirely rely.

When I was a boy, said he, living at home at Drumgunniol, I used to take my Goldsmith's *Roman History* in my hand and go down to my favourite seat, the flat stone, sheltered by a hawthorn tree beside the little lough, a large and deep pool, such as I have heard called a tarn in England. It lay in the gentle hollow of a field that is overhung toward the north by the old orchard, and being a deserted place was favourable to my studious quietude.

One day reading here, as usual, I wearied at last, and began to look about me, thinking of the heroic scenes I had just been reading of. I was as wide awake as I am at this moment, and I saw a woman appear at the corner of the orchard and walk down the slope. She wore a long, light grey dress, so long that it seemed to sweep the grass behind her, and so singular was her appearance in a part of the world where female attire is so inflexibly fixed by custom, that I could not take my eyes off her. Her course lay diagonally from corner to corner of the field, which was a large one, and she pursued it without swerving.

When she came near I could see that her feet were bare, and that she seemed to be looking steadfastly upon some remote object for guidance. Her route would have crossed me— had the tarn not interposed— about ten or twelve yards below the point at which I was sitting. But instead of arresting her course at the margin of the lough, as I had expected, she went on without seeming conscious of its existence, and I saw her, as plainly as I see you, sir, walk across the surface of the water, and pass, without seeming to see me, at about the distance I had calculated.

I was ready to faint from sheer terror. I was only thirteen years old then, and I remember every particular as if it had happened this hour.

The figure passed through the gap at the far corner of the field, and there I lost sight of it. I had hardly strength to walk home, and was so nervous, and ultimately so ill, that for three weeks I was confined to the house, and could not bear to be alone for a moment. I never entered that field again, such was the horror with which from that moment every object in it was clothed. Even at this distance of time I should not like to pass through it.

This apparition I connected with a mysterious event; and, also, with a singular liability, that has for nearly eight years distinguished, or rather afflicted, our family. It is no fancy. Everybody in that part of the country knows all about it. Everybody connected what I had seen with it.

I will tell it all to you as well as I can.

When I was about fourteen years old— that is about a year after the sight I had seen in the lough field— we were one night expecting my father home from the fair of Killaloe. My mother sat up to welcome him home, and I with her, for I liked nothing better than such a vigil. My brothers and sisters, and the farm servants, except the men who were driving home the cattle from the fair, were asleep in their beds. My mother and I were sitting in the chimney corner chatting together, and watching my father's supper, which was kept hot over the fire. We knew that he would return before the men who were driving home the cattle, for he was riding, and told us that he would only wait to see them fairly on the road, and then push homeward.

At length we heard his voice and the knocking of his loaded whip at the door, and my mother let him in. I don't think I ever saw my father drunk, which is more than most men of my age, from the same part of the country, could say of theirs. But he could drink his glass of whisky as well as another, and he usually came home from fair or market a little merry and mellow, and with a jolly flush in his cheeks.

To-night he looked sunken, pale and sad. He entered with the saddle and bridle in his hand, and he dropped them against the wall, near the door, and put his arms round his wife's neck, and kissed her kindly.

"Welcome home, Meehal," said she, kissing him heartily.

"God bless you, mavourneen," he answered.

And hugging her again, he turned to me, who was plucking him by the hand, jealous of his notice. I was little, and light of my age, and he lifted me up in his arms, and kissed me, and my arms being about his neck, he said to my mother:

"Draw the bolt, acuishla."

She did so, and setting me down very dejectedly, he walked to the fire and sat down on a stool, and stretched his feet toward the glowing turf, leaning with his hands on his knees.

"Rouse up, Mick, darlin'," said my mother, who was growing anxious, "and tell me how did the cattle sell, and did everything go lucky at the fair, or is there anything wrong with the landlord, or what in the world is it that ails you, Mick, jewel?"

"Nothin', Molly. The cows sould well, thank God, and there's nothin' fell out between me an' the landlord, an' everything's the same way. There's no fault to find anywhere."

"Well, then, Mickey, since so it is, turn round to your hot supper, and ate it, and tell us is there anything new."

"I got my supper, Molly, on the way, and I can't ate a bit," he answered.

"Got your supper on the way, an' you knowin' 'twas waiting for you at home, an' your wife sittin' up an' all!" cried my mother, reproachfully.

"You're takin' a wrong meanin' out of what I say," said my father. "There's something happened that leaves me that I can't ate a mouthful, and I'll not be dark with you, Molly, for, maybe, it ain't very long I have to be here, an' I'll tell you what it was. It's what I've seen, the white cat."

"The Lord between us and harm!" exclaimed my mother, in a moment as pale and as chap-fallen as my father; and then, trying to rally, with a laugh, she said: "Ha! 'tis only funnin' me you are. Sure a white rabbit was snared a Sunday last, in Grady's wood; an' Teigue seen a big white rat in the haggard yesterday."

"'Twas neither rat nor rabbit was in it. Don't ye think but I'd know a rat or a rabbit from a big white cat, with green eyes as big as halfpennies, and its back riz up like a bridge, trottin' on and across me, and ready, if I dar' stop, to rub its sides against my shins, and maybe to make a jump and seize my throat, if that it's a cat, at all, an' not something worse?"

As he ended his description in a low tone, looking straight at the fire, my father drew his big hand across his forehead once or twice, his face being damp and shining with the moisture of fear, and he sighed, or rather groaned, heavily.

My mother had relapsed into panic, and was praying again in her fear. I, too, was terribly frightened, and on the point of crying, for I knew all about the white cat.

Clapping my father on the shoulder, by way of encouragement, my mother leaned over him, kissing him, and at last began to cry. He was wringing her hands in his, and seemed in great trouble.

"There was nothin' came into the house with me?" he asked, in a very low tone, turning to me.

"There was nothin', father," I said, "but the saddle and bridle that was in your hand."

"Nothin' white kem in at the doore wid me," he repeated.

"Nothin' at all," I answered.

"So best," said my father, and making the sign of the cross, he began mumbling to himself, and I knew he was saying his prayers.

Waiting for a while, to give him time for this exercise, my mother asked him where he first saw it.

"When I was riding up the bohereen,"— the Irish term meaning a little road, such as leads up to a farm-house— "I bethought myself that the men was on the road with the cattle, and no one to look to the horse barrin' myself, so I thought I might as well leave him in the crooked field below, an' I tuck him

there, he bein' cool, and not a hair turned, for I rode him aisy all the way. It was when I turned, after lettin' him go— the saddle and bridle bein' in my hand— that I saw it, pushin' out o' the long grass at the side o' the path, an' it walked across it, in front of me, an' then back again, before me, the same way, an' sometimes at one side, an' then at the other, lookin' at me wid them shinin' eyes; and I consayted I heard it growlin' as it kep' beside me— as close as ever you see— till I kem up to the doore, here, an' knocked an' called, as ye heerd me."

Now, what was it, in so simple an incident, that agitated my father, my mother, myself, and finally, every member of this rustic household, with a terrible foreboding? It was this that we, one and all, believed that my father had received, in thus encountering the white cat, a warning of his approaching death.

The omen had never failed hitherto. It did not fail now. In a week after my father took the fever that was going, and before a month he was dead.

My honest friend, Dan Donovan, paused here; I could perceive that he was praying, for his lips were busy, and I concluded that it was for the repose of that departed soul.

In a little while he resumed.

It is eighty years now since that omen first attached to my family. Eighty years? Ay, is it. Ninety is nearer the mark. And I have spoken to many old people, in those earlier times, who had a distinct recollection of everything connected with it.

It happened in this way.

My grand-uncle, Connor Donovan, had the old farm of Drumgunniol in his day. He was richer than ever my father was, or my father's father either, for he took a short lease of Balraghan, and made money of it. But money won't soften a hard heart, and I'm afraid my grand-uncle was a cruel man— a profligate man he was, surely, and that is mostly a cruel man at heart. He drank his share, too, and cursed and swore, when he was vexed, more than was good for his soul, I'm afraid.

At that time there was a beautiful girl of the Colemans, up in the mountains, not far from Capper Cullen. I'm told that there are no Colemans there now at all, and that family has passed away. The famine years made great changes.

Ellen Coleman was her name. The Colemans were not rich. But, being such a beauty, she might have made a good match. Worse than she did for herself, poor thing, she could not.

Con Donovan— my grand-uncle, God forgive him!— sometimes in his rambles saw her at fairs or patterns, and he fell in love with her, as who might not?

He used her ill. He promised her marriage, and persuaded her to come away with him; and, after all, he broke his word. It was just the old story. He tired of her, and he wanted to push himself in the world; and he married a girl of the Collopys, that had a great fortune— twenty-four cows, seventy sheep, and a hundred and twenty goats.

He married this Mary Collopy, and grew richer than before; and Ellen Coleman died broken-hearted. But that did not trouble the strong farmer much.

He would have liked to have children, but he had none, and this was the only cross he had to bear, for everything else went much as he wished.

One night he was returning from the fair of Nenagh. A shallow stream at that time crossed the road— they have thrown a bridge over it, I am told, some time since— and its channel was often dry in summer weather. When it was so, as it passes close by the old farm-house of Drumgunniol, without a great deal of winding, it makes a sort of road, which people then used as a short cut to reach the house by. Into this dry channel, as there was plenty of light from the moon, my grand-uncle turned his horse, and when he had reached the two ash-trees at the meering of the farm he turned his horse short into the river-field, intending to ride through the gap at the other end, under the oak-tree, and so he would have been within a few hundred yards of his door.

