PAST MASTERS 213

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Charlotte Bronte
John Galsworthy
Bret Harte
Anthony Hope
Algernon Blackwood
C. J. Dennis
Tod Robbins
Damon Runyon

and more

PAST MASTERS 213

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: A Night's Adventure in Rome

William Harrison Ainsworth

1805-1882

In: Auriol; or, The Elixir of Life, London, 1850

1. Santa Maria Maggiore

CHANCING to be in Rome in the August of 1830, I visited the gorgeous church of Santa Maria Maggiore during the celebration of the anniversary of the Holy Assumption.

It was a glorious sight to one unaccustomed to the imposing religious ceremonials of the Romish church, to witness all the pomp and splendour displayed at this high solemnity— to gaze down that glittering pile, and mark the various ecclesiastical dignitaries, each in their peculiar and characteristic costume, employed in the ministration of their sacred functions, and surrounded by a wide semicircle of the papal guards, so stationed to keep back the crowd, and who, with their showy scarlet attire and tall halberds, looked like the martial figures we see in the sketches of Callot. Nor was the brilliant effect of this picture diminished by the sumptuous framework in which it was set. Overhead flamed a roof resplendent with burnished gold; before me rose a canopy supported by pillars of porphyry, and shining with many-coloured stones; while on either hand were chapels devoted to some noble house, and boasting each the marble memorial of a pope. Melodious masses proper to the service were ever and anon chanted by the papal choir, and overpowering perfume was diffused around by a hundred censers.

Subdued by the odours, the music, and the spectacle, I sank into a state of dreamy enthusiasm, during a continuance of which I almost fancied myself a convert to the faith of Rome, and surrendered myself unreflectingly to an admiration of its errors. As I gazed among the surrounding crowd, the sight of so many prostrate figures, all in attitudes of deepest devotion, satisfied me of the profound religious impression of the ceremonial. As elsewhere; this feeling was not universal; and, as elsewhere, likewise, more zeal was exhibited by the lower than the higher classes of society; and I occasionally noted amongst the latter the glitter of an eye or the flutter of a bosom, not altogether agitated; I suspect; by holy aspirations. Yet me thought, on the whole, I had never seen such abandonment of soul, such prostration of spirit, in my own colder clime, and during the exercise of my own more chastened creed, as that which in several instances I now beheld; and I almost envied the poor maiden near me, who, abject upon the earth, had washed away her sorrows, and perhaps her sins, in contrite tears.

As such thoughts swept through my mind, I felt a pleasure in singling out particular figures and groups which interested me, from their peculiarity of costume, or from their devotional fervour. Amongst others, a little to my left, I remarked a band of mountaineers from Calabria, for such I judged them to be from their wild and picturesque garb. Deeply was every individual of this little knot of peasantry impressed by the ceremonial. Every eye was humbly cast down; every knee bent; every hand was either occupied in grasping the little crucifix suspended from its owner's neck, in telling the beads of his rosary, or fervently crossed upon his bare and swarthy breast.

While gazing upon this group, I chanced upon an individual whom I had not hitherto noticed; and who now irresistibly attracted my attention. Though a little removed from the Calabrian mountaineers, and reclining against the marble walls of the church, he evidently belonged to the same company; at least, so his attire seemed to indicate, though the noble cast of his countenance was far superior to that of his comrades. He was an old man, with a face of the fine antique Roman stamp— a bold outline of prominent nose, rugged and imperious brow, and proudly-cut chin. His head and chin, as well as his naked breast, were frosted over with the snowy honours of many winters, and their hoar appearance contrasted strikingly with the tawny hue of a skin almost as dark and as lustrous as polished oak. Peasant as he was, there was something of grandeur and majesty in this old man's demeanour and physiognomy. His head declined backwards, so as completely to expose his long and muscular throat. His arms hung listlessly by his side; one hand drooped upon the pavement, the other was placed within his breast: his eyes were closed. The old man's garb was of the coarsest fabric; he wore little beyond a shirt, a loose vest, a sort of sheep-skin cloak, and canvas leggings bound around with leathern thongs. His appearance, however, was above his condition; he became his rags as proudly as a prince would have become his ermined robe.

The more I scrutinised the rigid lines of this old man's countenance, the more I became satisfied that many singular, and perhaps not wholly guiltless, events were connected with his history. The rosary was in his hand— the cross upon his breast— the beads were untold— the crucifix unclasped— no breath of prayer passed his lips. His face was turned heavenward, but his eyes were closed,— he dared not open them. Why did he come thither, if he did not venture to pray Why did he assume a penitential attitude, if he felt no penitence?

So absorbed was I in the perusal of the workings of this old man's countenance, as to be scarcely conscious that the service of high mass was concluded, and the crowd within the holy pile fast dispersing. The music was

hushed, the robed prelates and their train had disappeared, joyous dames were hastening along the marble aisles to their equipages; all, save a few kneeling figures near the chapels, were departing; and the old man, aware, from the stir and hum prevailing around, that the ceremonial was at an end, arose, stretched out his arm to one of his comrades, a youth who had joined him, and prepared to follow the concourse.

Was he really blind? Assuredly not. Besides, he did not walk like as one habituated to the direst calamity that can befal our nature. He staggered in his gait, and reeled to and fro. Yet wherefore did he not venture to unclose his eyes within the temple of the Most High? What would I not have given to be made acquainted with his history! For I felt that it must be a singular one. I might satisfy my curiosity at once. He was moving slowly forward, guided by his comrade. In a few seconds it would be too late— he would have vanished from my sight. With hasty footsteps I followed him down the church, and laid my hand, with some violence, upon his shoulder.

The old man started at the touch, and turned. Now, indeed, his eyes were opened wide, and flashing full upon me,— and such eyes! Heretofore I had only dreamed of such. Age had not quenched their lightning, and I quailed beneath the fierce glances which he threw upon me. But if I was, at first, surprised at the display of anger which I had called forth in him, how much more was I astonished to behold the whole expression of his countenance suddenly change. His eyes continued fixed upon mine as if I had been a basilisk. Apparently he could not avert them; while his whole frame shivered with emotion. I advanced towards him; he shrank backwards, and, but for the timely aid of his companion, would have fallen upon the pavement.

At a loss to conceive in what way I could have occasioned him so much alarm, I rushed forward to the assistance of the old man, when his son, for such it subsequently appeared he was, rudely repelled me, and thrust his hand into his girdle; as if to seek for means to prevent further interference.

Meanwhile the group had been increased by the arrival of a third party, attracted by the cry the old man had uttered in falling. The new comer was an Italian gentleman, somewhat stricken in year; of stern and stately deportment, and with something sinister and forbidding in his aspect. He was hastening towards the old man, but he suddenly stopped, and was about to retire when he encountered my gaze. As our eyes met he started; and a terror, as sudden and lively as that exhibited by the old man, was at once depicted in his features.

My surprise was now beyond all bounds, and I continued for some moments speechless with astonishment. Not a little of the inexplicable awe which affected the old man and the stranger was communicated to myself.

Altogether, we formed a mysterious and terrible triangle of which each side bore some strange and unintelligible relation to the other.

The new comer first recovered his composure, though not without an effort. Coldly turning his heel upon me, he walked towards the old man, and shook him forcibly. The latter shrank from his grasp, and endeavoured to avoid him; but it was impossible. The stranger whispered a few words in his ear, of which, from his gestures being directed towards myself, I could guess the import. The old man replied. His action in doing so was that of supplication and despair. The stranger retorted in a wild and vehement manner, and even stamped his foot upon the ground; but the old man still continued to cling to the knees of his superior.

"Weak, superstitious fool!" at length exclaimed the stranger, "I will waste no more words upon thee. Do, or say, what thou wilt; but beware!" And spurning him haughtily back with his foot, he strode away.

The old man's reverend head struck against the marble floor. His temple was cut open by the fall, and blood gushed in torrents from the wound. Recovering himself, he started to his feet— a knife was instantly in his hand, and he would have pursued and doubtless slain his aggressor, if he had not been forcibly withheld by his son, and by a priest who had joined them.

"*Maledizione*!" exclaimed the old man— "a blow from him— from that hand! I will stab him, though he were at the altar's foot; though he had a thousand lives, each should pay for it. Release me, Paolo! release me! for, by Heaven! he dies!"

"Peace, father!" cried the son, still struggling with him.

"Thou art not my son, to hinder my revenge!" shouted the enraged father. "Dost not see this blood— my blood— thy father's blood?— and thou holdest me back? Thou shouldst have struck him to the earth for the deed— but he was a noble, and thou daredst not lift thy hand against him!"

"Wouldst thou have had me slay him in this holy place?" exclaimed Paolo, reddening with anger and suppressed emotion.

"No, no," returned the old man, in an altered voice; "not here, not here, though 'twere but just retribution. But I will find other means of vengeance. I will denounce him— I will betray all, though it cost me my own life! He shall die by the hands of the common executioner;— there is one shall testify for me!" And he pointed to me.

Again I advanced towards him.

"If thou hast aught to disclose pertaining to the Holy Church, I am ready to listen to thee, my son," said the priest; "but reflect well ere thou bringest any charge thou mayest not be able to substantiate against one who stands so high in her esteem as him thou wouldst accuse."

The son gave his father a meaning look, and whispered somewhat in his ear. The old man became suddenly still.

"Right, right," said he; "I have bethought me. 'Twas but a blow. He is wealthy, I am poor; there is no justice for the poor in Rome."

"My purse is at your service," said I, interfering; "you shall have my aid."

"Your aid!" echoed the old man, staring at me; "will you assist me, signor?"

"I will."

"Enough. I may claim fulfilment of your promise."

"Stop, old man," I said; "answer me one question ere you depart. Whence arose your recent terrors."

"You shall know hereafter, signor," he said; "I must now begone. We shall meet again. Follow me not," he continued, seeing I was bent upon obtaining further explanation of the mystery. "You will learn nothing now, and only endanger my safety. *Addio*, signor." And with hasty steps he quitted the church, accompanied by his son.

"Who is that old man?" I demanded of the priest.

"I am as ignorant as yourself," he replied, "but he must be looked to; he talks threateningly." And he beckoned to an attendant.

"Who was he who struck him?" was my next inquiry.

"One of our wealthiest nobles," he replied, "and an assured friend of the church. We could ill spare him. Do not lose sight of them," he added to the attendant, "and let the sbirri track them to their haunts. They must not be suffered to go forth to-night. A few hours' restraint will cool their hot Calabrian blood."

"But the name of the noble, father?" I said, renewing my inquiries.

"I must decline further questioning," returned the priest, coldly. "I have other occupation; and meanwhile it will be well to have these stains effaced, which may else bring scandal on these holy walls. You will excuse me, my son." So saying, he bowed and retired.

I made fruitless inquiries for the old man at the door of the church. He was gone; none of the bystanders who had seen him go forth knew whither.

Stung by curiosity, I wandered amid the most unfrequented quarters of Rome throughout the day, in the hope of meeting with the old Calabrian, but in vain. As, however, I entered the court-yard of my hotel, I fancied I discovered, amongst the lounging assemblage gathered round the door, the dark eyes of the younger mountaineer. In this I might have been mistaken. No one answering to his description had been seen near the house.

2. The Marchesa

Une chose ténébreuse fait par des hommes ténébreux. — Lucrece Borgia.

ON the same night I bent my steps towards the Colosseum; and, full of my adventure of the morning, found myself, not without apprehension, involved within its labyrinthine passages. Accompanied by a monk, who, with a small horn lantern in his hand, acted as my guide, I fancied that, by its uncertain light, I could discover stealthy figures lurking within the shades of the ruin.

Whatever suspicions I might entertain, I pursued my course in silence. Emerging from the vomitorio, we stood upon the steps of the colossal amphitheatre. The huge pile was bathed in rosy moonlight, and reared itself in serene majesty before my view.

While indulging in a thousand speculations, occasioned by the hour and the spot, I suddenly perceived a figure on a point of the ruin immediately above me. Nothing but the head was visible; but that was placed in bold relief against the beaming sky of night, and I recognised it at once. No nobler Roman head had ever graced the circus when Rome was in her zenith. I shouted to the old Calabrian, for he it was I beheld. Almost ere the sound had left my lips, he had disappeared. I made known what I had seen to the monk. He was alarmed—urged our instant departure, and advised me to seek the assistance of the sentinel stationed at the entrance to the pile. To this proposal I assented; and, having descended the vasty steps and crossed the open arena, we arrived, without molestation, at the doorway.

The sentinel had allowed no one to pass him. He returned with me to the circus; and, after an ineffectual search amongst the ruins, volunteered his services to accompany me homewards through the Forum. I declined his offer, and shaped my course towards a lonesome vicolo on the right. This was courting danger; but I cared not, and walked slowly forward through the deserted place.

Scarcely had I proceeded many paces, when I heard footsteps swiftly approaching; and, ere I could turn round, my arms were seized from behind, and a bandage was passed across my eyes. All my efforts at liberation were unavailing; and, after a brief struggle, I remained passive.

"Make no noise," said a voice which I knew to be that of the old man, "and no harm shall befal you. You must come with us. Ask no questions, but follow."

I suffered myself to be led, without further opposition whithersoever they listed. We walked for it might be half an hour, much beyond the walls of Rome. I had to scramble through many ruins and frequently stumbled over inequalities of ground. I now felt the fresh breeze of night blowing over the

wide campagna, and my conductors moved swiftly onwards as we trod on its elastic turf.

At length they came to a halt. My bandage was removed, and I beheld myself beneath the arch of an aqueduct, which spanned the moonlit plain. A fire was kindled beneath the arch, and the ruddy flame licked its walls. Around the blaze were grouped the little band of peasantry I had beheld within the church, in various and picturesque attitudes. They greeted my conductors on their arrival, and glanced inquisitively at me, but did not speak to me. The elder Calabrian, whom they addressed as Cristofano, asked for a glass of aqua vitae, which he handed respectfully to me. I declined the offer, but he pressed it upon me.

"You will need it, Signor," he said; "you have much to do to-night. You fear, perhaps, it is drugged. Behold!" And he drank it off.

I could not, after this, refuse his pledge. "And now, signor," said the old man, removing to a little distance from the group, "may I crave a word with you— your name?"

As I had no reason for withholding it, I told him how I was called.

"Hum! Had you no relation of the name of—"

"None whatever." And I sighed, for I thought of my desolate condition.

"Strange!" he muttered; adding, with a grim smile, "but, however, likenesses are easily accounted for."

"What likenesses?" I asked. "Whom do I resemble? and what is the motive of your inexplicable conduct?"

"You shall hear," he replied, frowning gloomily. "Step aside, and let us get within the shade of these arches, out of the reach of yonder listeners. The tale I have to tell is for your ears alone."

I obeyed him; and we stood beneath the shadow of the aqueduct.

"Years ago," began the old man, "an Englishman, in all respects resembling yourself; equally well-favoured in person, and equally young, came to Rome, and took up his abode within the eternal city. He was of high rank in his own country, and was treated with the distinction due to his exalted station here. At that time I dwelt with the Marchese di —. I was his confidential servant— his adviser— his friend. I had lived with his father— carried him as an infant— sported with him as a boy— loved and served him as a man. Loved him, I say; for, despite his treatment of me, I loved him then as much as I abhor him now. Well! signor, to my story. If his youth had been profligate, his manhood was not less depraved; it was devoted to cold, calculating libertinism. Soon after he succeeded to the estates and title of his father, he married. That he loved his bride, I can scarcely believe; for, though he was wildly jealous of her, he was himself unfaithful, and she knew it. In Italy, revenge, in such cases; is easily

within a woman's power; and, for aught I know, the marchesa might have meditated retaliation. My lord, however, took the alarm, and thought fit to retire to his villa without the city, and for a time remained secluded within its walls. It was at this crisis that the Englishman I have before mentioned arrived in Rome. My lady, who mingled little with the gaieties of the city, had not beheld him; but she could not have been unacquainted with him by report, as every tongue was loud in his praises. A rumour of his successes with other dames had reached my lord; nay, I have reason to believe that he had been thwarted by the handsome Englishman in some other quarter, and he sedulously prevented their meeting. An interview, however, did take place between them, and in an unexpected manner. It was the custom then, as now, upon particular occasions, to drive, during the heats of summer, within the Piazza Navona, which is flooded with water. One evening the marchesa drove thither: she was unattended, except by myself. Our carriage happened to be stationed near that of the young Englishman."

"The marchesa was beautiful, no doubt?" I said, interrupting him.

"Most beautiful!" he replied; "and so your countryman seemed to think, for he was lost in admiration of her. I am not much versed in the language of the eyes, but his were too eloquent and expressive not to be understood. I watched my mistress narrowly. It was evident from her glowing cheek, though her eyes were cast down, that she was not insensible to his regards. She turned to play with her dog, a lovely little greyhound, which was in the carriage beside her, and patted it carelessly with the glove which she held in her hand. The animal snatched the glove from her grasp, and, as he bounded backwards, fell over the carriage side. My lady uttered a scream at the sight, and I was preparing to extricate the struggling dog, when the Englishman plunged into the water. In an instant he had restored her favourite to the marchesa, and received her warmest acknowledgments. From that moment an intimacy commenced, which was destined to produce the most fatal consequences to both parties."

"Did you betray them?" I asked, somewhat impatiently.

"I was then the blind tool of the marchese. I did so," replied the old man. "I told him all particulars of the interview. He heard me in silence, but grew ashy pale with suppressed rage. Bidding me redouble my vigilance, he left me. My lady was now scarcely ever out of my sight; when one evening, a few days after what had occurred, she walked forth alone upon the garden-terrace of the villa. Her guitar was in her hand, and her favourite dog by her side. I was at a little distance, but wholly unperceived. She struck a few plaintive chords upon her instrument, and then, resting her chin upon her white and rounded arm, seemed lost in tender reverie. Would you had seen her, signor, as I beheld her

then, or as one other beheld her! you would acknowledge that you had never met with her equal in beauty. Her raven hair fell in thick tresses over shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the most perfect proportion. Her deep dark eyes were thrown languidly on the ground, and her radiant features were charged with an expression of profound and pensive passion.

"In this musing attitude she continued for some minutes, when she was aroused by the gambols of her dog, who bore in his mouth a glove which he had found. As she took it from him, a letter dropped upon the floor. Had a serpent glided from its folds, it could not have startled her more. She gazed upon the paper, offended, but irresolute. Yes, she was irresolute; and you may conjecture the rest. She paused, and by that pause was lost. With a shrinking grasp she stooped to raise the letter. Her cheeks, which had grown deathly pale, again kindled with blushes as she perused it. She hesitated— cast a bewildering look towards the mansion— placed the note within her bosom— and plunged into the orange-bower."

"Her lover awaited her there?"

"He did. I saw them meet. I heard his frenzied words— his passionate entreaties. He urged her to fly— she resisted. He grew more urgent— more impassioned. She uttered a faint cry, and I stood before them. The Englishman's hand was at my throat, and his sword at my breast, with the swiftness of thought; and but for the screams of my mistress, that instant must have been my last. At her desire he relinquished his hold of me; but her cries had reached other ears, and the marchese arrived to avenge his injured honour. He paused not to inquire the nature of the offence, but, sword in hand, assailed the Englishman, bidding me remove his lady. The clash of their steel was drowned by her shrieks as I bore her away; but I knew the strife was desperate. Before I gained the house my lady had fainted; and, committing her to the charge of other attendants, I returned to the terrace. I met my master slowly walking homewards. His sword was gone— his brow was bent— he shunned my sight. I knew what had happened, and did not approach him. He sought his wife. What passed in that interview was never disclosed, but it may be guessed at from its result. That night the marchesa left her husband's halls— never to return. Next morn I visited the terrace where she had received the token. The glove was still upon the ground. I picked it up and carried it to the marchese, detailing the whole occurrence to him. He took it, and vowed as he took it that his vengeance should never rest satisfied till that glove had been steeped in her blood."

"And he kept his vow?" I asked, shuddering.

"Many months elapsed ere its accomplishment. Italian vengeance is slow, but sure. To all outward appearance, he had forgotten his faithless wife. He

had even formed a friendship with her lover, which he did the more effectually to blind his ultimate designs. Meanwhile, time rolled on, and the marchesa gave birth to a child— the offspring of her seducer."

"Great God!" I exclaimed, "was that child a boy?"

"It was— but listen to me. My tale draws to a close. One night, during the absence of the Englishman, by secret means we entered the palazzo where the marchesa resided. We wandered from room to room till we came to her chamber. She was sleeping, with her infant by her side. The sight maddened the marchese. He would have stricken the child, but I held back his hand. He relented. He bade me make fast the door. He approached the bed. I heard a rustle— a scream. A white figure sprang from out the couch. In an instant the light was extinguished— there was a blow— another— and all was over. I threw open the door. The marchese came forth, The corridor in which we stood was flooded with moonlight. A glove was in his hand— it was dripping with blood. His oath was fulfilled— his vengeance complete— no, not complete, for the Englishman yet lived."

"What became of him?" I inquired.

"Ask me not," replied the old man; "you were at the Chiesa Santa Maria Maggiore this morning. If those stones could speak, they might tell a fearful story."

"And that was the reason you did not dare to unclose your eyes within those holy precincts— a film of blood floated between you and heaven."

The old man shuddered, but replied not.

"And the child?" I asked, after a pause; "what of their wretched offspring?"

"It was conveyed to England by a friend of its dead father. If he were alive, that boy would be about your age, signor."

"Indeed!" I said; a horrible suspicion flashing across my mind.

"After the Englishman's death," continued Cristofano, "my master began to treat me with a coldness and suspicion which increased daily. I was a burden to him, and he was resolved to rid himself of me. I spared him the trouble— quitted Rome— sought the mountains of the Abruzzi— and thence wandered to the fastnesses of Calabria, and became— no matter what. Here I am, Heaven's appointed minister of vengeance. The marchese dies to-night!"

"To-night! old man," I echoed, horror-stricken. "Add not crime to crime. If he has indeed been guilty of the foul offence you have named, let him be dealt with according to the offended laws of the country. Do not pervert the purposes of justice."

"Justice!" echoed Cristofano, scornfully.

"Ay, justice. You are poor and powerless, but means may be found to aid you. I will assist the rightful course of vengeance."

"You shall assist it. I have sworn he shall die before dawn, and the hand to strike the blow shall be yours."

"Mine! never!"

"Your own life will be the penalty of your obstinacy, if you refuse; nor will your refusal save him. By the Mother of Heaven, he dies! and by your hand. You saw how he was struck by your resemblance to the young Englishman this morning in the chiesa. It is wonderful! I know not who or what you are; but to me you are an instrument of vengeance, and as such I shall use you. The blow dealt by you will seem the work of retribution; and I care not if you strike twice, and make my heart your second mark."

Ere I could reply he called to his comrades, and in a few moments we were speeding across the campagna.

We arrived at a high wall: the old man conducted us to a postern-gate, which he opened. We entered a garden filled with orange-trees, the perfume of which loaded the midnight air. We heard the splash of a fountain at a distance, and the thrilling notes of a nightingale amongst some taller trees. The moon hung like a lamp over the belvidere of the proud villa. We strode along a wide terrace edged by a marble balustrade. The old man pointed to an open summer-house terminating the walk, and gave me a significant look, but he spoke not. A window thrown open admitted us to the house. We were within a hall crowded with statues, and traversed noiselessly its marble floors. Passing through several chambers, we then mounted to a corridor, and entered an apartment which formed the ante-room to another beyond it. Placing his finger upon his lips, and making a sign to his comrades, Cristofano opened a door and disappeared. There was a breathless pause for a few minutes, during which I listened intently but caught only a faint sound as of the snapping of a lock.

Presently the old man returned.

"He sleeps," he said, in a low deep tone to me; "sleeps as his victim slept—sleeps without a dream of remorse; and he shall awaken, as she awoke, to despair. Come into his chamber!"

We obeyed. The door was made fast within side.

The curtains of the couch were withdrawn, and the moonlight streamed full upon the face of the sleeper. He was hushed in profound repose. No visions seemed to haunt his peaceful slumbers. Could guilt sleep so soundly? I half doubted the old man's story.

Placing us within the shadow of the canopy, Cristofano approached the bed. A stiletto glittered in his hand. "Awake!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

The sleeper started at the summons.

I watched his countenance. He read Cristofano's errand in his eye. But he quailed not. "Cowardly assassin!" he cried, "you have well consulted your own safety in stealing on my sleep."

"And who taught me the lesson?" fiercely interrupted the old man. "Am I the first that have stolen on midnight slumber? Gaze upon this? When and how did it acquire its dye?" And he held forth a glove, which looked blackened and stained in the moonlight.

The marchese groaned aloud.

"My cabinet broken open!" at length he exclaimed— "villain! how dared you do this? But why do I rave? I know with whom I have to deal." Uttering these words he sprung from his couch, with the intention of grappling with the old man; but Cristofano retreated, and at that instant the brigands, who rushed to his aid, thrust me forward. I was face to face with the marchese.

