PAST MASTERS 212

Edgar Wallace
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Miles J. Breuer
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Harold Mercer
Sherwood Anderson

and more

PAST MASTERS 212

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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1: The Mystery of Basinghall Castle

Francis Gribble

1862-1946

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THE AMERICAN CONSUL was accustomed to callers who expected him to execute commissions outside the ordinary range of consular duties; but he was nevertheless surprised when a fellow countryman drifted in upon him, and announced his business thus:

"It's about a dream I had on the other side. I've come all the way from Los Angeles about it. I thought, maybe, you'd be able to help me to figure it out."

"It seems to me," was the other's reply, "that the man you're looking for is not the United States Consul, but the Prophet Daniel, perhaps? His address is in the *London Directory*— perhaps it isn't. You had better look and see."

He pushed the bulky red volume across the table, with the dim idea that he was dealing with a lunatic, and that this would be the best way of humoring him; but though the stranger had visionary eyes, his manner and behavior were sane. He was young and well set-up— an athlete, one would judge, from one of the American Universities. He presented his visiting card— "Mr. Henry Gale, Los Angeles," was the inscription on it— and proceeded:

"I suppose I'm a bit mysterious, but I expect you can help me all the same. Shall I begin the story at the beginning?"

"That wouldn't be a bad place to begin at," the American Consul conceded; and Henry Gale continued:

"It's about my brother Robert. He was over here, going round seeing the sights, looking up the antiquities. He was just nuts on antiquities, was Robert. Up and after them like a dog after a rat. Crumbling old castles, and all that sort of thing, you know."

The Consul nodded.

"And he came to grief on one of them— that's what I dreamt, always supposing that it was a dream. First I heard Robert calling for help, and then I saw him. I thought there was a struggle, but I couldn't be quite sure of that. It seemed somehow as if Robert went through a hole in the floor. I couldn't make out how or why, but I saw him falling— falling— falling—" He put his hands before his face as he spoke, as if to hide the vision.

"Well?" asked the interlocutor, beginning to be interested.

"I didn't think much of it at the time. I put it down to something I might have had for supper. At least, I tried to— but—"

"Well?"

"Since the night of that dream there's been no news of Robert. He's just disappeared off the face of the earth. He hasn't sent for the baggage he left at

the Hotel Cecil; he hasn't negotiated any of his circular notes. So I've came over here to look for him."

"And you've no clue?"

"No clue whatever, except my dream. But I'm a bit of an artist, and I've put that dream on paper in watercolors. It's just a picture of the old castle as I dreamt it. I've got it with me, and I want you to look at it and tell me what castle it is."

"That's rather a tall order," said the Consul; but Henry Gale produced the water-color from the portfolio, and put it before him, and he examined it— albeit, rather sceptically.

"Well," he said, "It isn't the Tower of London. It isn't Windsor Castle. It isn't Warwick Castle. I don't believe it's any real castle at all, and I'll tell you why. You've painted a brick castle, and the castles in this country are made of stone. Still, if you want to make further inquiries—"

"I'd be glad if you'd put me in the way of doing so."

"I will— right now. Come along with me in a taxi."

"Where to?"

"The Print Room of the British Museum."

They drove off, and within half an hour Henry Gale's watercolor was undergoing the inspection of an expert on architectural prints. When the situation had been explained to him as sceptically as the American Consul himself but then he started.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Gale," he asked, ''that you dreamt this picture in California?"

"I did, sir."

"You've painted a brick castle, haven't you?"

"Yes, I reckon it's bricks. I just painted what I dreamt."

"Then that settles it."

Henry Gale's face fell. "You mean to say there's no such castle in this country?" he asked,

"On the contrary, Mr. Gale, there is just one. I express no opinion about your dream, of course; but this drawing, though not quite architecturally accurate, is unmistakably a drawing of Basinghall Castle. It is the one really good specimen of mediaeval brickwork in England. It is also, so far as I know, the only castle in England with machicolations."

"Machi— what?" asked Henry Gale, who know nothing of the architectural technique of mediaeval fortresses.

"Machicolations— an ingenious device for defence, consisting of holes pierced in a parapet projecting over the entrance gate of the fortress, enabling the defenders, without exposing themselves, to drop stones or pour down

boiling water or boiling pitch on to the heads of the assailants when they brought up the battering ram."

Then it was Henry Gale's turn to start. I

"Those must have been the holes in the floor in my dream," he said; and there remained nothing further to do except to thank the export and inquire where Basinghall Castle was situated, and repair to it.

It stood in the eastern counties, at a point where the fens ended and the moors began. An antiquary could still point out the remains of the moats, both inner and outer, and the sites of the draw-bridges and the foundations of the walls; but to the untrained eye of the ordinary visitor nothing was visible except the shell of the keep.

It was only a shell, but a shell in a remarkable state of preservation. The roof was gone— the lead composing it having presumably been either sold or stolen— and all the three floors had fallen through. The four walls remained, however— naturally, seeing that they were fifteen feet thick and the mortar was still as hard as when it was laid— and so did the round towers at the four corners, and so did the early English windows and the loopholes and the battlements. It was a square and massive structure, some hundred and twenty feet in height; and its position in the midst of a flat, unwooded country made it, even from a distance of many miles, a conspicuous object of the landscape, dominating the scene by day and obstructing it weirdly and eerily in the twilight.

"Yes, that's it," Henry Gale concluded without difficulty when he saw it; and he made his inquiries and ascertained that such a tragedy as that which concerned him had indeed occurred there.

It was not, of course, a tragedy which had made a stir— otherwise the American Consul would have heard of it; but still it was a tragedy of which the Basinghall Coroner had had to take cognisance. The dead and mangled body of a stranger—a tourist, apparently, on a walking tour— had been found at the base of the ruin. It was guessed, but not known, that he had come there straight from the nearest railway station, about six miles away. No papers had been found about him which could lead to his identification; but, on the other hand, there had been no marks indicative of violence. And so, as he could hardly have fallen over a breast-high parapet by accident, the jury, after viewing the body, had returned a verdict of "Suicide while of unsound mind."

Henry Gale said the words over to himself with a sort of scorn and exasperation. "Suicide while of unsound mind!" And Robert as sane a man as ever walked this earth, and about as likely to commit suicide as to fly!"

Decidedly there was a mystery there for him to probe. He made his first attempt in the village inn, though without explaining who he was or why he was interested; and it goes without saying that he found the villagers willing enough to talk. They had had nothing so exciting to talk about for many years; and they

made the most of the theme over their mugs of beer. It had inspired them with a superstitious terror, which they hugged, rejoicing in the thrills it gave them. They openly professed themselves afraid to go near the ruin after dark, declaring that they believed it to be haunted.

"They do say," one of them put in, "that there's devils up at the top of it."

"And when there is devil anywhere," remarked a second, "there's no knowing what devilment they won't be up to."

"That stands to reason," was the philosophical conclusion of a third.

"But if you ask me my opinion," threw in a fourth, "I should say that Mad Alec knows more about it than any devils."

"Him— a little chap like that!" objected one of the others, contemptuously.

So the talk ran, and Henry Gale listened without taking any great part in it. He did not even inquire who Mad Alec was, or why ho was credited with knowledge. He took a mental note of the name of Mad Alec, but he said nothing. He was quite an amateur at detective work; but he understood that the ears of the walls of village inns are long, and the tongues of village gossips longer. Consequently he proceeded from the inn to the vicarage, and sought his information there.

"Amazing!" said the Vicar, when he heard his story. "There are more things in heaven and earth'— you know the rest. I have heard such stories before, but never one that came so close to one. Telepathy, the men of science call it— for my own part, I would rather say providential guidance. But I'm interested, and I'd like to help you. Have you yet paid a visit to the old ruin?"

"I was just going there."

"Will you accept my company?"

"I should be very glad of it."

So the young artist and the old clergyman started off over the moor together, conversing as they went, and climbed the winding staircase in the northern tower, and went out on to the gallery which ran along the top of the ruin on its western side, above the great entrance-gate. They paced along it, they leant against the parapet and looked out over the moor; and Henry Gale took careful stock of the things which his companion was too familiar with to notice.

"Yes," he said at last, as if summing up his reflections, "it's just as I dreamt it— holes in the floor and all."

"Holes in the floor? Ah I yes—you mean the machicolations. You know what they're for, of course? The parapet projects like a balcony, as you see, overhanging the entrance of the keep. Anything dropped through any of these holes would fall on the heads of an enemy trying batter in the ISP to. It might be heavy stones or quicklime or boiling lead or pitch or—"

"I know, they told me till about that at the British Museum. But what I was thinking was this: these holes are large enough to let a man's body through."

"Yes, I suppose they are."

"In places they're worn and knocked about, so that a man's body could go through easily."

"Yes, now that you mention it, I see that, too."

"And it was just here— just underneath these holes— that Robert's body was found."

"Yes, it was just there."

"Well, Vicar, in my dream, and I told you, Robert started falling through a hole in the floor; and here, I take it, is the hole in the floor he fell through."

He paused, examining the hole, and considering the possibilities. When he spoke again, it was to dismiss incredible alternatives.

"Robert wasn't a lunatic. He didn't jump into one of those holes just to find out what was at the bottom of it."

"No, I presume not."

"He wouldn't have fallen into it by accident any more than we have. For one thing, he was sure-footed; for another, the hole isn't in the track that he'd be walking on."

"That's true. The holes, of course, are all well away from the path."

"But if ho didn't go through the hole on purpose or by accident, it follows that he must have been thrown through it, or pushed through it."

"So it would seem."

"But Robert wasn't the sort of man to be pushed or thrown anywhere he didn't want to go. Robert was a man who took a deal of pushing. He'd played football for Harvard; and I think you may take it that anyone who tried to push him through that hole would have gone through the hole himself instead."

"Then you conclude—"

"I conclude, Vicar, that there's not only been foul play, but foul play of some very tricky kind."

He paused again, as if reconsidering the problem in all its bearings. He repeated questions which he had asked before as to contents of the dead man's pockets. Money had been found in them, but not much. The thief, if there had been a thief, had left just enough coin to allay suspicion, but had abstracted letters, cheque-book, and all other papers which might lead to his victim's identification. The presumption that there had been a murder, with robbery for its motive, was fairly clear. To find the murderer and prove his guilt might be hard; but that was the task which Henry Gale had set himself.

"Vicar," he asked, abruptly, "who is that man they call Mad Alec?" And the Vicar told him.

"He's a poor daft fellow who lives out here on the moor alone in a log hut that he's built for himself."

"What does ho do for a living?"

"Occasional odd jobs for farmers. At other times he goes round to the country houses and begs."

"He isn't the guide who shows people over this castle?"

"There isn't any regular guide."

"But does this Mad Alec ever act as a guide?"

''Now and then, I believe, but not often. As a rule, visitors— and there aren't many—don't like the look of him."

"A formidable sort of person, then?"

"More ugly than formidable, I should say. He might be stronger than ho looks; but still—"

"Not the sort of man who would be likely to make trouble for a Harvard football player?"

"Oh, no!"

"Still, he was in the neighbourhood, I take it, when— when this happened?"

"He was the man who brought the news to the police."

"Ah! And they didn't suspect him at all?"

"As there were ne marks of violence on the body, there were no grounds for suspecting anyone."

"You thought Robert had dropped through that hole out of curiosity; or else that he hoisted himself up on to that parapet and jumped because he was tired of life?"

"That was what it looked like on the evidence."

"I see. But it doesn't look like that to anyone who knew Robert; and so I wonder—"

He had been pacing the gallery, scrutinising everything closely while he spoke. He continued the scrutiny in a silence which the Vicar respected. Then, quite abruptly, he broke out again.

"Vicar," he said, "I mean getting to the bottom of this, and I'm getting near the bottom of it now. I don't know yet who did it, but I do know how it was done."

"Surely, my dear sir—"

"Yes, Vicar, I do. You see this bit of rope here? You see how it's fastened?"

He picked up a piece of cord about the thickness of a clothes line, which trailed, as if left by accident, along the floor of the gallery on which they stood. One end of it was attached by a complicated knot to an ornamentation of the battlement, the other end lay on the ground.

"What of it?" asked the puzzled Vicar. And Henry Gale explained,

"Pick up your end of the rope, Vicar," he said. And the Vicar did so.

"Now," he continued, "step right out to the edge of the parapet, still holding the rope in your hands;" and the rest of his explanation only pointed out the obvious.

"See, Vicar, my place is right by the largest of these mantraps. The rope starts from the parapet, passes round my body, and then comes back to the parapet where you stand holding it. I'm a heavier man than you; but if you were to give a sudden jerk on that rope you'd jerk me into the mantrap before I'd have time to cry 'stop.' Do you allow that that is so?'

The Vicar had no choice but to allow it, marvelling at the ingenuity of the young man who had made so much out of so little. But the young man had not finished.

"That's how it was done, Vicar," ho continued. "That's the only way it could be done with a man of Robert's fighting weight. The next question is: Did this man you call Mad Alec do it? I don't know that yet; but I mean to know it before I'm a day older."

"But, my dear sir, your conjecture may be very plausible, though you have no evidence, and I don't see—"

Henry Dale was impatient, and interrupted him.

"Vicar," he said, "I'm going to have that evidence, one way or the other, before this day is out, and I'll tell you how I'm going to get it. I'm going to do what they're always doing in the French detective stories— that's to say, *reconstruct the crime*."

The Vicar, not being a reader of French detective stories, did not understand; and, indeed, Henry Gale was using his technical expression rather loosely. He explained what he meant, taking full charge, of the situation, and giving orders to his companion.

"I'm going to fetch your Mad Alec up on to this terrace and give him a chance of jerking me into the manhole."

"But, my dear sir, the risk that you are taking "

"Don't you be frightened, Vicar. I've taken my precautions, and we won't get further than trying; but I've got this job to do, and I mean to do it. What you've got to do is to hide yourself away in that turret over there and see it done. I want it done in the presence of a witness. Then we've got him. See?"

The Vicar saw and acquiesced, overborne by the energetic resolution of the impetuous youth. Ho told his companion whore Mad Alec was likely to be found, and then lit his pipe, promising to extinguish. it and withdraw into the turret indicated as soon as he heard steps or voices on the winding staircase; and Henry Gale, having seen the proper dispositions made, descended on his errand.

He had not far to go. Mad Alec's hut was in a sheltered hollow at little more than a furlong's distance from the ruin; and Mad Alec himself was just returning

to it from some mendicant excursion as he approached. He was a dwarf and a hunchback, and obviously strong both in the arms and in the legs, filthily dirty and unkempt, with a straggling coal-black board and eyes which glowed like sparks in deep and cavernous sockets.

"Hardly mad, but certainly half-witted, and yet cunning. I don't wonder travellers don't like the look of him," was Henry Gale's impression; and, having thus summed him up, he spoke to him.

He could not practice the adroit hypocrisy of a professional detective; but his own bluff manner served his purpose well enough.

"I suppose you're the man they call Mad Alec, aren't you?" he asked, curtly.

"It's no business of mine what people call me," was the surly response.

"Still, it's the name you answer to, I guess?"

"It's the only name I get a chance of answering to."

"That's right. You know your way all round that old ruin there, I take it?"

"I suppose I ought to."

"Well, just you come along and take me up to the top of it. Never mind about it's getting dark. I'll pay you extra for that. See?"

He pulled a handful of mixed gold and silver coins from his trousers pocket. It was his one bit of acting— an appeal to cupidity— and it sufficed. Mad Alec nodded his ugly head, and led the way. Henry Gale followed him, and presently the Vicar heard the footsteps which were his signal to put out his pipe and hide. It was the easier for him to do so because the sun had now set and the pallor of the twilight was beginning. Placing his eye to a loophole of the turret, he looked and listened, wondering what was to happen next.

He saw Mad Alec come out on to the gallery, and Henry Gale follow him a few yards behind. Both of them stood on firm ground, but in front of them were those machicolations which the American persisted in speaking of as mantraps and holes in the floor. Henry Gale, apparently by accident, but really, no doubt, by deliberate intention, had taken his stand, with the rope trailing behind him, immediately in front of the very largest of the holes. Mad Alec had passed on to the point where the end of the rope lay at his feet. He was looking at it in an odd, nervous way, as if hesitating whether to pick it up or not. It seemed to be touch and go whether he would renin ro.

"H'm. Letting 'I dare not wait upon I would,' " quoted the Vicar to himself, unable to escape from scholarship even at this exciting instant; and meanwhile the twilight deepened and the darkness gathered, so that, though he could still hear the voices clearly, the figures of the two men gradually grew as vague as shadows.

But that was what Henry Gale was waiting for, knowing that darkness makes criminals feel safe, assured that Mad Alec would he more likely to pick up the rope if he thought that he could do so unobserved. He had thought out his

plans, and meant to leave nothing to chance; and he knew exactly what ho must do to screw Mad Alec's courage to the sticking-point. He must give him all the sense of security which darkness could afford, and then— and then he must denounce him. And that was what the Vicar heard him doing now.

"Mad Alec!" the Vicar heard him calling. "Just you listen to me, Mad Alec. I've something to say to you."

The Vicar could not tell in the darkness whether Mad Alec showed fear or not. He only gave him a grunt in answer; and then he heard the young American continued his harangue:

"Mad Alec, the last man you took up here stood just where I am standing; and the next thing that was known of him was that his dead body was found down there below us."

It was still impossible to tell whether Mad Alec was showing signs of emotion; but Henry Gale went on, without waiting for such signs, his denunciation gathering vehemence as he proceeded:

"Mad Alec! There was money in his pocket when he fell— more money than was found on him when they picked up his body."

There was another pause of unbroken silence, and then:

"He didn't fall by accident, Mad Alec. Even a fool couldn't fall by accident off a place like this. He didn't fall oft, and he didn't jump off— he was thrown off!"

And then, after yet another pause:

"He was a stranger, Mad Alec. He was a stranger, and a lonely man. There was no one here to ask questions about him if he disappeared, and you knew it. He was alone with you up here, just as I am, with money in his pocket, just as I have. You wanted that money, Mad Alec. You thought you were quite safe. You didn't guess that another lonely man would come all the way from America to find you out; and so, Mad Alec—"

The eloquence was having its effect at last. The Vicar saw Mad Alec stoop. He knew that he could be stooping for no reason except to pick up his end of the rope; and he also know that the rope passed round the American's body, and, if pulled, would jerk him towards the gaping aperture. He doubted whether the young man could resist the strain, even if he were prepared for it. A cry of warning rose to his lips; but he bit his lip and refrained from uttering it. The young man, he remembered, had spoken of "precautions" which he had taken. He must leave him, therefore, as he had promised to be the guardian of his own safety; and so, with his heart in his mouth, he continued to look and listen, waiting for the inevitable moment when Mad Alec would pull the rope with all his weight.

He heard the voice of Henry Gale uplifted yet again, and passing from denunciation to menace.

"You thought you'd never he found out, Mad Alec, but you are. You're found out, and you're going to swing for it. I've found you out, and I've come for you. I've got the handcuffs in my pocket, and now—"

But Mad Alec did not wait for action to follow in the track of speech. His cunning told him that it was his turn to act, and that he must act now or never. In the midst of Henry Gale's unfinished sentence he stopped, with the rope in his hands, to the very edge of the parapet, planted his foot firmly, and leant back, jerking at the rope with all the force of his sturdy, muscular arms.

And then the Vicar perceived what Henry Gale had meant when he said that he had taken his precautions. He had cut the rope through with his pocket-knife while in the act of talking, so that it only held together by a few fragile strands.

Even so the shock made him stagger. He fell forward on to one knee, and caught himself with his hands against the projecting slab of the machicolation; but as he did so the sudden cessation of the strain told him that the rope had broken, and he heard first a thud and then a piercing yell:

"Help! Help! Good heavens! Quick! Quick! I'm falling!"

Instantly he sprang to his feet, and ran to offer help. The Vicar, at the same instant, darted out of his hiding place in the turret to the rescue. But too late.

Mad Alec, unbalanced by the sudden shock, had fallen flat on his back into the last of the long row of yawning holes. He was clutching frantically at the slabs, but failing to get a grip on them, Before a hand could be reached out to clutch at his coat-collar he had fallen through— fallen a hundred and twenty feet— and lay, just as his victim had lain, at the foot of the ruin, a battered and mangled corpse, with a broken back.

The two men stood still for a space with beating hearts, in silence; and then Henry Gale spoke.

"Vicar!" he said. "We've solved the mystery, I take it."

"Yes, I think so."

"But you see why I needed a witness. Now we'd better go together and tell the police about it."

2: Lame Dogs

Cosmo Hamilton

Henry Charles Hamilton Gibbs, 1870-1942
The London Magazine, Sep 1912

THE SUN fell straightly upon a great golden cornfield. Already the sickle had been at work upon its edges, and tall bundles, among whose feet the vermilion poppy peeped, stood head-to-head at regular distances. Among the ripe heads of the uncut corn the intermittent puffs of a soft August breeze whispered, offering congratulations and perhaps condolences— congratulations mostly, because what is there more beautiful and right in all the year's usefulness than the glorious fulfilment of the spring's green promise?

All the hours of a busy morning had been marked off melodiously by the old clock of an older church which stood with maternal dignity among gravestones several fields away. It wanted only a few moments to the hour of one. A brawny son of the soil, tanned of face, neck, and arms, who had been working in the angle of the field nearest the road, had just laid down his sickle and his crooked stick.

He was hot, but satisfied. He was also sharp-set, and very ready for the dinner that awaited him, with beer, at his cottage on the outskirts of the village. He sang, quietly and monotonously, in a typical burring way, a song which was written in praise of boiled beef and carrots. And while he sang he dabbed his face and neck with a startling handkerchief of red and yellow.

Swallows, flying high, skimmed the air playfully. Flocks of sparrows moved quickly among the standing corn, no longer frightened by the tin with stones in it, that was rattled by a slow-footed boy in the distance. They were eager to get their fill of stolen fruits before their natural enemies removed it from their beaks. The air was alive with the glimmering heat, and the shadows of the trees were almost straight.

One sounded, and before the bell's reverberations had blown away, a note of discord in the delicious harmony was struck by the sudden appearance of a man, who leaned on the white gate which divided the field from the road.

He was a short, slight, odd-looking creature, dressed in clothes that were rather too smart, and a green dump hat a little the worse for wear. His clean-shaven face, mobile and curiously lined, was pale and a little pinched, and the whole limp appearance of the man showed that he was only just recovering from an illness. Across one shoulder a knapsack was slung, and behind his left ear there rested a cigarette. A pearl was stuck in a rather loud tie, and there was a large ring on one of his little fingers.

There was something both comic and pathetic In the figure, and everything that was peculiarly the very antithesis of the exquisite rural surroundings. The

initials "R. D." were stencilled on the knapsack, and they stood for Richard Danby, a name that was well known in towns, but wholly unknown among cornfields and under the blue, unsmoked sky.

Danby, who had gladly leaned on the gate to rest, watched the big, muscular man for a moment, with eyes in which there was admiration, and listened to the unmusical rendering of a song which had trickled, note by note, into the country from London, with amusement. He then adopted an air of forced cheerfulness and clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he said. "Bravo!"

Peter Pippard turned slowly, antagonistically.

"Eh?" he said.

The little man waved his ringed hand.

"I said 'Bravo'— well rendered. What is it? An aria from *Faust*, or a little thing of your own?"

The big man was puzzled and surprised.

"Eh?" he said again.

Danby was not to be beaten. There was something in his manner which showed that he was in the habit of addressing himself to audiences and talking for effect.

"How delightful," he continued, with fluent insincerity, "to find a peasant in song! A merry heart wags all the day. Who wouldn't be happy among the golden corn, in touch with Nature, with the field-bugs gambolling over one's back!"

"Eh?"

Danby laughed.

"You find me a little flowery; I am flying too high for you. I am indulging in aeroplanics. I'll come down to the good red earth. Marnin', matey. How's t'crops?"

The imitation of the country accent was ridiculously exaggerated. The farm-hand examined the town man searchingly and suspiciously.

"Eh?" he said again.

"Beat again!" said Danby, with a shriek of laughter.

Pippard went closer, but slowly.

"Want onythin', mister?" he asked.

"No. Oh Lord, no! I only want to get some other word out of you than 'eh.'"

"Oh," said Pippard.

"Thanks. Thanks most awfully. Now we're moving.... Well, how's the corn? It looks fine and fat."

"Ah," said Pippard, grinning broadly and affectionately.

The little man bowed. He seemed to be saying things which would arouse laughter among an invisible audience.

85"Again I thank you. Yes, very fine and fat. You've been punching out and giving them thick ears. What?"

The examination was continued.

"You doan't seem ter be talkin' sense, mister."

Another shriek of laughter disturbed the characteristic peacefulness.

"Congratulations! You've discovered me. How can I talk sense when I'm trying to be sociable? You don't object to a little bright conversation, do you?"

"Noa."

"Well, we'll cut generalities and come to facts. How's the twins?"

"Ain't got no twins."

"Nonsense! I don't believe it. A great, big, brawny fellow like you. I take it you've got some nippers?"

Pippard chuckled. "Three girls and two boys."

"Ah, that's something like! Again congratulations! It's very kind of you to ask me to come over. Since you're so pressing, I think I will." He climbed over the gate a little painfully and walked jauntily into the field.

The farm-hand broke into a laugh. "Ah reckon as 'ow you're a funny man, ain't you?"

The little man became suddenly serious, so suddenly and so eagerly serious, that if Pippard had been endowed with the first glimmerings of psychology, he would have been startled and a little nervous. "Are you joking, or do you mean it? Is it possible that I make you laugh? Is it possible?"

"The very sight o' you gives me a ticklin' inside," was the reply.

Danby seized the brawny and surprised hand and wrung it warmly. "God bless you, dear old Hodge!" he said hoarsely. "God bless you!" Then he laughed merrily. "You make me feel like an attack of bronchitis."

The feeble joke went home. Pippard roared. "There you goes agin," he said. "What *are* yer, mister? A hartist?"

"An artist? Oh, dear no. Oh, God bless me, no! I'm an *artiste*."

"What's the difference, any'ow?"

If the little man had asked for his cue, he could not have got it more readily. "An artist earns his bread-and-butter by putting paint on canvas, and an *artiste* gets an occasional dish of tripe and onions by putting paint on his face."

"Ah reckon as 'ow you're an *artiste*, mister, although Ah can't see no paint on yer face."

"I washed over twelve months ago," said Danby sadly. "Oh, by the way, am I trespassing?"

"Well, it all depends on wot ye're a-goin' ter do."

"Eat, old boy. If you've no objection I'm going to spread out my *hors d'œuvres* and *pâté de foie gras*, and lunch *al-fresco*."

"Don't onderstand a blame wurd," said Pippard, grinning.

"Putting it in plain English, I'm going to wrestle with half a loaf of bread and two slices of cold ham. Will you join me? Do." The invitation was made eagerly. "Stay here and let me hear you laugh. It does me more good than a whole side of streaky bacon."

Pippard scratched his head doubtfully. "Well, Ah told th' old 'ooman as 'ow Ah'd be wome for dinner," he said.

"The old woman must not be disappointed. Do you pass a pub on your way home?"

"Can't go anywhere from 'ere without passin' a poob."

Danby squeezed a shilling into the great sun-tanned fist.

"Well, call in and get a drink."

"Thankee, Ah doan't mind if Ah do."

"Drink to my health. I don't suppose you want a drink more than I want health." He walked round the farm-labourer admiringly. He looked like a smooth-haired terrier who had suddenly met a St. Bernard. "My word, I'd give something to be a man like you. What muscle, what bones, what a back! What a hand! It's as big as a leg of mutton. Do you ever get tired of being healthy? Do you ever wake up in the morning and say: 'O Lord, I'm still as strong as an ox— why can't I get a nice thumping headache to keep me in bed?'"

It was altogether too much for the man who rose with the sun and went to bed with the sun and worked out in the fields all day long; the big, simple, healthy, natural man, whose life was a series of seasons, to whom there was no tragedy except bad weather, and a lack of work and wages. This odd little creature, who said unexpected things as though he meant them, and asked funny questions seriously, was "a comic"— such a man as the clown who came with the circus twice a year, and played the fool in the big tent which was pitched on the green and lighted with flares of gas. Pippard laughed so loudly that he scared the eager sparrows.

"There you go," he said. "Ah reckon as 'ow you was born funny."

Danby eyed him keenly and wistfully. "Are you laughing at me?" he asked. "*Me?*"

"Laffin'? Why, you'd make an old sow laff."

"You amaze me," said Danby. He gave the man another shilling. "Get further drinks on your way back. You're— you're a pink pill for pale people, old boy."

"Ah *must* go," said Pippard reluctantly.

"Yes, you trudge off to the old woman and get your dinner. I'll drink your health in a glass of water and a tabloid."

Pippard got into his coat and re-lit a short black clay.

"Well, good day, and thankee."

"Good day, and thank *you*." Danby held out his hand. It was thin and pale. It was grasped and shaken monstrously. "That's right— hurt it. Go on; hurt it. You

make me feel almost manly.... Good day and good luck! My love to the old woman and the kids, and the rabbit, and the old dog, and granny."

Laughing again, the big man marched off, made small work of the gate, and trudged away. Danby followed him up to the gate, and stood watching him curiously and admiringly, and as he watched he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Good day, giant," he said. "Good day, simple son of the soil, who eats hearty, drinks like a fish, and digests everything. Good-bye, man who knows nothing, and doesn't want to know anything. I'd give ten years of my life for five of yours any day. Well, well."

He turned with a sigh, took off his hat and hung it on a twig of the hedge, and then divested himself of his knapsack. This he unstrapped, and, taking out a napkin, spread it with a certain neatness on the grass, and set upon it a loaf, a piece of Cheddar cheese, a lettuce, and several slices of ham wrapped in paper, a knife and fork. To this not unappetising meal he added a large green bottle of water.

"Ah!" he said. A sudden thought struck him. He put his finger and thumb into a waistcoat pocket, and brought out a small bottle of tabloids. He swallowed one with many grimaces and much effort. He sighed again and sat down. He looked with feigned interest at the eatables in front of him for several minutes. He then shook his head and gave an expressive gesture. "No," he said aloud, in order that he might not feel quite so lonely. "No, not hungry. Beautiful food, clean napkin, lettuce washed in the brook, no appetite— not one faint semblance of a twist!"

It appeared from the startled flight of a thrush from the hedge that R. D. was not to be lonely after all. Another person bent over the gate, and looked into the cornfield, seemed perfectly satisfied, and climbed over. "This is all right," she said. "Carlton, S.W. Oh!"

The exclamation was involuntary. The girl caught sight of the man and pulled up short.

Danby sprang to his feet. The girl was pretty; and although her once smart clothes were shabby, and her shoes very much the worse for wear, she looked a nice, honest, frank creature, aglow with health and youth and optimism. Danby caught up his hat, put it on, and took it off again in his best society manner.

"No intrusion," he said. "Just a little al-fresco lunch, nothing more."

The girl smiled. Her teeth were very small and white and regular. "That was my idea," she said. "Not in the way, I hope?"

"Oh, please," replied Danby. "The sight of some one eating may inspire me and give me the much-desired appetite."

A ringing laugh was caught up by the gentle breeze.

"I should like to be able to eat enough to starve mine. Good morning!"

"Good morning!" said Danby. He bowed again, and hung his hat back on the twig. He was not a little disappointed. He had hoped for conversation and companionship. He sat down, but with interested eyes watched the girl unpack her luncheon quickly and deftly. She had no napkin. She spread her bread and meat on a sheet of newspaper, and cleaned her knife by thrusting it into the earth and wiping it on the grass. He noticed that her shoes were very dusty, and came to the conclusion that she had walked some distance. He was right. He caught her eye and looked away quickly.

"I beg pardon!" he said.

"Granted, I'm sure." Danby's manners were excellent.

"You haven't got such a thing as a pinch of salt, I suppose?"

"I can oblige you with all the condiments, including a little A1 sauce."

The girl laughed again. It was a charming laugh. "Oh, I can do without that," she said.

Danby, only too glad of an excuse to be of use, scrambled to his feet and made his way across the golden stubble to the girl's side. In his hand he held a small tobacco-tin. He opened it and held it out.

"Navy-cut?" she said, with wide-eyed surprise.

"An old 'Dreadnought' turned into a merchant ship. It's quite clean."

"Oh, thanks most awfully!" She helped herself to salt.

"Not at all," said Danby. "Any little thing like that.... Good day!"

"Good day!" she said.

But Danby did not move. The girl's kind heart was reflected in her blue eyes. Never in his life had he needed sympathy and companionship so desperately. He felt that even his long-lost appetite would return if she were to invite him to eat with her.

She too was lonely, although her indomitable courage did not permit her to own it, even to herself. There was, too, something about the little man that was very attractive, something which made her feel sorry for him. She wished that he would ask her if he might join her and bring his own food. What was it about him which reminded her of some one she had seen before?

"Rather nice here, isn't it?" she said.

He replied quickly, eagerly.

"Charming!" he said. "So sylvan."

"So whater?"

"Sylvan. French for rustic."

"Oh, French!"

"Yes; I beg your pardon."

"Good day!" she said.

"Good day!" he replied.

He returned reluctantly to his pitch. He felt that he deserved his dismissal. It was a very foolish thing to have shown that he was something of a scholar. Evidently she considered that he was putting on side.

He sat down and made a sandwich. He felt that he could eat it with some enjoyment if he were seated on the other side of her square of newspaper. As it was....

The girl gave a short laugh.

"I'm afraid I'm a great nuisance," she began apologetically.

"Not at all. Far from it." There was another chance, then.

"You haven't got such a thing as a touch of mustard, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, I have. Almost quite fresh."

He got up again, and carried a little cold-cream pot with him.

"Oh, thank you!" She took the pot and gazed at its label, with raised eyebrows.

"It's a has-been," he said hastily. "I'm a bit of an engineer. Everything comes in useful."

"Oh— thanks frightfully." She helped herself.

"Honoured and delighted." He remained standing over her.

She looked up.

"Anything I can do for you, now?"

"Yes, if you would. When you came here you said something about Carlton Hotel."

"Oh, that was a poor attempt at wit."

Danby's hand went up to his tie. It was extraordinary how nervous he felt these days.

"Don't think me intrusive, but suppose we imagine that this is the Carlton Hotel, and that all the tables are full except one."

"Well?"

"Well, in that case, as you and I both wish to lunch, it would be very natural for us to be put at the same table, wouldn't it? Do you take me?"

The girl laughed heartily.

"Come on, then. Two's company."

"How kind you are!" said Danby. "It will give me an appetite for the first time for months." He hurried to his belongings and brought them back. "I know this is very irregular, our not having been introduced, but I don't think under the circumstances it will cause a scandal in high life."

"No, nor a paragraph in the weeklies."

Danby respread his napkin and arranged his things on it. A sudden unexpected sensation of high spirits infected him.

He adopted what he considered to be the manner of a man of the world.

"Waitah, waitah!" he called, shooting his cuffs. "Great heaven, where's that waitah! I shall really have to lodge a complaint with the manager. Hi! you in last week's shirt, her ladyship and I have been waiting here for five minutes and no one's been near us. It's a disgrace. Don't stand gaping there, sir, with a Swiss grin. Alley-vous ang. Gettey-vous gone toute suite, and bringey moi le menu. Verfluchtes, geschweinhund!" He waved the imaginary waiter away. "Pray pardon my heat, Lady Susan."

The girl was intensely amused.

"Oh, certainly, Lord Edmund," she replied, assuming an elaborately refined accent.

Danby kept it up.

"Do you find the glare of the electric light too much for you? Shall I complain about the orchestra?"

"One must endure these things in these places, your lordship. Were you riding in the Row this morning?"

"Yaas." Danby twirled an imaginary moustache. "I had a canter. My mare cast a shoe— sixteen buttons. I rode her so hard that she strained her hemlock. She's a good little mare. Has fourteen hands, and plenty of action. She's a bit of a roarer, but then her mother was ridden by a Cabinet Minister."

"You haven't taken to a car, then?"

"Oh, yes. I've got one Fit and two Damlers. The annoying thing is, I've just lost my chauffeur."

"Oh, really? How?"

"He dropped an oath into the petrol-tank and was seen no more."

"What an absurdly careless person!"

Danby dropped acting, and eyed the girl keenly.

"I say," he exclaimed, "that was good!"

"So's that ham," said the girl involuntarily.

Instantly Danby's fork prodded the best piece.

"Have some. Do!"

"Sure you can spare it?"

"It would be a pity to waste it. I can't tackle more than one slice."

The girl held out a slice of bread.

"Haven't seen ham for ten days," she said simply. "It's an awfully odd thing."

"What? The ham?"

"No; your face."

Danby laughed.

"You're not the first who's thought so."

"And your voice is familiar, too," said the girl.

Danby pretended to misunderstand. She had provided him with a chance he simply could not resist.

"Familiar? Oh, don't say that. I thought I was behaving like an undoubted gentleman— one of the old régime."

The girl examined the little man with a sudden touch of excitement.

"Look here," she said. "Tell me the truth. Haven't you been a picture-postcard?"

"Yes," said Danby bitterly, "oh dear, yes! A year ago I was to be found in all the shops, between Hackenschmidt and the German Emperor."

"I've got it!" she cried. "I know you."

"No, you don't," said Danby.

"I do. I recognise you."

"I think not. No one could recognise *me* now."

"But I do. You're Dick Danby— *the* Dick Danby. The famous Dick Danby. The Dick Danby who used to set all London laughing, who played Widow Twankey at Drury Lane, and topped the bill at the Tivoli and the Pav."

The little man's thin pale hands went up to his face.

"Oh, don't!" he said, bursting into tears. "I can't bear it."

For a moment the girl was not sure whether this unexpected emotion was not part of the celebrated funny man's comic method. She was about to laugh, when she found that Danby's shoulders were shaking with very real and very terrible sobs. She was intensely surprised and upset and touched. She had never seen a man cry before. She put a soft hand on his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Danby," she said, "what is it— what's the matter?"

"Haven't you heard? Dick Danby's done for— gone under— gone *phut*. Dick Danby that was; Dick Danby that is no more. Dick Danby, that used to make 'em laugh, is a broken man. Oh, my God!"

"Oh, don't go on like that!" said the girl brokenly. "You'll make me cry if you do. What's happened, Mr. Danby?"

The little man shook himself angrily. He was ashamed of himself. He didn't know that he had become so weak, so unstrung, so little master of himself.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've never cried before. It was your recognising me. I didn't think any one could recognise me as I am now. It was overwork, overstrain, three halls a night— I couldn't stand it. I tried to struggle on, but it was no use. I earned my living as a funny man. Can you imagine what it means to a funny man to find that his jokes don't go? Can you imagine what it meant for me to stand waiting in the wings for my number to go up, trembling all over with fear and fright, and then to face the public that used to roar with delight, and get a few scattered hands? Oh, those awful nights! The crowd, no longer my friends, who struck matches and talked. The look of pity on the face of the conductor, and the few words from the stage door when I crept away: 'Never mind, Mr. Danby; can't always expect to knock 'em, y'know.' Do you wonder that I fretted myself into an illness? Do you wonder that I've been creeping

about the country, afraid to face the managers? I'm done. I'm a funny man gone unfunny. I'm the Dick Danby that can't get his laughs."

The girl listened to this painful confession with intense sympathy. She too had earned a hard living on the music-hall stage. She too knew what it was to fail in her anxious endeavour to win applause. She too was at that moment tramping to London in search of work, with only a few shillings between the lodging-house and the Salvation Army shelter. There was something very different between her case and Richard Danby's. She was an insignificant member of a large army of music-hall artistes whose place was always at the very beginning or the very end of the programme. When she had the good fortune to be in work, her salary was a bare living wage, and it was only by stinting herself of the few luxuries of life that she could put by a few pounds for a rainy day. Dick Danby's case was utterly— almost ludicrously— different. His salary for years had been large enough to take her breath away. He had earned more in a week than she had earned in a year. His health had broken down, and his nerves and confidence had left him, but, at any rate, he was not faced, or likely to be faced, with starvation and the Embankment, and other terrors that were unmentionable.

"Don't take it to heart, Mr. Danby," she said cheerily. "You'll get better, never fear, and knock 'em again. And, until then, you can be a country gentleman, and enjoy yourself. Think of all the money you've made!"

Danby gave a curious little laugh.

"And spent," he said. "Money? Oh, yes, I made money— money to burn— and I burnt it— in the usual way. I thought my day would go on for ever, but, like other thoughtless fools, I made a mistake. It came to a sudden end."

"But— but you don't mean to tell me that you haven't saved, Mr. Danby?"

"Saved?" Danby laughed again. "Have you ever heard that the word 'save' isn't in the dictionary of the men who earn their living behind the footlights? I've got just enough left to keep me on the road till the end of the summer."

"And then?"

"And then— the workhouse or the prison."

"Never, never!" cried the girl. "Never!"

A great thrill ran through the little man's veins. The emphatic cry was the best thing he had heard for many long, depressing months. The fact that it came from a shabby girl who might be in a worse plight than himself did not seem to matter.

"But what am I to do?" he asked.

The girl did not hesitate.

"Go back to the halls with new and better turns," she said strongly.

Danby shuddered, and went back, snail-like, into his shell.

"I couldn't. I couldn't face 'em. Who'd have me now?"

"The Coliseum; the Hippodrome."

"They'd never look at me. *Me?* They only want good stuff— first-rate stuff— all stars."

"But you are a star!"

"A fallen star. No; it's the workhouse for me. I'm a 'has-been,' a waster."

"Who will be again," said the girl. "Mr. Danby, I know *you*, and what you're capable of. *I've* been in the same bill with you, and you haven't *begun* to show 'em what you can do yet."

Danby looked at this girl, whose young voice quivered with confidence, with a new interest.

"*You* in the same bill with *me*!"

"Yes. You've never heard of the Sisters Ives?"

Danby wrinkled up his forehead.

"The Sisters Ives? Fanny and Emily Ives?"

"I'm Fanny. Emily's dead. We did pretty well together, but somehow— I dunno, I don't seem to catch on alone. I'm tramping back to London." She was unable to keep her resolutely cheerful voice quite steady, or prevent her smiling mouth from trembling.

Danby bent forward and caught Fanny's hand, and held it warmly.

"Oh, my dear," he said. "My dear."

There was no longer any need for society manners between these two, nor introductions nor small-talk. They had become brother and sister— two human beings on the same hard road.

"So we're both of us lame dogs, eh?" he said.

"Yes," said Fanny, "but not too lame to give each other a hand over the stile. *I'm* not going to give up barking, and you're not, either."

"I've got no bark left in me," said Danby sadly. "Not even a growl."

The girl sprang to her feet. Her young body seemed to be alight with energy.

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Danby!" she said. "Cock up your tail, go springy on your feet, and come back to London, and give 'em a bit of the old. D'you mean to tell me that you can't remember the knack you had of doing the blear-eyed major?"

Danby was beginning to feel horribly excited. His depression seemed to be lifting like a mist.

"I can remember nothing," he said irritably. "I tell you I'm no good. I've lost my pluck!" He said these things merely in the hope that they might be denied.

"Go on. Pluck! You only want a shove. I'm not going to have any of that sort of thing, believe me. You've got to wake up, you have. You've got to be brought in from grass and stuck into harness again. Now, no nonsense. I'm the great B. P., I am, for the time being. Now, then, on you come. The blear-eyed major, quick. We'll take the song for sung. Come to the patter!"

Danby's fingers twitched, and already he had flung out his chest and squared his shoulders.

"I— I can't," he said.

"You shall!" said Fanny.

"But— but what about make-up?"

Fanny nearly gave a shout of triumph. It had got as far as make-up. She was winning!

"Make-up!" she scoffed. "A great artiste wants no make-up!"

"But I must have a moustache. I never did the major without something to twirl."

Fanny's quick hands were up to her hair.

"Here you are," she said, holding out a curl. "Bit of my extra. Go on now. Get it up."

Danby caught it, and laughed. He was shaking with excitement.

"You— you inspire me," he said. "You— fill me with new life. How can I stick it on? I know. Mustard!"

He rushed to the cold-cream pot, put his fingers into it, rubbed the thick yellow stuff on his upper lip, and stuck on the curl. Then he seized his hat, cocked it on at an angle of forty-five, buttoned up his coat, and strutted about like an irascible bantam cock.

"Armay? Armay? My dear lady, we have no Armay! It was taken over by a lawyer as a hobby. It's a joke, a bad joke, at which nobody laughs. When you ask about the Armay you go back to the days of my youth, when I was in the 45th— a deuce of a feller too, I give you my word. We officers of Her Majesty's British Armay were fine fellows, handsome dorgs, my dear lady; and I think I may say I am the last of the fruitay old barkers who could make love as well as they could fight. Oh, *I'amour, I'amour*! Do you kiss?"

There was in this rapidly touched-in sketch something of portraiture which was not spoilt by the banality of the patter. It was, perhaps, the portrait of the stage-major, but it was the portrait of a man who might conceivably have lived even for the strong note of caricature.

Fanny danced with delight, and clapped her hands until they smarted.

"Hot stuff, Mr. Danby; very hot stuff!"

"No; it's rotten. Hopeless. You'd better give me up!" Danby, still afraid to believe in himself, took off the impromptu moustache and unbuttoned his coat.

"Give you up! I'll see you further. Now, then. The woman turn. Quick. You were a scream as a woman, Mr. Danby dear."

"The woman! How can I?" He looked round for his properties— wig, bonnet, dress, umbrella, little dog. His hands fluttered impotently.

Fanny was ready for him— ready for anything. She was playing the angel, the Florence Nightingale. She was bringing back a human being to life, to a sense

of responsibility, to a realisation of power, putting him on his feet again. She intended to win.

"Here you are," she said. "Get into this."

With quick, deft fingers she undid her belt and some hooks, slipped her skirt down, stepped out of it, and threw it at him. In her short, striped petticoat she looked younger and prettier and more honest than ever.

Danby gave a gurgle of excitement.

"Oh!" he said. "Oh, Miss Ives, you— you beat me, you—" He got into the skirt.

"That's the notion," she said. "Now get into this." She had whipped off her hat and held it out.

Danby took it. If Pippard had caught sight of him as he stood among the stubble in a skirt beneath his coat he would have fallen into what might turn out to be a dangerous fit of laughter.

"But how about hair?" asked Danby. "Oh, I know."

It was an inspiration. He darted to the nearest rick, plucked out a handful of golden corn, twisted it into a sort of halo, put it on turbanwise, and placed the hat on top. The effect was excellent; but it was the expression of the little actor's face which did more to put before his audience of one the garrulous, spiteful, prying woman than the skirt and hat put together.

He came forward with a life-like walk and smile.

"Oh, how do you do, my dear Mrs. Richmansworth?" he said. "I'm afraid I'm a little late, but I only just remembered that it's the third Thursday. I see you've got a new knocker. It represents a gargoyle, or a Chinese god, does it not? Or is it a fancy portrait of your husband? How is dear Mr. Richmansworth? Better! Ah, I wish I could say the same for mine. *My* husband.... But there; the least said the soonest mended. I see that you've been having some coal in to-day. Isn't it dreadful how coal has risen? I don't call it coal now— I call it yeast. My husband.... But let us talk of pleasant things. I see that you've lost your next-door neighbour. She was a good woman, and a great personal friend of mine; but I must say, in all fairness and in very truth, that she won't be missed, for her tongue was bitter and her words poison. No, thank you! I will not take tea. I was foolish enough to drink a cup at Mrs. Snodgrass's; and although I don't wish to go into details, I might just as well have swallowed a cannon-ball. I'm that swollen, I could hardly put my gloves on. I think it's called gastritis."

Fanny roared with delight. The absurd patter was said with an unmistakable touch of humour which would have appealed irresistibly to any music-hall audience.

"Good old Dick Danby!" she cried. "It's a case of six weeks at the Coliseum and fifteen on the road, with a star line on the bills. Give me my skirt."

"I beg your pardon!" He got out of it quickly. "Oh, if only I dared! If only I had the pluck to face my friends in front again! 'Return of Mr. Richard Danby,' eh?"

"That's it! It's a cert.! It's fine! You're up to your best form. You only want a couple of good songs, and your face will gleam again in all the shop windows."

Danby put his trembling hands on the girl's shoulders.

"Oh, Miss Ives! Oh, Fanny, you're better than all the medicine. You're a lady doctor— a hospital of lady doctors. You've bucked me up. You've given me back my pluck. Come on— to London— to London!"

"Yes," cried Fanny, "to London!"

Danby ran to his knapsack and began to pack it feverishly. The colour had returned to his face. His eyes were alight. He laughed as he packed. They both laughed; and when, a few minutes later, they faced each other again, ready for the road, they both looked as if a fairy had touched them with her wand.

"Your sister's dead," said Danby, "and you're down on your luck. Join forces with me, and we'll do a turn together— *this* turn, *this* story, just as we've done it here, and we'll call it 'Lame Dogs.'"

Fanny's tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Danby, do you mean that?"

Danby almost shouted with excitement.

"Mean it? I never meant anything so seriously in my life. Dick Danby and Fanny Ives at ten o'clock nightly. That's what I mean, my dear. You've done it. You've helped a lame dog over a stile. In future, I won't work only for myself. I'll work for you too. Little Dick Danby's on his feet again. Little Dick Danby's believed in. He's come face to face with Miss Fanny Hope Faith Charity Ives, and he won't let her go. Is it a contract?"

Fanny tried to take the outstretched hand. She tried to speak, and failed. Danby bent down and put his lips on her sleeve. Then he led her to the stile, helped her over, and together they took the road which led to London.

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3: Dick Boyle's Business Card

Bret Harte

1836-1902

In: *Trent's Trust and other stories*, 1903

THE SAGE WOOD and Dead Flat stage coach was waiting before the station. The Pine Barrens mail wagon that connected with it was long overdue, with its transfer passengers, and the station had relapsed into listless expectation. Even the humors of Dick Boyle, the Chicago "drummer,"— and, so far, the solitary passenger— which had diverted the waiting loungers, began to fail in effect, though the cheerfulness of the humorist was unabated. The ostlers had slunk back into the stables, the station keeper and stage driver had reduced their conversation to impatient monosyllables, as if each thought the other responsible for the delay. A solitary Indian, wrapped in a commissary blanket and covered by a cast-off tall hat, crouched against the wall of the station looking stolidly at nothing. The station itself, a long, rambling building containing its entire accommodation for man and beast under one monotonous, shed-like roof, offered nothing to attract the eye. Still less the prospect, on the one side two miles of arid waste to the stunted, far-spaced pines in the distance, known as the "Barrens;" on the other an apparently limitless level with darker patches of sage brush, like the scars of burnt-out fires.

Dick Boyle approached the motionless Indian as a possible relief. "YOU don't seem to care much if school keeps or not, do you, Lo?"

The Indian, who had been half crouching on his upturned soles, here straightened himself with a lithe, animal-like movement, and stood up. Boyle took hold of a corner of his blanket and examined it critically.

"Gov'ment ain't pampering you with A1 goods, Lo! I reckon the agent charged 'em four dollars for that. Our firm could have delivered them to you for 2 dols. 37 cents, and thrown in a box of beads in the bargain. Suthin like this!" He took from his pocket a small box containing a gaudy bead necklace and held it up before the Indian.

The savage, who had regarded him— or rather looked beyond him— with the tolerating indifference of one interrupted by a frisking inferior animal, here suddenly changed his expression. A look of childish eagerness came into his gloomy face; he reached out his hand for the trinket.

"Hol' on!" said Boyle, hesitating for a moment; then he suddenly ejaculated, "Well! take it, and one o' these," and drew a business card from his pocket, which he stuck in the band of the battered tall hat of the aborigine. "There! show that to your friends, and when you're wantin' anything in our line—"

The interrupting roar of laughter, coming from the box seat of the coach, was probably what Boyle was expecting, for he turned away demurely and

walked towards the coach. "All right, boys! I've squared the noble red man, and the star of empire is taking its westward way. And I reckon our firm will do the 'Great Father' business for him at about half the price that it is done in Washington."