As he approached the "gap" he saw, or thought he saw, with a slow motion, gliding along the ground toward the same point, and now and then with a soft bound, a white object, which he described as being no bigger than his hat, but what it was he could not see, as it moved along the hedge and disappeared at the point to which he was himself tending.

When he reached the gap the horse stopped short. He urged and coaxed it in vain. He got down to lead it through, but it recoiled, snorted, and fell into a wild trembling fit. He mounted it again. But its terror continued, and it obstinately resisted his caresses and his whip. It was bright moonlight, and my grand-uncle was chafed by the horse's resistance, and, seeing nothing to account for it, and being so near home, what little patience he possessed forsook him, and, plying his whip and spur in earnest, he broke into oaths and curses.

All on a sudden the horse sprang through, and Con Donovan, as he passed under the broad branch of the oak, saw clearly a woman standing on the bank beside him, her arm extended, with the hand of which, as he flew by, she

struck him a blow upon the shoulders. It threw him forward upon the neck of the horse, which, in wild terror, reached the door at a gallop, and stood there quivering and steaming all over.

Less alive than dead, my grand-uncle got in. He told his story, at least, so much as he chose. His wife did not quite know what to think. But that something very bad had happened she could not doubt. He was very faint and ill, and begged that the priest should be sent for forthwith. When they were getting him to his bed they saw distinctly the marks of five fingerpoints on the flesh of his shoulder, where the spectral blow had fallen. These singular marks— which they said resembled in tint the hue of a body struck by lightning— remained imprinted on his flesh, and were buried with him.

When he had recovered sufficiently to talk with the people about him— speaking, like a man at his last hour, from a burdened heart, and troubled conscience— he repeated his story, but said he did not see, or, at all events, know, the face of the figure that stood in the gap. No one believed him. He told more about it to the priest than to others. He certainly had a secret to tell. He might as well have divulged it frankly, for the neighbours all knew well enough that it was the face of dead Ellen Coleman that he had seen.

From that moment my grand-uncle never raised his head. He was a scared, silent, broken-spirited man. It was early summer then, and at the fall of the leaf in the same year he died.

Of course there was a wake, such as beseemed a strong farmer so rich as he. For some reason the arrangements of this ceremonial were a little different from the usual routine.

The usual practice is to place the body in the great room, or kitchen, as it is called, of the house. In this particular case there was, as I told you, for some reason, an unusual arrangement. The body was placed in a small room that opened upon the greater one. The door of this, during the wake, stood open. There were candles about the bed, and pipes and tobacco on the table, and stools for such guests as chose to enter, the door standing open for their reception.

The body, having been laid out, was left alone, in this smaller room, during the preparations for the wake. After nightfall one of the women, approaching the bed to get a chair which she had left near it, rushed from the room with a scream, and, having recovered her speech at the further end of the "kitchen," and surrounded by a gaping audience, she said, at last:

"*May* I never sin, if his face bain't riz up again the back o' the bed, and he starin' down to the doore, wid eyes as big as pewter plates, that id be shinin' in the moon!"

"Arra, woman! Is it cracked you are?" said one of the farm boys as they are termed, being men of any age you please.

"Agh, Molly, don't be talkin', woman! 'Tis what ye consayted it, goin' into the dark room, out o' the light. Why didn't ye take a candle in your fingers, ye aumadhaun?" said one of her female companions.

"Candle, or no candle; I seen it," insisted Molly. "An' what's more, I could a'most tak' my oath I seen his arum, too, stretchin' out o' the bed along the flure, three times as long as it should be, to take hould o' me be the fut."

"Nansinse, ye fool, what id he want o' yer fut?" exclaimed one scornfully.

"Gi' me the candle, some o' yez— in the name o' God," said old Sal Doolan, that was straight and lean, and a woman that could pray like a priest almost.

"Give her a candle," agreed all.

But whatever they might say, there wasn't one among them that did not look pale and stern enough as they followed Mrs. Doolan, who was praying as fast as her lips could patter, and leading the van with a tallow candle, held like a taper, in her fingers.

The door was half open, as the panic-stricken girl had left it; and holding the candle on high the better to examine the room, she made a step or so into it.

If my grand-uncle's hand had been stretched along the floor, in the unnatural way described, he had drawn it back again under the sheet that covered him. And tall Mrs. Doolan was in no danger of tripping over his arm as she entered. But she had not gone more than a step or two with her candle aloft, when, with a drowning face, she suddenly stopped short, staring at the bed which was now fully in view.

"Lord, bless us, Mrs. Doolan, ma'am, come back," said the woman next her, who had fast hold of her dress, or her 'coat,' as they call it, and drawing her backwards with a frightened pluck, while a general recoil among her followers betokened the alarm which her hesitation had inspired.

"Whisht, will yez?" said the leader, peremptorily, "I can't hear my own ears wid the noise ye're makin', an' which iv yez let the cat in here, an' whose cat is it?" she asked, peering suspiciously at a white cat that was sitting on the breast of the corpse.

"Put it away, will yez?" she resumed, with horror at the profanation. "Many a corpse as I sthretched and crossed in the bed, the likes o' that I never seen yet. The man o' the house, wid a brute baste like that mounted on him, like a phooka, Lord forgi' me for namin' the like in this room. Dhrive it away, some o' yez! out o' that, this minute, I tell ye."

Each repeated the order, but no one seemed inclined to execute it. They were crossing themselves, and whispering their conjectures and misgivings as

to the nature of the beast, which was no cat of that house, nor one that they had ever seen before. On a sudden, the white cat placed itself on the pillow over the head of the body, and having from that place glared for a time at them over the features of the corpse, it crept softly along the body towards them, growling low and fiercely as it drew near.

Out of the room they bounced, in dreadful confusion, shutting the door fast after them, and not for a good while did the hardiest venture to peep in again.

The white cat was sitting in its old place, on the dead man's breast, but this time it crept quietly down the side of the bed, and disappeared under it, the sheet which was spread like a coverlet, and hung down nearly to the floor, concealing it from view.

Praying, crossing themselves, and not forgetting a sprinkling of holy water, they peeped, and finally searched, poking spades, "wattles," pitchforks and such implements under the bed. But the cat was not to be found, and they concluded that it had made its escape among their feet as they stood near the threshold. So they secured the door carefully, with hasp and padlock. But when the door was opened next morning they found the white cat sitting, as if it had never been disturbed, upon the breast of the dead man.

Again occurred very nearly the same scene with a like result, only that some said they saw the cat afterwards lurking under a big box in a corner of the outer-room, where my grand-uncle kept his leases and papers, and his prayer-book and beads.

Mrs. Doolan heard it growling at her heels wherever she went; and although she could not see it, she could hear it spring on the back of her chair when she sat down, and growl in her ear, so that she would bounce up with a scream and a prayer, fancying that it was on the point of taking her by the throat.

And the priest's boy, looking round the corner, under the branches of the old orchard, saw a white cat sitting under the little window of the room where my grand-uncle was laid out and looking up at the four small panes of glass as a cat will watch a bird.

The end of it was that the cat was found on the corpse again, when the room was visited, and do what they might, whenever the body was left alone, the cat was found again in the same ill-omened contiguity with the dead man. And this continued, to the scandal and fear of the neighbourhood, until the door was opened finally for the wake.

My grand-uncle being dead, and, with all due solemnities, buried, I have done with him. But not quite yet with the white cat. No banshee ever yet was more inalienably attached to a family than this ominous apparition is to mine.

But there is this difference. The banshee seems to be animated with an affectionate sympathy with the bereaved family to whom it is hereditarily attached, whereas this thing has about it a suspicion of malice. It is the messenger simply of death. And its taking the shape of a cat— the coldest, and they say, the most vindictive of brutes— is indicative of the spirit of its visit.

When my grandfather's death was near, although he seemed quite well at the time, it appeared not exactly, but very nearly in the same way in which I told you it showed itself to my father.

The day before my Uncle Teigue was killed by the bursting of his gun, it appeared to him in the evening, at twilight, by the lough, in the field where I saw the woman who walked across the water, as I told you. My uncle was washing the barrel of his gun in the lough. The grass is short there, and there is no cover near it. He did not know how it approached; but the first he saw of it, the white cat was walking close round his feet, in the twilight, with an angry twist of its tail, and a green glare in its eyes, and do what he would, it continued walking round and round him, in larger or smaller circles, till he reached the orchard, and there he lost it.

My poor Aunt Peg— she married one of the O'Brians, near Oolah— came to Drumgunniol to go to the funeral of a cousin who died about a mile away. She died herself, poor woman, only a month after.

Coming from the wake, at two or three o'clock in the morning, as she got over the style into the farm of Drumgunniol, she saw the white cat at her side, and it kept close beside her, she ready to faint all the time, till she reached the door of the house, where it made a spring up into the white-thorn tree that grows close by, and so it parted from her. And my little brother Jim saw it also, just three weeks before he died. Every member of our family who dies, or takes his death-sickness, at Drumgunniol, is sure to see the white cat, and no one of us who sees it need hope for long life after.

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17: A Dream of Murder

William Crawford Honeyman (as by James McGovan)

1845–1919

In: *The Edinburgh Detective, or, His Last Confessions*

From the reprint in *Old Cap Collier Library,* 5 Oct 1883

THE MISSING MAN, David Comyn, was under-gamekeeper on an estate a good many miles west of Edinburgh. Like the most ignorant and brutish men, when invested with a little brief authority, Comyn was generally disliked in the district; but in this case there seems to have been more ground than usual for the feeling. Comyn was drunken and unprincipled, and was known to accept bribes in fair proportion to the means of any one he caught poaching. He was reckless and extravagant, up to the ears in debt, and even then under notice to quit his place.