The apparition of the murdered man could not have staggered him more. His limbs were stiffened by the shock, and he remained in an attitude of freezing terror.

"Is he come for vengeance?" he ejaculated.

"He is!" cried Cristofano. "Give him the weapon!" And a stiletto was thrust into my hand. But I heeded not the steel. I tore open my bosom— a small diamond cross was within the folds.

"Do you recollect this?" I demanded of the marchese.

"It was my wife's!" he shrieked, in amazement.

"It was upon the infant's bosom as he slept by her side on that fatal night," said Cristofano. "I saw it sparkle there."

"That infant was myself— that wife my mother!" I cried.

"The murderer stands before you! Strike!" exclaimed Cristofano.

I raised the dagger. The marchese stirred not. I could not strike.

"Do you hesitate?" angrily exclaimed Cristofano.

"He has not the courage," returned the younger Calabrian. "You reproached me this morning with want of filial duty. Behold how a son can avenge his father!"

And he plunged his stiletto within the bosom of the marchese.

"Your father is not yet avenged, young man!" cried Cristofano, in a terrible tone. "You alone can avenge him!"

Ere I could withdraw its point the old man had rushed upon the dagger which I held extended in my grasp.

He fell without a single groan.

2: The Stolen Necklace

Victor L. Whitechurch

1868-1933

The Royal Magazine March 1906

THORPE HAZELL was dining at his club. They were accustomed to his eccentricities there, and hardly a member had looked up from his newspaper when he had divested himself of his coat, and gravely gone through his "digestive exercises" in a convenient corner before proceeding to the dining-room. Here preparation had been made, for he had told the head-waiter he was coming. A table was reserved, and on it stood a carafe of milk, a little loaf of brown bread, and a dish of his favourite biscuits. A bowl— he never would use a soup-plate— of lentil soup was soon put before him, and he commenced his meal.

"Hullo, Hazell," said a voice presently, as the speaker clapped him on the shoulders, "don't you overfeed yourself, old chap!"

"Oh, it's you, is it, Masters?" exclaimed Hazell, as he looked up. "I thought you were out of town."

"So I was till half-an-hour ago. I've just come up by the West-Northern, and I'm frantically hungry. Thought I'd come round for a meal at once before going to my chambers."

Hazell motioned him to take a seat at his table. The waiter came up and presented the menu. Hazell listened while his friend ordered dinner. Then he said:

"Oxtail soup is very heating. Whiting is a fish that ought to be cooked within two hours of catching. Curry is deadly for the liver. How you can digest Welsh rarebit is more than I can imagine, and alcohol in any form has been proved by the leading doctors to be a poison."

Frank Masters laughed heartily.

"Your life must be a misery to you, Hazell!"

"Not at all. I never suffer from indigestion."

"Neither do I."

"Not now, perhaps, but your old age will be a misery to you."

"How do you know yours won't, too? You haven't put that to the test with your system yet!"

Hazell shook his head sadly as the other fell to on his soup. There were few converts to be made at the club.

"Did you have a good run up to town?" asked Hazell presently.

"Capital."

"Where did you come from?"

"Redminster."

"Ah, you took the express arriving in town at 7.28?"

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw!"

"Mr. Bradshaw" was Thorpe Hazell's nickname at the club, and he rather rejoiced in it than otherwise. No man ever, attempted the fag of looking at a railway guide when Hazell was near at hand.

"Was it in to time?"

"To the minute."

"Generally is. Did you notice whether a compound drew it?"

"What?"

"A compound locomotive."

"My dear fellow, I haven't the slightest idea what you mean. As long as I get to my journey's end I don't worry about the engine. Jolly good train, that express. No stop at all except at Wisden Junction, and I can't see the necessity for that."

"They take tickets there," replied Hazell.

"I know. But why the johnny can't collect 'em on the train instead of only just looking at 'em is one of those railway mysteries that you know more about than I do."

"They could collect them on the train, of course," replied Hazell, "or even at Redminster. But there's another reason why the train stops at Wisden— in case there are any passengers for South London."

"Then why do they disturb you on the train, and make you hunt in all your pockets just to see your ticket?"

"They don't," said Hazell, in blunt contradiction, as he helped himself liberally to boiled rice— for his second course had just arrived.

"But I tell you they do," replied his friend.

"Oh, well," said Hazell, "it must be something new. I travelled by that train a fortnight ago, and they didn't do it then. Oh— what an ass I am! Of course, I know what it was. A ticket inspector must have been on the train. The railway companies are not so foolish as you think, Masters, and they often catch fellows in that way."

The conversation took a general turn, and, after a bit, Hazell finished his meal and said good-night to his friend, with another gentle remonstrance against the savoury he was enjoying.

The next morning he had scarcely finished breakfast at his flat when there came a ring, and he heard his servant show someone into his study. The next moment he was looking at a visiting card.

"Miss St. John Mallaby."

When he went into the study he found himself confronted by a remarkably pretty young lady, whose face, however, was wearing a very anxious expression.

"I hope you don't mind my coming here, Mr. Hazell," she began, "but I think you've met my brother."

"Do sit down," he answered, "yes, of course I have."

"He told me about you, and what a clever railway detective you are, and I've come to you. I thought you might advise me." Hazell smiled.

"I'm afraid I have a reputation that I don't deserve," he said. "I'm scarcely a railway detective, as you put it."

"Oh, but you *will* help me— please!" said the girl earnestly.

"Of course, I'll do anything I can for you, Miss Mallaby. But tell me what it's about?"

"I don't want anyone to know— I mean I want you to promise you won't tell anyone. I'm in great trouble. I've done something awfully wrong, and it's like a judgment on me."

"My dear young lady," replied Hazell gravely, "before you make a confidant of me are you sure that it is wise to do so?"

"Oh, yes— yes— yes. Because you may be able to help me. Please let me tell you."

"Very well, then," said Hazell encouragingly.

"Well, I've lost a diamond necklace!" she blurted out.

Hazell nodded and waited.

"I ought not to have worn it all," she went on, "and that's the terrible part of it. It belongs to my aunt. I'm staying at her house in town. You see it's going to be mine one day— she has promised to give it to me when I come of age, and that's why I borrowed it."

"Suppose," said Hazell kindly, "you begin at the beginning and try to tell me exactly what has happened?"

"Yes, I will, as well as I can. My mother and I came up last week to stay with aunt for the season. It was then that she showed me the necklace. I'd often heard about it, for it's been in the family a long time. Well, last Monday aunt had to go away unexpectedly, owing to her brother being taken ill. She left her keys in charge of mother. On Tuesday I was to go down to Appledon to Sir Roland Hartingford's. His daughter, who is a great friend of mine, came of age that day, and there was a ball at the house. Just before I started, the idea suddenly struck me that I would dearly love to wear the necklace at the dance. I know it was awfully wrong of me, but the temptation was a strong one, and I found myself saying that if aunt had been at home she would have lent me the diamonds. And then I yielded and took them."

"How did you get them?"

"It was very simple. I had to borrow my mother's keys for something, and she gave me her chatelaine. In it were the other keys. Almost before I realised what I had done, I had gone into my aunt's room and unlocked the safe which is fixed there. The necklace was in a small leather case. I took it out, locked up the safe again, and gave my mother back the keys."

"Did you tell her what you had done?"

"No. She does not know even yet."

"Where did you put the necklace?"

"In my dressing-case, which contains my own jewellery and which never leaves me when I travel. Well, I went down to Appledon with my maid and wore the diamonds at the ball. It was on the return journey— yesterday— that I lost them."

"In the train?"

"Yes. That's why I came to you, Mr. Hazell. At least, I think it *must* have been in the train— and yet— I hardly know what to say. It is all so terrible."

"Well, you must try to tell me."

The girl thought for a moment.

"Appledon is on a branch line," she said, "and you join the main line at Redminster."

"Quite so," said Hazell indulgently.

"It must have happened in the main line train, because after we had got in I wanted something from my case and unlocked it. The necklace was there then; I'm positive of that."

"What train was it?"

"The 5.40 express from Redminster. I was travelling with my maid in a first-class compartment. It was a corridor train."

"Was anyone else in the carriage with you?"

The girl hesitated and blushed slightly. Then she said:

"One of the guests at Appledon— Mr. Kestron was coming up to town by the same train, and he travelled with me."

"The Honourable George Kestron?"

"Yes."

"I know him slightly," replied Hazell, remembering that a rumour was abroad to the effect that this same Kestron was rather hard up— had borrowed money, so it was said.

Miss Mallaby noticed a certain tone in Hazell's voice as he replied.

"No— *no*!" she exclaimed, "I can't suspect him."

"Had you, then?" asked Hazell.

"The thought *would* come into my head. It was partly for that reason that I did not go to the police. Oh, Mr. Hazell, I don't know what to think."

"Well, go on with your story, please. Perhaps you will tell me how you were seated in the carriage?"

She explained that she was at first seated in the corner next to the corridor with her back to the engine, and Kestron was opposite. Her maid was on her left by the window, with the dressing-case, covered over by a rug, between them. After a while, Kestron had suggested changing places, as she had said something about travelling with her back to the engine. She was careful to move the dressing-case over to her side. Afterwards Kestron had changed his place again and had sat next to her until Wisden Junction was reached— the dressing-case being between them.

"Have you known Mr. Kestron long?" asked Hazell.

"I had only met him a few times before the ball. We danced a good deal together that night, but I had not known him very long— that was why I asked my maid to stay in the compartment."

"How came he to travel with you?"

"He had asked me the night before what train I was going by."

"I see. Well, when did you miss the necklace?"

She told him it was after the train had left Wisden Junction. She put her hand into the outside pocket of the case, where she kept her purse, and discovered, to her horror, that a long slit had been cut through the inner side. She unlocked the case, and the necklace was missing. Kestron had got out at Wisden, having to take a train from there on business before he went home that night.

"Do you know his address?" asked Hazell.

"Lancaster Crescent— number eight, I think."

Having discovered the loss of the jewels, she was terribly upset, and even asked her maid if she had taken them. The latter was indignant, and wanted to be searched on the spot. They looked everywhere in the compartment. It was still broad daylight, and she was certain that neither of them had left the compartment between Redminster and Wisden.

"Did anyone else come in?"

"No— even the ticket-collector only opened the door, and stood half outside when he asked to see our tickets."

Hazell suddenly remembered that the friend with whom he had been dining on the previous evening had travelled by the same train. He thought for a minute, and then asked her to tell him how the three were seated when the ticket-collector came, and who gave him the tickets.

"Mr. Kestron was next to me— it was after he had changed places the second time. I handed his ticket to the man, who glanced at it and returned it. My maid had both our tickets— she always sees to that— and she showed them to him."

"But as she was near the window, how did she do it?"

"Why," exclaimed the girl rather petulantly, "she naturally moved across to him."

"I see," said Hazell thoughtfully. "The corridor, of course, was on the *left* as you faced the engine. Can you remember whether the ticket-collector came from the front or back of the train, and whereabouts your carriage was in the train?"

"About the middle. The collector came from the front, but he had passed along the corridor just before."

"Only *just* before?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Well, I think you've told me all I want to know. It's a troublesome case. By the way, what happened when you arrived at the terminus?"

"My aunt's brougham was there to meet me, and the footman got my luggage from the van. My maid and I went straight to the brougham. I was foolish, perhaps, but I didn't tell anyone what had happened. I dreaded the police knowing. I felt like a thief myself. And— and—"

"You suspected Mr. Kestron, I suppose?"

Her eyes fell before his gaze, and she nodded slowly.

"I don't wonder," said Hazell.

"But— but— do you think he took it, Mr. Hazell? I don't know what to do about it— and my aunt comes home this evening. I shall have to tell her. If— if— he took it, are you going to try to find out?"

"I shall have to keep you in suspense for a little while, Miss Mallaby," said Thorpe Hazell. "I want you to go straight home and say nothing about this visit. Please give me your address, and I will call as soon as possible— to-day, I expect. I can't promise anything, but there is just a chance of getting on the track."

She thanked him. He put on his hat and saw her to the door, where her taxi was waiting. Then he hailed another and directed the driver to take him quickly to the terminus of the West-Northern Railway.

"Wait," he said as he got out. "I shall want you again directly."

He made his way to the office of the traffic-manager, whom he knew.

"I want some information," he said. "Will you tell me if there was a ticket-collector or inspector on the 5.40 p.m. express from Redminster last evening?"

"Another mystery?" asked the official.

"Yes— but the chances are against a solution, I'm afraid."

The manager rang for a clerk and gave some orders. In ten minutes' time the report was brought in. *No ticket inspector or collector had been on the train*.

"That settles it," cried Hazell. "I'd advise you to look after your old uniforms, Mr. Street. Good-morning."

His next move was to drive to Frank Masters, whom he found busy with a pile of briefs in front of him.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Hazell, "but the matter is of importance. It's about your railway journey last night. That ticket-collecting incident is the clue to a mystery. Can you remember what the fellow was like?"

"Yes. A man with a black beard and moustache, and rather a gruff voice."

"After he'd looked at your ticket did he go back along the corridor?"

"No. He passed first, and asked for tickets Coming back."

"From the front of the train— yes, I know. Now, whereabouts in the carriage were you— which compartment were you in, I mean?"

"The last but two— a first-class."

"Last but two from the engine?"

"Yes."

"H'm. I wish I knew about those two compartments behind you."

"I can tell you."

"Good!" ejaculated Hazell. "How?"

"There was a fellow in my compartment who lit an Egyptian cigarette. I can't stand the smell of 'em, so I went out."

"After the tickets were looked at?"

"Yes— some ten minutes later— just before we got to Wisden. The next compartment was evidently reserved for ladies, so I avoided it; the last was a second class, but I didn't mind that. There was only one man in it."

"Oh, that's grand," cried Hazell, with great glee. "I'll have a drink on the strength of it." And he pulled out his milk flask.

"What was he like?" he went on.

"A clean-shaven fellow, with the exception of slight whiskers. He was reading a paper when I went in."

"That's the man I want," said Hazell. "You see, I happen to know that the doors at the ends of the coaches on this train were locked, the key being with the guard. So it was impossible that anyone could get through to the next coach. If only I could find out where that man is now!"

Masters wheeled round his chair suddenly.

"Will you tell me why you want to know?" he asked.

"I can't, my dear chap."

"Will you assure me, then, that no harm will come of it if I can give you a clue?"

"On the other hand, you will be doing a very great service in the cause of justice."

"Very well, then. I took a taxi straight to the club when I arrived at the terminus. And I happened to notice that my travelling companion took the next on the rank. He had a large Gladstone and a smaller bag with him."

"That settles it. I'm off," exclaimed Hazell.

In half an hour's time he was back at the terminus, in consultation with the cab inspector, who keeps watch at the station gates.

"I want the number and destination of the taxi that followed immediately after the one bound for the Avenue Club last evening— from the 7.35 from Redminster."

He knew, of course, that every cabman has to shout out his destination to the inspector as he passes the little office at the gate. The man consulted his book.

"Number 28,533. Destination, Eight, Lancaster Crescent."

Thorpe Hazell stood as one stunned.

"Kestron's address!" he muttered to himself. "The girl must have been right, after all. It's pretty bad!"

"I think you'll find the taxi on the rank now, sir," went on the inspector.

It was there, and in answer to his inquiries the driver informed Hazell that the address was quite correct, and that his fare had certainly gone in at number eight.

"I'm sorry for her," said Hazell to himself, as he told his own cabman to drive him there; "but at least I can try to bluff him. Still, it's very strange. There's a hitch in my reasoning somewhere. Except, of course, this man must have been his tool. I can't make it out."

He rang the bell of number eight, and a servant opened the door.

"Is Mr. Kestron in?"

"No, sir; he went out half an hour ago."

Thorpe Hazell paused, then he said:

"Ah, he has returned from the country, then?"

"Yes, sir. He came back late last night."

"About eight?"

"No, sir; not till after ten."

"Oh," said Hazell nonchalantly, "I thought he returned by the train arriving at about half-past seven and drove straight home."

"No, sir; the valet came back with the luggage then, but Mr. Kestron arrived later."

Instantly the solution flashed across his mind. Producing half-a-sovereign, he said to the girl: "I want to see his valet."

The girl looked at him doubtfully, and hesitated.

"I am a friend of your master," said Hazell quietly.

Then the bribe acted. In a couple of minutes the valet came into the room where Hazell had been shown. Without a word the latter walked to the door and locked it. Then he turned upon the man.

"Do you find ticket-collecting a paying business?" he asked.

The other turned very pale.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I can prove that you were amusing yourself asking for tickets on the express from Redminster last night. I have all the details."

The man was thoroughly taken aback. At first he denied everything, but something in Hazell's quiet manner was too much for him.

"Well," he said sullenly, "and if I was? It was a harmless enough joke. You're from the railway company, I suppose?"

Hazell ignored the question.

"I want that diamond necklace that was handed to you by Miss Mallaby's maid," he said, "sharp!"

The man gave a bound forward.

"It was a clever scheme you both hatched out at Appledon— no!" he cried, "I know exactly what happened. If you attempt any nonsense you're done for, my man." Then he went on to explain that if the necklace were restored quietly nothing more would be said.

"Not for your sake, you know," he added grimly, "but because it's best to hush it up. If you refuse, I'll open the window and tell my cabman to fetch the police. These are my conditions. You give me the necklace, and clear out of here before your master returns. For I fancy *he'll* know about this one of these days."

"Who are you?" blurted out the man.

"My name's Thorpe Hazell— if that's any use to you, and this isn't the first little affair of the railway I've solved."

"I've heard of you," said the valet. "Were you on the train?"

"No. Now then— that necklace, please."

"I'll— I'll go and get it."

"Then I'll come with you."

He looked at Hazell for a moment, then, putting his hand in the inner pocket of his coat he drew out a small case, and handed it over to Hazell with a curse. The latter opened it, and saw the diamonds were intact.

"Thanks," he said. "I've two questions to ask you— out of mere curiosity. Why did you trouble to ask for tickets in every compartment of that carriage?"

"I thought it might allay suspicion if the alarm were given before the end of the journey. The other passengers would—"

"Oh, it is very weak!" interrupted Hazell. "How should you have changed into uniform if there had been anyone else in your compartment?"

"There was the lavatory."

"I see. Good-morning. You may think yourself very lucky, my friend."

In an hour's time the necklace was in the hands of Miss St. John Mallaby, who was profuse in her expressions of relief and gratitude.

"And you are sure that—"

"That Mr. Kestron had nothing to do with it? Absolutely. Now, please ring for your maid."

The latter came in. Hazell held the necklace in his hands.

"Your mistress thinks you had better take yourself off at once," he said. "Mr. Kestron's valet is also out of a situation. Did you use your scissors or a knife to slit open that dressing-case under cover of the rug?"

She stood for half-a-minute gasping for breath. Then she left the room without a word.

"It has been an interesting case, Miss Mallaby," remarked Hazell, "and I am glad to think that the last of my little investigations of railway mysteries has cleared a good man of suspicion and ended happily."

2: The Devil and Daniel Webster

Stephen Vincent Benét

1898-1943

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IT'S A STORY they tell in the border country, where Massachusetts joins Vermont and New Hampshire.

Yes, Dan'l Webster's dead— or, at least, they buried him. But every time there's a thunder storm around Marshfield, they say you can hear his rolling voice in the hollows of the sky. And they say that if you go to his grave and speak loud and clear, "Dan'l Webster— Dan'l Webster!" the ground 'll begin to shiver and the trees begin to shake. And after a while you'll hear a deep voice saying, "Neighbour, how stands the Union?" Then you better answer the Union stands as she stood, rock-bottomed and copper sheathed, one and indivisible, or he's liable to rear right out of the ground. At least, that's what I was told when I was a youngster.

You see, for a while, he was the biggest man in the country. He never got to be President, but he was the biggest man. There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty, and they told stories about him and all the things that belonged to him that were like the stories of patriarchs and such. They said, when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out in the sky, and once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground. They said, when he walked the woods with his fishing rod, Killall, the trout would jump out of the streams right into his pockets, for they knew it was no use putting up a fight against him; and, when he argued a case, he could turn on the harps of the blessed and the shaking of the earth underground. That was the kind of man he was, and his big farm up at Marshfield was suitable to him. The chickens he raised were all white meat down through the drumsticks, the cows were tended like children, and the big ram he called Goliath had horns with a curl like a morning-glory vine and could butt through an iron door. But Dan'l wasn't one of your gentlemen farmers; he knew all the ways of the land, and he'd be up by candlelight to see that the chores got done. A man with a mouth like a mastiff, a brow like a mountain and eyes like burning anthracite— that was Dan'l Webster in his prime. And the biggest case he argued never got written down in the books, for he argued it against the devil, nip and tuck and no holds barred. And this is the way I used to hear it told.

There was a man named Jabez Stone, lived at Cross Corners, New Hampshire. He wasn't a bad man to start with, but he was an unlucky man. If he planted corn, he got borers; if he planted potatoes, he got blight. He had good enough land, but it didn't prosper him; he had a decent wife and children, but the more children he had, the less there was to feed them. If

stones cropped up in his neighbours's field, boulders boiled up in his; if he had a horse with the spavins, he'd trade it for one with the staggers and give something extra. There's some folks bound to be like that, apparently. But one day Jabez Stone got sick of the whole business.

He'd been plowing that morning and he'd just broke the plowshare on a rock that he could have sworn hadn't been there yesterday. And, as he stood looking at the plowshare, the off horse began to cough— that ropy kind of cough that means sickness and horse doctors. There were two children down with the measles, his wife was ailing, and he had a whitlow on his thumb. It was about the last straw for Jabez Stone. "I vow," he said, and he looked around him kind of desperate— "I vow it's enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil. And I would, too, for two cents!"

Then he felt a kind of queerness come over him at having said what he'd said; though, naturally, being a New Hampshireman, he wouldn't take it back. But, all the same, when it got to be evening and, as far as he could see, no notice had been taken, he felt relieved in his mind, for he was a religious man. But notice is always taken, sooner or later, just like the Good Book says. And, sure enough, next day, about supper time, a soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger drove up in a handsome buggy and asked for Jabez Stone.

Well, Jabez told his family it was a lawyer, come to see him about a legacy. But he knew who it was. He didn't like the looks of the stranger, nor the way he smiled with his teeth.

They were white teeth, and plentiful— some say they were filed to a point, but I wouldn't vouch for that. And he didn't like it when the dog took one look at the stranger and ran away howling, with his tail between his legs. But having passed his word, more or less, he stuck to it, and they went out behind the barn and made their bargain. Jabez Stone had to prick his finger to sign, and the stranger lent him a silver pin. The wound healed clean, but it left a little white scar.

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AFTER THAT, all of a sudden, things began to pick up and prosper for Jabez Stone. His cows got fat and his horses sleek, his crops were the envy of the neighbourhood, and lightning might strike all over the valley, but it wouldn't strike his barn. Pretty soon, he was one of the prosperous people of the county; they asked him to stand for selectman, and he stood for it; there began to be talk of running him for state senate. All in all, you might say the Stone family was as happy and contented as cats in a dairy. And so they were, except for Jabez Stone.

He'd been contented enough, the first few years. It's a great thing when bad luck turns; it drives most other things out of your head. True, every now and then, especially in rainy weather, the little white scar on his finger would give him a twinge. And once a year, punctual as clockwork, the stranger with the handsome buggy would come driving by. But the sixth year, the stranger lighted, and, after that, his peace was over for Jabez Stone.

The stranger came up through the lower field, switching his boots with a cane— they were handsome black boots, but Jabez Stone never liked the look of them, particularly the toes. And, after he'd passed the time of day, he said, "Well, Mr. Stone, you're a hummer! It's a very pretty property you've got here, Mr. Stone."

"Well, some might favour it and others might not," said Jabez Stone, for he was a New Hampshireman.

"Oh, no need to decry your industry!" said the stranger, very easy, showing his teeth in a smile. "After all, we know what's been done, and it's been according to contract and specifications. So when— ahem— the mortgage falls due next year, you shouldn't have any regrets."

"Speaking of that mortgage, mister," said Jabez Stone, and he looked around for help to the earth and the sky, "I'm beginning to have one or two doubts about it."

"Doubts?" said the stranger, not quite so pleasantly.

"Why, yes," said Jabez Stone. "This being the U. S. A. and me always having been a religious man." He cleared his throat and got bolder.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I'm beginning to have considerable doubts as to that mortgage holding in court."

"There's courts and courts," said the stranger, clicking his teeth. "Still, we might as well have a look at the original document." And he hauled out a big black pocketbook, full of papers. "Sherwin, Slater, Stevens, Stone," he muttered. "I, Jabez Stone, for a term of seven years— Oh, it's quite in order, I think."

But Jabez Stone wasn't listening, for he saw something else flutter out of the black pocket book. It was something that looked like a moth, but it wasn't a moth. And as Jabez Stone stared at it, it seemed to speak to him in a small sort of piping voice, terrible small and thin, but terrible human.