But at this point the ostlers came hurrying out of the stables. "She's comin'," said one. "That's her dust just behind the Lone Pine— and by the way she's racin' I reckon she's comin' in mighty light."

"That's so," said the mail agent, standing up on the box seat for a better view, "but darned ef I kin see any outside passengers. I reckon we haven't waited for much."

Indeed, as the galloping horses of the incoming vehicle pulled out of the hanging dust in the distance, the solitary driver could be seen urging on his team. In a few moments more they had halted at the lower end of the station.

"Wonder what's up!" said the mail agent.

"Nothin'! Only a big Injin scare at Pine Barrens," said one of the ostlers. "Injins doin' ghost dancin'— or suthin like that— and the passengers just skunked out and went on by the other line. Thar's only one ez dar come— and she's a lady."

"A lady?" echoed Boyle.

"Yes," answered the driver, taking a deliberate survey of a tall, graceful girl who, waiving the gallant assistance of the station keeper, had leaped unaided from the vehicle. "A lady— and the fort commandant's darter at that! She's clar grit, you bet— a chip o' the old block. And all this means, sonny, that you're to give up that box seat to *her*. Miss Julia Cantire don't take anythin' less when I'm around."

The young lady was already walking, directly and composedly, towards the waiting coach— erect, self-contained, well gloved and booted, and clothed, even in her dust cloak and cape of plain ashen merino, with the unmistakable panoply of taste and superiority. A good-sized aquiline nose, which made her handsome mouth look smaller; gray eyes, with an occasional humid yellow sparkle in their depths; brown penciled eyebrows, and brown tendrils of hair, all seemed to Boyle to be charmingly framed in by the silver gray veil twisted around her neck and under her oval chin. In her sober tints she appeared to him to have evoked a harmony even out of the dreadful dust around them. What HE appeared to her was not so plain; she looked him over— he was rather short; through him— he was easily penetrable; and then her eyes rested with a frank recognition on the driver.

"Good-morning, Mr. Foster," she said, with a smile.

"Mornin', miss. I hear they're havin' an Injin scare over at the Barrens. I reckon them men must feel mighty mean at bein' stumped by a lady!"

"I don't think they believed I would go, and some of them had their wives with them," returned the young lady indifferently; "besides, they are Eastern people, who don't know Indians as well as WE do, Mr. Foster."

The driver blushed with pleasure at the association. "Yes, ma'am," he laughed, "I reckon the sight of even old 'Fleas in the Blanket' over there," pointing to the Indian, who was walking stolidly away from the station, "would frighten 'em out o' their boots. And yet he's got inside his hat the business card o' this gentleman— Mr. Dick Boyle, traveling for the big firm o' Fletcher & Co. of Chicago"— he interpolated, rising suddenly to the formal heights of polite introduction; "so it sorter looks ez ef any SKELPIN' was to be done it might be the other way round, ha! ha!"

Miss Cantire accepted the introduction and the joke with polite but cool abstraction, and climbed lightly into the box seat as the mail bags and a quantity of luggage— evidently belonging to the evading passengers— were quickly transferred to the coach. But for his fair companion, the driver would probably have given profane voice to his conviction that his vehicle was used as a "d——d baggage truck," but he only smiled grimly, gathered up his reins, and flicked his whip. The coach plunged forward into the dust, which instantly rose around it, and made it thereafter a mere cloud in the distance. Some of that dust for a moment overtook and hid the Indian, walking stolidly in its track, but he emerged from it at an angle, with a quickened pace and a peculiar halting trot. Yet that trot was so well sustained that in an hour he had reached a fringe of rocks and low bushes hitherto invisible through the irregularities of the apparently level plain, into which he plunged and disappeared. The dust cloud which indicated the coach— probably owing to these same irregularities— had long since been lost on the visible horizon.

The fringe which received him was really the rim of a depression quite concealed from the surface of the plain,— which it followed for some miles through a tangled trough-like bottom of low trees and underbrush,— and was a natural cover for wolves, coyotes, and occasionally bears, whose half-human footprint might have deceived a stranger. This did not, however, divert the Indian, who, trotting still doggedly on, paused only to examine another footprint— much more frequent— the smooth, inward-toed track of moccasins. The thicket grew more dense and difficult as he went on, yet he seemed to glide through its density and darkness— an obscurity that now seemed to be stirred by other moving objects, dimly seen, and as uncertain and intangible as sunlit leaves thrilled by the wind, yet bearing a strange resemblance to human figures! Pressing a few yards further, he himself presently became a part of this shadowy procession, which on closer scrutiny revealed itself as a single file of Indians, following each other in the same tireless trot. The woods and underbrush were full of them; all moving on, as he had moved, in a line parallel with the vanishing

coach. Sometimes through the openings a bared painted limb, a crest of feathers, or a strip of gaudy blanket was visible, but nothing more. And yet only a few hundred yards away stretched the dusky, silent plain— vacant of sound or motion!

Meanwhile the Sage Wood and Pine Barren stage coach, profoundly oblivious— after the manner of all human invention— of everything but its regular function, toiled dustily out of the higher plain and began the grateful descent of a wooded canyon, which was, in fact, the culminating point of the depression, just described, along which the shadowy procession was slowly advancing, hardly a mile in the rear and flank of the vehicle. Miss Julia Cantire, who had faced the dust volleys of the plain unflinchingly, as became a soldier's daughter, here stood upright and shook herself— her pretty head and figure emerging like a goddess from the enveloping silver cloud. At least Mr. Boyle, relegated to the back seat, thought so— although her conversation and attentions had been chiefly directed to the driver and mail agent. Once, when he had light-heartedly addressed a remark to her, it had been received with a distinct but unpromising politeness that had made him desist from further attempts, yet without abatement of his cheerfulness, or resentment of the evident amusement his two male companions got out of his "snub." Indeed, it is to be feared that Miss Julia had certain prejudices of position, and may have thought that a "drummer"— or commercial traveler— was no more fitting company for the daughter of a major than an ordinary peddler. But it was more probable that Mr. Boyle's reputation as a humorist— a teller of funny stories and a boon companion of men— was inconsistent with the feminine ideal of high and exalted manhood. The man who "sets the table in a roar" is apt to be secretly detested by the sex, to say nothing of the other obvious reasons why Juliets do not like Mercutios!

For some such cause as this Dick Boyle was obliged to amuse himself silently, alone on the back seat, with those liberal powers of observation which nature had given him. On entering the canyon he had noticed the devious route the coach had taken to reach it, and had already invented an improved route which should enter the depression at the point where the Indians had already (unknown to him) plunged into it, and had conceived a road through the tangled brush that would shorten the distance by some miles. He had figured it out, and believed that it "would pay." But by this time they were beginning the somewhat steep and difficult ascent of the canyon on the other side. The vehicle had not crawled many yards before it stopped. Dick Boyle glanced around. Miss Cantire was getting down. She had expressed a wish to walk the rest of the ascent, and the coach was to wait for her at the top. Foster had effusively begged her to take her own time— "there was no hurry!" Boyle glanced a little longingly after her graceful figure, released from her cramped position on the

box, as it flitted youthfully in and out of the wayside trees; he would like to have joined her in the woodland ramble, but even his good nature was not proof against her indifference. At a turn in the road they lost sight of her, and, as the driver and mail agent were deep in a discussion about the indistinct track, Boyle lapsed into his silent study of the country. Suddenly he uttered a slight exclamation, and quietly slipped from the back of the toiling coach to the ground. The action was, however, quickly noted by the driver, who promptly put his foot on the brake and pulled up. "Wot's up now?" he growled.

Boyle did not reply, but ran back a few steps and began searching eagerly on the ground.

"Lost suthin?" asked Foster.

"Found something," said Boyle, picking up a small object. "Look at that! D——d if it isn't the card I gave that Indian four hours ago at the station!" He held up the card.

"Look yer, sonny," retorted Foster gravely, "ef yer wantin' to get out and hang round Miss Cantire, why don't yer say so at oncet? That story won't wash!"

"Fact!" continued Boyle eagerly. "It's the same card I stuck in his hat— there's the greasy mark in the corner. How the devil did it— how did HE get here?"

"Better ax him," said Foster grimly, "ef he's anywhere round."

"But I say, Foster, I don't like the look of this at all! Miss Cantire is alone, and—"

But a burst of laughter from Foster and the mail agent interrupted him. "That's so," said Foster. "That's your best holt! Keep it up! You jest tell her that! Say thar's another Injin skeer on; that that thar bloodthirsty ole 'Fleas in His Blanket' is on the warpath, and you're goin' to shed the last drop o' your blood defendin' her! That'll fetch her, and she ain't bin treatin' you well! G'lang!"

The horses started forward under Foster's whip, leaving Boyle standing there, half inclined to join in the laugh against himself, and yet impelled by some strange instinct to take a more serious view of his discovery. There was no doubt it was the same card he had given to the Indian. True, that Indian might have given it to another— yet by what agency had it been brought there faster than the coach traveled on the same road, and yet invisibly to them? For an instant the humorous idea of literally accepting Foster's challenge, and communicating his discovery to Miss Cantire, occurred to him; he could have made a funny story out of it, and could have amused any other girl with it, but he would not force himself upon her, and again doubted if the discovery were a matter of amusement. If it were really serious, why should he alarm her? He resolved, however, to remain on the road, and within convenient distance of her, until she returned to the coach; she could not be far away. With this purpose he walked slowly on, halting occasionally to look behind.

Meantime the coach continued its difficult ascent, a difficulty made greater by the singular nervousness of the horses, that only with great trouble and some objurgation from the driver could be prevented from shying from the regular track.

"Now, wot's gone o' them critters?" said the irate Foster, straining at the reins until he seemed to lift the leader back into the track again.

"Looks as ef they smelt suthin— b'ar or Injin ponies," suggested the mail agent.

"Injin ponies?" repeated Foster scornfully.

"Fac'! Injin ponies set a hoss crazy— jest as wild hosses would!"

"Whar's yer Injin ponies?" demanded Foster incredulously.

"Dunno," said the mail agent simply.

But here the horses again swerved so madly from some point of the thicket beside them that the coach completely left the track on the right. Luckily it was a disused trail and the ground fairly good, and Foster gave them their heads, satisfied of his ability to regain the regular road when necessary. It took some moments for him to recover complete control of the frightened animals, and then their nervousness having abated with their distance from the thicket, and the trail being less steep though more winding than the regular road, he concluded to keep it until he got to the summit, when he would regain the highway once more and await his passengers. Having done this, the two men stood up on the box, and with an anxiety they tried to conceal from each other looked down the canyon for the lagging pedestrians.

"I hope Miss Cantire hasn't been stampeded from the track by any skeer like that," said the mail agent dubiously.

"Not she! She's got too much grit and sabe for that, unless that drummer hez caught up with her and unloaded his yarn about that kyard."

They were the last words the men spoke. For two rifle shots cracked from the thicket beside the road; two shots aimed with such deliberateness and precision that the two men, mortally stricken, collapsed where they stood, hanging for a brief moment over the dashboard before they rolled over on the horses' backs. Nor did they remain there long, for the next moment they were seized by half a dozen shadowy figures and with the horses and their cut traces dragged into the thicket. A half dozen and then a dozen other shadows flitted and swarmed over, in, and through the coach, reinforced by still more, until the whole vehicle seemed to be possessed, covered, and hidden by them, swaying and moving with their weight, like helpless carrion beneath a pack of ravenous wolves. Yet even while this seething congregation was at its greatest, at some unknown signal it as suddenly dispersed, vanished, and disappeared, leaving the coach empty— vacant and void of all that had given it life, weight, animation, and purpose— a mere skeleton on the roadside. The afternoon wind blew

through its open doors and ravaged rack and box as if it had been the wreck of weeks instead of minutes, and the level rays of the setting sun flashed and blazed into its windows as though fire had been added to the ruin. But even this presently faded, leaving the abandoned coach a rigid, lifeless spectre on the twilight plain.

An hour later there was the sound of hurrying hoofs and jingling accoutrements, and out of the plain swept a squad of cavalrymen bearing down upon the deserted vehicle. For a few moments they, too, seemed to surround and possess it, even as the other shadows had done, penetrating the woods and thicket beside it. And then as suddenly at some signal they swept forward furiously in the track of the destroying shadows.

Miss Cantire took full advantage of the suggestion "not to hurry" in her walk, with certain feminine ideas of its latitude. She gathered a few wild flowers and some berries in the underwood, inspected some birds' nests with a healthy youthful curiosity, and even took the opportunity of arranging some moist tendrils of her silky hair with something she took from the small reticule that hung coquettishly from her girdle. It was, indeed, some twenty minutes before she emerged into the road again; the vehicle had evidently disappeared in a turn of the long, winding ascent, but just ahead of her was that dreadful man, the "Chicago drummer." She was not vain, but she made no doubt that he was waiting there for her. There was no avoiding him, but his companionship could be made a brief one. She began to walk with ostentatious swiftness.

Boyle, whose concern for her safety was secretly relieved at this, began to walk forward briskly too without looking around. Miss Cantire was not prepared for this; it looked so ridiculously as if she were chasing him! She hesitated slightly, but now as she was nearly abreast of him she was obliged to keep on.

"I think you do well to hurry, Miss Cantire," he said as she passed. "I've lost sight of the coach for some time, and I dare say they're already waiting for us at the summit."

Miss Cantire did not like this any better. To go on beside this dreadful man, scrambling breathlessly after the stage— for all the world like an absorbed and sentimentally belated pair of picnickers— was really *too* much. "Perhaps if *you* ran on and told them I was coming as fast as I could," she suggested tentatively.

"It would be as much as my life is worth to appear before Foster without you," he said laughingly. "You've only got to hurry on a little faster."

But the young lady resented this being driven by a "drummer." She began to lag, depressing her pretty brows ominously.

"Let me carry your flowers," said Boyle. He had noticed that she was finding some difficulty in holding up her skirt and the nosegay at the same time.

"No! No!" she said in hurried horror at this new suggestion of their companionship. "Thank you very much— but they're really not worth keeping—

I am going to throw them away. There!" she added, tossing them impatiently in the dust.

But she had not reckoned on Boyle's perfect good-humor. That gentle idiot stooped down, actually gathered them up again, and was following! She hurried on; if she could only get to the coach first, ignoring him! But a vulgar man like that would be sure to hand them to her with some joke! Then she lagged again— she was getting tired, and she could see no sign of the coach. The drummer, too, was also lagging behind— at a respectful distance, like a groom or one of her father's troopers. Nevertheless this did not put her in a much better humor, and halting until he came abreast of her, she said impatiently: "I don't see why Mr. Foster should think it necessary to send any one to look after me."

"He didn't," returned Boyle simply. "I got down to pick up something."

"To pick up something?" she returned incredulously.

"Yes. *That*." He held out the card. "It's the card of our firm."

Miss Cantire smiled ironically. "You are certainly devoted to your business."

"Well, yes," returned Boyle good-humoredly. "You see I reckon it don't pay to do anything halfway. And whatever I do, I mean to keep my eyes about me." In spite of her prejudice, Miss Cantire could see that these necessary organs, if rather flippant, were honest. "Yes, I suppose there isn't much on that I don't take in. Why now, Miss Cantire, there's that fancy dust cloak you're wearing— it isn't in our line of goods— nor in anybody's line west of Chicago; it came from Boston or New York, and was made for home consumption! But your hat— and mighty pretty it is too, as *you've* fixed it up— is only regular Dunstable stock, which we could put down at Pine Barrens for four and a half cents a piece, net. Yet I suppose you paid nearly twenty-five cents for it at the Agency!"

Oddly enough this cool appraisement of her costume did not incense the young lady as it ought to have done. On the contrary, for some occult feminine reason, it amused and interested her. It would be such a good story to tell her friends of a "drummer's" idea of gallantry; and to tease the flirtatious young West Pointer who had just joined. And the appraisement was truthful— Major Cantire had only his pay— and Miss Cantire had been obliged to select that hat from the government stores.

"Are you in the habit of giving this information to ladies you meet in traveling?" she asked.

"Well, no!" answered Boyle— "for that's just where you have to keep your eyes open. Most of 'em wouldn't like it, and it's no use aggravating a possible customer. But you are not that kind."

Miss Cantire was silent. She knew she was not of that kind, but she did not require his vulgar indorsement. She pushed on for some moments alone, when

suddenly he hailed her. She turned impatiently. He was carefully examining the road on both sides.

"We have either lost our way," he said, rejoining her, "or the coach has turned off somewhere. These tracks are not fresh, and as they are all going the same way, they were made by the up coach last night. They're not *our* tracks; I thought it strange we hadn't sighted the coach by this time."

"And then—" said Miss Cantire impatiently.

"We must turn back until we find them again."

The young lady frowned. "Why not keep on until we get to the top?" she said pettishly. "I'm sure I shall." She stopped suddenly as she caught sight of his grave face and keen, observant eyes. "Why can't we go on as we are?"

"Because we are expected to come back to the *coach*— and not to the summit merely. These are the 'orders,' and you know you are a soldier's daughter!" He laughed as he spoke, but there was a certain quiet deliberation in his manner that impressed her. When he added, after a pause, "We must go back and find where the tracks turned off," she obeyed without a word.

They walked for some time, eagerly searching for signs of the missing vehicle. A curious interest and a new reliance in Boyle's judgment obliterated her previous annoyance, and made her more natural. She ran ahead of him with youthful eagerness, examining the ground, following a false clue with great animation, and confessing her defeat with a charming laugh. And it was she who, after retracing their steps for ten minutes, found the diverging track with a girlish cry of triumph. Boyle, who had followed her movements quite as interestedly as her discovery, looked a little grave as he noticed the deep indentations made by the struggling horses. Miss Cantire detected the change in his face; ten minutes before she would never have observed it. "I suppose we had better follow the new track," she said inquiringly, as he seemed to hesitate.

"Certainly," he said quickly, as if coming to a prompt decision. "That is safest."

"What do you think has happened? The ground looks very much cut up," she said in a confidential tone, as new to her as her previous observation of him.

"A horse has probably stumbled and they've taken the old trail as less difficult," said Boyle promptly. In his heart he did not believe it, yet he knew that if anything serious had threatened them the coach would have waited in the road. "It's an easier trail for us, though I suppose it's a little longer," he added presently.

"You take everything so good-humoredly, Mr. Boyle," she said after a pause.

"It's the way to do business, Miss Cantire," he said. "A man in my line has to cultivate it."

She wished he hadn't said that, but, nevertheless, she returned a little archly: "But you haven't any business with the stage company nor with ME,

although I admit I intend to get my Dunstable hereafter from your firm at the wholesale prices."

Before he could reply, the detonation of two gunshots, softened by distance, floated down from the ridge above them. "There!" said Miss Cantire eagerly. "Do you hear that?"

His face was turned towards the distant ridge, but really that she might not question his eyes. She continued with animation: "That's from the coach— to guide us— don't you see?"

"Yes," he returned, with a quick laugh, "and it says hurry up— mighty quick— we're tired waiting— so we'd better push on."

"Why don't you answer back with your revolver?" she asked.

"Haven't got one," he said.

"Haven't got one?" she repeated in genuine surprise. "I thought you gentlemen who are traveling always carried one. Perhaps it's inconsistent with your gospel of good-humor."

"That's just it, Miss Cantire," he said with a laugh. "You've hit it."

"Why," she said hesitatingly, "even I have a derringer— a very little one, you know, which I carry in my reticule. Captain Richards gave it to me." She opened her reticule and showed a pretty ivory-handled pistol. The look of joyful surprise which came into his face changed quickly as she cocked it and lifted it into the air. He seized her arm quickly.

"No, please don't, you might want it— I mean the report won't carry far enough. It's a very useful little thing, for all that, but it's only effective at close quarters." He kept the pistol in his hand as they walked on. But Miss Cantire noticed this, also his evident satisfaction when she had at first produced it, and his concern when she was about to discharge it uselessly. She was a clever girl, and a frank one to those she was inclined to trust. And she began to trust this stranger. A smile stole along her oval cheek.

"I really believe you're afraid of something, Mr. Boyle," she said, without looking up. "What is it? You haven't got that Indian scare too?"

Boyle had no false shame. "I think I have," he returned, with equal frankness. "You see, I don't understand Indians as well as you— and Foster."

"Well, you take my word and Foster's that there is not the least danger from them. About here they are merely grown-up children, cruel and destructive as most children are; but they know their masters by this time, and the old days of promiscuous scalping are over. The only other childish propensity they keep is thieving. Even then they only steal what they actually want,— horses, guns, and powder. A coach can go where an ammunition or an emigrant wagon can't. So your trunk of samples is quite safe with Foster."

Boyle did not think it necessary to protest. Perhaps he was thinking of something else.

"I've a mind," she went on slyly, "to tell you something more. Confidence for confidence: as you've told me YOUR trade secrets, I'll tell you one of OURS. Before we left Pine Barrens, my father ordered a small escort of cavalrymen to be in readiness to join that coach if the scouts, who were watching, thought it necessary. So, you see, I'm something of a fraud as regards my reputation for courage."

"That doesn't follow," said Boyle admiringly, "for your father must have thought there was some danger, or he wouldn't have taken that precaution."

"Oh, it wasn't for me," said the young girl quickly.

"Not for you?" repeated Boyle.

Miss Cantire stopped short, with a pretty flush of color and an adorable laugh. "There! I've done it, so I might as well tell the whole story. But I can trust you, Mr. Boyle." (She faced him with clear, penetrating eyes.) "Well," she laughed again, "you might have noticed that we had a quantity of baggage of passengers who didn't go? Well, those passengers never intended to go, and hadn't any baggage! Do you understand? Those innocent-looking heavy trunks contained carbines and cartridges from our post for Fort Taylor"— she made him a mischievous curtsy— "under *my* charge! And," she added, enjoying his astonishment, "as you saw, I brought them through safe to the station, and had them transferred to this coach with less fuss and trouble than a commissary transport and escort would have made."

"And they were in *this* coach?" repeated Boyle abstractedly.

"Were? They *are*!" said Miss Cantire.

"Then the sooner I get you back to your treasure again the better," said Boyle with a laugh. "Does Foster know it?"

"Of course not! Do you suppose I'd tell it to anybody but a stranger to the place? Perhaps, like you, I know when and to whom to impart information," she said mischievously.

Whatever was in Boyle's mind he had space for profound and admiring astonishment of the young lady before him. The girlish simplicity and trustfulness of her revelation seemed as inconsistent with his previous impression of her reserve and independence as her girlish reasoning and manner was now delightfully at variance with her tallness, her aquiline nose, and her erect figure. Mr. Boyle, like most short men, was apt to overestimate the qualities of size.

They walked on for some moments in silence. The ascent was comparatively easy but devious, and Boyle could see that this new detour would take them still some time to reach the summit. Miss Cantire at last voiced the thought in his own mind. "I wonder what induced them to turn off here? and if you hadn't been so clever as to discover their tracks, how could we have found them? But," she added, with feminine logic, "that, of course, is why they fired those shots."

Boyle remembered, however, that the shots came from another direction, but did not correct her conclusion. Nevertheless he said lightly: "Perhaps even Foster might have had an Indian scare."

"He ought to know 'friendlies' or 'government reservation men' better by this time," said Miss Cantire; "however, there is something in that. Do you know," she added with a laugh, "though I haven't your keen eyes I'm gifted with a keen scent, and once or twice I've thought I *smelt* Indians— that peculiar odor of their camps, which is unlike anything else, and which one detects even in their ponies. I used to notice it when I rode one; no amount of grooming could take it away."

"I don't suppose that the intensity or degree of this odor would give you any idea of the hostile or friendly feelings of the Indians towards you?" asked Boyle grimly.

Although the remark was consistent with Boyle's objectionable reputation as a humorist, Miss Cantire deigned to receive it with a smile, at which Boyle, who was a little relieved by their security so far, and their nearness to their journey's end, developed further ingenious trifling until, at the end of an hour, they stood upon the plain again.

There was no sign of the coach, but its fresh track was visible leading along the bank of the ravine towards the intersection of the road they should have come by, and to which the coach had indubitably returned. Mr. Boyle drew a long breath. They were comparatively safe from any invisible attack now. At the end of ten minutes Miss Cantire, from her superior height, detected the top of the missing vehicle appearing above the stunted bushes at the junction of the highway.

"Would you mind throwing those old flowers away now?" she said, glancing at the spoils which Boyle still carried.

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, they're too ridiculous. Please do."

"May I keep one?" he asked, with the first intonation of masculine weakness in his voice.

"If you like," she said, a little coldly.

Boyle selected a small spray of myrtle and cast the other flowers obediently aside.

"Dear me, how ridiculous!" she said.

"What is ridiculous?" he asked, lifting his eyes to hers with a slight color. But he saw that she was straining her eyes in the distance.

"Why, there don't seem to be any horses to the coach!"

He looked. Through a gap in the furze he could see the vehicle now quite distinctly, standing empty, horseless and alone. He glanced hurriedly around them; on the one side a few rocks protected them from the tangled rim of the

ridge; on the other stretched the plain. "Sit down, don't move until I return," he said quickly. "Take that." He handed back her pistol, and ran quickly to the coach. It was no illusion; there it stood vacant, abandoned, its dropped pole and cut traces showing too plainly the fearful haste of its desertion! A light step behind him made him turn. It was Miss Cantire, pink and breathless, carrying the cocked derringer in her hand. "How foolish of you— without a weapon," she gasped in explanation.

Then they both stared at the coach, the empty plain, and at each other! After their tedious ascent, their long detour, their protracted expectancy and their eager curiosity, there was such a suggestion of hideous mockery in this vacant, useless vehicle— apparently left to them in what seemed their utter abandonment— that it instinctively affected them alike. And as I am writing of human nature I am compelled to say that they both burst into a fit of laughter that for the moment stopped all other expression!

"It was so kind of them to leave the coach," said Miss Cantire faintly, as she took her handkerchief from her wet and mirthful eyes. "But what made them run away?"

Boyle did not reply; he was eagerly examining the coach. In that brief hour and a half the dust of the plain had blown thick upon it, and covered any foul stain or blot that might have suggested the awful truth. Even the soft imprint of the Indians' moccasined feet had been trampled out by the later horse hoofs of the cavalrymen. It was these that first attracted Boyle's attention, but he thought them the marks made by the plunging of the released coach horses.

Not so his companion! She was examining them more closely, and suddenly lifted her bright, animated face. "Look!" she said; "our men have been here, and have had a hand in this— whatever it is."

"Our men?" repeated Boyle blankly.

"Yes!— troopers from the post— the escort I told you of. These are the prints of the regulation cavalry horseshoe— not of Foster's team, nor of Indian ponies, who never have any! Don't you see?" she went on eagerly; "our men have got wind of something and have galloped down here— along the ridge— see!" she went on, pointing to the hoof prints coming from the plain. "They've anticipated some Indian attack and secured everything."

"But if they were the same escort you spoke of, they must have known you were here, and have"— he was about to say "abandoned you," but checked himself, remembering they were her father's soldiers.

"They knew I could take care of myself, and wouldn't stand in the way of their duty," said the young girl, anticipating him with quick professional pride that seemed to fit her aquiline nose and tall figure. "And if they knew that," she added, softening with a mischievous smile, "they also knew, of course, that I was protected by a gallant stranger vouched for by Mr. Foster! No!" she added,

with a certain blind, devoted confidence, which Boyle noticed with a slight wince that she had never shown before, "it's all right! and 'by orders,' Mr. Boyle, and when they've done their work they'll be back."

But Boyle's masculine common sense was, perhaps, safer than Miss Cantire's feminine faith and inherited discipline, for in an instant he suddenly comprehended the actual truth! The Indians had been there *first*; *they* had despoiled the coach and got off safely with their booty and prisoners on the approach of the escort, who were now naturally pursuing them with a fury aroused by the belief that their commander's daughter was one of their prisoners. This conviction was a dreadful one, yet a relief as far as the young girl was concerned. But should he tell her? No! Better that she should keep her calm faith in the triumphant promptness of the soldiers— and their speedy return.

"I dare say you are right," he said cheerfully, "and let us be thankful that in the empty coach you'll have at least a half-civilized shelter until they return. Meantime I'll go and reconnoitre a little."

"I will go with you," she said.

But Boyle pointed out to her so strongly the necessity of her remaining to wait for the return of the soldiers that, being also fagged out by her long climb, she obediently consented, while he, even with his inspiration of the truth, did not believe in the return of the despoilers, and knew she would be safe.

He made his way to the nearest thicket, where he rightly believed the ambush had been prepared, and to which undoubtedly they first retreated with their booty. He expected to find some signs or traces of their spoil which in their haste they had to abandon. He was more successful than he anticipated. A few steps into the thicket brought him full upon a realization of more than his worst convictions— the dead body of Foster! Near it lay the body of the mail agent. Both had been evidently dragged into the thicket from where they fell, scalped and half stripped. There was no evidence of any later struggle; they must have been dead when they were brought there.

Boyle was neither a hard-hearted nor an unduly sensitive man. His vocation had brought him peril enough by land and water; he had often rendered valuable assistance to others, his sympathy never confusing his directness and common sense. He was sorry for these two men, and would have fought to save them. But he had no imaginative ideas of death. And his keen perception of the truth was consequently sensitively alive only to that grotesqueness of aspect which too often the hapless victims of violence are apt to assume. He saw no agony in the vacant eyes of the two men lying on their backs in apparently the complacent abandonment of drunkenness, which was further simulated by their tumbled and disordered hair matted by coagulated blood, which, however, had lost its sanguine color. He thought only of the unsuspecting girl sitting in the lonely coach, and hurriedly dragged them further into the bushes. In doing this

he discovered a loaded revolver and a flask of spirits which had been lying under them, and promptly secured them. A few paces away lay the coveted trunks of arms and ammunition, their lids wrenched off and their contents gone. He noticed with a grim smile that his own trunks of samples had shared a like fate, but was delighted to find that while the brighter trifles had attracted the Indians' childish cupidity they had overlooked a heavy black merino shawl of a cheap but serviceable quality. It would help to protect Miss Cantire from the evening wind, which was already rising over the chill and stark plain. It also occurred to him that she would need water after her parched journey, and he resolved to look for a spring, being rewarded at last by a trickling rill near the ambush camp. But he had no utensil except the spirit flask, which he finally emptied of its contents and replaced with the pure water— a heroic sacrifice to a traveler who knew the comfort of a stimulant. He retraced his steps, and was just emerging from the thicket when his quick eye caught sight of a moving shadow before him close to the ground, which set the hot blood coursing through his veins.

It was the figure of an Indian crawling on his hands and knees towards the coach, scarcely forty yards away. For the first time that afternoon Boyle's calm good-humor was overswept by a blind and furious rage. Yet even then he was sane enough to remember that a pistol shot would alarm the girl, and to keep that weapon as a last resource. For an instant he crept forward as silently and stealthily as the savage, and then, with a sudden bound, leaped upon him, driving his head and shoulders down against the rocks before he could utter a cry, and sending the scalping knife he was carrying between his teeth flying with the shock from his battered jaw. Boyle seized it— his knee still in the man's back— but the prostrate body never moved beyond a slight contraction of the lower limbs. The shock had broken the Indian's neck. He turned the inert man on his back— the head hung loosely on the side. But in that brief instant Boyle had recognized the "friendly" Indian of the station to whom he had given the card.

He rose dizzily to his feet. The whole action had passed in a few seconds of time, and had not even been noticed by the sole occupant of the coach. He mechanically cocked his revolver, but the man beneath him never moved again. Neither was there any sign of flight or reinforcement from the thicket around him. Again the whole truth flashed upon him. This spy and traitor had been left behind by the marauders to return to the station and avert suspicion; he had been lurking around, but being without firearms, had not dared to attack the pair together.

It was a moment or two before Boyle regained his usual elastic good-humor. Then he coolly returned to the spring, "washed himself of the Indian," as he grimly expressed it to himself, brushed his clothes, picked up the shawl and

flask, and returned to the coach. It was getting dark now, but the glow of the western sky shone unimpeded through the windows, and the silence gave him a great fear. He was relieved, however, on opening the door, to find Miss Cantire sitting stiffly in a corner. "I am sorry I was so long," he said, apologetically to her attitude, "but—"

"I suppose you took your own time," she interrupted in a voice of injured tolerance. "I don't blame you; anything's better than being cooped up in this tiresome stage for goodness knows how long!"

"I was hunting for water," he said humbly, "and have brought you some." He handed her the flask.

"And I see you have had a wash," she said a little enviously. "How spick and span you look! But what's the matter with your necktie?"

He put his hand to his neck hurriedly. His necktie was loose, and had twisted to one side in the struggle. He colored quite as much from the sensitiveness of a studiously neat man as from the fear of discovery. "And what's that?" she added, pointing to the shawl.

"One of my samples that I suppose was turned out of the coach and forgotten in the transfer," he said glibly. "I thought it might keep you warm."

She looked at it dubiously and laid it gingerly aside. "You don't mean to say you go about with such things *openly*?" she said querulously.

"Yes; one mustn't lose a chance of trade, you know," he resumed with a smile.

"And you haven't found this journey very profitable," she said dryly. "You certainly are devoted to your business!" After a pause, discontentedly: "It's quite night already— we can't sit here in the dark."

"We can take one of the coach lamps inside; they're still there. I've been thinking the matter over, and I reckon if we leave one lighted outside the coach it may guide your friends back." He *had* considered it, and believed that the audacity of the act, coupled with the knowledge the Indians must have of the presence of the soldiers in the vicinity, would deter rather than invite their approach.

She brightened considerably with the coach lamp which he lit and brought inside. By its light she watched him curiously. His face was slightly flushed and his eyes very bright and keen looking. Man killing, except with old professional hands, has the disadvantage of affecting the circulation.

But Miss Cantire had noticed that the flask smelt of whiskey. The poor man had probably fortified himself from the fatigues of the day.

"I suppose you are getting bored by this delay," she said tentatively.

"Not at all," he replied. "Would you like to play cards? I've got a pack in my pocket. We can use the middle seat as a table, and hang the lantern by the window strap."

She assented languidly from the back seat; he was on the front seat, with the middle seat for a table between them. First Mr. Boyle showed her some tricks with the cards and kindled her momentary and flashing interest in a mysteriously evoked but evanescent knave. Then they played euchre, at which Miss Cantire cheated adorably, and Mr. Boyle lost game after game shamelessly. Then once or twice Miss Cantire was fain to put her cards to her mouth to conceal an apologetic yawn, and her blue-veined eyelids grew heavy. Whereupon Mr. Boyle suggested that she should make herself comfortable in the corner of the coach with as many cushions as she liked and the despised shawl, while he took the night air in a prowl around the coach and a lookout for the returning party. Doing so, he was delighted, after a turn or two, to find her asleep, and so returned contentedly to his sentry round.

He was some distance from the coach when a low moaning sound in the thicket presently increased until it rose and fell in a prolonged howl that was repeated from the darkened plains beyond. He recognized the voice of wolves; he instinctively felt the sickening cause of it. They had scented the dead bodies, and he now regretted that he had left his own victim so near the coach. He was hastening thither when a cry, this time human and more terrifying, came from the coach. He turned towards it as its door flew open and Miss Cantire came rushing toward him. Her face was colorless, her eyes wild with fear, and her tall, slim figure trembled convulsively as she frantically caught at the lapels of his coat, as if to hide herself within its folds, and gasped breathlessly,—

"What is it? Oh! Mr. Boyle, save me!"

"They are wolves," he said hurriedly. "But there is no danger; they would never attack you; you were safe where you were; let me lead you back."

But she remained rooted to the spot, still clinging desperately to his coat. "No, no!" she said, "I dare not! I heard that awful cry in my sleep. I looked out and saw it— a dreadful creature with yellow eyes and tongue, and a sickening breath as it passed between the wheels just below me. Ah! What's that?" and she again lapsed in nervous terror against him.

Boyle passed his arm around her promptly, firmly, masterfully. She seemed to feel the implied protection, and yielded to it gratefully, with the further breakdown of a sob. "There is no danger," he repeated cheerfully. "Wolves are not good to look at, I know, but they wouldn't have attacked you. The beast only scents some carrion on the plain, and you probably frightened him more than he did you. Lean on me," he continued as her step tottered; "you will be better in the coach."

"And you won't leave me alone again?" she said in hesitating terror.

"No!"

He supported her to the coach gravely, gently— her master and still more his own for all that her beautiful loosened hair was against his cheek and

shoulder, its perfume in his nostrils, and the contour of her lithe and perfect figure against his own. He helped her back into the coach, with the aid of the cushions and shawl arranged a reclining couch for her on the back seat, and then resumed his old place patiently. By degrees the color came back to her face— as much of it as was not hidden by her handkerchief.

Then a tremulous voice behind it began a half-smothered apology. "I am SO ashamed, Mr. Boyle— I really could not help it! But it was so sudden— and so horrible— I shouldn't have been afraid of it had it been really an Indian with a scalping knife— instead of that beast! I don't know why I did it— but I was alone— and seemed to be dead— and you were dead too and they were coming to eat me! They do, you know— you said so just now! Perhaps I was dreaming. I don't know what you must think of me— I had no idea I was such a coward!"

But Boyle protested indignantly. He was sure if *he* had been asleep and had not known what wolves were before, he would have been equally frightened. She must try to go to sleep again— he was sure she could— and he would not stir from the coach until she waked, or her friends came.

She grew quieter presently, and took away the handkerchief from a mouth that smiled though it still quivered; then reaction began, and her tired nerves brought her languor and finally repose. Boyle watched the shadows thicken around her long lashes until they lay softly on the faint flush that sleep was bringing to her cheek; her delicate lips parted, and her quick breath at last came with the regularity of slumber.

So she slept, and he, sitting silently opposite her, dreamed— the old dream that comes to most good men and true once in their lives. He scarcely moved until the dawn lightened with opal the dreary plain, bringing back the horizon and day, when he woke from his dream with a sigh, and then a laugh. Then he listened for the sound of distant hoofs, and hearing them, crept noiselessly from the coach. A compact body of horsemen were bearing down upon it. He rose quickly to meet them, and throwing up his hand, brought them to a halt at some distance from the coach. They spread out, resolving themselves into a dozen troopers and a smart young cadet-like officer.

"If you are seeking Miss Cantire," he said in a quiet, businesslike tone, "she is quite safe in the coach and asleep. She knows nothing yet of what has happened, and believes it is you who have taken everything away for security against an Indian attack. She has had a pretty rough night— what with her fatigue and her alarm at the wolves— and I thought it best to keep the truth from her as long as possible, and I would advise you to break it to her gently." He then briefly told the story of their experiences, omitting only his own personal encounter with the Indian. A new pride, which was perhaps the result of his vigil, prevented him.

The young officer glanced at him with as much courtesy as might be afforded to a civilian intruding upon active military operations. "I am sure Major Cantire will be greatly obliged to you when he knows it," he said politely, "and as we intend to harness up and take the coach back to Sage Wood Station immediately, you will have an opportunity of telling him."

"I am not going back by the coach to Sage Wood," said Boyle quietly. "I have already lost twelve hours of my time— as well as my trunk— on this picnic, and I reckon the least Major Cantire can do is to let me take one of your horses to the next station in time to catch the down coach. I can do it, if I set out at once."

Boyle heard his name, with the familiar prefix of "Dicky," given to the officer by a commissary sergeant, whom he recognized as having met at the Agency, and the words "Chicago drummer" added, while a perceptible smile went throughout the group. "Very well, sir," said the officer, with a familiarity a shade less respectful than his previous formal manner. "You can take the horse, as I believe the Indians have already made free with your samples. Give him a mount, sergeant."

The two men walked towards the coach. Boyle lingered a moment at the window to show him the figure of Miss Cantire still peacefully slumbering among her pile of cushions, and then turned quietly away. A moment later he was galloping on one of the troopers' horses across the empty plain.

Miss Cantire awoke presently to the sound of a familiar voice and the sight of figures that she knew. But the young officer's first words of explanation— a guarded account of the pursuit of the Indians and the recapture of the arms, suppressing the killing of Foster and the mail agent— brought a change to her brightened face and a wrinkle to her pretty brow.

"But Mr. Boyle said nothing of this to me," she said, sitting up. "Where is he?"

"Already on his way to the next station on one of our horses! Wanted to catch the down stage and get a new box of samples, I fancy, as the braves had rigged themselves out with his laces and ribbons. Said he'd lost time enough on this picnic," returned the young officer, with a laugh. "Smart business chap; but I hope he didn't bore you?"

Miss Cantire felt her cheek flush, and bit her lip. "I found him most kind and considerate, Mr. Ashford," she said coldly. "He may have thought the escort could have joined the coach a little earlier, and saved all this; but he was too much of a gentleman to say anything about it to ME," she added dryly, with a slight elevation of her aquiline nose.

Nevertheless Boyle's last words stung her deeply. To hurry off, too, without saying "good-by," or even asking how she slept! No doubt he *had* lost time, and was tired of her company, and thought more of his precious samples than of her! After all, it was like him to rush off for an order!

She was half inclined to call the young officer back and tell him how Boyle had criticised her costume on the road. But Mr. Ashford was at that time entirely preoccupied with his men around a ledge of rock and bushes some yards from the coach, yet not so far away but that she could hear what they said. "I'll swear there was no dead Injin here when we came yesterday! We searched the whole place— by daylight, too— for any sign. The Injin was killed in his tracks by some one last night. It's like Dick Boyle, lieutenant, to have done it, and like him to have said nothin' to frighten the young lady. He knows when to keep his mouth shut— and when to open it."

Miss Cantire sank back in her corner as the officer turned and approached the coach. The incident of the past night flashed back upon her— Mr. Boyle's long absence, his flushed face, twisted necktie, and enforced cheerfulness. She was shocked, amazed, discomfited— and admiring! And this hero had been sitting opposite to her, silent all the rest of the night!

"Did Mr. Boyle say anything of an Indian attack last night?" asked Ashford. "Did you hear anything?"

"Only the wolves howling," said Miss Cantire. "Mr. Boyle was away twice." She was strangely reticent— in complimentary imitation of her missing hero.

"There's a dead Indian here who has been killed," began Ashford.

"Oh, please don't say anything more, Mr. Ashford," interrupted the young lady, "but let us get away from this horrid place at once. Do get the horses in. I can't stand it."

But the horses were already harnessed and mounted, postilion-wise, by the troopers. The vehicle was ready to start when Miss Cantire called "Stop!"

When Ashford presented himself at the door, the young lady was upon her hands and knees, searching the bottom of the coach. "Oh, dear! I've lost something. I must have dropped it on the road," she said breathlessly, with pink cheeks. "You must positively wait and let me go back and find it. I won't be long. You know there's 'no hurry.' "

Mr. Ashford stared as Miss Cantire skipped like a schoolgirl from the coach and ran down the trail by which she and Boyle had approached the coach the night before. She had not gone far before she came upon the withered flowers he had thrown away at her command. "It must be about here," she murmured. Suddenly she uttered a cry of delight, and picked up the business card that Boyle had shown her. Then she looked furtively around her, and, selecting a sprig of myrtle among the cast-off flowers, concealed it in her mantle and ran back, glowing, to the coach. "Thank you! All right, I've found it," she called to Ashford, with a dazzling smile, and leaped inside.

The coach drove on, and Miss Cantire, alone in its recesses, drew the myrtle from her mantle and folding it carefully in her handkerchief, placed it in her reticule. Then she drew out the card, read its dryly practical information over

and over again, examined the soiled edges, brushed them daintily, and held it for a moment, with eyes that saw not, motionless in her hand. Then she raised it slowly to her lips, rolled it into a spiral, and, loosening a hook and eye, thrust it gently into her bosom.

And Dick Boyle, galloping away to the distant station, did not know that the first step towards a realization of his foolish dream had been taken!

4: The Ormolu Clock

Albert Kinross

1870-1929

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THERE was only that one light visible on all the earth. Above, the big stars throbbed against the darkness. Below stood the mountains— nothing but mountains; the rocky heart of the Sierra Nevada, reaching vast, immense, till the dim outline cut and jagged the solemn sky. Only an occasional patch of snow, showing blue-gray -against its background of silent black, relieved the gloom of these dark masses. And, in all that majestic night-piece, the distant light was the sole indication of a human presence. Towards it I now trudged, astray and weary, in the hope of finding food, shelter, and some sort of companionship.

All the long day I had been sketching, solitary, far from path or bridle-way, in broad, glaring sunlight, under a sky of so fierce a blue that every object, far and near alike, had stood out clear and distinct in the same harsh metallic relief . There was no atmosphere in this Spanish landscape, hot colour had supplanted mystery; and all the gaudy world seemed close at hand, profanely evident. Then night had fallen, and with it some measure of pervading majesty; but I was tired, uncertain, and very hungry, and over yonder shone a faint promise of rest and victual.

As I drew nearer to this light, which burned steadily, lower and more yellow than the lowest star, I gradually made out the cross-lathing of a window. A few steps more and a hut, a cabin of perhaps two or three rooms, disengaged itself from the darkness. I hurried on, found a door, tried the latch; it was locked. Then I knocked hard with my sketching-stool, an implement that, when not in use, folded up into a decent-sized club.

'Who's there r' asked a voice— in English, of all possible languages. I swallowed the carefully composed Spanish greeting that I had prepared, and substituted a homely, 'I am.'

'Who the devil are you?' came from the other side of the door, in accents even more hastened by surprise than my own.

'My name's Ponsford. I've been sketching all day. I am an artist, and—'

The voice cut me short: 'Come round to the window and let's have a look at you.'

I went round and stood in the light, my knees encountering the edge of a bench that projected from somewhere below. A coarse and hairy face appeared on the other side of the glass and looked me carefully over.

'Sure you're alone?' it asked, dubiously, and as though uncertain how to act.

'Yes,' and I waited, ravenous, hollow as a drum, wondering what particular notions of etiquette were agitating this unkempt solitary.

'Show us your things,' he at length proposed. I held up my paraphernalia.

He fumbled for a moment and then swung the window wide open.

'I suppose it's all right,' he said, putting his head and shoulders out. ' Anyhow, you may come in.' Here he broke off abruptly to interject, 'Rather rum, isn't it, talking English like this— who'd have thought it—' Then he unbolted the door.

'It's all right, father, you needn't, afraid, you needn't,' said the man, turning from the threshold to someone inside. 'He won't hurt you, will he?' and he grinned at me through as ugly a set of teeth as ever straggled behind human heard.

'I'll hurt your supper, if you've got any,' I answered, as gaily as the conditions would permit.

The man that my host had addressed as 'father ' sat holt upright in a bed that ran lengthways against the opposite wall, and watched me enter and take a seat. He was a queer, half-witted looking old fellow, all touzled white hair and grimy flesh; with a face whose furtive expression might have been piteous had any recent application of soap and water allowed it fair play.

Beyond the bed there was little other furniture in the place: only a couple of rough wooden chairs, a table of similar make, a chest with several drawers, and, set somewhat incongruously atop of this last article, a heavy ormolu clock, whose incessant ticking filled whatever silences were left by the gaps in our conversation. One or two cupboards were built into the walls, and in a corner stood a group of clumsy earthenware jars, similar to those in use at the '*ventas*' I had halted at on my way south from Granada. One of these jars the younger man now placed on the table, while, from a cupboard, e produced a couple of mugs, the larger half of a boiled fowl, some eggs, and a huge piece of cheese. There was bread in plenty as well, and before long I had eaten and drunk my fill, my entertainer watching me keenly while I harassed his provender; he questioning me the whiles and in detail about the fore-summer ramble which had brought me under his roof.

The older man's interest in these proceedings had subsided with my settling down; he had turned his face to the wall Again, evidently bent upon resuming such slumbers as my unexpected entry had disturbed.

'Had enough?' asked my companion, when I drew back from the table and produced a pipe.

'Rather, thanks, may we smoke?' and I handed him my pouch. He sniffed at the tobacco; it was somebody's mixture and pretty full.

'This is something like !' said he, rising and going over to the chest of drawers. 'You can leave me some o' this— it's all cigarillos here!'

He came back with a well-worn briar, which he first of all wiped on his trousers and then crowded to the rim. The wine passed to and fro and we sat at table and talked till the air was thick with smoke.

Now and then the ticking, of the clock intruded between speech and speech, and ever and anon we heard the old man turn in his bed. As before, the bulk of our conversation bore either directly or indirectly upon myself. Several times I tried to steer it towards a fresher and more reciprocal channel; hut my companion was evidently disinclined to such diversion, would throw no light upon the other side of this peculiar encounter.

He looked through my sketches as, we proceeded.

' It's wonderful like,' he repeated, as he fingered the things, 'wonderful like— I can't understand how you do it!'

I pencilled a rough portrait of him and passed it across.

'I'm goin' to keep this.' He looked hard at me as he spoke, almost as though he was expecting a refusal.

'All right,' said I, 'you can have a better one if you like.'

He meditated over the rough outline, and then looked up.

'Best not,' he replied slowly. 'Best not,' and he tore my sketch up into eight pieces, which he dropped through the open window into the still air outside. I looked on, but ventured no remark.

He chuckled over my evident astonishment; yet, beyond a further repetition of 'best not,' accompanied by a sagacious wagging of his head, he did nothing to explain the action.

'You don't draw any more of these here,' he said. 'It's a fine night, and when the old man's gone to sleep we two'll go an' sit outside— it's it bit thick in here. Wants airing a trifle. This baccy goes a long way,'

I assented briskly enough, the warm glow of the wine in my body clinching this unconcern. After all, the man, was barely. my own weight; and, more soothing still, I could feel the reassuring pressure of the revolver that nestled unostentatiously, under my Norfolk jacket.

We had by now emptied our first jar of wine and were well into a second— my companion lowered the stuff as though it were water— when, from the bed where lay the old, man, came in tones heavy with fear, 'Galloping— they're always galloping!'— the first words he had that night uttered.

My companion turned roughly at the sound.

'So you're beginning again, are you? Just you lie down an' go to sleep;' he said, with a promptitude, half impatience, half the result of the liquor he had swallowed.

'They're always galloping— always galloping!' came from the bed.

'Shut that, you fool, it's the clock!'

But the. old man was not to be silenced.

'I didn't want his money— I didn't want anything, God knows I didn't!' he moaned; 'and now they're always galloping— after me! after me! Don't you hear them?'

He had started up, was sitting rigid, with a hand to his ear, intent, listening.

'Don't you hear them?' he asked of me this time; 'you can hear them?'

There was no sound audible but the-steady tick of the heavy ormolu clock, which, indeed, by an ill man, might have been mistaken for the regular beat of hoofs.

'I don't hear anybody,' I replied, as gently as was possible.

Here the other impatiently interposed, his huge fist menacing the chest of drawers.

'It's that there clock, I tell you; I'll smash the thing one o' these days.'

'No, don't do that, George— it— it's my clock,' pleaded the older man.

'But it's always a-settin' you off like this— an' I'm getting tired of it, I tell yer.'

'But ain't they galloping?' came furtively in reply.

'Don't I tell yer it's that there clock! Why don't you listen to sense— you with yer galloping! Who d'yer think would gallop after you!' replied George, laughing derisively, and drunkenly candid at the finish.

'They always do— and my time's coming, same as his, same as his!' whined the other.

'Why can't you talk o' something else,' something cheerful ?'

'There's nothing else left— only that and—'

'Swinging,' suggested George, with a grin.

'Who the —— told you?' came furiously from the bed.

I sat impassive. There were three cartridges in my revolver.

'Never you mind,' answered the other more gently, 'an' just you lie still, or else me an' this gentleman'll go for a walk an' leave you to yer gallopings.'

'Don't go, George— don't go!' pleaded the grimy face through its pathetic tangle of gray hair.

'Now you put that head o' yours to the wall, an' keep it shut— I'm all right; and, as for that there clock—'

'Ye won't harm it, George?'

'No, not this time now you just go to sleep,' and George crossed over, a tone of relenting in his voice, almost a caress in it.