A sheriff-officer had been at his cottage the day before to see what furniture there was to poind, and had been grievously disappointed with the result, and other creditors were bestirring themselves so actively in the same direction that Comyn had seriously begun to consider how he could best vanish from the place, taking all he could with him. Fate was to settle the question for him in a manner he never had dreamed of.

It was on a soft November evening that the disappearance took place. Comyn stood for a few minutes outside his cottage, speaking with his wife, in the quiet gloaming.

It was his usual time for starting on a tour through the plantations. Sometimes the round occupied but an hour or two; at others it might be two or three o'clock in the morning before he returned. He was in rather a bad temper, and scolded his wife about some inattention on her part to the feeding of the pig, but there was nothing in his manner or conversation to indicate that he meditated a prolonged absence. He carried no gun, but had a game bag slung by his side lest he should pick up any on the way. He carried in his hand a stout stick with a heavy head, which everyone knew he could use for more than support in walking. He was a big, powerful fellow, and with that stick in his hands was quite as safe as with a double-barreled gun.

"Are ye goin' across by the march?" asked his wife as he turned away.

"No, they've been there wi' the ploo's, and it's heavy walking," he answered, in a sullen tone. "I'll gang by Whinny Head and Craig End."

A young collie dog, which Comyn had in training, at that moment ran out of the house, and sought to accompany him. Comyn swore at the dog; kicked it back into the house; made it howl with the wight of his stick, and then disappeared into the shades of evening. His wife saw him strike across a field near by for the first plantation, and then turned into the house, muttering that

scathing comment which has been used by nearly every wife from Mother Eve downwards— "Grumblin' brute!"

Having thus relieved herself, and little dreaming that she was looking upon her husband for the last time in life, Jen Comyn turned into the house, and in two hours was sound asleep in bed. The door remained unlocked during the whole night, and Jen, aroused about five in the morning by her child crying, was surprised to note the hour and find that her husband had not returned. She felt no alarm or concern, but simply quieted her child and went to sleep again. Comyn did not appear at breakfast time, and Jen made up her mind that he must have caught some one and had to lug him off to jail, and that, as a natural result, he would be in a fearfully bad temper when he did appear.

"I'll jist let him flyte awa' and answer never a word," was her wise resolve, only, like wise resolves, it came too late.

The day wore away; Comyn did not appear, and the head gamekeeper reported that he was not to be seen anywhere on the estate. No one had met him or cast eyes on him since he left Jen at the cottage door, so far as his superior could learn, and he was not slow to give his opinion that Comyn was merely shirking duty, and away at the nearest town having a drinking bout. Jen thought differently, but did not say so. She knew that Comyn was in dread of imprisonment for debt, and that he had spoken of going to another part of the country, and then sending word to her to follow when he should be safely settled. Jen's swift thought was that he had suddenly made up his mind to go that night, and that her best course would be a prudent silence.

"If onything had come owre him," she reasoned, meaning any calamity or accident, "he wad have been found by this time. He has heard some word after he gaed oot, and slippit awa' in the nicht time."

Strange, some of the Craig End people, and others in the adjacent town, showed more tender solicitude over Comyn than his own wife. These were his creditors. They showed genuine grief over his disappearance. They had the wood scoured for miles around; they had his house searched and watched; and the police bounded on to hunt for the missing man as energetically as if he had been beloved of the whole community, a touching proof that the meanest among us my be sadly missed when he is gone.

The cool demeanor of Jen did not escape notice. If anything serious had happened to her husband his wife would have shown grief. It was evident, folk said, that Jen knew perfectly well where her husband was concealed; and her protests to the contrary were received with significant winks and skeptical grins. Jen, from being looked upon as a dull-pated country wench, was suddenly exalted to a person of superior cunning and genius in dodging. After

that none of us need despair of a reputation. Like the dew's of the morning, it may come unbidden, and afterwards vanish as swiftly.

Now, up to this point the anxious ones had done their best and failed, and all interest in Comyn was dying away. It was believed that he had shown a clean pair of heels, and all but Jen began to be reconciled to the loss. The wife was in a sad fix. She believed her husband to be in safety, but then he was so securely hidden that not even she could find him. She was under notice to quit the cottage, and had not the faintest idea whither to turn her steps.

At this point occurred the strange revelation which led to me being called out to assist in the case. At first it was only a whisper which passed from mouth to mouth, but by-and-by a name was given, and some outlines of the dream, and then one of the county police took the trouble to call on Jake Binning the ploughman, or farm hand, with whom the rumor originated.

Jake was both reticent and skeptical, and disposed to laugh at the serious aspect of the county constable. He didn't believe in dreams, he said, so what good could come of repeating one that he had had.

All this coyness on the part of Jake only quickened the curiosity of the constable, and then he succeeded in extracting from Jake the extraordinary narrative which caused them to send for me. Dreams, at best, are but filmy clues for a detective to work upon, but in the present case it will be seen that the dream itself was not the most extraordinary feature. Here is the substance of Jake Binning's statement as it was afterwards repeated to me:—

On the night of Comyn's disappearance Binning was confined to the house with a sore heel, which had kept him off his work during the day. His wife happened to be confined to bed at the same time, and Binning was able to "hirple about" and attend to her. Their cottage was one of a row near the place called Whinny Head, past which Comyn had stated his intention of going.

Being thus precluded from taking active exercise, Jake went early to bed—bow early he could not say, as his wife was asleep at the time and she was better remembering these things than he.

But Jake bad not been long in bed and asleep when he found himself in a vision, looking down on a tangled brake or wood quite unknown to him. The spot seemed to be a small bill, covered with pines and underbrush, and having in its center a whinstone quarry, quite dry and disused, and also clothed round its sides with underbrush of broom, brambles, wild rasps and whins. A grassy path skirted the edge of the quarry, and on that open path the moon was shining brightly.

As a matter of fact I found that there was no moon at all on the night of Comyn's disappearance, but in dreams one must not look for absolute accuracy.

Jake seemed to be looking down on that path— which in actual life he had never seen— in the clearest moonlight, and with a strange tremor of apprehension. He felt that something tragic was about to happen under his eyes, yet had not the power to drag himself from the horrifying spectacle. His feet clung o the ground; his knees refused to work on their hinges; and even grabbing at the trees to pull himself away did not draw him an inch from the spot.

While he vainly struggled, the tragedy which he sought to avoid seeing began by the appearance of a man as strange to him as the spot.

He was a short, broad shouldered fellow, roughly clad, and apparently accustomed to the roads; he had a bundle or box slung from his shoulders by a canvas strap, and carried in his right hand two pheasants. As he emerged from the shade of the tree, this broad shouldered man stooped, and was about to stowaway the two birds in his wallet or box when Comyn appeared at the opposite end of the grassy path, shouting out the words—

"Hullo you I what are ye aboot now?"

The dreamer recognized Comyn at a glance, and knew his voice perfectly. The thick-set man started up, and, without completing the stowing away of the pheasants, turned to fly, but Comyn, with a ferocious spring and swift race, got up to him before he could re-enter the wood, and the two were speedily locked together in a deadly embrace. Neither appeared to get any advantage, for what the poacher lacked in height he seemed to have in muscle, and Comyn neither succeeded in overpowering or in felling the man with his stick, though he made several desperate attempts at both.

Comyn did all the shouting and swearing, threatening his opponent with all the terrors of the law. The short man never opened his month, but gradually forced Comyn towards the edge of the grassy path overlooking the quarry." Neither appeared aware of the danger, and the horrified dreamer tried in vain to scream out a warning. The right leg of the short man was twisted suddenly about those of Comyn, and a quick wrench and push sent the unfortunate keeper backwards over the edge of the rock into the quarry. Comyn fell head foremost close to the side of the quarry, and was instantly hidden from sight by some bracken growing at the foot of the rock. The short man appeared greatly horrified, and stood stupidly staring before him, with his head bent on one side as if listening for any sounds of life from below. Then he got down on his knees, crept to the edge of the rocks, and peeped over, but evidently saw no sign of his opponent. After a long scrutiny the scared man moved along the path and down an adjacent slope, and so got round to the entrance of the quarry, which he crossed. He then began groping and searching among the bracken till he came on the body of Comyn. It lay in a recess of the rock, with

the head bent under it, as if the neck had been broken in the fall, the man had chanced to touch the face in groping, and his fingers came out into the moonlight covered with blood. He shuddered and wiped his hands on the grass, and turned and hastily left the quarry. He was so scared and upset that at first he forgot the box or wallet and the two pheasants up on the grassy path, but after a minute or two returned, secured these, and made off across the country at a rapid rate.

That was the substance of Jake Binning's dream of murder.

Being asked if he thought he could recognize the spot seen in his dream, he said he believed he could, but was sure that there was no such place in that quarter.

Asked again if he could identify the murderer, he was not so decided in his reply. He could describe the man minutely enough, yet seemed uncertain whether he could identify him.

Now, when this narrative was first delivered to the chief constable there was present the head gamekeeper, and this man no sooner heard the quarry described than he said very decisively—

''Yon mean Craigie's Cutting, the old quarry that was used to build Craig End, and then closed again?"

"Where's that? I never heard of it," was Jake Binning's answer, and then the gamekeeper explained that the place in question was in the center of one of the plantations not well known, because surrounded by cultivated fields and far back from the road.