"Neighbour Stone!" it squeaked. "Neighbour Stone! Help me! For God's sake, help me!"

But before Jabez Stone could stir hand or foot, the stranger whipped out a big bandanna handkerchief, caught the creature in it, just like a butterfly, and started tying up the ends of the bandanna.

"Sorry for the interruption," he said. "As I was saying— "

But Jabez Stone was shaking all over like a scared horse.

"That's Miser Stevens' voice!" he said, in a croak. "And you've got him in your handkerchief!"

The stranger looked a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I really should have transferred him to the collecting box," he said with a simper, "but there were some rather unusual specimens there and I didn't want them crowded. Well, well, these little contretemps will occur."

"I don't know what you mean by contertan," said Jabez Stone, "but that was Miser Stevens' voice! And he ain't dead! You can't tell me he is! He was just as spry and mean as a woodchuck, Tuesday!"

"In the midst of life—" said the stranger, kind of pious. "Listen!" Then a bell began to toll in the valley and Jabez Stone listened, with the sweat running down his face. For he knew it was tolled for Miser Stevens and that he was dead.

"These long-standing accounts," said the stranger with a sigh; "one really hates to close them. But business is business."

He still had the bandanna in his hand, and Jabez Stone felt sick as he saw the cloth struggle and flutter.

"Are they all as small as that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Small?" said the stranger. "Oh, I see what you mean. Why, they vary." He measured Jabez Stone with his eyes, and his teeth showed. "Don't worry, Mr. Stone," he said. "You'll go with a very good grade. I wouldn't trust you outside the collecting box. Now, a man like Dan'l Webster, of course— well, we'd have to build a special box for him, and even at that, I imagine the wing spread would astonish you. He'd certainly be a prize. I wish we could see our way clear to him. But, in your case, as I was saying—"

"Put that handkerchief away!" said Jabez Stone, and he began to beg and to pray. But the best he could get at the end was a three years' extension, with conditions.

But till you make a bargain like that, you've got no idea of how fast four years can run. By the last months of those years, Jabez Stone's known all over the state and there's talk of running him for governor— and it's dust and ashes in his mouth. For every day, when he gets up, he thinks, "There's one more night gone," and every night when he lies down, he thinks of the black pocketbook and the soul of Miser Stevens, and it makes him sick at heart. Till, finally, he can't bear it any longer, and, in the last days of the last year, he hitches his horse and drives off to seek Dan'l Webster. For Dan'l was born in New Hampshire, only a few miles from Cross Corners, and it's well known that he has a particular soft spot for old neighbours.

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IT WAS EARLY in the morning when he got to Marshfield, but Dan'l was up already, talking Latin to the farm hands and wrestling with the ram, Goliath, and trying out a new trotter and working up speeches to make against John C. Calhoun. But when he heard a New Hampshire man had come to see him, he dropped every thing else he was doing, for that was Dan'l's way. He gave Jabez Stone a breakfast that five men couldn't eat, went into the living history of every man and woman in Cross Corners, and finally asked him how he could serve him.

Jabez Stone allowed that it was a kind of mortgage case.

"Well, I haven't pleaded a mortgage case in a long time, and I don't generally plead now, except before the Supreme Court," said Dan'l, "but if I can, I'll help you."

"Then I've got hope for the first time in ten years," said Jabez Stone, and told him the details.

Dan'l walked up and down as he listened, hands behind his back, now and then asking a question, now and then plunging his eyes at the floor, as if they'd bore through it like gimlets. When Jabez Stone had finished, Dan'l puffed out his cheeks and blew. Then he turned to Jabez Stone and a smile broke over his face like the sunrise over Monadnock.

"You've certainly given yourself the devil's own row to hoe, Neighbour Stone," he said, "but I'll take your case."

"You'll take it?" said Jabez Stone, hardly daring to believe.

"Yes," said Dan'l Webster. "I've got about seventy-five other things to do and the Missouri Compromise to straighten out, but I'll take your case. For if two New Hampshiremen aren't a match for the devil, we might as well give the country back to the Indians."

Then he shook Jabez Stone by the hand and said, "Did you come down here in a hurry?"

"Well, I admit I made time," said Jabez Stone.

"You'll go back faster," said Dan'l Webster, and he told 'em to hitch up Constitution and Constellation to the carriage. They were matched grays with one white forefoot, and they stepped like greased lightning.

Well, I won't describe how excited and pleased the whole Stone family was to have the great Dan'l Webster for a guest, when they finally got there. Jabez Stone had lost his hat on the way, blown off when they overtook a wind, but he didn't take much account of that. But after supper he sent the family off to bed, for he had most particular business with Mr. Webster. Mrs. Stone wanted them to sit in the front parlor, but Dan'l Webster knew front parlors and said

he preferred the kitchen. So it was there they sat, waiting for the stranger, with a jug on the table between them and a bright fire on the hearth— the stranger being scheduled to show up on the stroke of midnight, according to specification.

Well, most men wouldn't have asked for better company than Dan'l Webster and a jug. But with every tick of the clock Jabez Stone got sadder and sadder. His eyes roved round, and though he sampled the jug you could see he couldn't taste it. Finally, on the stroke of 11:30 he reached over and grabbed Dan'l Webster by the arm.

"Mr. Webster, Mr. Webster!" he said, and his voice was shaking with fear and a desperate courage. "For God's sake, Mr. Webster, harness your horses and get away from this place while you can!"

"You've brought me a long way, neighbour, to tell me you don't like my company," said Dan'l Webster, quite peaceable, pulling at the jug.

"Miserable wretch that I am!" groaned Jabez Stone. "I've brought you a devilish way, and now I see my folly. Let him take me if he wills. I don't hanker after it, I must say, but I can stand it. But you're the Union's stay and New Hampshire's pride! He mustn't get you, Mr. Webster! He mustn't get you!"

Dan'l Webster looked at the distracted man, all gray and shaking in the firelight, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm obliged to you, Neighbour Stone," he said gently. "It's kindly thought of. But there's a jug on the table and a case in hand. And I never left a jug or a case half finished in my life."

And just at that moment there was a sharp rap on the door "Ah," said Dan'l Webster, very coolly, "I thought your clock was a trifle slow, Neighbour Stone." He stepped to the door and opened it. "Come in," he said. The stranger came in— very dark and tall he looked in the firelight. He was carrying a box under his arm— a black, japanned box with little air holes in the lid. At the sight of the box, Jabez Stone gave a low cry and shrank into a corner of the room. "Mr. Webster, I presume," said the stranger, very polite, but with his eyes glowing like a fox's deep in the woods.

"Attorney of record for Jabez Stone," said Dan'l Webster, but his eyes were glowing too. "Might I ask your name?"

"I've gone by a good many," said the stranger carelessly. "Perhaps Scratch will do for the evening. I'm often called that in these regions."

Then he sat down at the table and poured himself a drink from the jug. The liquor was cold in the jug, but it came steaming into the glass.

"And now," said the stranger, smiling and showing his teeth, "I shall call upon you, as a law-abiding citizen, to assist me in taking possession of my property."

Well, with that the argument began— and it went hot and heavy. At first, Jabez Stone had a flicker of hope, but when he saw Dan'l Webster being forced back at point after point, he just sat scrunched in his corner, with his eyes on that japanned box. For there wasn't any doubt as to the deed or the signature— that was the worst of it. Dan'l Webster twisted and turned and thumped his fist on the table, but he couldn't get away from that. He offered to compromise the case; the stranger wouldn't hear of it. He pointed out the property had increased in value, and state senators ought to be worth more; the stranger stuck to the letter of the law. He was a great lawyer, Dan'l Webster, but we know who's the King of Lawyers, as the Good Book tells us, and it seemed as if, for the first time, Dan'l Webster had met his match.

Finally, the stranger yawned a little. "Your spirited efforts on behalf of your client do you credit, Mr. Webster," he said, "but if you have no more arguments to adduce, I'm rather pressed for time—" and Jabez Stone shuddered.

Dan'l Webster's brow looked dark as a thundercloud. "Pressed or not, you shall not have this man," he thundered. "Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the service of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in '12 and we'll fight all hell for it again!"

"Foreign?" said the stranger. "And who calls me a foreigner?"

"Well, I never yet heard of the dev— of your claiming American citizenship," said Dan'l Webster with surprise.

"And who with better right?" said the stranger, with one of his terrible smiles. "When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck. Am I not in your books and stories and beliefs, from the first settlements on? Am I not spoken of, still, in every church in New England? 'Tis true the North claims me for a Southerner, and the South for a Northerner, but I am neither. I am merely an honest American like yourself— and of the best descent— for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don't like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours."

"Aha!" said Dan'l Webster, with the veins standing out in his forehead. "Then I stand on the Constitution! I demand a trial for my client!"

"The case is hardly one for an ordinary court," said the stranger, his eyes flickering. "And, indeed, the lateness of the hour— "

"Let it be any court you choose, so it is an American judge and an American jury!" said Dan'l Webster in his pride. "Let it be the quick or the dead; I'll abide the issue!"

"You have said it," said the stranger, and pointed his finger at the door. And with that, and all of a sudden, there was a rushing of wind outside and a

noise of footsteps. They came, clear and distinct, through the night. And yet, they were not like the footsteps of living men.

"In God's name, who comes by so late?" cried Jabez Stone, in an ague of fear.

"The jury Mr. Webster demands," said the stranger, sipping at his boiling glass. "You must pardon the rough appearance of one or two; they will have come a long way."

iv

AND WITH THAT the fire burned blue and the door blew open and twelve men entered, one by one.

If Jabez Stone had been sick with terror before, he was blind with terror now. For there was Walter Butler, the loyalist, who spread fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution; and there was Simon Girty, the renegade, who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn. His eyes were green, like a catamount's, and the stains on his hunting shirt did not come from the blood of the deer. King Philip was there, wild and proud as he had been in life, with the great gash in his head that gave him his death wound, and cruel Governor Dale, who broke men on the wheel. There was Morton of Merry Mount, who so vexed the Plymouth Colony, with his flushed, loose, handsome face and his hate of the godly. There was Teach, the bloody pirate, with his black beard curling on his breast. The Reverend John Smeet, with his strangler's hands and his Geneva gown, walked as daintily as he had to the gallows. The red print of the rope was still around his neck, but he carried a perfumed handkerchief in one hand. One and all, they came into the room with the fires of hell still upon them, and the stranger named their names and their deeds as they came, till the tale of twelve was told. Yet the stranger had told the truth— they had all played a part in America.

"Are you satisfied with the jury, Mr. Webster?" said the stranger mockingly, when they had taken their places.

The sweat stood upon Dan'l Webster's brow, but his voice was clear.

"Quite satisfied," he said. "Though I miss General Arnold from the company."

"Benedict Arnold is engaged upon other business," said the stranger, with a glower. "Ah, you asked for a justice, I believe."

He pointed his finger once more, and a tall man, soberly clad in Puritan garb, with the burning gaze of the fanatic, stalked into the room and took his judge's place.

"Justice Hathorne is a jurist of experience," said the stranger. "He presided at certain witch trials once held in Salem. There were others who repented of the business later, but not he."

"Repent of such notable wonders and undertakings?" said the stern old justice. "Nay, hang them— hang them all!" And he muttered to himself in a way that struck ice into the soul of Jabez Stone.

Then the trial began, and, as you might expect, it didn't look anyways good for the defense. And Jabez Stone didn't make much of a witness in his own behalf. He took one look at Simon Girty and screeched, and they had to put him back in his corner in a kind of swoon.

It didn't halt the trial, though; the trial went on, as trials do. Dan'l Webster had faced some hard juries and hanging judges in his time, but this was the hardest he'd ever faced, and he knew it. They sat there with a kind of glitter in their eyes, and the stranger's smooth voice went on and on. Every time he'd raise an objection, it'd be "Objection sustained," but whenever Dan'l objected, it'd be "Objection denied." Well, you couldn't expect fair play from a fellow like this Mr. Scratch.

It got to Dan'l in the end, and he began to heat, like iron in the forge. When he got up to speak he was going to flay that stranger with every trick known to the law, and the judge and jury too. He didn't care if it was contempt of court or what would happen to him for it. He didn't care any more what happened to Jabez Stone. He just got madder and madder, thinking of what he'd say. And yet, curiously enough, the more he thought about it, the less he was able to arrange his speech in his mind. Till, finally, it was time for him to get up on his feet, and he did so, all ready to bust out with lightnings and denunciations. But before he started he looked over the judge and jury for a moment, such being his custom. And he noticed the glitter in their eyes was twice as strong as before, and they all leaned forward. Like hounds just before they get the fox, they looked, and the blue mist of evil in the room thickened as he watched them. Then he saw what he'd been about to do, and he wiped his forehead, as a man might who's just escaped falling into a pit in the dark.

For it was him they'd come for, not only Jabez Stone. He read it in the glitter of their eyes and in the way the stranger hid his mouth with one hand. And if he fought them with their own weapons, he'd fall into their power; he knew that, though he couldn't have told you how. It was his own anger and horror that burned in their eyes; and he'd have to wipe that out or the case was lost. He stood there for a moment, his black eyes burning like anthracite. And then he began to speak.

He started off in a low voice, though you could hear every word. They say he could call on the harps of the blessed when he chose. And this was just as

simple and easy as a man could talk. But he didn't start out by condemning or reviling. He was talking about the things that make a country a country, and a man a man.

And he began with the simple things that everybody's known and felt— the freshness of a fine morning when you're young, and the taste of food when you're hungry, and the new day that's every day when you're a child. He took them up and he turned them in his hands. They were good things for any man. But without freedom, they sickened. And when he talked of those enslaved, and the sorrows of slavery, his voice got like a big bell. He talked of the early days of America and the men who had made those days. It wasn't a spread-eagle speech, but he made you see it. He admitted all the wrong that had ever been done. But he showed how, out of the wrong and the right, the suffering and the starvations, something new had come. And everybody had played a part in it, even the traitors.

Then he turned to Jabez Stone and showed him as he was an ordinary man who'd had hard luck and wanted to change it. And, because he'd wanted to change it, now he was going to be punished for all eternity. And yet there was good in Jabez Stone, and he showed that good. He was hard and mean, in some ways, but he was a man. There was sadness in being a man, but it was a proud thing too. And he showed what the pride of it was till you couldn't help feeling it. Yes, even in hell, if a man was a man, you'd know it. And he wasn't pleading for any one person any more, though his voice rang like an organ. He was telling the story and the failures and the endless journey of mankind. They got tricked and trapped and bamboozled, but it was a great journey. And no demon that was ever foaled could know the inwardness of it— it took a man to do that.

v

THE FIRE began to die on the hearth and the wind before morning to blow. The light was getting gray in the room when Dan'l Webster finished. And his words came back at the end to New Hampshire ground, and the one spot of land that each man loves and clings to. He painted a picture of that, and to each one of that jury he spoke of things long forgotten. For his voice could search the heart, and that was his gift and his strength. And to one, his voice was like the forest and its secrecy, and to another like the sea and the storms of the sea; and one heard the cry of his lost nation in it, and another saw a little harmless scene he hadn't remembered for years. But each saw something. And when Dan'l Webster finished he didn't know whether or not he'd saved Jabez Stone. But he knew he'd done a miracle. For the glitter was

gone from the eyes of judge and jury, and, for the moment, they were men again, and knew they were men.

"The defense rests," said Dan'l Webster, and stood there like a mountain. His ears were still ringing with his speech, and he didn't hear any thing else till he heard Judge Hathorne say, "The jury will retire to consider its verdict."

Walter Butler rose in his place and his face had a dark, gay pride on it. "The jury has considered its verdict," he said, and looked the stranger full in the eye. "We find for the defendant, Jabez Stone."

With that, the smile left the stranger's face, but Walter Butler did not flinch.

"Perhaps 'tis not strictly in accordance with the evidence," he said, "but even the damned may salute the eloquence of Mr. Webster."

With that, the long crow of a rooster split the gray morning sky, and judge and jury were gone from the room like a puff of smoke and as if they had never been there. The stranger turned to Dan'l Webster, smiling wryly. "Major Butler was always a bold man," he said. "I had not thought him quite so bold. Nevertheless, my congratulations, as between two gentlemen."

"I'll have that paper first, if you please," said Dan'l Webster, and he took it and tore it into four pieces. It was queerly warm to the touch. "And now," he said, "I'll have you!" and his hand came down like a bear trap on the stranger's arm. For he knew that once you bested anybody like Mr. Scratch in fair fight, his power on you was gone. And he could see that Mr. Scratch knew it too.

The stranger twisted and wriggled, but he couldn't get out of that grip. "Come, come, Mr. Webster," he said, smiling palely. "This sort of thing is ridic— ouch!— is ridiculous. If you're worried about the costs of the case, naturally, I'd be glad to pay—"

"And so you shall!" said Dan'l Webster, shaking him till his teeth rattled. "For you'll sit right down at that table and draw up a document, promising never to bother Jabez Stone nor his heirs or assigns nor any other New Hampshire man till doomsday! For any Hades we want to raise in this state, we can raise ourselves, without assistance from strangers."

"Ouch!" said the stranger. "Ouch! Well, they never did run very big to the barrel, but— ouch!— I agree!"

So he sat down and drew up the document. But Dan'l Webster kept his hand on his coat collar all the time.

"And, now, may I go?" said the stranger, quite humble, when Dan'l 'd seen the document was in proper and legal form.

"Go?" said Dan'l, giving him another shake. "I'm still trying to figure out what I'll do with you. For you've settled the costs of the case, but you haven't settled with me. I think I'll take you back to Marshfield," he said, kind of

reflective. "I've got a ram there named Goliath that can butt through an iron door. I'd kind of like to turn you loose in his field and see what he'd do."

Well, with that the stranger began to beg and to plead. And he begged and he pled so humble that finally Dan'l, who was naturally kind hearted, agreed to let him go. The stranger seemed terrible grateful for that and said, just to show they were friends, he'd tell Dan'l's fortune before leaving. So Dan'l agreed to that, though he didn't take much stock in fortunetellers ordinarily.

But, naturally, the stranger was a little different. Well, he pried and he peered at the line in Dan'l's hands. And he told him one thing and another that was quite remarkable. But they were all in the past.

"Yes, all that's true, and it happened," said Dan'l Webster. "But what's to come in the future?"

The stranger grinned, kind of happily, and shook his head. "The future's not as you think it," he said. "It's dark. You have a great ambition, Mr. Webster."

"I have," said Dan'l firmly, for everybody knew he wanted to be President.

"It seems almost within your grasp," said the stranger, "but you will not attain it. Lesser men will be made President and you will be passed over."

"And, if I am, I'll still be Daniel Webster," said Dan'l. "Say on."

"You have two strong sons," said the stranger, shaking his head. "You look to found a line. But each will die in war and neither reach greatness."

"Live or die, they are still my sons," said Dan'l Webster. "Say on."

"You have made great speeches," said the stranger. "You will make more."

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster.

"But the last great speech you make will turn many of your own against you," said the stranger. "They will call you Ichabod; they will call you by other names. Even in New England some will say you have turned your coat and sold your country, and their voices will be loud against you till you die."

"So it is an honest speech, it does not matter what men say," said Dan'l Webster. Then he looked at the stranger and their glances locked. "One question," he said. "I have fought for the Union all my life. Will I see that fight won against those who would tear it apart?"

"Not while you live," said the stranger, grimly, "but it will be won. And after you are dead, there are thousands who will fight for your cause, because of words that you spoke."

"Why, then, you long-barreled, slab-sided, lantern-jawed, fortune-telling note shaver!" said Dan'l Webster, with a great roar of laughter, "be off with you to your own place before I put my mark on you! For, by the thirteen original colonies, I'd go to the Pit itself to save the Union!"

And with that he drew back his foot for a kick that would have stunned a horse. It was only the tip of his shoe that caught the stranger, but he went flying out of the door with his collecting box under his arm.

"And now," said Dan'l Webster, seeing Jabez Stone beginning to rouse from his swoon, "let's see what's left in the jug, for it's dry work talking all night. I hope there's pie for breakfast, Neighbour Stone."

But they say that whenever the devil comes near Marshfield, even now, he gives it a wide berth. And he hasn't been seen in the state of New Hampshire from that day to this. I'm not talking about Massachusetts or Vermont.

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4: The Misanthrope

J. D. Beresford

1873-1947

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SINCE I HAVE RETURNED from the rock and discussed the story in all its bearings, I have begun to wonder if the man made a fool of me. In the deeps of my consciousness I feel that he did not.

Nevertheless, I cannot resist the effect of all the laughter that has been evoked by my narrative.

Here on the mainland the whole thing seems unlikely, grotesque, foolish. On the rock the man's confession carried absolute conviction. The setting is everything; and I am, perhaps, thankful that my present circumstances are so beautifully conducive to sanity. No one appreciates the mystery of life more than I do; but when the mystery involves such a doubt of oneself, I find it pleasanter to forget. Naturally, I do not want to believe the story. If I did I should know myself to be some kind of human horror. And the terror of it all lies in the fact that I may never know precisely what kind...

Before I went we had eliminated the facile and banal explanation that the man was mad, and had fallen back upon the two inevitable alternatives: Crime and Disappointed Love. We were human and romantic, and we tried desperately hard not to be too obvious.

Once before a man had made the same attempt and had built or tried to build a house on the Gulland rock; but he had been defeated within a fortnight, and what was left of his building was taken off the island and turned into a tin church. It is there still. We all went to Trevone and ruminated over and round it, perhaps with some faint hope that one of us might, all-unknowing, have the abilities of a psychometrist.

Nothing came of that visit but a slight intensification of those theories that were already becoming a little stale. We compared the early failure of thirty years ago, the attempt that was baffled, with the present success. For this new misanthrope had lived on the Gulland through the whole winter— and still lived. Indeed, the fact of his presence on that awful lump of rock was now accepted by the country people; to them he was scarcely a shade madder than the other visitors; that remunerative, recurrent host that this year broke their journey to Bedruthan in order to stand on Trevone beach and stare foolishly at the just visible hut that stuck like a cubical gall on the landward face of that humped, desolate island.

We all did that; stared at nothing in particular and meditated enormously; but in what I felt at the time was a wild spirit of adventure, I went out one night to the point of Gunver Head and saw an actual light within that distant hut; a patch of golden lichen on the mother parasite.

Some aspect of humanity I found in that light it was that finally decided me; that and some quality of sympathy, perhaps with the hermit— mad, criminal, or lovelorn?— who had found sanctuary from the pestilent touch of the encroaching crowd. It was, in fact, a wildish night, and I stayed until the little yellow speck went out, and all I could see through the murk was an occasional canopy of curving spray when the elbow of the Trevone Light touched a bare corner of that black Gulland.

The making of a decision was no difficult matter, but while I waited for the necessary calm that would permit the occasional boat to land provisions on the island two miles out from the mainland, I suffered qualms of doubt and nervousness. And I suffered them alone, for I had determined that no hint of my adventure should be given to anyone of our party until the voyage had been made. They might think that I had gone fishing, an excuse which had all the air of probability given to it by the coming of the boatman to say that the tide and wind would serve that morning. I had warned— and bribed— him to give no clue to my friends of the goal of my proposed excursion.

My nervousness suffered no decrease as we approached the rock and saw the authentic figure of its single inhabitant awaiting our arrival. I had some consolation in the thought that he would be in some way prepared by the sight of our surprisingly passengered boat; but my mind shuddered at the necessity for using some conventional form of address if I would make at once my introduction and excuse. The civilised opening was so hopelessly incapable of expressing my sympathy, presenting instead so unmistakably, it seemed to me, the single solution of common curiosity. I wondered that he had not— as the boatman so clearly assured me was the case— had other prying visitors before me.

My self-consciousness increased as we came nearer to the single opening among the spiked rocks, that served as a miniature harbour at half-tide. I felt that I was being watched by the man who now stood awaiting us at the water's edge. And suddenly my spirit broke, I decided that I could not force myself upon him, that I would remain in the boat while its cargo was delivered, and then return with the boatmen to Trevone. So resolute was I in this plan that when we had pulled in to the tiny landing-place, I kept my gaze steadfastly averted from the man I had come to see, and stared solemnly out at the humped back of Trevone, seen now in an entirely new aspect.

The sound of the hermit's voice startled me from a perfectly genuine abstraction.

"Fairly decent weather to-day," he remarked with, I thought, a touch of nervousness. He had, I remembered, addressed the same remark to the boatmen, who were now conveying their cargo up to the hut.

I looked up and met his stare. He was, indeed, regarding me with a curious effect of concentration, as if he were eager to note every detail of my expression.

"Jolly," I replied. "Been pretty beastly the last day or two. Kept you rather short, hasn't it?"

"I make allowances for that," he said. "Keep a reserve, you know. Are you I staying over there?" He nodded towards the bay.

"For a week or two," I told him, and we began to discuss the country around Harlyn with the eagerness of two strangers who find a common topic at a dull reception.