'You just go to sleep,' he sat on the edge of the bed and laid a hand on the other's shoulder, 'You just go to sleep, he whispered.'

The old man obeyed, settling down once move amid his frowsy coverings, and, after a while, his regular breathing told of some respite from pursuing memory. Two or three times he had started up, but, seeing us two serenely seated over the lamp, he had turned his face to the wall again. Gradually,

however, these disturbance had ceased, and, by the time we broached our third flagon, he was deep in slumber.

'He'll do now,' said George, lowering the lamp and picking up the wine, 'go quiet, and we'll get a breath o' fresh air before bed time.'

He opened the door as he spoke, glanced over his shoulders at the silent shape beyond. I followed him. Outside, the mountains slept and the white stars breathed upon their velvet beds.

'You aren't in no hurry about turnin' in?' asked George, leaning luxuriously back with head and shoulders half-filling the dimly-lighted window-frame— we were sitting side by side upon a rude kind of bench that was let into the cabin wall; the same sloping seat that had met my knees when George's hairy face had first appeared at the window.

'You aren't in no hurry, are you?' he repeated.

'Nothing special,' I rejoined; for my first feeling of weariness had disappeared, and was now replaced by that special form of open-eyed wakefulness which accompanies slumber baulked or postponed. 'I haven't done much talkin', not for a long while know— at least, not o' this sort, easy and sociable, an' in English,' said George affably as he refilled the mugs. 'We don't keep much company out here, no parties, nor tea o' Sundays, nor wedding breakfasts here,' he added with a laugh.

'Your own fault, isn't it?' I replied.

'It's my fault an' his misfortune— that's about the size of it— my fault an' his misfortune!'

Either the idea conveyed, or else its happy expression by this familiar formula, seemed to afford him a strange delight. He was shaking with suppressed merriment.

'My fault an' his misfortune,' he repeated, 'you've hit it off proper, first go off too!'

'Hit what— hit what?' I asked. He laid a familiar hand upon my shoulder.

'That's all right— I'm only waitin'— I'm goin' to wait an there, ain't no hurry,' he replied, slowly and with due deliberation. He had drunk a deal of wine, but the liquor affected him strangely, brightening him up rather than confusing him. His voice now fell roundly, deep and decided. The surly brutality of his first manner had almost disappeared. Something of the glow and freshness of youth was in his present tone, an engaging frankness that only here and there betrayed its vinous origin.

He continued slowly and with the same judicial gravity as before,

'I'm going to wait, an' there ain't no hurry— besides it's mor'n half the fun is waiting. The old man don't see it— at least not my way,' said George, reverting to the gay note of previous utterances. 'The old man don't see it. I'm a-payin' now, but when he's gone, I guess we'll be quits. It's been a fair deal all round—

I'm always fair— I look fair, don't I?— I struck you as fair?' he asked with a sudden display of eagerness.

'It's too dark to see, much too dark. I'll take it for granted,' said I, somewhat at a loss.

'That's right.' Then he added, 'George ain't much now, is it?'

'Certainly not.' The wine we had drunk was telling out here in the open. I, too, was inclined to vivacity. 'Certainly not— now you just go ahead,' I rejoined briskly. '—

' George ain't much, an' it's all you're likely to know! There are dozens o' Georges — you're sure this won't go no further?'

'Quite sure.'

'Well, it was me that did it, not him! I killed Cook Robin; an' there's that ole owl in there jumpin' up in his sleep an' shakin' all day because he thinks it was him!' laughed George, shaking off the last tether of restraint, luxuriating in long repressed confidences. 'He don't get blind now, he don't knock the plaster out o' the ceiling, lyin' on the floor an' pluggin' with me gun— only squirms— you've seen him squirm— an' here am I just seein' him through— that's all, just seein' him through, an' when that's done, I quit. That's the price, an' I'm fair— ye said I was fair, didn't yer?'

'You're a sportsman,' I agreed, mainly in the dark, yet with notions. 'P'raps I am,' resumed George, dubiously, 'p'raps I am; but that there cuss had me fair, an' it's all along' o' him— all his doin'— a Yank he was an' I picked him up at a Strand bar. London's great— I'll get back some day, an' that not so far off neither— we two'll make the pieces fly, won't we!'

'A Strand bar,' said I.

'Well, I picked him up, an' got talkin' cards. It was my game, yer see, mine an' the old man's— we two run the house. I got that Yank a-talking cards, an' he said he was just dyin' for a game with someone honest. "You look honest," says he, grinning— he had a smooth face, just like a gal's— "you look honest," says he, "I ain't afraid o' you; but this city's chock full o' sharks, an' a man has to be careful!"

'I took him on— it was my game, yer know. The ole man run the shop, he'd taught me all he knew, and we'd worked together years an' years, ever since I'd known him. He stopped me one day in the square. I was come down and cold an' hungry; with a face like a fiddle, an' goin,' to enlist when he spoke to me, says I was too grand for soldiering, an a shillin' a day. We'd worked together ever since, here— I mean: London—an' America, out West, an' Noo' York an' back, again, an' Melbourne an' Sydney. So I knew it thing, or two when I took that there Yank on.

'He was just rollin' in money, pullin' out bills an' makin' my mouth water; an' flingin' gold about— an' me that short. The ole man always kep' me short— he

hold the bank— an' I was fond of livin'— dressed like a toff those days, I did, an' always spent what I had. An' so he kep' me short— said he'd learn me that coin wasn't made to be chucked away, an' that we was goin' to save an' turn honest, an' go to church o' Sundays when we'd got enough. He was great on church, he was, specially when in drink. An' here was I, near stone broke, with this Yank in tow, an' he fairly stinkin' o' coin.'

I filled another pipe, and lit it while George continued:

'We got to the house— it was ten o'clock, an' as fine a night as this, an' no one about but we two... A big house we had, out on the Regent's Park, as lonely as sin, an' only a policeman passing, twice to the hour. I started in with four quid an' silver, all I had, an' that there Yank, raked it in. No, he played square enough, no' dodgin' about him; but he just knew the game, an' he knew my game, an' gave me no chance. He had a head on him, he had— an' there he was playin' square, not knowin' that game an' every trick I was able. He played me like a baby— just amusin' himself; an' when I tried to fake he says, quite polite, smooth an' oily, says he, "Excuse me, but my game's a little different to yours, if you'll allow me to explain. We confine ourselves to what's dealt us, an' we don't take no liberties with the pack."

'I was cleaned out, an' cheatin', an' he as good as said so; an' he half my size, with little hands an' a smooth face an' slender built.

' "I ain't square, is that what you're saying," answers I, "an' you pocketin' my coin—"

' "I was remarkin' on the customs of my country," says he.

' "Bluff's one o' them, isn't it? You just clear out of my house, yer little devil, an' go back home;" an' I got up an' looked at him— I twice his size. An' there lay my money an' half o' his on the table between us, an' I that short, an' owin' all round too.

'He stood there grinnin' at me— just grinnin', as though I was no more to him than a hit o' dirt.

' "Get out o' my house," I says again, "or else you'll be thrown."

' "I ain't done yet," he answers, "an' if you're in a hurry, you needn't wait, I'll excuse you," says he, an' he bowed at me. One of his hands was in his pocket— he had a reefer jacket on, with pockets each side— an' he began to load up again with the other.

' "You leave go o' that coin," says I. There was no one else in the house, an' I was that short an' he half my size.

'He took no notice, but just helped himself. ' "Get out' o' this sharp, an' pay your way," I says.

' "I take my own time; an' I shoot when I'm flurried," he answers back.

'So I lammed him over the head with a chair, his bullet went into the wood, an' he lay quiet, with his pocket full o' coin. Then I took his gun away an' lay the

gold an' notes on the table— emptied him dry. Presently he comes round an' sees things. "My turn, sonny," says I, as he gets up, "go home quiet, or I'll drop a bullet into yer." It was quite peaceful-like in the room, only that there big clock a-ticking on the mantelshelf, till he went for me, lookin' ugly as sin. I plugged him one, an' he up with his arm and pulled down that clock to throw; I plugged him another, an' then he lay down with that clock under him, an' things was quiet again— they was quiet.'

George had paused, pensive, forgetful of my share in his re-enactment. After a while he resumed.

'I was alone in the house with that table full o' brass an' that dead Yank an' nothing else. I sat down quite serious to think, when in comes the old man ; an' lie that blind with drink that he could hardly see. I turned the lights out sharp. "You'll do," I thinks; an' I 'gives him a shove that landed him atop o' the other. An' he went to sleep there, so drunk that he didn't know nor see. I took his hat an' umbrella to put outside, an' there they two lay on the floor o' that room in a puddle o' moonlight, looking like wax. I pulled down the blind on them. The Yank's money was on the table. I let half o' that alone, an' I takes his gun an' puts it in the ole man's fiat— all in the dark an' stumblin'— got the left fist first o' all. "You'll do," says I, when it was over, "you'll do till to-morrow. Ta-ta, dear brethren; I'm agoin' to walk on this." So I turned out into the street— not even a copper about, an' the park lyin' right ahead an' full o' trees. ' I walked about that Outer Circle till I came to the canal, an' I thought o' going back an' droppin' the Yank into the wet. "Best not," says I, "best not— the ole man's good enough for me, an' he's kep' me short, or else this accident wouldn't ha' happened." Besides, what was the good o' takin' risks?'

Here George turned to me for support, some notion of approval; but I only said, 'Go on.'

Somehow there was a deal of disillusion in all this, enough almost to make me doubt the reality of it all. The man who sat beside me was of such as I had been taught to shrink from and name murderer yet, somehow, in all that he had narrated there had been a feeling so natural, so comprehensible, so lacking in the monstrous, despite its sheer brutality. Here was a certain inevitability that bade fair to upset all previously formed ideas, that had broken and dissipated any sudden shock the crude statement of the case might have occasioned me— or else the wine had deadened sensibility, as I sat thus still and listened to what, after all, were only words; only words, and spoken by a man whom any barber and tailor could have made presentable between them.

But this was not the end. He continued: 'I stayed clean away that night, didn't go back till next morning before the woman came to tidy up. I didn't want her mixin' in. So I missed most o' the fun, didn't see the ole man wake up an'

find himself lyin' there with that six-shooter in his fist, an' a man underneath with two holes in him, an' stark dead

'About eight I lets myself in, cool as ice, an' goes straight for that room. He'd locked the door, so I sings out. "Who's there?" "Is that you, George?" he says, an' I knew he was tremblin' because o' his voice. "It's me. What's the game inside, father?" says I.

'Then he unlocked, an' I saw the body lying there, an' the gun, an, the coin on the table, an' the ole man shiverin' an' whiter than the Yank.

' "What d'yer do it for?" asks I, lookin' sick.

' "I dunno— I don't remember; but there's the pistol, an' that's him an' I too blind drunk to remember anything. I started soakin' as soon as I left home, that was about ten, but I don't remember no more— but this is good enough, ain't it? I'd better own up an' get it done with," says he, all pat an' dismal, like a lesson he'd spent half the night in learnin'. '

'He went back to the body, an' there lay that clock with the hands at five to eleven. The ole man saw it an' fired up sudden.

' "I don't take half an hour to fill up," says he; "an' we knocked this down— we must ha' knocked this down, I swear we must!"

'I scratches my head an' thinks. "Supposing." I says, "supposin' it had stopped on its own long before you come in?" An' then the bell rang. God! how that ole man jumped!

' "You stay here,' says he, 'you stay— you'll stay wi' me, George?" he moans, shiverin'.

'The bell rings again, so I looks out o' the window; hadn't thought o' it before. "Who's there, an' what'd'er want?" I calls out, openin'. It was the woman that came every day to tidy up, an' I'd forgotten all about her. "You needn't come to-day nor to-morrow either— we're goin' out o' town for a day or two," says I. Then she says, "Oh," an' gets off home.

'I shuts the window an' goes back to the ole man; an' there he was nursin' that clock o' his. "Think it stopped?"

' "Hope not," I answers with a grin— he's made me do a lot o' grinnin' has the ole man— "Hope not,' I answers. "What are you goin' to do! Can't sit here all day, can yer?"

' "Give in," he whines; "an' to think that I was goin' to out it all, get clear an' turn honest— I was, s' help me God, I was !— only another month or two an' we was goin' to live at the seaside, and live in peace and quiet, an' forget all this here." He looks at that clock again, as though' he wanted it to talk to him.

' "It's five to eleven," he says, "five to eleven; an' I swear I didn't turn out till closin' time— that's twelve an' a-half— I never turned out before, an' I swear I didn't begin yesterday. I must ask," he says.

' "Ain't ' that an answer? Ain't that good enough?" says I; for I didn't want no askin', not me! "You'd better keep your mouth shut, an' quit— get out o' here before it's too late. Yer a good 'un," says I, "yer'e been a good un' 'to me, an' I'll, take care o' yer." ''But that clock— ain't that evidence?' he asks, persistin'.

' "Let's see how it winds," says I.'

Here George paused and took a swig at his mug. I could hear the low gurgle of the wine distinctly as he swallowed. He set the mug down, and then, in the wonderful silence of the hour and place, I heard ever so faintly, the beat of the heavy ormolu clock. Through the open window, dimly lit by the lowered lamp, and half-filled by George's head and shoulders, the ceaseless tick-tick had penetrated. And, as I listened, it seemed as though atop of this steady swing, I could hear, more faint and muffled still, a low sound of breathing; a low breathing such as might be emitted by some crouching animal.

But George had proceeded, unconcerned, stifling these real or imaginary sounds with the fuller volume of his voice.

' "Let's see how it winds,' I says to him, when he begun to talk about evidence, an' then I got up an' found the key. Five times it wound, an' that was all— an' then that there clock began to go, same as now. "It weren't run down— it was goin'— goin'!" sings out the ole man. "I'm free," he yells. "Good God, he did it himself or somebody else did it— I wasn't here!"

' "But the gun was in your hand, wasn't it?" I asks, quite grave and thoughtful. "Who says so?" says he.

'I felt pale all over— he had me there! but I did my hit o' bluff: "You said so yerself," says I, quite cool, an' then he went flat again.

' ''George, you're goin' against me now," he says, quite broke up. "You're all against me, an I'm done."

' "No, you ain't done neither," I says, going gentle. "I'll turn out an' see what's to do. I'll stand by yer," I says. He didn't want to be left alone, an' asked an' begged o' me to stay, but I saw it wasn't no good wastin' time, an' I'd best be off at once.

' "I must have some brass," says I, "if I'm to do any good," and I pointed to the heap on the table.

' "Take it," says he. "I don't want his money"— he was lookin' at the Yank— "why should I be awantin' o' his money?" he says, sort o' whisperin' it out.

'I helped myself. "Now you just keep the door locked an' bolted," I says, "an' don't let no one in— an' you go sit in another room; this company's had for yer." Then I went into the street, an' when I got fair inside the park, I laughed fit to bust myself! "You're a good 'un," I says, "an' if this don't beat all! Books ain't in it, and plays ain't in it. Ole man, you're a-killin' o' me as well!" I says, with the tears in my eye an' runnin' down.'

He was laughing now at the recollection, was George as he stopped and helped himself to more wine. Again he swallowed, and again I could hear the wonderful silence of that southern night; and then as before, emerging from the stillness, came the faint pulse of the clock indoors, and again that sound of low breathing, now shorter, a quicker and more painful drawing of—

But George had continued :

' "Business first an' pleasure afterwards," thinks I, when I'd done laughing; so I started, walking hard an' thinking' till my head ached.

'I went down to Charing Cross, an' then along by the river an' through the City till I come, to London bridge, an' there I saw a ship unloadin' oranges— cases an' cases o' oranges. "You're good enough," thinks I, an' I went down to the wharf an' boarded her. The captain was away, but they said he was comin' back after he'd had his dinner, so I waited patient an' took stock o' things. The mate came up presently an' he an' I talked, he doin' his bit of lingo first-class for a foreigner.

'They were goin' back to Cadiz an' Barcelona, where they come from, in a day or two goin' to Cardiff first for a load of coal, an' then straight ahead. An' I told him that I had a sick friend who wanted a sea-trip cheap; he couldn't afford to pay much, but, if they had room, would they take us there an' back— an' cheap?

'The captain come aboard, an' the mate explains, and t'other was willin'. Twenty quid, an' all found for the pair o' us, an' pay in advance, he says, an' come aboard the day after to-morrow. "All right," I says, an' then I went home again. The ole man cheered up a bit when I told him the news, but he didn't last— began to snivel whenever left him alone. "You lie down, an' read the paper," says I in the evenin', "specially if you won't eat— nor drink," an' I grins when I come to the drink. "Never no more,' he says; 'I've drunk enough to last me."

'Then I went out again an' hires a' horse an' trap, an' stables 'em in the back garden; an' late that night, me an' the corpse took a drive. I loaded him heavy, an' he sunk in that there canal— an' that was the last o' Regent's Park. Next day we went to live at a hotel down by the river— left the house standin' an' never been near it since. The day after we went aboard, an' it was no lie either I'd told about that sick friend o' mine. We held on the whole trip an' got safe to Barcelona— only put in a day at Cadiz— me an' the ole man, an' the clock. He'd brought that clock with him— weighs about a hundredweight!

' "It's evidence," he says continual. 'My Lord, I was brought up, religious, an' to think that I should ha' come to this, me that was goin' to retire an' live honest! Hear anything indoors?'

George had stopped short, with a hand to my wrist. We both listened for a long moment, but the sound, whatever it had been, was not repeated.

'It must have been that clock tickin'; it ticks wonderful loud,' said George.

'I thought just now—' I began.

'It's that clock,' he interposed. 'Where was I— the ole man ravin' on board that ship?' and he continued, light-heartedly:

'The skipper heard him time an' time again, but didn't twig, bein' Spanish an' not speakin' our lingo fluent. "Did he steal that there clock?" he asks, "what's wrong with the ole boy?" or words with that meaning. An' I taps my head. "Daft, poor ole chap," I says, "loco, that's it— you've got it, loco," an' then we has another cigarette together, him an' I.

'We'd got plenty of coin, all the ole man's savin's an' the Yank's, an from Barcelona we struck away south, left the captain an' his ship, an' found this here villa residence. Pretty lonely it is, an' not much to look at, an' only the ole man an' that there clock for company— an' he lookin' after it like a mother; keepin' it alive with windin'— when he ain't carryin' on like to-night. But I can wait, I'm goin' to wait— it's bloomin' fun waitin' with that ole man, an' he yelpin' half the time. "My fault an' his misfortune," yer said before I begun— hit it off proper first go off. Rich, ain't it?'

I looked up and George was smiling in his seat, his head and shoulders covering half the window-frame.

'I'm fair, yer said I was fair?' he asked. I was still looking upwards. 'Why don't yer say something? What is it you're staring at behind?'

But the question was never completed, never answered. I had seen hands— the old man's hands— at the window behind George's head. And then I had seen the heavy ormolu clock, falling— falling; and the same hands empty— above George's head; it had dropped forward on to his chest, and the clock had followed, pounding over the turf at our feet. The old man's face was at the window now, for a moment only; then, indoors, another fall, as of a limp body striking walls and floor.

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon. I was feeling better now. The woman of the inn had placed my chair outside in the sunshine. The sky was quite blue, everywhere blue, except for a thin cloud of dark smoke that floated m the distance, towards the north. I watched this one wasting shadow till it dwindled— dwindled. The sky was quite blue now. Had I been dreaming? The woman came out of the inn with a glass of something cool. Her husband had gone up the valley with the gendarmes. The sky was quite blue. The woman went back to her work. Figures moved in the village below. It seemed hard to believe that I had burst in upon these people, hatless, maniacal, dishevelled, and flourishing my empty revolver.

The dark wreath of smoke had vanished, all was peace. And, only that morning, I had sat beside George— George, broken-necked, with his head on his chest.

The dawn had come shuddering from behind the mountains, the dew lay heavy and wet upon us both. There had been sounds in the hut— I could have prevented it all had I cried out. But it was too late now. I rose and dragged George indoors, and laid him beside the old man. The old man's hands were clenched. I did not look at his face, but his heart was quite still. It was all like a dream, . like some horrible nightmare. I had moved and moved, but I could not think. The lowered lamp still burned on. My shaking hand upset it— and then there was flame. I ran from it— ran through that accursed volley— how I ran!— for hours and hours. I must have met somebody or reached here at last. They took my revolver away from me. They seemed to know George, seemed to be afraid of him. They made me lie down afterwards. The woman came out of the inn. Her hand shaded her eyes.

'Son ellos,' she cried.

I looked ahead and there were the gendarmes and the inn-keeper. One of them carried the clock— all they had found up there. It was broken— I was glad it was broken— but there it was, discoloured, its faded gilt all blackened— the heavy ormolu clock!

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5: Carrying Home the Sheaves

Lucy Gertrude Moberly

1860-1931

Australasian (Melbourne) 12 Sep 1925

English author of many novels and short stories in the early years of the 20th century.

FROM HER GARDEN Diane Matherson could see across the harvest field that sloped along the hill beyond it. Her garden had been terraced out of the hillside, and as she sat on its lowest terrace her glance travelled over the low wall which was the garden boundary to the long slope of meadow, where the corn was set up in sheaves ready to be carried home. Behind the hill the sun was setting in a golden sky, where softly purple clouds drifted across the gold; and the fir trees on the hill top were in very dark, very clear, outlines against the golden background.

The last rays of the sun fell across the cornfield, striking it too into gold, and as Diana's eyes watched it she said under her breath, " 'He that now goeth on his way weeping, and bringeth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him. Only sometimes there is no coming again with joy no carrying home the sheaves!"

Then she rose from the low stone seat on which she sat— the seat placed in an angle of the wall just where it could command the widest view of meadow and woodland, sweeping plain and far-off hills, and for an instant she leant against the wall itself, looking out to those same far-off hills on the horizon— looking back too in a rare moment of reminiscence across her life. .. .

Diana Matherson was not given to retrospection: every day brought so full a measure of work to be done that she had little time to look back, even if it had, been her nature to dig amongst the ruins of the past. "Miss Diana," as all her neighbours affectionately called, her, was far too busy helping lame dogs over styles, comforting the sore-hearted, rejoicing with the glad, and giving a hand wherever a hand was wanted, to expend time or energy in recalling old memories.

But on this summer evening, looking out across the harvest field, her thoughts all at once travelled back over the years; but it was a spring evening that rose before her eyes— an evening of May loveliness and promise—instead of this golden fulfilment of the harvest time. The apple trees showed a glory of dainty blossom in the orchard across the fence— the grass below the apple trees was golden with buttercups— and in the lilac bush in the garden a blackbird sang and sang. The very fragrance of that May evening came back to her— tie scent of growing things— and memory showed her her own young self, full of the gladness and expectation of youth.

The man who, stood beside her? His face suddenly flashed before her vision and her hands gripped at the stone of the wall because of the little quick stab at her heart. Twenty-five years since she and Guy Dellerfield had parted in the old rectory garden; yet the memory of him still had power to stab her heart.

The harvest field, glowing in the westering sun, vanished from her sight; the purple softness of the near hills, the blue mistiness of the distant range all melted away. She saw only a sea of apple blossom in the May sunlight, a buttercup meadow, and the face of the man who on that May day long ago had passed out of her life for ever. The fair, quiet face, with its blue serene eyes and the smile that had always seemed to her the most wonderful smile she ever saw, was looking down at her again; his hand held hers in a close grip; his voice came back to her as if he were standing by her side to-day.

"You think I am right to go?" he asked. "You agree with me that I am right?"

For an instant her mouth had felt so parched and dry that any answer was impossible. Then she pulled herself together, and she remembered her own surprise at the quietness of her voice.

"I am sure you are right," she said unfalteringly, though her heart was heavy as lead, and great shadows seemed to fall across the sunlight. "I know you must go— and I— shall be waiting for you when you come back."

"You and I will each have our work to do until we meet again," he said, with that smile, the very remembrance of which had power to quicken her pulse; "and, perhaps some day when I have done the first pioneer bit, and you are less tied here, you will come out to me, and we will live our lives out there together."

"If only I could have gone with you," she heard her own breathless, unfinished sentence, and he put a hand on her shoulder with a tender touch.

"The beginnings are going to be too rough for any woman," he answered, "even for you, my plucky sweetheart. And you couldn't leave the old people yet."

"No, I couldn't leave the old people yet," she repeated monotonously, "and I know I should only be a hindrance, not a help, in such a pioneer work as yours."

The untrodden wilds whither he was bound absorbed their talk next. How it all came back to her this evening, looking but across the harvest field!

His hospital course finished, he had been selected to go as doctor with an expedition, being sent into a then unexplored country. The special knowledge upon which, he had concentrated during his student days gave him additional value in the eyes of those who were sending the expedition, and his particular work was to be that of research. His own hope was that later on he might settle in that far-off land; there to continue the work of research. And there Diana would join him when he was established in his work, and when her sister had

finished a hospital career and could take her place in caring for their old father and mother.

They had dreamed dreams and seen visions on that long ago day of May-she! and her lover. They had planned their home in a tropic country; they had pictured their future life together. Love and hope had spread over these pictures a golden haze.

IT ALL swept back into Diana's mind, as though it had happened only yesterday instead of 25 years ago; and standing against the wall looking out over the silent sunlit space, she saw the wide stretch of downland along which she and Guy had walked on that last afternoon. She had said good-bye to her father and mother in the old rectory, and she had walked with him part of his way along the downland road towards the station. The larks were singing. Their clear, triumphant songs had made her heart ache almost unbearably, and for years afterwards those songs had hurt her very soul. She could recall the feel of the crisp down grass under her feet; see the little down flowers that made a delicate embroidery of colour upon its greenness; and the blossom was white upon the hawthorn bushes.

''You mustn't come any further, sweetheart," Guy had said; "it will be dark before you get back. We must say good bye here."

"Don't let it be too long before we are together again," her own breathlessly appealing voice sounded across the years; "I don't know how I can bear it if is very long."

"It won't be very long," his voice was cheery and assured-the deep voice that had power to make her heartstrings vibrate, "and all the time we shall never be far apart, you and I. We must be captains of our souls, and do the best work we can."

His close clasp had relaxed, her arms had dropped away from clinging round his neck; his last lingering kisses had touched her lips— and then she was alone on the downland, watching his figure moving away into the falling twilight shadows.

And he had never come back!

Through all the first months after the expedition started his letters had been her greatest joy; but as the party travelled farther and farther into the interior news was scarcer, until at last there came a time when there was no news at all; when day after day went by in agonising suspense and hope deferred.

Then came rumours of disaster; tales of trouble with recalcitrant tribes; hints of a ghastly catastrophe. And sometimes in the after years Diana wondered how she had lived through those days at all.

Suspense ended at last ended in a certainty more terrible than the suspense had been. News of the expedition reached England; news that filled her heart with sick dismay.

It was scanty news, and no full details were ever forthcoming. Only it was definitely declared that the whole expedition had been attacked by an unfriendly tribe, far in the interior, and not one white member of the expedition was left to tell the tale.

The weeks following the tidings were like one long nightmare of pain to Diana; and only those last words her lover had spoken to her as she herself put it, "kept her head above water." But Guy's words rang In her heart like a clarion call: "We must be captains of our souls, and do the best work we can"— and throughout all the years that followed those words had been her guiding star.

Long ago her father and mother had been laid to rest in the churchyard on the heath; and she herself had moved from the rectory into the house on the where the garden sloped down to a corn field whose sheaves glowed ruddy in the setting sun. And Miss Diana's house was the place to which everyone came with joys and sorrows, with difficulties and sufferings. It was to Miss Diana that every body turned: Miss Diana, whose hands, and heart were so full and busy. yet never too full or too busy to do one thing more; Miss Diana, who was such a gallant captain of her own soul that she could help all other souls in need.

"CAN YOU come across to the hospital? A patient is asking urgently for you."

The note was from the matron, of the cottage hospital farther up the hillside, and Diana's small handmaiden stood waiting on the path for an answer.

"Tell whoever has brought the note that I will come at once," Diana said, a faint wonder crossing her mind, as to which of her many friends in the village could be ill and wanting her.

"I hope it isn't any accident," she thought, as she passed up her garden bathed still in warm light. "I don't think it can be, or matron would have mentioned it."

She did not wait to put on a hat. Some how nobody, in Mansmere troubled much about hats, and as she went along the up land lane, the light touched her white hair and turned it into a crown of silver.

The matron met her in the hall of the cottage hospital.

"I'm glad you have come, Miss Matheson," she said; "A patient who came to-day is asking for you so insistently.'

"Who is it?" Diana questioned.

"A stranger here. He was on his way to the village, it seems, and collapsed with heat and fatigue, and they brought him into the hospital. He is very confused and incoherent as to his name and where be comes from, but he never wavers about his wish to see you."

All this was said whilst the matron and Diana walked along the passage to the door of a small ward.

"As this private ward was empty we put him in here," the matron explained; "it is quieter for him."

Indeed it was a very peaceful place. Through the open window the glance travelled across a sea of purple heather to the blue hills on the horizon, and the golden sky of the west, and between them that great sea of distance which gave one such a sense of infinity.

There were only two beds in the ward— one was empty, and in the other lay a man with a thin bronzed face— a face that was lined and wrinkled, and wore marks of great sorrow or great privation. His hair was grey, his hands that lay on the coverlet were pitifully emaciated; there was an air of utter exhaustion about the whole man. But his eyes— clear and blue— looked out with a dauntless serenity that gave you the impression of some unconquerable quality of soul.

The eyes were turned towards the opening door, and, as Diana entered, they lit up with an extraordinary light.

"My dear!" he said. "My dear!"

For an instant Diana stood still by the door, staring at the man as if she felt herself to be in the midst of some incomprehensible dream.

"Guy!" she said under her breath, and no other word would come to her lips.

Sheer bewilderment held her dumb. Guy! But Guy had been killed in the expedition of 25 years ago. Guy had been one of those white men whose lives were lost in the massacre, and yet the serene blue eyes that met hers were her lover's eyes, though the tired and haggard face and the grey hair made him seem like an old man.

"My dear," he repeated, and one of his hands went out towards hers with a tremulous gesture.

In a moment she was on her knees by the bedside, her hands folded over his tremulous hand, her lips against his cheek.

"I have come back to you," he said, in a voice that was as tremulous as his hand. "I thought I should come back so soon— and it has been half a lifetime."

"Half a lifetime," she echoed, drawing his head against her with passionate tenderness; "but it is like a dream— a dream I can't understand."

"I always tried to keep to our pledge," he said, with a wistfulness that made her heart ache; "I have tried to be the captain of my soul, and to do the best work I could. And I have found what I went to look for."

For an instant a great triumph shone in his eyes and then exhaustion seemed to overpower him and he dropped into unconsciousness.

IT WAS many days before he was well enough to give any coherent account of the long years of suffering and privation which lay behind him; but bit by bit he was able to tell Diana of all he had endured.

Of all the expedition which had gone out with such high hopes, he was the only one who escaped massacre at the hands of the tribe which had fallen upon them; and he had only been saved because the savages I had discovered his powers as a healer.

Held a close prisoner in a remote village, separated by great forests from all touch with the outside world, he had been installed as medicine man to the tribe. But he was prisoner as well as doctor. Carefully guarded, threatened with unspeakable tortures if he attempted to escape, he had lived amongst that race of primitive people for 25 long years.

"I did my best," he said simply; "I taught them all I could; I healed the sick as well as I knew how; I— and that was the hardest struggle— I fought against the savagery in myself that struggled to get to the top. And often I went through hell. But I remembered our promise to each other to be captains of our souls."

"And at last you escaped?"

"At last I escaped," he shuddered; "I escaped once, and they took me back and tortured me." Once more he shuddered, and for an instant the serenity of his eyes was clouded by old, hideous memories. But he thrust them from him quickly. "I don't want ever to think or to speak of that time again," he said. "It was almost more than flesh and blood could bear— almost, not quite," and he smiled, a flickering smile which yet held much of the charm of his old smile.

"I don't know how long it took me to reach the coast." he went on. "I shall never know that. I had lost count of days and weeks in that ghastly country, and I had no means of knowing how long it took me to cross forests and mountains and rivers and long, long plains before at long last I came to the coast and civilisation. But out of all the horror and the pain something good has come," he ended. "Through all the years in that native village I could go on with the research work which had always been my ultimate aim. And I have found out what I wanted to find out"— his eyes shone—" I have succeeded!"

They were seated upon the low scat by the wall in Diana's garden, and over the harvest field, whose sheaves had all been garnered now, he looked out to the great plain and the blue distant hills.

"And I have found you waiting," he said softly, his hand on, here, "waiting and doing your work."

"Do you know what I was thinking a few weeks ago when I sat here watching the sunset on the cornfield? The wonderful old words haunted me, and to-day they have come true-they have come true." She spoke a little breathlessly. " 'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come

again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' We have come back to each other, carrying home our sheaves."

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6: The Verdict of Faro Mountain

Rex Beach

1877-1949

Pearson's Magazine, Feb 1904

THIN, blue streamers of smoke were rising in the still air over the snow-covered "igloos" clustered around Chief Joe's cabin, while on every roof curled shivering, husky dogs seeking the faint, welcome heat of the stove-pipes. Though the dazzling sunlight reflected from miles of stainless white was brighter than the eye could bear, yet the silent cold bit deep, and the snows creaked and complained under foot like the dry sand of the seashore.

Buckburst and Thomas had marked the strange architecture as the work of some stranded white or roving trader who, wintering here in years past, had built a house of logs as his forefathers did, and they lashed their bleeding dogs up the steep bank, pausing before the door.

Howling curs swarmed from the roofs, while out from the low tunnels crawled tattered, fur-clad Eskimo children and silent women. From the cabin a wrinkled old man tottered, speaking guttural words of welcome to the newcomers.

"Here's a go, pal!" said Buckhurst, as be unlashed the bulging sled. "It's all squaws and kids. I wonder where the bucks are."

"Dunno, and what's more, I don't care!" replied Thomas, who had freed the last sore-footed dog from the harness, and with a kick sent it howling among the huts. "What I want is something to eat, and mighty quick, too. If this here old sport knows what's good fer him, he'll invite us into his house pretty pronto."

In halting words and eloquent gestures the old chief explained that the men had gone hunting, and would not return for many days.

"He says the grub is gone and they're all starving. It seems there ain't any deer on the hills now, and the seals are gone, too. Now they're killing the dogs, but they won't last long."

"Serves 'em right!" grumbled the other, as he strained at the heavy grub-box. "They'd ought to work summers and lay up a grub-stake. 'Spose now, they want to eat ours, that we've hauled three hundred miles. Well, we'll fool 'em!"

As Buckhurst prepared the welcome meal within, willing hands brought wooden bowls of water from the distant hole, while old women, weak with hunger, mutely laid offerings of dried chips, grass, and drift-wood for the fire.

Round the mossy walls crouched hollow-eyed, patient squaws, sheltering wretched children, who gazed hungrily at the prodigal display before them. Strange, unknown dishes of the white men!

Weeks before hunger had stilled the childish laughter of the village, and teething babes sucked at rawhide thongs, while the elders gnawed on bits of bone and salmon fins which promised nourishment.

Thomas, knife in hand, sliced thin strips of bacon for the pan, while Chief Joe eagerly gathered the moldy rinds and apportioned them among the mothers, who muttered to the skin-clad infants in their arms.

Soon a fragrant steam of cooking food, of boiling coffee and frying meal, filled the low room. Children cried softly, while the squaws stirred uneasily and moistened their lips.

Unmindful of the hungry sounds, Buckhurst busied himself at the stove, while Thomas curiously examined the surroundings.

"Say, Chief, how much you sell 'em?" said he, indicating a handsome white-fox skin, hanging on the low ridge pole. Instantly three of the listening women slipped out, returning at once with other skins, which they shyly handed to the white man.

"No sell 'em, money!'' answered the Chief as spokesman. "Grub— 'at's all! 'Cow-Cow peluk!' You plenty grub. Squaws hungry, by and by babies die. No sell 'em, money. Grub— 'at's all!"

"No; we ain't got any more grub than we want. I'll give you five dollars apiece, though. See!" and holding up five fingers, he made his meaning clear, producing from his "poke" some bright new cooper pennies.

After renewed entreaties for food rather than money, to which he turned a deaf ear, the shining yellow coins were accepted.

"Ain't that easy?" he croaked, with a wink to his partner. "That's not the first time I've worked off a new penny on an Eskimo for a five-dollar gold piece."

As they voraciously fell to, and noisily cleaned up dish after dish, a lonely little brown-faced girl sidled cautiously forward and, standing unobserved behind them, eagerly watched the unfamiliar proceedings.

Buckhurst had placed a half-eaten bread crust on the box edge, where it lay unheeded as he held a steaming plate of beans below his chin, and dexterously shoveled them into his cavernous mouth.

A small, dark hand stole out of the ragged parka toward the crust, then slowly dropped. Hunger spoke again, and the slender fingers curled over the morsel.

Instantly Buckhurst flipped his knife end for end, and grasping the blade, brought the steel handle swiftly down upon the child's exposed knuckles with a cruel crack, and as she scurried, sobbing, to the shelter of her mother's arms, he snarled, "D— you! I'll teach you to steal!"

Thomas' food-distended cheeks exploded into wet and noisy laughter, sprinkling the other with masticated crumbs and a mist of coffee, while low murmurs circled the room.

His mirth was cut short by a gust of cold air as the low door swung back to admit a stooping figure, which straightened up showing the tall form and clean-shaven features of a white man.

"How are you, gentlemen? White men's laughter is a welcome sound after a month on the trail. I judged from your sled outside that there were strangers stopping here.

"All right, Matka!" he called through the door. "Unhook the dogs; we'll lie over here till to-morrow."

"Yes, Captain," came back from outside.

''Where ye from?" questioned Buckhurst, as the newcomer stamped the snow from his beaded *mukluks* and wriggled out from his *parka*.

"Just down from Dawson," he replied, "and bound for the new strike at Faro Mountain. It's a long trip, but I wanted to get in before the rush next spring."

"That's where we're goin'," said Thomas, as he gathered up the dishes. "We're from St. Michaels."

As the newcomer thawed his stiffened fingers at the puny stove while they questioned him, he tried to recall an incident when a hearty invitation to eat had not followed the first rough greeting to the trail-worn "musher." He had not tasted food for two days, and his greedy eyes sought the grub-box with its wealth of food. There was a half-emptied pail of brown beans lazily steaming beside the frying-pan, in which were strips of crisp bacon afloat in hot grease. There was a long loaf of bread, real bread, too, made of yeast and free from dyspeptic baking powder, while the ample coffee-pot half concealed a full can of golden butter.

His stomach had shudderingly rebelled at its greasy fare of seal-oil and flour two days before, and the enticing sight nearly dragged him trembling from the stove. As though in mockery, the dishes were rapidly disappearing into the box as Thomas pursued his work.

He heard the surly tones of Buckhurst, "This thievin' bunch of savages here think they're starvin'. I caught one brat stealin' our grub jest now. Guess she'll nurse them knuckles for a spell."

Captain beheld a sobbing bundle of furs caressing a tiny, swollen fist.

"Yes; and I come up with 'em, too," chuckled Thomas. "See them fox skins? Only cost me four new pennies."

Matka entered at this moment from his care of the dogs, and with native words of greeting to his kindred, squatted on his haunches by the fire, and with famished face stared curiously at the vanishing food.

Captain cleared his throat uneasily. He had never asked for favors, and now was loath to begin. Evidently these men had overlooked the fact that he might be hungry.

"We had an accident down the coast," he began; "Matka upset my sled in an ice crevice and lost all the outfit. Fortunately we saved a little flour and some seal-oil that I brought along for dog feed. We've traveled two hundred miles on that diet. Ugh! Ever try seal-oil flapjacks? The Indian can go it all right, but it's past me. I went the limit day before yesterday, when I tried three times to keep it down. Then I had to quit— elevator service too prompt for me." He laughed pleasantly.

Thomas as dishwasher clattered noisily, and Buckhurst, propped against the wall, puffed silently at his pipe.

"What did ye do with the savage?" he finally said.

"Humph! I know what I'd done," sniffed his partner. "I'd a-thrown his dummed carcass in after it."

Captain paused.

"If it isn't asking too much, gentlemen," he said, "I'd like to buy enough of your grub to last me and my boy here to Faro Mountain. I'm simply famishing for something to eat."

There was no laugh in his voice now. Thomas went to the door and flung the dishwater viciously over a shivering dog crouched in the entrance.

The bubbling nicotine in the other's pipe sounded in the silent cabin.

Finally the former coughed slightly and, glancing at his companion for support, said, "We ain't got any more grub than we want."

Yes," echoed Buckhurst, "we've hauled this grub clear from St. Michaels, and we want what there is of it ourselves. Seems to me like if you'd made it so far, you could last through to Faro."

A strangely gentle mood seemed to settle over the hungry newcomer. He smiled a frank ingenuous smile, while his voice took on a tone as soft as that of the mother who quieted the weeping child in her lap.

Matka rose from beside the stove and spoke in his native tongue:

"Behold the big man. He makes talk like a woman. Soon you will see strange things. Perhaps the gun will speak, and then the men will shake and grow sick in their bellies."

Captain continued,

"Gentlemen, you don't seem to realize what it is to hit the trail on an empty stomach. I haven't eaten for two days, and this cold bites hard. Name your price. You can get more grub at Faro, and—"

"No! I don't know what it is to go hungry, and don't intend to learn, either!" roughly interjected Buckhurst, emboldened by the other's apparent timidity. Then he paused abruptly.

A big black six-shooter had leaped to the stranger's hand and lay carelessly therein, with hammer viciously curled like the head of a striking adder, while his fingers toyed nervously with the trigger.

To Buckhurst's widening eyes the weapon was foreshortened till there appeared only a horrid black hole surrounded by others, gleaming full of leaden death.

With a sharp gasp of incredulity Thomas had instinctively shoved his hands roofwards till his heels left the floor. In one hand glistened the wet frying-pan, while from the other the dish-rag dripped greasy water.

Buckhurst, pipe in hand, with gaping jaws rose stiffly, back to the wall.

"Fortunately I am not a quick-tempered man," purred he of the dulcet tones, "or I'd injure you curs! Don't try any quick movements. This gun has the easiest trigger I ever saw, and I was born with the gift of marksmanship. For instance, your pipe is going—" His last words were drowned in the roar of a double discharge.

With a startled cry Buckhurst snatched at the fingers of his left hand, from which the pipe had shivered, while the skillet rang clattering from the hands of Thomas, pierced by a ragged hole.

The frowning weapon smoked angrily, still unmoved, from the stranger's wrist.

Small brown faces peeped fearfully from behind the women's forms, flattened against the walls, while the weeping child clasped her injured knuckles and solemnly eyed the trio.

"Face the wall, both of you," he commanded. "Hands up! Now, Matka, divide that grub. Half and half, you savvy? Two piles, all same."

With an alacrity born of hunger the guide obeyed.

Now Buckhurst found his voice: ''Ye ain't goin' to hold us up, are ye? Man, this is plain robbery!"

"If you'd said you was so all-fired hungry, we'd a-let you have something," whimpered Thomas. "You wouldn't take half of all we've got? Jest take what you need to get to Faro, and we won't say anything about price," he insinuated.

"Oh! I don't intend to take more than enough to last me through," said Captain; then, at the sigh of relief, "I'll give the rest to these friends of yours. Shut up!" as they attempted to interrupt. "And, as you suggested, we won't consider price at all."

"Matka, tell the squaws to hitch up the strangers' dogs; they're going to leave in a few minutes."

The guide, kneeling beside the box, rapidly divided the provisions. Half the beans he scooped into a wooden bowl; the bacon slab he bisected with a stroke of his knife; a ham fared likewise. With can in hand, like a chemist with his beaker, he impartially poured out half the precious sugar, returning a few pinches to the traveler's cup, to restore the balance, as though weighing yellow dust. Finishing with each article, he licked his fingers clean for the next.

A new loaf of bread was hacked in two midway. Then, seizing the partially eaten loaf, he severed from the opposite end a piece equal to what was missing, fitting it to the other end to verify his judgment, then divided the remaining portion like-wise.

The can of butter offered more difficulties. but, tracing lines in the surface with his knife point, by dint of careful gouging he completed it to his satisfaction.

Other articles fared the same— tea, flour, lard, pepper, and finally a plug of precious T. & B., the sight of which brought a sweat of envy to the old Chief's wrinkled brow. Without a word he replaced the remaining articles in the box, slammed the lid and, grasping the handles, hurried it on to the waiting sled, where he dexterously lashed it in place.

"Now get into your clothes," commanded Captain, whose ill-humor had largely vanished at the sight of Matka in the role of the blind goddess.

"You can leave those skins here, too. If you think you're going to be short of grub," he added, "I'll give you some seal oil, which I can recommend as being most nutritious. Really, I'd like to have you try—"

"It's your turn now," growled Buckhurst, glaring sullenly at him, "but if I don't get ye some day, I hope I rot!"

The sled shot down the bank to the dim trail which wound like a thread along the gleaming coast, and without a look behind at the row of curious faces they plunged into the silent cold.

"I SAY AGAIN, we must maintain law and order during the early growth of our camp, if we wish it to bud and burst into the full bloom of a city as its riches develop."

The Governor paused and gazed attentively at the bearded population of Faro Mountain, which in fur and mackinaw had assembled to a man at the Northern Saloon. He continued:

"These strangers, whose statements you have heard, lured hither by a laudable desire to share in the wealth which lurks in the hills about us, have been robbed of that which is more precious in this desolate country than gold— their food. Robbed at our very doors, too, by a desperado who will doubtless be among us in a few hours.

"Long ago we formed regulations governing this camp, which read, immediately following the section referring to the return of stray dogs, as follows: 'Any person or persons convicted of stealing grub or provisions of any kind shall be publicly whipped at the post in front of the A. C. Company's store, and forced to leave camp within twelve hours thereafter.'

"The severity of this sentence is warranted by the conditions of this country, where an ounce of flour will often retain the spark of life which an untold weight of gold could not rekindle.

"On the frozen trails food is never refused the hungry traveler who asks; but this man, without requesting aid, held up our friends at the point of his weapon, while his vicious accomplice took the major portion of their precious supply, and wantonly threw it to the lazy Eskimos, leaving barely enough for them to reach the welcome of our midst.

"Therefore, as it is your pleasure to carry out the letter of our law, as chairman of this meeting I will appoint Mr. Barton, 'Kid' Sullivan, and Brocky Dick to execute the sentence upon the accused, if he should have the temerity to appear among us.

"The meeting is adjourned."

As "Red," the barkeeper, resumed his interrupted activities, speculation was rife regarding the stranger.

"I'll tell you," said Big Mike, "he'll never show up in this camp. He's no fool."

"P'raps he thinks this is Arizony or New Mexico, and don't realize what a hold-up means out here!" answered Jones, the dealer, as he slid his neatly shuffled cards into the faro-box, and making a turn pulled down a twenty-dollar bet of the Governor.

The committee had assembled in the rear of the hall and were conversing in low tones.

"I will not be a party to it," Barton was saying. "I'll help to expel him from the camp or I'll fight him, if necessary, but I won't help to lash the bare back of a shackled man. I couldn't do it, if he were a murderer."

Barton wore a large university letter on the front of his sweater, and his views were peculiarly effeminate.

"As fur as whippin' a helpless man goes, I ain't lookin' for none the best of it myself, but I hate a thief wuss'n a criminnial," said Brocky Dick, whose distinctions were sometimes difficult.

"If he makes a gun-play, you jest beat him to it, and me'n the Kid'll tend to the floggin'."

A MAN opened the door, closed it carefully behind him, and said in a tense voice, "Here they come!"

"H—!" said Jones the gambler, and opening a drawer extracted a shining gun, cocked it, spun the long cylinder, rapidly laid it in his lap and resumed his monotonous dealing.

The committee filed to the bar and backed against it, while the eager crowd pressed forward along the walls and grouped themselves behind the tables, with curious eyes fixed upon the door.

Without there sounded the tinkle of sleigh-bells, a loud "Whoa!" followed by murmuring voices, as the dogs were unharnessed.

Within the silence was broken only by the shifting of moccasins on the board floor and the shuffling of the cards.

The door opened boldly and a man entered, followed by a native encumbered with rattling dog-harness and a roll of bedding, which he threw behind the door. He advanced to the crackling stove with a few brief words of greeting, bent forward and dragged the clinging *parka* over his head.

"Now's yer chance," whispered "Kid" Sullivan to Barton. "Cover him and we'll get his gun" But the latter, at his first glimpse of the newcomer, had started forward and was poised eagerly as though about to rush his man.

As the stranger, freed from his garment, turned, Barton sprang toward him with a cry, and, grasping the other's hand, wrung it fiercely.

"Why, Cap! Is it you, Cap? Where did you come from? Come here and let me look at you, Charley! The greatest tackle that ever wore the blue. This is a good sight!" and dragging the smiling visitor by the arm, he brought him toward the light, where the rest of the committee stood bewildered.

"Yes, I'm Charley, all right!" answered the other. "But who would expect to find you in this God-forsaken place? I've been in Dawson off and on for three years. Made my pile and lost it again. You know how."

He felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, while the pitted visage of Brocky Dick was thrust before his eves.

"Guess ye don't remember 'Brocky,' do ye? Ye ain't forgot that day at White Horse Rapids, when ye dragged me off them rocks half-drowned, have ye? Well, I ain't! Put her there!" and turning to the indignant onlookers, he said: "Gents, they's a vacancy on this here committee from now on."

"Me, too!" cried Barton suddenly, returning from frosty days on the gridiron and the hoarse roar of football-maddened multitudes. "I resign my place!"

"What's the trouble?" said Captain, scanning the angry faces surrounding him; then, spying the hairy front and sneering eyes of Buckhurst and Thomas,

"Ah! Looking for more trouble, are you?"

As he loosely hitched his belt to the fore, the objects of his remarks side-stepped quickly behind their companions, while Jones dropped his right hand into his lap and straightened in his chair.

"That's him!" loudly proclaimed Buckhurst. "I want to know what this camp's goin' to do with this here strong-arm man."

The Governor mounted a chair and began:

"Gentlemen, a miscarriage of justice seems imminent. Two of our committee have refused to act, and as chairman of the recent meeting, I will appoint in their places 'Big Mike' and Mr. Jones of Australia."

"I seem to be involved in this trouble some way, and I want to know how?" questioned Captain.

"Why, these men say you held them up and took all their grub," interposed Barton. "So they called a miners' meeting and we've voted to whip you at the post and run you out of camp. That was before we knew who it was, Charley!"

"The inherent gravity of the crime renders a severe example necessary," continued the Governor. "Is it the will of the meeting that the committee act immediately?"

"You bet! Yes! Yes!" answered many voices.

"Hold on!" said Captain. "Won't you allow a man to speak in his own behalf?"

"There ain't nothin' to say," cried Thomas, nervously. "He stuck us up and took our grub that we'd hauled three hundred miles, and gave it to a lot of d— Siwashes! Didn't ye? Now we want justice."

To Matka's questioning eyes, the circle of stubborn faces boded trouble. He loosed his knife in its sheath, and taking his place beside Captain, watched with wary glances for a hostile sign.

"Yes! I held you up," said Captain; "but I was starving, and you refused me grub— "

''Don't ye believe him!" yelled Buckhurst, while a murmur of disbelief sounded from the crowd. "He just walked in on us and took it."

"You lie!" Captain's voice cooed soft and clear.

At the words the crowd, dividing, scrambled hastily toward the walls out of range, leaving Captain and Buckhurst facing one another.

Buckhurst, perspiring violently, licked his lips, while his roving eyes gleamed appealingly toward the men pressed against the wall breathlessly awaiting the expected retort and shot.

After a pregnant moment of suspense, Jones whispered wonderingly:

"He's goin' to swallow them words."