It was used chiefly as a rearing ground for young game, and at certain seasons was very closely watched by the keepers on that account. Binning could not say whether it was likely to be that spot or not, but thought it might be worth while to have the quarry searched.

The same evening, therefore, the chief constable, with two of his men and the gamekeeper, proceeded to the secluded spot named Craigie's Cutting.

The gamekeeper was averse to making the search, though not strongly so, averring that he had already searched the place thoroughly, and found no trace of either the missing man or a murder.

He laughed derisively at Jake's dream, and freely expressed an opinion that Jake's head that night had contained more whiskey than was good for the owner.

The police superintendent was inclined to think differently, possibly being of a more superstitious cast of mind.

Under the guidance of the gamekeeper, about fifteen minute's walking brought them to Craigie's Cutting.

They lighted two lamps which they had brought, and walked across the quarry to the spot described so accurately by Binning in his dream.

There was the bracken at the foot of the rock; there was the natural recess he had described; and, on parting the bushes, and holding forward the lamps, there was the body of a man!

The gamekeeper looked grave and startled, and somewhat foolish; the superintendent jubilant, the natural result of finding themselves wrong and right.

Very carefully they lifted out the body, which lay with the head doubled up under it, and then ascertained beyond doubt that it was that of David Comyn.

There were few injuries and little blood discernible; death had evidently been swift, and caused by the breaking of the neck. Under the bracken which had hidden the body they found the stout walking stick which Comyn had been known to carry.

The four men stood staring at each other in awe and wonderment. Every particular of the dream seemed confirmed. Comyn's death had evidently been caused by a fall from the top of the quarry; the only possibility remaining was that he might have gone over by accident.

They left the body and ascended to the grassy path.

More confirmation. There were most palpable traces of a struggle immediately above the spot where the body lay; the turfy ground was indented, torn, and scraped, as by heavy feet in fierce conflict.

The death had not been accidental. The whole revelation seemed supernatural and astounding, and there came additional confirmation.

The body of Comyn was conveyed to his home, and on the way thither the chief constable said—

"I believe I know a character answering the description of the man who did it. His character isn't the best, and though he professes to be a hawker, and has a license, he doesn't confine himself to that. Many a hundred pounds' worth of game has passed through Pate Coulter's hands."

"Coulter?" observed one of the constables. "I saw him three or four days ago about five miles from here. He was going in the direction of Edinburgh, and had his box slung over his back."

"Strange! and he does not move about with anything like regularity. He might not be in this quarter for six months again," continued the chief constable. "Strange that he should have been here, or near here, on that night. And the description fits him perfectly— and would fit no other that I know."

The sensation caused by these investigations and discoveries in that quiet country place is indescribable.

Had the police had their own way the whole would have been kept secret for a time at least, but Jake Binning had made no secret of his dream, and the rest speedily oozed out.

But meanwhile the telegraph had been at work, and I was requested to look after the mysterious hawker seen in Jake's dream.

It seemed to me that this message came far too late. I did not know that the hawker in question moved but slowly at times, and I quite despaired of picking him up in Edinburgh.

But quickly following the telegram came the chief constable himself, and from him I learned a number of particulars regarding the man we sought.

Among other things, I was told that Peter Coulter was a great crony with carriers and farmers, and frequently got a lift in their carts. This induced me to pay a visit to the Grassmarket, and the constable accompanied me.

A number of these carriers and farmers put up in that quarter, and among so many from the districts surrounding the city it seemed strange to me if we did not come on some clue to the whereabouts of Pate Coulter.

Be it observed I had absolutely no expectation of finding the actual man there. We had gone through two of the inns without coming on any information of importance, when I was surprised by my companion saying, quickly—

"Why, there's Pate himself!"

I looked in the direction indicated, and saw two carriers and a short, muscular-looking man of forty-five or so seated drinking together.

The man we sought appeared quite cool and unconcerned, and nodded familiarly to my companion.

He had a rather cunning eye, and seemed a knowing fellow altogether, but there was nothing depraved or brutal about the expression of his face.

"I've been looking for you, Pate Coulter," said my companion. "Are you staying here?"

"Yes, sir— grand weather," was the hearty reply.

"Then get your things and come away with us," coldly continued the constable.

Quite a puzzled look overspread the hawker's face, and at length, after a scratch at his towsy pow, he said—

"Guidness me, what's the maitter? Do ye think I've been poaching?"

"Oh, you've done that, too, in your day, I daresay," answered my companion; "but this officer, Detective M'Govan, wants you on a much more serious charge."

Pate's alarmed gaze fell upon me, and there was something comical in his aspect.

"Preserve me, is that M'Govan?" he said, concernedly; "and what do ye want wi' me?"

"You are wanted on a charge of murder," I answered, trying to look grave, which was no easy matter.

"Murder?" he vacantly returned; "murdering some useless bit rabbitie or hare, ye mean?"

"No, not a hare or rabbit— a man," and I swiftly warned him to say nothing more than he could help.

"Humph! I've naething to be feared for," was Pate's scornful reply. "Murdered a man? Did onybody ever hear the like? My manny, ye've made a mistak' this time. Div I look like a murderer?"

Truth to tell he did not, but then appearances go for nothing in cases of that kind. Some of the most gentlemanly-looking fellows have made their last bow on the gallows.

We took Pate away and searched him. He wore a loose sack coat, and under that a deep waistcoat, of light moleskin, and this waistcoat, at the left side, under the arm, was deeply stained with blood.

"It was only a hare, gentlemen— a hare that I was commissioned to carry into the toon," quickly observed Pate. "It had got gie sair hashed aboot the head, and I was feared some policeman might think it was a poached ane," he added with a sly look, " so I carried it under my jacket."

Questioned closely, Pate admitted that he had killed the hare with his stick. He had come on it asleep on the road— a likely story!— and smashed it dead on the spot.

In his declaration he stated that he had passed along the public road near Craig End on the afternoon before Comyn's disappearance.

He knew Comyn by sight, but had not seen him for many a day— six months at least. He had no idea where Comyn was to be found at that moment— he might be in the moon for aught he knew.

Yes, he knew Craigie's Cutting. It was an old quarry. He had seen it worked for stones long ago.

No, most decidedly he was not near Craigie's Cutting on the night after he passed Craig End. He was certain of that; he hadn't time to go as far, and never thought of going— why should he? Did he not pass through the wood surrounding that quarry, and on the way kill two pheasants?

Pate looked perfectly thunderstruck at the question, and answered with such haste and warmth as to make in his answer rather a cool admission.

"No, I didna!" was his indignant reply. "I havena killed a pheasant for mony a day, and they'd be clever that wad kill ane there, where the place is sae weel watched."

He had not been nearer the quarry than Whinny Head, where he sold some of his small wares. He remembered that distinctly.

It was about three or four in the afternoon, and if they didn't believe him, they could ask the people at that row of farmhands' cottages.

It was mother-o'-pearl buttons he had sold, and it was a man who bought them. He declared he would know the man again, though he had seen him then for the first time.

The man was not lame, and did not limp when he walked, so far as Pate could see.

This was nearly all that was contained in Coulter's declaration, and he was locked up. Then I went out to Whinny Head and brought in the man Binning to see the prisoner.

Binning did not seem inclined to come, and shuffled hard to get out of the task. He was quite sure he could not identify the face— faces in dreams were so hazy and indistinct, and sometimes one face seems to change into another.

As I was firm, however, he had to accompany me, and the result was exactly what I had expected, with a little more added on, which was expected by neither of us.

When Jake Binning was shown Pate Coulter he hesitated, looked again, asked the hawker to speak so that he might hear the tone of his voice, and finally said the prisoner "was like the man he had seen in his dream in size and form, but the face was not the same."

This was disappointing, and I began to distrust Binning. It seemed to me that he had, for some reason, made up his mind not to identify Pate. But a startling surprise was in store for us both. Just as Binning concluded Pate shouted out—

"That's the man I saw at Whinny Head and selt the buttons to, and there's the very buttons on his waistcoat," and as he spoke Pate indicated three mother o' pearl buttons, which did not exactly match the others on Binning's waistcoat.

"You've made a mistake," said Binning, turning pale. "I never saw you in my life before."

"What? Do you think I'm daft?" returned the pedlar. "I have the rest o' the buttons in my box yet; and do ye no mind hoo ye grudged the price, and wad hue the odd ha'penny struck aff?"

Binning denied the whole most vociferously, got confused, contradicted himself in some little particulars, and finally appeared in a great hurry to get away.

"Look after that fellow, Mr. M'Govan." said Pate to me in a whisper, as I left the place, "for if he's no the murderer himself, he kens something about it."

I went to Pate's box, being accompanied with much reluctance by Binning, and turned out his small stock, when I came upon a paper of mother o' pearl buttons from which some had been removed, and which matched exactly the three odd ones on Binning's waistcoat.

After consultation, it was my duty to inform the clever dreamer that he was arrested and formally detained, charged with being concerned in the murder. He appeared to lose his head for a moment, for he blurted out—

"I can swear I never meant— I mean, never killed the man."

The words were taken down, but very little more did we get out of Binning. His declaration only amounted to a strong protest of innocence.

But then we had his former statement to fall back upon. I found, on investigation, that Binning had not been lame or confined to the house on the night of the murder; indeed, I came upon one witness who had seen him and spoke to him at least a mile from his house, and at a very late hour, that night.

His own wife could not say for certain that her husband had been in the house all the evening, as she had been asleep most of the time, and in the "ben" end of the house.