"Never been on the Gulland before, I suppose?" he ventured at last, when the boatmen had discharged their load and were evidently ready to be off.

"No, no, I haven't," I said, and hesitated. I felt that the invitation must come from him.

He boggled over it by saying, "Dashed awkward place to get to, and nothing to see, of course. I don't know if you're at all keen on fishing?"

"Rather," I said with enthusiasm. "There's deep water on the other side of the rock," he went on. "In the right weather you get splendid bass there." He stopped and then added, "It'll be absolutely top hole for 'em, this afternoon."

"Perhaps I could come back..." I began; but the boatman interrupted me at once.

"Yew can coom back to-morrow, sure 'nough," he said. "Tide only serves wance avery twalve hours."

"If you'd care to stay, now..." began the hermit.

"Thanks! it's awfully good of you. I should like to of all things," I said. I stayed on the clear understanding that the boatmen were to fetch me the next morning. At first there was really very little that seemed in any way strange about the man on the Gulland.

His name, he told me, was William Copley, but it appeared that he was no relation to the Copleys I knew. And if he had shaved he would have looked a very ordinary type of Englishman roughing it on a holiday. His age I judged to be between thirty and forty.

Only two things about him struck me as a little queer during our very successful afternoon's fishing. The first was that intense appraising stare of his, as if he tried to fathom the very depths of one's being. The second was an

inexplicable devotion to one particular form of ceremony. As our intimacy grew, he dropped the ordinary formal politeness of a host; but he insisted always on one observance that I supposed at first to be the merely conventional business of giving precedence.

Nothing would induce him to go in front of me. He sent me ahead even as we explored the little purlieus of his rock— the only level square yard on the whole island was in the floor of the hut. But presently I noticed that this peculiarity went still further, and that he would not turn his back on me for a single moment.

That discovery intrigued one. I still excluded the explanation of madness— Copley's manner and conversation were so convincingly sane. But I reverted to and elaborated those other two suggestions that had been made. I could not avoid the inference that the man must in some strange way be afraid of me; and I hesitated as to whether he were flying from some form of justice or from revenge, perhaps a vendetta. Either theory seemed to account for his intense, ap-praising stare. I inferred that his longing for companionship had grown so strong that he had determined to risk the possibility of my being an emissary, sent by some— to me— exquisitely romantic person or persons who desired Copley's death. I recalled, and wallowed in, some of the marvellous imaginings of the novelist. I wondered if I could make Copley speak by convincing him of my innocent identity. How I thrilled at the prospect!

But the explanation of it all came without any effort on my part.

He sent me out of the hut while he prepared our supper— quite a magnificent meal, by the way.

I saw his reason at once; he could not manage all that business of cooking and laying the table without turning his back on me. One thing, however, puzzled me a little; he drew down the blind of the little square window as soon as I had gone outside.

Naturally, I made no demur. I climbed down to the edge of the sea— it was a glorious evening— and waited until he called me. He stood at the door of the hut until I was within a few feet of him, and then retreated into the room and sat down with his back to the wall.

We discussed our afternoon's sport as we had supper, but when we had finished and our pipes were going, he said, suddenly:

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you."

Like a fool, I agreed eagerly, when I might so easily have stopped him...

"It began when I was quite a kid," he said. "My mother found me crying in the garden; and all I could tell her was that Claude, my elder brother, looked 'horrid.' I couldn't bear the sight of him for days afterwards, either; but I was such a perfectly normal child that they weren't seriously perturbed about this

one idiosyncrasy of mine. They thought that Claude had 'made a face' at me, and frightened me. My father whacked me for it eventually.

"Perhaps that whacking stuck in my mind. Anyway, I didn't confide my peculiarity to anyone until I was nearly seventeen. I was ashamed of it, of course. I am still— in a way.".He stopped and looked down, pushed his plate away from him, and folded his arms on the table. I was pining to ask a question, but I was afraid to interrupt. And after a moment's hesitation he looked up and held my gaze again, but now without that inquiring look of his.

Rather, he seemed to be looking for sympathy.

"I told my house-master," he said. "He was a splendid chap, and he was very decent about it; took it all quite seriously and advised me to consult an oculist, which I did. I went in the holidays with the pater— I had given him a more reasonable account of my trouble— and he took me to the best man in London. He was tremendously interested, and it proves that there must be something in it, that it can't be imagination, because he really found a defect in my eyes, something quite new to him, he said. He called it a new form of astigmatism; but, of course, as he pointed out, no glasses would be any use to me."

"But what...?" I began, unable to keep down my curiosity any longer.

Copley hesitated, and dropped his eyes. "Astigmatism, you know," he said, "is a defect— I quote the dictionary, I learned that definition by heart; I often puzzle over it still— 'causing images of lines having a certain direction to be indistinctly seen, while those of lines transverse to the former are distinctly seen.' Only mine is peculiar in the fact that my sight is perfectly normal except when I look back at anyone over my shoulder." He looked up, almost pathetically.

I could see that he hoped I might understand without further explanation.

I had to confess myself utterly mystified. What had this trifling defect of vision to do with his coming to live on the Gulland, I wondered.

I frowned my perplexity. "But I don't see..." I said.

He knocked out his pipe and began to scrape the bowl with his pocket-knife. "Well, mine is a kind of moral astigmatism, too," he said. "At least, it gives me a kind of moral insight. I'm afraid I must call it insight. I've proved in some cases that..." He dropped his voice. He was apparently deeply engrossed in the scraping out of his pipe. He kept his eyes on it as he continued.

"Normally, you understand, when I look at people straight in the face, I see them as anybody else sees them. But when I look back at them over my shoulder I see...oh! I see all their vices and defects. Their faces remain, in a sense, the same, perfectly recognisable, I mean, but distorted— beastly...There was my brother Claude— good-looking chap, he was— but when I saw

him...that way...he had a nose like a parrot, and he looked sort of weakly voracious...and vicious." He stopped and shuddered slightly, and then added: "And one knows, now, that he is like that, too. He's just been hammered on the Stock Exchange. Rotten sort of failure it was..."

"And then Denison, my house-master, you know; such a decent chap. I never looked at him, that way, until the end of my last term at school. I had got into the habit, more or less, of never looking over my shoulder, you see. But I was always getting caught. That was an instance. I was playing for the School against the Old Boys. Denison called out, 'Good luck, old chap,' just as I was going in, and I forgot and looked back at him..."

I waited, breathless, and as he did not go on, I prompted him with "Was he...'wrong,' too?"

Copley nodded. "Weak, poor devil. His eyes were all right, but they were fighting his mouth, if you know what I mean. There would have been an awful scandal at the school there, four years after I left, if they hadn't hushed it up and got Denison out of the country.

"Then, if you want any more instances, there was the oculist— big, fine chap, he was. Of course, he made me look at him over my shoulder, to test me. He asked me what I saw, and I told, more or less. He was simply livid for a moment. He was a sensualist, you see; and when I saw him that way he looked like some filthy old hog.

"The thing that really finished me," he went on, after a long interval, "was the breaking off of my engagement to Helen. We were frightfully in love with one another, and I told her about my trouble. She was very sympathetic, and I suppose rather sentimentally romantic, too. She believed it was some sort of spell that had been put on me. I think, anyway, she had a theory that if I once saw anybody truly and ordinarily over my shoulder, I should never have any more trouble— the spell-would-be-broken sort of thing. And, of course, she wanted to be the person. I didn't resist her much. I was infatuated, I suppose. Anyway, I thought she was perfection and that it was simply impossible that I could find any defect in her. So I agreed, and looked— that way..."

His voice had fallen to an even note of despondency, as though the telling of this final tragedy in his life had brought him to the indifference of despair. "I looked," he continued, "and saw a creature with no chin and watery, doting eyes; a faithful, slobbery thing— eugh! I can't...I never spoke to her again...

"That broke me, you know," he said presently. "After that I didn't care. I used to look at everyone that way, until I had to get away from humanity. I was living in a world of beasts. Most of them looked like some beast or bird or other. The strong were vicious and criminal; and the weak were loathsome. I couldn't stick it. In the end— I had to come here away from them all."

A thought occurred to me. "Have you ever looked at yourself in the glass?" I asked.

He nodded. "I'm no better than the rest of them," he said. "That's why I grew this rotten beard. I hadn't got a looking-glass here."

"And you can't keep a stiff neck, as it were," I asked, "going about looking humanity straight in the face?"

"The temptation is too strong," Copley said. "And it gets stronger. Curiosity, partly, I suppose; but partly it's the momentary sense of superiority it gives you. You see them like that, you know, and forget how you look yourself. And then after a bit it sickens you."

"You haven't..." I said, and hesitated. I wanted to know and yet I was horribly afraid. "You haven't," I began again, "er— you haven't— er— looked at me yet...that way?"

"Not yet," he said.

"Do you suppose..."

"Probably. You look all right, of course. But then so did heaps of the others."

"You've no idea how I should look to you, that way?"

"Absolutely none. I've been trying to guess, but I can't."

"You wouldn't care...?"

"Not now," he said sharply. "Perhaps, just before you go."

"You feel fairly certain, then...?"

He nodded with disgusting conviction.

I went to bed, wondering whether Helen's theory wasn't a true one; and if I might not break the spell for poor Copley.

The boatmen came for me soon after eleven next morning.

I had shaken off some of the feeling of superstitious horror that had held me overnight, and I had not repeated my request to Copley; nor had he offered to look into the dark places of my soul.

He came down after me to the landing-place and we shook hands warmly, but he said nothing about my revisiting him.

And then, just as we were putting off, he turned back towards the hut and looked at me over his shoulder— just one quick glance.

"Wait," I commanded the boatmen, and I stood up and called to him.

"I say, Copley," I shouted.

He turned and looked at me, and I saw that his face was transfigured. He wore an expression of foolish disgust and loathing. I had seen something like it on the face of an idiot child who was just going to be sick.

I dropped down into the boat and turned my back on him.

I wondered then if that was how he had seen himself in the glass.

But since I have only wondered what it was he saw in me...
And I can never go back to ask him.

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5: The Door in the Wall

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The Daily Chronicle July 14 1906

ONE CONFIDENTIAL EVENING, not three months ago, Lionel Wallace told me this story of the Door in the Wall. And at the time I thought that so far as he was concerned it was a true story.

He told it me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere, and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focussed shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from every-day realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. "He was mystifying!" I said, and then: "How well he did it!..... It isn't quite the thing I should have expected him, of all people, to do well."

Afterwards, as I sat up in bed and sipped my morning tea, I found myself trying to account for the flavour of reality that perplexed me in his impossible reminiscences, by supposing they did in some way suggest, present, convey— I hardly know which word to use— experiences it was otherwise impossible to tell.

Well, I don't resort to that explanation now. I have got over my intervening doubts. I believe now, as I believed at the moment of telling, that Wallace did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret for me. But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess. Even the facts of his death, which ended my doubts forever, throw no light on that. That much the reader must judge for himself.

I forget now what chance comment or criticism of mine moved so reticent a man to confide in me. He was, I think, defending himself against an imputation of slackness and unreliability I had made in relation to a great public movement in which he had disappointed me. But he plunged suddenly. "I have" he said, "a preoccupation—"

"I know," he went on, after a pause that he devoted to the study of his cigar ash, "I have been negligent. The fact is— it isn't a case of ghosts or apparitions— but— it's an odd thing to tell of, Redmond— I am haunted. I am haunted by something— that rather takes the light out of things, that fills me with longings....."

He paused, checked by that English shyness that so often overcomes us when we would speak of moving or grave or beautiful things. "You were at Saint Athelstan's all through," he said, and for a moment that seemed to me quite irrelevant. "Well"— and he paused. Then very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Now that I have the clue to it, the thing seems written visibly in his face. I have a photograph in which that look of detachment has been caught and intensified. It reminds me of what a woman once said of him— a woman who had loved him greatly. "Suddenly," she said, "the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn't care a rap for you— under his very nose....."

Yet the interest was not always out of him, and when he was holding his attention to a thing Wallace could contrive to be an extremely successful man. His career, indeed, is set with successes. He left me behind him long ago; he soared up over my head, and cut a figure in the world that I couldn't cut— anyhow. He was still a year short of forty, and they say now that he would have been in office and very probably in the new Cabinet if he had lived. At school he always beat me without effort— as it were by nature. We were at school together at Saint Athelstan's College in West Kensington for almost all our school time. He came into the school as my co-equal, but he left far above me, in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance. Yet I think I made a fair average running. And it was at school I heard first of the Door in the Wall— that I was to hear of a second time only a month before his death.

To him at least the Door in the Wall was a real door leading through a real wall to immortal realities. Of that I am now quite assured.

And it came into his life early, when he was a little fellow between five and six. I remember how, as he sat making his confession to me with a slow gravity, he reasoned and reckoned the date of it. "There was," he said, "a crimson Virginia creeper in it— all one bright uniform crimson in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow, though I don't clearly remember how, and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen. I take it that means October. I look out for horse-chestnut leaves every year, and I ought to know.

"If I'm right in that, I was about five years and four months old."

He was, he said, rather a precocious little boy— he learned to talk at an abnormally early age, and he was so sane and "old-fashioned," as people say,

that he was permitted an amount of initiative that most children scarcely attain by seven or eight. His mother died when he was born, and he was under the less vigilant and authoritative care of a nursery governess. His father was a stern, preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention, and expected great things of him. For all his brightness he found life a little grey and dull I think. And one day he wandered.

He could not recall the particular neglect that enabled him to get away, nor the course he took among the West Kensington roads. All that had faded among the incurable blurs of memory. But the white wall and the green door stood out quite distinctly.

As his memory of that remote childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him— he could not tell which— to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning— unless memory has played him the queerest trick— that the door was unfastened, and that he could go in as he chose.

I seem to see the figure of that little boy, drawn and repelled. And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went through that door.

Wallace described all these moments of hesitation to me with the utmost particularity. He went right past the door, and then, with his hands in his pockets, and making an infantile attempt to whistle, strolled right along beyond the end of the wall. There he recalls a number of mean, dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator, with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead ball taps, pattern books of wall paper, and tins of enamel. He stood pretending to examine these things, and coveting, passionately desiring the green door.

Then, he said, he had a gust of emotion. He made a run for it, lest hesitation should grip him again, he went plump with outstretched hand through the green door and let it slam behind him. And so, in a trice, he came into the garden that has haunted all his life.

It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad— as only in rare

moments and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there.....

Wallace mused before he went on telling me. "You see," he said, with the doubtful inflection of a man who pauses at incredible things, "there were two great panthers there... Yes, spotted panthers. And I was not afraid. There was a long wide path with marble-edged flower borders on either side, and these two huge velvety beasts were playing there with a ball. One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide, this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home.

"You know, in the very moment the door swung to behind me, I forgot the road with its fallen chestnut leaves, its cabs and tradesmen's carts, I forgot the sort of gravitational pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life. I became in a moment a very glad and wonder-happy little boy— in another world. It was a world with a different quality, a warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky. And before me ran this long wide path, invitingly, with weedless beds on either side, rich with untended flowers, and these two great panthers. I put my little hands fearlessly on their soft fur, and caressed their round ears and the sensitive corners under their ears, and played with them, and it was as though they welcomed me home. There was a keen sense of home-coming in my mind, and when presently a tall, fair girl appeared in the pathway and came to meet me, smiling, and said Well?' to me, and lifted me, and kissed me, and put me down, and led me by the hand, there was no amazement, but only an impression of delightful rightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked. There were broad steps, I remember, that came into view between spikes of delphinium, and up these we went to a great avenue between very old and shady dark trees. All down this avenue, you know, between the red chapped stems, were marble seats of honour and statuary, and very tame and friendly white doves.....

"And along this avenue my girl-friend led me, looking down— I recall the pleasant lines, the finely-modelled chin of her sweet kind face— asking me questions in a soft, agreeable voice, and telling me things, pleasant things I know, though what they were I was never able to recall... And presently a little Capuchin monkey, very clean, with a fur of ruddy brown and kindly hazel eyes,

came down a tree to us and ran beside me, looking up at me and grinning, and presently leapt to my shoulder. So we went on our way in great happiness...."

He paused.

"Go on," I said.

"I remember little things. We passed an old man musing among laurels, I remember, and a place gay with paroquets, and came through a broad shaded colonnade to a spacious cool palace, full of pleasant fountains, full of beautiful things, full of the quality and promise of heart's desire. And there were many things and many people, some that still seem to stand out clearly and some that are a little vague, but all these people were beautiful and kind. In some way— I don't know how— it was conveyed to me that they all were kind to me, glad to have me there, and filling me with gladness by their gestures, by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love in their eyes. Yes—"

He mused for awhile. "Playmates I found there. That was very much to me, because I was a lonely little boy. They played delightful games in a grass-covered court where there was a sun-dial set about with flowers. And as one played one loved....

"But— it's odd— there's a gap in my memory. I don't remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again— in my nursery— by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me.... Then presently came a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a sombre woman wearing a soft long robe of pale purple, who carried a book and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall— though my playmates were loth to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was carried away. 'Come back to us!' they cried. 'Come back to us soon!' I looked up at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave. She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee. The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born....

"It was wonderful to me, because the pages of that book were not pictures, you understand, but realities."

Wallace paused gravely— looked at me doubtfully.

"Go on," I said. "I understand."

"They were realities— yes, they must have been; people moved and things came and went in them; my dear mother, whom I had near forgotten; then my father, stern and upright, the servants, the nursery, all the familiar things of

home. Then the front door and the busy streets, with traffic to and fro: I looked and marvelled, and looked half doubtfully again into the woman's face and turned the pages over, skipping this and that, to see more of this book, and more, and so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall, and felt again the conflict and the fear.

"'And next?' I cried, and would have turned on, but the cool hand of the grave woman delayed me.

"'Next?' I insisted, and struggled gently with her hand, pulling up her fingers with all my childish strength, and as she yielded and the page came over she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow.

"But the page did not show the enchanted garden, nor the panthers, nor the girl who had led me by the hand, nor the playfellows who had been so loth to let me go. It showed a long grey street in West Kensington, on that chill hour of afternoon before the lamps are lit, and I was there, a wretched little figure, weeping aloud, for all that I could do to restrain myself, and I was weeping because I could not return to my dear play-fellows who had called after me, 'Come back to us! Come back to us soon!' I was there. This was no page in a book, but harsh reality; that enchanted place and the restraining hand of the grave mother at whose knee I stood had gone— whither have they gone?"

He halted again, and remained for a time, staring into the fire.

"Oh! the wretchedness of that return!" he murmured.

"Well?" I said after a minute or so.

"Poor little wretch I was— brought back to this grey world again! As I realised the fulness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful homecoming remain with me still. I see again the benevolent-looking old gentleman in gold spectacles who stopped and spoke to me— prodding me first with his umbrella. 'Poor little chap,' said he; 'and are you lost then?'— and me a London boy of five and more! And he must needs bring in a kindly young policeman and make a crowd of me, and so march me home. Sobbing, conspicuous and frightened, I came from the enchanted garden to the steps of my father's house.

"That is as well as I can remember my vision of that garden— the garden that haunts me still. Of course, I can convey nothing of that indescribable quality of translucent unreality, that difference from the common things of experience that hung about it all; but that— that is what happened. If it was a dream, I am sure it was a day-time and altogether extraordinary dream.... H'm!— naturally there followed a terrible questioning, by my aunt, my father, the nurse, the governess— everyone....

"I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then, as I said, everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it. Even my fairy tale books were taken away from me for a time— because I was 'too imaginative.' Eh? Yes, they did that! My father belonged to the old school.... And my story was driven back upon myself. I whispered it to my pillow— my pillow that was often damp and salt to my whispering lips with childish tears. And I added always to my official and less fervent prayers this one heartfelt request: 'Please God I may dream of the garden. Oh! take me back to my garden! Take me back to my garden!'

"I dreamt often of the garden. I may have added to it, I may have changed it; I do not know.... All this you understand is an attempt to reconstruct from fragmentary memories a very early experience. Between that and the other consecutive memories of my boyhood there is a gulf. A time came when it seemed impossible I should ever speak of that wonder glimpse again."

I asked an obvious question.

"No," he said. "I don't remember that I ever attempted to find my way back to the garden in those early years. This seems odd to me now, but I think that very probably a closer watch was kept on my movements after this misadventure to prevent my going astray. No, it wasn't until you knew me that I tried for the garden again. And I believe there was a period— incredible as it seems now— when I forgot the garden altogether— when I was about eight or nine it may have been. Do you remember me as a kid at Saint Athelstan's?"

"Rather!"

"I didn't show any signs did I in those days of having a secret dream?"

HE LOOKED UP with a sudden smile.

"Did you ever play North-West Passage with me?.... No, of course you didn't come my way!"

"It was the sort of game," he went on, "that every imaginative child plays all day. The idea was the discovery of a North-West Passage to school. The way to school was plain enough; the game consisted in finding some way that wasn't plain, starting off ten minutes early in some almost hopeless direction, and working one's way round through unaccustomed streets to my goal. And one day I got entangled among some rather low-class streets on the other side of Campden Hill, and I began to think that for once the game would be against me and that I should get to school late. I tried rather desperately a street that seemed a *cul de sac*, and found a passage at the end. I hurried through that with renewed hope. 'I shall do it yet,' I said, and passed a row of frowsy little

shops that were inexplicably familiar to me, and behold! there was my long white wall and the green door that led to the enchanted garden!

"The thing whacked upon me suddenly. Then, after all, that garden, that wonderful garden, wasn't a dream!"...

He paused.

"I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn't for a moment think of going in straight away. You see... For one thing my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time— set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt *some* little desire at least to try the door— yes, I must have felt that... But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school. I was immediately interested by this discovery I had made, of course— I went on with my mind full of it— but I went on. It didn't check me. I ran past tugging out my watch, found I had ten minutes still to spare, and then I was going downhill into familiar surroundings. I got to school, breathless, it is true, and wet with perspiration, but in time. I can remember hanging up my coat and hat... Went right by it and left it behind me. Odd, eh?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "Of course, I didn't know then that it wouldn't always be there. School boys have limited imaginations. I suppose I thought it was an awfully jolly thing to have it there, to know my way back to it, but there was the school tugging at me. I expect I was a good deal distraught and inattentive that morning, recalling what I could of the beautiful strange people I should presently see again. Oddly enough I had no doubt in my mind that they would be glad to see me... Yes, I must have thought of the garden that morning just as a jolly sort of place to which one might resort in the interludes of a strenuous scholastic career.

"I didn't go that day at all. The next day was a half holiday, and that may have weighed with me. Perhaps, too, my state of inattention brought down impositions upon me and docked the margin of time necessary for the detour. I don't know. What I do know is that in the meantime the enchanted garden was so much upon my mind that I could not keep it to myself.

"I told— What was his name?— a ferrety-looking youngster we used to call Squiff."

"Young Hopkins," said I.

"Hopkins it was. I did not like telling him, I had a feeling that in some way it was against the rules to tell him, but I did. He was walking part of the way home with me; he was talkative, and if we had not talked about the enchanted

garden we should have talked of something else, and it was intolerable to me to think about any other subject. So I blabbed.

"Well, he told my secret. The next day in the play interval I found myself surrounded by half a dozen bigger boys, half teasing and wholly curious to hear more of the enchanted garden. There was that big Fawcett— you remember him?— and Carnaby and Morley Reynolds. You weren't there by any chance? No, I think I should have remembered if you were....

"A boy is a creature of odd feelings. I was, I really believe, in spite of my secret self-disgust, a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows. I remember particularly a moment of pleasure caused by the praise of Crawshaw— you remember Crawshaw major, the son of Crawshaw the composer?— who said it was the best lie he had ever heard. But at the same time there was a really painful undertow of shame at telling what I felt was indeed a sacred secret. That beast Fawcett made a joke about the girl in green—"

Wallace's voice sank with the keen memory of that shame. "I pretended not to hear," he said. "Well, then Carnaby suddenly called me a young liar and disputed with me when I said the thing was true. I said I knew where to find the green door, could lead them all there in ten minutes. Carnaby became outrageously virtuous, and said I'd have to— and bear out my words or suffer. Did you ever have Carnaby twist your arm? Then perhaps you'll understand how it went with me. I swore my story was true. There was nobody in the school then to save a chap from Carnaby though Crawshaw put in a word or so. Carnaby had got his game. I grew excited and red-eared, and a little frightened, I behaved altogether like a silly little chap, and the outcome of it all was that instead of starting alone for my enchanted garden, I led the way presently— cheeks flushed, ears hot, eyes smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame— for a party of six mocking, curious and threatening school-fellows.

"We never found the white wall and the green door..."

"You mean?—"

"I mean I couldn't find it. I would have found it if I could.

"And afterwards when I could go alone I couldn't find it. I never found it. I seem now to have been always looking for it through my school-boy days, but I've never come upon it again."

"Did the fellows— make it disagreeable?"