The blazing head of the bartender cautiously reappeared over the bar, while the Governor tactfully cleared his throat and began:

"Sir, you have admitted that you robbed these men at the point of a gun. That admission would seem to suffice. You can't really expect us to believe that these gentlemen refused food to a hungry 'musher.' Such a thing is unheard of in this country, and does your ingenuity no credit."

"Sure. That don't go," scoffed a bearded bystander. "I reckon you've about had your little say."

"Well, I haven't had my little say," gently murmured Captain, "and I'll advise your committee not to get busy until I stop." His long fingers toyed with the belt fringe near his revolver. "I want you to hear the truth of this matter."

"The truth!" said the former. "I don't see why we'd ought to take your word any more than these other fellers. Who are ye, anyhow?"

"He's Charley Captain," chorused Barton and the "Kid." "You've all heard of Captain, squarest man on the Yukon. On the All American Team four years," vaguely added Barton. "You Dawson men remember the rescue of the Porcupine party, don't ye?"

A murmur of surprise greeted the remarks, and men looked curiously at the hero of many wintry tales, while in a respectful silence he briefly told of his meeting with the two at the village.

"There's not an old-timer in the country who doesn't owe his life to Indians," he continued. "They once dragged me raving mad from a raft on the Tanana; they fed me when their babies hungered. They found me snow-blind and frozen on the ice pack, and nursed me back to life and saved my hands and feet. They're done more for others of you, too."

"That's right!" echoed voices.

"Chief Joe gave these men all he had, his hospitality, and they robbed the hungry squaws. That coward crushed the fingers of a starving baby who snatched a crust from him, then laughed at its sobs. They refused to sell their grub to me, a famished white man, and, gentlemen, I'm sorry I didn't shoot to kill."

No man doubted the words of this clear-eyed stranger, whose name had run from Skagway to the Straits, and from Katmai to the Arctic.

A yellow mackinaw gleamed above the crowd while the voice of Big Mike roared, "Meeting will come to order!"

"Governor, you're chairman. Now, I move ye that the committee transfers its affectionate attenshun to them two 'skunks'!" and he stretched a huge, piston-like arm toward the pair, who encountered a barrier of threatening looks which forever shut them out of Faro Mountain.

"Second the motion!" cried the camp as one voice.

"Carried!" shouted Mike, who still retained his footing on the chair and, drowning the protests of the Governor, who tugged vainly at a jaundiced coat-tail, he continued:

"As the Governor says, we're goin' to protect the law an' order here durin' the bloomin' growth of our buddin' camp, and we ain't got room for fellers like you. See! You git! Meeting is adjourned."

As he stepped down from his chair, he continued: "Well, Governor, maybe it ain't accordin' to Roberts' *'Rules and Parliament Practice*,' but it's accordin' to Alaska."

"And Hoyle," added Jones, the dealer, while in the chorus of laughter the door closed on the figures of Buckhurst and Thomas.

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7: We'll Have Another

John Mackay Wilson

1804-1835

In: *The Faa's Revenge and other tales*, 1892

When the glass, the laugh, and the social "crack" go round the convivial table, there are few who may not have heard the words, "*We'll have another!*" It is an oft-repeated phrase— and it seems a simple one; yet, simple as it appears, it has a magical and fatal influence. The lover of sociality yieldeth to the friendly temptation it conveys, nor dreameth that it is a whisper from which scandal catcheth its thousand echoes— that it is a phrase which has blasted reputation— withered affection's heart— darkened the fairest prospects— ruined credit— conducted to the prison-house, and led to the grave. When our readers again hear the words, let them think of our present story.

Adam Brown was the eldest son of a poor widow who kept a small shop in a village near the banks of the Teviot. From his infancy, Adam was a mild retiring boy, and he was seldom seen to join in the sports of his schoolmates. On the winter evenings, he would sit poring over a book by the fire, while his mother would say— "Dinna stir up the fire, bairn; ye dinna mind that coals are dear; and I'm sure ye'll hurt yoursel' wi' pore, poring ower your books— for they're never out o' your hand." In the summer, too, Adam would steal away from the noise of the village to some favourite shady nook by the river side; and there, on the gowany brae, he would, with a standard author in his hand, "crack wi' kings," or "hold high converse with the mighty dead." He was about thirteen when his father died; and the Rev. Mr Douglas, the minister of the parish, visiting the afflicted widow, she said "she had had a sair bereavement, yet she had reason to be thankfu' that she had ae comfort left, for her poor Adam was a great consolation to her; every night he had read a chapter to his younger brithers— and, oh, sir," she added, "it wad make your heart melt to have heard my bairn pray for his widowed mother." Mr Douglas became interested in the boy, and finding him apt to learn, placed him for another year at the parish school at his own expense. Adam's progress was all that his patron could desire. He became a frequent visitor at the manse, and was allowed the use of the minister's library. Mr Douglas had a daughter who was nearly of the same age as his young *protegé*. Mary Douglas was not what could be called beautiful, but she was a gentle and interesting girl. She and Adam read and studied together. She delighted in a flower-garden, and he was wont to dress it, and he would often wander miles, and consider himself happy when he obtained a strange root to plant in it.

Adam was now sixteen. It was his misfortune, as it has been the ruin of many, to be *without an aim*. His mother declared that she "was at a loss what to

make him; but," added she, "he is a guid scholar, that is ae thing, and CAN DO is easy carried about." Mr Douglas himself became anxious about Adam's prospects: he evinced a dislike to be apprenticed to any mechanical profession, and he was too old to remain longer a burden upon his mother. At the suggestion of Mr Douglas, therefore, when about seventeen, he opened a school in a neighbouring village. Some said that he was too young; others, that he was too simple, that he allowed the children to have all their own way; and a few even hinted that he went too much back and forward to the manse in the adjoining parish to pay attention to his school. However these things might be, certain it is the school did not succeed; and, after struggling with it for two years, he resolved to try his fortune in London.

He was to sail from Leith, and his trunk had been sent to Hawick to be forwarded by the carrier. Adam was to leave his mother's house early on the following morning; and, on the evening preceding his departure, he paid his farewell visit to the manse. Mr Douglas received him with his wonted kindness; he gave him one or two letters of recommendation, and much wholesome advice, although the good man was nearly as ignorant of what is called the world, as the youth who was about to enter it. Adam sat long and said little, for his heart was full and his spirit heavy. He had never said to Mary Douglas, in plain words, that he loved her— he had never dared to do so; and he now sat with his eyes anxiously bent upon her, trembling to bid her farewell. She, too, was silent. At length he rose to depart; he held out his hand to Mr Douglas; the latter shook it affectionately, adding— "Farewell, Adam!— may Heaven protect you against the numerous temptations of the great city." He turned towards Mary— he hesitated, his hands dropped by his side— "Could I speak wi' you a moment?" said he, and his tongue faltered as he spoke. With a tear glistening in her eyes, she looked towards her father, who nodded his consent, and she arose and accompanied Adam to the door. They walked towards the flower-garden— he had taken her hand in his— he pressed it, but he spoke not, and she offered not to withdraw it. He seemed struggling to speak; and, at length, in a tone of earnest fondness, he nervously said, "Will you not forget me, Mary?"

A half-smothered sob Was her reply, and a tear fell on his hand.

"Say you will not," he added, yet more earnestly.

"O Adam!" returned she, "how can you say *forget*!— never!— never!"

"Enough! enough!" he continued, and they wept together.

It was scarce daybreak when Adam rose to take his departure, and to bid his mother and his brethren farewell. "Oh!" exclaimed she, as she placed his breakfast before him; "is this the last meal that my bairn's to eat in my house?" He ate but little; and she continued, weeping as she spoke— "Eat, hinny, eat; ye have a lang road before ye;— and, O Adam, aboon everything earthly, mind that

ye write to me every week; never think o' the postage— for, though it should tak' my last farthing, I maun hear frae ye."

He took his staff in his hand, and prepared to depart. He embraced his younger brothers, and tears were their only and mutual adieu. His parent sobbed aloud. "Fareweel, mother!" said he, in a voice half choked with anguish— "Fareweel!"

"God bless my bairn!" she exclaimed, wringing his hand; and she leaned her head upon his shoulder and wept as though her heart would burst. In agony he tore himself from her embrace, and hurried from the house; and, during the first miles of his journey, at every rising ground, he turned anxiously round, to obtain another lingering look of the place of his nativity; and, in the fulness and bitterness of his feelings, he pronounced the names of his mother, and his brethren, and of Mary Douglas, in the same breath.

We need not describe his passage to London, nor tell how he stood gazing wonderstruck, like a graven image of amazement, as the vessel winded up the Thames, through the long forest of masts, from which waved the flags of every nation.

It was about mid-day, early in the month of April, when the smack drew up off Hermitage Stairs, and Adam was aroused from his reverie of astonishment by a waterman, who had come upon deck, and who, pulling him by the button-hole, said— "Boat, master? boat?" Adam did not exactly understand the question, but, seeing the other passengers getting their luggage into the boats, he followed their example. On landing, he was surrounded by a group of porters, several of whom took hold of his trunk, all inquiring, at the same moment, where he wished it taken to. This was a question he could not answer. It was one he had never thought of before. He looked confused, and replied, "I watna."

"*Watna!*" said one of the Cockney burden-bearers— "*Watna!* there ain't such a street in all London."

Adam was in the midst of London, and he knew not a living soul among its millions of inhabitants. He knew not where to go; but, recollecting that one of the gentlemen to whom Mr Douglas had recommended him was a Mr Davidson, a merchant in Cornhill, he inquired—

"Does ony o' ye ken a Mr Davison, a merchant in Cornhill?"

"Vy, I can't say as how I know him," replied a porter; "but, if you wish your luggage taken there, I will find him for you in a twinkling."

"And what wad ye be asking to carry the bit box there?" said Adam, in a manner betokening an equal proportion of simplicity and caution.

"Hasking?" replied the other— "vy, I'm blessed if you get any one to carry it for less than four shillings."

"I canna afford four shillings," said Adam, "and I'll be obleeged to ye if ye'll gi'e me a lift on to my shoulder wi' it, and I'll carry it mysel'."

They uttered some low jests against his country, and left him to get his trunk upon his shoulders as he best might. Adam said truly that he could not afford four shillings; for, after paying his passage, he had not thirty shillings left in the world.

It is time, however, that we should describe Adam more particularly to our readers. He was dressed in a coarse grey coat, with trowsers of the same colour, a striped waistcoat, a half-worn broad-brimmed hat, and thick shoes studded with nails, which clattered as he went. Thus arrayed, and with his trunk upon his shoulders, Adam went tramping and clattering along East Smithfield, over Towerhill, and along the Minories, inquiring at every turning— "If any one could direct him to Mr Davison's, the merchant in Cornhill?" There was many a laugh, and many a joke, at poor Adam's expense, as he went trudging along, and more than once the trunk fell to the ground as he came in contact with the crowds who were hurrying past him. He had been directed out of his way; but at length he arrived at the place he sought. He placed his burden on the ground— he rang the bell— and again and again he rung, but no one answered. His letter was addressed to Mr Davison's counting-house. It was past business hours, and the office was locked up for the day. Adam was now tired, disappointed, and perplexed. He wist not what to do. He informed several "decent-looking people," as he said, "that he was a stranger, and he would be obleeged to them if they could recommend him to a lodging." He was shown several, but the rent per week terrified Adam. He was sinking under his burden, when, near the corner of Newgate Street, he inquired of an old Irish orange-woman, if "she could inform him where he would be likely to obtain a lodging at the rate of eighteenpence or two shillings a-week?"

"Sure, and it's I who can, jewel," replied she, "and an iligant room it is, with a bed his Holiness might rest his blessed bones on, and never a one slapes in it at all but my own boy, Barney; and, barring when Barney's in dhrink— and that's not above twice a-week— you'll make mighty pleasant sort of company together."

Adam was glad to have the prospect of a resting-place of any sort before him at last, and with a lighter heart and a freer step he followed the old orange-woman. She conducted him to Green Dragon Court, and desiring him to follow her up a long, dark, dirty stair, ushered him into a small, miserable-looking garret, dimly lighted by a broken sky-light, while the entire furniture consisted of four wooden posts without curtains, which she termed a bed, a mutilated chair, and a low wooden stool. "Now, darlint," said she, observing Adam fatigued, "here is a room fit for a prince; and, sure, you won't be thinking half-a-crown too much for it?"

"Weel," said Adam, for he was ready to lie down anywhere, "we'll no' quarrel about a sixpence."

The orange-woman left him, having vainly recommended him "to christen his new tenement with a drop of the cratur." Adam threw himself upon the bed, and, in a few minutes, his spirit wandered in its dreams amidst the "bonny woods and braes" of Teviotdale. Early on the following day he proceeded to the counting-house of Mr Davison, who received him with a hurried sort of civility— glanced over the letter of introduction— expressed a hope that Mr Douglas was well— said he would be happy to serve him— but he was engaged at present, and if Mr Brown would call again, if he should hear of anything he would let him know. Adam thanked him, and, with his best bow (which was a very awkward one), withdrew. The clerks in the outer office tittered as poor Adam, with his heavy hob-nailed shoes, tramped through the midst of them. He delivered the other letter of introduction, and the gentleman to whom it was addressed received him much in the same manner as Mr Davison had done, and his clerks also smiled at Adam's grey coat, and gave a very peculiar look at his clattering shoes, and then at each other. Day after day he repeated his visits to the counting-houses of these gentlemen— sometimes they were too much engaged to see him, at others they simply informed him that they were sorry they had heard of nothing to suit him, and continued writing, without noticing him again; while Adam, with a heavy heart, would stand behind their desk, brushing the crown of his brown broad-brimmed hat with his sleeve. At length, the clerks in the outer office merely informed him their master had heard of nothing for him. Adam saw it was in vain— three weeks had passed, and the thirty shillings which he had brought to London were reduced to ten.

He was wandering disconsolately down Chancery Lane, with his hands thrust in his pockets, when his attention was attracted to a shop, the windows and door of which were covered with written placards, and on these placards were the words, "*Wanted, a Book-keeper*"— "*Wanted, by a Literary Gentleman, an Amanuensis*"— in short, there seemed no sort of situation for which there was not a person wanted, and each concluded with "*inquire within*." Adam's heart and his eyes overflowed with joy. There were at least half-a-dozen places which would suit him exactly— he was only at a loss now which to choose upon— and he thought also that Mr Douglas's friends had used him most unkindly in saying they could hear of no situation for him, when here scores were advertised in the streets. At length he fixed upon one. He entered the shop. A sharp, Jewish-looking little man was writing at a desk— he received the visitor with a gracious smile.

"If you please, sir," said Adam, "will ye be so good as inform me where the gentleman lives that wants the bookkeeper?"

"With pleasure," said the master of the register office; "but you must give me five shillings, and I will enter your name."

"Five shillings!" repeated Adam, and a new light began to dawn upon him. "Five shillings, sir, is a deal o' money, an', to tell you the truth, I can very ill afford it; but, as I am much in want o' a situation, maybe you wad tak' half-a-crown."

"Can't book you for that," said the other; "but give me your half-crown, and you may have the gentleman's address."

He directed him to a merchant in Thames Street. Adam quickly found the house; and, entering with his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, and scraping the hob-nails along the floor— "Sir," said he, "I'm the person Mr Daniells o' Chancery Lane has sent to you as a bookkeeper."

"Mr Daniells— Mr Daniells," said the merchant; "don't know any such person— have not wanted a bookkeeper these six months."

"Sir," said Adam, "are ye no' Mr Robertson, o' 54 Thames Street?"

"I am," replied the merchant; "but," added he, "I see how it is. Pray, young man, what did you give this Mr Daniells to recommend you to the situation?"

"Half-a-crown, sir," returned Adam.

"Well," said the other, "you have more money than wit. Good morning, sir, and take care of another Mr Daniells."

Poor Adam was dumfoundered; and, in the bitterness of his spirit, he said London was a den o' thieves. I might tell you how his last shilling was expended— how he lived upon bread and water— how he fell into arrears with the orange-woman for the rent of his garret— how she persecuted him— how he was puzzled to understand the meaning of the generous words, "*Money lent*;" how the orange-woman, in order to obtain her rent, taught him the mystery of the *three golden balls*; and how the shirts— which his mother had made him from a web of her own spinning— and his books, all that he had, save the clothes upon his back, were pledged— and how, when all was gone, the old landlady turned him to the door, houseless, friendless, pennyless, with no companion but despair. We might have dwelt upon these things, but must proceed with his history.

Adam, after enduring privations which would make humanity shudder, obtained the situation of assistant-porter in a merchant's office. The employment was humble, but he received it joyfully. He was steady and industrious, and it was not long until he was appointed warehouseman; and his employer, finding that, in addition to his good qualities, he had received a superior education, made him one of his confidential clerks. He had held the situation about two years. The rust, as his brother-clerks said, was now pretty well rubbed off Scotch Adam. His hodden grey was laid aside for the dashing green, his hob-nailed shoes for fashionable pumps, and his broad-brimmed hat

for a narrow-crowned beaver; his speech, too, had caught a sprinkling of the southern accent; but, in other respects, he was the same inoffensive, steady, and serious being as when he left his mother's cottage.

His companions were wont "to roast" Adam, as they termed it, on what they called his Methodism. They had often urged him to accompany them to the theatre; but, for two years, he had stubbornly withstood their temptations. The stage was to Adam what the tree of knowledge was to his first namesake and progenitor. He had been counselled against it, he had read against it, he had heard sermons against it; but had never been within the walls of a theatre. *The* Siddons, and her brother John Kemble, then in the zenith of their fame, were filling not only London but Europe with their names. One evening they were to perform, together— Adam had often heard of them— he admired Shakspeare— his curiosity was excited, he yielded to the solicitations of his companions, and accompanied them to Covent Garden. The curtain was drawn up. The performance began. Adam's soul was riveted, his senses distracted. The Siddons swept before him like a vision of immortality— Kemble seemed to draw a soul from the tomb of the Cæsars; and, as the curtain fell, and the loud music pealed, Adam felt as if a new existence and a new world had opened before him, and his head reeled with wonder and delight. When the performance was concluded, his companions proposed to have a single bottle in an adjoining tavern; Adam offered some opposition, but was prevailed upon to accompany them. Several of the players entered— they were convivial spirits, abounding with wit, anecdote, and song. The scene was new, but not unpleasant to Adam. He took no note of time. He was unused to drink, and little affected him. The first bottle was finished. "*We'll have another*," said one of his companions. It was the first time Adam had heard the fatal words, and he offered no opposition. He drank again— he began to expatiate on divers subjects— he discovered he was an orator. "Well done, Mr Brown," cried one of his companions, "there's hope of you yet— *we'll have another*, my boy— three's band!" A third bottle was brought; Adam was called upon for a song. He could sing, and sing well too; and, taking his glass in his hand, he began—

"Stop, stop, we'll ha'e anither gill,
Ne'ermind a lang-tongued beldame's yatter;
They're fools wha'd leave a glass o' yill
For ony wife's infernal clatter.

"There's Bet, when I gang hame the night,
Will set the hail stairhead a ringin'—
Let a' the neebours hear her flyte,
Ca' me a brute, and stap my singin'.

"She'll yelp about the bairns' rags—
Ca' me a drucken gude-for-naethin'!
She'll curse my throat an' drouthy bags,
An' at me thraw their duddy claethin'!

"Chorus, gentlemen— chorus!" cried Adam, and continued—

"The fient a supper I'll get there—
A dish o' tongues is a' she'll gie me!
She'll shake her nieve and rug her hair,
An' wonder how she e'er gaed wi' me!

She vows to leave me, an' I say,
'Gang, gang! for dearsake!— that's a blessin'!'
She rins to get her claes away,
But— o' the kist the key's amissin*!*

"The younkers a' set up a skirl,
They shriek an' cry— 'O dinna, mither!'
I slip to bed, and fash the quarrel
Neither ae way nor anither.

Bet creeps beside me unco dour,
I clap her back, an' say— 'My dawtie!'
Quo' she— 'Weel, weel, my passion's ower,
But dinna gang a-drinkin', Watty.'"

"Bravo, Scotchy!" shouted one. "Your health and song, Mr Brown," cried another. Adam's head began to swim— the lights danced before his eyes— he fell from his chair. One of his friends called a hackney coach; and, half insensible of where he was, he was conveyed to his lodgings. It was afternoon on the following day before he appeared at the counting-house, and his eyes were red, and he had the languid look of one who has spent a night in revelry. That night he was again prevailed upon to accompany his brother-clerks to the club-room, "just," as they expressed it, "to have one bottle to put all right." That night he again heard the words— "*We'll have another*," and again he yielded to their seduction.

But we will not follow him through the steps and through the snares by which he departed from virtue and became entangled in vice. He became an almost nightly frequenter of the tavern, the theatre, or both, and his habits opened up temptations to grosser viciousness. Still he kept up a correspondence with Mary Douglas, the gentle object of his young affections, and for a time her endeared remembrance haunted him like a protecting angel, whispering in his ear and saving him from depravity. But his religious principles were already

forgotten; and, when that cord was snapped asunder, the fibre of affection that twined around his heart did not long hold him in the path of virtue. As the influence of company grew upon him, her remembrance lost its power, and Adam Brown plunged headlong into all the pleasures and temptations of the metropolis.

Still he was attentive to business— he still retained the confidence of his employer— his salary was liberal— he still sent thirty pounds a-year to his mother; and Mary Douglas yet held a place in his heart, though he was changed— fatally changed. He had been about four years in his situation when he obtained leave for a few weeks to visit his native village. It was on a summer afternoon when a chaise from Jedburgh drove up to the door of the only public-house in the village. A fashionably dressed young man alighted, and, in an affected voice, desired the landlord to send a porter with his luggage to Mrs Brown's. "A porter, sir?" said the innkeeper— "there's naething o' the kind in the toun; but I'll get twa callants to tak' it alang."

He hastened to his mother's. "Ah! how d'ye do?" said he, slightly shaking the hands of his younger brothers; but a tear gathered in his eye as his mother kissed his cheek. She, good soul, when the first surprise was over, said "she hardly kenned her bairn in sic a fine gentleman." He proceeded to the manse, and Mary marvelled at the change in his appearance and his manner; yet she loved him not the less; but her father beheld the affectation and levity of his young friend, and grieved over them.

He had not been a month in the village when Mary gave him her hand, and they set out for London together.

For a few weeks after their arrival, he spent his evenings at their own fireside, and they were blest in the society of each other. But it was not long until company again spread its seductive snares around him. Again he listened to the words— "*We'll have another*"— again he yielded to their temptations, and again the *force of habit* made him its slave. Night followed night, and he was irritable and unhappy, unless in the midst of his boon companions. Poor Mary felt the bitterness and anguish of a deserted wife; but she upbraided him not— she spoke not of her sorrows. Health forsook her cheeks, and gladness had fled from her spirit; yet as she nightly sat hour after hour waiting his return, as he entered, she welcomed him with a smile, which not unfrequently was met with an imprecation or a frown. They had been married about two years. Mary was a mother, and oft at midnight she would sit weeping over the cradle of her child, mourning in secret for its thoughtless father.

It was her birthday, her father had come to London to visit them; she had not told him of her sorrows, and she had invited a few friends to dine with them. They had assembled; but Adam was still absent. He had been unkind to her; but this was an unkindness she did not expect from him. They were yet

awaiting, when a police-officer entered. His errand was soon told. Adam Brown had become a gambler, as well as a drunkard— he had been guilty of fraud and embezzlement— his guilt had been discovered, and the police were in quest of him. Mr Douglas wrung his hands and groaned. Mary bore the dreadful blow with more than human fortitude. She uttered no scream— she shed no tears; for a moment she sat motionless— speechless. It was the dumbness of agony. With her child at her breast, and, in the midst of her guests, she flung herself at her father's feet. "Father!" she exclaimed, "for my sake!— for my helpless child's sake— save! oh, save my poor husband!"

"For your sake, what I can do I will do, dearest," groaned the old man.

A coach was ordered to the door, and the miserable wife and her father hastened to the office of her husband's employer.

When Adam Brown received intelligence that his guilt was discovered from a companion, he was carousing with others in a low gambling-house. Horror seized him, and he hurried from the room, but returned in a few minutes. "*We'll have another!*" he exclaimed, in a tone of frenzy— and another was brought. He half filled a glass— he raised it to his lips— he dashed into it a deadly poison, and, ere they could stay his hand, the fatal draught was swallowed. He had purchased a quantity of arsenic when he rushed from the house.

His fellow-gamblers were thronging around him, when his injured wife and her grey-headed father entered the room. "Away, tormentors!" he exclaimed, as his glazed eyes fell upon them, and he dashed his hand before his face.

"My husband! my dear husband!" cried Mary, flinging her arms around his neck. "Look on me, speak to me!"

He gazed on her face— he grasped her hand. "Mary, my injured Mary!" he exclaimed convulsively, "can *you* forgive me— *you*— *you*? O God; I was once innocent! Forgive me, dearest!— for our child's sake, curse not its guilty father!"

"Husband!— Adam!" she cried, wringing his hand— "come with me, love, come— leave this horrid place— you have nothing to fear— your debt is paid."

"Paid!" he exclaimed, wildly— "Ha! ha!— Paid!" These were his last words— convulsions came upon him, the film of death passed over his eyes, and his troubled spirit fled.

She clung round his neck— she yet cried "Speak to me!"— she refused to believe that he was dead, and her reason seemed to have fled with his spirit.

She was taken from his body and conveyed home. The agony of grief subsided into a stupor approaching imbecility. She was unconscious of all around; and, within three weeks from the death of her husband, the broken spirit of Mary Douglas found rest, and her father returned in sorrow with her helpless orphan to Teviotdale.

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8: The Treasure of the Kalahari

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Collected in: *Circumstantial Evidence*, 1929

ROMANCE may come on the heels of tragedy.

So it came to Mirabelle Maynard at Red Cot farm in Sussex; for when the shock of her brother's death had passed, she found a certain tender interest in the letters which arrived, sometimes from Bulawayo, sometimes from Kimberley, but as often as not bearing the postmark of the mail-sorting van. They were well expressed letters in a crabbed handwriting, and they told her of things that left her a little breathless; and when she had read them through she would sit down and indite epistles almost as voluminous, and these she addressed to the Rev. George Smith at a little store in Mafeking. She did not know that it was a little store, but the Reverend George very kindly told her so.

He did not tell her that it was a Kaffir store, and that the letters, by arrangement, were sent on to him, since his own addresses were uncertain and shifting. But he did hint that he was young and single and that he was good-looking. He said, amongst other things, that he had left the ministry and was devoting his life and energy to securing justice for her and punishment for the venal officials who were endeavoring to rob her of her inheritance.

Upon a certain day, Mirabelle Maynard mortgaged and let her farm, booked a first-class passage to Capetown on the *Dover Castle*, and disappeared from England. She was destined never to meet the romantic clergyman whose summons brought her feet to the corridors of adventure...

There was a time, in the queer days following the rising and the subsequent rush to the diamond diggings westward of Fourteen Streams, when the citizens of a certain Bechuanaland town decided that one Walter Vellors, who was awaiting execution at the fine and new stone gaol for the murder of a storekeeper, was not really a bad fellow as fellows went; and anyway, these damned storekeepers... Peruvian Jews most of them... too bad that a fellow like Walter... or was it Jim...? should swing, eh, boys?

They got up a petition, and they had a meeting, and they telegraphed the legislature at Capetown, and finally they held up Zeederberg's coach eighteen miles outside of Geelow, and took therefrom the official and only hangman the country possessed. Him they made so gloriously drunk that his name appears first of the signatories to another petition, which begins:

"We free men of Bechuanaland, holding capital punishment in abhorrence—etc.," and may be seen to this day framed in the office of the Minister of Justice.

Then the same free men seduced from their lofty duty the chief warder (who was Governor) and three common warders (two half-colored), so that the Governor and warders and condemned prisoner fraternized in maudlin fashion.

Into this electric atmosphere rode Captain Bill Stark, a lean, brown, expectant man.

He came into Adderley Street (so they had christened a strip of dust that divided one line of tin shanties from the other), and they turned out of the Grand Hotel in such a great hurry to tell the news that the Grand Hotel swayed crazily.

They told him, all speaking at once.

"Poor feller, he's suffered, Sheriff... damned storekeeper robbed him, you bet.... Why, one feller I know robbed another feller I know.... Anyway, everybody's against it, that's all."

"Is that so?" said Bill Stark. "And the gaol staff, you say?"

"Everybody," doggedly, but not without triumph.

"*And* the hangman?"

"That's God's truth.... Now, Captain..."

But the Captain was riding for the gaol. He was Chief Constable, Sheriff, and Tax-Collector. He rode through the gate, and the warder held the rein as he flung off and into the guardroom.

"Properly speaking, Captain Stark," said the chief warder, on his dignity and in that falsetto which the illiterate regard as a tolerable imitation of high-class conversation, "properly speaking, you have no status in this. I am responsible, sir, to the High Commissioner..."

"Turn round," said Stark wearily. "You colored men go first. Open the door of the first cell.... In you go. Now your keys, Schultz—all of them. Thank you."

They did not argue, not even the chief warder, partly because the long barrel of a service Webley was sticking into his belt, and partly because it was not until he subsequently indicted his "Report on Outrageous Happening in Geelow Gaol" that he thought of appropriate repartee.

So Stark locked the men in the cell and went in search of Walter Vellors. Him he found, and Walter protested indignantly.

"My dear man," said Captain Bill Stark testily, "if you go shooting up storekeepers and robbing their safes, you can't complain about being punished."

"I refuse to be hanged until I have an accredited minister of the Gospel," said Walter Vellors, within his rights.

"Why argue?" pleaded Bill, as he strapped the man. "You'll be seeing Peter in a second or so."

"Half a minute," said Vellors, his unshaven face twitching. "There's something I want to get off my chest. It is about a mine and a girl—"

Bill Stark's lips curled until he looked like an angry dog.

"If you get sentimental I'll cry," he said, "and crying never did improve my appearance—"

"There's no sentiment about it," said Vellors, surprisingly cool. "I did up this Peruvian, and I was the fellow that killed Jan van Rhys at Laager Sprint. I shot Pieter Roos down in the Lydenberg district, and— oh, I've done a lot and I guess I'm fully entitled to the company of the saints. But this girl's in the Kalahari by now. I sent her a fake plan— all jumbled up... got an idea she's come up to Bulawayo to see me, because, from what her brother said *and* her picture, she's a good looker, and... I'm a lady's man myself."

"Get on to the mine," snarled Stark, "and remember that serial stories bore me stiff."

But Mr. Walter Vellors was not to be hurried. He and a man named Maynard had located a "pan" in the Kalahari desert— a ten-mile stretch of alluvial gold.

"I'm willing to admit that it was a miracle," he confessed. "I met Maynard, who was a new chum just out from England, looking for a new home for him and his sister. I told the tale about the alluvial. I've told it a hundred times to suckers, and some have fallen and some have passed me by. But Maynard took up the idea, and him and me went out into the bush country for a two days' trip. It lasted a month because we lost ourselves, and if it hadn't been for striking a Hottentot village I'd have died natural. And then we found the 'pan.' Maynard found it and took samples— we had no water to wash it, but he said there was a new way of dealing with that kind of stuff. Anyway, we got back to Vryburg and washed the samples, and then Maynard got a heat stroke and pegged out. That looked as if I'd got an easy job, but it wasn't. He'd registered the claim in his own name, and that damned Commissioner wouldn't listen to me when I told him I was Maynard's partner. It appears that in a will he'd left everything to his sister.

"It was tough luck on me, Sheriff— there was a million, or maybe ten, and I couldn't touch it. The chief of police at Vryburg gave me twenty-four hours to get out of town, so I dodged up to Mafeking and got a grand idea. I wrote to the girl and told her all about the gold claims me and her brother had, and asked her to come out to Bulawayo. I called myself Smith— George Smith."

"Well?" asked the Sheriff coldly, as the man paused.

"Give us a gasper, Sheriff," begged Mr. Vellors. "This story is worth the makings... I'm not kidding you. I told the girl not to go to the Government office at Vryburg— I said there was a plot to swindle her. I wanted to see her first, you understand, to get my share. Well, she wrote a lovely letter thanking me for my kindness, and said she'd meet me, not at Bulawayo, but at Kibi Cubo— that's a 'tot' village near the supposed property. You see"— the prisoner drew the smoke into his lungs and paused before he exhaled— "you see, I had to give her a second place where we could meet, but I never dreamt that she would go into the desert. Being young, maybe, and romantic..."

"When is she due?" asked Stark quickly.

"Today."

Again the Sheriff's lips curled back.

"You're lying, I guess—"

"If I die this minute—" protested the other indignantly.

The Sheriff looked at his watch. "In five minutes," he said tersely, "whether you speak the truth or lie..."

AND WHEN it was all over he went down town and rode his horse to the group before the Grand Hotel— silent, uneasy, fearful.

"I've hanged your friend," said Bill, staring coldly down on them, "and he's completely dead. Got anything to say?"

Somebody had, after a long and speechless while.

"No good crying over spilt milk, Captain."

"That's so," said Bill Stark. "And now, you miners and loafers, get back to your huts; and whilst I'm in my best admonitory mood, I want to tell the gentleman who is buying diamonds from the natives working the Boyson field, that if I catch him or any other man engaged in I.D.B., I'll put him on the Breakwater at Capetown for seven years."

He rode away.

"Bullying swine," said a voice. Captain Stark did not turn in his saddle. He rode at a hack canter to the telegraph office, and found the operator drinking neat whisky and cheating himself at patience.

"Get me a through line to Vryburg," he said, and the operator, who knew him, did not argue.

"Ask this..." said Bill, and waited until the answer came:

"Gold claims registered in Maynard's name. No sign of sister. Ask Brakpan Halt, nearest railway stop to claims."

Brakpan Halt was more difficult to reach. No answer came for half an hour, and then:

"Young lady detrained, bought Cape cart, three horses from Tyl, and trekked west this morning."

"Tell him," said Bill, "to send somebody out to bring her back to the rail."

And, when that message had gone through:

"Get Masabili and tell the stationmaster to hold the Bulawayo mail for me—"

"You won't get any mail train at Masabili," interrupted the operator, with the satisfaction of one possessing superior information. "It's thirty-five miles from here to Masabili halt, and the train goes through at midnight."

Bill Stark scratched his long nose thoughtfully.

"I may make it with two horses," he said.

Riding the one and leading the other, he cantered out of town, watched by resentful citizens. He was ten miles on his road before he remembered that, in his capacity as Coroner, he had not held the necessary inquest on the late Mr. Walter Vellors.

The road was bad, and half-way one of his horses fell lame and had to be left at the mule station where the coaches changed teams. He reached the brow of the hill overlooking Masabili in time to see the faint red lights of the mail dimming in the desert.

At four in the morning a leisurely goods train drew in, and he made the journey northward in a truck which was carrying a huge dynamo for a new power station at Bulawayo.

"It is the only covered truck, Sheriff," said the train guard apologetically. "My caboose is full of parcel mail."

"It will do," said Stark. The sleep he enjoyed in that car nearly cost him his life.

He was turned out at Brakpan Halt at two o'clock on a blazing afternoon.

"No, mister, she hasn't come back. As a matter of fact," said the stationmaster frankly, "I didn't rightly get your instructions. And if it comes to that, I can't take no orders from Geelow— where in hell is Geelow anyway?"

"Did you send out to search for this lady or didn't you?" asked Bill Stark, and the slightly, but only slightly, colored official told the truth.

"I didn't. I've got enough trouble of my own. There were four cases of cigarettes stolen from the 17-down yesterday, and I've been worried to death about it. They couldn't have been pinched at this siding. How could they have got 'em away— the thieves, I mean? And I get reported twice a week because the Bulawayo mail can't get water. She sits here and hoots for hours, and I live four miles away and have to come in. Why don't they take their water at Mahagobi? That's what I say... settin' here hooting all night for water... I have to come in and set the pump going..."

Bill Stark cursed him evenly but fearfully.

"Damn you and your pump and your hooting locos," he snapped. "You'll have a life on your hands, you coffee-colored son of a Hottentot. Get me a horse and don't argue, or I'll skin your head!"

The station premises adjoined an ancient farm belonging to the Dutchman from whom the girl had secured her Cape cart and horses. The Sheriff interviewed Mr. Tyl, and learnt little save that the girl had paid twice the value for her purchases.

"Ach! She seemed a capable young woman. She said she was going to meet friends, and, man, she could drive. She had a little farm in England and she sold it to come out.... I told her where the water holes were..."

"I want two horses, baas," said the Sheriff briefly.

He stopped long enough to load one animal with biscuit and biltong and two great waterbags, and as the sun slipped down behind the dwarf thorn trees, he headed westward, following the tracks of wheels.

He went on till darkness failed, and then, lantern in hand and leading his horses, he followed on foot until the tracks grew more difficult to read. Before daybreak he was on the trail, and when daylight came at last he extinguished his lantern, snatched a hasty meal, and rode on at a jog-trot. A minor cause for annoyance was the discovery that his watch had gone dead. Thereafter he had to judge the time by the position of the sun.

He had passed the thick belt of *wachteinbitje* bushes, and had come to sheer, unadulterated desert, where the tracks no longer appeared. There had been a gale of wind in the night— he had heard it with something like fear in his heart— and fine sand had drifted over the wheel tracks. After two hours' search he picked up the trail, only to lose it again. Once he passed a solitary Hottentot woman tramping unerringly to her kraal. She had seen no white girl, nor Cape cart.

On the third day he halted finally and definitely. His horses were exhausted, and his stock of water was running low.

And then, at the moment when he was taking a compass bearing for the first stage of his retreat, there came over a low ridge of sand a weary horse and rider. At first he thought it was a boy— she sat astride, a slim figure in white, her head bowed dejectedly on her breast.

He stood staring at her, and she would have passed unnoticing if he had not found his voice. At the sound of his yell she reined in her horse, and, shading her eyes, looked toward him.

Another second, and she turned her horse's head in his direction, and the half-dead animal made an heroic effort to trot.

"Thank God I've found you, Mr. Smith!" she called hysterically as she slipped from the saddle. "Oh, I'm so frightened of this place! I've been two nights... I missed the village... If I had only gone on to Bulawayo..."

She stumbled and would have fallen, but his arm was about her.

"Sit down, Miss— er— Maynard," he said awkwardly.

It would have been an awkward meeting in any circumstances. He had never troubled to think what she was like. She was just a woman— somebody's sister. He certainly had never thought of her as pretty, with a mop of golden hair and a skin like milk and peaches.

"Everybody thought I was mad to come out, but of course I didn't tell them about the horrible way the Commissioner at Vryburg had behaved," she went on a little breathlessly. "And I've done a whole lot of desert travel— my poor brother and I spent every winter in Algeria before things went wrong, and we... You are Mr. Smith, aren't you?"

Bill Stark blinked like a man waking from sleep.

"To be perfectly honest, I'm not," he blurted. "Smith, whose real name is Vellors, is dead— hanged. I hanged him. I'm the Sheriff of Geelow..."

He cursed himself when he saw the horror in her face. In an instant she was on her feet, staring at him, terrified. "Hanged... oh no! Mr. Smith was my friend— how horrible!"

"I'm a dam' fool for telling you," said Bill Stark, a trifle incoherently. "Excuse the language.... Yes, Vellors was a murderer and he had to go. He told me all about you and the fake mine—there's a real mine somewhere, but the Commissioner at Vryburg will tell you all about that— told me just before— just before his"— he coughed—"untimely end."

This time she really fainted, and Bill Stark, in a panic, dashed to his pack horse, and, unstrapping the last water-bottle, poured an improvident quantity over her face.

"You must forgive me if I'm a little shaken," she said unsteadily. "I think I am— what called yourself just now. Hadn't we better be getting back?"

Bill nodded slowly.

"Mr. Smith said that they would stop at nothing to get the claims," she said. She seemed to be speaking her thoughts aloud. "I suppose you have told me the truth?"

He did not answer. He was looking at her in amazement.

"That is why he asked me to meet him without letting anybody know," she continued listlessly. "So you have killed him!"

Bill cleared his throat, but before he could protest she went on:

"I don't for a moment imagine that you want to kill me, though if you would kill a clergyman—"

"A what?"

"You know Mr. Smith was a missionary," she said. "That is how he came to meet my brother."

"Good God!" gasped the awestricken Sheriff. "Did Wally tell you that?"

"Don't let us talk about it," she said. "Shall we go back?"

"One moment." Bill Stark was aroused. "This Vellors was a notoriously bad character and a triple murderer. I hanged him because there was nobody else there to do it— and he wanted hanging badly!"

She sighed and looked across the waste of bush and sand, and it hurt him to read the scepticism in her drawn face.

"I didn't believe him when he started telling this story— about the gold-pan and you and your brother. It was the only decent thing he ever did— to tell me, I mean."

She was not convinced; such is the contrariness of women, she could smile when he asked her what had happened to her Cape cart.

"I don't know. One of the horses died. And then my riding horse died too. I think they must have been sick. I saddled the other."

"Oh!" said Bill, and then, gravely: "I think we'd better get back."

They rode side by side almost in silence. Twice he halted to consult the map he had borrowed from the stationmaster, and set a course with the help of his compass. And on the second occasion, when they had stopped to eat a frugal meal and drink sparingly of the rapidly diminishing stock of water, she saw him frown and shake a little instrument.

"That's funny," he said.

"What is funny? I should like to be amused."

She looked over his shoulder as he laid the compass on the map. "*That* isn't the north," she said. "Look! The needle is pointing to the west!"

"So I observe," he said quietly. "I've been using this infernal thing by night, otherwise I should have seen it was wrong."

He took out his watch and looked at the dial.

"That went wrong the day I left the rail," he said, "and—"

He stopped suddenly.

"I traveled up in company with a big dynamo that was being shipped up to Bulawayo— Miss Maynard, do you know what a dynamo is?"

"I know what a dynamo is," she said. "It is a machine for making electrical current."

He nodded. "It is also a powerful magnet," he said," and my compass isn't worth three grains of sand."

They looked at one another in dead silence.

"Is that so?" she said mechanically, and then: "I think I believe you. Mr.— Mr.—"

"Stark," he suggested.

"About Smith— ugh!" she shuddered. "I'm glad... in a way. What shall we do now?"

He had already considered that problem and had found no satisfying solution.

"We will strike east," he said. "You haven't a compass, of course?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing so intelligent," she said, and there was a note of bitterness in her flippancy. "Nothing but unlimited faith in humanity and a taste for adventure. Did it... was he hurt? How dreadful that you had to do it!"

Her mind was still on the hanging.

"We'll go east," he said. "We can judge roughly, but where we'll land eventually, the Lord He knows!"

Morning brought them to the end of the water. He dug down into the sandy soil, using his broad-bladed hunting-knife, and she stood holding her horse's head, watching him curiously.

"We're lost, aren't we?" she said, and with her words there came to him in full force the terriffic danger in which she stood. The hanging sheriff sat down with a groan as he realized that the real treasure of the desert stood before him, a white-faced girl in whose eyes was dawning the fear of death.

"No, no, not lost," he said huskily, and struggled to his feet. "Over there..."

He pointed with a hand that shook, and somehow his momentary weakness gave her courage.

That night they lay down side by side, their tongues parched, their throats harsh and dry. He heard her soft weeping in the darkness, and, putting out his arm, drew her toward him until her head was pillowed on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he muttered.

"I'm sorry, too," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "And I'm not sorry... though I wish we could... could die less thirstily!"

She sat up suddenly.

"What was that?" she gasped.

There came to his ears a faint and eerie wail of sound.

"I'm glad you heard it," he said in a low voice. "I thought I was imagining things— listen!"

They stood up, straining their ears. And then it came again— a thin, sobbing shriek. With trembling fingers the Sheriff lit the candle in his lantern.

"What is it?" she asked in an awful whisper, but he did not answer, striding ahead, his lantern throwing long shadows on the gray sands and revealing the yellow blossoms of the dwarf trees. An hour, two hours passed, and she was ready to drop with exhaustion, when suddenly she found herself climbing the steep sides of an embankment, and she stumbled over a long obstruction.

"The railway!" she gasped.

But he did not speak. Standing in the center of the track, he was waving his lantern to and fro, and presently she was blinded by the glare of a head-lamp as the engine of the Bulawayo mail came round the shoulder of a sandy hill, and the howl of her siren, heard nearer at hand, was very pleasant music.

"IT WAS the engine hooting for water at the halt," he said.

He sat by her side, one arm about her, her head again on his shoulder. "And of course we walked in a circle. I'll start you off for Vryburg in the morning, and then what will you do?"

"I don't know." She looked up at him. "What are you going to do?"

He considered a moment.

"I've got something to clear up at Geelow, and then I'm at your service," he said.

He had remembered his duties as a coroner.

9: The Man With the Strange Head

Miles J. Breuer

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A MAN in a gray hat stood halfway down the corridor, smoking a cigar and apparently interested in my knocking and waiting. I rapped again on the door of Number 216 and waited some more, but all remained silent. Finally my observer approached me.

"I don't believe it will do any good," he said. "I've just been trying it. I would like to talk to someone who is connected with Anstruther. Are you?"

"Only this." I handed him a letter out of my pocket without comment, as one is apt to do with a thing that has caused one no little wonderment:

"Dear Doctor," it said succinctly. *"I have been under the care of Dr. Faubourg who has recently died. I would like to have you take charge of me on a contract basis, and keep me well, instead of waiting till I get sick. I can pay you enough to make you independent, but in return for that, you will have to accept an astonishing revelation concerning me, and keep it to yourself. If this seems acceptable to you, call on me at 9 o'clock, Wednesday evening. Josiah Anstruther, Room 216, Cornhusker Hotel."*

"If you have time," said the man in the gray hat, handing me back the letter, "come with me. My name is Jerry Stoner, and I make a sort of living writing for magazines. I live in 316, just above here."

"By some curious architectural accident," he continued, as we reached his room, "that ventilator there enables me to hear minutely everything that goes on in the room below. I haven't ever said anything about it during the several months that I've lived here, partly the man with the strange head because it does not disturb me, and partly because it has begun to pique my curiosity—a writer can confess to that, can he not? The man below is quiet and orderly, but seems to work a good deal on some sort of clockwork; I can hear it whirring and clicking quite often. But listen now!"

Standing within a couple of feet of the opening which was covered with an iron grill, I could hear footsteps. They were regular, and would decrease in intensity as the person walked away from the ventilator opening below, and increase again as he approached it; were interrupted for a moment as he probably stepped on a rug, and were shorter for two or three counts, no doubt as he turned at the end of the room. This was repeated in a regular rhythm as long as I listened. "Well?" I said.

"You perceive nothing strange about that, I suppose," said Jerry Stoner. "But if you had listened all day long to just exactly that you would begin to wonder.

That is the way he was going on when I awoke this morning; I was out from 10 to 11 this forenoon. The rest of the time I have been writing steadily, with an occasional stretch at the window, and all of the time I have heard steadily what you hear now, without interruption or change. It's getting on my nerves.

"I have called him on the phone, and have rung it on and off for twenty minutes; I could hear his bell through the ventilator, but he pays no attention to it. So, a while ago I tried to call on him. Do you know him?"

"I know who he is," I replied, "but do not remember ever having met him."

"If you had ever met him you would remember. He has a queer head. I made my curiosity concerning the sounds from his room an excuse to cultivate his acquaintance. The cultivation was difficult. He is courteous, but seemed afraid of me."

We agreed that there was not much that we could do about it. I gave up trying to keep my appointment, told Stoner that I was glad I had met him, and went home.

THE next morning at seven he had me on the telephone.

"Are you still interested?" he asked, and his voice was nervous.

"That bird's been at it all night. Come and help me talk to the hotel management."

I needed no urging.

I found Beesley, the hotel manager, with Stoner; he was from St. Louis, and looked French.

"He can do it if he wants to," he said, shrugging his shoulders comically; "unless you complain of it as a disturbance."

"It isn't that," said Stoner; "there must be something wrong with the man."

"Some form of insanity—" I suggested; "or a compulsion neurosis."

"That's what I'll be pretty soon," Stoner said. "He is a queer gink anyway. As far as I have been able to find out, he has no close friends. There is something about his appearance that makes me shiver, his face is so wrinkled and droopy, and yet he sails about the streets with an unusually graceful and vigorous step. Loan me your pass key; I think I'm as close a friend of his as anyone."

Beesley lent the key, but Stoner was back in a few minutes, shaking his head. Beesley was expecting that; he told us that when the hotel was built, Anstruther had the doors made of steel with special bars, at his own expense, and the windows shuttered, as though he were afraid for his life.

"His rooms would be as hard to break into as a fort," Beesley said as he left us; "and thus far we do not have sufficient reason for wrecking the hotel."

"Look here!" I said to Stoner; "it will take me a couple of hours to hunt up the stuff and string up a periscope; it's an old trick I learned as a Boy Scout."

Between us we had it up in about that time; a radio aerial mast clamped on the window sill with mirrors at the top and bottom, and a telescope at our end of it, gave us a good view of the room below us. It was a sort of living room made by throwing together two of the regular-sized hotel rooms. Anstruther was walking across it diagonally, disappearing from our field of view at the further end, and coming back again. His head hung forward on his chest with a ghastly limpness. He was a big, well-built man, with a vigorous stride. Always it was the same path. He avoided the small table in the middle each time with exactly the same sort of side step and swing. His head bumped limply as he turned near the window and started back across the room. For two hours we watched him in shivering fascination, during which he walked with the same hideous uniformity.

"That makes thirty hours of this," said Stoner. "Wouldn't you say that there was something wrong?"

We tried another consultation with the hotel manager. As a physician, I advised that something be done; that he be put in a hospital or something. I was met with another shrug.

"How will you get him? I still do not see sufficient cause for destroying the hotel company's property. It will take dynamite to get at him."

He agreed, however, to a consultation with the police, and in response to our telephone call, the great, genial Chief Peter John Smith was soon sitting with us. He advised us against breaking in.

"A man has a right to walk that way if he wants to," he said. "Here's this fellow in the papers who played the piano for 49 hours, and the police didn't stop him; and in Germany they practice making public speeches for 18 hours at a stretch. And there was this Olympic dancing fad some months ago, where a couple danced for 57 hours."

"It doesn't look right to me," I said, shaking my head. "There seems to be something wrong with the man's appearance; some uncanny disease of the nervous system— Lord knows I've never heard of anything that resembles it!"

WE decided to keep a constant watch. I had to spend a little time on my patients, but Stoner and the Chief stayed, and agreed to call me if occasion arose. I peeped through the periscope at the walking man several times during the next twenty-four hours; and it was always exactly the same, the hanging, bumping head, the uniformity of his course, the uncanny, machine-like exactitude of his movements. I spent an hour at a time with my eye at the telescope studying his movements for some variation, but was unable to be certain of any.

That afternoon I looked up my neurology texts, but found no clues. The next day at four o'clock in the afternoon, after not less than 55 hours of it, I was there with Stoner to see the end of it; Chief Peter John Smith was out.

As we watched, we saw that he moved more and more slowly, but with otherwise identical motions. It had the effect of the slowed motion pictures of dancers or athletes; or it seemed like some curious dream; for as we watched, the sound of the steps through the ventilator also slowed and weakened. Then we saw him sway a little, and totter, as though his balance were imperfect. He swayed a few times and fell sidewise on the floor, we could see one leg in the field of our periscope moving slowly with the same movements as in walking, a slow, dizzy sort of motion. In five more minutes he was quite still.

The Chief was up in a few moments in response to our telephone call.

"Now we've got to break in," he said. Beesley shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Stoner came to the rescue of the hotel property. "A small man could go down this ventilator. This grill can be unscrewed, and the lower one can be knocked out with a hammer; it is cast-iron."

Beesley was gone like a flash, and soon returned with one of his window-washers, who was small and wiry, and also a rope and hammer. We took off the grill and held the rope as the man crawled in. He shouted to us as he hit the bottom. The air drew strongly downwards, but the blows of his hammer on the grill came up to us. We hurried downstairs. Not a sound came through the door of 216, and we waited for some minutes. Then there was a rattle of bars and the door opened, and a gust of cold wind struck us, with a putrid odor that made us gulp. The man had evidently run to open a window before coming to the door.