After a week's meditation in prison Binning got permission to make a second statement.

His new declaration was practically a confession of the murder. He had been wearied with the day's confinement in the house and the nursing of his wife, and had gone out after dark when she was asleep.

He declared that he only wanted a walk in the fresh air, but it was thought that he would not have missed the chance of a rabbit or hare if it had come in his way.

The rest of his declaration was simply a repetition of the incidents of his "dream," with this difference, that, instead of the pedlar figuring as the doer of the deed, he occupied that place himself.

Comyn had charged him with poaching, which he indignantly replied that he had no such thought or intention in his head, and, as for trespassing, he said "he would walk owre a' God's earth in spite o' him and his maister, as lang's he kent he was daein' nae harm."

The answer seemed to enrage Comyn, for they immediately closed, with the fatal result already described.

The dream was an after thought, and the idea of introducing the figure of the pedlar as he had appeared at his own door came to him only when he thought that the man would be safely out of reach.

His object was, by being the first to direct attention to where the body lay, to effectually draw suspicion away from himself.

When Binning's trial came on Pate was ready to appear as a witness against him— though it had nearly been the other way— but Binning pleaded guilty to a charge of culpable homicide, and no witnesses were called.

His sentence was two years' imprisonment.

Whether he actually told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in his account of the murder, lies "between him and the lang day."

18: The Man in the Train

Max Afford

1906-1954

Mail (Adelaide), 17 Aug 1935

IT has been a rather unusual experience. To this day I do not know whether I have been the victim of a vulgar hoax, or whether I have actually talked with a murderer unsuspected by everyone save myself.

Some months ago, when the Melbourne centenary celebrations were at their height I determined to pay a visit to that capital. Accordingly, I booked my passage on the express and made my way to the platform some five minutes before the starting of the train. The usual crowd of visitors thronged the platform, and although the train seemed fairly crowded, I was pleased to find my compartment unoccupied. Under my arm were three detective novels which I had bought to wile away the tedium of the journey.

Scarcely had I read the opening paragraph of one book when the door of the carriage was pushed open and another passenger entered. Under my breath I prayed that he might move along, but no. He looked into my compartment, nodded to himself, and entering, took his seat directly opposite me. Over the edge of the book I studied him covertly. He was a middle-aged man, mild-eyed, and stoop-shouldered and dressed in a rusty black suit that gave him the appearance of an ancient crow. I docketed him at once; an insignificant unit in the great army of mankind. The unobtrusive type of person who married, raised a family, and died without leaving any appreciable mark on the world. I decided to ignore him and bury myself in my novel, which promised to be much more interesting than my companion. But he apparently, had other ideas.

The train had scarcely pulled out of the station when he gave a deprecatory little cough.

'So we're fellow-passengers?' he said brightly.

I nodded curtly without speaking, my eyes still on the book.

'I see you're interested in detective novels?' Again that self-conscious little cough. 'You know, they all seem rather ridiculous to me.'

This was heresy. I said coldly, 'Really?'

He nodded.

'Yes. Because no matter how brilliant the murderer may be, he always gets caught in the last chapter.'

He paused and looked up at me from under his blue-veined eyelids. His voice had a queer slur in it. 'In real life, the genuinely clever murderer never gets caught!'

It was a surprising remark under any circumstances. Coming from this watery-eyed little man, it was astonishing. I lowered the book and studied him. I'm afraid there was more than a trace of amused condescension in my voice when I spoke.

'So— you're one of those people who believe there is such a thing as a perfect murder?'

He nodded. A shadow of a smile hung nervously on his lips. 'I don't believe. I *know* that there is such a thing!'

'Indeed?'

The little man laid a cold hand on my knee. 'You're sceptical, aren't you? And shall I tell you why? Because that's the genius of the perfect murderer. He accomplishes his task so well that people simply can't grasp the fact that a murder has been done. They not only close their eyes to the perfect crime— they close their intelligence, too.'

'But not you,' I said with faint irony.

He rubbed his hands. A smile lit his face.

'Oh, no. Not me. You see I know a perfect crime when I see one.'

'And where have you seen one?'

'You have one in this very city,' he said quietly. 'What about the Weldon mansions murder? Perhaps I can recall the facts to your mind. You see, I followed the case pretty closely And I think you'll find it more interesting than that fiction novel— because in the mansions murder case the murderer was never caught.'

'And that's why it's a perfect crime?'

'And that's why it's the perfect crime of ail time,' my companion repeated slowly. So serious was his manner, so convincing that ring in his voice, that I laid aside my novel and settled the rug more comfortably about my legs.

'Go ahead.' I invited.

HE sat with downcast eyes focused on his clasped fingers, as though seeking to marshal his thoughts. Presently, he looked up. gave that apologetic cough, and began.

'Weldon mansions was one of those buildings that reflect the modern idea of cave-dwelling in the heart of the city,' he said. 'It was one of the largest blocks of flats within the city area. I say 'was' because the place has since been demolished and the land used for some other purpose. But it was over a year ago that Weldon mansions leaped into newspaper prominence, for at that time it not only housed 50 paying boarders, but it gave shelter to one of the most baffling murder mysteries of all time.

'Among the fifty tenants who occupied the flats was a Miss Rose Reynolds. Very little was known about this woman. She was middle-aged, somewhere in her late thirties. And she was not particularly good looking, although she is known to have possessed a rather attractive personality Also she had a little money, a nest-egg of some £500 left to her by an aunt.

'Now, like most women. Miss Reynolds had leanings toward the stage, and her spinster's life being rather lonely, she joined a dramatic society which was being formed by another tenant. This man was a Mr. Claude Bassett, who occupied the flat beneath that of Miss Reynolds. This Mr. Bassett was a professional actor who had fallen on lean times. It was believed that he had saved a little money and was living at the mansions until something should turn up for him. Being a lonely soul, it was inevitable that he and Miss Reynolds should be ultimately drawn toward each other. They spent quite an amount of time together, and it was during these conversations that Miss Reynolds confessed her leanings toward acting. Immediately Bassett told her of his plans and asked her to join his drama league. The spinster was willing.

'Miss Reynolds, according to Bassett's later evidence, showed remarkable aptitude for the stage. So much so that, a few months later, a local charity asked Mr. Bassett to produce and act in a one-act play for their programme. Bassett agreed, chose a drama containing two people, and asked Miss Reynolds if she would play opposite him. The woman was only too pleased. Thus rehearsals began, sometimes in Bassett's flat and sometimes in Miss Reynolds' rooms above. The play, I understand, was a novelty, and the producer insisted that the name and nature of the sketch should be kept a secret until the night of the play. There was, no doubt, clever showmanship in this, since curiosity surrounding a thing always increases its value.'

'NOW, I must explain that the flats at the mansions consisted of a sitting room, bedroom, and kitchen. Each flat was self-contained and entered from the main corridor by a single door. Miss Reynolds and Bassett occupied outside flats, by which I mean their windows looked out across the park in which the building stood. The mansions were 10 stories high. Bassett's flat was on the fourth floor, and Miss Reynolds on the fifth. A dumb-waiter arrangement ran between the floors. It served each tenant, and on this was placed any vegetables or groceries that the flat owners required from the store in the basement. It was loaded from the ground floor, and the tenants pulled the carrier up by means of cords attached.

'Now, we come to the afternoon of April 6. I remember the date quite clearly for it is my birthday. I am now going to give you a sequence of events as set down later in the evidence. At 3 o'clock that afternoon Bassett went to the

flat occupied by Miss Reynolds, and reminded her of the final dress rehearsal that was to take place that evening. He told her that he was giving a small dinner in his flat before the rehearsal, that he had asked three acquaintances from the surrounding flats, and wanted Miss Reynolds to make a fifth. After the dinner they could have their last rehearsal. Miss Reynolds agreed. She said that, as it was to be a dress rehearsal she would wear her stage frock down to dinner, and Bassett could suggest any alterations or additions.

'The rehearsal was timed to start at .8.30. At 7 o'clock, Miss Reynolds, the three men guests. and Bassett sat down to dinner. The spinster looked rather attractive. She was wearing a frock that was theatrical in the extreme, cut low at the back and with a bodice composed of scarlet roses entwined. She laughed and joked with the other guests, and indeed it seemed a merry party. About 8 o'clock the woman rose. and. refusing coffee on the plea of a headache, announced that she would go to her room. It was a half-hour before the rehearsal; during that time, she could take a small sleeping powder and the subsequent nap might relieve her aching head She asked Bassett not to come up to her rooms, where the rehearsal was to be held, until the half-hour was up.

'Leaving Bassett to clear away the dishes the three men accompanied Miss Reynolds up to her room. They saw her inside, watched her mix a sleeping powder. She then said she would lock herself in to prevent disturbance. The three men took their leave and heard her turn the key in the door. They made their way to Bassett's flat. As they entered he was standing by the dumb-waiter packing away the dirty dishes.'

Again the little man paused.

As he related the earlier history of the case other details floated back into my mind.

'Didn't one of these men say that, after Miss Reynolds shut and locked that door, he heard her talking to some one in the room?'

'Yes.' The speaker nodded.

'A point I forgot. As Miss Reynolds turned the key in the lock, the man closest to the door heard her say, "So, this is where you've been hiding?" He admitted that the words sounded strange, considering they had been in Miss Reynolds' room only a few seconds before, and they had seen no person. But it was no business of his, and it was not until later that those words took on a new significance.