"Beastly.... Carnaby held a council over me for wanton lying. I remember how I sneaked home and upstairs to hide the marks of my blubbering. But when I cried myself to sleep at last it wasn't for Carnaby, but for the garden, for the beautiful afternoon I had hoped for, for the sweet friendly women and

the waiting playfellows and the game I had hoped to learn again, that beautiful forgotten game....

"I believed firmly that if I had not told—.... I had bad times after that—crying at night and wool-gathering by day. For two terms I slackened and had bad reports. Do you remember? Of course you would! It was *you*— your beating me in mathematics that brought me back to the grind again."

FOR A TIME my friend stared silently into the red heart of the fire. Then he said: "I never saw it again until I was seventeen.

"It leapt upon me for the third time— as I was driving to Paddington on my way to Oxford and a scholarship. I had just one momentary glimpse. I was leaning over the apron of my hansom smoking a cigarette, and no doubt thinking myself no end of a man of the world, and suddenly there was the door, the wall, the dear sense of unforgettable and still attainable things.

"We clattered by— I too taken by surprise to stop my cab until we were well past and round a corner. Then I had a queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will: I tapped the little door in the roof of the cab, and brought my arm down to pull out my watch. 'Yes, sir!' said the cabman, smartly. 'Er— well— it's nothing,' I cried. '*My* mistake! We haven't much time! Go on!' and he went on...

"I got my scholarship. And the night after I was told of that I sat over my fire in my little upper room, my study, in my father's house, with his praise— his rare praise— and his sound counsels ringing in my ears, and I smoked my favourite pipe— the formidable bulldog of adolescence— and thought of that door in the long white wall. 'If I had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford— muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then this career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

"Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine, but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world. I saw another door opening— the door of my career."

He stared again into the fire. Its red lights picked out a stubborn strength in his face for just one flickering moment, and then it vanished again.

"Well", he said and sighed, "I have served that career. I have done— much work, much hard work. But I have dreamt of the enchanted garden a thousand dreams, and seen its door, or at least glimpsed its door, four times since then. Yes— four times. For a while this world was so bright and interesting, seemed so full of meaning and opportunity that the half-effaced charm of the garden was by comparison gentle and remote. Who wants to pat panthers on the way to dinner with pretty women and distinguished men? I came down to London

from Oxford, a man of bold promise that I have done something to redeem. Something— and yet there have been disappointments...

"Twice I have been in love— I will not dwell on that— but once, as I went to someone who, I know, doubted whether I dared to come, I took a short cut at a venture through an unfrequented road near Earl's Court, and so happened on a white wall and a familiar green door. 'Odd!' said I to myself, 'but I thought this place was on Campden Hill. It's the place I never could find somehow— like counting Stonehenge— the place of that queer day dream of mine.' And I went by it intent upon my purpose. It had no appeal to me that afternoon.

"I had just a moment's impulse to try the door, three steps aside were needed at the most— though I was sure enough in my heart that it would open to me— and then I thought that doing so might delay me on the way to that appointment in which I thought my honour was involved. Afterwards I was sorry for my punctuality— I might at least have peeped in I thought, and waved a hand to those panthers, but I knew enough by this time not to seek again belatedly that which is not found by seeking. Yes, that time made me very sorry....

"Years of hard work after that and never a sight of the door. It's only recently it has come back to me. With it there has come a sense as though some thin tarnish had spread itself over my world. I began to think of it as a sorrowful and bitter thing that I should never see that door again. Perhaps I was suffering a little from overwork— perhaps it was what I've heard spoken of as the feeling of forty. I don't know. But certainly the keen brightness that makes effort easy has gone out of things recently, and that just at a time with all these new political developments— when I ought to be working. Odd, isn't it? But I do begin to find life toilsome, its rewards, as I come near them, cheap. I began a little while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes— and I've seen it three times."

"The garden?"

"No— the door! And I haven't gone in!"

He leaned over the table to me, with an enormous sorrow in his voice as he spoke. "Thrice I have had my chance— *thrice!* If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay.... I swore it and when the time came— *I didn't go*.

"Three times in one year have I passed that door and failed to enter. Three times in the last year.

"The first time was on the night of the snatch division on the Tenants' Redemption Bill, on which the Government was saved by a majority of three. You remember? No one on our side— perhaps very few on the opposite side—

expected the end that night. Then the debate collapsed like eggshells. I and Hotchkiss were dining with his cousin at Brentford, we were both unpaired, and we were called up by telephone, and set off at once in his cousin's motor. We got in barely in time, and on the way we passed my wall and door— livid in the moonlight, blotched with hot yellow as the glare of our lamps lit it, but unmistakable. 'My God!' cried I. 'What?' said Hotchkiss. 'Nothing!' I answered, and the moment passed.

"'I've made a great sacrifice,' I told the whip as I got in. They all have,' he said, and hurried by.

"I do not see how I could have done otherwise then. And the next occasion was as I rushed to my father's bedside to bid that stern old man farewell. Then, too, the claims of life were imperative. But the third time was different; it happened a week ago. It fills me with hot remorse to recall it. I was with Gurker and Ralphs— it's no secret now you know that I've had my talk with Gurker. We had been dining at Frobisher's, and the talk had become intimate between us. The question of my place in the reconstructed ministry lay always just over the boundary of the discussion. Yes— yes. That's all settled. It needn't be talked about yet, but there's no reason to keep a secret from you.... Yes— thanks! thanks! But let me tell you my story.

"Then, on that night things were very much in the air. My position was a very delicate one. I was keenly anxious to get some definite word from Gurker, but was hampered by Ralphs' presence. I was using the best power of my brain to keep that light and careless talk not too obviously directed to the point that concerns me. I had to. Ralphs' behaviour since has more than justified my caution.... Ralphs, I knew, would leave us beyond the Kensington High Street, and then I could surprise Gurker by a sudden frankness. One has sometimes to resort to these little devices.... And then it was that in the margin of my field of vision I became aware once more of the white wall, the green door before us down the road.

"We passed it talking. I passed it. I can still see the shadow of Gurker's marked profile, his opera hat tilted forward over his prominent nose, the many folds of his neck wrap going before my shadow and Ralphs' as we sauntered past.

"I passed within twenty inches of the door. 'If I say good-night to them, and go in,' I asked myself, 'what will happen?' And I was all a-tingle for that word with Gurker.

"I could not answer that question in the tangle of my other problems. 'They will think me mad,' I thought. 'And suppose I vanish now!— Amazing disappearance of a prominent politician!' That weighed with me. A thousand inconceivably petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis."

Then he turned on me with a sorrowful smile, and, speaking slowly; "Here I am!" he said.

"Here I am!" he repeated, "and my chance has gone from me. Three times in one year the door has been offered me— the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know. And I have rejected it, Redmond, and it has gone—"

"How do you know?"

"I know. I know. I am left now to work it out, to stick to the tasks that held me so strongly when my moments came. You say, I have success— this vulgar, tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it." He had a walnut in his big hand. "If that was my success," he said, and crushed it, and held it out for me to see.

"Let me tell you something, Redmond. This loss is destroying me. For two months, for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all, except the most necessary and urgent duties. My soul is full of inappeasable regrets. At nights— when it is less likely I shall be recognised— I go out. I wander. Yes. I wonder what people would think of that if they knew. A Cabinet Minister, the responsible head of that most vital of all departments, wandering alone— grieving— sometimes near audibly lamenting— for a door, for a garden!"

I CAN SEE NOW his rather pallid face, and the unfamiliar sombre fire that had come into his eyes. I see him very vividly to-night. I sit recalling his words, his tones, and last evening's *Westminster Gazette* still lies on my sofa, containing the notice of his death. At lunch to-day the club was busy with him and the strange riddle of his fate.

They found his body very early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward. It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding between two gangers, and through it he made his way....

My mind is darkened with questions and riddles.

It would seem he walked all the way from the House that night— he has frequently walked home during the past Session— and so it is I figure his dark form coming along the late and empty streets, wrapped up, intent. And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, ever any green door in the wall at all?

I do not know. I have told his story as he told it to me. There are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of the coincidence

between a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination and a careless trap, but that indeed is not my profoundest belief. You may think me superstitious if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half convinced that he had in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something— I know not what— that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger and death. But did he see like that?

———————

6: Miggles

Bret Harte

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WE were eight including the driver. We had not spoken during the passage of the last six miles, since the jolting of the heavy vehicle over the roughening road had spoiled the Judge's last poetical quotation. The tall man beside the Judge was asleep, his arm passed through the swaying strap and his head resting upon it—, altogether a limp, helpless looking object, as if he had hanged him self and been cut down too late. The French lady on the back seat was asleep too, yet in a half-conscious propriety of attitude, shown even in the disposition of the handkerchief which, she held to her forehead and which partially veiled her face. The lady from Virginia City, traveling with her husband, had long since lost all individuality in a wild confusion of ribbons, veils, furs, and shawls. There was no sound but the rattling of wheels and the dash of rain upon the roof. Suddenly the stage stopped and we became dimly aware of voices. The driver was evidently in the midst of an exciting colloquy with some one in the road,— a colloquy of which such frag ments as "bridge gone", "twenty feet of water", "can't pass," were occasionally distinguishable above the storm. Then came a lull, and a mysterious voice from the road shouted the parting adjuration—

"Try Miggles's."

We caught a glimpse of our leaders as the vehicle slowly turned, of a horseman vanishing through the rain, and we were evidently on our way to Miggles's.

Who and where was Miggles? The Judge, our authority, did not remember the name, and he knew the country thoroughly. The Washoe traveler thought Miggles must keep a hotel. We only knew that we were stopped by high water in front and rear, and that Miggles was our rock of refuge. A ten minutes' splashing through a tangled byroad, scarcely wide enough for the stage, and we drew up before a barred and boarded gate in a wide stone wall or fence about eight feet high. Evidently Miggles's, and evidently Miggles did not keep a hotel.

The driver got down and tried the gate. It was securely locked.

"Miggles! O Miggles!"

No answer.

"Migg-ells! You Miggles!" continued the driver, with rising wrath.

"Migglesy!" joined in the expressman persuasively. "O Miggy! Mig!''

But no reply came from the apparently insensate Miggles. The Judge, who had finally got the window down, put his head out and propounded a series of

questions, which if answered categorically would have undoubtedly elucidated the whole mystery, but which the driver evaded by replying that "if we didn't want to sit in the coach all night we had better rise up and sing out for Miggles."

So we rose up and called on Miggles in chorus, then separately. And when we had finished, a Hiberian fellow passenger from the roof called for "Maygells!" whereat we all laughed. While we were laughing the driver cried, "Shoo!"

We listened. To our infinite amazement the chorus of "Miggles" was re peated from the other side of the wall, even to the final and supplemental "Maygells."

"Extraordinary echo!" said the Judge.

"Extraordinary d d skunk!'' roared the driver contemptuously. "Come out of that, Miggles, and show yourself! Be a man, Miggles! Don't hide in the dark; I wouldn't if I were you, Miggles," continued Yuba Bill now dancing about in an excess of fury.

"Miggles!" continued the voice. "O Miggles!"

"*My* good man! Mr. Myghail," said the Judge, softening the asperities of the name as much as possible, "consider the inhospitality of refusing shelter from the inclemency of the weather to helpless females. Really, my dear sir—" But a succession of Miggles, ending in a burst of laughter, drowned his voice.

Yuba Bill hesitated no longer. Taking a heavy stone from the road, he battered down the gate, and with the expressman entered the inclosure. We followed. Nobody was to be seen. In the gathering darkness all that we could distinguish was that we were in a garden— from the rose bushes that scattered over us a minute spray from their dripping leaves— and before a long, rambling wooden building.

"Do you know this Miggles?'' asked the Judge of Yuba Bill.

"No, nor don't want to," said Bill shortly, who felt the Pioneer Stage Company insulted in his person by the contumacious Miggles.

"But, my dear sir," expostulated the Judge, as he thought of the barred gate.

"Lookee here," said Yuba Bill, with fine irony, "hadn't you better go back and sit in the coach till yer introduced? I'm going in," and he pushed open the door of the building.

A long room, lighted only by the embers of a fire that was dying on the large hearth at its farther extremity; the walls curiously papered, and the flickering fire light bringing out its grotesque pattern; somebody sitting in a large armchair by the fireplace. All this we saw as we crowded together into the room after the driver and expressman.

"Hello! be you Miggles?'' said Yuba Bill to the solitary occupant.

The figure neither spoke nor stirred. Yuba Bill walked wrathfully toward it and turned the eye of his coach-lantern upon its face. It was a man's face, prematurely old and wrinkled, with very large eyes, in which there was that expression of perfectly gratuitous solemnity which I had sometimes seen in an owl's. The large eyes wandered from Bill's face to the lantern, and finally fixed their gaze on that luminous object without further recognition.

Bill restrained himself with an effort.

"Miggles! be you deaf? You ain't dumb anyhow, you know," and Yuba Bill shook the insensate figure by the shoulder.

To our great dismay, as Bill removed his hand, the venerable stranger apparently collapsed, sinking into half his size and an undistinguishable heap of clothing.

"Well, dern my skin," said Bill, looking appealingly at us, and hopelessly retiring from the contest.

The Judge now stepped forward, and we lifted the mysterious invertebrate back into his original position. Bill was dismissed with the lantern to reconnoitre outside, for it was evident, that from the helplessness of this solitary man, there must be attendants near at hand, and we all drew around the fire. The Judge, who had regained his authority, and had never lost his conversational amiability,— standing before us with his back to the hearth,— charged us, as an imaginary jury, as follows:

"It is evident that either our distin guished friend here has reached that con dition described by Shakespeare as 'the sere and yellow leaf' or has suffered some premature abatement of his mental and physical faculties. Whether he is really the Miggles—"

Here he was interrupted by "Miggles! O Miggles! Migglesy! Mig!'' and, in fact, the whole chorus of Miggles in very much the same key as it had once before been delivered unto us.

We gazed at each other for a moment in some alarm. The Judge, in particular, vacated his position quickly, as the voice seemed to come directly over his shoulder. The cause, however, was soon discovered in a large magpie who was perched upon a shelf over the fireplace, and who immediately relapsed into a sepulchral silence, which contrasted singularly with his previous volubility. It was, undoubtedly, his voice which we had heard in the road, and our friend in the chair was not responsible for the discourtesy. Yuba Bill, who re-entered the room after an unsuccessful search, was loath to accept the explanation, and still eyed the helpless sitter with suspicion. He had found a shed in which he had put up his horses, but he came back dripping and

skeptical. "Thar ain't nobody but him within ten mile of the shanty, and that ar d——d old skeesicks knows it."

But the faith of the majority proved to be securely based. Bill had scarcely ceased growling before we heard a quick step upon the porch, the trailing of a wet skirt, the door was flung open, and with a flash of white teeth, a sparkle of dark eyes, and an utter absence of ceremony or diffidence, a young woman entered, shut the door, and, panting, leaned back against it.

"Oh, if you please, I'm Miggles!" And this was Miggles! this bright-eyed, full-throated young woman, whose wet gown of coarse blue stuff could not hide the beauty of the feminine curves to which it clung; from the chestnut crown of whose head, topped by a man's oil skin sou'wester, to the little feet and ankles, hidden somewhere in the recesses of her boy's brogans, all was grace,— this was Miggles, laughing at us, too, in the most airy, frank, off-hand manner imaginable.

"You see, boys," said she, quite out of breath, and holding one little hand against her side, quite unheeding the speechless discomfiture of our party or the complete demoralization of Yuba Bill, whose features had relaxed into an expression of gratuitous and imbecile cheer fulness,— "you see, boys, I was mor'n two miles away when you passed down the road. I thought you might pull up here, and so I ran the whole way, knowing nobody was home but Jim, — and— and— I'm out of breath— and— that— lets me out." And here Miggles caught her dripping oilskin hat from her head, with a mischievous swirl that scattered a shower of raindrops over us; attempted to put back her hair; dropped two hairpins in the attempt; laughed and sat down beside Yuba Bill, with her hands crossed lightly on her lap.

The Judge recovered himself first and essayed an extravagant compliment.

"I'll trouble you for that ha'rpin," said Miggles gravely. Half a dozen hands were eagerly stretched forward; the missing hairpin was restored to its fair owner; and Miggles, crossing the room, looked keenly in the face of the invalid.

The solemn eyes looked back at hers with an expression we had never seen before. Life and intelligence seemed to struggle back into the rugged face. Miggles laughed again,— it was a singularly eloquent laugh,— and turned her black eyes and white teeth once more to wards us.

"This afflicted person is"— hesitated the Judge.

"Jim!" said Miggles.

"Your father?"

"No!"

"Brother?"

"No!"

"Husband?"

Miggles darted a quick, half-defiant glance at the two lady passengers, who I had noticed did not participate in the general masculine admiration of Miggles, and said, gravely, "No; it's Jim!"

There was an awkward pause. The lady passengers moved closer to each other; the Washoe husband looked ab stractly at the fire, and the tall man apparently turned his eyes inward for self-support at this emergency. But Miggles's laugh, which was very infectious, broke the silence.

"Come," she said briskly, "you must be hungry. Who'll bear a hand to help me get tea?"

She had no lack of volunteers. In a few moments Yuba Bill was engaged like Caliban in bearing logs for this Miranda; the expressman was grinding coffee on the veranda; to myself the arudous duty of slicing bacon was assigned; and the Judge lent each man his good-humored and voluble counsel. And when Miggles, assisted by the Judge and our Hiberian "deck-passenger" set the table with all the available crockery, we had become quite joyous, in spite of the rain that beat against the windows, the wind that whirled down the chimney, the two ladies who whispered together in the corner, or the magpie, who uttered a satirical and croaking commentary on their conversation from his perch above. In the now bright, blazing fire we could see that the walls were papered with illustrated journals, arranged with feminine taste and discrimination. The furniture was extemporized and adapted from candleboxes and packing-cases, and covered with gay calico or the skin of some animal. The armchair of the helpless Jim was an ingenious variation of a flour barrel. There was neatness and even a taste for the picturesque to be seen in the few details of the long, low room.

The meal was a culinary success. But more, it was a social triumph,— chiefly, I think, owing to the rare tact of Miggles in guiding the conversation, asking all the questions herself, yet bearing throughout a frankness that rejected the idea of any concealment on her own part, so that we talked of ourselves, of our prospects, of the journey, of the weather, of each other,— of everything but our host and hostess. It must be confessed that Miggles's conversation was never elegant, rarely grammatical, and that at times she employed expletives the use of which had generally been yielded to our sex. But they were delivered with such a lighting up of teeth and eyes, and were usually followed by a laugh— a laugh peculiar to Miggles— so frank and honest that it seemed to clear the moral atmos phere.

Once during the meal we heard a noise like the rubbing of a heavy body against the outer walls of the house. This was shortly followed by a scratching and sniffling at the door. 'That's Joaquin," said Miggles, in reply to our questioning glances; "would you like to see him?" Before we could answer she

had opened the door, and disclosed a half-grown grizzly, who instantly raised himself on his haunches, with his forepaws hanging down in the popular attitude of mendicancy, and looked admiringly at Miggles, with a very singular resemblance in his manner to Yuba Bill. "That's my watch dog," said Miggles, in explanation. "Oh, he don't bite," she added, as the two lady passengers fluttered into a corner. "Does he, old Toppy?" (the latter remark being addressed directly to the sagacious Joaquin). "I tell you what, boys," continued Miggles, after she had fed and closed the door on Ursa Minor, "you were in big luck that Joaquin wasn't hanging round when you dropped in to-night."

"Where was he?" asked the Judge.

"With me," said Miggles. "Lord love you! he trots round with me nights like as if he was a man."

We were silent for a few moments, and listened to the wind. Perhaps we all had the same picture before us,— of Miggles walking through the rainy woods with her savage guardian at her side. The Judge, I remember, said something about Una and her lion; but Miggles received it, as she did other compliments, with quiet gravity. Whether she was altogether unconscious of the admiration she excited,— she could hardly have been oblivious of Yuba Bill's adoration,— I know not; but her very frankness sug gested a perfect sexual equality that was cruelly humiliating to the younger mem bers of our party.

The incident of the bear did not add anything in Miggles's favor to the opin ions of those of her sex who were present. In fact, the repast over, a chillness radiated from the two lady passengers that no pine boughs brought in by Yuba Bill and cast as a sacrifice upon the hearth could wholly overcome. Miggles felt it; and suddenly declaring that it was time to "turn in," offered to show the ladies to their bed in an adjoining room. "You boys will have to camp out here by the fire as well as you can," she added, "for thar ain't but the one room."

Our sex— by which, my dear sir, I allude of course to the stronger portion of humanity— has been generally relieved from the imputation of curiosity or a fondness for gossip. Yet I am constrained to say, that hardly had the door closed on Miggles than we crowded to gether, whispering, snickering, smiling, and exchanging suspicions, surmises, and a thousand speculations in regard to our pretty hostess and her singular companion. I fear that we even hustled that imbecile paralytic, who sat like a voiceless Memnon in our midst, gazing with the serene indifference of the Past in his passionless eyes upon our wordy counsels. In the midst of an exciting discussion the door opened again and Miggles reentered.

But not, apparently, the same Miggles who a few hours before had flashed upon us. Her eyes were downcast, and as she hesitated for a moment on the

threshold, with a blanket on her arm, she seemed to have left behind her the frank fearlessness which had charmed us a moment before. Coming into the room, she drew a low stool beside the paralytic's chair, sat down, drew the blanket over her shoulders, and saying, "If it's all the same to you, boys, as we're rather crowded, I'll stop here to-night," took the in valid's withered hand in her own, and turned her eyes upon the dying fire. An instinctive feeling that this was only pre monitory to more confidential relations, and perhaps some shame at our previous curiosity, kept us silent. The rain still beat upon the roof, wandering gusts of wind stirred the embers into momentary brightness, until, in a lull of the elements, Miggles suddenly lifted up her head, and, throwing her hair over her shoulder, turned her face upon the group and asked,—

"Is there any of you that knows me?"

There was no reply.

"Think again! I lived at Marysville in '53. Everybody knew me there, and everybody had the right to know me. I kept the Polka Saloon until I came to live with Jim. That's six years ago. Perhaps I've changed some."

The absence of recognition may have disconcerted her. She turned her head to the fire again, and it was some seconds before she again spoke, and then more rapidly—

"Well, you see I thought some of you must have known me. There's no great harm done anyway. What I was going to say was this: Jim here"— she took his hand in both of hers as she spoke— "used to know me, if you didn't, and spent a heap of money upon me. I reckon he spent all he had. And one day— it's six years ago this winter— Jim came into my back room, sat down on my sofy, like as you see him in that chair, and never moved again without help. He was struck all of a heap, and never seemed to know what ailed him. The doctors came and said as how it was caused all along of his way of life,— for Jim was mighty free and wild-like,— and that he would never get better, and couldn't last long anyway. They advised me to send him to 'Frisco to the hospital, for he was no good to any one and would be a baby all his life. Perhaps it was something in Jim's eye, perhaps it was that I never had a baby, but I said 'No.' I was rich then, for I was popular with everybody,— gentlemen like yourself, sir, came to see me,— and I sold out my business and bought this yer place, because it was sort of out of the way of travel, you see, and I brought my baby here."

With a woman's intuitive tact and poetry, she had, as she spoke, slowly shifted her position so as it would bring the mute figure of the ruined man be tween her and her audience, hiding in the shadow behind it, as if she offered it as a tacit apology for her actions. Silent and expressionless, it yet spoke for

her; helpless, crushed, and smitten with the Divine thunderbolt, it still stretched an invisible arm around her.

Hidden in the darkness, but still holding his hand, she went on:

"It was a long time before I could get the hang of things about yer, for I was used to company and excitement. I couldn't get any woman to help me, and a man I dursn't trust; but what with the Indians hereabout, who'd do odd jobs for me, and having everything sent from the North Fork, Jim and I managed to worry through. The Doctor would run up from Sacramento once in a while. He'd ask to see 'Miggles's baby,' as he called Jim, and when he'd go away, he'd say, 'Miggles, you're a trump,— God bless you,' and it didn't seem so lonely after that. But the last time he was here he said, as he opened the door to go, 'Do you know, Miggles, your baby will grow up to be a man yet and an honor to his mother; but not here, Miggles, not here!" And I thought he went away sad,— and— and"— and here Miggles's voice and head were somehow both lost completely in the shadow.

"The folks about here are very kind," said Miggles, after a pause, coming a little into the light again. "The men from the Fork used to hang around here, until they found they wasn't wanted, and the women are kind, and don't call. I was pretty lonely until I picked up Joaquin in the woods yonder one day, when he wasn't so high, and taught him to beg for his dinner; and then thar's Polly— that's the magpie— she knows no end of tricks, and makes it quite sociable of evenings with her talk, and so I don't feel like as I was the only living being about the ranch. And Jim here," said Miggles, with her old laugh again, and coming out quite into the firelight,— "Jim— Why, boys, you would admire to see how much he knows for a man like him. Sometimes I bring him flowers, and he looks at 'em just as natural as if he knew 'em; and times, when we're sitting alone, I read him those things on the wall. Why, Lord!" said Miggles, with her frank laugh, "I've read him that whole side of the house this winter. There never was such a man for reading as Jim."