Anstruther lay on his side, with one leg straight and the other extended forward as in a stride; his face was livid, sunken, hideous. Stoner gave him a glance, and then scouted around the room— looking for the machinery he had been hearing, but finding none. The Chief and I also went over the rooms, but they were just conventional rooms, rather colorless and lacking in personality. The Chief called an undertaker and also the coroner, and arranged for a post mortem examination. I received permission to notify a number of professional colleagues; I wanted some of them to share in the investigation of this unusual case with me. As I was leaving, I could not help noting the astonished gasps of the undertaker's assistants as they lifted the body; but they were apparently too well trained to say anything.

THAT evening, a dozen physicians gathered around the figure covered with a white sheet on the table in the center of the undertaker's workroom. Stoner was there; a writer may be anywhere he chooses. The coroner was preparing to draw back the sheet.

"The usual medical history is lacking in this case," he said. "Perhaps an account by Dr. B. or his author friend, of the curious circumstances connected with the death of this man, may take its place."

"I can tell a good deal," said Stoner, "and I think it will bear directly on what you find when you open him up, even though it is not technical medical stuff. Do you care to hear it?"

"Tell it! Go on! Let's have it!"

"I have lived above him in the hotel for several months," Stoner began. "He struck me as a curious person, and as I do some writing, all mankind is my legitimate field for study. I tried to find out all I could about him.

"He has an office in the Little Building, and did a rather curious business. He dealt in vases and statuary, bookends and chimes, and things you put around in rooms to make them look artistic. He had men out buying the stuff, and others selling it, all by personal contact and on a very exclusive basis. He kept the stock in a warehouse near the Rock Island tracks where they pass the Ball Park; I do not believe that he ever saw any of it. He just sat in the office and signed papers, and the other fellows made the money; and apparently they made a lot of it, for he has swung some big financial deals in this town.

"I often met him in the lobby or the elevator. He was a big, vigorous man and walked with an unusually graceful step and an appearance of strength and vitality. His eyes seemed to light up with recognition when he saw me, but in my company he was always formal and reserved. For such a vigorous-looking man, his voice was singularly cracked and feeble, and his head gave an impression of being rather small for him, and his face old and wrinkled.

"He seemed fairly well known about the city. At the Eastridge Club they told me that he plays golf occasionally and excellently, and is a graceful dancer, though somehow not a popular partner. He was seen frequently at the Y.M.C.A. bowling alleys and played with an uncanny skill. Men loved to see him bowl for his cleverness with the balls, but wished he were not so formally courteous, and did not wear such an expression of complete happiness over his victories. Bridley, manager of Rudge & Guenzel's book department, was the oldest friend of his that I could find, and he gave me some interesting information. They went to school together, and Anstruther was poor in health as well as in finances. Twenty-five years ago, during the hungry and miserable years after his graduation from the University, Bridley remembered him as saying:

" 'My brain needs a body to work with. If I had physical strength, I could do anything. If I find a fellow who can give it to me, I'll make him rich!'

"Bridley also remembers that he was sensitive because girls did not like his debilitated physique. He seems to have found health later, though I can find no one who remembers how or when. About ten years ago he came back from Europe where he had been for several years, in Paris, Bridley thinks; and for

several years after this, a Frenchman lived with him. The city directory of that time has him living in the big stone house at 13th and 'G' streets. I went up there to look around, and found it a double house, Dr. Faubourg having occupied the other half. The present caretaker has been there ever since Anstruther lived in the house, and she says that his French companion must have been some sort of an engineer, and that the two must have been working on an invention, from the sounds she heard and the materials they had about. Some three or four years ago the Frenchman and the machinery vanished, and Anstruther moved to the Cornhusker Hotel. Also at about this time, Dr. Faubourg retired from the practice of medicine. He must have been about 50 years old, the man with the strange head and too healthy and vigorous to be retiring on account of old age or ill health.

"Apparently Anstruther never married. His private life was quite obscure, but he appeared much in public. He was always very courtly and polite to the ladies. Outside his business he took a great interest in Y.M.C.A. and Boy Scout camps, in the National Guard, and in fact in everything that stood for an outdoor, physical life, and promoted health. In spite of his oddity he was quite a hero with the small boys, especially since the time of his radium hold-up. This is intimately connected with the story of his radium speculation that caused such a sensation in financial circles a couple of years ago.

"About that time, the announcement appeared of the discovery of new uses for radium; a way had been found to accelerate its splitting and to derive power from it. Its price went up, and it promised to become a scarce article on the market. Anstruther had never been known to speculate, nor to tamper with sensational things like oil and helium; but on this occasion he seemed to go into a panic. He cashed in on a lot of securities and caused a small panic in the city, as he was quite wealthy and had especially large amounts of money in the building-loan business. The newspapers told of how he had bought a hundred thousand dollars worth of radium, which was to be delivered right here in Lincoln— a curious method of speculating, the editors volunteered.

"It arrived by express one day, and Anstruther rode the express wagon with the driver to the station. I found the driver and he told the story of the hold-up at 8th and 'P' streets at eleven o'clock at night. A Ford car drove up beside them, from which a man pointed a pistol at them and ordered them to stop. The driver stopped.

" 'Come across with the radium!' shouted the big black bulk in the Ford, climbing upon the express wagon. Anstruther's fist shot out like a flash of lightning and struck the arm holding the pistol; and the driver states that he heard the pistol crash through the window on the second floor of the Lincoln Hotel. Anstruther pushed the express driver, who was in his way, backwards over the seat among the packages and leaped upon the hold-up man; the driver

said he heard Anstruther's muscles crunch savagely, as with little apparent effort he flung the man over the Ford; he fell with a thud on the asphalt and stayed there. Anstruther then launched a kick at the man at the wheel of the Ford, who crumpled up and fell out of the opposite side of the car.

"The police found the pistol inside a room on the second floor of the Lincoln Hotel. The steering post of the Ford car was torn from its fastenings. Both of the hold-up men had ribs and collar- bones broken, and the gunman's forearm was bent double in the middle with both bones broken. These two men agreed later with the express driver that Anstruther's attack, for suddenness, swiftness, and terrific strength was beyond anything they had dreamed possible; he was like a thunderbolt; like some furious demon. When the two men were huddled in black heaps on the pavement, Anstruther said to the driver, quite impersonally: 'Drive to the police station. Come on! Wake up! I've got to get this stuff locked up!'

"One of the hold-up men had lost all his money and the home he was building when Anstruther had foreclosed a loan in his desperate scramble for radium. He was a Greek named Poulos, and has been in prison for two years; just last week he was released—"

Chief Peter John Smith interrupted.

"I've been putting two and two together, and I can shed a little light on this problem. Three days ago, the day before I was called to watch Anstruther pacing his room, we picked up this man Poulos in the alleyway between Rudge & Guenzel's and Miller & Paine's. He was unconscious, and must have received a terrible licking at somebody's hands; his face was almost unrecognizable; several ribs and several fingers on his right hand were broken. He clutched a pistol fitted with a silencer, and we found that two shots had been fired from it. Here he is—"

A limp, bandaged, plastered man was pushed in between two policemen. He was sullen and apathetic, until he caught sight of Anstruther's face from which the Chief had drawn a corner of the sheet. Terror and joy seemed to mingle in his face and in his voice. He raised his bandaged hand with an ineffectual gesture, and started the man with the strange head off on some Greek religious expression, and then turned dazedly to us, speaking painfully through his swollen face.

"Glad he dead. I try to kill him. Shoot him two time. No kill. So close—" indicating the distance of a foot from his chest; "then he lick me. He is not man. He is devil. I not kill him, but I glad he dead!"

The Chief hurried him out, and came in with a small, dapper man with a black chin whisker. He apologized to the coroner.

"This is not a frame-up. I am just following out a hunch that I got a few minutes ago while Stoner was talking. This is Mr. Fournier. I found his address in

Anstruther's room, and dug him up. I think he will be more important to you doctors than he will in a court. Tell 'em what you told me!"

While the little Frenchman talked, the undertaker's assistant jerked off the sheet. The undertaker's work had had its effect in getting rid of the frightful odor, and in making Anstruther's face presentable. The body, however, looked for all the world as though it were alive, plump, powerful, pink. In the chest, over the heart, were two bullet holes, not bloody, but clean-cut and black. The Frenchman turned to the body and worked on it with a little screw-driver as he talked.

"Mr. Anstruther came to me ten years ago, when I was a poor mechanic. He had heard of my automatic chess-player, and my famous animated show-window models; and he offered me time and money to find him a mechanical relief for his infirmity. I was an assistant at a Paris laboratory, where they had just learned to split radium and get a hundred horse-power from a pinch of powder. Anstruther was weak and thin, but ambitious."

The Frenchman lifted off two plates from the chest and abdomen of the body, and the flanks swung outward as though on hinges. He removed a number of packages that seemed to fit carefully within, and which were on the ends of cables and chains.

"Now—" he said to the assistants, who held the feet. He put his hands into the chest cavity, and as the assistants pulled the feet away, he lifted out of the shell a small, wrinkled emaciated body; the body of an old man, which now looked quite in keeping with the well-known Anstruther head. Its chest was covered with dried blood, and there the man with the strange head were two bullet holes over the heart. The undertaker's assistants carried it away while we crowded around to inspect the mechanism within the arms and legs of the pink and live-looking shell, headless, gaping at the chest and abdomen, but uncannily like a healthy, powerful man.

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10: The Pearl Men

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Port Adelaide News 6 Feb 1925

THEY ARE ALL strong men, these pearl-getters; hardy, wiry, lean, with an odd swagger about than, as of one who calls no man his master. And they have eyes like bits of mineral; eyes that throw a stone in your face. Maddox had been cheated of romance; and this was the fashion of it. The smell of the Manchester goods in Wargrave & Musterton's had turned him side; the jokes of the young gentlemen in the adjoining "hosiery" after four years of hosiery, calico smells, and japes— had made him feel murderous. And there were shining advertisements in *Sydney Morning Herald*, about the Islands.

Most of the young calico clerks in Sydney feel that they could live splendidly, widely in the Islands. Maddox not only felt, he resolved. Besides, *She* had thrown him over .

He wondered if the days of Bully Hayes and his were really dead. To come sailing down on a terrified island town in one's own swift schooner; to hold it up in some brilliantly alarming but quite non-criminal way; to find a faithless woman making a honeymoon tour with a perfect beast, carry them both away, spare her nobly; but maroon him on some barren spot, like Tahiti or Honolulu, where he would be eaten or starved to death— It all shone in Maddox's eyes.

You will have diagnosed that he was not yet twenty years of age. Scott Philipson's, the Island firm, knew he was lying when gave himself twenty-one; but they did not care. They were used to the youth who practically runs away from home and Maddox, with an eye and a half on Romance, was not particular about wages: Scott Philipson's are Lowland Scotch. Australia— unkindly— says that they would hunt a halfpenny to hell. They will certainly hunt it to the Line, which is very much the same.

So they took young Maddox at a much-too-little salary, and told him he was to sail for New Guinea on Tuesday afternoon. Maddox went out, drunk with the glory of the round world. The notices in Scott Philipson's windows— "Dealers in Pearls, Pearlshell, Tortoise-shell, Copra, Ivory, Nuts, Fungus, and All Island Produce"— sang in his brain. He could have kissed the boots of the third mate coming out of the private office.

The man was no older than himself, but he rolled as if the head offices of Scott Philipson and Company, Limited, were a ship, and his ship at that; he had a face of mahogany, he looked as if he could swear terribly, and throw belaying-pins— Maddox was not sure what they were, but they were in all Clark Russell's books— at fierce and mutinous crews.

Maddox felt crowned with glory when the young officer gave him a snatch at his request, and afterwards— at his request, and also at his cost— drank three whiskies in the Marble Bar. He asked the officer to tell him tales of the Islands. The officer did. They were all about copra, and cargo, and Maddox did not find them interesting.

But, nevertheless, he was convinced that Romance awaited him in Port Moresby. The first sight of the town hit him like a blow. New Guinea is, all in all, one of the loveliest countries in the world, but is dissembles its loveliness successfully, if you enter by the capital.

Instead of the green isles and gleaming shores that he had expected, the young man, as the dawn broke on the port and town, was confronted by a dry-burned circle of hills, colored like, the pictures of Palestine in cheap Sunday school books. There were some palms, but they looked sick. There was a singularly ugly little town, thrown about at random on the hills. And there was a largish store with an iron roof, where he was to work.

In Scott Philipson's store building , the heat was worse than it had ever been in Wargrave & Musterton's; the young men who served were twin brothers of the Manchester and hosiery assistants from whom he had fled. There was even the old smell of calicoes. And there was another agony. Through the windows of the store, all day, one looked out upon a wide blue floor of sea; one saw white ships come into port; one heard the rattle of anchor chains and the hailing calls of captains and of mates; "Pearl ahoy!" "*Ysabel*! *Ysabel*! *Ysabel*! *Ysabel* dinghy!". In Wargrave & Musterton's, the passing-trams on which one looked from the "Manchester" caused no such pangs. They were not Romance. Romance within the length of your arm and hopelessly out of reach.

Maddox began to realise that Port Moresby, ugly and citified as it was, had all the romance of wonderful New Guinea circulating through it; and through Scott Philipson's flowed one of the biggest current;—out of his reach.

Past his counter strange men would roll into the head office; the door would be left open, New Guinea fashion, for coolness, and Maddox would see the men haul bundles of gold dust, tied up in pieces of moleskin trousers, out of their pockets; produce pearls that clicked with a lovely sound, and spill out gold and gems on the manager's broad desk. Maddox had seen the manager scoop up pearls in a brass bank shovel— scoop it up full and rattling. The sight moved him strangely.

They were all strong men, these pearl-getters, gold-gatherers, hardy, wiry, lean, with an odd swagger about them, as of one who called no man his better or his master. And they had eyes like bits of mineral; eyes that threw a stone in your face.

Maddox, staying behind one day at lunch hour to tidy up some boxes, went to the big window in the harbor window, and stared at himself.

It struck him, not suddenly, but slowly— if a thing can strike slowly— that he was not of the breed of the clerks. The clerk race is the same the whole world over— in Melbourne, in London, in Port Moresby.

It clerks because it was born to; it is narrowish in the shoulder, fattish in the hip, and when you look it in the face you see the nose, first of all, and realise the chin last, Maddox noticed that his chin showed first, and that his neck ran in straight lines, down from the ear. It seemed significant to him, but he could not tell why. It was also significant that his body had lines different from those of the men who sold tinned butter and shirts in his company. He seemed to taper more. He looked as if his waist had better hinges to it.

Of course, he had always been strong; he knew that— but it had never seemed to do him any good— even in the matter of Her. She had married, the tubby forty-year-old with the money that She always does marry.

It didn't seem concerned with Her, somehow: Maddox looked again, and quietly, clearly recognised his family. He was of the breed of the wilderness men. The men of the gold and the pearls and the tortoiseshell. The men who ran schooners of their own and had fights with wild cannibals away down in the Purari end. He wasn't a clerk by nature. He was not meant to have an employer. Heaven, how he hated the name of employer! How he had always hated it, without knowing! He knew now.

And there was no way out. He could not save ten shillings a month from his wages. He could not break his way into the independent life, the man's life, without capital. People would only laugh at him. When you were twenty, everyone laughed at you. Maddox damned something— he did not know what— and went out to lunch.

At two o'clock the pearl buyer came in to purchase a tie. Pearl buyers are not like pearl getters; they are smallish men with dark hair that inclines to curl, and to be damp. They dress well, and have wary, agreeable eyes that tell nothing. They never have Hebrew names: The buyer was named, or called, Macallum. He turned over the ties.

Maddox asked him idly if he were doing well.

"Middling—middling," said Macallum of the curly hair. He never acknowledged to more than middling. "Not so many pearls this time, but I've got a fair quality of Emma-pea."

Maddox couldn't imagine what he meant. The buyer went on talking.

"Emma-pea isn't as good as it used to be," he said. "I used to get some fine stuff Samarai way, worth nearer two hundred than one. They used to bring me some good blisters in the Emma-pea. We speculated. Took it as it was and gave as much as a thousand pounds for one. Just chanced it; you see, might be one in it, or might not, and once we got— ah! Barker of Cape York outdid us. He got

the Northern Star— Emma-pea! Worth anything you like to Macallum," said the general manager, popping a genial head round the corner of his glass loose-box.

The buyer pocketed his tie, called "Charge it," and hurried off, leaving Maddox wild with curiosity.

What on earth was the Emma-pea that owned such startling characteristics?

The manager sent him out that afternoon to tally off a number of pearl-less. When the great, bumpy sacks smelling of sea and fish, were stored away in the shellhouse.

Maddox gathered up courage to ask the schooner captain who was delivering the goods what the meaning of Emma-pea might be. The captain looked at him with screwed-up twinkling eyes, and then roared with laughter.

"Yer gettin 'at us!" he said; and strolled off to Ryan's bar.

Maddox tried again. He asked the head accountant.

"About a hundred fifty-five," said the accountant.

"But what is it?" persisted Maddox.

"If you want the private affairs of the firm told you, go and ask the G.M., not me. A hundred and fifty-five will do you," said the accountant suspiciously; and strolled away.

Maddox felt as if the world were going mad. In the afternoon the Sydney steamer sailed. It gave him a good deal of extra work, and, for the time being, he was obliged to neglect the Emma-pea. But he kept the idea in his head, and decided that he would look up Macallum as soon as business was over. Somehow— he didn't know how— he felt that this business of the Emma-pea concerned himself. There was a memory floating half-submerged in dark caves of his mind, a recollection of something seen. What? Where?

At five o'clock the bell jangled out and stores were closed.

Maddox made straight for the hotel. Everyone was to be found there, if you only waited long enough. They told him that Macallum had sailed by the Sydney boat. He came out again into the thunder blues and yellows of a steaming north-west afternoon. The sky seemed to sit down on his head, like the lid of an iron pot. The smell of frangipani flowers was poisonously sweet. He was a day in which there seemed to be no hope of anything. Maddox did not specify. But he began to understand why the Port Moresby man so often drinks to excess.

Lepper, the driver and engineer, came swinging down the hill, one hand on his hip. Lepper was as thin as a rake. He had roving blue eyes, and looked the devil of a fellow, instead of which he was successfully married and loved cats. Maddox, moved by a sudden inspiration, asked him what was Emma-pea.

"Shell," said Lepper, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his lip. "Pearl shell— mother-of-pearl— M. O. P."

He had a salt-water, piratical way with him. Maddox felt he must know things, but something in that dark cave at the back of his mind told him not to

talk. He went home to his disagreeable cheap boarding-house, sat on his bed till dinner, and thought He recalled every word of Macallum's speech.

Blisters in the M. O. P. A thousand pounds.

He could not put it together. He knew that blister and baroque pearls were not worth much every white woman in Port Moresby had one or two as big as your little finger, set in cheap brooches or bracelets. Then why? And, also, what— what was it he was trying to remember?

He drifted down to Lepper's that night. If anyone knew, Lepper would; and yet one could not ask him. The groping half-memory of something seen somewhere forbade. But, as it happened, it had no need to ask. He mentioned the Star of the North by accident, and instantly, as if a lock-gate had been lifted, his host burst into a flood of pearling talk.

Did he know the Star? Did he not? Had he not handled it, weighed and appraised it? Had he not been there, at Broome, W.A., when they got it? Why, he'd been down a score of times over the very spot where Barker, owner of the Star, had got it! He had shell at that very minute—

Lepper sprang to his feet and darted into another room. seemed to jump or dart, instead of walking like other men. His eyes were burning wide when he came back; his mouth was still open ready to begin again.

"There," he said, dashing down pearl shell as big as a dinner-plate on the table. "Look at that! Thick as your thumb, perfect shape. No waste. Shine on it almost as good as a pearl. That, my boy, came off the bed where the Star was got. That's the sort of shell they get things like the Star out of. Sometimes loose, sometimes, like the Star, inside of a blister. The right kind of a blister, of course."

"What's— what's the right kind?" asked Maddox.

His heart had, in defiance of anatomical laws, begun to beat in the top of his head. He couldn't speak quite easily; he hoped that no one noticed. A remembrance and an idea had struck him, together, right in the wind.

"The right kind?" chatted Lepper delightedly. "Why, of course, the right kind has got that nice, even sort of bump on it, like a big gumboil, you know— that's common baroque. Inside the big gumboil you may get things like the Star. Wish I could."

He lit a fifth cigarette, and began to. smoke it fast and excitedly.

Maddox treading carefully, ventured on delicate ground.

"Do people," he asked, clearing his throat nervously— "do people in general— I mean, people who aren't in the trade— know that?"

"Why not?" said Lepper absently. "But the Star of the North; I must tell you about Barker, and what he—"

Mrs. Lepper, a slender, well-figured woman, with intelligent brown eyes, joined in the conversation. She had been silent hitherto.

"I do not believe people in general do know about that kind of pearl," she said. Her clever eyes dropped, and fixed themselves on her embroidery.

"Why?" she suddenly asked.

Maddox was within a breath of answering, as he recognised with horror the moment after. The question had been so quick and so clever. Already his path was set about with peril; it was just like the books

"I must get out of this," he said to himself. He made some excuse, and hurried, with a sense of relief, into the windy, starry night, and the scent of frangipani, and the wet, mossy smell of the coral reef, that lay bare beneath a wide, full moon. On its outer wall the sea was fretting and combing, and pearl white in the moonlight.

"Oh, yes," said Maddox, "I'm listening to you, my beauty. I'll answer you some day soon. But the wedding ring must be of gold, beauty. Wait, wait—it won't be long." He was so uplifted, though there had been only coffee at Lepper's, that he sang as he walked down the wide main road of the town. Nobody noticed him. There is much wild music in the streets of Port Moresby o' nights, though it is not usually inspired by coffee.

The next day was Saturday. Maddox got a horse when the stores closed at one, and started out on the main road to Sapphire Creek. Near the Creek, as he remembered quite clearly now, there was a little humpy where he had once stopped for a drink of water, when making a weekend excursion with some of the other men. There had been a queer old gold-miner living in the humpy, a man who had given up digging through age and weakness, but who had apparently acquired enough, first of all, to keep him in rough bush comfort for the rest of his days.

Maddox remembered that his house was cool and pleasant; built of native stuff, with packing-case furniture; decorated with big red and yellow Papuan shells. There had been a group of them in a rather dark and dusty corner—balers, trumpets, helmets, green "snail" trocus and a few big flat pearl shells. And on one of the big pearl shells— Maddox remembered it with absolutely photographic clearness— there had been— there certainly had been— a big, smooth swelling "like a gumboil."

He wondered, as the horse joggled on over the glaring, rough red road among the shadeless eucalyptus trees, how it was that he had been the only one to notice it.

Two answers immediately presented themselves. Once he had dropped a shilling, and gone down on his knees to recover it; the shells were low, and near the floor. Two people in general did not know what a boil of that kind meant— a gold miner in especial never knew anything except gold; probably this old chap was just like the rest. It would be easy to—

He broke off short. He had ridden for several hours, and the sun was low, and in the yellow level light one could see a long way off across the grassy plain. And in the nearer distance, just where the miner's humpy lay, a little procession was turning out upon the main road. It consisted of four white men, carrying something two white men walking behind.

Maddox spurred his horse, and cantered briskly forward. He knew, long before he overtook the little procession, that it was carrying a coffin.

"Who's dead?" he called out, as soon as he was within earshot.

"Old Croker," answered one of the bearers. "The digger, you know. We're going to bury him among those eucalyptuses. Seems a nice shady sort of place for the beggar to lie in

"Who's at the hut?" asked Maddox walking his horse alongside. He had noted a finger of smoke.

"His wife."

"Wife? Had he one?"

"Seems so. She ran a hash-house in Port— wouldn't acknowledge him. He was a little daffy, certainly, poor old chap. She came out here yesterday when we sent in word. He winked out last night."

"Isn't she going to see him buried?"

"Not much. Too busy throwing out his things, looking for gold, reckon."

Maddox felt an odd, seasick qualm. b as he going to lose his chance— his prize? He hurried the horse up to the doorway of the hut, and, to his stupefaction, beheld his own landlady inside, very busy turning over boxes, bed, and kitchenware. He had known she was away, but—

"That tartar!" he murmured uneasily. "I wonder has she—"

Mrs. Croker, commonly known as Jennings— she was more or less married again, without leave from the law— hailed her boarder loudly. She rather liked Maddox; he was absent-minded about extras in the bills, and never broke the furniture—never even got into a furniture-breaking condition.

"My old Number One's gone," she explained casually. "Coming to take over his things. Cripes, but he kept the place dirty. He was always like that. I've been heaving rubbish into the creek for—"

"What did you throw?" asked Maddox, aghast For now he could see well inside, and there was not a single shell remaining.

"Cleared out that dirty mess of shells, first thing," said the landlady. "Threw them into the deep hole. They smelt like the devil. He couldn't have rotted them out proper before he put them up. Like him. Lazy brute he always was."

"What about my camping here for the night?" asked Maddox. He had an idea.

"All the same to me," answered the woman indistinctly, holding one end of a tablecloth in her teeth as she shook it out. "You can do your own cookin'."

"Oh, I'll attend on my— Well, I think I'll hobble the horse, and go down the creek for a swim. Is that hole a good place?"

"Not unless you want to get your head bit off! Why, man, this part of the creek is fair hopping with alligators. You can see them in the shallow; but it ain't none too safe bathing anywhere."

"Then I won't," said Maddox. "I think I'll go back to Port."

"But I'm not beaten," he added to himself. "There is a way. There has just got to be a way!"

He returned that evening to Port Moresby. Mrs. Croker stayed behind. She wanted to satisfy herself beyond all question that her late husband had not hidden away any gold. It may be mentioned, briefly, that if he did, neither Mrs. Croker nor anyone else has yet found it.

Maddox, a certain purpose crystallising in his mind, went, on Monday morning, into the native trade department and chose certain things from the goods supplied to Papuans— one long sheath-knife of good Sheffield steel, double-edged for most of its length; one pair of water glasses such as the pearl divers use. They are like motor goggles, fitting close round the orbit of the eye— they keep out water, and allow the wearer to see, through the glasses, as clearly as if he were on land.

He took them down to the open-air swimming baths during lunch hour, and tried them. He was fascinated with the clearness of sight they gave under water. Incidentally, he did a quarter of an hour's practice in under-water swimming.

There was difficulty about getting away. He could not wait until Saturday; a flood in Sapphire Creek might sweep away his hopes. He could not ask for a holiday on "urgent private affairs," because no one in Port Moresby has any private affairs, the mere whisper of such a thing being enough to set half the town staring and spying. (You must not judge it too hardly; it has no theatres, and only one picture show a week.) He could not tell a lie— and pretend illness— it seemed unlucky, if no worse. For the second time he simply walked out. If he lost his job, why, he lost it.

Already Maddox, coming to his own, had begun to feel the world firm underneath his foot. Only while you cling all-fours to the One Job is life a perilous quagmire. Let go long enough to put your foot well down, and behold, the fathomless swamp is but ankle-deep.

Nevertheless, the pinch came sharply on Tuesday afternoon, when he stood in front of the creek, looked at it, and realised just what was before him. Up to this Maddox had sold calicoes, had gone to town hall dances, and to picnics down Sydney Harbor, had travelled on trams, and lived soft and easy. He had not wanted the softness and easiness, they were no choice of his— nevertheless, they clung to him, now that he was shivering in the raw air of the real rough man s world, and made him hesitate.

It was quite extraordinarily unpleasant to think of stripping, tying on the glasses and the knife, and diving into the creek hole to get that shell— among the alligators. Of course any Papuan native would have done it without a moment's hesitation. Maddox wondered if it might not be better to— There was a village not far away. Should he—

He stood on the bank of the creek, looking at the drooping pandanus palms that were glassed in the dark of the pool, and hating the job. Then it suddenly occurred to him that the life he had wanted— the wild, adventurous, outdoor life that this piece of luck was to give him— would be made up of many things hard and unpleasant.

It came upon him with force that adventures were really dangerous. Not dangerous in a sort of romantic picture show fashion, but actually. You might get hurt, you might get killed. That was what adventures were. Of course, he had known it all along, but he had not realised it—until the moment when he stood in the cool-smelling shades of Sapphire Creek, looking at the pool where the pearlshell lay.

In that moment it was Maddox's husky shoulders that saved him— they, and his straight set neck and boot-tie chin. Youth will always dream of adventure, but youth's spirit, unless it is horsed on a good, galloping sort of body, will soon faint by the way. Maddox's body was of the galloping kind, and when he touched it with the spur, it went. He was amazed to find how cool he felt, pulling off the clothes that he might never put on again, and belting the knife round his waist. He fastened on the goggles carefully, lay down for a minute on the edge of the pool, and peered with his head under water.

He could see a pebbly bottom, about ten feet down, covered with reddish and yellowish things that seemed to waver in the slow current of the stream. Was there anything white among them? He thought there was. He was almost sure.

Anyhow, it was amazingly light down there, and there was not a sign of an alligator. His spirits went up. After all, people made too much fuss about alligators in this country. When had anyone ever heard of a white man being taken by one? Natives, of course— one supposed it was because they weren't careful— but of whites, he could only, remember the vague tale of the explorer Flood, and of the half-caste— if you could call him white— who was knocked out of a boat by an alligator in Cloudy Bay, and torn to pieces before anyone could get at him. It was a nasty story— but those estuarine alligators— crocodiles properly— were notably worse than the river kind.

There was no use in frightening oneself. One was going through with it He hit the water at just the right angle— Maddox had always been a neat diver— and kept on down to the bottom, swimming at a slant.

Balanced on head and hands, his neck bent back, the current of the river dragging at his legs till they wavered like seaweed, he scanned the pebbly bottom. Jove, those goggles were good! It was like having the eyes of a fish. Shells here, bits of broken china there, shells again. A hole in the bank, with an ugly face looking out of it. How long could he keep down? That was a pearl shell—a small flat one—not the one he Under the big clam— something shining like a crescent moon—now to scramble with the hands— how hard it was to keep down!

Hold the breath, hold the breath. Getting it, almost got—

Heavens, what was that? He had heard nothing— one could not hear under the smothering blanket of the water. He had seen nothing— nothing at all, save trembling river plants, that looked like green crystal, rainbow-edged, and the ell face, and the shells. But all of a sudden, he was deadly afraid. His body, that had been serving his will so meekly, under hard stress, revolted, tore loose from the spirit's control, and protested so madly against something unbearable, unknown, that, like a bolting horse, it was away with him before he realised the fact.

His head burst into warm air; he smelt the burned smell of the Laloki plains as he drew in a huge, panting breath. His hands were clutching at the weeds and slush of the bank— one hand was impeded— by what? Oh, the shell; he had brought it, after all. Feet in the mud— on the dry hot bank— safe!

The warm feel of the grass under his stomach made him realise that he lying flat and exhausted. He still could not think very clearly. What had made him do a bolt like that?

A remembrance came to his mind—of a friend who had gone bathing near Sydney with him in the Parramatta River. There are sharks in the Parramatta, but if you go high enough up, they do not trouble. Maddox and his friend had thought they were quite high enough. There was a deep hole in the river; they had not swum across it, but gone round.

"Somehow," said the friend, "I feel as if I oughtn't to. I can't say why. It seems silly, don't it?"

Maddox agreed that it was silly, but neither of them crossed. A week after, the friend, swimming alone, was seen by a man on the bank to throw up his arms, just over the deep hole, and go down with a yell. Blood spread over, the water. They never found his body.

"Perhaps." thought Maddox, panting like a frog on the grass, "there's something that warns us."

He was getting back his senses. "There must be some curious plants here," he thought "Scented plants; it's very strong; I don't quite like it"

He sat up, and turned the pearl shell over in his hands. It was as he had remembered; there was a magnificent big swelling on one edge— large, smooth, and even— "like a gumboil in the pearl."

"Hooray," said the boy in Maddox's young soul. "I might as well dress," he thought, "this sun will fry me alive. Why, that smell is actually getting stronger. Where does it come from?"

He whirled round, sitting on the slippery grass, and saw a log, a grey, blunt-ended log, sticking out of the creek, just where he had emerged. He could not remember that log. He stared at it— And, as he stared it quietly, without any hurry, slid back, back into the water, and went down. And Maddox knew what the strong, thick scent had meant And he knew what the fear was that had driven his revolting, terrified body out of the creek hole against the orders of the ignorant mind.

"Heaven!" he said. It was almost a prayer.

He got up and moved a few yards further from the creek. It took him some time to recover this second shock, but by and by, feeling better, he proceeded to put on his clothes. Holding his precious shell in his hand he strolled down the creekside, taking care not to walk very near the edge.

There was a horse asleep under a tree further down; he wondered if it wasn't Sultan, the Government stallion, who had got away from the stud farm a day or two earlier, and was being hunted for all over the Laloki country.

Sultan was a bright bay. This horse was a bright bay. Probably it was he, but why was he lying down with his neck stretched out to the creek— almost in it? And where was his head? It seemed to be in a hole.

It was not in a hole. Sultan was lying dead, and he had no head at all, and his neck was red and torn, and ripped into the water.

"Why, he can't have been dead ten minutes!" said Maddox feeling the great corpse. "He's still warm. If I'd come up a little sooner— or walked round this way before I tried the hole— the poor brute would have been alive now."

Then he realised that if Sultan had been alive, he undoubtedly would not— so close a call had it been between the two victims of the alligator.

"It kept him away for a minute," thought Maddox, "but he was coming—" When he got back to town he reported the discovery of Sultan.

"Now, that's too bad," said the Government official. "We were going to dynamite some of those pools to morrow, by permission of the governor."

"Dynamite? What for?"

"To kill an alligator or two. They damage the stock badly. Dynamiting rivers is against the law, but you can get a permit."

"And can you kill them with dynamite?"

"Yes; as easy as falling off a log. What are you looking like that for?"

"Because I'm a dashed fool," said Maddox.

"Have it your own way," said the Government official, and went off, staring.

Maddox was reprimanded by the manager, and said nothing at all. He intended to keep his job till Macallum came back. That would be in a week. Macallum had only gone down to Thursday Island on a flying trip.

At night he used to get out the shell and stare at it. He had suffered at first from qualms of conscience on the subject of Mrs. Croker— though a thing you threw away into a river was surely not yours any more— until he heard from the Anglican clergyman that the lady had been bigamously married to Croker, with full knowledge of a pre-existing wife in a bar in West Australia. The Anglican clergyman was rather sore on the point, and thought she ought to be made an example of, if anybody had evidence enough. It seemed that no one had, or that people preferred to let the matter rest in the grave of Croker. But Maddox felt now that . he could hug his pearl in perfect content "

He felt horribly tempted to get at it: He longed to see it, to feel it roll out from its prison into his trembling palm, and throw back for the first time in its existence the light from its shining face.

He wondered face. if it were as good as the famous Star, which had come out of just such a blister on just such a shell. He hated the idea of black-curled Macallum taking all the profit. Why not get at it somehow— anyhow— himself, and sell it for the many, many thousands it must be worth? Macallum had never given more than a thousand in a gamble of that kind. Why let him gamble?

If Maddox had had any idea how one extracted a pearl, fragile, worth thousands of pounds, from solid block of pearl shell without damage, he would undoubtedly have tried to make the acquaintance of his treasure long before Macallum's boat was due. It seemed almost unbearable to sleep every night with a fortune under his head and not be able to look at it. But he was withheld— only just— by a fear that he might spoil the thing. And then he would want to kill himself. No, best to wait for Macallum.

In the meantime, the manager gave him notice for want of attention to his work. And Maddox, not in the least heart-broken, dreamed through business hours, an spent his leisure time gazing at the smaller ships in the harbor with a lover's eye. How soon would he have the right to possess one of those beauties?

A captain— Tombazis his papers called him, Knives-and-Dynamite his mates named him, because of his Greek father and Irish mother and the disposition he inherited from the two— saw Maddox wandering about one afternoon, and asked him, with strange oaths of the sea, what he was looking for.

"I have a friend who wants to buy a small ship. I— he wants me to see a few for him first," explained Maddox, feeling horribly like the women who used to wear his life out in the Manchesters. They were always "looking for a friend."

The captain, who did not believe Maddox in the least, slapped a hand into his, and said he had come to the right place. Jack Sanders, who owned the

Ysabel there— that tight little schooner— had just been speared by the natives up the Fly, and the Government would be selling his boat. A word from him in the ear of a certain official, and Maddox would have first choice. The Government blokes would one and all of them eat out of his hand. It was wonderful how much they thought of his opinion. Everyone thought a lot of his opinion. If poor Sanders had had more senses and listened to what he— Tombazis— told him, he'd have had a fortune in pearlshell on shares with him, instead of being eat up the Fly.

"Have you been pearling with the *Ysabel*?" asked Maddox eagerly.

"My oath," agreed the captain, swaying slightly on his feet as if the Government jetty were a ship at sea. "And will again, if she gets an owner who knows what she's fit for. There's a fortune down at— down at various sorts of places. If I had command of her, and a few likely divers—"

"If I— any friend buys the *Ysabel* I'll see you get command," broke in Maddox, half drunk with the feeling of power.

"No doubt, my boy, no doubt," said the captain kindly, clapping him on the back with a hand like a leg of mutton. Maddox had a feeling that Tombazis was being indulgent to his supposed weakness. He wore the suit of a man who has heard many lies told, and tolerates them out of good-heartedness.

The conversation ended as all conversations in Port Moresby do end—

"?"— "I don't mind if I do."

Two days later Maddox signed a tightly drawn agreement before Bertie the lawyer, and gave up his chance of many thousand to the dark-eyed, patient Macallum. He did not know whether he wanted most to scream with anguish, or shriek with joy, when he closed his hand round a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds. He thought he must feel very much as a man did when he signed the. marriage register with his bride, for good or ill, there was no going back now.

"Show it to me, won't you?" he pleaded. "I'd simply love to have look at it. It must be a bosker one."

"Oh, you can't swear there's anything there at all," declared Macallum. "But I'll get at it to-night if you like. Come over to my room when I send."

Maddox, half crazy with mixed emotions, went as soon as the telephone summoned him. He found the little pearl buyer seated under a powerful incandescent lamp, chipping away at the shell with a delicate punch. There was a line of small holes round the blister.

"She's nearly through now. I wanted you to come and see so that there can be no deception," he explained. "The top will be off in another— ah!"

"Where is it—where is it?" asked Maddox wildly. He thought there must be something wrong with his eyes. Macallum had just lifted off the tiny lid of pearl shell, and exposed the cavity underneath. The pearl! Where was the pearl? It was very funny but he couldn't see it. Macallum dropped his hands. The glare

from the lamp shone on his shrewd, calm face. He did not seem at all upset. He was even smiling— a resigned little smile.

"You win," he said. "There isn't any pearl."

WHEN the *Ysabel* cleared Port Moresby Harbor, with all her papers in order, and the owner and the master on board, it was a spumy, rainy day; but to Maddox the heavens were full of sunshine, and invisible birds sang songs. He had done what not one man in twenty thousand does— not one lad in twenty million— He had got his wish. Sometimes— though not to me nor to you— the Fates are really kind.

Tombazis, quite sober and as deferential as anyone could expect him to be— which was not saying much— steered the *Ysabel* through the reef, humming "Blow the Man Down."

The wind answered him and screamed from the open sea.

"You'll have to change her name," he said to Maddox, spitting in a manner which the owner of the ship felt to be entirely nautical. "She didn't have no luck with that Sanders. Unlucky beggar he was anyhow, or he wouldn't have got eat. What d'ye think of calling her? Some nice girl's name. One of your Sydney gals." He whistled melodiously "I'll go no more a-roving with you, fair maid."

Maddox thought for a moment. She— he had not thought of her in quite a little while— had had a pretty name, Viola. Should he call his beauty the Viola?

"I'm hanged if I will," he muttered to himself.

"What was it you said?" asked Tombazis. "What name?"

Maddox opened his mouth and spoke distinctly against the sheering blast.

"I'll call her," he said, "the *Emma P*."

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11: The Horror of the Heights

(Which Includes the Manuscript Known as the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment)

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

The Strand Magazine Nov 1913

In: *Danger!* 1918

THE IDEA that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most *macabre* and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforce the statement. Though the assertions contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation. This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R.N., and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent and Sussex border. It was on the fifteenth of September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chauntry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock. A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The notebook was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H. Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognised the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned

with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be gathered from other sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air-pilots of England. For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscopic attachment which is known by his name. The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible— exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving aeroplane. There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the outside cover, which have been pronounced by the Home Office experts to be blood— probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year. He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than any one, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen, Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: "And where, pray, is Myrtle's head?"

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the Flying School on Salisbury Plain, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airmen will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show

that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked note-book:—

NEVERTHELESS, when I dined at Rheims with Coselli and Gustav Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone— always presuming that my premonitions are correct.

Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been immeasurably raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district.

It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, every one said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First, there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne, but they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the

machine, which was at an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything. There were several other similar cases, and then there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the halfpenny papers, and yet how little was ever done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous vol-plané from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot's seat. Died of what? 'Heart disease,' said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor's heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. 'Died of fright,' said Venables, but could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like 'Monstrous.' They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he *did* die of fright, just as Venables thought.

And then there was Myrtle's head. Do you really believe— does anybody really believe— that a man's head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed that it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes— 'all slimy with grease,' said somebody at the inquest. Queer that nobody got thinking after that! I did— but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time. I've made three ascents— how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun!— but I've never been high enough. Now, with this new light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand to-morrow. I'll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it's dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I'll visit the air-jungle to-morrow— and if there's anything there I shall know it. If I return, I'll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don't, this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please.

I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There's nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing, it doesn't mind damp, and the weather looks as if we should be in the clouds all the time. It's a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements— enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian-

blind principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot. You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded boots, a storm-cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part. Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I should if I were using the biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show— if you want to get the last foot of lift out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered— or both.

I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then, with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow down wind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud-bank above me. It's all-important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

"It was a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west— one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger— before we learned to put an overmastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud-banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action— a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full, deep-throated purr— the ten singing as one. That's where the beauty of our modern silencers comes in. We can at last control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the early aviators could come back to see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which have been bought at the cost of their lives!

About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half-a-dozen flying machines were doing hackwork at the thousand-foot level, looking like little

black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud-land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapour were swirling round my face. It was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards. My sopped and dripping wings had made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in lighter cloud, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second— opal-coloured and fleecy— at a great height above my head, a white unbroken ceiling above, and a dark unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small water-birds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whirr of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud-stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westward. The wind had been steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze— twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out into a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head— all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach. It was a quarter past ten o'clock, and the barograph needle pointed to twelve thousand eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pumNo wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down wind at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I hadalways to turn again and tack up in the wind's eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay, and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harp-strings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky. There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose— rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbours have called a *tourbillon*, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I have spoken had, as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment's warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun round for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet. It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half-insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort— it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out of the eddies and was skimming down the sky. Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady

grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the danger-spot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of that peculiar nausea which goes with rarefaction of the air. For the first time I unscrewed the mouth of my oxygen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I soared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

It is very clear to me that the insensibility which came upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero Fahrenheit. At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the surface of the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my planes, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent missfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something whizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is for ever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth's envelope the risk would be a very real one.

My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no farther. Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear, but my machine had reached its limit. The attenuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still

missfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action. If I had not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring in circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers which I had imagined.

I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new air-tract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen— nothing but the distant silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for more than another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent vol-plané could at any time take me to the earth.

Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to very fine cigarette-smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil upon my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind when my eyes looked upwards and I saw the most wonderful vision that ever man has seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size— far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul's. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsated with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

I had half-turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of

all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the toThere was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely iridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me, a wonderful fairy squadron of strange, unknown argosies of the sky— creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon— the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them. These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

But a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles, and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy-up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of prey which is waiting to pounce. Its method of progression— done so swiftly that it was not easy to

follow— was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a vol-piqué, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I disengaged myself, but only to be caught round the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on to my back.

As I fell over I blazed off both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that mighty bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature's back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared to attempt, my engine still full on, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite. Far behind me I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious spiral *vol-plané* from nearly eight miles of altitude— first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel beneath me as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tank, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from the village of Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal upon earth has ever yet taken and

lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of the heights— and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and will confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of…

[HERE a page of the manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing:—]

Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!

SUCH in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington upon the borders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the note-book was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator's theory is correct that this air-jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures at some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found. The picture of that monoplane skimming down the sky, with the nameless terrors flying as swiftly beneath it and cutting it off always from the earth while they gradually closed in upon their victim, is one upon which a man who valued his sanity would prefer not to dwell. There are many, as I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has disappeared, and I would commend to them his own words: "This note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please."

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12: The Haunted Camp

Valerie Jameson

fl 1898-1938

Western Mail (Perth) 30 Nov 1907

The writer married at Kalgoorlie in 1898; the last press report was in 1938, when she was reported, in a brief paragraph, to be "in poor health". Circa 1900 she moved from Kalgoorlie goldfields to New South Wales. She ceased writing short stories in 1921.

UNA FERNLEIGH surveyed her new home with pleased appreciation. That its chief charm was contributed by spring flowers and sunshine, flowers doomed to a brief existence, and sunshine that would increase in strength till every green twig yielded up its life, was not apparent to the happy young bride. The simple humpy in that fragrant hollow where vagrant wild-flowers crept to the threshold and golden broom rambled luxuriantly seemed the most desirable place on earth. Her expressions of pleasure and surprise were immensely gratifying to the young brigand who on a holiday jaunt to Adelaide had descended upon a veritable garden of girls, and by methods as ancient as Eden succeeded in capturing the fairest. Loud was the outcry of parents and other relatives. "Don't leave us for those dreadful goldfields! They are only fit for blacks."

Una laughed gaily as these anti-nuptial warnings recurred to her.

"Not nearly so dreadful as prophesied," said her husband.

"I am more to be envied than pitied," she replied naively, and was caught in a grateful hug by the brigand.

"Really, Frank," protested the laughing captive, soothing her pretty tumbled hair, "the least excuse—"

"Sorry, dear," said the culprit, "but really, you know, how can I help it?"

The pathetic look of one who is irresistibly tempted beyond human control accompanied this apology. Una gravely proposed to pinion the obstreperous arms behind.

The weak point in this proposition, Frank explained, was in the event of some dashing bush-pirate chancing along in search of golden-haired brides. A harsh voice from the road without seemed to convey a touch of reality to this romantic fancy.

"Are you there, Frank?"

Una cast a startled, enquiring glance at her husband.

"It's the pirate himself ," he whispered, and, with a protecting arm about her slender waist, went to interview the visitor.

Though she extended a hand in greeting to the stranger in response to her husband's introduction Una was consciously repelled by his looks. Jet-black hair, eyes, and whiskers had earned Joseph Carter the local appellation, Black Joe.

His smile, a frequent contribution in conversation, gave a fascinating glimpse of fine white teeth. "A man to be feared, not trusted," was the mental decision of Mrs. Fernleigh.

"You will see Mr. Carter often, Una," said her husband. "He is one of us. A worker and a well-wisher of the grafter, eh, Joe?"

"Rather," responded Black Joe, "I hope to see the gold making headway before long. It's only a question of time and development. The lode's alright."

The animated discussion that followed was unintelligible to Una. She was sub-consciously dissecting the voice, facial expression, and gestures of this man whom she was to see often. Observing her long scrutiny, the stranger said, "You will find it pretty lonesome here after the city, Mrs. Fernleigh."

"I don't think so," returned Una shortly.

''It's pleasant enough in the flower season," he continued, "but the hot weather soon puts a finish on them. You must put up a bough-shade for the missus, Frank, against the hot weather."

"I intend to," said Fernleigh, "and if that's not cool enough, we can drop her into the hundred-foot drive."

"Indeed, no," said Una, shuddering, "I'll never screw up courage to go underground."

"lt's nothing when you're used to it," remarked Black Joe with another flashing glimpse of white teeth as he doffed his cap in farewell.

"I don't like that man," said Una emphatically, when the object of her aversion returned to his camp on the far side of the Grafter.

"Fanciful little woman,'' rebuked her husband, "Black Joe's a decent chap and a good grafter. We don't make fine distinctions in these uncivilised parts. You must be civil to my mates, dearie, that is all I ask."

"But I hope he won't come often," said Una.

"He improves on acquaintance." explained Frank, "I recollect a similar repulsion when I first knew him, but I've never discovered anything to back up the feeling, so we stand on a friendly footing."

The interesting task of decorating her new home occupied the remainder of the evening, and Una's heart was too full of happiness to bear any external shadow long.

Weeks of sun-bright, flower-sweet days possed happily over the humpy. Some ladies from the distant township drove out on friendly visits, and contributed a welcome break to monotony.

The young wife never confessed to feeling lonesome.

"Frank seems quite near when I look over to the mine," she said, "although he's, underground."

Often when the toiler was delayed beyond the usual knock-off time, she would peer anxiously across in dread of an accident, and these nervous fancies were always uppermost when Black Joe manned the brace. Although he was, as her husband prophesied, a frequent visitor, Mrs. Fernleigh could not overcome her aversion, though she strove to conceal it.

The numerous employees of the Tryall mine, owned by an English syndicate, had, with their wives and families, settled on the adjacent areas and formed a small township. This township, named Pellington, was two miles from the Grafter. The long, red road passing between the mine and Mrs. Fernleigh's humpy picked up other settlements on its way to Kalgoorlie.

There were a few other abandoned shows in the neighbourhood of the Grafter. One possessed a gruesome history, perpetuated by its local title, "Haunted Camp." The worthless dump and old dwelling once occupied by its deceased owner could be seen from the rear door of the humpy, in a state of partial collapse, ravaged to ruin by wind-willies and cyclones.

Black Joe informed Una that the original owner committed suicide three years before, and although the ground was repegged again and again by prospecting parties, no one ever passed a second night on the claim. The unquiet spirit of the suicide would have no successor.

Una laughed scornfully. "Are great men so superstitious?''

"One must believe the evidence of his own eyesight," asserted Black Joe.

"Have you seen the ghost?" queried Una.

"I wouldn't like to say," replied the visitor curtly, offended at the scornful raillery of Una's voice and eyes, "but take my advice," he added, "and give Haunted Camp a wide berth."

"Anything with a dash of mystery has charms for me," said Una. ''I'm mightily tempted to seek an interview with this interesting ghost. I have heard of one who carried his head under his arm. Can your ghost perform that feat?"

"Ask Mrs. Robbins at the Corner Hotel," said Black Joe angrily; "she'll tell you of men rushing in after midnight with ghastly faces speechless with terror, an' what they saw that drove them like maniacs from their bunks at Haunted Camp. Ask Mrs. Robbins."

'"Pah!" returned Una placidly, "most ghost scares are practical jokes. Ghosts, when dissected, are very paltry affairs."

Black Joe scowled darkly at these words, and Una flinched beneath his look as if it were a blow. He was on surface work that afternoon, and had sauntered across on some trivial errand to where Mrs. Fernleigh sat quietly plying her needle in a shady nook. His duty at the brace would not allow of long dallying, and Una was relieved to see him walk back to the claim.

"I do wish," she murmured over her stitches, "that horrid man would keep away."

ABOUT a month after this conversation Frank Fernleigh brought a speci-men of golden quartz from the underground crosscut to present to his wife.

''It is beautiful, Frank." she said, joyously, turning it about in the sun-light. "Doesn't it glitter? And see, this loose piece is clinging by a natural chain of solid gold."

"I expect she'll go four ounces this crushing," said Frank, his face aglow with pride. "There'd a two-foot seam of that quality just opened up. We'll have about fifty tons bagged in a fort-night, and then you shall be banker, my girlie."