'Well, the three men returned to Bassett's flat for coffee and cigarettes When the half-hour was up they decided to ho to their own rooms, which lay on the next floor beyond the suite occupied by Rose Reynolds. Bassett accompanied them They walked upstairs, reached Miss Reynolds' door and

waited, talking, while Bassett knocked. There was no answer, and after a pause, he knocked again. Still there was no response. Then one of the men, recalling the sleeping draught the woman had mixed, suggested that she might not be awake. Bassett suggested that the men hoist him up to the fan-light, so that he could peep inside the room and see what was the matter. The men agreed. Bassett was duly hoisted, he peered through the glass into the room— and the next moment, almost fell from their arms. The room was brilliantly lighted, and he could see the woman quite plainly. She lay on the floor, one hand flung out as though in sleep. But it was not this that chained her body into that rigid pose. Rose Reynolds lay motionless, bleeding from a great wound in her breast, a wound that was like a scarlet flower, blooming wider even as he watched.

'BASSETT recovered himself, jumped to the floor, and told the trio what he had seen They next tried the door, only to find it locked. Now there was mild pandemonium. While the three men considered breaking down the door. Bassett, the more self-contained of the four, ran downstairs to his own flat and telephoned the police. The manager of the flats was summoned with his pass-key and a little group of tenants gathered. It was this crowd that confronted Detective-Inspector Conway when he arrived some minutes later.

'At first it was found difficult to fit the pass-key into the lock, because Miss Reynolds' own key was already in the keyhole on the inside of the door. Eventually it was dislodged and the door opened. The crowd began to surge inside, but Conway ordered his men to bar the door. While the doctor was examining the woman's body. Conway took a look around— and what he saw worried him not a little.

'The body lay stretched out on the floor. It was some 20 ft. away from the locked door— locked on the inside, remember. There was no other entrance to the room, save the windows, which looked out on to a sheer drop of 50 ft. The wall was steep and bare, no ivy creeper on it or tree nearby. It seemed impossible that anyone could have entered that suite ,yet Miss Reynolds was not only dead—she had been murdered!'

With a rumble and a scream the train plunged into the first tunnel. The lights in the carriage flickered, on, grew brighter, and emphasized the temporary night that had fallen outside the windows. My companion had paused, not troubling to speak against the thunder of the train. I saw him give a half-amused glance at the discarded novel by my side. I had no thought for that now. Just then the train sprang out into the open and daylight flooded in.

'Go on.' I prompted.

'Rose Reynolds had been, shot through the heart. Medical evidence showed that the crime had been committed some 20 minutes before, and that the bullet came from a small revolver. Thus, while the four men jested and laughed in the room below that bullet had been discharged.

Death must have been practically instantaneous for the bullet-hole had pierced the scarlet rose and entered the heart. According to the doctor the woman had made an effort to rise— a last convulsive effort that ended in death.

'It was one of the constables who found the weapon. A small silver-plated revolver fitted with a silencer. It lay on the floor near the entrance to the kitchen. The position of the weapon weakened the suggestion of suicide, since a woman shot through the heart certainly cannot toss a revolver across the room. And the suicide theory was destroyed absolutely when impressions were discovered on the weapon. Plain on the silver-plating were fingerprints— with the exception of the fourth finger, which was missing.

'Bassett identified the revolver as belonging to Miss Reynolds, and told Conway of the words spoken by Miss Reynolds as the three men left her door:— "So, this is where you've been hiding?" To whom had she spoken, and why was the unknown person skulking in her room?

'Conway then began his investigation inside the mansions. In his questioning of Bassett, the inspector unearthed a curious point. In the corridor outside Miss Reynolds' rooms a wall telephone was situated. It struck Conway as peculiar that Bassett, in ringing for the police, should trouble to go down to his own apartment to telephone when there was an instrument almost at his elbow. Yet Bassett, when interrogated, explained this move in a perfectly logical manner. He said that he had not noticed the wall telephone. His thoughts had immediately flown to the instrument in his own rooms as a medium for the raising of the police. But although this explanation was quite feasible, Bassett could feel that Conway was not quite satisfied.

'You probably remember how Bassett moved heaven and earth to prove his innocence. The three men who had been present at the dinner swore that he had never been near Miss Reynolds' room. They described how they had left him at 8 o'clock and returning a few minutes later, had stayed with him until the half-hour had elapsed. They agreed that it would have been impossible for Bassett to have left his rooms during that time without their knowledge— indeed, during that 30 minutes their host had not moved from his chair. Yet medical evidence showed that it was during the time between 8 o'clock and 8.30 that Rose Reynolds had met her death.

'Finally, Basset insisted upon having impressions taken of his fingerprints to compare with those found on the revolver. This seemed hardly necessary,

under the circumstances, since the right hand of Bassett was completely normal. Yet Conway was not a man to take anything for granted. He obtained impressions of Bassett's fingerprints and compared them with those on the weapon. They were so completely dissimilar as to exonerate Bassett from all suspicion.

'Nevertheless, there were four questions that puzzled the good inspector not a little. Given the right answer to one of these would put him on the scent. He conned those questions again and again.

'Why was Miss Reynolds murdered?

'How did the murderer enter and leave the locked room?

'Who fired the shot and left the fingerprints on the revolver?

'Who was the mysterious person hiding in the room, to whom Miss Reynolds spoke before locking herself in?'

The little man paused. His watery-blue eyes held mine for a second and then dropped to the floor. He made a curious shrugging movement of his shoulders.

'No answer was ever made to any of those questions,' he said slowly. 'Detective-Inspector Conway was beaten from the start. You might remember he resigned from the department because of his failure. And the Weldon mansions murder remains one of the most baffling mysteries of all time.'

'A REALLY perfect murder?' I asked.

He repeated my words in that irritating way he had. 'A really perfect murder.' Then, after a short silence. 'Don't you agree?'

I shook my head. 'I do not agree.'

'Why?'

'Because, in your so-called "perfect murder," the criminal ties the loose ends of his crime with such neatness that nothing is left for the police to work upon. Yet in the Weldon mansion murder, a most vital clue was left. Not only did the murderer leave his revolver and silencer, but he made the stupid mistake of signing that weapon with his fingerprints. And fingerprints that showed his fourth finger was missing! Surely, with all our modern identification systems to work upon that weapon was as fatal as a visiting card with the murderer's name and address on it?'

My companion shook his head. In his pale blue eyes a curious amusement flamed for an instant and was gone.

'You think so? The police, my friend, were inclined to agree with you in the beginning, but they realised their mistake very bitterly as time went on. Do you realise that, with all their fingerprint system and their poroscopes and blood

tests, they are no nearer the truth of the Weldon mansions murder than the day it was committed?'

A bleak little chuckle escaped him. It swelled suddenly to a chilly cackle that rocked his shrunken little body backwards and forwards. There were tears of uncontrolled amusement in his eyes. He wiped them with a soiled handkerchief and sobered.

'Because that was the ingenious cleverness of the murderer. He left the police what appeared to be a most important clue— because he knew that it would be not only useless to them, but it also gave him an added advantage. In other words, he left them a clue so absolutely useless that it shielded him by pointing in the wrong direction! Conway was a clever man, but it never occurred to him that the revolver had been deliberately left on the floor! Imagine the criminal who plans a brilliant murder like this one leaving such incriminating evidence behind him? It was the limit in stupidity— but what brilliant stupidity!'

In his high-pitched, excited words there was some subtle gloating quality that was almost evil. He seemed transported by the idea of this perverted genius, and I felt a sudden dislike of this weak-eyed little person, chuckling to himself in the corner. An impulse seized me to prick the bubble of his tainted hero-worship. I stared at him coldly.

'Since you followed the case so closely perhaps you actually know who killed Rose Reynolds?'

He nodded calmly. His hands lay passive in his lap. 'Of course I know who killed her!'

'You do?'

'Certainly. It was Claude Bassett who planned it all!'

'Bassett?'

He nodded again.

'But— but this is absurd! Bassett had a cast-iron alibi! Three reliable witnesses were with him every moment of the half-hour when the shot was fired. The prints on the gun proved definitely that he had never handled the weapon!'

'And he had a normal right hand, didn't he?' my companion prompted. 'And apparently no motive for killing Miss Reynolds? Yet he did— in a manner so clever that it takes your breath away.'

'I still don't understand.'

The little man leaned forward. 'Listen,' he said. 'You say that Bassett was never alone. Then you're making exactly the same mistake as the police. Because there were two occasions when Bassett was very much alone. The first when he stayed behind to pack the dirty dishes in the dumb waiter while

his guests went upstairs. The second when he went down to his own rooms to telephone— when there was a telephone at his elbow he could have used!'

'But Conway...' I began.

My companion waved a limp hand.

'Of course! Conway was on the right track. But he didn't delve far enough. He didn't ask himself why Bassett had to be alone on those two occasions. He didn't trouble to find out what that man did that was so secret that no other eyes could see it.'

'But Bassett explained about the telephoning.'

'Nonsense,' replied the little man sharply. 'Claude Basset! went down to his own rooms, not only to telephone, but to remove the final traces of the murder in the flat above. He did it. And so successfully that today he walks the streets a free man!'

'But how in the name of sin did he get into that locked room?'

The man opposite smiled slowly. He leaned back in his seat and folded his arms.

'That was another error on the part of the good Conway,' he said. 'He overlooked the most important factor in the case. Miss Reynolds and Bassett were rehearsing a one-act play for two people. And Conway did not even trouble to inquire the name of the play.' He leaned forward. 'Have you ever read Bram Stoker's thriller, *The Monkey Knows*?'