"Why," asked the Judge, "do you not marry this man to whom you have de voted your youthful life?"

"Well, you see," said Miggles, "it would be playing it rather low down on Jim to take advantage of his being so helpless. And then, too, if we were man and wife, now, we'd both know that I was bound to do what I do now of my own accord."

"But you are young yet and attractive—"

"It's getting late," said Miggles gravely," and you'd better all turn in. Good night, boys"; and throwing the blanket over her head, Miggles laid herself down beside Jim's chair, her head pillowed on the low stool that held his feet, and spoke no more. The fire slowly faded from the hearth; we each sought our

blankets in silence; and presently there was no sound in the long room but the pattering of the rain upon the roof and the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

It was nearly morning when I awoke from a troubled dream. The storm had passed, the stars were shining, and through the shutterless window the full moon, lifting itself over the solemn pines without, looked into the room. It touched the lonely figure in the chair with an infinite compassion, and seemed to baptize with a shining flood the lowly head of the woman whose hair, as in the sweet old story, bathed the feet of him she loved.

It even lent a kindly poetry to the rugged! outline of Yuba Bill, half reclining on his elbow between them and his passengers, with savagely patient eyes keeping watch and ward. And then I fell asleep and only woke at broad day, with Yuba Bill standing over me, and "all aboard" ringing in my ears.

Coffee was waiting for us on the table, but Miggles was gone. We wandered! about the house and lingered long after the horses were harnessed, but she did not return. It was evident that she wished to avoid a formal leave-taking, and had so left us to depart as we had come. After we had helped the ladies into the coach, we returned to the house and solemnly shook hands with the paralytic Jim, as solemnly setting him back, into position after each handshake. Then we looked for the last time around the long low room, at the stool where Miggles had sat, and slowly took our seats in the waiting coach. The whip cracked, and we were off!

But as we reached the highroad, Bill's dexterous hand laid the six horses back on their haunches, and the stage stopped with a jerk. For there, on a little emi nence beside the road, stood Miggles, her hair flying, her eyes sparkling, her white handkerchief waving, and her white teeth flashing a last "good-by." We waved our hats in return. And then Yuba Bill, as if fearful of further fascination, madly lashed his horses forward, and we sank back in our seats.

We exchanged not a word until we reached the North Fork and the stage drew up at the Independence House. Then, the Judge leading, we walked into the bar-room and took our places gravely at the bar.

"Are your glasses charged, gentlemen?" said the Judge, solemnly taking off his white hat.

They were.

"Well, then, here's to *Miggles*— GOD BLESS HER!''

Perhaps He had. Who knows?

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7: Napoleon and the Spectre

Charlotte Bronte

1816-1855

In: *The Twelve Adventurers and Other Stories*, 1925

Originally written in 1833, when the author was 17. Part of a longer story called "*The Green Dwarf*".

WELL, as I was saying, the Emperor got into bed.

'Chevalier,' says he to his valet, 'let down those window-curtains, and shut the casement before you leave the room.'

Chevalier did as he was told, and then, taking up his candlestick, departed.

In a few minutes the Emperor felt his pillow becoming rather hard, and he got up to shake it. As he did so aslight rustling noise was heard near the bed-head. His Majesty listened, but all was silent as he lay down again.

Scarcely had he settled into a peaceful attitude of repose, when he was disturbed by a sensation of thirst. Lifting himself on his elbow, he took a glass of lemonade from the small stand which was placed beside him. He refreshed himself by a deep draught. As he returned the goblet to its station a deep groan burst from a kind of closet in one corner of the apartment.

'Who's there?' cried the Emperor, seizing his pistols. 'Speak, or I'll blow your brains out.'

This threat produced no other effect than a short, sharp laugh, and a dead silence followed.

The Emperor started from his couch, and, hastily throwing on a robe-de-chambre which hung over the back of a chair, stepped courageously to the haunted closet. As he opened the door something rustled. He sprang forward sword in hand. No soul or even substance appeared, and the rustling, it was evident proceeded from the falling of a cloak, which had been suspended by a peg from the door.

Half ashamed of himself he returned to bed.

Just as he was about once more to close his eyes, the light of the three wax tapers, which burned in a silver branch over the mantelpiece, was suddenly darkened. Helookedup. A black, opaque shadow obscured it. Sweating with terror, the Emperor put out his hand to seize the bell-rope, but some invisible being snatched it rudely from his grasp, and at the same instant the ominous shade vanished.

'Pooh!' exclaimed Napoleon, 'it was but an ocular delusion.'

'Was it?' whispered a hollow voice, in deep mysterious tones, close to his ear. 'Was it a delusion, Emperor of France? No! all thou hast heard and seen is sad forewarning reality. Rise, lifter of the Eagle Standard! Awake, swayer of the Lily Sceptre! Follow me, Napoleon, and thou shalt see more.'

As the voice ceased, a form dawned on his astonished sight. It was that of a tall, thin man, dressed in a blue surtout edged with gold lace. It wore a black cravat very tightly round its neck, and confined by two little sticks placed behind each ear. The countenance was livid; the tongue protruded from between the teeth, and the eyes all glazed and bloodshot started with frightful prominence from their sockets.

'*Mon Dieu*!' exclaimed the Emperor, 'what do I see? Spectre, whence cometh thou?'

The apparition spoke not, but gliding forward beckoned Napoleon with uplifted finger to follow.

Controlled by a mysterious influence, which deprived him of the capability of cither thinking or acting for himself, he obeyed in silence.

The solid wall of the apartment fell open as they approached, and, when both had passed through, it closed behind them with a noise like thunder.

They would now have been in total darkness had it not been for a dim light which shone round the ghost and revealed the damp walls of a long, vaulted passage. Down this they proceeded with mute rapidity. Ere long a cool, refreshing breeze, which rushed wailing up the vault and caused the Emperor to wrap his loose nightdress closer round, announced their approach to the open air.

This they soon reached, and Nap found himself in one of the principal streets of Paris.

'Worthy Spirit,' said he, shivering in the chill night air, 'permit me to return and put on some additional clothing. I will be with you again presently.'

'Forward,' replied his companion sternly.

He felt compelled, in spite of the rising indignation which almost choked him, to obey.

On they went through the deserted streets till they arrived at a lofty house built on the banks of the Seine. Here the Spectre stopped, the gates rolled back to receive them, and they entered a large marble hall which was partly concealed by a curtain drawn across, through the half transparent folds of which a bright light might be seen burning with dazzling lustre. A row of fine female figures, richly attired, stood before this screen. They wore on their heads garlands of the most beautiful flowers, but their faces were concealed by ghastly masks representing death's-heads, 'What is all this mummery?' cried the Emperor, making an effort to shake off the mental shackles by which he was so unwillingly restrained, 'Where am I, and why have I been brought here?'

'Silence,' said the guide, lolling out still further his black and bloody tongue. 'Silence, if thou wouldst escape instant death.'

The Emperor would have replied, his natural courage overcoming the temporary awe to which he had at first been subjected, but just then a strain of wild, supernatural music swelled behind the huge curtain, which waved to and fro, and bellied slowly out as if agitated by some internal commotion or battle of waving winds. At the same moment an overpowering mixture of the scents of mortal corruption, blent with the richest Eastern odours, stole through the haunted hall.

A murmur of many voices was now heard at a distance, and something grasped his arm eagerly from behind.

He turned hastily round. His eyes met the well-known countenance of Marie Louise.

'What! are you in this infernal place, too?' said he. 'What has brought you here?'

'Will your Majesty permit me to ask the same question of yourself ?' said the Empress, smiling.

He made no reply; astonishment prevented him.

No curtain now intervened between him and the light. It had been removed as if by magic, and a splendid chandelier appeared suspended over his head. Throngs of ladies, richly dressed, but without death's-head masks, stood round, and a due proportion of gay cavaliers was mingled with them. Music was still sounding, but it was seen to proceed from a band of mortal musicians stationed in an orchestra near at hand. The air was yet redolent of incense, but it was incense unblended with stench.

'*Mon Dieu*!' cried the Emperor, 'how is all this come about? Where in the world is Piche?'

'Piche?' replied the Empress. 'What does your Majesty mean? Had you not better leave the apartment and retire to rest?'

“Leave the apartment? Why, where am I?'

'In my private drawing-room, surrounded by a few particular persons of the Court whom I had invited this evening to a ball. You entered a few minutes since in your nightdress with your eyes fixed and wide open. I suppose from the astonishment you now testify that you were walking in your sleep.'

The Emperor immediately fell into a fit of catalepsy, in which he continued during the whole of that night and the greater part of next day.

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8: "And Behold a White Horse"

C. A. Dawson Scott

Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, 1865-1934

In: *The Vampire: A Book of Cornish and other Stories,* 1925

This story brought to mind Terry Pratchett's character Death, and his white horse Binky....

THAT the men of the Church Town at Trezannion were out after supper, leaning against the old wall and smoking, was probably due to the night being moonlit. They stood— Tavis Bennett, the smith; Tristram Old, lover of all women with the exception of his wife, Carrie; and Alec Tremain, hired man to Killanogue— and they talked of witchings and ill-wishings and the power of the "old fellow what charm."

Behind the wall rose the remains of the cross which had called the tribes to council before ever there was a church; and about it the generations of men slept to the lulling of Atlantic tides.

"Someone riding," said the blacksmith, who could recognize the trot of every horse in the parish; and on the still air fell the faint beat of hoofs.

"Doctor wanted to Pleasant Springs," suggested Old. "Wonder if it will be another little maid?"

The smith shook his head. "Not Brenton's mare. Her cloppity-clop have a catch in it where she staked her off hind leg two year back."

Church Town stood high and the roads were a tracery of white on the country side. Between the black hedges something still afar off moved, and the sound of his coming grew. The smith looked puzzled. "Sure I do not know who it is... a white horse, too. Tubby Gregor have a grey, but..."

Tremain moved uneasily. The sound of this riding made him think of the old man at Killanogue— alone since the death of his last child.

No reason to think of Mr. Strongman, for as far as Tremain knew, the old man had no friends outside the parish.

At the cross-roads the strange rider drew rein for a moment.

"Not sure of his way," commented the smith, but the white horse turned uphill.

"It is for one of us?" murmured Tremain, and thought the mild air colder than it had been.

"Us? Your grandmother!" they cried sceptically.

He thought again. "But after Church Town there is only the bay."

"Aw— man is out of his road."

The horse took the ascent, a sharp one, as if fresh to his journey, but on reaching Church Green, the rider hesitated as if again at fault, and the men leaning against the low wall shifted in their places, watching.

Against the pale horse, the rider, his face hidden by the brim of his hat, showed black, a light but impenetrable bulk. His voice came hollow from the darkness above his cloak. "I believe there is a short way to Killanogue across these fields."

"Sure, sir, through the gates." It was Tremain who answered, His cottage was to one side of the farmhouse; his wife, Alice, waited on old Mr. Strongman.

"The— gates?" Three gates, each leading, apparently, into a meadow, opened on Church Green. The rider turned his head uncertainly.

"I—I am so pressed for time," he murmured, but as if speaking to himself rather than to the listening men. "And I have not been here for ten years, no wonder I have forgotten the way."

Tremain stepped forward. The lights in the huddle of cottages on the further side of the green were now shining from the upstairs windows— time to be home and abed, and he was going Killanogue way. "I'll put you across."

The grey house, once manor, now farm, lay among its outhouses in a sheltering dip. From Church Town only the tops of surrounding trees were visible, a shadow on the wide space of moonlit country. Tremain led the way across the green and past the cottages. He was wondering why the stranger was come so late to Killanogue. Old Master would be in his bed by now and might be upset, being so very old, if he were unexpectedly aroused.

As the pale horse found the road, the lights went out in Mrs. Old's cottage.

" 'Tis a fine beast you are riding, sir," Tremain ventured, pushing back the first gate.

"It had need be." The latch caught with a dipping click and the stallion, pacing stately, went forward along the field path.

"Carries you grand."

"It is not often that I ride alone." A shadowy hand touched the arched neck. "Generally he carries a double burthen."

The first meadow was a narrow oblong, the path running whitely across the short end. Being curious as to the identity of the horseman, Tremain, walking on the short grass by the side of the path, tried one or two oblique remarks. "It is a long way to Killanogue by the road."

The horse quickened his stride as if moved by a feeling that time was passing and work had yet to be done. "Ay."

"Ten years since you were here, I think you said?"'

"Yours is a healthy village— births, marriages, and men growing old...."

"Yes, last death we had was when Old Master lost his son— walked over cliff he did when he had the fever."

"And before that," said the rider, and his hollow voice had a dreamy note, as if he were recalling old scenes, old faces, "before that it was Ellen Morecamb of a decline."

How was it the stranger knew of Old Master's son and pretty Ellen? "There is a maid in the village the very spit of poor little Ellen— 'tis Morwenna Biddick. Happen you know her, sir?"

"Not yet." They were crossing the second field. "My business to-night is with Mr. Strongman."

So Tremain had supposed. "Old chap is terrible aged." He was a little anxious. What could the stranger want with his master? "It may hurry him up if you rouse him this time of night. Couldn't wait till the morning, I suppose?"

"My business does not brook delay."

Tremain was instantly apologetic. "He will sure be glad to see you, sir. He don't have many people calling on him, nowadays."

"Even so, he may not be glad to see me."

The third gate opened inward. Tremain stepped forward, pointing down the slope. The grey house among the elms slept with one eye open, an eye under an eve of thatch, a red watchful eye. "There be Killanogue, sir," said Tremain, his back for a moment to the man on the white stallion. "I can see the light in Old Master's bedroom. Hope he haven't been took ill."

His hand on the latch of the gate, he turned. The horse had not passed him, and yet—

The black and white of the moonlight was very clear, yet he could not descry horse or rider.

They were not behind—or in front—or in either of the two meadows. He stood dumbfounded.

For a long moment he searched the landscape, looking down on Killanogue, looking back to Church Town, almost invisible, the old tower topped the rise, and between him and it were the white ranks of named and dated stones— the stranger had been oddly familiar with those names.

A warm July night, yet the latch slipped from Tremain's fingers because they were shaking. He stood by the path hardly able to control his limbs. No question but that the man with whom he had been in familiar talk had vanished.

Walking as if he had ' drink taken,' Alec Tremain went down the farm lane, went round to the back. What was happening at Killanogue?

It did not surprise him that as he reached the door, it should be opened to him by his wife.

'Why, Alec," she cried, "how did you know?"

"I don't know, but it was I showed stranger the way. I don't know what he wanted."

She ignored his remark as if he had spoken in a foreign tongue. " Alec," she cried, catching hold of his arm as if the feel of living muscle in some way comforted her, "Alec— Old Master's— gone."

He knew at once that this was what he had expected to hear. "Gone?"

'I took him his bowl of gruel as I always do day-end, and he seemed much as usual."

"Ah!"

"Then suddenly he sat up. 'Alice,' says he, 'they are calling me.' And his face changed so, you would not believe. ' Quick,' he cries, pointing to the press, 'give me my riding breeches.' But before I could so much as turn he had falled back on the pillow. Sure enough, old dear was gone."

And Tremain remembered that the white horse had needed to be strong as generally it had to carry a double burthen.

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9: The Capitulation of Jean Jacques

John Galsworthy (as by John Sinjohn)

1867-1933

In: *From The Four Winds*, 1897

S.S. Wapiti.
May 16th, 188—

...TO-DAY, fine again, gorgeous, but mighty hot. Left Suva at daybreak. Very one-horse place, with a lovely harbour. We got a lot of bananas and pines from a Fijian's canoe as we went out— they ought to last till we get to Sydney....

A rum thing happened about five o'clock; some 150 miles sou'-west of Suva we sighted a small cutter with two men in her. They were making signals with a pair of breeches. The Captain stopped for them, and lowered a boat to see what was up. I got leave to go. The poor beggars were burnt up— I never saw men so completely frizzled; Frenchmen— one a very big man, one a very little— awfully plucky little chap, said he was 'all ar-right,' only wanted water, and was trying to make Suva from Tahiti! 'm! *In a ten-ton cutter!* Double 'mm!!

He asked his course,— we gave it him, and a cask of water. I was the last to go over the side of the cutter, and he said to me: 'Monsieur, you gentlemens, is it not?' 'Hope so,' said I. 'Going to Noumea, is it not?' 'Yes,' said I. 'Will it 'ave ze *extrêmement* kindness to inform *ce cher Gouverneur* zat "Jean Jacques" made to 'im ze compliments?' With that he put his finger to his lips, and smiled sweetly upon me.

I don't think any nigger could have given him points for brownness, but I liked the looks of him hugely.

As we were pulling back, the second officer said to me:

'Scaped convicts, you bet, poor devils— no business of mine.'

I thought of that smile and forbore to wink....

(Extract from the *Diary of a Passenger*.)

'*Sacré!* these walls are high! lift me, Pierre.'

A very small lean man raised himself with the agility of a cat from his perch in the uplifted grasp of the giant below, and was through a window twelve feet from the ground, and crouching in the shadow of the white curtains without a sound stirring the silence of the night air.

Jean Jacques, Frenchman, man of genius, man of diminutive stature, man of sun-baked countenance, political convict, crouched in the shadow of the curtains and reflected. His reflections were the résumé of a carefully matured plan,— in fine, his reflections were these:

'I, Jean Jacques, am at large; I have not been at large for some time; certainly, then, I wish to remain at large; I wish also my friend Pierre below to

remain at large. *Que faire?*' The reasoning unconsciously took the form of Ollendorf.

'I am in the room of the four-year-old daughter of the Governor. How do I know this? Because I can see her little socks hanging over the end of the bed. Is not the four-year-old daughter of the Governor the apple of the Governor's eye? Certainly, she is the apple of the eye of the Governor. Given, then, Jean Jacques, the apple of the eye of the Governor, and the desire to remain at large, what happens? P-s-s-t, it is apparent, any child can see what *must* happen!'

Jean Jacques rose to the height of his five feet two, his lean, dark face glowing, and his crisp black hair curling with the greatness of his ideas, and advancing, drew aside the curtains of the little bed.

A small figure in a wisp of a nightgown stretched her limbs thereon in childish abandon, and turned her elf's face up to her nocturnal visitor in the unconscious serenity of sleep. That Jean Jacques was a humane man was evidenced by the thoughtful way in which he bestowed dress, socks, slippers, dolls, and sun-bonnet within the capacious folds of his convict's blouse; that he was a man of energy and action, by the manner in which he enveloped the child's head in a soft shawl, and her little body in a discarded blanket, and, before she had time or breath to wake and scream, passed himself and her into the upstretched arms of Pierre, and regained the ground.

Then two dim figures, with a hostage to liberty, flitted through the deserted streets, and the night swallowed them up.

NOUMEA was looking its best; what that means one must have been there to know. Not yet astir with the day, the town and harbour were pretending an innocence of the twin spirits of despair and misery throbbing and raging within their boundaries. Out of the blue Pacific, also pretending a non-existent innocence, the sun was rising, and causing the ruddy copper tints of the island rocks to shine with a morning glory, the foam of the reefs to sparkle, and the green and red of leaf and flower to glint and glow with a tender and dewy freshness. The native market was already beginning to stir with the busy sellers of most conceivable, and some inconceivable, fruits and vegetables. Soon, above the everyday droning hum of the vending of merchandise, rose and swelled an ever-increasing buzz, like the tuning of an orchestra, in dozens of discordant quirks and twitters, till, hushing every sound, as does the uplifting of the conductor's baton, there boomed forth once and twice over the stillness of the harbour the deep angry tone of the convict escape-gun. Then the buzz broke out again, but this time with the unanimity of knowledge and conviction. Not that a convict's escape was any rare occurrence in a community boasting

the possession of some nine thousand such, in a greater or less degree of captivity; the buzz had a deeper and a wider meaning; there were nine thousand convicts; there was but one Governor, and to that Governor was but one daughter. The 'buzz,' with an intelligence which did it credit, connected the two disappearances, it was even whispered— that is to say, it was bewailed and lamented at the top of the shrill native voice— that there was a third disappearance, of knives and ropes, and good food-stuff, to wit; this formed a tail to the comet in the opinion of the buzz. The buzz was immensely tickled and interested, it was even compelled to open its mouth— which was bad for it— when from the barracks issued patrols armed to the teeth, and from the quay departed snowily-breeched officials to the various ships lying at anchor. Grievously agape was the mouth of the buzz when from Government House marched the Governor, grey-headed and of soldierly bearing. The Governor was a widowed man, and had but one child; it amused the buzz and affected it to tears to see what he had suffered. In spite of his soldier's pride, suffering had lined his face during the last hour, and the furrows deepened as he marched on with head up into the middle of the Place, and spoke to the buzz with wingéd words, that hushed it completely, distending its mouth and stimulating its stomach by the liberality of the promised reward.

There was a scattering and a hurrying, such as the official methodism of the town had not known since the French and English blue-jacket fight— a tussle of unquenchable memory and much friendly shedding of gore.

The hours rolled on, the sun blazed, the world forgot its siesta, while the shadow on the Governor's face deepened with the waning of the day. He sat in the Place and waited— round him a staff of messengers coming and going, as fresh thoughts and possibilities thronged his anxious mind. Presently, as hope faded and grew wan, he said—

'I can bear it no more here, I will go up and wait in the Cathedral— perchance God will send me inspiration,' and he took his way thither....

Now, if one desires to see the most perfect picture in the world, one may look upon it— if one goes in the evening to the Cathedral at Noumea, and, standing at the eastern end, looks down the aisle to the west. There, framed in the grey walls, hangs a picture as of heaven— not, indeed, of canvas and paint, but of the sea and the air and the earth, as a man sees them when the glow of a setting sun is flooding and filling all with an unearthly glory of light. So the Governor, even in his great grief, saw the vision of heaven, and bowing his head upon his hands, sat gazing thereon— silent and alone. As the sun dipped he fell, worn out, into a sort of trance, rousing himself with a start as the rim of the fiery globe rested lightly on the horizon, seeming to poise itself before sinking to rest, while the grey shadows of the twilight crept out, as if eager

before their time to whelm the last hopes of the day in a filmy maze. Out of the West, before the eyes of the Governor— far away in a reverie of pain— floated a white cloud, and dimly his mind became conscious of it. 'Very odd cloud,' he thought abstractedly, 'that comes so suddenly and close;' then he sprang up as though he had been shot. 'Was it a cloud? No, assuredly it was not.' It floated, it quivered, it waggled with the breeze, it was— bathos— it was a nightgown.

Suspended between sky and earth in the middle of that picture of heaven, fading already with the growing darkness, waved a child's nightgown. Instinctively the answer to the whole problem of the day's disappearance flashed before the Governor's mind, and what he saw when he had hurried through the door under the folds of that flag of truce came as no surprise. He stood and gazed upwards. Down below in the streets of the town, in all the country round, the buzz was still actively engaged in pursuing the promised satisfaction of its stomach.

Now this was what the Governor saw on the roof of the Cathedral, thirty feet above him. Over the stone parapet a lean, dark face surmounting a bare brown arm and hand, from which hung the rope of the flag of truce; behind, what seemed to him a vast blue statue, astride the neck of which sat a little figure in a cotton blouse, dangling two bare legs, and patting the statue's head with one hand, while with the other it blew kisses to the amazed and horrified Governor. His hand caught the butt of his revolver. Escaped convicts were wild beasts— and his child sat on the shoulders of one and played with what was left of its hair! The Governor's aristocratic and sporting instincts were aroused.

Jean Jacques, leaning over the parapet, smiled genially, and his other hand, in which glistened the long blade of a knife, rested for a moment on the parapet. Only for a second, but the Governor let fall the pistol, and covered his face in his hands with a shrinking gesture of physical pain and fear.

'*Bien! Monsieur*,'— Jean Jacques took the word in courteous tones, and with a caressing upward wave of the hand that no longer held the knife to the little white atom on his comrade's shoulders. '*Bien!* decidedly Monsieur and I shall understand one another. I have the honour of addressing Monsieur le Gouverneur? Good.' Jean Jacques made a polite bow with what could be seen of him in response to the Governor's sign of assent.

'Monsieur, I will be brief. I am Jean Jacques. My friend Monsieur Pierre Legros— Monsieur le Gouverneur!'

He indicated the silent Pierre with a backward and airy wave.

'My friend and I were bored— it was not your fault, Monsieur, do not be distressed— we were in want of distraction, we were also in want of being free— ah! Free—'

Jean Jacques looked up with a sigh that spoke volumes even to the Governor, pre-occupied as he was with dread anxiety.

'*Nous voila!* distracted and free— do you think we will again return to the other state?' An accent of menace crept into his voice, but passed as quickly as it came.