Una looked up fondly into his adoring eves. "You will spoil me, Frank."

"Who has a better right?" he demanded.

''Surely," was the demure reply followed by the inevitable salute.

"Gold is sweet," murmured Una, looking again at her precious specimen. "Pure gold, the emblem of all that is best in ourselves. How often we hear the phrase 'as good as bold,' 'a heart of gold,' or 'worth his weight in gold.' And on the other side there is no greater incentive to crime in the world. Men scheme, rob, fight, and kill to possess it. Good and evil alike is the power of gold. It should be feared more than loved."

"Little philosopher, what mood is this?"

"I don't know myself." said Una gravely, ''I'm bewitched by the specimen, I think."

"Bewitched, darling! But don't be sad. I shall feel horribly guilty if I find my bird drooping in exile."

But there was more gold gleaming in the sunlight at the open door. With a cry of delight Una ran and clasped the treasure in her arms— the golden chris and sweet roguish face of Dickie Floss, the storekeeper's tiny daughter.

"Me tum for week," announced Dickie solmenly.

"You shall stay as long as you like, pet," replied Mrs. Farnleigh.

"Dunno where she's going to sleep," grumbled Frank teasingly. "Jolly awk-ward when people take you on the hop, and expect to be accommodated for a week. There's room on the henroost," consideringly.

"Don't tease, Frank," rebuked Una, for the great blue eyes of the child were turning dewy. "Don't notice him, pet; you shall sleep in my room."

"And where are you going to put me?" in pretended alarm.

"Henwoost," said Dickie promptly, and chimed in the merry laugh that followed.

A pair of kittens, parrots, canaries, and frolicsome Dickie made merry with the hours of daylight, but shortly after sundown the last of these frivollers dropped her curly head on the pillow asleep. Fernleigh and his partner Kepple,

an elderly man whose family resided in Perth, often worked an extra shift to speed the crushing. Black Joe and another, Stoggart, being employed as wages men only, were released at the usual time.

These late shifts made many lonesome hours for Una, but in considerate regard for her husband's enterprise, she made no lament. There were many ways for a bright young housewife to beguile tedious hours. But. whatever the task, her eyes would wander fre-quently to the clock and she rebuked the enemy with a gentle sigh.

Lingering on the threshold one even-ing to catch a last glimpse of her hus-band returning to his night's toil be-low, she heard the distant musical clink-clink of quartz beaten in a dolly. So soft and distant was the lay, she thought it might be imaginary, especially as it proceeded from the direction of Haunted Camp. Black Joe's story had been corroborated by several others. Her husband ridiculed the ghost, but advised her, half-seriously, not to go tempting it.

Though not forgetful of his warning, the desire to unearth the mysterious gold-beater was irresistible. It was yet daylight. The sun blinked a lingering eye on the landscape, and the breeze that carried the clink-clink melody to her ears came direct from Haunted Camp. Tossing a sun-bonnet on her head she sauntered slowly across the flower-strewn track that led to forbidden ground, idly plucking a sprig from the bushes that brushed her skirts as she passed, or stooping to pick an occasional everlasting, till she was within close range of the derelict.

The clink-clink commenced again. Clearly the operator was concealed within the tattered camp. With flush-ed cheeks and parted lips, expectant of she knew not what,

"Something neither man nor woman.
Something neither beast nor human,"

Una tip-toed to the rickety door that stood partly open.

Crouched in the centre of the room, creating the music that had lured her to the scene, was Black Joe; beside him a bag of ore like the specimen her husband had given her. On a rough deal table was an old tin, bearing a jam label, and a small heap of granular gold. Close by Stoggart was panning off the dollied stone. Suppressing a cry of surprise, the girl, aware that her position if caught might place her at the mercy of unscrupulous men, attempted a swift retreat. But the tell-tale sun had thrown her shadow athwart the floor.

With a spring like a panther Black Joe cleared the intervening space and seized her by the wrist. Crushing it with cruel force, he hissed in her ear, "Spy!" So close that she felt the loathsome touch of his coarse moustache, and felt the

black blaze in his eyes scorching her face. Yet she lifted her head proudly to meet that fierce scrutiny.

"Release my hand."

The captor laughed mockingly and tightened his grip. "Oh no, fair lady. You came of your own free will, you'll stay by mine. We're not going to put ourselves at the mercy of your tattling tongue. You were told to keep away from here, but, womanlike, you must come prying where you're not wanted. This is Bluebeard's secret chamber, madam, and you can't take the key to that husband of yours, so we must give you temporary accommodation."

"I will be missed" said Una, striving to conceal her terror.

"Not for some time!" returned Black Joe with an evil grin.

Stoggart brushed the heap of gold from the table and the contents of the tin into a chamois bag and strapped it beneath his belt. Una's secret anxiety concerning her punishment was soon ended.

When Stoggart secured the gold Black Joe led his captive, by that vice-like grip, to the mouth of the deserted shaft and coiled a long rope about her body.

White as marble, but with clenched lips that scorned to plead for mercy, the girl cast despairing eyes towards her distant home. Its windows glowed like rubies with the beams of the setting sun. Her heart yearned for that sweet security and for the shelter of the strong arms— deep, deep below that white dump, then gave a sound of terror, as, suspended by a slender rope in the hands of desperate knaves, she swung over the black abyss.

Down, down, with many a cruel bump against the jagged walls that tore the delicate skin of arms and face; then came the sudden, shock of stoppage and the stinging lash of the rope flung from above.

The full horror of her situation oppressed Una as she crouched in her underground prison. She knew now why Black Joe had cautioned her against the place, and why he circulated ghostly rumours. Such isolation was necessary for his nefarious practices. The small square patch of sky overhead slowly darkened. A star looked down in friendly pity on the forlorn prisoner.

"Oh, Frank, Frank," she moaned "I was always afraid of Black Joe," then yielding to overstrained nerves she broke into a passionate storm of tears. When this abated, she looked up and saw the small celestial lamp twinkling so far above. "God is there," she thought," and has sent that star to remind me. He knows."

Clasping her hands devoutly, she sent up a passionate prayer for aid.

FRANK Fernleigh, returning home at midnight, was surprised to see no beckoning light from the humpy windows. An unusual omission and significant of something amiss with methodical Una. His fingers trembled apprehensively as he opened the door and fumbled awkwardly with the match-box before he

secured a light. A glance in at the bedroom door showed the bed "untreasured of its mistress."

"Good God!" he exclaimed. ''What is wrong? Una! Una!" he called, within and without the humpy. Black silence followed him everywhere. Rushing across to Kepple's camp, he found him already stretched on his bunk asleep. Two shifts in one day was a long labourious spell for an old man, but Frank thought of nothing but his loss.

"Kepple," he cried, tugging the sleeper's arm, "my wife's gone."

"Eh, what? Kepple rubbed his eyes stupidly.

"Una— my wife—" stammered Fern-leigh, "is away, God knows where— lost in the bush perhaps."

Again and again he shouted the loved name, rushing hither and thither with a hurricane lamp, raving at the hours of darkness. Distracted with agonising fears he cursed the work that kept him from her side and left her exposed to peril.

"Cheer up, Frank," said Kepple sympathetically, "she'll turn up alright. Women and cats has nine lives. That's what I tell my ole woman. She's done a tumble off a roof, got chucked over a horse's head 'arf a dozen times, bin wrecked at sea, bin humped out o' burning houses an' in between the lot turned out a dozen youngsters an' now I often says you could't kill 'er with an axe."

The catalogue of Mrs. Kepple's calamities was no consolation to Fernleigh.

He roamed frantically about the bush in the vicinity of the humpy. At last, spent with grief and fatigue, he drop-ped to the ground, buried his face in his arms, and gave the great sobs liberty. Merciful sleep stole upon the sufferer unawares and stilled the pain awhile; then as the grey light of early dawn lifted the pall of night, he awoke to a sense of aching joints and throbbing pains in his head. He had fallen asleep face downward on the hard ground. Then came recollection and, careless of physical pain, he leapt from the ground in a frenzy of regret for the wasted hours.

He was about to search the township in the forlorn hope that he might find Una safe with one of her lady friends. A second thought sent him to the camp of the wages men, to enlist Black Joe's services. Renewed consternation seized the bewildered man on finding the camp empty. Deadly suspicion gripped his heart with pain like knife-stabs. Again he roused his partner.

"Black Joe and Stoggart are missing too."

"That's ugly," admitted Kepple, appalled at the ghastly fear on Fernleigh's face.

"If there is foul play," he muttered hoarsely, "I'll tear them limb from limb."

"Don't jump to conclusions, Frank," said Kepple hopefully," maybe the men are on a spree at Pellington, and the missus may have strayed into the bush. You know she is powerful fond of wild-flowers. I'll go down and hunt up the men

while you search the bush. It I don't find 'em I'll inform the police and get all help I can."

NO blessed boon of sleep came to Una in her dungeon, but after that fervent appeal to Heaven she felt more hopeful or deliverance. Groping about, she discovered three solid walls and a vacuum on one side. This she correctly surmised was a drive leading to other workings. While her eyes blinked wearily at the engulfing blackness she heard a distant pit-pat of footfalls advancing towards her, and saw or fancied she saw two luminous eyes peering through the gloom. Her heart palpitated wildly. What fresh horror was to come upon her? What else but superhuman terrors could exist underground?

Close to the furthest wall she crouch-ed with wide, horrified eyes, and bated breath, waiting. Closer, closer came the sound. Something breathed on her hand and touched it. She gave a startled scream, then laughed hysterically. It was warm and moist. She passed her hand along the head and horns of a domestic goat. Throwing her arms around the creature's neck in grateful relief, she laid her head upon its rought coat and cried for joy.

"Oh, Nan, Nan," she sobbed, "have you met Bluebeard too?"

Light stealing in from above proclaimed another day. The goat entered the drive again and bleated as if inviting Una to follow. Wondering if the animal was acquainted with some other exit she plucked up courage, clutched one of Nan's long horns, and stumbled blindly along the rough, unknown path. It seemed interminable in that dense gloom, but she kept on bravery, trusting to the sagacity of her four-footed chum.

At last thick darkness melted into grey distinguishable twilight. A lit-tle further and Una found herself in the well of another shaft, much wider and of shallower a depth than the first and more accessible to daylight. Further inspection revealed perpendicular ladders fastened to one of the walls. The thought of mounting these at first was appalling, but the desire for liberty conquered fear.

"Poor Nan," she said in farewell, "if I succeed I'll send help to you," and clutching the lower rungs commenced the perilous ascent, pausing halfway in fear that the old timber might give way and hurl her to destruction.

Dizzy and sick with apprehensive fears she struggled on step by step, every breath a prayer, until she seemed to feel unseen hands supporting her. At last, spent with the struggle, but safe and free, she knelt on the sweet surface sods.

Words cannot paint the bliss of reunion between husband and wife. Black Joe's treachery would have cost his life had he encountered Fernleigh that day.

But he and his accomplice were eventually captured by detectives, and sentenced to several years imprisonment for their dastardly crime.

As for Nan, like an independent goat, she found her way out by a breakaway into another "pot hole," by which she had so opportunely strayed into the mine. She is a privileged pet at the humpy yet, and the Haunted Claim has since become a payable proposition in the hands of the Grafter Syndicate.

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13: Honor of a Horse-Thief

S. B. H. Hurst

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"IN ALL Afghanistan you are the I only man I can trust, Shir Ali!" said the Amir.

Shir Ali was a horse-thief.

It was nearing midnight in the palace of the Amir of Afghanistan in Kabul. Shir Ali was alone with the Amir in a little room. Midnight of that terrible winter. Terrible in its cold and in the revolt of the Afghan army.

The Amir was no longer Amir. The glow from a ruby-colored lamp showed his tired, strained face. The city was but a shadow, with a tinkle of music from heavy-walled houses and the scent of musk on frosty air, but about the palace was the noise and high confusion of an army that had set up one of its officers as king. In the isolated little room there still was privacy.

The Amir shrugged his shoulders.

"The throne and the army are one," he said bitterly. "The people are not interested. One Amir taxes them as does another! In a little while my head will rot on die Lahori gate.... More than glad I am that you came, Shir Ali. Strange how our lives have crossed and re-crossed! Like paths twisting across the plain. I was sitdng in judgment when I first saw you. You made me laugh, so I let you go free. Later, you did me a special service— caught a rebel and likely saved my throne for me. You can not save it now—not for me. But—if God wills.... See!"

The Amir lifted a silk covering from a tiny bed. Asleep on the bed was a little boy of about a year old.

"My only son. Some day, if God wills and you, Shir Ali, are not killed on your journey—well, some day you may look back and say that you saved tny throne again—not for me but for my son!"

Shir Ali stood erect, squared his shoulders and gravely saluted the sleeping child.

"Nadir Shah, the new Amir, will cut off my head and stick it on the Lahori gate, according to custom—maybe tomorrow, maybe in a month: when he grows tired of keeping me in suspense. Nadir Shah, the new Amir, whom I favored and raised to Sirdar of the army! A big ugly devil of a man, marvelously like thee. Shir Ali! So like thee, indeed, that if you were garbed in his uniform, with his jewelled turban on that great head of thine, and he was put into your sheepskin coat—I would think you were him and he was you.... No matter. A man can die but once.... And my son must live!"

The Amir, Abdur Rahman, spoke with fierce affection, striding to and fro across the heavy rug.

"You came through the secret door, up the steps to this room. You and I are the only two men now alive who know of that door. You will take my sou and escape with him—through that door. After that, you will stay with him and watch him grow, and guide his small feet, and be like another father to him—always keeping in his mind that he is the son of a king, and that some day he will be king himself. By the strength of his arm and the fickle favor of the army of Afghanistan!"

Shir Ali spoke for the first time.

"To where shall I take thy son, lord Amir?"

" 'Lord Amir'?" the Amir laughed bitterly. "Never mind.... Take him— but, oh, what a terrible ride for him and thee! Take him through the Lataband, the Khyber—to Peshawah. Take him to the English!"

"The English?"

"Yes! They have always kept faith with me. Had I allowed them to build a railway and put a telegraph in my country the English would have had an army here by now— or, at any rate, on the way. For I could have sent them the swift word. I have kept faith with the Queen-Empress, and not a foot has Russia dared to advance. The English will guard my son, and educate him and care for him as a prince should be cared for. So, Shir Ali, take my only son and ride for Peshawah. No other man in the world could make that ride. And no other man would I trust! ... I love thee, you damned old villain!"

And the Amir flung his arm across the horse-thief's shoulders.

Shir Ali raised his right arm gravely.

"I take oath," he said. "By Allah and His prophet Mohamet! I take the King's Oath! My blood for the King's blood— drop by drop as long as I have blood! My blood for the Son of the King—my Prince! To my King and his Son do I dedicate the last drop of my blood, and every drop! Aod this I swear by God and His prophet! May Allah blast me and Shaitan burn my soul if I fail in my trust! For this is the King's Oath, and I am a Durani!"

The Amir returned the salute. He took a letter from a pocket of his uniform.

"This— I will read it to thee, for I remember, many years ago, that you told me you could not read— this letter to the general of the English, whom you will find at the post called Jamrud, just this side of Peshawah. This later, so that the English will know the child is indeed my son. Listen!"

The Amir, Abdur Rahman, read:

"Excellency,

My army has rebelled and raised Nadir Shah to be Amir. I await his pleasure in the matter of when he will order my head to be taken from my body. 1 can not escape, even if life seemed worth the weariness of the effort. But the bearer of

this, toy dear and trusted friend Shir Ali, may be able to get away. He is a very clever, and very strong man. To him 1 am trusting my only son. Therefore, if Shir Ali is able safely to make the terrible ride through the passes choked with the snows of winter, and to present to thee this letter of mine, you will know that the babe he brings with him is my only son. To thee, Excellency, and to England do I send my son, knowing that England will treat him as my son and as a prince. For England never forgets! I can write no more. I can hear the rebels in my palace, and the time is short.

Abdur Rahman."

Abdur Rahman gave the letter to Shir Ali.

"Go quickly!" he said.

"I have no money," said Shir Ali.

Abdur Rahman laughed.

"As of old! Always the same!" He pinched Shir Ali's ear. He became sad and grave again. "If I gave thee an order on the treasury the purse-keeper would laugh at thee. But— take this! If, when you sell it, the broker asks you where you got it, say you stole it. Don't risk a quarrel with him. Take this!"

Abdur Rahman gave Shir Ali a splendid diamond.

"I happened to have it with me. All I have to give thee—when but a little while ago I was a great king, and could have smothered thee in diamonds!"

Shir Ali blinked.

''The value of a horse I know, and can judge— it is my trade! But this— what is this worth, my lord?"

"It is worth what the buyer wills— if he desires it enough. But ten thousand English sovereigns would not buy it in open market."

Shir Ali put the diamond in his. belt.

"Go quickly," whispered Abdur Rahman. "They are coming—forme. Hurry! the secret door!" The Amir lifted the sleeping child from the bed, kissed him and placed him tenderly in Shir Ali's arms. "Go quickly, and God go with thee! I will open the door!"

Abdur Rahman fingered a sliding panel. It opened noiselessly. Shir Ali, the child in his arms, stepped through. A draft of cold air met him. He walked carefully down some steps. Abdur Rahman shut the door.

SHIR ALI walked over a tiny bridge. It was very dark, but waist-high walls prevented falling. Under the bridge ran a swift deep stream— a narrow tributary of the Logar river. What secrets that dark, underground river contained!.... Across the bridge, still within the secret tunnel, Shir Ali reached another door. He laid down the child and opened the door cautiously. Then he picked up the child, stepped into the winter night and closed the door again.

Would the child remain quiet? It slept and snuggled contentedly against the old horse-thief's heart, warm under his sheepskin. Shir Ali had stolen horses and taken chances under all sorts of conditions, but this was a new experience. With a sleeping baby under his left arm he had to steal a horse from the palace of a dethroned Amir, with the palace filled by the xebeilious army. And the night was too clear. Stars and not a cloud in the frosty sky.

He loafed slowly toward the stables. The noise about the palace had quiaed somewhat. Shir Ali nodded. The soldiers were gambling. They had taken Abdur Rahman, and would now have no other thought but their games.... Shir Ali reached the end of the long north wall of the palace. He began to whistle as he turned the corner toward the stables. At that moment he saw a fat Usbeg groom.

"Ho! Ho!" greeted the groom, "Who art thou? And the bundle under the arm, friend?"

"You must have lost all your money?" replied Shir Ali, continuing to walk toward the stable.

"I have, or I would not be here. But who are you, and what's that under your arm?"

"Can you keep your big mouth shut?" Shir Ali let his voice drop to a confidential whisper.

"Of course!" the groom whispered, avidly.

"Come quietly with me, then! I will show thee what I have. No doubt something for thee, also—if that mouth of thine does not make a noise!"

The groom nodded. He grinned as a confederate in crime should grin. The big man had evidently made a good haul, and was trying to avoid discovery by sharing it. That was good! The Usbeg would be able to gamble again.

"I don't want to divide with every groom in Afghanistan!" Shir Ali was whispering again. "Let us go where there isn't a crowd."

"You are going right—otherwise I would have told thee," chuckled the groom. 'Would I want every groom to share with me? This is that part of the stables where Abdur Rahman kept his best horses!"

They were in the stable. Better than the groom did Shir Ali know where the best horses were kept.

"Now let me see what you have," whispered the Usbeg.

At that moment the whole world seemed to fall on him. A minute later Shir Ali was leading out a splendid horse. Very lightly for so large a man, his arm balancing the prince as if in a cradle. Shir Ali mounted. He spoke quietly to the horse and it walked quietly. Then he swore rather loudly at die whims of the world and the hard lot of all grooms—to arouse the interest of the sentry as naturally as possible. The child whimpered softly. Shir Ali raised his voice to drown the little cry.

"Well?" asked the sentry, who also felt h hard that he had to stand in the cold while his comrades gambled in comfort. "Where are you going with that horse?"

"Hullo, *naik*!" laughed Shir Ali.

"Don't call me *naik*—if I was a corporal I would not be here. And answer my question."

The voice of Shir Ali became the voice of a man who tells a smutty story.

"I can not tell you, but you can guess. The officer merely ordered me to have a horse there —in case he needs it!"

"No doubt! But in that case you must have some sort of pass! And what is in that bundle under your arm?... You look like a thief to me. Show me the bundle!"

Shir Ali sighed. It was a deep, pitiful sigh, the sigh of a truthful and honest man who is hurt by unbelief.

"Very well! Look!"

The sentry stepped closer. Something flashed in the starlight. The soul of the sentry went out in the cold. Shir Ali urged the horse forward. He had stolen a horse from the stable of a deposed Amir, from among that Amir's enemies. No other horse-thief had ever done the like! He grinned with grim pride. And he had nor violated the horse-thief's code of ethics. He had merely stunned the groom, not killed him. Sentries, of course, were different!

The little prince stirred and whimpered plaintively.

"Lie still, little sparrow," Shir Ali spoke tenderly. "I will guard thee. I have taken the king's oath to thy father, and I am, thank God, a Durani! Lie at ease, son of the king, for Shir Ali will protea thee— if he has to kill every man he meets to do it!"

The horse was cantering. The palace is outside the city, but soon Shir Ali was riding through the narrow, crooked streets of Kabul.

In one very narrow street, merely an alley between the high, windowlcss walls cf the houses of wealthy men. Shir Ali reined in the horse. It was very quiet. He looked up at a small, barred, square opening in the wall of the house. He whistled softly. There was no answer. He looked up again. Far above, as it were through a slit in the roof of the world, he saw the stars. Again he whistled. This time a voice answered quietly.

"Who?"

"Shir Ali! I pray you open the door of your yard so that I may bring in my horse!"

"I will open."

Shir Ali rode out of the narrow way and around to the front of the house. Here were high, wide walls, with a door through which a man and horse might

just pass, if the man bent low over the horse's neck. Shir Ali heard die heavy bolts being drawn. The door opened. "Come in, friend."

"The blessing of God upon thee, Ben Mohamet!" greeted Shir Ali, as he entered and Ben Mohamet closed the door. "Old friend, I have need of thee!" He dismounted carefully. The little prince did not cry. "Need of thee as in times past when in trouble. I need a saddle for this fine horse, for I have a long ride. But first a good blanket to cover him from the frost of the night— for I must enter the house to show you something. To show you two wonderful things. And— which is unusual— I can pay for the saddle!"

"No pay," said Ben Mohamet, leading the way into the house. 'T will neyer accept pay from thee, Shir Ali, as I have often told you. Do you always forget how you saved my life and all I have?" He stood aside politely. "Enter, I beg of you, my friend."

Shir Ali entered. The door was shut. They stood in a room of rugs and Oriental furnishings, under the glow from a silver lamp, in that sacred privacy of the East which is like the privacy of a tomb.

"May I ask you to call your wife?" said Shir Ali. "I need much advice from the lady."

"Maybe advice in the matter of gifts for some houri of earth?" smiled Ben Mohamet.

"Not so, friend. It happens that I am now the father of a little son of great value, and I need a woman to explain to me how to feed him and the like."

Shir Ali laid the baby gently on a table.

"See, friend! Behold the future Amir of Afghanistan!" he said quietly.

Ben Mohamet stared at him. Surprizing it had been when Shir Ali needed the advice of a woman. The baby increased that surprize. But— the future Amir.... Ben Mohamet understood.

"So, he gave thee the child to raise and care for— hence your coming here so quietly in the night. Well, friend Shir Ali, there are still loyal hearts in Kabul. You did right to bring the baby here. We are, as you know, childless, and my wife and I will give the baby love and adoration."

Shir Ali bowed.

"I thank thee, loyal heart, but I may not leave the baby here. I have a long way to ride with him. I will explain. And we must hasten. Here/' he produced the diamond, "is money for the journey— give me a part of its value. Not all! Be my banker. Please call your wife!"

Ben Mohamet acted quickly. He called his wife. Then he went to get the saddle and the money.

"The precious princeling," cooed the woman. "See, Shir Ali, you must hold him this way. You do your best, but a child can not be carried like a goose! This way!... And now— oh, there is so much to tell thee! Did ever a woman before

me have the task of instructing a big, rough man in the ways of mothers— and with only a few minutes for the teaching of all that women have learned since Eve suckled her first-born?"

THE MORNING was clear and cold, but the heavy clouds upon the crests of the Hindu Koosh presaged more snow. Through the passes of the worst country in the world— such was the ride Shir Ali faced with the baby. And in such weather!

"Oh, well," he muttered, "I won't have to swing my sword in one hand and cuddle the prince in the other— this weather will keep the brigands at home!"

He shivered, though, as he thought of something else. The ghosts and djinns of the mountain passes. Shir Ali was afraid of nothing— if it was flesh and blood. But a ghost! His racial superstitions crept along his spine. The tales he had heard since he was a child. The terrible dead men who haunted the Lataband. Worse than the Khyber. But all agreed that both were fearful! Ghosts. Armies of theml The tales of men, the eery stories of the women. Not all travelers killed in the passes were killed by robbers!... The very dust of the passes was the dust of the dead. Ghosts of the armies of Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazni, Jenghis

Khan, Berber.... And Shir Ali had to ride through that country, in the dark of the dead of winter, with a babe to care for— to the British post of Jamrud.... He tried to fight down superstition with wit.

"Maybe the ghosts will ask me if I have ceased being a horse-thief and fumed kidnapper!"

He camped at dusk— between four and five in the afternoon. The early stars watched him caring for the child in the snow.

"I am a clumsy thing," he growled when the baby cried. "I have let the cold wind bite the tenderling. Thank Allah he comes of stout stock! See, the little thoroughbred is blue with cold, but he grits his teeth and refuses to whimper."

But Shir Ali made very slow progress. The snow was deep and loose. Even if alone he could have only made short marches between camps. No horse could stand much of such traveling. And when he stopped to care for the child the eery, icy mountain winds seemed to howl uncanny suggestions. An occasional handful of krut was all the man ate. He kept grimly onward. Between Kismet and Allah he hoped to avoid the occult.

Came a time when his physical sufferings made him indifferent to superstition. These had grown worse hourly. And then disaster struck him. The horse stumbled and broke a leg.

Shir Ali looked up at the leaden sky and cursed.

"I have forgotten some few prayers, and at times shown slight respect for the mullahs, and I have never made the pilgrimage to Mecca. These be things in a man's life! If I have stolen horses— well, I had lo live; and I am told that the

Koran says nothing against the trade! Be that as it may, I am now on an errand of duty— and where is Thy protection? Has Satan risen from Hell to rule the world? Or is this just Thy mock of me— all these miles from Jamrud with a child in my arms, and no horse? Surely Thou knowest that I never walk!"

The bitter wind answered him. His eyes watered at its sting. Then he laughed like the fighting man he was.

"No more camps, by God! The horse had to be rested now and then, but I am a man!"

He was! But, as of old, the Pass hated men. Down through the centuries men had disturbed its solitudes, and all that time the Pass had taken its toll of naen. But this man! Never before had the Pass seen such a sight! A big, hairy Afghan, a man of a cruel race, struggling forward, slipping and falling—but always taking care that his precious burden was not harmed. A man with a baby.

"My blood for the king's blood, and for his son— as long as I have blood to give. By Allah and His Prophet! I am a Durani, and this is the King's Oath!"

In a delirium of fatigue which would have killed an ordinary man Shir Ali decided that Kismet had ordained him for this end— to give his life to bring the baby to the protection of the British. But what a strange end! Would the houris welcome him into Paradise if he died saving a baby? Did they not crave a man who died fighting? He fell again. Could he ever get up? He asked the cold stars. Well, if he could not walk he could crawl!

THE Khyber was in that weather no place through which to move an army, but a treaty is a treaty, and the British army had put Jamrud behind it. Abdur Rahman had done his part as regards Russia, and England must keep her promise and help him when he needed help. But the army could make only the slowest of progress.

Just how far the rebellion had gone the English general did not know. Abdur Rahman had been unable to send word since the trouble began. A message had come through asking for help. That was all. Then the snow had blocked the passes.

The sentry wondered. What was that crawling toward him? Stopping, lying at full length, crawling again. Surely that could not be a man! What would a man be doing there— crawling that way? Was it a bear? The sentry was no naturalist, but he promptly reported that he saw something.

Thus it came about that Shir Ali woke to consciousness from a cruel dream that seemed to have lasted since Allah created the world. He heard voices. His eyes were a film, and his eyebrows were crusted with icicles. But, dimly, he saw men.... Maybe they were not real. The only real thing in all this misery was the baby. Even in the extremity of his suffering he had given the baby the tenderest care.... But, still, that was a voice— asking in Pushtu:

"Who are you?"

Shir Ali grunted and tried to get to his feet. Two soldiers helped him. They supported him, for he could not stand.

"I..... seek the general... of the English ... at Jamrud.... Take me to the... Sirdar... I... have a letter... a letter... from my Amir ... for the Sirdar.... And here... be very careful of him... here is the Amir's only son!"

They were very careful, very kind. So kind that Shir Ali wondered how soldiers could be so kind.... Then he felt himself falling, falling into the bottomless Pit— concerning which, he remembered, the mullah who taught the boys of his district had given him a most accurate description.... But that did not matter, because he could sleep now.

He awoke after many hours, stared about and was greatly puzzled. Some one had undressed him while he slept! Shir Ali could not remember having been undressed by any one before. When very young, his mother!... The word was a whip to memory. Who had cared for the baby while he was sleeping? Like a hog he had lain there, while the little prince... The English soldiers would know nothing about caring for babies! They lacked his experience! Perhaps they had tried and, in kindly ignorance, harmed the tenderling!... Shir Ali was rolling out of the blankets, shouting. He felt well but a trifle shaky. He shouted. Ah, here was a soldier!... Shir Ali gripped the field hospital orderly and shouted frantic questions in Pushtu.... Where was the prince? The baby? The little one!... Puggle, don't you understand?... The orderly did not understand a word. He decided that Shir Ali was suffering from the shock of his recent hardships, and was delirious.

" 'Ere, 'ere, 'old hup, old feller! Don't go to gettin' hexited!"

Shir Ali almost screamed with rage. He wrestled with the orderly. The orderly, accustomed to holding writhing men, did very well against his heavier antagonist, but he shouted for help. Shir Ali heard other footsteps. He looked up and saw a woman. He stopped wrestling. As he stared at her he realized that the baby had been properly cared for. Here was a woman. But what was she doing here— in a camp of soldiers?... Women followed the armies of Afghanistan, but not such women as this! There was a quality about this one. And she was wearing a sort of uniform....

She spoke with authority to the orderly. He obeyed her! Shir Ali relaxed with an astonishment that was akin to horror. A woman giving orders to a soldier, and, what was worse, the soldier obeyed her!

Ah, only a queen is obeyed.... But, he had heard, the queen of the English was old. This one was young and good to look at. What was that tiny glass tube she was shaking? She was coming toward him with it! Some sorcery here, surely!... He shrank away. The woman smiled and advanced. She was not a bit afraid of him when he scowled at her. So he shouted for help— in Pushtu! The

woman was still bent upon doing something to him with that glass tube. This was terrible! Shir Ali roared again.

Into this excitement came the officer who had spoken to Shir Ali when they found him in the snow. He looked and laughed. The pretty nurse looked at him reproachfully. The officer laughed again. Then he spoke to Shir Ali.

"The general sends his compliments, sir, and hopes you are well!" The old horse-thief grinned.

"Well, yes, thank God! But, sahib, I am all mixed up. A woman here who orders men! Yet am I relieved in my mind at seeing her, for I know the small prince has been cared for. I was worried about him!''

The officer translated for the benefit of the nurse. She beamed upon Shir Ali and replaced the thermometer in its case.

"The poor man, and all that was the matter with him was that he was worried about the baby!''

She looked at the orderly, as if the orderly ought to have known. Shir Ali insisted upon seeing the prince before he either ate or saw the general. The joy of that grim old fighter was wonderful when the baby recognized him, crowed and held up a tiny hand in greeting.

"The Amir had not been killed when you left Kabul, then?" said the general.

"No, Sirdar. Nadir Shah will amuse himself by keeping Abdur Rahman in suspense— as is the custom. That is what I think. But, again, the head of Abdur Rahman may even now be staring sightless from the high top of the Lahori Gate."

T see! My instructions are to take Kabul and to place on the throne another Amir than Nadir Shah— a man we can trust. The little prince will of course be taken to England, and reared as Abdur Rahman wished. You will go with him, since that was also Abdur Rahman's wish, and your own desire. It will be interesting to you. Hem!" the general grinned. "I understand you were horrified when the soldier obeyed the nurse. In England men often obey women. Don't allow that to disturb you.... By the way, the matter of your rank may become important. In this letter the Amir does not mention your rank.''

Shir Ali grinned.

"I have served Abdur Rahman in confidential capacities..."

"I see," said the general. "Chief of Intelligence, corresponding to rank of colonel in our army. Were you a cavalry officer?"

"Everybody in Afghanistan knows of my connection with horses," said Shir Ali gravely.

The general nodded.

"If Abdur Rahman is not yet dead— is there any way, think you, of delaying his execution until I can get to Kabul?"

For a moment Shir Ali stared tensely at the general. Then he jumped to his feet.

"By God, yes!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that before? If he still lives... if I can get to Kabul in time.... A horse, Sirdar! Get me a good horse quickly. I may be able to stop his execution."

"How?" asked the general.

"The horse, quickly. Never mind what I do. You English have queer ideas, and my plan might seem... never mind. The horse, quickly, your excellency.... If he is dead I can do nothing. But... take good care of the prince! And follow me with all speed, Burra Sahib. I will ride like hell, and I am a good rider!"

SHIR ALI had better luck going north, and, considering everything, made remarkable time. He had no baby to care for, and his mind was set and at rest upon the solution of a problem. If Abdur Rahman still lived. Quite simple. It was the law that only an Amir can set the date for the execution of an Amir. For centuries that had been the law. It was a sacred law and could not be broken. Only an Amir can say to another Amir, "Cut off his head today!" And the time of death was never set until an hour or so before execution. Very simple, then. All Shir Ali had to do was to kill Nadir Shah! With Nadir Shah dead Abdur Rahman would live until the army elected another Amir. The new Amir could, of course, order Abdur Rahman's head to be cm off. But by that time the English army would be at Kabul! Very simple. If Abdur Rahman was alive.

"The oath of the king's blood! Thank God I am a Durani! I may be able to do it quietly, without being seen, or I may have to do it with ten thousand men watching me— who will tear me to bits! It does not matter very much— that tearing! The prince is safe, and— my blood for the king!"

He reached Kabul in the darkening of late afternoon. The practise of a lifetime bade him get rid of the horse, and the only way to get rid of a horse was to sell ft to somebody he could trust. Shir Ali rode to the serai of an old crook with whom he had had many dealings.

The approach to the stable was intricate. A groom held a lantern to Shir All's face.

"Put that damned thing away!" growled Shir Ali.

"I did not know it was you." the man apologized. " Let me lead in the horse. A fine horse!"

"Yes, I stole him from an English general down in Peshawah!" said Shir Ali.

The groom laughed delightedly. This was Shir Ali, indeed! The cleverest horsethief and the cleverest liar in Afghanistan.

"A splendid lie," he chuckled flatteringly. "From Peshawah he brings a horse that he says he stole from an English general— with the passes full of snow!"

But Shir Ali was not flattered. Usually he enjoyed making up a story to explain his possession of a horse as much as he did stealing it. But this night he had no time for amusement.

"I will flatten your silly face if you doubt my word," he growled. "Tell me, fool, where is Coomer Ali?"

"Here!"

An old voice cracked gleefully.

"Don't hit me, Shir Ali! Tell any tale your heart desires, for, as you know, I believe them all! How much for the horse?"

Shir Ali dismounted. A boy brought coffee and tobacco. But Shir Ali did not sit down. He spoke hurriedly.

"The best horse I ever brought thee!" Habit framed the words. He went on with careless truth. "A little tired he is, maybe. I have come a long way with him, and the snow in the passes makes hard riding."

Coomer Ali laughed politely.

"As I said," Shir Ali spoke rapidly, "I have been away. What is the news here in Kabul? Does the head of Abdur Rahman look down from the Lahori Gate?"

Coomer Ali raised his shaggy eyebrows.

"You almost make me believe you— and your tale about where you got the horse. But why twit an old and discreet friend? You know very well that the head of Abdur Rahman is not yet an ornament, and that Nadir Shah torments him by sending him fine food every day —saying, 'Eat, friend Abdur Rahman, for I want thy head to look fat and sleek when I stick it on the Gate! All this you must know, for it is the talk of the town!"

Shir Ali nodded.

"I will take your offer for the horse! I am reminded that I have an appointment."

Coomer Ali gasped with astonishment. What had happened to Shir Ali? Usually, always was he a good business man, who would bargain for hours. Now he was accepting an offer before it was made! Was he sick? God was good, and Coomer Ali would make a fine profit, but he couldn't understand it.

"Well?" growled Shir Ali. "Hurry! I do not want to be late!"

"Of course not! Of course not! One must not keep a lady waiting!" Coomer Ali was thrusting money into Shir Ali's hand. Shir Ali never even looked at it before putting it into his belt. Coomer Ali was glad he did not look, for Shir Ali had a terrible temper, and the amount of the money, for such a horse, was an insult. Coomer Ali had been ready with a joke had Shir Ali counted the money. He did not count. All was well, and God was good to old men!...

"Good-bye!" Shir Ali walked out of the stable quickly.

"By Allah," Coomer Ali laughed. "I believe the cleverest horse-thief in the world has fallen in love!"

SHIR ALI walked through the dark city.

He possessed one big advantage— a way of attack unsuspected by the enemy. Only Abdur Rahman and Shir Ali knew of the secret door. Torture could not have wrung that secret out of either of them. That secret door in the long north wall of the palace, which a man might stare at for a week and never see.

He avoided everybody, did not speak to a soul, walking cautiously. Several times he crept in the shadows when, outside the city, he reached the grounds of the palace. He bent his huge body through the secret entrance, closed the door and stood quietly in the dark. There was not a shiver in his marvelous nervous system.

The underground river that never froze. The little bridge that crossed it. The steps to the room in which Shir Ali had last seen Abdur Rahman. These were passed, and Shir Ali stood listening at the sliding panel. Voices in the room. Shir Ali did not recognize the voices, but the conversation made identification easy. Nadir Shah was talking with some other men. Shir Ali grinned nastily. And with satisfaction. He had deduced that Nadir Shah would take that room for his own, after the fashion of usurpers, aping the dignity of the fallen.

Shir Ali listened. He was willing to take any sort of chance to accomplish his end, but he did not intend to be foolish. Nadir Shah had taken over that room for his own and the time would come when Nadir Shah would be alone in it. All Shir Ali had to do was to wait. Then he would be able to kill Nadir Shah and escape; and no man would know who had done the deed. Why didn't they stop talking in there? Shir Ali was bored. Affairs of state—the buzzings of flies that come and go, pass foolish laws, do cruel and silly things. Shir Ali suppressed a yawn and thanked God he was a horsethief! Would they never stop their chatter— Nadir Shah and the fawning sycophants of ministers?... New laws. Talking about them.... Shir Ali grinned. Nadir Shah would soon be interested in one law only. An old law, made by Allah. Dead men arc dead men!... Laws! Chatter! And for the living the old law was good enough and sufficient: pubktunwali, an eye for an eye, a head for a head.... Ah, thank God, the chatterers were leaving. Nadir Shah was saying:

"Leave me. I will sleep for a while. We will continue this discussion on the morrow."

Shir Ali grinned.

"The talk is ended," he muttered. "Now for business!"

He listened again, carefully. He made certain that Nadir Shah was entirely alone.

"My blood for the king's blood!" he murmured, and softly slid the panel.

All followed very quickly. The same room, the same lamp, the same furniture. Nadir Shah on the divan. Shir Ali took all this in in one swift look. He

made less noise than a cat, but a sense of danger roused Nadir Shah— too late. He saw the sudden apparition of Shir Ali. What else he saw in this world was a hideous jumble. The fingers of Shir Ali, in which was literally the strength of a vise, gripped the throat of Nadir Shah. Swiftly, silently.

As silently as possible. There would be guards near by.

"So," gasped Shir Ali when the thing was done. "My oath! And it will be some little time before another Amir struts in this room, and orders the head of my king to be stuck on the Lahori Gate!"

He turned away toward the secret panel. Then he looked back. The light was shining full on the dead face of Nadir Shah. Shir Ali stared at the face, and suddenly a wild and splendid idea pulsed through him.

"A big, ugly devil of a man, marvelously like thee. Shir Ali! So like thee that if you were garbed in his uniform—"

The words of Abdur Rahman. And the dead face proved those words true.

Shir Ali was on the floor, kneeling by the dead man, swiftly stripping him. He tore off his own clothes, and put on the uniform of Nadir Shah, the jewels, the royal aigrette on the turban. He picked up the dead body and his own discarded clothing, and carried all through the panel down the steps to the bridge. There was a splash in the underground river, and the body of Nadir Shah and the clothes of Shir Ali were borne from human sight forever.... Shir Ali calmly climbed the steps again, slid the panel shut and sat down contentedly on the divan.

"Now I am Amir of Afghanistan," he murmured. "All the Amirs have been robbers— of a sort— but I am certainly the first professional horse-thief to reach this eminence!"

There came a knock on the door. Shir Ali looked in the mirror. He could not expea to continue this impersonation very long. Who was this at the door? What would he do if it was one of those damned ministers? His was no brain to wrestle with such things! For a moment Slur Ali felt like a trapped tiger. He— no, he could not kill ail those damned talkers!... Yes, he could. But to do that would not serve. Well, he would have to la the fellow come in, or else suspicion might start something. By his looks he was Nadir Shah, and who would think otherwise when Nadir Shah had been left alone in the room, and, apparently, Nadir Shah was found there, alone, again?

"Come in!" growled Shir Ali, in the gruff manner of Nadir Shah.

The palace Officer of the Day entered and saluted.

"The midnight report, your highness," he said.

" All right," yawned Shir Ali. "I have been sleeping, but now I will walk abroad. You may go. Leave the door open."

The officer saluted and obeyed.

Nadir Shah's habit of rough democracy with the soldiers had been the cause of his popularity. Shir AI: had no doubt of his ability to aa the part of Nadir Shah in this regard. No man in Afghanistan could tell a story as well. Nadir Shah had been good, no doubt, but-

"I will beat him at his own game," thought Shir Aii gleefully, as he loafed carelessly from the little room into the splendid halls of the palace of the Amirs. "That will be amusing.... After that, may my right arm and Kismet help me— also my horse-thief wit!"

He mingled with the palace guard, and laughed with them. Then he went out into the winter night— alone, bidding no man follow him because he wanted to be alone so he could think! He thanked God the night was so cold. Few men would be about, perhaps none. A big question troubled him, a question which any man or officer about the palace could answer, but which Shir Ali dare not ask— because he was supposed to know the answer. To ask would seem queer.

"Where was Abdur Rahman confined?"

Somewhere in the palace, of course— handy for the tormenting Nadir Shah had enjoyed. But the palace was a vast place, with a hundred dungeons. And Shir Ali's knowledge was limited to a part of the stables and the secret door.

How quiet it was! Here was a passage. Dark in there. The habit of years bade Shir Ali walk cautiously. He grinned, squared his shoulders and swaggered.

"I am still a horse-thief, but I must try to remember that I am now a king!"

The dark passage was undoubtedly filled with cells, but there was no light at all. Shir Ali understood. Nadir Shah, to enhance his popularity, had set all the prisoners free. Except Abdur Rahman. That explained the quiet. No guards, and the soldiers amusing themselves. But here was another passage. And this one was also empty.

"I may have to ask somebody. I could shut his mouth after he told me! Ah!"

Shir Ali had heard voices. Two men having an argument. One of the voices remonstrated.

"But the man can not escape! He is locked in, and we have the key!"

The other spoke more quietly.

"Yes, but you know the order. Nadir Shah is good-natured— because he knows that his throne rests on the shoulders of men like you and me— but he is quite capable of having our heads cut off if he comes here— as he is likely to do— and finds nobody on guard, and nobody to unlock the door for him. How do you know he is in bed? When he is forever prowling around! Stay here, then, in case he comes. It's my turn, but... I will be back in an hour."

Shir Ali crouched in the shadows against the wall, and waited until the last speaker had gone. Then he walked into the passage.

"You return quickly— why?" the voice of the guard greeted him.

"Your eyes are dull," growled Shir Ali in the manner of Nadir Shah. "I come for some little talk with that which thou hast in the cage! Unlock the door!"

"My lord Amir!" The guard squirmed in his eagerness to please. "Certainly, my lord. The thing in there sleeps. I will open the door of its cage."

Shir Ali stared into the dark little cell. He spoke loudly, sarcastically, insultingly.

"How fares my captive goat?"

Abdur Rahman did not answer, but the guard laughed flatteringly. Then he asked:

"Shall I make the surly swine answer my lord?"

Shir Ali clenched his fist.

"Speakest thou so of a king?" he asked quietly.

"Why, my lord! . .

But Shir Ali's fist met the wagging chin, and the guard pitched headlong and unconscious into the cell.

Shir Ali stepped quickly after him. He saw, dimly in a corner, the figure of the astonished Abdur Rahman.

"This is thy friend Shir Ali, now Amir of Afghanistan!" Shir Ali spoke rapidly, laughing with the thrill of it. "Quick, a piece of thy shirt, or something. I need a gag for this guard before he can shout."

"Shir Ali... Amir!" gasped Abdur Rahman.

"Thy shirt, quickly!"

Abdur Rahman acted rapidly. As they gagged and bound the guard he asked:

"How did you do it, worker of miracles? And—how is my son?"

"Well, and cared for by English women! I did but seek to prevent Nadir Shall from cutting off thy head. Then I saw his face, and did some thinking. For I had heard him talk with his ministers, and saw that they were likely to change all the old laws. Nadir Shah could no longer trouble thee, but those ministers might make a cook into an Amir. So I became determined to rescue thee. I saw the face of Nadir Shah. Like mine, as you said. The way then was easy. I saw that my job would not be complete until I saw your throne made safe for thee. So I decided to rule in thy stead until the English army ends this petty revolution. I wanted to see what it felt like to be an Amiri"

"Where is Nadir Shah?"

Shir Ali chuckled.

"Let's hope he is in Paradise. But the last I saw of him he was going down a dark cold river into the bowels of the earth! Come now, and I will get horses!"

The guard struggled back to consciousness. He gurgled. Shir Ali spoke with mock gentleness.

"Be not disturbed, little one. Thine Amir is merely amusing himself. But be not afraid, for Nadir Shah will never so much as harm a hair of thy head!"

Shir Ali took Abdur Rahman by the arm. They left the cell. Shir Ali locked the door. He put the key in his pocket. He laughed softly.

"One can never tell when the key of a jail may come in handy. I will keep this one!"

Abdur Rahman, physically and nervously worn by the cat-and-mouse torment he had endured, shivered as they came out of the passage into die bitter wind.

'What next?" his teeth chattered.

Shir Ali blew out his chest. His Afghan soul delighted in his answer.

"Now we will put you back on the throne again, and give those damned rebels such a lesson that you will never again be troubled by them. You shall ride into Kabul at the head of the English army, with all the people cheering your return! In the meanwhile— oh, but this is delicious!— I will get two horses merely by ordering a groom to saddle them for me. I would dearly like to strut through the palace again, with men bowing to me, but why sacrifice victory to vanity? Wait here, my lord, in the shadow, lest some observant groom recognize thee. I go to order horses. What a holy situation for a horse-thief! Allah be praised, what a wonderful world this is!"

Shir Ali strode, as an Amir should stride, to the stable. He was living at the height of life, speaking not in Pushtu but in flowing Persian periods, acquired heaven knows where, drunk with the wine of delight but coldly cunning, as ever, in his actions.

The warm smell of the stables and a groom asleep. Shir Ali touched him with his foot, and the groom jumped blinking to his feet.

"Saddle two of the best horses," growled Shir Ali. "Not those, thickhead! Who ever made thee a groom? You should be tending camels! See, take that one, and that roan in the stall!"

The groom was amazed. For the Amir was working with him. And the groom had never seen a cleverer man with horses. And the Amir was saying:

"I will lead them out! It's cold out there, and I don't want my servants to be uncomfortable!"

"NOW, my lord, mount! The world turns and brings thy throne back to thee. The English outposts will not be far away by this time. Mount and ride, Abdur Rahman, my king— but be careful not to speak to the sentry. He will pass *me* as Amir of Afghanistan!"

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14: The Mysterious Sketch

Erckmann-Chatrian

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OPPOSITE THE CHAPEL of Saint Sebalt in Nuremberg, at the corner of Trabaus Street, there stands a little tavern, tall and narrow, with a toothed gable and dusty windows, whose roof is surmounted by a plaster Virgin. It was there that I spent the unhappiest days of my life. I had gone to Nuremberg to study the old German masters; but in default of ready money, I had to paint portraits— and such portraits! Fat old women with their cats on their laps, big-wigged aldermen, burgomasters in three-cornered hats— all horribly bright with ochre and vermilion. From portraits I descended to sketches, and from sketches to silhouettes.

Nothing is more annoying than to have your landlord come to you every day with pinched lips, shrill voice, and impudent manner to say: "Well, sir, how soon are you going to pay me? Do you know how much your bill is? No; that doesn't worry you! You eat, drink, and sleep calmly enough. God feeds the sparrows. Your bill now amounts to two hundred florins and ten kreutzers— it is not worth talking about."

Those who have not heard any one talk in this way can form no idea of it; love of art, imagination, and the sacred enthusiasm for the beautiful are blasted by the breath of such an attack. You become awkward and timid; all your energy evaporates, as well as your feeling of personal dignity, and you bow respectfully at a distance to the burgomaster Schneegans.

One night, not having a sou, as usual, and threatened with imprisonment by this worthy Mister Rap, I determined to make him a bankrupt by cutting my throat. Seated on my narrow bed, opposite the window, in this agreeable mood, I gave myself up to a thousand philosophical reflections, more or less comforting.

"What is man?" I asked myself. "An omnivorous animal; his jaws, provided with canines, incisors, and molars, prove it. The canines are made to tear meat; the incisors to bite fruits; and the molars to masticate, grind and triturate animal and vegetable substances that are pleasant to smell and to taste. But when he has nothing to masticate, this being is an absurdity in Nature, a superfluity, a fifth wheel to the coach."

Such were my reflections. I dared not open my razor for fear that the invincible force of my logic would inspire me with the courage to make an end of

it all. After having argued so finely, I blew out my candle, postponing the sequel till the morrow.

That abominable Rap had completely stupefied me. I could do nothing but silhouettes, and my sole desire was to have some money to rid myself of his odious presence. But on this night a singular change came over my mind. I awoke about one o'clock— I lit my lamp, and, enveloping myself in my gray gabardine, I drew upon the paper a rapid sketch after the Dutch school— something strange and bizarre, which had not the slightest resemblance to my ordinary conceptions.

Imagine a dreary courtyard enclosed by high dilapidated walls. These walls are furnished with hooks, seven or eight feet from the ground. You see, at a glance, that it is a butchery.

On the left, there extends a lattice structure; you perceive through it a quartered beef suspended from the roof by enormous pulleys. Great pools of blood run over the flagstones and unite in a ditch full of refuse.

The light falls from above, between the chimneys where the weathercocks stand out from a bit of the sky the size of your hand, and the roofs of the neighboring houses throw bold shadows from story to story.

At the back of this place is a shed, beneath the shed a pile of wood, and upon the pile of wood some ladders, a few bundles of straw, some coils of rope, a chicken-coop, and an old dilapidated rabbit-hutch.

How did these heterogeneous details suggest themselves to my imagination? I don't know; I had no reminiscences, and yet every stroke of the pencil seemed the result of observation, and strange because it was all so true. Nothing was lacking.