I nodded.

'Yes. That's the play which concerns a French actress who keeps a pet monkey. If I remember rightly, in the climax of the play, the animal, who has been trained to five a revolver, turns on his, mistress and shoots her through the heart—'

I paused abruptly, a thousand possibilities flooding through my mind. The little man took up my words.

'And in this particular case, Rose Reynolds was playing the part of the woman, and Bassett was producing the play.'

'I still don't see—?'

'Yet you recall how, when the guests came back after seeing Miss Reynolds to her room, Bassett was standing by the dumbwaiter?'

THERE was a long pause The train rattled across a set of points and plunged into a cutting.

I said slowly. 'Are you trying to suggest that Bassett pulled himself up to Miss Reynolds' flat in the dumb-waiter? Because if so might I point out firstly that the shot was not fired until 10 minutes later when Bassett was in the

room below with his friends. And secondly, the dumb-waiter itself was much too small to accommodate the body of a grown man.'

There was something almost like a leer on the shabby man's face.

'Too small to hold the body of a grown man, perhaps. But not too small to take the body of a monkey.'

'A monkey?'

He nodded.

'A small orang-outang, to be correct. The orang-outang that was playing the third part in Bassett's production of *The Monkey Knows*.'

'You see, Bassett had obtained a small orang-outang for the play. It was a most intelligent beast, perfect except that the fourth finger of its right hand was missing. But that would never be noticed on the stage. Next came the training of the animal. They taught the beast on the principal of applied association of ideas. In the shooting scene of the play Miss Reynolds always wore that fantastic dress with its roses. Thus, by slow degrees, the animal came to associate that dress with the pulling of the trigger. Naturally, blank cartridges were used at the rehearsals. Until, toward the end, the link in the ape's brain was so definitely established that the mere sight of the woman wearing her scarlet dress was sufficient mental stimulus to produce the firing of the revolver. Bassett had studied animal psychology very well, you see. He had been an animal trainer at a circus during his rather checkered career.

'On the afternoon of the final rehearsal he brought the monkey secretly to his rooms, concealed it, and waited until his guests had gone up to Rose Reynolds' room. Then he placed the animal in the dumbwaiter, gave it a feed of bananas, and placed the revolver, fitted with a silencer and a real bullet, in its deformed hand. With a parting caress, he pulled the animal up on to the next floor. When his friends returned they found him standing near the dumb-waiter, ready with the excuse that be was packing away the dirty dishes.

'We can readily reconstruct what happened then. The animal, leaping out of the dumb-waiter, sees the woman lying asleep on the divan. She is wearing exactly the same dress she has worn at rehearsals. And the animal goes through its part of the play. Her contortions as she died probably frightened the animal, who dropped the revolver near the kitchen door, and sprang back into the dumb-waiter.'

Again that bleak smile.

'You see how cleverly it was worked? Only one thing remained— for Bassett to pull down the dumb-waiter to his own rooms and hide the animal. That was why he was so keen to be alone when he telephoned. The animal was concealed until late that night, when he took it away under the cover of darkness. There was one small flaw in the arrangement. He had either lo kill

the animal or keep it with him, because it was too dangerous to turn free. He kept it with him, I believe Bassett was very fond of animals.'

The train plunged through a tunnel, and the lights in the carriage glowed stronger. The black walls raced along outside the window. Then, with a shrill scream, the train was out in the open again.

'But the fingerprints?' I objected.

My companion shifted his position.

'Don't you know that the fingerprints of an orang-outang are in every way similar to those of a human being?' he said slowly. 'All the human loops, whorls, and bifurcations are there, and they can be classified in the same letters and numbers as a set of human fingerprints.' He nodded. 'Oh, yes. That was proved quite recently at the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, when a fingerprint expert took impressions of an orang-outang there.'

'Then who was it that Miss Reynolds spoke to as she locked herself in her room?'

'She spoke to no person at all,' was the reply.

'Remember the words? "So, this is where you've been hiding?" These words form the opening line of Miss Reynolds first entrance in the play. The rehearsal was due to start in half an hour. The woman was merely going over her lines in her mind and happened to pronounce that sentence aloud!'

'But the motive? Why should Bassett want to kill this woman?'

My companion leaned forward and placed a hand on my knee.

'I happen to know that Bassett wanted money to start a small travelling show. He persuaded Miss Reynolds to put £300 into that show for him. In return, he promised to marry her. Unfortunately, he couldn't do that. He already had a wife. Miss Reynolds found this out and threatened, not only to make trouble for Bassett and his wife, but also to demand the return of her money. But Bassett had already spent it. So Miss Reynolds had to be removed.'

I must confess to gaping a little.

'But how do you know all this?'

He gave a bland smile.

'I know Bassett very well,' he explained 'He has rather a charming manner, although he's not much to look at. Certainly he doesn't look like a murderer— but then, real murderers never do. Take Crippen, for instance— an ordinary, everyday little man at whom you wouldn't glance twice.'

'But, knowing that this man is a murderer, why don't you go to the police and tell them what you know?'

The little man measured me with his eyes. His voice was very, quiet.

'Because,' he said slowly, 'if I did, they'd laugh at me. They'd say I had an overworked imagination. I don't warn to look a fool.'

His mood changed, and he smiled.

'But Bassett will probably give himself away one of these days.'

'In what way?'

The man rose to his feet.

'The trouble with these brilliant murderers is that they can't resist boasting about their crimes. Take the case of the Dusseldorf murderer, Peter Kurten, for instance. If he hadn't gone about boasting of his cleverness he might never have been caught. And Bassett will probably trip up the same way. He'll be so delighted over his crime that he won't be able to keep silent about it. One day, he'll open his mouth to the wrong man— and then—'

He finished the sentence with an expressive gesture.

WITH a shudder and gush of steam the train pulled to a stop at one of the small country stations that dot the line My companion gave a quick glance out of the window and nodded. 'Well, good-bye. I get off here.' He gave that apologetic smile.

'Now you can return to your detective novel— but don't take that stuff too seriously.'

Was it my imagination or was there a faint tinge of mockery in his smile?

The train drew to a halt. Outside on the platform stood a dumpy, big-bosomed woman, a typical country housewife. She swept the station with vague, tired eyes set in a placid face. Next moment the face lighted and I watched her come toward the carriage to meet my late companion, who took her hand and smiled in return. She was just the kind of woman I had judged was his wife, a fitting mate for the garrulous little man in his shabby black suit. I watched them walk along the platform, in the direction of the guard's van.

Craning my neck from the window. I perceived a small crowd of children gathered there, as though some attraction was exciting their curiosity. Presently, the cause was revealed. The man and his wife came walking along the platform, and by his side, trotting grotesquely, was a small orang-outang. On its head was a tiny red fez, and as the trio came opposite my window the little man looked up and saw me. He said something to the animal at his side.

With a clumsy, mechanical action, the ape put its hand to its head and doffed the fez. But it was not so much the gesture as something else I noticed. The right hand of the orang-outang was minus a fourth finger! On top of that shock came another. Now the trio had passed, and as I stared after them, I saw that the animal carried on its back an advertising placard. Even though they were some little distance away I caught the main lettering standing out in bold scarlet letters: —

'MILLIE, THE ONLY SHARPSHOOTING
ORANG-OUTANG IN EXISTENCE!'

Then the train gave a shrill scream and began to move off. The country-side sped past the windows. But I had no eyes for the scenery. I sat staring into space. What had the little man said about Basset—

'He had to keep the animal with him because it was too dangerous to turn free.' And then again that sly chuckling utterance— 'He'll be so delighted over his crime that he won't be able to keep silent about it....'

And as I half rose to pull the communication cord another remark of my late companion came forcibly to my mind. I recalled the quiet way he had measured me, with his eyes. What was it he had said about telling the police?

'They'd laugh... an over-worked imagination. I don't want to look a fool...'

What could I do? Should I call the guard, tell him what I knew and take the risk of being branded an imaginative fool. — or was that little man a superlative practical joker and the whole story just a vulgar hoax, the elaborate jest of a trickster? And now, months after the incident, I am still wondering!

———————————

20: The Melbourne Cup Mystery

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Bulletin, 7 July 1927

THE sensational ending of the Melbourne Cup of 1931 is likely to remain amongst the Great Baffling Mysteries with the personality of the Man in the Iron Mask and the unsolved problem of the deserted ship *Marie Celeste*, found floating in a crewless condition, but with nothing to explain why its company had abandoned their vessel or where they had gone.

The morning of the eventful race found Ted Tracey, the crack jockey who had the mount on Valais Prince, in a state of nerves such as he had never known before in his long racing career. It was not a question of his own financial interest in the race; confident as he was of his good horsemanship and the ability of his thoroughbred to capture the great prize, Tracey had not backed his mount to the extent of a single pound. His riding fee and percentages and the large sum the owner had laid him to nothing on the horse's chance would amount to a considerable sum; but a lot more than money depended upon the winning of the Cup.

Tracey had a keen longing to close his racing career with the winning of this race— a longing that had become an obsession. The champion jockey disliked and almost despised the business from which, a man of careful and well-ordered life, he had amassed a comfortable fortune. When, a mere lad, he had made his way from the country to Melbourne, his clear-cut ambition was to find some work which would enable him to make his way through the University and into one of the professions. He found that circumstances baffled him; it was sheer necessity that led him to seek employment in a racing stable, where the horse-knowledge of a lad who was almost born in the saddle found him ready employment. It opened up to him an easy way of making money in large sums when his capabilities as a jockey were discovered. His ambition remoulded itself. He would take the fortune the gods had sent; later on, when he had made enough, he would leave the game and pursue, untrammelled by monetary cares, the professional course he had mapped for himself.