'No, we shall remain free; it rests with Monsieur to decide how and on what terms. Providence has kindly sent Monsieur to us alone; my friend and I do not wish that anyone should see Monsieur talking with us— it might compromise him as affairs will turn out. Therefore, if Monsieur will give to us his ears, my friend and I will briefly explain to him how things stand, and what we have the honour to desire at the hands of Monsieur.'

He paused for a moment, and turned to Pierre, standing in the shadow behind him; the latter made a sign of acquiescence, and Jacques went on:

'Mademoiselle Cecile is very happy with us; it is a new game we are playing,'— he turned again and smiled at the child, who waved her hand and laughed back at him,— 'and we are very fond of Mademoiselle. But we have thought it may be best for everyone that we should continue to be free in another land— across the seas. Monsieur le Gouverneur will therefore cause to be prepared for us, in the little bay of Pontet to the east, a good seaworthy cutter of not less than ten tons, with provisions and water for twenty days; also he will in his kindness see that the road is clear for us to embark at midnight to-morrow, and he will give us— will he not?— his word of honour that he will not cause us to be pursued. Monsieur's word of honour is his bond. If Monsieur will come to the little bay of Pontet at twelve on that night he will find Mademoiselle in the little cave close by the bay. Should Monsieur not see his way to accept these terms, he will do as he pleases, always remembering that Mademoiselle is with us, and that what happens to Jean Jacques or his friend Pierre, happens, unfortunately, to Mademoiselle also.'

So ending, Jean Jacques bared his teeth again in a genial smile.

The Governor groaned— his situation dawned slowly on him in the fulness of its horror— he clenched his teeth and groaned. His duty drew him one way, his feelings (and he was conscious then how overpoweringly) dragged him the other. He bowed his head, and pondered painfully. Jean Jacques waited some time in silent politeness, then he said:

'Monsieur will understand that to my friend and myself our liberty is as dear as to Monsieur is Monsieur's daughter: also Monsieur shall, if he pleases, have the night and the day in which to reflect and prepare; and in order that there may be no mistake as to the preparations, it will be best if Monsieur will return himself and give us his answer at two hours before midnight to-morrow.'

The Governor was conscious, with a feeling of rage and shame, that the convict knew only too surely that the game was in his hands; he raised his head with a jerk, and said, sharply and sternly:

'It shall be so— at ten to-morrow night you shall have my answer.'

Then with one look at his little daughter calling merrily, and blowing kisses to him, and a muttered 'Good-night, my darling, be a good brave child,' he stepped firmly away, turning for a moment to say fiercely, 'Be careful of her, men; if but one hair of her head be harmed, woe betide you.' Then he marched heroically down the hill, and hastened to his home to hide his deadly agony of doubt and fear.

THE BUZZ was hushed— hushed until the day should come again to lend it zeal and courage. It was one thing to hunt for escaped convicts, in packs, under the smiling sun, it was another to seek desperate men in the blue-black of the Southern night. The buzz was of opinion that its stomach might wait a little. Inland among the hills tired parties of soldiery still pursued their weary search, but to no purpose. That buttress on the Cathedral was a full fifteen feet from the ground— its combination with a giant, a man of genius, and a rope had occurred to no one's mind; furthermore, the side of the Cathedral roof overlooked by the coastguard station was protected by a parapet, and this fact had also been unobserved.

Underneath the parapet the child lay tossing between her two captors. Even in her restlessness she seemed to have complete faith in them; one hand lay in Pierre's monstrous paw, with the other she kept throwing off the clothing that Jean Jacques carefully replaced. Neither man slept; they watched their little prisoner anxiously, and every now and then Jacques spoke a word or two of soothing to the restless little mortal. In the middle watches of the night, Cecile waked suddenly from her dreams, and sat up, shaking her dark straight locks back from her hot little head, and looking wildly about her. Then she screamed, a child's scream of terror, and the look of fright that the two men had been waiting for so painfully and anxiously shone in her black eyes. That, which only Jacques' wonderful, almost mesmeric, power with children and the giant Pierre's gentleness had restrained so far, was come at last.

'*Bon Dieu*, but this is terrible,' said Jacques; 'gently, *ma chérie*, it is all play; see, here are thy two good friends, here is thy horse, the big Pierre who gave thee that good ride on his shoulders; gently, *ma chérie*, gently.'

He stroked the soft head, and with the tenderness of a mother kissed the hot little cheek. Pierre turned his head away, with the dumb and blind confidence in his comrade in all moments of danger and difficulty that possessed his faithful soul. But scream after scream broke from the child; it

was not all play, she was in the dark, where was her little bed and her nurse? and she wanted her daddy. Jean Jacques was the father of children, a man of genius, and kindly, but he was unequal to this situation, perhaps from that very kindliness which forbade him to use the shawl to smother the child's cries.

Now the Cathedral was high above the town, and the buzz in the nearest houses was tired, and only turned in its heavy sleep to say, 'Listen to the wild cats in the mountains— to-morrow we will go and hunt them and the other wild beasts with dogs.' So the paroxysm passed, and the child lay still again in Pierre's arms, but with a dull fever burning in her cheeks and eyes. The night grew old, and the chill air smote the exhausted babe in spite of all the men's care, and morning brought the raging fever that, if it be not stayed, means death to the white child. The men looked at each other with dismay in faces haggard with the strain of sleepless nights and dread anxiety.

'Must we then fail after all?' said Jacques, more to himself than to his comrade. He turned his eyes, gloomy with a bitter resentment at the rising sun.

'Twenty hours— only twenty hours— and three lives hanging in the balance. I *will* not fail; the child *shall* live, and so shall we.'

'Water,' said Pierre, and without another word took off his hat and fitted the rope through the brim to make a bucket.

'Yes, water before the people are stirring,' said Jacques.

By the aid of the rope he descended with his extemporised bucket and stole down the hill under shelter of a wall to the nearest cottage— a laundry, as luck would have it— then, filling his bucket, he got back without being seen. Cecile was delirious, and as she raved and tossed, the tears stole down the cheeks of the big convict, and gently he stroked back the dark hair and carefully arranged the blanket so that no ray of the fast rising sun should fall on her. Jacques tore the flag of truce into shreds meet for bandages, and they bound them wet round the fevered head and laid the little frame in Pierre's arms. They had no food left now except a few bananas, which they kept for the child. The fever seemed to abate somewhat, and presently she slept.

The two men sat hour after hour gazing at each other, and at the sun creeping up in the heavens. Now and then Jacques looked away at the sea gleaming brilliant and free, with a yearning look in his eyes that told more than a thousand words, and from it he looked back again at the flushed cheek of the babe in his comrade's arms, weighing and weighing all that the sea meant to him against the pangs of that helpless innocent. Pierre sat immovable; cramp had possession of his limbs, but he sat still for his life; if the child slept through the heat of the day they were saved— what was dearer than life was theirs— if she waked, he dared not think.

Noon came and passed, and the two men sat on— sat on with the same yearning look in their eyes, and the same speechless constraint, and the child still slept. A change seemed to be stealing over the heated face. Jacques watched it anxiously.

'The fever is leaving her,' he said; 'what will come after?'

Hope and despair alternated in his face.

Two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock, they counted the chimes with desperate eagerness— never were hours more leaden-footed— and still the child slept. A wan white look had come into her face, and she looked very ethereal and transparent.

'*Bon dieu!*' thought Jacques, in agony, 'will she fade away before our very eyes?'

Involuntarily Pierre stirred; a spasm of cramp had shaken him to the soul, and Cecile awoke. Contrition and consternation stilled the cramp in Pierre's vast frame, and he rocked her gently to and fro.

'Give her to me, my friend,' said Jean Jacques, quietly, but the look he bent on the child and the tone of his voice showed that despair had entered into him.

Truly it was pitiful— the babe was strengthless and voiceless, she only made a little imploring gesture, and looked with eyes big and dark-shadowed in helpless appeal. The two men gazed at each other in silent accord, then Jacques said:

'She will die, if she meets again the chill night air— it is all over, my friend; with the first shadows we must take her back.'

He gave one burning look at the sea that mocked him in long blue ripples of laughter, then turned to the babe in his arms with a smile in his eyes and soothing words.

Pierre groaned, and turning over lay on his face motionless. Jacques' watch had begun. How terrible those next three hours were— waiting for the pitiless sun to go down and the ending, ah!— such an ending of the Day of Hope. If they took her back at sunset, the child would live— yes, he knew that, he was sure of it— but at what a cost! Freedom to him was the all of life, the air he breathed; in the cause of freedom, or what he deemed such, had he not already endured two years of torment— must he go back to heaven knew how many more? Stay, could he not harden his heart? After all, who knows, the child might live anyway; it was only to keep her another four hours. A silent and bitter rage filled his heart, his own brilliant idea had cut from them their last chance; so near to freedom and yet how far; not even a run for their money, as the English say. Then his glance fell again on those appealing eyes that seemed to ask so much and yet so little— only to be taken back to her

own little bed. A terrible dread and horror welled up in the convict's heart, and quenched the flames of rage; the shame of his deed was casting its shadow before, and with anxious, desperate eyes, he watched the sun's departure from the heavens with an agonising hope that the remorse of the murderer of an innocent might be spared him.

Slowly, slowly, the sun went down. With the lengthening of the shadows Jacques made his preparations for the return. He formed a cradle of the blanket by passing a piece of the rope through the four corners, and then made the end of the rope fast to the roof. When the lights began to twinkle from the town through the fast gathering dusk, and the strains of the convict band playing in the Place came to their ears, they journeyed— and it was time indeed.

Pierre went first down the rope, then Jacques lowered the child in her blanket cradle into his arms and followed, flinging the rope back again on to the roof, that no sign of their hiding should be left for the buzz to make mock of. They took a narrow upper path that led above the town to the back of the Governor's house.

A sneering fate kept that procession as secret as the former one— not a creature came nigh them. The buzz was recruiting its disappointed energies with gossip to the strains of Faust. Jean Jacques, a former distinguished member of that orchestra, even now, as he walked in Pierre's wake, jaded with hunger and fatigue, and racked with the pangs of despair, cursed his successor under his breath for a wrong note in the solo of the Devil's serenade, the strains of which were wafted to him on an unfriendly breeze.

'Hurry, Pierre,' he said between his teeth.

Rapidly and noiselessly they skirted the outer wall, passed through a wicket gate, and crossed the garden to the long white house. It seemed deserted, save for a light streaming into the outside darkness from a window on the ground floor. Creeping quietly forward, Jacques saw through the open casement the figure of the Governor seated at a table in a long low room that did duty as a library. His head was bowed upon his two outstretched arms, a hat, cloak, and pistol were laid on the table in front of him.

So the preparations had been made!...

Jean Jacques withdrew, and making a sign to Pierre they moved back along the verandah until once again they were below the window of their little prisoner's room. Noiselessly as she had been taken from it Cecile was restored to the little bed that lay ready for her. With a deep sigh she turned her eyes gratefully on Jacques as he placed her softly amongst the pillows, and then closed them in an exhaustion, deep as the grave. After listening a moment to

make certain from her breathing that all was well, he drew the clothes gently over her, closed the mosquito-curtains, and slid to the ground.

'*Allons!*' said he to Pierre, and linked his arm in his comrade's.

So they passed through the open window and stood before the Governor. He raised his grey head slowly from his arms, and sat staring in amaze at the two figures in front of him.

'Monsieur le Gouverneur,' said Jean Jacques, simply, 'we are here, my friend and I, to render ourselves; you may do to us what you please— we have failed.'

He raised his head, and confronted the Governor, with calm and haggard face. The latter sprang to his feet with the cry:

'My child! My child! Cowards, miscreants, what have you done to my child?'

'Pardon, Monsieur, we are not cowards— we should not be here else. Go and look for your child in her own bed; we wait for your return.'

The Governor, without a word, turned and fled out of the room and up the stairs.

The two stood immovable and waited; Pierre indeed made a gesture towards the pistol, but Jacques, into whose eyes had crept a look almost of hope, shook his head, and the giant, faithful in his confidence to the last, left it untouched. The Governor returned, grave and stern, but his eye was bright and he walked with a firm step.

'My child is ill,' he said.

'Monsieur,' said Jacques, with dignity, 'we were afraid for her, so we brought her home; had we kept her till midnight she would have died; but have no fear— I know the fever; she will be well again in a short time.'

The Governor shivered— the shock and strain of the last two days had unnerved him. He sat down again, and leant back, thinking. A flame shot into his eyes.

'And you would have killed my child!' he said, with a menacing gesture at the two figures in front of him.

'No, Monsieur, we would not, and the proof is in that we have brought her back rather than that she should be harmed.' Jacques looked fearlessly back into the searching and resentful eyes. The Governor fell back in his chair, and it seemed to them an eternity before he spoke again. When he did it was slowly and measuredly, and his words were those of a judge:

'Men, I, the Governor of this great island, and a French gentleman, had sacrificed my duty and my honour to my love. What you required has been done— the boat is provisioned and ready, the way will be clear from eleven o'clock till twelve. At your bidding, *yours*, had I done this; *you* had put me to

this shame, but Fate has delivered you into my hands, and saved me what, as God be my witness, was necessity. Why should I spare you? Yet,' he paused, and the sombre calm of Jacques' face was pierced again for an instant by that gleam of hope, 'you have made a sacrifice. I know that to such as you, liberty is sweeter than life,— I cannot doubt the sacrifice,— and I will grant you one chance. If that chance favour you, you will find in that chest what I have prepared for you— disguises and some papers, signed by me, assuring you a passport; hide in this room till eleven o'clock, then go, and may fortune speed you— the boat is at the little bay; but if the chance favour you not— look for no mercy from me, for by heaven, you shall have none. Wait for me here.'

Again he left the room and ascended the stairs.

'Go, go!' said Pierre, 'there is still time.'

'No,' said Jacques, and they waited— for nearly an hour they waited, so worn that they no longer felt the strain,— there is a limit to suffering, bodily and mental, beyond which feeling is not.

The Governor returned; his eyes softened somewhat when he saw them, and he took the pistol in his hand.

'Mademoiselle is awake; *this* is your chance. Follow me upstairs and into her room. If, when her eyes fall upon you, there pass but a shadow over her beloved face, there is no mercy for you.'

So saying, he went out. Jean Jacques turned to Pierre and gripped his hand.

'*Courage*,' he said, '*jouons bon jeu*,' and the indomitable spirit shone out of his black eyes into his comrade's.

The Governor mounted the stairs. Jean Jacques whistled under his breath, Pierre wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and they followed. The Governor passed into the room through the open door; as they paused for one second, they could see Cecile's eyes turned lovingly on him and her hands stretched out; her old nurse was sitting at the head of the bed on one side, and a doctor was on the other. A lamp, turned low, gave a fitful light; the Governor reached forward and turned it up.

'*Dieu merci, nous avons de la chance*,' thought Jacques, 'at all events she will not take us for ghosts or bogies;' then, with head up, and a smile on his lips and in his eyes, he marched boldly into the room, Pierre following like a dog.

The Governor, standing back in the shadow, his head bowed, stood watching his little daughter with eyes that burned like coals of fire in the hollows of his wasted cheeks.

No one spoke.

As Jacques moved forward, the child turned her eyes from her father towards him; when they lighted upon him, a look of curiosity, but not of fear,

dwelt in them for a moment, then a smile dimpled up in the brave little face, her hand moved, and her lips parted as if to blow a kiss to her guests.

Jacques advanced to the bed and stroked the little head— Pierre stood at the foot and grinned with sympathy.

'It is enough,' said the Governor, 'you are *men*; go, and God save you.'

10: The Wings of a Butterfly

Alice C. Tomholt

1887-1949

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"I do not love thee less for what is done.
And cannot be undone. Thy very weakness
Hath brought thee nearer to me, and henceforth
My love win nave a sense of pity in it,
Making; it less a worship than before."
—Longfellow.

SHE WAS the orphan child of an old school friend of Mrs Graham, who took charge of her after the death of her parents, when she was only seven years old. Her real name was Mary Louise; but bluff and hearty Mr Graham christened her Butterfly soon after her arrival at the farm at Taarnong, because of the charming and sprightly little way she had of flitting about, and loving the wealth of flowers in the old-fashioned garden.

Jim, the Grahams' only child, was barely in his teens when she arrived; and it was he who saved her, soon after her eleventh birthday, from the floodwaters of the creek. They were returning from the school in the township during the raging of a violent storm, and as they were crossing the bridge the girl's pony reared at a terrifying clap of thunder, throwing her into the roaring flood beneath.

The same creek ran through the Graham property, further down the valley. In it Jim had early learned to swim in a strong, sure way, and he flung off his coat and boots to plunge in after the little figure that was being carried helplessly down stream. Reaching and clasping her safely, he clung desperately to the branch of a half-submerged blackwood until the merciful help arrived.

They were both brought safely to the bank; but Jim had been struck by a floating log, and lay unconscious for several hours in his home. A white faced Butterfly stole into his room when his mother had left it for a moment; and when the boy opened his eyes she was beside him, her usually tantalising blue eyes soft and sweet with her tears.

"I thought you were dead," she breathed, kissing his hand with all the ardor of her passionate young nature. "I thought you were dead, and they wouldn't tell me."

A few days later, when he was convalescent and sitting on the verandah that overlooked the valley, green and fragrant with the first breath of spring, she seated herself on the step at his feet, clasped her two hands about her bare hunched knees, and looked up at him in new adoration and hero-worship.

"Jimmie," she said gravely, "Bessie Leyton says I'll have to marry you when I'm properly grown up."

Jim grinned. "Oh?" said he.

"Yes," she added. "Bessie said that ladies always have to do that when gentlemen rescue them from being drowned very badly. So, when I'm old enough, I will."

"Right!" said Jim. He was a boy of few words.

The little childish compact was not mentioned again after that; perhaps Mary Louise forgot it in her Butterfly way; but as Jim grew to manhood, and manhood's love of her, her promise took a serious shape in his mind, and glowed like a precious beacon in his life, ever guiding him onward to bigger things that should be worthy of her. A big, rugged-faced young fellow, rather too grave and silent for his years, he worked like a Trojan on the farm. His father, lovable, good-natured and easy-going, had never been very successful with the place; but, with his son's entry into its business affairs and working, it prospered amazingly.

And, as the years sped on, there was only one thing that marred Jim's joy in his work, and that was the Butterfly's growing discontent. She was inordinately fond of reading, and, perhaps, got her extravagant ideas from the not too edifying books that were lent to her by girls from neighboring farms. She hated the country, she said, often to Mrs Graham, as she helped with the work of the house. Why couldn't they all go down to town to live? And one day the good woman scolded her so roundly about her discontent that the Butterfly learned to hide it.

"It is the spirit of her foolish young mother coming out in her," Mrs Graham said one night to her husband. "Poor Molly was always like that— always wanting something far beyond her reach. But the child will get over it, I hope."

As she grew older, Mary Louise be came possessed of a quaint and tantalising attractiveness, and her impish eyes usually glowed mockingly beneath the cloud of her dusky hair. Her brooding discontent was dissipated a great deal by Mrs Graham's generosity in the matter of clothes.

When the farm continued to prosper beneath Jim's good management, she was able to buy the girl many of the dainty things for which her butterfly soul longed so ardently. Without that generous indulgence of her inherited whims, the fragile wings of Mary Louise might have flown from the quiet home life long before they did.

Though his impatience and longing grew persistently, Jim had decided to wait until she reached the age of twenty-one before he asked her if she intended to keep her promise.

But she made it hard for him to keep to that decision. His heart was often torn with jealousy at the dances and picnics. In the unsounded depths of her mischievous heart, there was always a tenderness for her Jimmie; but she played with him like a cat with a mouse, teasing, scolding and coaxing him, until it was often a difficult matter for the man in him to resist the sweet red lure of her lips.

Everything might have gone well at the Graham homestead so far as the Butterfly and Jim were concerned if Jack Horton hadn't come to Taarnong one Christmas.

Most girls go through a stage of strange longings and unrest before they finally decide to settle down to the routine of matrimony. But Horton somehow took Mary Louise completely off her feet. He was staying with Tony Marshall, the son of a neighboring farmer. The boy had met him during a visit to some rather gay, and not too particular, city cousins. But Horton was sufficiently clever to hide most of his defects during his stay with the Marshall. He was good company, and good-looking, and was popular at the dances, where he taught the Butterfly all the latest jazzes and fox trots.

In her dazzled eyes he was the quintessence of perfection in his well-tailored suits, his faultless ties and socks, and smooth, clean-shaven face. And to him, satiated with the poppy-like beauty of the other girls with whom he had been wont to associate in town, she was like a freshly opened rose, with the dew still wet and sweet upon its petals. And he promptly set out to win her.

Jim watched it all with an aching heart.

"Your promise, dear," he said to her on the eve of her twenty- first birthday, which happened to fall during Horton's visit to Taarnong. The city man had just gone from the house, and Jim and the girl stood together on the moonlit verandah, watching him cantering down the valley on one of the Marshall's mares.

"You haven't forgotten that promise, have you. Butterfly?"

She turned to him slowly, her white summer frock making her look like some elusive moonbeam in the misty light.

"What promise, Jimmie?" she asked, not quite steadily.

"That promise the day of the flood," the boy replied. "Perhaps you forgot it— didn't mean it. But I have never forgotten. I was just waiting for this birthday of yours to come before I spoke."

Her fingers played a little nervously among the tendrils of the honeysuckle that clambered in fragrant sweetness about the verandah post.

"That was just a foolish baby promise," she said presently. "You surely didn't take it seriously, Jimmie."

Jim stood before her, big and a little awkward in his loosely made clothes. His face whitened in the darkness as he watched her turn her eyes toward the sound of horse's hoof-beats that still clattered faintly in the distance, like the hammering of pigmies falling across the eerie silence of the tranquil night.

"You mean that you haven't thought of that promise at all since you've grown up?" he said slowly. "You mean you take it back?"

Something in the controlled quietness of his tone touched her. With the light from the sitting-room windows falling goldenly upon her slight young figure, she placed her two hands upon his shoulders and looked up into his face, a faint, uncertain smile about her own.

"Jimmie dear," she said softly, in her sweetest coaxing tone; "you mustn't be hurt about a little thing like that. You belong to the country, somehow. You are part of it, just as the gums in the paddocks and the great old mountains in the distance are part of it. You could never change any more than they could; you have to belong to it always, just as they do.

"You couldn't be transplanted; you'd just die, I'm sure. But I, Jimmie," her low voice throbbed passionately, "I was born of the city. Some day I will have to go back to it. Horton has been telling me about it, and if has made me long the more for the life of it— for the lights and the laughter of it. I would never be a fit mate for you; I am too shallow and little for your bigness. I would always be worrying you— would always be in a state of unrest. And there are other girls, Jimmie dear— ever so many other girls who would just love to have you."

He took the two small hands gently from his shoulders. His face looked suddenly drawn and old as the light from the windows, fell on it.

"You are right," he said quietly; "the country is part of me, or I of it. But Mary, Mary girl,—" he turned to her in sudden passionate protest— "you yourself must surely feel the glory of many things about us here in Taarnong. It is considered one of the most beautiful places in Victoria. You must know in your heart that those other things you long for are just empty, fleeting things when compared, with this."

He indicated the peaceful moonlit valley and the distant beauty of the hills beyond the few scattered lights of the township. "The others are shadows, hiding emptiness; this is eternal— reality."

"Yes, to you, Jimmie dear, to you!" she cried softly, with a half sob in her distressed voice. "But to me the loneliness and silence of it all is dreadful. It seems to hem me in so much sometimes that I could scream. You named me rightly here. I am a butterfly— just a useless, foolish butterfly. I can't go deep into things like you do. I have, to flit always across the shallow waters."

And less than two weeks later the Butterfly went to the lights that lured her.

HORTON had succeeded in persuading her to go with him secretly when he left Taarnong. Despite his apparently complete self-assurance, he knew that the Grahams would never consent to his marrying their Mary Louise without some inquiries into his affairs and character in the city— inquiries which could not prove satisfactory in their eyes. And, because he was tired of the poppy-like beauty of the girls that awaited him in the life to which he was returning, he took back with him the stolen sweetness of his country rose. She left a little note pleading for the Grahams' forgiveness. The Butterfly, she wrote, had never been worth the dear love they had given to her. Perhaps it would be far better now if they tried to forget her.

But all too soon she found that, for her, the lights were just cruel things that deceived and blinded with their dazzling radiance. Her marriage with Horton had been quite orthodox and correct, and the first few weeks she spent with him at the seaside hotel to which he took her were a dream of undimmed glamor and happiness. The lights had not yet blinded and the laughter still seemed glad.

But soon after their return to town and the cold ugliness of the boarding house to which his lack of funds forced him to take her, her eyes were opened to all the gibbering mockery of her apparent happiness.