But on the right, one corner of the sketch remained a blank. I did not know what to put there.... Something suddenly seemed to writhe there, to move! Then I saw a foot, the sole of a foot. Notwithstanding this improbable position, I followed my inspiration without reference to my own criticism. This foot was joined to a leg— over this leg, stretched out with effort, there soon floated the skirt of a dress. In short, there appeared by degrees, an old woman, pale, disheveled, and wasted, thrown down at the side of a well, and struggling to free herself from a hand that clutched at her throat.

It was a murder scene that I was drawing. The pencil fell from my hand.

This woman, in the boldest attitude, with her thighs bent on the curb of the well, her face contracted by terror, and her two hands grasping the murderer's arm, frightened me. I could not look at her. But the man— he, the person to whom that arm belonged— I could not see him. It was impossible for me to finish the sketch.

"I am tired," I said, my forehead dripping with perspiration; "there is only this figure to do; I will finish it to-morrow. It will be easy then."

And I went to bed again, thoroughly frightened by my vision.

The next morning, I got up very early. I was dressing in order to resume my interrupted work, when two little knocks were heard on my door.

"Come in!"

The door opened. An old man, tall, thin, and dressed in black, appeared on the threshold. This man's face, his eyes set close together and his large nose like the beak of an eagle, surmounted by a high bony forehead, had something severe about it. He bowed to me gravely.

"Mister Christian Vénius, the painter?" said he.

"That is my name, sir."

He bowed again, adding:

"The Baron Frederick Van Spreckdal."

The appearance of the rich amateur, Van Spreckdal, judge of the criminal court, in my poor lodging, greatly disturbed me. I could not help throwing a stealthy glance at my old worm-eaten furniture, my damp hangings and my dusty floor. I felt humiliated by such dilapidation; but Van Spreckdal did not seem to take any account of these details; and sitting down at my little table:

"Mister Vénius," he resumed, "I come—" But at this instant his glance fell upon the unfinished sketch— he did not finish his phrase.

I was sitting on the edge of my little bed; and the sudden attention that this personage bestowed upon one of my productions made my heart beat with an indefinable apprehension.

At the end of a minute, Van Spreckdal lifted his head:

"Are you the author of that sketch?" he asked me with an intent look.

"Yes, sir."

"What is the price of it?"

"I never sell my sketches. It is the plan for a picture."

"Ah!" said he, picking up the paper with the tips of his long yellow fingers.

He took a lens from his waistcoat pocket and began to study the design in silence.

The sun was now shining obliquely into the garret. Van Spreckdal never said a word; the hook of his immense nose increased, his heavy eyebrows contracted, and his long pointed chin took a turn upward, making a thousand little wrinkles in his long, thin cheeks. The silence was so profound that I could distinctly hear the plaintive buzzing of a fly that had been caught in a spider's web.

"And the dimensions of this picture, Mister Vénius," he said without looking at me.

"Three feet by four."

"The price?"

"Fifty ducats."

Van Spreckdal laid the sketch on the table, and drew from his pocket a large purse of green silk shaped like a pear; he drew the rings of it—

"Fifty ducats," said he, "here they are."

I was simply dazzled.

The Baron rose and bowed to me, and I heard his big ivory-headed cane resounding on each step until he reached the bottom of the stairs. Then, recovering from my stupor, I suddenly remembered that I had not thanked him, and I flew down the five flights like lightning; but when I reached the bottom, I looked to the right and left; the street was deserted.

"Well!" I said, "this is strange."

And I went upstairs again all out of breath.

ii

THE SURPRISING way in which Van Spreckdal had appeared to me threw me into a deep wonderment. "Yesterday," I said to myself, as I contemplated the pile of ducats glittering in the sun, "yesterday I formed the wicked intention of cutting my throat, all for the want of a few miserable florins, and now to-day Fortune has showered them from the clouds. Indeed it was fortunate that I did not open my razor; and, if the same temptation ever comes to me again, I will take care to wait until the morrow."

After making these judicious reflections, I sat down to finish the sketch; four strokes of the pencil and it would be finished. But here an incomprehensible difficulty awaited me. It was impossible for me to make those four sweeps of the pencil; I had lost the thread of my inspiration, and the mysterious personage no longer stood out in my brain. I tried in vain to evoke him, to sketch him, and to recover him; he no longer accorded with the surroundings than with a figure by Raphael in a Teniers inn-kitchen. I broke out into a profuse perspiration.

At this moment, Rap opened the door without knocking, according to his praiseworthy custom. His eyes fell upon my pile of ducats and in a shrill voice he cried:

"Eh! eh! so I catch you. Will you still persist in telling me, Mr. Painter, that you have no money?"

And his hooked fingers advanced with that nervous trembling that the sight of gold always produces in a miser.

For a few seconds I was stupefied.

The memory of all the indignities that this individual had inflicted upon me, his covetous look, and his impudent smile exasperated me. With a single bound, I caught hold of him, and pushed him out of the room, slamming the door in his face.

This was done with the crack and rapidity of a spring snuff-box.

But from outside the old usurer screamed like an eagle:

"My money, you thief, my money!"

The lodgers come out of their rooms, asking:

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

I opened the door suddenly and quickly gave Mister Rap a kick in the spine that sent him rolling down more than twenty steps.

"That's what's the matter!" I cried, quite beside myself. Then I shut the door and bolted it, while bursts of laughter from the neighbors greeted Mister Rap in the passage.

I was satisfied with myself; I rubbed my hands together. This adventure had put new life into me; I resumed my work, and was about to finish the sketch when I heard an unusual noise.

Butts of muskets were grounded on the pavement. I looked out of my window and saw three soldiers in full uniform with grounded arms in front of my door.

I said to myself in my terror: "Can it be that that scoundrel of a Rap has had any bones broken?"

And here is the strange peculiarity of the human mind: I, who the night before had wanted to cut my own throat, shook from head to foot, thinking that I might well be hanged if Rap were dead.

The stairway was filled with confused noises. It was an ascending flood of heavy footsteps, clanking arms, and short syllables.

Suddenly somebody tried to open my door. It was shut.

Then there was a general clamor.

"In the name of the law— open!"

I arose, trembling and weak in the knees.

"Open!" the same voice repeated.

I thought to escape over the roofs; but I had hardly put my head out of the little snuff-box window, when I drew back, seized with vertigo. I saw in a flash all the windows below with their shining panes, their flower-pots, their birdcages, and their gratings. Lower, the balcony; still lower, the street lamp; still lower again, the sign of the "Red Cask" framed in iron-work; and, finally, three glittering bayonets, only awaiting my fall to run me through the body from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head. On the roof of the opposite house a tortoise-shell cat was crouching behind a chimney, watching a band of sparrows fighting and scolding in the gutter.

One can not imagine to what clearness, intensity, and rapidity the human eye acquires when stimulated by fear.

At the third summons I heard:

"Open, or we shall force it!"

Seeing that flight was impossible, I staggered to the door and drew the bolt.

Two hands immediately fell upon my collar. A dumpy, little man, smelling of wine, said:

"I arrest you!"

He wore a bottle-green redingote, buttoned to the chin, and a stovepipe hat. He had large brown whiskers, rings on every finger, and was named Passauf.

He was the chief of police.

Five bull-dogs with flat caps, noses like pistols, and lower jaws turning upward, observed me from outside.

"What do you want?" I asked Passauf.

"Come downstairs," he cried roughly, as he gave a sign to one of his men to seize me.

This man took hold of me, more dead than alive, while several other men turned my room upside down.

I went downstairs supported by the arms like a person in the last stages of consumption— with hair disheveled and stumbling at every step.

They thrust me into a cab between two strong fellows, who charitably let me see the ends of their clubs, held to their wrists by a leather string— and then the carriage started off.

I heard behind us the feet of all the urchins of the town.

"What have I done?" I asked one of my keepers.

He looked at the other with a strange smile and said:

"Hans— he asks what he has done!"

That smile froze my blood.

Soon a deep shadow enveloped the carriage; the horses' hoofs resounded under an archway. We were entering the Raspelhaus. Of this place one might say:

"Dans cet antre,
Je vois fort bien comme l'on entre,
Et ne vois point comme on en sort."

All is not rose-colored in this world; from the claws of Rap I fell into a dungeon, from which very few poor devils have a chance to escape.

Large dark courtyards and rows of windows like a hospital, and furnished with gratings; not a sprig of verdure, not a festoon of ivy, not even a weathercock in perspective— such was my new lodging. It was enough to make one tear his hair out by the roots.

The police officers, accompanied by the jailer, took me temporarily to a lock-up.

The jailer, if I remember rightly, was named Kasper Schlüssel; with his gray, woolen cap, his pipe between his teeth, and his bunch of keys at his belt, he

reminded me of the Owl-God of the Caribs. He had the same golden yellow eyes, that see in the dark, a nose like a comma, and a neck that was sunk between the shoulders.

Schlüssel shut me up as calmly as one locks up his socks in a cupboard, while thinking of something else. As for me, I stood for more than ten minutes with my hands behind my back and my head bowed. At the end of that time I made the following reflection: "When falling, Rap cried out, 'I am assassinated,' but he did not say by whom. I will say it was my neighbor, the old merchant with the spectacles: he will be hanged in my place."

This idea comforted my heart, and I drew a long breath. Then I looked about my prison. It seemed to have been newly whitewashed, and the walls were bare of designs, except in one corner, where a gallows had been crudely sketched by my predecessor. The light was admitted through a bull's-eye about nine or ten feet from the floor; the furniture consisted of a bundle of straw and a tub.

I sat down upon the straw with my hands around my knees in deep despondency. It was with great difficulty that I could think clearly; but suddenly imagining that Rap, before dying, had denounced me, my legs began to tingle, and I jumped up coughing, as if the hempen cord were already tightening around my neck.

At the same moment, I heard Schlüssel walking down the corridor; he opened the lock-up, and told me to follow him. He was still accompanied by the two officers, so I fell into step resolutely.

We walked down long galleries, lighted at intervals by small windows from within. Behind a grating I saw the famous Jic-Jack, who was going to be executed on the morrow. He had on a straitjacket and sang out in a raucous voice:

"*Je suis le roi de ces montagnes.*"

Seeing me, he called out:

"Eh! comrade! I'll keep a place for you at my right."

The two police officers and the Owl-God looked at each other and smiled, while I felt the goose-flesh creep down the whole length of my back.

iii

SCHLÜSSEL shoved me into a large and very dreary hall, with benches arranged in a semicircle. The appearance of this deserted hall, with its two high grated windows, and its Christ carved in old brown oak with His arms extended and His head sorrowfully inclined upon His shoulder, inspired me with I do not know what kind of religious fear that accorded with my actual situation.

All my ideas of false accusation disappeared, and my lips tremblingly murmured a prayer.

I had not prayed for a long time; but misfortune always brings us to thoughts of submission. Man is so little in himself!

Opposite me, on an elevated seat, two men were sitting, with their backs to the light, and consequently their faces were in shadow. However, I recognized Van Spreckdal by his acquiline profile, illuminated by an oblique reflection from the window. The other person was fat, he had round, chubby cheeks and short hands, and he wore a robe, like Van Spreckdal.

Below was the clerk of the court, Conrad; he was writing at a low table and was tickling the tip of his ear with the feather-end of his pen. When I entered, he stopped to look at me curiously.

They made me sit down, and Van Spreckdal, raising his voice, said to me:

"Christian Vénius, where did you get this sketch?"

He showed me the nocturnal sketch which was then in his possession. It was handed to me. After having examined it, I replied:

"I am the author of it."

A long silence followed; the clerk of the court, Conrad, wrote down my reply. I heard his pen scratch over the paper, and I thought: "Why did they ask me that question? That has nothing to do with the kick I gave Rap in the back."

"You are the author of it?" asked Van Spreckdal. "What is the subject?"

"It is a subject of pure fancy."

"You have not copied the details from some spot?"

"No, sir; I imagined it all."

"Accused Christian," said the judge in a severe tone, "I ask you to reflect. Do not lie."

"I have spoken the truth."

"Write that down, clerk," said Van Spreckdal.

The pen scratched again.

"And this woman," continued the judge— "this woman who is being murdered at the side of the well— did you imagine her also?"

"Certainly."

"You have never seen her?"

"Never."

Van Spreckdal rose indignantly; then, sitting down again, he seemed to consult his companion in a low voice.

These two dark profiles silhouetted against the brightness of the window, and the three men standing behind me, the silence in the hall— everything made me shiver.

"What do you want with me? What have I done?" I murmured.

Suddenly Van Spreckdal said to my guardians:

"You can take the prisoner back to the carriage; we will go to Metzerstrasse."

Then, addressing me:

"Christian Vénius," he cried, "you are in a deplorable situation. Collect your thoughts and remember that if the law of men is inflexible, there still remains for you the mercy of God. This you can merit by confessing your crime."

These words stunned me like a blow from a hammer. I fell back with extended arms, crying:

"Ah! what a terrible dream!"

And I fainted.

When I regained consciousness, the carriage was rolling slowly down the street; another one preceded us. The two officers were always with me. One of them on the way offered a pinch of snuff to his companion; mechanically I reached out my hand toward the snuff-box, but he withdrew it quickly.

My cheeks reddened with shame, and I turned away my head to conceal my emotion.

"If you look outside," said the man with the snuff-box, "we shall be obliged to put handcuffs on you."

"May the devil strangle you, you infernal scoundrel!" I said to myself. And as the carriage now stopped, one of them got out, while the other held me by the collar; then, seeing that his comrade was ready to receive me, he pushed me rudely to him.

These infinite precautions to hold possession of my person boded no good; but I was far from predicting the seriousness of the accusation that hung over my head until an alarming circumstance opened my eyes and threw me into despair.

They pushed me along a low alley, the pavement of which was unequal and broken; along the wall there ran a yellowish ooze, exhaling a fetid odor. I walked down this dark place with the two men behind me. A little further there appeared the chiaroscuro of an interior courtyard.

I grew more and more terror-stricken as I advanced. It was no natural feeling: it was a poignant anxiety, outside of nature— like the nightmare. I recoiled instinctively at each step.

"Go on!" cried one of the policemen, laying his hand on my shoulder; "go on!"

But what was my astonishment when, at the end of the passage, I saw the courtyard that I had drawn the night before, with its walls furnished with hooks, its rubbish-heap of old iron, its chicken-coops, and its rabbit-hutch. Not a dormer window, high or low, not a broken pane, not the slightest detail had been omitted.

I was thunderstruck by this strange revelation.

Near the well were the two judges, Van Spreckdal and Richter. At their feet lay the old woman extended on her back, her long, thin, gray hair, her blue face, her eyes wide open, and her tongue between her teeth.

It was a horrible spectacle!

"Well," said Van Spreckdal, with solemn accents, "what have you to say?"

I did not reply.

"Do you remember having thrown this woman, Theresa Becker, into this well, after having strangled her to rob her of her money."

"No," I cried, "no! I do not know this woman; I never saw her before. May God help me!"

"That will do," he replied in a dry voice. And without saying another word he went out with his companion.

The officers now believed they had best put handcuffs on me. They took me back to the Raspelhaus, in a state of profound stupidity. I did not know what to think; my conscience itself troubled me; I even asked myself if I really had murdered the old woman!

In the eyes of the officers I was condemned.

I will not tell you of my emotions that night in the Raspelhaus, when, seated on my straw bed with the window opposite me and the gallows in perspective, I heard the watchmen cry in the silence of the night: "Sleep, people of Nuremberg; the Lord watches over you. One o'clock! Two o'clock! Three o'clock!"

Every one may form his own idea of such a night. There is a fine saying that it is better to be hanged innocent than guilty. For the soul, yes; but for the body, it makes no difference; on the contrary, it kicks, it curses its lot, it tries to escape, knowing well enough that its rôle ends with the rope. Add to this, that it repents not having sufficiently enjoyed life and at having listened to the soul when it preached abstinence.

"Ah! if I had only known!" it cried, "you would not have led me about by a string with your big words, your beautiful phrases, and your magnificent sentences! You would not have allured me with your fine promises. I should have had many happy moments that are now lost forever. Everything is over! You said to me: 'Control your passions.' Very well! I did control them. Here I am now! they are going to hang me, and you— later they will speak of you as a sublime soul, a stoical soul, a martyr to the errors of Justice. They will never think about me!"

Such were the sad reflections of my poor body.

Day broke; at first, dull and undecided, it threw an uncertain light on my bull's-eye window with its cross-bars; then it blazed against the wall at the back. Outside the street became lively. This was a market-day; it was Friday. I heard the vegetable wagons pass and also the country people with their baskets. Some

chickens cackled in their coops in passing and some butter sellers chattered together. The market opposite opened, and they began to arrange the stalls.

Finally, it was broad daylight and the vast murmur of the increasing crowd, housekeepers who assembled with baskets on their arms, coming and going, discussing and marketing, told me that it was eight o'clock.

With the light, my heart gained a little courage. Some of my black thoughts disappeared. I desired to see what was going on outside.

Other prisoners before me had managed to climb up to the bull's-eye; they had dug some holes in the wall to mount more easily. I climbed in my turn, and, when seated in the oval edge of the window, with my legs bent and my head bowed, I could see the crowd, and all the life and movement. Tears ran freely down my cheeks. I thought no longer of suicide— I experienced a need to live and breathe, which was really extraordinary.

"Ah!" I said, "to live what happiness! Let them harness me to a wheelbarrow— let them put a ball and chain around my leg— nothing matters if I may only live!"

The old market, with its roof shaped like an extinguisher, supported on heavy pillars, made a superb picture: old women seated before their panniers of vegetables, their cages of poultry and their baskets of eggs; behind them the Jews, dealers in old clothes, their faces the color of old boxwood; butchers with bare arms, cutting up meat on their stalls; countrymen, with large hats on the backs of their heads, calm and grave with their hands behind their backs and resting on their sticks of hollywood, and tranquilly smoking their pipes. Then the tumult and noise of the crowd— those screaming, shrill, grave, high, and short words— those expressive gestures— those sudden attitudes that show from a distance the progress of a discussion and depict so well the character of the individual— in short, all this captivated my mind, and notwithstanding my sad condition, I felt happy to be still of the world.

Now, while I looked about in this manner, a man— a butcher— passed, inclining forward and carrying an enormous quarter of beef on his shoulders; his arms were bare, his elbows were raised upward and his head was bent under them. His long hair, like that of Salvator's Sicambrian, hid his face from me; and yet, at the first glance, I trembled.

"It is he!" I said.

All the blood in my body rushed to my heart. I got down from the window trembling to the ends of my fingers, feeling my cheeks quiver, and the pallor spread over my face, stammering in a choked voice:

"It is he! he is there— there— and I, I have to die to expiate his crime. Oh, God! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

A sudden idea, an inspiration from Heaven, flashed across my mind. I put my hand in the pocket of my coat— my box of crayons was there!

Then rushing to the wall, I began to trace the scene of the murder with superhuman energy. No uncertainty, no hesitation! I knew the man! I had seen him! He was there before me!

At ten o'clock the jailer came to my cell. His owl-like impassibility gave place to admiration.

"Is it possible?" he cried, standing at the threshold.

"Go, bring me my judges," I said to him, pursuing my work with an increasing exultation.

Schlüssel answered:

"They are waiting for you in the trial-room."

"I wish to make a revelation," I cried, as I put the finishing touches to the mysterious personage.

He lived; he was frightful to see. His full-faced figure, foreshortened upon the wall, stood out from the white background with an astonishing vitality.

The jailer went away.

A few minutes afterward the two judges appeared. They were stupefied. I, trembling, with extended hand, said to them:

"There is the murderer!"

After a few moments of silence, Van Spreckdal asked me:

"What is his name?"

"I don't know; but he is at this moment in the market; he is cutting up meat in the third stall to the left as you enter from Trabaus Street."

"What do you think?" said he, leaning toward his colleague.

"Send for the man," he replied in a grave tone.

Several officers retained in the corridor obeyed this order. The judges stood, examining the sketch. As for me, I had dropped on my bed of straw, my head between my knees, perfectly exhausted.

Soon steps were heard echoing under the archway. Those who have never awaited the hour of deliverance and counted the minutes, which seem like centuries— those who have never experienced the sharp emotions of outrage, terror, hope, and doubt— can have no conception of the inward chills that I experienced at that moment. I should have distinguished the step of the murderer, walking between the guards, among a thousand others. They approached. The judges themselves seemed moved. I raised up my head, my heart feeling as if an iron hand had clutched it, and I fixed my eyes upon the closed door. It opened. The man entered. His cheeks were red and swollen, the muscles in his large contracted jaws twitched as far as his ears, and his little restless eyes, yellow like a wolf's, gleamed beneath his heavy yellowish red eyebrows.

Van Spreckdal showed him the sketch in silence.

Then that murderous man, with the large shoulders, having looked, grew pale— then, giving a roar which thrilled us all with terror, he waved his enormous arms, and jumped backward to overthrow the guards. There was a terrible struggle in the corridor; you could hear nothing but the panting breathing of the butcher, his muttered imprecations, and the short words and the shuffling feet of the guard, upon the flagstones.

This lasted only about a minute.

Finally the assassin re-entered, with his head hanging down, his eyes bloodshot, and his hands fastened behind his back. He looked again at the picture of the murder; he seemed to reflect, and then, in a low voice, as if talking to himself:

"Who could have seen me," he said, "at midnight?"

I was saved!

MANY YEARS have passed since that terrible adventure. Thank Heaven! I make silhouettes no longer, nor portraits of burgomasters. Through hard work and perseverance, I have conquered my place in the world, and I earn my living honorably by painting works of art— the sole end, in my opinion, to which a true artist should aspire. But the memory of that nocturnal sketch has always remained in my mind. Sometimes, in the midst of work, the thought of it recurs. Then I lay down my palette and dream for hours.

How could a crime committed by a man that I did not know— at a place that I had never seen— have been reproduced by my pencil, in all its smallest details?

Was it chance? No! And moreover, what is chance but the effect of a cause of which we are ignorant?

Was Schiller right when he said: "The immortal soul does not participate in the weaknesses of matter; during the sleep of the body, it spreads its radiant wings and travels, God knows where! What it then does, no one can say, but inspiration sometimes betrays the secret of its nocturnal wanderings."

Who knows? Nature is more audacious in her realities than man in his most fantastic imaginings.

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15: From Feinberg to Fitzroy

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 6 Feb 1937

MR. JACOB FEINBERG was in love. Badly, madly, sadly in love. In his condition, garlic smelled like lilacs, and his seat on the Bronx subway was as comfortable as the roomiest Rolls Royce. He fell asleep nights with Mildred's name on his lips, and awakened mornings with the girl on his mind. In other words, he was a first-class subject for a popular song— or a psychopathic ward.

His marriage was only three weeks away. He was counting the hours, the days, and the bank-roll. Surely he was the luckiest man alive. He had a dress business that hadn't failed as yet. His insurance was in fine shape. His father and mother approved of Mildred. He was healthy, and only 27 years of age. And, above all, he had Mildred. Ah, that girl! To Mr. Feinberg she was the very essence of perfect. She was a Peggy Joyce, a Clara Bow, a Janet Gaynor and a Jean Harlow all rolled into one. She was his honey lamb, his favorite flower, and his most gorgeous statue.

I hate to spoil the picture, but were you and I to look at Mildred in those days, we might not be so enthusiastic as Mr. Feinberg. In the first place, the young lady's eyes could grow very cold. And in the second place, she talked back too often. Accordingly, brothers, let me give you a tip: When you're in love with a girl whose eyes grow cold and who talks back too frequently, that's no time for romance. That's the time for you to pack your bag and settle down alone in Alaska.

But Mr. Feinberg did not ask for my advice. Nor would it have done any good. For when Mildred's eyes grew cold, Mr. Feinberg thought they were more beautiful than ever. And when she talked back, he was proud of her spirit. And so, alas, they were married.

FOR a year or so, everything was peaches and milk. Mr. Feinberg was getting along as nicely as you might expect, and he hadn't failed in the dress business. And he was devoted to Mrs. Feinberg in spite of her nagging. Yes, even Mr. Feinberg had begun to admit that she was something of a nag. Never content to let well enough alone you know. If his business earned a profit of 300 dollars in one week, she wanted to know why It hadn't been 400 dollars. If he wanted to take her to a night club, she called him extravagant. If he wanted to stay in, she said he was stingy.

One night, out of a cloudy sky— Just to be different — the blow fell. Mrs. Feinberg put down her coffee and looked at her husband.

"What you are going to do," she said, "is change your name."

Her husband almost choked on a piece of strudel. "Wha-wha-what?" he stammered. "What did you say?"

"I said," repeated Mrs. Feinberg calmly, "that you are going to change your name. I've been thinking about this for some time and I made up my mind this afternoon. I'll pick out some fine American name and you'll have the proper papers drawn up by your lawyer. I think that Forrester would be nice. Or maybe Fitzroy."

Mr. Feinberg was looking at her with astonished eyes. "Have you suddenly gone crazy?" he asked. "Do you want me to call Dr. Himmelstein? Or is it possible that you are serious?"

"Certainly I'm serious," she snapped back. Do you think I'm speaking just to hear myself talk? with such a name as Feinberg, we can't possibly get anywhere in the social world. And I'm not so sure that it's helping you in the business world either. That's why we're no longer going to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Feinberg."

The man stood up. Get ready to cheer this speech, boys. For the first time in his married life, it. was Mr. Feinberg's turn for the eyes to grow cold and the voice to bark back.

"Get this straight, Mildred," he roared. "The name of Feinberg has been good enough for my family for countless generations, and it's good enough for me today. To hell with the social world. If I'm not good enough for them as Feinberg, I'm not good enough for them as Fitzroy either.

"I'm satisfied the way I am. And you're no longer going to tell me what I can or can't do. I'm remaining Mr. Jacob Feinberg. And you're remaining Mrs. Jacob Feinberg."

But the wife had turned from Feinberg to Iceberg. "You've said enough," was her cold rejoinder. "Either you change your name, or I'm getting out."

"Get," said Mr. Feinberg. And she got.

IT WAS JUST about six months later that Mr. Feinberg called his wife upon the phone. They had not spoken since the fatal night.

"Don't hang up on me, dearest," he said pleadingly. "I've made a mistake, and I'm only calling to apologise. Will you "

"You're too late," she interrupted. "I'm leaving for Reno tomorrow. I'm going to divorce you."

Mr. Feinberg grew panicky. "But, Mildred, you can't do that. Wait, baby. ' I've got a big surprise for you. Remember what you asked me to do? About changing my name, I mean. Well, I've done it. The court gave me permission this morning. You are no longer Mrs. Jacob Feinberg. You are Mrs. Jack Fitzroy!"

If he had expected a verbal caress, he was doomed to disappointment.

"It makes no difference now," he heard her say. "I'm going to Reno just the same."

"But, darling," he pleaded. "Don't you understand? I've done as you asked. I've changed from Feinberg to Fitzroy. Surely you?"

Once again she stepped in. "I'm sorry," she said, "but it's no use now. It's too late. I don't expect to see or hear from you again. Goodbye."

And that was the end of that. Our hero cried bitterly. Because our hero didn't know when he was well off.

WE SKIP another two years just as blithely as you please, and we arrive at the present time. Mr. Jack Fitzroy was walking along Fifth Avenue without a care in the world. Suddenly his heart bumped his tonsils. Mildred, the girl who had divorced him, had just walked by!

Mr. Fitzroy turned back. He took her arm. She looked up in. surprise. They shook hands warmly.

"Gee, Mildred, I'm certainly glad to see you again. You're looking fine. Been living on the coast, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied the woman. "And I'm very happy. I went to California as soon as the divorce came through, and I've been living there ever since. Just here on a visit. And by the way, I've married again."

"Married," replied Mr. Fitzroy, with a slight catch in his voice. "To whom?"

"You wouldn't know him," returned his ex-wife. "It's a man named Feinberg."

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16: The Ides of March

E. W. Hornung

1866-1921

Cassell's Magazine, June 1898

In: *The Amateur Cracksman*, 1899

This story introduced A. J. Raffles, the gentleman burglar

IT WAS HALF-PAST twelve when I returned to the Albany as a last desperate resort. The scene of my disaster was much as I had left it. The baccarat-counters still strewed the table, with the empty glasses and the loaded ash-trays. A window had been opened to let the smoke out, and was letting in the fog instead. Raffles himself had merely discarded his dining jacket for one of his innumerable blazers. Yet he arched his eyebrows as though I had dragged him from his bed.

"Forgotten something?" said he, when he saw me on his mat.

"No," said I, pushing past him without ceremony. And I led the way into his room with an impudence amazing to myself.

"Not come back for your revenge, have you? Because I'm afraid I can't give it to you single-handed. I was sorry myself that the others— "

We were face to face by his fireside, and I cut him short.

"Raffles," said I, "you may well be surprised at my coming back in this way and at this hour. I hardly know you. I was never in your rooms before to-night. But I fagged for you at school, and you said you remembered me. Of course that's no excuse; but will you listen to me— for two minutes?"

In my emotion I had at first to struggle for every word; but his face reassured me as I went on, and I was not mistaken in its expression.

"Certainly, my dear man," said he; "as many minutes as you like. Have a Sullivan and sit down." And he handed me his silver cigarette-case.

"No," said I, finding a full voice as I shook my head; "no, I won't smoke, and I won't sit down, thank you. Nor will you ask me to do either when you've heard what I have to say."

"Really?" said he, lighting his own cigarette with one clear blue eye upon me. "How do you know?"

"Because you'll probably show me the door," I cried bitterly; "and you will be justified in doing it! But it's no use beating about the bush. You know I dropped over two hundred just now?"

He nodded.

"I hadn't the money in my pocket."

"I remember."

"But I had my check-book, and I wrote each of you a check at that desk."

"Well?"

"Not one of them was worth the paper it was written on, Raffles. I am overdrawn already at my bank!"

"Surely only for the moment?"

"No. I have spent everything."

"But somebody told me you were so well off. I heard you had come in for money?"

"So I did. Three years ago. It has been my curse; now it's all gone— every penny! Yes, I've been a fool; there never was nor will be such a fool as I've been… . Isn't this enough for you? Why don't you turn me out?" He was walking up and down with a very long face instead.

"Couldn't your people do anything?" he asked at length.

"Thank God," I cried, "I have no people! I was an only child. I came in for everything there was. My one comfort is that they're gone, and will never know."

I cast myself into a chair and hid my face. Raffles continued to pace the rich carpet that was of a piece with everything else in his rooms. There was no variation in his soft and even footfalls.

"You used to be a literary little cuss," he said at length; "didn't you edit the mag. before you left? Anyway I recollect fagging you to do my verses; and literature of all sorts is the very thing nowadays; any fool can make a living at it."

I shook my head. "Any fool couldn't write off my debts," said I.

"Then you have a flat somewhere?" he went on.

"Yes, in Mount Street."

"Well, what about the furniture?"

I laughed aloud in my misery. "There's been a bill of sale on every stick for months!"

And at that Raffles stood still, with raised eyebrows and stern eyes that I could meet the better now that he knew the worst; then, with a shrug, he resumed his walk, and for some minutes neither of us spoke. But in his handsome, unmoved face I read my fate and death-warrant; and with every breath I cursed my folly and my cowardice in coming to him at all. Because he had been kind to me at school, when he was captain of the eleven, and I his fag, I had dared to look for kindness from him now; because I was ruined, and he rich enough to play cricket all the summer, and do nothing for the rest of the year, I had fatuously counted on his mercy, his sympathy, his help! Yes, I had relied on him in my heart, for all my outward diffidence and humility; and I was rightly served. There was as little of mercy as of sympathy in that curling nostril, that rigid jaw, that cold blue eye which never glanced my way. I caught up my hat. I blundered to my feet. I would have gone without a word; but Raffles stood between me and the door.

"Where are you going?" said he.

"That's my business," I replied. "I won't trouble YOU any more."

"Then how am I to help you?"

"I didn't ask your help."

"Then why come to me?"

"Why, indeed!" I echoed. "Will you let me pass?"

"Not until you tell me where you are going and what you mean to do."

"Can't you guess?" I cried. And for many seconds we stood staring in each other's eyes.

"Have you got the pluck?" said he, breaking the spell in a tone so cynical that it brought my last drop of blood to the boil.

"You shall see," said I, as I stepped back and whipped the pistol from my overcoat pocket. "Now, will you let me pass or shall I do it here?"

The barrel touched my temple, and my thumb the trigger. Mad with excitement as I was, ruined, dishonored, and now finally determined to make an end of my misspent life, my only surprise to this day is that I did not do so then and there. The despicable satisfaction of involving another in one's destruction added its miserable appeal to my baser egoism; and had fear or horror flown to my companion's face, I shudder to think I might have died diabolically happy with that look for my last impious consolation. It was the look that came instead which held my hand. Neither fear nor horror were in it; only wonder, admiration, and such a measure of pleased expectancy as caused me after all to pocket my revolver with an oath.

"You devil!" I said. "I believe you wanted me to do it!"

"Not quite," was the reply, made with a little start, and a change of color that came too late. "To tell you the truth, though, I half thought you meant it, and I was never more fascinated in my life. I never dreamt you had such stuff in you, Bunny! No, I'm hanged if I let you go now. And you'd better not try that game again, for you won't catch me stand and look on a second time. We must think of some way out of the mess. I had no idea you were a chap of that sort! There, let me have the gun."

One of his hands fell kindly on my shoulder, while the other slipped into my overcoat pocket, and I suffered him to deprive me of my weapon without a murmur. Nor was this simply because Raffles had the subtle power of making himself irresistible at will. He was beyond comparison the most masterful man whom I have ever known; yet my acquiescence was due to more than the mere subjection of the weaker nature to the stronger. The forlorn hope which had brought me to the Albany was turned as by magic into an almost staggering sense of safety. Raffles would help me after all! A. J. Raffles would be my friend! It was as though all the world had come round suddenly to my side; so far

therefore from resisting his action, I caught and clasped his hand with a fervor as uncontrollable as the frenzy which had preceded it.

"God bless you!" I cried. "Forgive me for everything. I will tell you the truth. I *did* think you might help me in my extremity, though I well knew that I had no claim upon you. Still— for the old school's sake— the sake of old times— I thought you might give me another chance. If you wouldn't I meant to blow out my brains— and will still if you change your mind!"

In truth I feared that it was changing, with his expression, even as I spoke, and in spite of his kindly tone and kindlier use of my old school nickname. His next words showed me my mistake.

"What a boy it is for jumping to conclusions! I have my vices, Bunny, but backing and filling is not one of them. Sit down, my good fellow, and have a cigarette to soothe your nerves. I insist. Whiskey? The worst thing for you; here's some coffee that I was brewing when you came in. Now listen to me. You speak of 'another chance.' What do you mean? Another chance at baccarat? Not if I know it! You think the luck must turn; suppose it didn't? We should only have made bad worse. No, my dear chap, you've plunged enough. Do you put yourself in my hands or do you not? Very well, then you plunge no more, and I undertake not to present my check. Unfortunately there are the other men; and still more unfortunately, Bunny, I'm as hard up at this moment as you are yourself!"

It was my turn to stare at Raffles. "You?" I vociferated. "You hard up? How am I to sit here and believe that?"

"Did I refuse to believe it of you?" he returned, smiling. "And, with your own experience, do you think that because a fellow has rooms in this place, and belongs to a club or two, and plays a little cricket, he must necessarily have a balance at the bank? I tell you, my dear man, that at this moment I'm as hard up as you ever were. I have nothing but my wits to live on— absolutely nothing else. It was as necessary for me to win some money this evening as it was for you. We're in the same boat, Bunny; we'd better pull together."

"Together!" I jumped at it. "I'll do anything in this world for you, Raffles," I said, "if you really mean that you won't give me away. Think of anything you like, and I'll do it! I was a desperate man when I came here, and I'm just as desperate now. I don't mind what I do if only I can get out of this without a scandal."

Again I see him, leaning back in one of the luxurious chairs with which his room was furnished. I see his indolent, athletic figure; his pale, sharp, clean-shaven features; his curly black hair; his strong, unscrupulous mouth. And again I feel the clear beam of his wonderful eye, cold and luminous as a star, shining into my brain— sifting the very secrets of my heart.

"I wonder if you mean all that!" he said at length. "You do in your present mood; but who can back his mood to last? Still, there's hope when a chap takes that tone. Now I think of it, too, you were a plucky little devil at school; you once did me rather a good turn, I recollect. Remember it, Bunny? Well, wait a bit, and perhaps I'll be able to do you a better one. Give me time to think."

He got up, lit a fresh cigarette, and fell to pacing the room once more, but with a slower and more thoughtful step, and for a much longer period than before. Twice he stopped at my chair as though on the point of speaking, but each time he checked himself and resumed his stride in silence. Once he threw up the window, which he had shut some time since, and stood for some moments leaning out into the fog which filled the Albany courtyard. Meanwhile a clock on the chimney-piece struck one, and one again for the half-hour, without a word between us.

Yet I not only kept my chair with patience, but I acquired an incongruous equanimity in that half-hour. Insensibly I had shifted my burden to the broad shoulders of this splendid friend, and my thoughts wandered with my eyes as the minutes passed. The room was the good-sized, square one, with the folding doors, the marble mantel-piece, and the gloomy, old-fashioned distinction peculiar to the Albany. It was charmingly furnished and arranged, with the right amount of negligence and the right amount of taste. What struck me most, however, was the absence of the usual insignia of a cricketer's den. Instead of the conventional rack of war-worn bats, a carved oak bookcase, with every shelf in a litter, filled the better part of one wall; and where I looked for cricketing groups, I found reproductions of such works as "Love and Death" and "The Blessed Damozel," in dusty frames and different parallels. The man might have been a minor poet instead of an athlete of the first water. But there had always been a fine streak of aestheticism in his complex composition; some of these very pictures I had myself dusted in his study at school; and they set me thinking of yet another of his many sides— and of the little incident to which he had just referred.

Everybody knows how largely the tone of a public school depends on that of the eleven, and on the character of the captain of cricket in particular; and I have never heard it denied that in A. J. Raffles's time our tone was good, or that such influence as he troubled to exert was on the side of the angels. Yet it was whispered in the school that he was in the habit of parading the town at night in loud checks and a false beard. It was whispered, and disbelieved. I alone knew it for a fact; for night after night had I pulled the rope up after him when the rest of the dormitory were asleep, and kept awake by the hour to let it down again on a given signal. Well, one night he was over-bold, and within an ace of ignominious expulsion in the hey-day of his fame. Consummate daring and extraordinary nerve on his part, aided, doubtless, by some little presence of

mind on mine, averted the untoward result; and no more need be said of a discreditable incident. But I cannot pretend to have forgotten it in throwing myself on this man's mercy in my desperation. And I was wondering how much of his leniency was owing to the fact that Raffles had not forgotten it either, when he stopped and stood over my chair once more.

"I've been thinking of that night we had the narrow squeak," he began. "Why do you start?"

"I was thinking of it too."

He smiled, as though he had read my thoughts.

"Well, you were the right sort of little beggar then, Bunny; you didn't talk and you didn't flinch. You asked no questions and you told no tales. I wonder if you're like that now?"

"I don't know," said I, slightly puzzled by his tone. "I've made such a mess of my own affairs that I trust myself about as little as I'm likely to be trusted by anybody else. Yet I never in my life went back on a friend. I will say that, otherwise perhaps I mightn't be in such a hole to-night."

"Exactly," said Raffles, nodding to himself, as though in assent to some hidden train of thought; "exactly what I remember of you, and I'll bet it's as true now as it was ten years ago. We don't alter, Bunny. We only develop. I suppose neither you nor I are really altered since you used to let down that rope and I used to come up it hand over hand. You would stick at nothing for a pal— what?"

"At nothing in this world," I was pleased to cry.

"Not even at a crime?" said Raffles, smiling.

I stopped to think, for his tone had changed, and I felt sure he was chaffing me. Yet his eye seemed as much in earnest as ever, and for my part I was in no mood for reservations.

"No, not even at that," I declared; "name your crime, and I'm your man."

He looked at me one moment in wonder, and another moment in doubt; then turned the matter off with a shake of his head, and the little cynical laugh that was all his own.

"You're a nice chap, Bunny! A real desperate character— what? Suicide one moment, and any crime I like the next! What you want is a drag, my boy, and you did well to come to a decent law-abiding citizen with a reputation to lose. None the less we must have that money to-night— by hook or crook."

"To-night, Raffles?"

"The sooner the better. Every hour after ten o'clock to-morrow morning is an hour of risk. Let one of those checks get round to your own bank, and you and it are dishonored together. No, we must raise the wind to-night and re-open your account first thing to-morrow. And I rather think I know where the wind can be raised."

"At two o'clock in the morning?"

"Yes."

"But how— but where— at such an hour?"

"From a friend of mine here in Bond Street."

"He must be a very intimate friend!"

"Intimate's not the word. I have the run of his place and a latch-key all to myself."

"You would knock him up at this hour of the night?"

"If he's in bed."

"And it's essential that I should go in with you?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I must; but I'm bound to say I don't like the idea, Raffles."

"Do you prefer the alternative?" asked my companion, with a sneer. "No, hang it, that's unfair!" he cried apologetically in the same breath. "I quite understand. It's a beastly ordeal. But it would never do for you to stay outside. I tell you what, you shall have a peg before we start— just one. There's the whiskey, here's a syphon, and I'll be putting on an overcoat while you help yourself."

Well, I daresay I did so with some freedom, for this plan of his was not the less distasteful to me from its apparent inevitability. I must own, however, that it possessed fewer terrors before my glass was empty. Meanwhile Raffles rejoined me, with a covert coat over his blazer, and a soft felt hat set carelessly on the curly head he shook with a smile as I passed him the decanter.

"When we come back," said he. "Work first, play afterward. Do you see what day it is?" he added, tearing a leaflet from a Shakespearian calendar, as I drained my glass. "March 15th. 'The Ides of March, the Ides of March, remember.' Eh, Bunny, my boy? You won't forget them, will you?"

And, with a laugh, he threw some coals on the fire before turning down the gas like a careful householder. So we went out together as the clock on the chimney-piece was striking two.

ii

PICCADILLY was a trench of raw white fog, rimmed with blurred street-lamps, and lined with a thin coating of adhesive mud. We met no other wayfarers on the deserted flagstones, and were ourselves favored with a very hard stare from the constable of the beat, who, however, touched his helmet on recognizing my companion.

"You see, I'm known to the police," laughed Raffles as we passed on. "Poor devils, they've got to keep their weather eye open on a night like this! A fog may be a bore to you and me, Bunny, but it's a perfect godsend to the criminal

classes, especially so late in their season. Here we are, though— and I'm hanged if the beggar isn't in bed and asleep after all!"

We had turned into Bond Street, and had halted on the curb a few yards down on the right. Raffles was gazing up at some windows across the road, windows barely discernible through the mist, and without the glimmer of a light to throw them out. They were over a jeweller's shop, as I could see by the peep-hole in the shop door, and the bright light burning within. But the entire "upper part," with the private street-door next the shop, was black and blank as the sky itself.

"Better give it up for to-night," I urged. "Surely the morning will be time enough!"

"Not a bit of it," said Raffles. "I have his key. We'll surprise him. Come along."

And seizing my right arm, he hurried me across the road, opened the door with his latch-key, and in another moment had shut it swiftly but softly behind us. We stood together in the dark. Outside, a measured step was approaching; we had heard it through the fog as we crossed the street; now, as it drew nearer, my companion's fingers tightened on my arm.

"It may be the chap himself," he whispered. "He's the devil of a night-bird. Not a sound, Bunny! We'll startle the life out of him. Ah!"

The measured step had passed without a pause. Raffles drew a deep breath, and his singular grip of me slowly relaxed.

"But still, not a sound," he continued in the same whisper; "we'll take a rise out of him, wherever he is! Slip off your shoes and follow me."

Well, you may wonder at my doing so; but you can never have met A. J. Raffles. Half his power lay in a conciliating trick of sinking the commander in the leader. And it was impossible not to follow one who led with such a zest. You might question, but you followed first. So now, when I heard him kick off his own shoes, I did the same, and was on the stairs at his heels before I realized what an extraordinary way was this of approaching a stranger for money in the dead of night. But obviously Raffles and he were on exceptional terms of intimacy, and I could not but infer that they were in the habit of playing practical jokes upon each other.

We groped our way so slowly upstairs that I had time to make more than one note before we reached the top. The stair was uncarpeted. The spread fingers of my right hand encountered nothing on the damp wall; those of my left trailed through a dust that could be felt on the banisters. An eerie sensation had been upon me since we entered the house. It increased with every step we climbed. What hermit were we going to startle in his cell?

We came to a landing. The banisters led us to the left, and to the left again. Four steps more, and we were on another and a longer landing, and suddenly a

match blazed from the black. I never heard it struck. Its flash was blinding. When my eyes became accustomed to the light, there was Raffles holding up the match with one hand, and shading it with the other, between bare boards, stripped walls, and the open doors of empty rooms.

"Where have you brought me?" I cried. "The house is unoccupied!"

"Hush! Wait!" he whispered, and he led the way into one of the empty rooms. His match went out as we crossed the threshold, and he struck another without the slightest noise. Then he stood with his back to me, fumbling with something that I could not see. But, when he threw the second match away, there was some other light in its stead, and a slight smell of oil. I stepped forward to look over his shoulder, but before I could do so he had turned and flashed a tiny lantern in my face.

"What's this?" I gasped. "What rotten trick are you going to play?"

"It's played," he answered, with his quiet laugh.

"On me?"

"I am afraid so, Bunny."

"Is there no one in the house, then?"

"No one but ourselves."

"So it was mere chaff about your friend in Bond Street, who could let us have that money?"

"Not altogether. It's quite true that Danby is a friend of mine."

"Danby?"

"The jeweller underneath."

"What do you mean?" I whispered, trembling like a leaf as his meaning dawned upon me. "Are we to get the money from the jeweller?"

"Well, not exactly."

"What, then?"

"The equivalent— from his shop."

There was no need for another question. I understood everything but my own density. He had given me a dozen hints, and I had taken none. And there I stood staring at him, in that empty room; and there he stood with his dark lantern, laughing at me.

"A burglar!" I gasped. "You— you!"

"I told you I lived by my wits."

"Why couldn't you tell me what you were going to do? Why couldn't you trust me? Why must you lie?" I demanded, piqued to the quick for all my horror.

"I wanted to tell you," said he. "I was on the point of telling you more than once. You may remember how I sounded you about crime, though you have probably forgotten what you said yourself. I didn't think you meant it at the time, but I thought I'd put you to the test. Now I see you didn't, and I don't

blame you. I only am to blame. Get out of it, my dear boy, as quick as you can; leave it to me. You won't give me away, whatever else you do!"

Oh, his cleverness! His fiendish cleverness! Had he fallen back on threats, coercion, sneers, all might have been different even yet. But he set me free to leave him in the lurch. He would not blame me. He did not even bind me to secrecy; he trusted me. He knew my weakness and my strength, and was playing on both with his master's touch.

"Not so fast," said I. "Did I put this into your head, or were you going to do it in any case?"

"Not in any case," said Raffles. "It's true I've had the key for days, but when I won to-night I thought of chucking it; for, as a matter of fact, it's not a one-man job."

"That settles it. I'm your man."

"You mean it?"

"Yes— for to-night."

"Good old Bunny," he murmured, holding the lantern for one moment to my face; the next he was explaining his plans, and I was nodding, as though we had been fellow-cracksmen all our days.

"I know the shop," he whispered, "because I've got a few things there. I know this upper part too; it's been to let for a month, and I got an order to view, and took a cast of the key before using it. The one thing I don't know is how to make a connection between the two; at present there's none. We may make it up here, though I rather fancy the basement myself. If you wait a minute I'll tell you."

He set his lantern on the floor, crept to a back window, and opened it with scarcely a sound: only to return, shaking his head, after shutting the window with the same care.

"That was our one chance," said he; "a back window above a back window; but it's too dark to see anything, and we daren't show an outside light. Come down after me to the basement; and remember, though there's not a soul on the premises, you can't make too little noise. There— there— listen to that!"

It was the measured tread that we had heard before on the flagstones outside. Raffles darkened his lantern, and again we stood motionless till it had passed.

"Either a policeman," he muttered, "or a watchman that all these jewellers run between them. The watchman's the man for us to watch; he's simply paid to spot this kind of thing."

We crept very gingerly down the stairs, which creaked a bit in spite of us, and we picked up our shoes in the passage; then down some narrow stone steps, at the foot of which Raffles showed his light, and put on his shoes once more, bidding me do the same in a rather louder tone than he had permitted

himself to employ overhead. We were now considerably below the level of the street, in a small space with as many doors as it had sides. Three were ajar, and we saw through them into empty cellars; but in the fourth a key was turned and a bolt drawn; and this one presently let us out into the bottom of a deep, square well of fog. A similar door faced it across this area, and Raffles had the lantern close against it, and was hiding the light with his body, when a short and sudden crash made my heart stand still. Next moment I saw the door wide open, and Raffles standing within and beckoning me with a jimmy.

"Door number one," he whispered. "Deuce knows how many more there'll be, but I know of two at least. We won't have to make much noise over them, either; down here there's less risk."

We were now at the bottom of the exact fellow to the narrow stone stair which we had just descended: the yard, or well, being the one part common to both the private and the business premises. But this flight led to no open passage; instead, a singularly solid mahogany door confronted us at the top.

"I thought so," muttered Raffles, handing me the lantern, and pocketing a bunch of skeleton keys, after tampering for a few minutes with the lock. "It'll be an hour's work to get through that!"

"Can't you pick it?"

"No: I know these locks. It's no use trying. We must cut it out, and it'll take us an hour."

It took us forty-seven minutes by my watch; or, rather, it took Raffles; and never in my life have I seen anything more deliberately done. My part was simply to stand by with the dark lantern in one hand, and a small bottle of rock-oil in the other.

Raffles had produced a pretty embroidered case, intended obviously for his razors, but filled instead with the tools of his secret trade, including the rock-oil. From this case he selected a "bit," capable of drilling a hole an inch in diameter, and fitted it to a small but very strong steel "brace." Then he took off his covert-coat and his blazer, spread them neatly on the top step— knelt on them— turned up his shirt cuffs— and went to work with brace-and-bit near the key-hole. But first he oiled the bit to minimize the noise, and this he did invariably before beginning a fresh hole, and often in the middle of one. It took thirty-two separate borings to cut around that lock.

I noticed that through the first circular orifice Raffles thrust a forefinger; then, as the circle became an ever-lengthening oval, he got his hand through up to the thumb; and I heard him swear softly to himself.

"I was afraid so!"

"What is it?"

"An iron gate on the other side!"

"How on earth are we to get through that?" I asked in dismay.

"Pick the lock. But there may be two. In that case they'll be top and bottom, and we shall have two fresh holes to make, as the door opens inwards. It won't open two inches as it is."

I confess I did not feel sanguine about the lock-picking, seeing that one lock had baffled us already; and my disappointment and impatience must have been a revelation to me had I stopped to think. The truth is that I was entering into our nefarious undertaking with an involuntary zeal of which I was myself quite unconscious at the time. The romance and the peril of the whole proceeding held me spellbound and entranced. My moral sense and my sense of fear were stricken by a common paralysis. And there I stood, shining my light and holding my phial with a keener interest than I had ever brought to any honest avocation. And there knelt A. J. Raffles, with his black hair tumbled, and the same watchful, quiet, determined half-smile with which I have seen him send down over after over in a county match!

At last the chain of holes was complete, the lock wrenched out bodily, and a splendid bare arm plunged up to the shoulder through the aperture, and through the bars of the iron gate beyond.

"Now," whispered Raffles, "if there's only one lock it'll be in the middle. Joy! Here it is! Only let me pick it, and we're through at last."

He withdrew his arm, a skeleton key was selected from the bunch, and then back went his arm to the shoulder. It was a breathless moment. I heard the heart throbbing in my body, the very watch ticking in my pocket, and ever and anon the tinkle-tinkle of the skeleton key. Then— at last— there came a single unmistakable click. In another minute the mahogany door and the iron gate yawned behind us; and Raffles was sitting on an office table, wiping his face, with the lantern throwing a steady beam by his side.