Perhaps it was because he regarded the work as a term of servitude that he cordially hated the whole racing business and his share in it. He loved horses, but the atmosphere of the racing stable, with its undercurrents of viciousness and trickery, revolted him. He imagined people referring to him, in spite of his success and his affluence, as "only a jockey," and attributing to him the blunted morals which were all too much in evidence amongst a large number of the people who make a business of horse-racing. There was consolation in the

promise to himself that he would show them his quality; he had no doubts about his mental abilities, and his brilliant course at the University would show them how far he was above the game he had used merely to reach his ultimate ends. But he had tangled the clear-cut issues of his life by marriage with a childhood sweetheart, the death of whose parents had left her unprotected and destitute. With the arrival of children the necessity for making his financial position still more solid before pursuing his ambitions had come to him, providing a reason for still lingering in the business where his skill earned him big retainers. Moreover, he had a feeling that it was only by putting himself at the very top of his occupation, by pulling off its greatest prize, that he could justify to himself his existence as a jockey. He wanted, with a desperate desire, to ride the winner in the Melbourne Cup.

Now that ambition seemed within his grasp. Three weeks before the race he was full of confidence of winning; but, day by day, a nervousness had grown upon him. Suppose he failed? He might then defer his ambition for another year in a dogged determination to make yet another effort to caphis racing career with the big prize. The possibility of that further year was a torture.

Yet the public, directly he was announced as the rider of Valais'Prince, had pinned its faith to that great thoroughbred. At the start Tracey had few doubts himself; but there was always the chance of accidents. Valais Prince, scion of a race of artists, had all the temperamental qualities that go with an artist. Tracey was one of the jockeys who could manage the sensitive horse; there seemed to be a sympathy between them without which the nervy animal, a vicious brute to those it did not like, the very spirit of gentleness to those who were its friends, would not give its best.But even with Tracey the temperament of the horse would display itself on occasion.

The Cranbie stable, with which horse-racing was a business, had three horses entered, and he knew that its investments on Speedsure were much heavier than was known to the public, whose faith in Valais Prince kept that horse well at the head of the market quotations. A dozen times a day Tracey made nervous guesses at the mission of the other two Cranbie horses, Moody and White Stocking, in the race— both speedy sprinters, hardly to be considered in the long distance, but capable of causing trouble in the race in the score of ways the tricky Cranbie people might devise.

Tracey was all nerves on the morning of Cup day. He told himself previously that it was the result of the wasting he had had to undergo to get down to weight; but that did not remove the apprehension that took possession of him. His condition was not improved by the infection which seemed to have reached his wife; she told him that she could not bear to go to the

racecourse— she knew how much depended upon the winning of the race, and the tension of looking on would be too much for her.

He himself felt an aversion to going to the racecourse; he wanted to put off his arrival there to the last possible moment.

And yet all the time there was a nervous urge to go— to go and get the whole thing over. A round of golf failed to bring him any tranquillity. Irritably he swore at himself; if there was anything that would spoil Valais Prince's chances in the race it was this nervousness of his own.

At last he set off in his two-seater to traverse the distance from his countryside bungalow to the course. The mad urge for speed, that he might run away from his thoughts, came to him; and subconsciously he put on pace.

He saw the break in the roadway, as he came round a sharp bend, too late to avoid the accident. The road here was sharply banked on the hill side, and a fall of earth had bitten off half the roadway. Into the opening the car pitched suddenly and somersaulted down the rock-strewn slope.

Tracey recovered consciousness to find himself, an aching mass, staring through a tracery of amber and green sapling leaves with a vacuity of mind that left him lying motionless for minutes. Then memory came back with a rush. He might have been lying there for hours! The fact that the sun was out of sight above the hill indicated that some time had passed; if he was to get to the racecourse in time to ride in the big race he must hurry.

As he moved, struggling desperately and painfully to his feet, he felt blood upon his clothes. No matter, he must— must— get to the course! Frenziedly. he dragged the bag with his racing clothes from the wreckage of the car and then, tottering and scrambling, climbed back to the roadway above. Having gained it, he staggered dizzily and fell, and his mind for a moment swam into unconsciousness. But grimly he took control of himself again and gained his feet.

Whatever happened, he must get to Flemington! If the effort killed him he must put that finishing touch on his career by winning the Cup. If he was only a jockey, at all events it would be remembered that he had at least won the biggest prize a jockey could win.

There was considerable traffic as a usual thing along the road. Scores of cars had probably passed since his accident while avoiding that gap in the road; it was quite easy to understand how they had missed seeing his predicament. Tracey was worried by the idea that any car-owner from whom he begged a lift might be more anxious to take him to hospital than to the racecourse.

When the roar of the racecourse surged upon him he could not remember how he had got there. The effort, to keep himself conscious had absorbed all his powers of concentration and left everything a blank. "I must win the Cup; I

must win the Cup!" he was conscious of saying over and over again— a suggestion to keep his mind from swooning into unconsciousness.

Similarly, he remembered nothing of what had happened on the racecourse until he, as if waking suddenly from a sleep, found himself mounted on the nervy Valais Prince trying to get him in the line facing the starting-tape. He knew he had somehow washed off the stains of his accident and clambered into his racing-clothes; he knew also that his face was deathly white— knew it even before one of the other jockeys had remarked to him that he looked ghostly. His head was swimming, but with grim determination he mastered the inclination to allow himself to flop from the saddle.

"I must win; I must win!" he kept repeating.

Then it was all a blur again— a blur of movement and mixed colors until, with a start, he came to a vivid realisation of what was happening. Perhaps it was something in the shouting of the crowd which woke him up. Valais Prince was running on the rails, blocked ahead by White Stocking, whilst on his girth ran Moody. They were in the dust of the pack of horses racing ahead of them, and apparently increasing their distance, with the colors of Speedsure showing prominently. Valais Prince, full of running, was growing restless at his cramped position; Tracey could almost feel the temper of the horse rising. He had allowed himself to fall into the trap the Craubie stable had set for him.

Tracey took a new grip upon himself, he saw his one chance and waited for it. It came at the bend; and like a shot he took it. White Stocking gave no opportunity, hugging the rails closely; but there was an opening between White Stocking and Moody through which Tracey went like an arrow A feeling of exultation came as he felt the joy with which the horse shot forward, and heard the approving roar of the multitude as the Valais colt closed the gap on the leading bunch.

Taking no further chances, Tracey guided the thoroughbred to the outside and saw horse after horse sliding backward past him. Valais Prince seemed to be exulting in his free running; and Tracey let. him go. It was a big effort that took the game colt away with a three-lengths' lead; but through Tracey's half-swooning mind came the wonder whether the effort had left the horse enough to shake off the final challenge that was sure to come. It seemed that even with the thought came the challenge. The winning-post was in sight, but Tracey saw suddenly at his girth the distended nostrils which he knew to belong to Speedsure. Half-inch by half-inch it crept more into his consciousness as, gripping his swooning mind, he set down to ride his horse right out.

And still, with yards to go, Speedsure seemed to be gaining irresistibly. Tracey turned his head for a moment and glared at the head by his knee; and suddenly the danger faded out. Something like a snort of terror came from the

distended nostrils, and the head faded abruptly out of sight. With the great roar that came from the racecourse multitude, Tracey knew that he had brought home his winner.

His head was whirling faintly. "Must weigh in, weigh in, weigh in!'' he muttered grimly; but his mind grappled feebly for consciousness, and blackness rushed in upon him.

THE JUBILATION of the Flemington crowd at the popular victory was changed almost immediately to consternation which culminated in one of the most remarkable demonstrations of frenzy ever seen on a racecourse. The sensation of the finish when the strongly-coming Speedsure had baulked suddenly with a start of terror, fading out of the race, so that it was Gorton, Slumber and Lilac Time that followed the winner past the post, was succeeded by a new one when, after the numbers had been hoisted, Valais Prince was seen to be galloping back riderless to the enclosure. Nobody had seen the jockey fall; he could not be found on the course; apparently he had vanished in air!

It was then that the crowd, baulked of their win on a popular favorite, commenced to break things; but Howard Jones, collecting his winnings on the 33-to-1 shot, Gorton, hurried into a taxi, and burst into hysterical sobbing.

"My God, my God! What a day!" he said. "It's the last bet I'll ever have on a race; but, thank God, the long shot came off! I'm clear! The wife and kiddies are safe."

He went straight home, full of new, clean resolve; and the voice of a newsboy shouting "Tracey mystery: Remarkable developments," caused him to buy a paper.

"The incident which will make this year's Melbourne Cup the most extraordinary in history," said the report, "has had the addition of almost unbelievable developments. Those who attended Flemington this afternoon will be prepared to swear that the rider of Valais Prince was Tracey, a jockey whose face is too well known to be mistaken.

Yet Tracey, found this afternoon lying beside his wrecked car, which had crashed over a broken edge in the Homefield-road, was hurried to Melbourne Hospital suffering from concussion and internal injuries. He never recovered consciousness, and died, curiously enough, at the very moment of the finish of the Cup race. The V.R.C. stewards, who have the task of unravelling the mystery of the disappearance of a jockey whom Mr. Thrower, the owner of Valais Prince, is prepared to swear was Tracey himself, have a very curious problem to unravel."

End