We were now in a bare and roomy lobby behind the shop, but separated therefrom by an iron curtain, the very sight of which filled me with despair. Raffles, however, did not appear in the least depressed, but hung up his coat and hat on some pegs in the lobby before examining this curtain with his lantern.

"That's nothing," said he, after a minute's inspection; "we'll be through that in no time, but there's a door on the other side which may give us trouble."

"Another door!" I groaned. "And how do you mean to tackle this thing?"

"Prise it up with the jointed jimmy. The weak point of these iron curtains is the leverage you can get from below. But it makes a noise, and this is where you're coming in, Bunny; this is where I couldn't do without you. I must have you overhead to knock through when the street's clear. I'll come with you and show a light."

Well, you may imagine how little I liked the prospect of this lonely vigil; and yet there was something very stimulating in the vital responsibility which it

involved. Hitherto I had been a mere spectator. Now I was to take part in the game. And the fresh excitement made me more than ever insensible to those considerations of conscience and of safety which were already as dead nerves in my breast.

So I took my post without a murmur in the front room above the shop. The fixtures had been left for the refusal of the incoming tenant, and fortunately for us they included Venetian blinds which were already down. It was the simplest matter in the world to stand peeping through the laths into the street, to beat twice with my foot when anybody was approaching, and once when all was clear again. The noises that even I could hear below, with the exception of one metallic crash at the beginning, were indeed incredibly slight; but they ceased altogether at each double rap from my toe; and a policeman passed quite half a dozen times beneath my eyes, and the man whom I took to be the jeweller's watchman oftener still, during the better part of an hour that I spent at the window. Once, indeed, my heart was in my mouth, but only once. It was when the watchman stopped and peered through the peep-hole into the lighted shop. I waited for his whistle— I waited for the gallows or the gaol! But my signals had been studiously obeyed, and the man passed on in undisturbed serenity.

In the end I had a signal in my turn, and retraced my steps with lighted matches, down the broad stairs, down the narrow ones, across the area, and up into the lobby where Raffles awaited me with an outstretched hand.

"Well done, my boy!" said he. "You're the same good man in a pinch, and you shall have your reward. I've got a thousand pounds' worth if I've got a penn'oth. It's all in my pockets. And here's something else I found in this locker; very decent port and some cigars, meant for poor dear Danby's business friends. Take a pull, and you shall light up presently. I've found a lavatory, too, and we must have a wash-and-brush-up before we go, for I'm as black as your boot."

The iron curtain was down, but he insisted on raising it until I could peep through the glass door on the other side and see his handiwork in the shop beyond. Here two electric lights were left burning all night long, and in their cold white rays I could at first see nothing amiss. I looked along an orderly lane, an empty glass counter on my left, glass cupboards of untouched silver on my right, and facing me the filmy black eye of the peep-hole that shone like a stage moon on the street. The counter had not been emptied by Raffles; its contents were in the Chubb's safe, which he had given up at a glance; nor had he looked at the silver, except to choose a cigarette case for me. He had confined himself entirely to the shop window. This was in three compartments, each secured for the night by removable panels with separate locks. Raffles had removed them a few hours before their time, and the electric light shone on a corrugated shutter bare as the ribs of an empty carcase. Every article of value was gone from the one place which was invisible from the little window in the door; elsewhere all was as it

had been left overnight. And but for a train of mangled doors behind the iron curtain, a bottle of wine and a cigar-box with which liberties had been taken, a rather black towel in the lavatory, a burnt match here and there, and our finger-marks on the dusty banisters, not a trace of our visit did we leave.

"Had it in my head for long?" said Raffles, as we strolled through the streets towards dawn, for all the world as though we were returning from a dance. "No, Bunny, I never thought of it till I saw that upper part empty about a month ago, and bought a few things in the shop to get the lie of the land. That reminds me that I never paid for them; but, by Jove, I will to-morrow, and if that isn't poetic justice, what is? One visit showed me the possibilities of the place, but a second convinced me of its impossibilities without a pal. So I had practically given up the idea, when you came along on the very night and in the very plight for it! But here we are at the Albany, and I hope there's some fire left; for I don't know how you feel, Bunny, but for my part I'm as cold as Keats's owl."

He could think of Keats on his way from a felony! He could hanker for his fireside like another! Floodgates were loosed within me, and the plain English of our adventure rushed over me as cold as ice. Raffles was a burglar. I had helped him to commit one burglary, therefore I was a burglar, too. Yet I could stand and warm myself by his fire, and watch him empty his pockets, as though we had done nothing wonderful or wicked!

My blood froze. My heart sickened. My brain whirled. How I had liked this villain! How I had admired him! Now my liking and admiration must turn to loathing and disgust. I waited for the change. I longed to feel it in my heart. But— I longed and I waited in vain!

I saw that he was emptying his pockets; the table sparkled with their hoard. Rings by the dozen, diamonds by the score; bracelets, pendants, aigrettes, necklaces, pearls, rubies, amethysts, sapphires; and diamonds always, diamonds in everything, flashing bayonets of light, dazzling me— blinding me— making me disbelieve because I could no longer forget. Last of all came no gem, indeed, but my own revolver from an inner pocket. And that struck a chord. I suppose I said something— my hand flew out. I can see Raffles now, as he looked at me once more with a high arch over each clear eye. I can see him pick out the cartridges with his quiet, cynical smile, before he would give me my pistol back again.

"You mayn't believe it, Bunny," said he, "but I never carried a loaded one before. On the whole I think it gives one confidence. Yet it would be very awkward if anything went wrong; one might use it, and that's not the game at all, though I have often thought that the murderer who has just done the trick must have great sensations before things get too hot for him. Don't look so distressed, my dear chap. I've never had those sensations, and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"But this much you have done before?" said I hoarsely.

"Before? My dear Bunny, you offend me! Did it look like a first attempt? Of course I have done it before."

"Often?"

"Well— no! Not often enough to destroy the charm, at all events; never, as a matter of fact, unless I'm cursedly hard up. Did you hear about the Thimbleby diamonds? Well, that was the last time— and a poor lot of paste they were. Then there was the little business of the Dormer house-boat at Henley last year. That was mine also— such as it was. I've never brought off a really big coup yet; when I do I shall chuck it up."

Yes, I remembered both cases very well. To think that he was their author! It was incredible, outrageous, inconceivable. Then my eyes would fall upon the table, twinkling and glittering in a hundred places, and incredulity was at an end.

"How came you to begin?" I asked, as curiosity overcame mere wonder, and a fascination for his career gradually wove itself into my fascination for the man.

"Ah! that's a long story," said Raffles. "It was in the Colonies, when I was out there playing cricket. It's too long a story to tell you now, but I was in much the same fix that you were in to-night, and it was my only way out. I never meant it for anything more; but I'd tasted blood, and it was all over with me. Why should I work when I could steal? Why settle down to some humdrum uncongenial billet, when excitement, romance, danger and a decent living were all going begging together? Of course it's very wrong, but we can't all be moralists, and the distribution of wealth is very wrong to begin with. Besides, you're not at it all the time. I'm sick of quoting Gilbert's lines to myself, but they're profoundly true. I only wonder if you'll like the life as much as I do!"

"Like it?" I cried out. "Not I! It's no life for me. Once is enough!"

"You wouldn't give me a hand another time?"

"Don't ask me, Raffles. Don't ask me, for God's sake!"

"Yet you said you would do anything for me! You asked me to name my crime! But I knew at the time you didn't mean it; you didn't go back on me to-night, and that ought to satisfy me, goodness knows! I suppose I'm ungrateful, and unreasonable, and all that. I ought to let it end at this. But you're the very man for me, Bunny, the— very— man! Just think how we got through to-night. Not a scratch— not a hitch! There's nothing very terrible in it, you see; there never would be, while we worked together."

He was standing in front of me with a hand on either shoulder; he was smiling as he knew so well how to smile. I turned on my heel, planted my elbows on the chimney-piece, and my burning head between my hands. Next instant a still heartier hand had fallen on my back.

"All right, my boy! You are quite right and I'm worse than wrong. I'll never ask it again. Go, if you want to, and come again about mid-day for the cash.

There was no bargain; but, of course, I'll get you out of your scrape— especially after the way you've stood by me to-night."

I was round again with my blood on fire.

"I'll do it again," I said, through my teeth.

He shook his head. "Not you," he said, smiling quite good-humoredly on my insane enthusiasm.

"I will," I cried with an oath. "I'll lend you a hand as often as you like! What does it matter now? I've been in it once. I'll be in it again. I've gone to the devil anyhow. I can't go back, and wouldn't if I could. Nothing matters another rap! When you want me, I'm your man!"

And that is how Raffles and I joined felonious forces on the Ides of March.

———————————

17: Marjorie's Dream

Evelyn Everett-Green

1856-1932

Daily Telegraph (Launceston, Tas) 19 Dec 1906

Prolific British romantic novelist of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, who had been a Methodist Sunday school teacher.

"MOTHER, DEAR, I had that funny dream again last night. That is the third time!"

"The dream about the old man in the brown coat? Well, dear child, perhaps now you have had it three times you will not dream it any more!"

"Perhaps not; but mother, it does not seem like an ordinary dream. I see the room so plainly— the part of it that I can see. And it is always just the same. There are the panelled walls, and the two windows one on either side of the big carved fireplace, and then over the mantel-piece this picture— the picture of the old man in the browny, snuff-colored long coat. And I'm almost sure the room is a bedroom. For I can see something that looks like part of a big canopied bed. And it's always just the same room— the same windows and everything— as well as the picture!"

"Yes, dear— dreams do repeat themselves sometimes, as we all know." Yes, but this does not quite repeat itself, mother, dear— it seems to go on, if you know what I mean. I told you that the first time as I looked at the old man in the picture he suddenly spoke to me and said, 'Look behind this picture— in the hollow of the frame.' Then the second time his eyes seemed quite angry, and he said, 'Why have you not done what I said?' And last night he looked more angry still, and he seemed to move in his frame and to shake his fist at me, and though he did not speak this time I felt as though he were coming at me to strike me, and I was so frightened that I woke!"

Rat-tat! It was the postman's knock that interrupted the talk, and Marjorie flew for the letters. The post was late, for the dreary atmosphere of a foggy London December was hanging like a pall over the town, and every form of traffic was delayed. Marjorie ran back with a glowing face, her dream momentarily forgotten.

"A letter from Gordon, mummy!"

This was not a very wonderful event; but it was always fraught with excitement and joy for Marjorie, and with a little anxious pleasure for Mrs Hylliard. She loved them both so dearly, and yet— and yet— it seemed an open question whether this betrothal ought to go on. There was apparently such small hope of any marriage— without a very long and weary probation. And that sort of waiting was not always well or wise, especially in these days of short engagements. Also Marjorie might so well do better for herself. There was that

kind Mr Greyling— with a fine law practice— only waiting a chance. To be sure he was old for the child— but then— could he not the better be trusted to take care of her, and his assured position and income. But the mother knew where Marjorie's heart had been given!

How sad it was that poor Gordon's prospects had been so shattered! He had had such hopes of the future, when the old miser uncle should have bequeathed to him the fortune, with the old family house and acres which must come to him by natural inheritance. But when the old man was taken the dream of wealth faded into thin air.

There was no fortune! Not a trace of it remained. Stocks— shares— everything had been sold, and what had become of the money there was nothing to show. The lawyers opined that the estate must in some way have swallowed it up; or that the old man was secretly gambling— perhaps in stocks and shares— the most fatal craze of all, when taken to by an old man unversed in the ways of the markets and inexperienced in his dealings with the advertisers, who send forth glowing prospectuses of easily won fortunes. Large numbers of such prospectuses were found among his papers; but no traces of any dealings resulting.

Still there was no knowing. A secretive man, living alone in hermit-like fashion, and jealous of the man who was to succeed him, was capable of carrying on transactions of which he was careful to leave no trace.

At least this much was certain. Gordon Allingham had succeeded to his estates, and had made a brave attempt to stem the tide of adversity which threatened the landed property; but without funded money had found him- self crippled and hampered at every turn. His younger brother's education swallowed up all of the ready money which could be had. What was to be the end of it all neither he nor anyone else could forecast.

Mrs Hylliard sometimes asked herself with a sigh whether it would have been better to have refused to sanction the engagement between him and Marjorie until he had really seen what his prospects were worth. But the children loved one another! They had loved each other in some fashion or other from childhood. And no one doubted that he would be a well-to-do young squire before he was thirty!

Mrs Hylliard was musing of these things as Marjorie skimmed her letter, and was roused by her daughter's voice speaking eagerly, yet with a ring of pain behind the brightness.

"Mother darling, Gordon wants us to come to him to spend Christmas! Oh, won't that be lovely!"

"To spend Christmas, darling! Why, that is a sudden idea, is it not?"

Marjorie seemed to be winking away the moisture from her eyes. Then her smile shone out and she ran across to her mother and clasped her arms round her neck.

"Mummy darling, you must listen and help me to be brave; for it's going to be rather hard for us. Gordon finds that he can't struggle any longer over the Grange property. It will have to go— either to be sold outright or else a long leasehold sold. He will have to have something for Frank's education and start in life; and for starting himself somewhere in the Colonies— where the landed interest is not so handicapped as it is here. Mummy, listen; I'm not going to say a word to stop him. He must play the man— and I must be brave for his sake. He talks of us giving each other up— that is not fair to me—"

The girl suddenly stood upright, and tossed the loose rebellious waves of hair out of her eyes. Her face, though quivering with stress of feeling, was all in a glow of generous devotion and the unquenchable courage of youth and of love.

"I must see Gordon— and talk to him. I must make him understand. Mother, it will be just lovely to spend our Christmas there with him! I've longed to see the place. And he wants me to see it. If it can never be our home, at least I can carry away memories of it— of being there with him! That will be something nobody can take away from me ever! Besides, I must see him! There are things that can never be said in writing! I am not going to be a fetter— a hamper— upon his future life. But if he thinks he must give me up— for my sake— because it is not fair to me; then I must make him understand that I would rather wait and wait and wait for him till my hair is grey and we are both old, than not have him love and think for and plan for—"

"Darling, do you quite know what all that weary waiting means?"

"Perhaps not, mother; but I am prepared for it whatever it means. Because I shall never, never, never love anybody but Gordon as long as I live. And if I cannot be his wife— some day— I shall never marry at all. So I may just as well wait as not!"

Mother and daughter went down together a few days before Christmas. The schoolboy brother joined them at the Junction, eager and excited— rapturous at the thought of the skating there would be on the lake in the grounds. "You don't know what a thundering sort of place it is, Marjorie— the house is as queer as they make 'em— but there's the farm and the park, and the lake and the gardens. Gordon says the gardens are a wilderness; but I don't care a hang if they are. They're rippin' fine places for everything a fellow wants. Birds' nests in the spring, and butterflies in the summer—and such roses! And skating in the winter, and shooting, too— only Gordon is a bit of a rotter about letting me have a gun! But we have ripping times together. Only he's always so bothered and badgered for money. Everybody wants things done to their farms and

houses. I can't think why they worry Gordon about that— especially as they're awful slack about paying their rents!"

The happy boy chattered on, mixing his gay anticipations of pleasure with many side lights as to the bareness of the exchequer and the cares which encompassed Gordon's daily life. Marjorie's heart was very full as in the early dusk they stepped out upon the platform of the little wayside station, and a tall figure approached her with swinging stride, and a full rich voice pronounced her name—

"Marjorie!"

She could not help it; besides, who was there to see in the enshrouding dusk? Her arms were about his neck, he bent his handsome head to meet her kiss, and there was something almost impassioned in the way she clung to him.

"Gordon, O Gordon!— this is just— heavenly!"

He had the four-wheeled dog-cart outside, and a farm cart for the luggage. Mrs Hylliard preferred to sit with Frank on the back seat, not to meet the keen frosty wind. It was Marjorie who occupied the seat by Gordon. Frank craned over the back seat to ask, "I say, why aren't you driving the pair? That's the Duke you've got tonight. Where's Rex?"

"He's sold— to a good home," answered Gordon quietly; and Marjorie instantly began admiring the road as they drove along. The misty moonlight threw weird effects over the meadows and trees, and the lights peeping out from the wayside cottages and scattered farmsteads added to the charm of the scene. After the foggy atmosphere of London the air felt like iced wine. Her face flushed with happiness as she sat beside her lover. Ah! if only that ride could go on for ever and ever— he and she together side by side, and the world of nature around them! They drove through a pair of stone pillars, from which handsome wrought iron gates stood back. Frank gave a whoop of joy and cried out as they whirled through the park.

"Where are the deer, Gordon— I generally sight a few! Are horse chestnuts plentiful this year?"

"Lord Polmorton bought the deer. I was glad to let them go, as I had nothing to feed them on, and the winter promised to be a cold one."

Then before there was time for any reply, they had passed the inner gate and Marjorie's eager eyes saw the picturesque irregular outline of an old-world manor-house loom up before her eyes and next moment Gordon was helping her to alight, and leading her into a panelled hall, lighted by a roaring fire of logs, where dogs made a clamor of wild welcome over their master and young Frank, and a table spread with all the necessaries for a travellers' tea gave hospitable aspect of welcome.

Marjorie gazed round her in delight— the air of space and stateliness, after a cramped London lodging, was so gracious and inspiring. Frank had rushed to a

great heap of Christmas greenery which lay beneath the wide staircase all ready for use, and he tugged out a great holly branch laden with berries and brandished it with a shout of triumph.

"There's Christmas for you, Marjorie!"

"Yes, and you've got to bestir yourself youngster in putting all that stuff up!" smiled back Gordon, "I've not the stuff to do decoration work— you must see to all that!"

"All right, won't I just! And Marjorie will help me too! I say, does the ice bear on the lake? And how's the shooting?"

"The shooting is let; but the ice bears all right; and I'll take you rabbiting one of these days. Then we've got to have a great ratting in the barns before long. The cold is driving in the rats to a frightful extent. Oh you're going to have a good time, my son. You needn't be afraid!"

Frank's spirits were wild and infectious. Besides it was such pure joy to Marjorie to be with Gordon again— to watch him play host and master of that old-world house— to picture what life there, at his side would be like, to dream the dreams which always come to maidenhood— that for the first evening she could not think of or feel that shadow which she knew was looming over them.

She ran from room to room upstairs and down; she peeped into ghostly passages, paused suddenly some-times at the threshold of a panelled chamber— wondering if it would be the dream-room in which the picture of an old man hung— an old man in snuff-colored coat, and with a crest of snow-white hair above his wide brow and rather fierce eyes. But she found no room and no picture to correspond with those of her thrice-repeated dream, though she looked with eager curiosity both that evening and the following morning, as she and Frank raced about the old house, half-romping, half exploring, and decided just how much they would decorate, so as to give the quaint old place its true Christmas air.

How lovely it would be to be rich, and live in such a house— with Gordon for its lord and master! Ah, it was for him that Marjorie longed for all the good things of life. Anything would do for her— if she only had him as well; but he was so splendid, so handsome, so courtly— a very prince amongst men! He ought to live as of old his fore-fathers had lived— to be the squire and the chief of the country side— looked up to, reverenced— beloved.

She dreamed her dreams, as she went to and fro— not grudging him to the duties which claimed his daylight hours, but only admiring him for his capacities, his brave struggle with the difficulties of his position and sometimes overcome with longing to help him. Beneath the skilful hands of Marjorie, and with the monkey-like agility of Frank, the house quickly took on its festive air of Christmas cheer.

Wood at least was abundant. Huge fires glowed everywhere. There was good cheer on the board, such as a farmyard could supply. It was like a fairy tale to Marjorie to be here; and in the evenings she would pace to and fro through hall and gallery with Gordon's arm about her; he telling her of the impossibilities of his present position; and how the only right and reasonable course to pursue seemed to him to let or sell the old house (he being the last in the entail); invest the half of the money thus obtained for Frank, and go forth himself to fight the world with his small capital, where he might better hope for success.

Marjorie saw much that told her this might be the wisest course to pursue— but oh, how she hated the idea of seeing him ousted from his ancestral home!

"It scarcely bears thinking of, sweetheart," he answered, "God only knows how I long to stay— and to bring you here. But if I must lose both my dreams—"

"No, no, no," suddenly cried Marjorie. "Not both— not both. I don't care what you say, Gordon— nor what mother says— at least you know what I mean. I love you— nothing can change that! I can't think of life with anybody else. It's no good your thinking it would ever come. I can wait and wait and wait— but there will never be anybody else for me so long as I live. If it be God's will that we cannot marry, I will bear it, and be patient. But I can never think of anybody else. I will not be a drag on you—"

"My darling, my darling—"

"Yes, but that is what some wives are— and so I know that we must wait. I shall have had this lovely Christmas with you, Gordon. If it is to be the only one we spend together, I shall always remember it and thank God for it to the last day of my life! But you will know that if ever you succeed— and you want me; you have only to say 'Come Marjorie!' and I shall be there waiting— I shall come."

For Marjorie had by this time learned that Gordon's love was as her own— indeed she had never doubted it for an instant. He was only afraid for her sake— not for his. He would no more think of another wife than she of another husband. He had her fast in his arms. He was covering her face with kisses. In the sunshine of a brilliant December day they were standing together in a bower of Christmas greenery. The bell-ringers were practicing for their task that night, and the chime of joy and gladness was ringing through the frosty air.

"My darling, my darling— my faithful love!"

"Yes, let us be happy for this beautiful Christmas that we have together, Gordon, which will be ours to our life's end! Listen to the promise of the bells— it is like an omen of happiness!"

"Then we shall take it as such! And see here, Marjorie, we will see if there is not a little left of my grandfather's famous old wine. Now that we have a moment's leisure I will show you the famous old cellars under the house! But I must fetch the key first. It always hangs on a nail in a locked cupboard in the old

man's bedroom. I have the key of the room. I locked it up because a silly rumour got about that it was haunted. So nobody goes there now but myself. Will you come?"

Marjorie's face suddenly went from red to pale, and from pale to red. A curious premonition seized her. She followed Gordon down many passages to the oldest part of the house. She had not entirely explored this portion. Frank told her it was dirty and dingy, and had nothing in it worth looking at. She had never noticed the door set deep in the recess which Gordon now threw wide open.

But as he strode into the room and drew up a blind, letting in a flood of sunshine, she stood as one in a trance; for there was the panelled room of her dreams, the two windows between which was the fireplace with the carving about it. Above, the portrait of the old man with the crest of white hair and the snuff-colored coat looking down at her; and from where she stood she saw a portion of an ancient canopied bed.

"Gordon," she cried, "who is that?"

His eyes followed the direction of hers.

"My grandfather, Marjorie; it was taken some fifteen years before his death; before he turned so queer, and shut himself up and lived like a hermit or miser. Darling, what is it?"

"Gordon, that old man has a message for you—and he has sent it to you through me. The message is—'Look behind this picture—in the hollow of the frame! No, Gordon, I am not mad and I am not dreaming—though I have dreamt before. Look—look—let us see what he means!"

She darted forward. Her eyes were shining like stars. At her bidding he stepped upon a high oaken stool, and with some difficulty lifted down the picture. Marjorie with shaking hands turned it face to the wall and examined the frame, passing her finger tips about it, till with a little cry she dislodged a small piece of wood-work, and in a hollow thus revealed lay a sheet of folded note paper. She seized it and passed it to Gordon.

"Read what it says!" she commanded.

Unfolding it, he read the lines, written in shaking characters.

"I have become afraid of everything— banks—stocks—shares—nothing but financial crashes everywhere. My gold is wife and child and all to me. I must have it where I can know it is safe. Behind my picture is a secret hiding place. It is all there. My heir will find it safe for him. But no one else must know; or I shall be robbed and murdered."

The shaking writing ended there. It was as though the old man had written this confession of weakness; but even then had been fearful of committing it to the care of any person.

Gordon's face paled as he read. He looked up at the panelling above the empty hearth. He had a strong knife in his pocket. His eyes were quick; his hands were strong. In less than five minutes a great portion of the panelling swung forward, like a door, revealing a deep cavity behind. In this cavity were rows upon rows of metal canisters.

He reached one down and handed it to Marjorie. Neither of them could speak many words at a time. It was as though they moved in a dream. He opened it; she sat down upon the floor; she turned the contents into her lap.

The shining golden coins seemed to catch the sunshine as they rolled out in a shower. Marjorie knew what a hundred shillings looked like from a bank bag. She gave a gasp as she gazed up in Gordon's face.

"There must be a thousand pounds here!"

He came and stood over her. He was trembling too.

"Marjorie—there are sixty-five of those canisters in that cupboard—and each that I have handled is as heavy as this one!"

She sprang to her feet. They were clasped in each other's arms. Marjorie was laughing and crying at once. He felt his own eyes moist.

"Come and tell mother!— come and tell mother! She knows all about my dream! O Gordon! O Gordon! It must have been God's way of giving us this great happiness!"

The Christmas joy-bells rang out that night with their message of goodwill to the earth; and Gordon and Marjorie stood listening to them, his arm about her waist, her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh! Gordon, Gordon! to think that this is only the first of the lovely, happy Christmas days that we shall spend here together in this dear lovely old house. I am so happy— I don't know how to believe it all!"

"And we owe it all to your wonderful dream, darling. I wonder how wise men would explain that dream away!"

"Oh, they have such wonderful names for things now! They would have a hundred theories for it! But what does it matter? What does anything matter—except that you and I are together not for this Christmas only—but for always? It came as a wonderful beautiful Christmas gift to us— and we must just take it for that!"

"A happy, happy, Christmas to you, my heart's desire, my dearest wife."

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18: Dr. Jenkins and Mr. 'Ides

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 1 April 1938

Mrs Parsely, Melbourne landlady of a boarding house, seems to have been educated at the same school as Mrs Malaprop...

BUT for the sensational newspaper reports of the disappearance of the notorious Enoch Nottaben, and incidentally £40,000 invested by trusting clients, Mrs. Parsley might not have told me about the mysterious Mr. Palder. Mrs. Parsley evidently had read the full details of the Nottaben affair; the one paragraph that really interested her was the part of the police report stating that the vanished Nottaben had not been seen in his "elaborate and stylishly fitted" flat for two weeks, and that six months' rent was owing.

Over that item the worthy Mrs. Parsley became, as she put it, "speechless with indignation." Which meant that she was more voluble than ever.

"Doing" my room, she said, "It makes me sick to read of a man like that, going off with all that money and not paying his rent. I don't call it at all honest."

"You don't look for honesty in a man who behaves in that way, do you?" I asked.

"Even if a man is a thief he can at least be honest," said Mrs. Parsley firmly. "You've only to take Mr. Palder, who was Number Seven. He might have been a Dr. Jenkins and a Mr. Ides, as Mr. Slompack once said, but he paid his rent as regularly as one of them Garden angels. Even those who whispered all sorts of things about him had to admit that he was a perfect gentleman.

"A jolly man he was; and his wife and he got on so well together that Miss Perry said she was quite sure they couldn't be married, not legal. Miss Perry is one of them who never seemed to have heard about what that Honey swore. Mrs. Palder was a nice woman, too, only she did like to put it on. And I didn't like the way she spoke about having Come Down, as if living in these flats was that. But I liked him very much. Everybody had to.

" 'Well, Mrs. Parsley,' he'd say as he went out in the evening, 'I'm off to break into another bank.'

"I thought all that was a harmless joke until the police came. Of course the breath of suspicion falls on the just and unjust alike, and Mr. Palder never seeming to do any work, but always prosperous and going out every night, made people curious. Especially Miss Perry. She thought he might be a drug-runner,

which she said made a lot of money. That about evil being to them as evil thinks applied to Miss Perry!

" 'You might as well say that young Mr. Vingard (he was Number Fourteen) is auspicious, too,' I says. 'He stays at home a lot during the day, and goes out at night.'

" 'That's silly,' says Miss Perry. 'Everybody knows that young Mr. Vingard is interested in mission work and is going to become a clergyman. But there's nothing to explain why Mr. Palder goes out at night, except what his wife says about him going to his club. Which I don't believe! I've never heard him coming home drunk yet— not on a single night.'

"That is what Mrs. Palder had told me: 'Tom is fond of the night life, although there isn't much of it in this country. Nothing to what we were used to in London. Tom would like to take me out, but I prefer to stay at home with a book now, and I don't interfere with Tom.'

"IT wasn't only Miss Perry; a lot of people were curious about Mr. Palder. Even Mr. Slompack used to talk about 'the mysterious Mr. Palder.' Of course, Mr. Slompack was always fond of high-flowing repertory.

"You'd better look out that you're not entertaining burglar's underwears,' he says.

" 'Mr. Palder,' I retorted, 'is down on the electrical roll as a gentleman, and I'm sure he is that, and nobody can say otherwise about him.'

" 'You never know, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack. 'He may be a nifty curious character. For all you know he is this Raffles burglar they're talking about so much.'

" 'You will have your little joke, Mr. Slompack,' I says. But I began to think there might be, as Mr. Slompack said, something nifty the night Miss Perry showed me that report in the evening paper.

"It was all about another of those Raffles robberies, and was headed 'Raffles Robber Again: Audrastic Thief Fools Maid.' The robber had been seen by a maid in the house, but he was lounging on a couch smoking and told her he was waiting for her mistress, who was his sister, to come home, and had got in with a key she had given him. 'You'd better keep your eye on me, young lady,' he says; 'I may be a burglar.' Him joking like that made the girl think it must be all right, and she left him alone, only to find, when her mistress came home, that the bird had flown and so had a lot of valuables. It was because he did things like that they called him the Raffles burglar, though I must say, at first, I thought it had something to do with the lottery.

" 'There you are,' says Miss Perry. 'You say there's nothing queer about Mr. Palder because he wouldn't joke about breaking into banks if there was. I suppose you'll say this man wasn't a burglar because he joked like that?'

"That seemed inexhortable, as Mr. Slompack says. It turned me into a doubting Thompson like the others. It seemed to me a terrible thing that a nice man like Mr. Palder might be a burglar; I'd never had anything like that in my house before.

"I didn't know what to do. At one time I thought of asking Mr. Palder to go before anything happened; but even if he was a burglar he was a most respectable burglar. It certainly seemed to me that if anything came out he would prove to be one of those good burglars you read about who do their burglaring to pay for an expensive operation for an invalid sister or some other good purpose.

"And I was glad to see him talking a lot with that Mr. Vingard, who he called 'Padre,' though he wasn't that yet— only a parson in embroglio, as Mr. Slompack put it. I thought that perhaps, talking to him, he might see the terror of his ways and that burgling wasn't quite the right thing.

"In any case, I didn't know that he was a burglar at all; and it was not for me to throw the first stone at the crows. But I do know that every time I saw a detective coming near the place it made me feel terribly frightened.

"IT was Detective Frame and Detective O'Grady who did come at last. Them police are a deceitful lot; oh, what a mangled web they weave the way they practise to deceive, as Shakspeare says. They pretended they was making inquiries about someone who was missing, and wanted to know who had come to stay at my flats during the last few months.

"I felt all of a-twitter. I'm a law-abiding citizen; but I would be a traitor to my sect if I betrayed a tenant who was really such a nice man and paid his rent regularly. So I tried to make the most of Mr. Vingard and all about how he was interested in missions and was going to be a clergyman. They didn't seem to worry much about him.

" 'This Mr. Palder Thomas Palder, isn't it? What does he do for a living, do you know, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Detective Frame.

"It seemed to me that matters might look very black for Mr. Palder if I told them he went out every night without doing any work, so I said he was night porter at a hotel, which was the only thing I could think of that was done at night that was respectable on the spurt of the moment.

" 'What hotel does he work at?' asks O'Grady, sharplike.

" 'Mr. O'Grady,' I says, dignerfied, 'I am not my brother's keepsake, and I do not ask where my tenants work unless they tell me.'

"I wanted to warn poor Mr. Palder, who, I felt sure, even if he was a burglar, was more sinned against than sinning; but it is difficult to let a man know you think he is a burglar.

"'A terrible thing happened yesterday, Mr. Palder,' I said when I caught him in the morning. 'It quite upset me. Two detectives came.'

" 'Aha, Mrs. Parsley, you are discovered!' he says. Not a twitch on his face, mind you. 'What have you been doing now?'

" 'I believe they're after that Raffles burglar, and they think he might have come here,' I says. 'Poor fellow, I feel sorry for him.'

"I thought that might prompt him to let me into his confidence trick, as they call it, and I wanted to see how he took it.

" 'Ah, the net's closing on that chap; they'll get him yet,' he says. He was as cool as a concubine.

" 'Them detectives are very auspicious,' I says.

"He only laughed. 'They'll be arresting me yet, I expect.'

"Him joking like that cheered me up; but then I thought of what the papers said about that Raffles.

"It seemed a pity, in a way; if he'd only taken me into his confidence trick I could have warned him, and he could have got down the back stairs and out the back way. But they were too quick for me. They were upstairs before I could say Jack Robinson, if I wanted to say anything so stupid.

"My heart felt quite heavy as I saw him go away with them, though he was still as cool and undiscerned as could be. There was something terrible about picturing a jolly soul like Mr. Palder being locked behind iron bars.

"I was quite prepared to be sympathetic to poor Mrs. Palder, with all her putting it on, when she came downstairs. But she didn't seem at all upset, as I thought she would be.

" 'Some men from the police have been here to get my husband to identify someone,' she says. I felt quite impatient with her, still putting on that swank when her husband seemed to be in trouble, as she must know, and trying to pretend that it was something altogether different. But she was angry, too.

" 'Some interfering fool has been saying that my husband works in a hotel—night porter or something,' she says. 'Fancy! My husband—a man of impudent means! I'd be obliged, Mrs. Parsley, if you hear anyone saying anything like that if you'd put them right. Night porter, indeed!'

"Fancy a woman going on about a simple thing like that when her husband was in serious trouble! From the way she took it, I didn't like to tell her that it was me that said that, doing my best for her husband.

"I WAS glad, I can tell you, to see him come back again, although them detectives were still with him, but soon they said good-bye and let him come in. They had been standing beneath my window, so I heard them calling him 'Tom.' That was something I didn't like. I've noticed that them detectives always call a

man they're going to arrest Tom or Joe or Bill. I suppose it's to make it more friendly-like.

"What it seemed to me was that the net was closing, as Mr. Palder himself said, and even if he'd bluffed them for a time they were just waiting to grab him. I was all the more sorry because Mr. Vingard had had to go away, being appointed to a mission in Balmain which he had to leave at once to go to. It is always useful for a man if he gets into trouble with the police, I've noticed, to have a clergyman to go along and give him a good character, even if he is a burglar. And although Mr. Vingard wasn't quite a clergyman, in embroglio is better than nothing.

"But you talk of being audrastic! That very night there was another of them Raffles robberies. It seemed like flying into the face of improvidence. The papers in the morning had a big account of it. That Raffles, after robbing a place, had helped himself to a good supper of cold chicken and champagne and left a note of thanks for it.

"If I saw them detectives once that day I saw them half a dozen times, passing the door and waiting about the street corner; it worried me so much that I had to ask Mrs. Palder if her husband was going out that night.

" 'Why, of course he is!' she says, as if surprised. 'Tom couldn't miss his club for the world.'

"She would swank, that woman! I felt inclined to shake her. Aha, me lady, I says, pride comes before a fall of snow; but all the same I was very sorry for him, and her, too, in what seemed bound to happen.

" 'Off to rob another bank, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, as cool as ever, as he was going out.

" 'Don't you think a little holiday in the country would do you good, Mr. Palder?' I asks.

" 'Think I need a holiday, eh?' he asks, laughing.

" 'You're not looking too well,' I says.

" 'You want to get rid of us, I'm afraid, Mrs. Parsley,' he laughs. 'It's not so easy.'

"As I said, you couldn't help but like Mr. Palder. Always so jolly, whatever happened.

"It was nearly midnight when the telephone began

to ring like mad. I seemed to know what it was before I lifted the receiver.

" 'Police here,' said the voice on the other end. 'Is that Mrs. Palder? No? I want to speak to Mrs. Palder. Tell her it's about her husband.'

" 'I'll tell her,' I says, my heart all jumping.,

"I'll say this, that she was extracted. She was very fond of her husband.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, my husband has met with— with an accident,' she says. It seemed to me then that even at the eleventh hour, when, as everyone knows,

graveyards yawn, she had to keep up her swank. 'He's in hospital. I'll have to go to him.'

" 'You pore soul!' I says. 'Can I do anything for you? Could I come with you? It's very late.'

"But off she went by herself without saying anything more. And she didn't come back, although I sat up nearly all night hoping to hear all about it.

"WHEN I did go to sleep I slept in. I was all late when I got up in the morning, and being behind with my work I had no time to look at the papers.

"And there, suddenly, was Mr. Palder! His head was all bound up, and his arm was in a sling; and he looked very pale.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I'm afraid we'll have to be leaving you. Mrs. Palder doesn't like going on living here now. She won't come back herself. She asked me to come to fix with you and collect the things.'

" 'Oh, Mr. Palder!' I says. 'I'm so sorry at what's happened. There's no need for her to feel like that about it. Did you get bail?'

"'Get bail?' he says; but he went on: 'My wife has got peculiar ideas. After all that was in the papers this morning she doesn't feel as if she could go on living here.'

" 'I've been that busy I haven't been able to get a paper yet,' I told him.

" 'Oh, here it is,' he said. It gave me a bit of a surprise— him carrying that paper and seeming proud of it all— but blunders never cease. On the paper I saw the headlines, as big as the Harbor Bridge: 'Raffles Caught. Night Watchman's Pluck. Injured, Holds Robber.'

" 'I'm sorry, Mr. Palder,' I says. 'Even if you were a burglar, I'm sure you were a good burglar.

" 'Burglar!' he exclaims. You'd need one of them excavation-marks to write it down the way he said it. 'I caught Raffles, Mrs. Parsley. Mrs. Palder is a bit sore with me getting my name in the papers like that. It's an honest living, I say; but, you know, Mrs. Palder is a bit peculiar. She doesn't like people to know I'm a night-watchman.'

"Did you ever hear the likes! There it was in blackened white, as the saying is, in the paper, all about how brave he'd been in tackling that Raffles.

" 'You'll be surprised about who Raffles was. Look here,' he said, pointing to the end of the report. I'll read it! *Edward Jones, alias Egbert Halliday, alias Tilton Vingard, alias Rev. Tilton Vingard*. That's Raffles!'

"I nearly dropped through the floor; but I knew then why that young young Vingard had been called away to a mission elsewhere after them detectives had come to the flats.

"But I will say this," concluded Mrs. Parsley, "even if Mr. Palder was a Dr. Jenkins and Mr. Ides and Mr. Vingard was a thief, they was both honest, They paid their rent."

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19: Seeds

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

In: *The Triumph of the Egg, and other stories*, 1921

HE WAS a small man with a beard and was very nervous. I remember how the cords of his neck were drawn taut.

For years he had been trying to cure people of illness by the method called psychoanalysis. The idea was the passion of his life. "I came here because I am tired," he said dejectedly. "My body is not tired but something inside me is old and worn-out. I want joy. For a few days or weeks I would like to forget men and women and the influences that make them the sick things they are."

There is a note that comes into the human voice by which you may know real weariness. It comes when one has been trying with all his heart and soul to think his way along some difficult road of thought. Of a sudden he finds himself unable to go on. Something within him stops. A tiny explosion takes place. He bursts into words and talks, perhaps foolishly. Little side currents of his nature he didn't know were there run out and get themselves expressed. It is at such times that a man boasts, uses big words, makes a fool of himself in general.

And so it was the doctor became shrill. He jumped up from the steps where we had been sitting, talking and walked about. "You come from the West. You have kept away from people. You have preserved yourself-damn you! I haven't-" His voice had indeed become shrill. "I have entered into lives. I have gone beneath the surface of the lives of men and women. Women especially I have studied-our own women, here in America."

"You have loved them—" I suggested.

"Yes," he said. "Yes— you are right there. I have done that. It is the only way I can get at things. I have to try to love. You see how that is— It's the only way. Love must be the beginning of things with me."

I began to sense the depths of his weariness. "We will go swim in the lake," I urged.

"I don't want to swim or do any damn plodding thing. I want to run and shout," he declared. "For a while, for a few hours, I want to be like a dead leaf blown by the winds over these hills. I have one desire and one only— to free myself."

We walked in a dusty country road. I wanted him to know that I thought I understood, so I put the case in my own way.

When he stopped and stared at me I talked. "You are no more and no better than myself," I declared. "You are a dog that has rolled in offal, and because you are not quite a dog you do not like the smell of your own hide."

In turn my voice became shrill. "You blind fool," I cried impatiently. "Men like you are fools. You cannot go along that road. It is given to no man to venture far along the road of lives."

I became passionately in earnest. "The illness you pretend to cure is the universal illness," I said. "The thing you want to do cannot be done. Fool— do you expect love to be understood—"

We stood in the road and looked at each other. The suggestion of a sneer played about the corners of his mouth. He put a hand on my shoulder and shook me. "How smart we are— how aptly we put things!"

He spat the words out and then turned and walked a little away. "You think you understand, but you don't understand," he cried. "What you say can't be done can be done. You're a liar. You cannot be so definite without missing something vague and fine. You miss the whole point. The lives of people are like young trees in a forest. They are being choked by climbing vines. The vines are old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men. I am myself covered by crawling creeping vines that choke me."

He laughed bitterly. "And that's why I want to run and play," he said. "I want to be a leaf blown by the wind over hills. I want to die and be born again, and I am only a tree covered with vines and slowly dying. I am, you see, weary and want to be made clean. I am an amateur venturing timidly into lives," he concluded. "I am weary and want to be made clean. I am covered by creeping crawling things."

A WOMAN from Iowa came here to Chicago and took a room in a house on the west-side. She was about twenty-seven years old and ostensibly she came to the city to study advanced methods for teaching music.

A certain young man also lived in the west-side house. His room faced a long hall on the second floor of the house and the one taken by the woman was across the hall facing his room.

In regard to the young man— there is something very sweet in his nature. He is a painter but I have often wished he would decide to become a writer. He tells things with understanding and he does not paint brilliantly.

And so the woman from Iowa lived in the west-side house and came home from the city in the evening. She looked like a thousand other women one sees in the streets every day. The only thing that at all made her stand out among the women in the crowds was that she was a little lame. Her right foot was slightly deformed and she walked with a limp. For three months she lived in the house— where she was the only woman except the landlady— and then a feeling in regard to her began to grow up among the men of the house.

The men all said the same thing concerning her. When they met in the hallway at the front of the house they stopped, laughed and whispered. "She

wants a lover," they said and winked. "She may not know it but a lover is what she needs."

One knowing Chicago and Chicago men would think that an easy want to be satisfied. I laughed when my friend— whose name is LeRoy— told me the story, but he did not laugh. He shook his head. "It wasn't so easy," he said. "There would be no story were the matter that simple."

LeRoy tried to explain. "Whenever a man approached her she became alarmed," he said. Men kept smiling and speaking to her. They invited her to dinner and to the theatre, but nothing would induce her to walk in the streets with a man. She never went into the streets at night. When a man stopped and tried to talk with her in the hallway she turned her eyes to the floor and then ran into her room. Once a young drygoods clerk who lived there induced her to sit with him on the steps before the house.

He was a sentimental fellow and took hold of her hand. When she began to cry he was alarmed and arose. He put a hand on her shoulder and tried to explain, but under the touch of his fingers her whole body shook with terror. "Don't touch me," she cried, "don't let your hands touch me!" She began to scream and people passing in the street stopped to listen. The drygoods clerk was alarmed and ran upstairs to his own room. He bolted the door and stood listening. "It is a trick," he declared in a trembling voice. "She is trying to make trouble. I did nothing to her. It was an accident and anyway what's the matter— I only touched her arm with my fingers."

Perhaps a dozen times LeRoy has spoken to me of the experience of the Iowa woman in the west-side house. The men there began to hate her. Although she would have nothing to do with them she would not let them alone. In a hundred ways she continually invited approaches that when made she repelled. When she stood naked in the bathroom facing the hallway where the men passed up and down she left the door slightly ajar. There was a couch in the living room down stairs, and when men were present she would sometimes enter and without saying a word throw herself down before them. On the couch she lay with lips drawn slightly apart. Her eyes stared at the ceiling. Her whole physical being seemed to be waiting for something. The sense of her filled the room. The men standing about pretended not to see. They talked loudly. Embarrassment took possession of them and one by one they crept quietly away.

One evening the woman was ordered to leave the house. Someone, perhaps the drygoods clerk, had talked to the landlady and she acted at once. "If you leave tonight I shall like it that much better," LeRoy heard the elder woman's voice saying. She stood in the hallway before the Iowa woman's room. The landlady's voice rang through the house.

LeRoy the painter is tall and lean and his life has been spent in devotion to ideas. The passions of his brain have consumed the passions of his body. His income is small and he has not married. Perhaps he has never had a sweetheart. He is not without physical desire but he is not primarily concerned with desire.

On the evening when the Iowa woman was ordered to leave the west-side house, she waited until she thought the landlady had gone down stairs, and then went into LeRoy's room. It was about eight o'clock and he sat by a window reading a book. The woman did not knock but opened the door. She said nothing but ran across the floor and knelt at his feet. LeRoy said that her twisted foot made her run like a wounded bird, that her eyes were burning and that her breath came in little gasps. "Take me," she said, putting her face down upon his knees and trembling violently. "Take me quickly. There must be a beginning to things. I can't stand the waiting. You must take me at once."

You may be quite sure LeRoy was perplexed by all this. From what he has said I gathered that until that evening he had hardly noticed the woman. I suppose that of all the men in the house he had been the most indifferent to her. In the room something happened. The landlady followed the woman when she ran to LeRoy, and the two women confronted him. The woman from Iowa knelt trembling and frightened at his feet. The landlady was indignant. LeRoy acted on impulse. An inspiration came to him. Putting his hand on the kneeling woman's shoulder he shook her violently. "Now behave yourself," he said quickly. "I will keep my promise." He turned to the landlady and smiled. "We have been engaged to be married," he said. "We have quarreled. She came here to be near me. She has been unwell and excited. I will take her away. Please don't let yourself be annoyed. I will take her away."

When the woman and LeRoy got out of the house she stopped weeping and put her hand into his. Her fears had all gone away. He found a room for her in another house and then went with her into a park and sat on a bench.

EVERYTHING LeRoy has told me concerning this woman strengthens my belief in what I said to the man that day in the mountains. You cannot venture along the road of lives. On the bench he and the woman talked until midnight and he saw and talked with her many times later. Nothing came of it. She went back, I suppose, to her place in the West.

In the place from which she had come the woman had been a teacher of music. She was one of four sisters, all engaged in the same sort of work and, LeRoy says, all quiet capable women. Their father had died when the eldest girl was not yet ten, and five years later the mother died also. The girls had a house and a garden.

In the nature of things I cannot know what the lives of the women were like but of this one may be quite certain— they talked only of women's affairs,

thought only of women's affairs. No one of them ever had a lover. For years no man came near the house.

Of them all only the youngest, the one who came to Chicago, was visibly affected by the utterly feminine quality of their lives. It did something to her. All day and every day she taught music to young girls and then went home to the women. When she was twenty-five she began to think and to dream of men. During the day and through the evening she talked with women of women's affairs, and all the time she wanted desperately to be loved by a man. She went to Chicago with that hope in mind. LeRoy explained her attitude in the matter and her strange behavior in the west-side house by saying she had thought too much and acted too little.

"The life force within her became decentralized," he declared. "What she wanted she could not achieve. The living force within could not find expression. When it could not get expressed in one way it took another. Sex spread itself out over her body. It permeated the very fibre of her being. At the last she was sex personified, sex become condensed and impersonal. Certain words, the touch of a man's hand, sometimes even the sight of a man passing in the street did something to her."

YESTERDAY I saw LeRoy and he talked to me again of the woman and her strange and terrible fate.

We walked in the park by the lake. As we went along the figure of the woman kept coming into my mind. An idea came to me.

"You might have been her lover," I said. "That was possible. She was not afraid of you."

LeRoy stopped. Like the doctor who was so sure of his ability to walk into lives he grew angry and scolded. For a moment he stared at me and then a rather odd thing happened. Words said by the other man in the dusty road in the hills came to LeRoy's lips and were said over again. The suggestion of a sneer played about the corners of his mouth. "How smart we are. How aptly we put things," he said.

The voice of the young man who walked with me in the park by the lake in the city became shrill. I sensed the weariness in him. Then he laughed and said quietly and softly, "It isn't so simple. By being sure of yourself you are in danger of losing all of the romance of life. You miss the whole point. Nothing in life can be settled so definitely. The woman— you see— was like a young tree choked by a climbing vine. The thing that wrapped her about had shut out the light. She was a grotesque as many trees in the forest are grotesques. Her problem was such a difficult one that thinking of it has changed the whole current of my life. At first I was like you. I was quite sure. I thought I would be her lover and settle the matter."

LeRoy turned and walked a little away. Then he came back and took hold of my arm. A passionate earnestness took possession of him. His voice trembled. "She needed a lover, yes, the men in the house were quite right about that," he said. "She needed a lover and at the same time a lover was not what she needed. The need of a lover was, after all, a quite secondary thing. She needed to be loved, to be long and quietly and patiently loved. To be sure she is a grotesque, but then all the people in the world are grotesques. We all need to be loved. What would cure her would cure the rest of us also. The disease she had is, you see, universal. We all want to be loved and the world has no plan for creating our lovers."

LeRoy's voice dropped and he walked beside me in silence. We turned away from the lake and walked under trees. I looked closely at him. The cords of his neck were drawn taut.

"I have seen under the shell of life and I am afraid," he mused. "I am myself like the woman. I am covered with creeping crawling vine-like things. I cannot be a lover. I am not subtle or patient enough. I am paying old debts. Old thoughts and beliefs— seeds planted by dead men— spring up in my soul and choke me."

For a long time we walked and LeRoy talked, voicing the thoughts that came into his mind. I listened in silence. His mind struck upon the refrain voiced by the man in the mountains.

"I would like to be a dead dry thing," he muttered looking at the leaves scattered over the grass. "I would like to be a leaf blown away by the wind." He looked up and his eyes turned to where among the trees we could see the lake in the distance. "I am weary and want to be made clean. I am a man covered by creeping crawling things. I would like to be dead and blown by the wind over limitless waters," he said. "I want more than anything else in the world to be clean."

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20: Hanged by a Hair, or, A Murder Mystery Minimised

Stephen Leacock

1869-1944

In: *Further Foolishness: Sketches and Satires on the Follies of the Day*, 1916

Among the latest follies in fiction is the perpetual demand for stories shorter and shorter still. The only thing to do is to meet this demand at the source and check it.
—Stephen Leacock

THE MYSTERY had now reached its climax. First, the man had been undoubtedly murdered. Secondly, it was absolutely certain that no conceivable person had done it.

It was therefore time to call in the great detective.

He gave one searching glance at the corpse. In a moment he whipped out a microscope.

"Ha! ha!" he said, as he picked a hair off the lapel of the dead man's coat. "The mystery is now solved."

He held up the hair.

"Listen," he said, "we have only to find the man who lost this hair and the criminal is in our hands."

The inexorable chain of logic was complete.

The detective set himself to the search.

For four days and nights he moved, unobserved, through the streets of New York, scanning closely every face he passed, looking for a man who had lost a hair.

On the fifth day he discovered a man, disguised as a tourist, his head enveloped in a steamer cap that reached below his ears. The man was about to go on board the *Gloritania*.

The detective followed him on board.

"Arrest him!" he said, and then drawing himself to his full height, he brandished aloft the hair.

"This is his," said the great detective. "It proves his guilt."

"Remove his hat," said the ship's captain sternly.

They did so.

The man was entirely bald.

"Ha!" said the great detective, without a moment of hesitation. "He has committed not *one* murder but about a million."

End