Horton cared for her as much as he was capable of caring for any woman; but he was entirely unfitted to take charge of another human being's life and happiness. He lived by his wits, and was nothing more than a gambler in the game of life. He had usually had a fair amount of good luck with his many doubtful schemes for procuring a livelihood; but after his marriage this luck seemed to evade him with persistent contrariness. He frequented racecourses and poker schools, and occasionally managed to win sufficient to keep the Butterfly in comparative comfort for a time; but usually they were drifting from one boarding-house to another, because of some loud-voiced landlady's righteous indignation at their inability to settle their bills. His run of bad luck irritated Horton to a white heat of fury after a while.

He gradually drifted into new ways and new schemes that he had previously ignored, and his finances increased in a mysterious way. He told the Butterfly that it was just the turning of his luck, and she believed this until the night that he shot himself on the eve of his arrest for his share in a big robbery, during which the life of one of the victims had been lost.

The weeks that followed were a nightmare of numbing horror for Mary Louise. The woman with whom she was boarding at the time of her husband's

death offered to keep her on if she would work in the house for her board and a few paltry shillings weekly, and the Butterfly accepted this offer until the time came for her to pass through the shadows of death in a public maternity hospital. She lay for weeks there, her life despaired of, after the birth of her baby son; then slowly recovered, and left the hospital with her helpless burden, a pitiable ghost of her former gay and vivid self. She had come to too full a knowledge by that time of the cruelty of the blow that she had delivered to the Grahams in leaving the shelter of their kindly home as she had done; and her pride would not allow her to appeal to them for help during the bitter reaping of her foolish error. She had not communicated with them in any way since her departure; and, since her marriage, she had so frequently been forced to change her name, because of the doubtful character of Horton's ways, that she had seemed to have lost all identity.

Before leaving the hospital, a fellow patient, mother of eight young children and wife of a drunken husband, had told her of several charitable institutions to which she could apply for help but she could not bring herself to so to any of these places, and returned instead to her former employer, offering her services at a lesser wage if she could be allowed to keep her baby. The woman consented grudgingly, successfully hiding her satisfaction at her part of the bargain; and, in payment for the miserable back room and the poor scraps of unhealthy food drained the poor, broken Butterfly daily of every ounce of her strength, until she was a physical wreck, quite unable to nurse her baby, and with insufficient money to buy him satisfactory artificial food. He became so puny and weak that one night, after, the hideous piles, of dirty dishes had been washed, she grew afraid, and left the house with the intention of taking him to a doctor. But she had hot gone far along the cold, and bitter street before she felt the frail little body stiffen in her arms. Beneath the light of one of the yellow lamps that gleamed palely through the murky gloom, she looked down at the tiny pinched face in horror, then stumbled forward blindly like some haunted creature in a hideous nightmare from which she could not waken.

From the tree-shadowed gloom of the East Melbourne streets she walked on and on toward the city, gay and bright with theatre lights and bright-faced people hurrying; hurrying ceaselessly In pursuit of pleasure. She wondered vaguely how they could smile as she wandered on and on amongst them, her pitiable burden clasped fiercely in her arms, her brain too numbed for reason. But she found something strangely comforting in their warmth and nearness, though not one had time to heed her.

She felt stricken with new horror at the thought of walking back through the dark East Melbourne streets to the place she called home; and wandered

anywhere where there were lights and people, until a man, walking as aimlessly as herself through , the crowd, stared at her for a moment in incredulous amazement, then caught at her arm as she would have passed by. It was Jim Graham.

"Mary," he said harshly. "Mary, is it you?" She looked up at him with soft crazed eyes that held the strange smile of incipient insanity, her face white and awful in the glaring yellow lights of the street.

"It's Jimmie," she said softly, presently. "It s Jimmie. But my baby," she held the little body toward him my baby, Jimmie. See— he is dead."

And the next instant he caught both her and her burden as she swayed toward him in a merciful unconsciousness.

When at last she opened her eyes to dim knowledge of things again, she looked listlessly about the room of the big private hospital in which she lay. It was white— all white, with flowers arranged on the mantelpiece and small tables in a wealth of Springtime's early sweetness. Beyond the widely opened windows the topmost branches of three great pines whispered together in the soft breeze. A swift-winged thrush flew from out their velvet darkness, and stood poised for a moment on. the edge of the wide sill before it darted upwards into the clear, blue dome of the morning sky. A blessed air of peace pervaded the whole room. The sound of the bells of the slow old cable trams passing along the tree-fringed St. Kilda road were mellowed into a silvery sweetness by the distance. And the nurse who came to her presently had the soft, sympathetic face of an angel; (The Butterfly did not know that her pitiable state on her arrival at the hospital Would have melted the heart of a Stoic.)

But her arms were empty— empty! And with a sudden flood of realisation she started up in the bed,

"Where have they put him?" she cried, like a child in distress. "Where have they put him— my baby?"

The nurse drew the dark young head close against the firm warmth of her breast.

"Hush, dear," she said gently. "You have been ill. Your baby has been laid to rest. Mr Graham saw to it all. His little body was covered with flowers."

Her soothing voice broke the floodgates of the tears which were to save the Butterfly's reason. And when, exhausted, she had sunk into a health-giving sleep, the nurse crept quietly from the room to Jim, who had haunted the hospital since the patient's arrival.

"She will be all right now," she said quietly, in response to the desperate appeal in the haggard young face. "You can go in and sit beside her until she wakens."

A MONTH LATER the Butterfly stood beside Jim on the verandah at Taarnong, looking down once again at the moonlit valley, where golden lights were beginning to gleam through the evening mist. Her eyes grew suddenly dim.

"They are home lights," she said softly. "The others were lights that blinded— lights that burned "

Jim drew her closer to him. He was content. As soon as the news of her husband's death had filtered through to Taarnong, he had left the farm to search for her. That search was now over. When she was strong again, the old promise was to be fulfilled. Through the fury of the fire that had singed her wings, the Butterfly had discovered the hidden gold that lies deep at the heart of simple things.

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11: Hairy Carey's Son

Stella Benson

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"MY FATHER," said Doctor Bligh, "lived on this island about a hundred years ago.... Seems a long time ago, doesn't it, but... well, let me see... where are we now?... nineteen hundred— yes— I'm over sixty and my father was over sixty when I was born. He lived here as a boy; he was born in Cardiff in 1785...."

All the way south from New York Doctor Bligh had been carefully not saying this. Ridiculously melodramatic though the conclusions were that might be drawn from the information that a harmless elderly passenger's father had lived on Lily Island a hundred years ago— drawn they might be, and especially by a facetious joker like Captain Fink.

"A hundred years ago on Lily Island," mused the captain in arch meditation. "Why— then he must have been a pirate!"

"There— you see!" said Doctor Bligh to himself. "You see what havoc three brandies and sodas after midnight can do with one's privacy!" However, the confidential impetus was irresistible now. Besides it was such a good retort to the captain's waggishness. "He was a pirate," said Doctor Bligh, leaning dramatically forward and then throwing himself back in his chair as if to watch the resulting excitement.

There was no excitement. The captain of the Rising Day, who suffered from a strong quivering spasm of the breath when amused, gave but a faint exhibition of it now, and rubbed his nose. What a silly old man this was, he thought. The old ass had been talking of the criminal frivolity of hospital nurses all the way from New York and now he says his father was a pirate. "We get quite a lot of pirate yarns told us, one way or another," sighed the captain. "But I don't remember hearing of any famous pirate on Lily Island called Bligh."

"He changed his name. When Queen Victoria came to the throne. That was when he ceased to be really proud of his past. His real name was Carey."

"Good Lord! Not Hairy Carey?" cried the captain, checking his tumbler three inches from his lips.

Doctor Bligh looked at him in some alarm. "I didn't know it was such a well-known name on Lily Island. If I had known it was a byword I wouldn't have told you the name."

"It's so long ago," said the captain. "I don't think I should trouble to be shy about it, if I were you. Anyway Hairy Carey didn't leave a scoundrelly reputation, you know— not like the man they called the Old Duke. Carey didn't have time— he was just a kid, I believe, when piracy was stamped out. The only thing they say about him, as far as I know, is that he grew a beard when

he was twelve, and that he fell through a hole in an inland cave once and bobbed up like a cork fifty yards out at sea. There's a song that the niggers sing about it— that's the only reason why Lily Island remembers Hairy Carey— because it rhymes with scary and wary and fairy...."

"What are you laughing at?" asked Doctor Bligh rather crossly.

"I'm not laughing," laughed the captain. "I was looking at Young Rummie here, collecting information about Hairy Carey— and collecting it through his mouth, apparently...."

Doctor Bligh turned irascibly to follow the direction of the captain's look. Young Rummie, the ship's boy, with his back to the two men, was fiddling with some glasses on a tray. His innocent young neck was claret-coloured with embarrassment.

"Have you come to Lily Island to hunt for your father's buried treasure?" persisted the wheezing captain. "Got a chart drawn in blood and everything just so?" Doctor Bligh saw his roguish distorted eye through the bottom of his tumbler, and wished he could throw something at it and distort it for good and all.

"No," he said shortly. "My father had a good position in the tobacco trade in England. He never made a penny out of the adventures of his boyhood." How undignified it was, thought Doctor Bligh, for a respectable general practitioner to be mixed up with the kind of story that excites cabin-boys and causes negroes to burst into song. Why on earth had he brought the subject up? It had been perfectly safe in his own mind. Really, of course, it had never been safe at all since he had found that paper. It had seethed so much in his mind that it was bound sooner or later to bubble over the brim before he could stop it. "My father had a sentimental fondness for this island," added Doctor Bligh. "As a very old man, especially, he often fancied himself on Lily Island. But it was a purely sentimental feeling, and it is on purely sentimental grounds that I have long wished to visit an island that my father held in such happy memory."

"There isn't much sentiment on Lily Island," said the captain. "Or much of anything else either, for that matter."

"Well, good-night," said Doctor Bligh, finding to his surprise as he stood up that his feet were a little unsteady, even though the Rising Day was at anchor and perfectly motionless. "I have to get up early to-morrow, if I want to get my walk over before the sun gets too hot."

On the deck, on the way to his cabin, the doctor paused and looked at Lily Island across a stretch of striped glass water polished by moonlight. The low uneven land was blurred black against the sky. Stars floated out of the land to follow the flying moon.

Doctor Bligh was saying this phrase to himself: "Fifty thousand pounds under a Cow's Lick." Whenever he thought of that phrase he felt a certainty and then a sort of squirm. What an absurd position to be in— if one wore woollen underclothes and weighed two hundred pounds— to be the reluctant slave of a romantic quest. It was as though he had been mysteriously impelled to find joy in the possession of a popgun and the taste of bull's-eyes.

"Pleessa," said a voice near him. He turned to see the tiresome freckled face of Young Rummie. "Pleessa— I couldn't help hearing what you was talking about in there-sa. Pleessa please may I come with you-sa, to look for your father's treasure-sa? I bin to the island often before-sa, and I'm strong and useful-sa...."

"Good God, boy," snapped the doctor. "What are you talking about? My father's treasure, indeed! Do I look like a man with a father who had any treasure? My father lived for fifty years after he left this island. If he had any treasure or knew of any treasure why should he have left it here or anywhere else without coming to get it? You go to hell, and stay there."

"I thought you told the cap'n your father was Hairy Carey-sa."

"Go to hell," repeated Doctor Bligh, but a little more doubtfully now. Was it possible that the boy had heard of or found something on the island? "What do you know about Carey?"

"On'y that he was about my age-sa— and that song about him...." And the irritating child began to sing in the creaking voice peculiar to the middle teens.

"Where-a you been, Hairy Carey?
Down-do-down, I bin drowned.
You go an' ask the green growin' fishes
Down-do-down
Down-do-down
Down-do-down what I found."

What were boys coming to! exclaimed Doctor Bligh to himself. Butting into the treasure-hunts of their elders and betters and insisting on singing to them, uninvited, in the middle of the night. "Captain Fink was mistaken, if you must know. My father was no pirate. He was very much interested in tobacco culture and came here some years ago to make experiments."

"Yessa," said the boy with docility.

"There were no pirates in his day."

"No-sa."

"Anything else you want to ask me?" asked Doctor Bligh in a withering voice.

"No-sa. On'y— please, pleessa let me come with you on your treasure-hunt-sa...."

Doctor Bligh walked furiously away across the deck to his cabin. "Fifty thousand pounds under a Cow's Lick," he thought. He carried always in his inner pocket the scrap of unexplained paper found between the pages of an old notebook labelled Heavens Sugar Farm. The writing— on the torn-out fly-leaf of a book called Beauty's Dower, published in London by Mr. Atkinson, MDCCXC— was not his father's writing. It was a mincing deliberate hand, and seemed almost as if idle fingers had gone over it again and again, crossing the super-crossing t's, dotting i's with galaxies of stars, adding frills to the capital letters. There was nothing to explain what it meant, or who scribbled it so, or how it got there among the papers of a reformed pirate. "Fifty thousand pounds under a Cow's Lick...." Doctor Bligh had first seen this scrap of paper on going through his father's possessions forty years ago when the old man died. At the time it had made no impression on him at all, for he had been a sober single-hearted young doctor filled with the determination to Do Good and Make Good. Now that the paper had become almost an obsession with him, he found it difficult to understand how he could have seen it so indifferently in his hot youth. But really his youth had never been hot— only in his mysteriously réchauffé middle age had Doctor Bligh suddenly become tired of tepid duty. Anything would have done as a hot sauce for duty— golf— stamp-collecting— the Primrose League— Angora rabbits— only it happened to be buried treasure. An idle rediscovery of the scrap of paper, and some idle speculation upon its meaning had lighted a discreet fuse which led to an explosion of fantastic convictions about an actual buried treasure on Lily Island. And with the thought of buried treasure, all kinds of romantic and grisly half-recollections had found their way into Doctor Bligh's consciousness. His mind's ear added ambiguously, fragment by fragment, to his memory of what old Bligh— late Hairy Carey— had said from time to time, fifty years ago. "It wasn't so much that the Old Duke was a murderer— he didn't murder people who crossed him, exactly.... There were none of the traditional pirate scenes in his ship— she was just dirty and dull and as much like your modern tramp steamers as a schooner can be— with just that wicked freak of speed thrown in. But there was a sort of crooked indirect curse on everything the Old Duke touched— he didn't murder a man who offended him— but he made a murderer of that man— and in such a way that it wasn't generally the dead man that was most to be pitied. So his property was always safe; he protected it with the irrelevance of his cruelty. It was to everyone's interest, somehow, not to offend the Old Duke." Had the old pirate said something like that, or had his son imagined it all, in the light of this new inexplicable romantic brooding?

"Am I really on the track of accursed treasure?" Doctor Bligh thought. "Am I to have adventures at last, before I die?"

Doctor Bligh slept and dreamed that he looked from the deck of the Rising Day and saw, on the island, a broad road apparently leading up easily to a terrace between the hoofs of a colossal golden cow upon the skyline. And yet, in his dream, he could not start on his walk along the road because there was no boat in which he could be rowed ashore, nor anyone to row him— only, in the distance, so elusive that the frantic dreamer sought him in vain, a singer singing in a faint wild treble voice.

Captain Fink had early breakfast with his passenger in the morning. "Young Rummie can row you ashore," he said. "And you'd better arrange with him where he shall meet you and at what time. Unless you'd like to take him and walk along to the Cove, three or four miles south, and meet us there. We have to drop down there for a few dozen crates of fruit when we've finished the little bunch now alongside. We'll be there about sunset. We go out at highwater to-morrow."

"I'll do that alone," said Doctor Bligh. "I don't fancy that Young Rummie much. He follows me about like a dog."

"He doesn't want to lose sight of the son of Hairy Carey, eh?" said the captain with an attack of his merry asthma. "Oh, come on, Doctor— even you must have been young once...."

Young Rummie rowed the little boat energetically over the gorgeous green water. Doctor Bligh, looking down, could see half-defined shapes in the water— peacock-coloured shadows that melted before they could be realized. The little beaked garfish skidded, splintering light and spray, from the tip of one wave to another. A great heart-shaped sting-ray slid across a patch of pearl-green sand thirty feet below, with a rolling ripple of its frills. In the distance sober somersaulting fins marked the progress of three or four grampuses, wheeling in slow suspended acrobatics across the roof of their green world.

"Please pleessa, let me come with you to-day. Pleessa, I'm sorry to go on botherin' you, but I can't bear it— I can't bear not to go-sa.... It may be the last chance I get, goin' after treasure-sa. I'm born to go after treasure-sa— pleessa please give me a try-sa.... I'm such a resourceful feller-sa— it might just make the difference to finding the—"

"How many times am I to tell you, you young fool— " shouted Doctor Bligh, "that there's no question of treasure? Didn't you hear me tell you— my father was here planting pineapples and—"

"Tobacco-sa."

"I said pineapples. As I told you, I am thinking of investing... I mean investigating...." He broke off. "What's the matter with me?" he thought irritably. "Going on lying... as if it was worth while explaining anything to this pink rat of a boy. What he really needs is a good whipping." Yet, looking along the little boat at Young Rummie's ugly shining face, bobbing backwards and forwards as he rowed, Doctor Bligh, with that inconsequence he was now coming to recognize as one of the perils of middle age, felt unexpectedly tolerant. A tooth was missing in the front of Young Rummie's broad mouth, and somehow this chink in the otherwise tough rubber armour of his youth made Doctor Bligh conscious of the anxious, desperately expectant heart beating beneath that dirty and childishly narrow singlet. As if, with the disclosure of the lost tooth, a tiny window had been opened.

"I don' cair-sa," said Young Rummie, after clearing his throat nervously. "I must— I must foller you-sa, whatever you say-sa.... I hope you'll forgive me-sa— when I've proved me worth...."

"If you want to inform yourself about pineapples under cultivation," said Doctor Bligh, grinding his teeth with anger, "follow me, and be damned to you. I can't stop you. Lily Island's not my property."

The little village of Corkscrew Bay squatted under its crooked palms and casuarinas on a bend in the narrow harbour. On the striped sand and seaweed beach, as the little boat ran ashore, white and mauve branches of coral lay among petalled shells that were like pink roses. The ragged black village children, fluttering with faded cottons, gathered on the beach to watch strangers arrive. The men of the village were standing in a group round the mate of the Rising Day, listening to his curses. That agitated man, his coat off, sweat running into his eyes and dripping from his chin, stood, like a defender, beside a complicated frail fortress built of pineapple crates. He was hoarsely and hopelessly exhorting the crowd of negroes to get to work. The men watched him rather plaintively and passively, as though more of the sense of what he was saying reached them through their wide wet eyes, their broad clumsy polished noses, their thick open mouths— than through the ears that leaned out from their dark skulls.

"Well, all I can say is . . ." said the mate in an exhausted voice when he saw Doctor Bligh. "Give me baboons— give me the blind pups of a cross-eyed bitch— give me half-baked clams— give me—"

"You find the islanders unintelligent?" said Doctor Bligh. "Look here, Mr. Wilkins, why don't you keep Young Rummie to help you get these crates aboard?... He was sent here as a sort of guide for me, but as a matter of fact I can well spare him."

"Please— pleessa— " Young Rummie's thin voice was full of real panic.

"There's only an hour's work here," said the mate. "I'd send the boy after you."

"Oh, I shan't need him."

"Pleessa— pleessa— pleessa—"

"Damn you, boy— Well.... I'll come back for you in an hour's time.... There's nothing— there's nothing to look for.... You're making a silly mistake.... Oh, all right then, I'll come back— I won't forget."

"Hey, you Rummie," shouted the mate with alacrity.

Free of his follower at last, Doctor Bligh strode away along a narrow path that led through the high guinea-grass. For the first time he wondered what actual steps he could take to decode the mysterious message and apply it to the country in front of him. "Fifty thousand pounds under a Cow's Lick." The whole affair from beginning to end had been so far contrary to the ordered plans of his life that, for the first time in his life, plans had seemed wholly irrelevant. Here he was, on Lily Island, under a spell, the magic wording of which was— "Fifty thousand pounds under a Cow's Lick." Of course it was all nonsense. Surely an elderly retired doctor is free to travel when his work is done. Why should not Lily Island be as good a destination as any other for a slightly asthmatically inclined professional gentleman in search of sea air and sunlight? Doctor Bligh looked uneasily round the horizon, regretting the translucent and candid horizon of last night's dream. Behind him was the village, scrawled with the shadows of palms and crazy huts; behind the village was a small valley pitted with pineapple holes. Round Doctor Bligh, shoulder-high, was the guinea-grass, varied here and there with dangling angular jumba beans and with prickly pears and organ-pipe cactuses. The low hills all round were furred over with frizzed brush, as evenly as negroes' heads are capped with wool. A rather higher strip of land in front of the traveller was spiked along the skyline with century palms— some closed like giant asparagus shoots, others opened out into jejune forks and fans. Far beyond this ridge of land was a higher ridge, only one bluff of which could be seen through a cleft in the near ridge. And that far bluff— was it Doctor Bligh's imagination?— was it perhaps an effect due to the abrupt framing in the near gorge?— the resemblance was very vague— yet was it so vague?... Doctor Bligh turned away for a moment to give his eyes a chance of blotting out their prejudice in favour of romance. The bluff, he now saw quite clearly, looked like a cow's head and shoulders— there was a quite bovine hump behind the shoulders.... It was a hornless cow, to be sure, unless one counted— but that would be foolishly fanciful— those two tall century palms as horns. The throat of the cow— that narrow receding flapping pendulous throat— was very clearly suggested, thought Doctor Bligh, trying to keep quite cool and unbiased. All the

same, he wished he could look at that cow's head for a second with fresh eyes. If Young Rummie were here, one could say, "What does that bluff remind you of?" Doctor Bligh was afraid of his own judgment now. He remembered how he had deceived his imagination with his pirate-father's stories— now, though he knew he had deceived himself, he could not say what was false and what was real in that stammering tale.

He drew in his breath as a negro woman, carrying a tall bundle on her head— a bundle crowned with boots and a trussed chicken, padded towards him round a bend in the narrow path.

"Good morning," said Doctor Bligh.

"Ma-anin', za."

"Can you tell me the name of that hill?"

"Aye, za."

"What is its name?"

"Aye, za."

"Hasn't got a name, eh?"

"Ya-azza."

"I was just thinking how like a cow's head it was. Did that ever strike you or your friends?"

The woman turned her head with smoothness and caution under her balancing bundle to look in the direction his finger indicated. "Ya-azza," she said, her opaque brown eyes searching the horizon for whatever might be the object of this unintelligible buckra's gaze.

"Like a cow— do you not think so?"

"Ca-aw, za?"

"Yes, a cow's head. Can you see it?"

"Ya-azza."

"You can! Can you not tell me the name of the ridge?"

"Ca-aw's zed, za."

"Cow's Head? Do you really mean that the ridge is called Cow's Head?"

"Ya-azza."

He searched her thick simple face with his eyes. Were his ears as well as his eyes biased to the point of self-deception? "Thank you so much. Good morning." He pushed along the path, combing the coarse yellow grass with his shins.

As he reached the slope up to the near ridge, the grass gave place to thick brush. A little breeze made all the short unkempt palms amid the brush seem to turn their backs. The path, which could barely push between the pale-stemmed bristles of the shrubs, gave a wide berth to the clumps of sisal and the century palm, with their defensive sheaves of spears, but sometimes the

detour was not wide enough, and Doctor Bligh's thin neat tussore trousers were soon torn and the plump neat legs beneath them severely scratched.

When, gasping, he reached the top of the near ridge, one thing was certain— he would not go back for Young Rummie. He had never meant very seriously to do so. He noticed that the Cow's Head had receded— had, apparently, side-slipped to quite a different point of the compass, and to a site at least twice as far away as he had expected. Without its frame, too, it was less arrestingly like— but no! it was like a cow's head. Between him and it lay a large lake— probably invisibly connected with the sea. Several of the ridges around this lake seemed to be paltry imitations of a cow's head too, but Doctor Bligh guiltily averted his mind from this suspicion. His cow, he told himself firmly, looked more like a cow than ever; it must have been a famous landmark for the pirates, as it evidently now was to the negroes. After a minute's thought, Doctor Bligh decided to walk down to the lake and then follow its western shore. As far as he could see, a broadish rocky ledge formed a more or less continuous rim to the lake; the bands of green thicket that interrupted this rocky strip seemed to him negligible from a distance. He almost ran down the slope to the water. The path he was following led straight into the lake, made no effort to veer to right or left. At its terminus lay the submerged skeleton of an old boat, with small striped fishes whisking between her ribs. Doctor Bligh began to walk along the terrace of rock beside the water. The high sun was giving a more and more breathless quality to the heat. The wind that had disturbed the palms on the ridge was still now. All the air quivered, and from the long spindling rafts of glare upon the lake, splintering spears of light were aimed to pierce the sight. Doctor Bligh found it very much more difficult than he expected, to walk along the waterside. The rock, a coral formation, was pitted with sharp-edged craters. And at every few dozen yards the rock surrendered the shore to mangroves.

Each strip of encroaching mangroves meant an obstacle of almost desperate difficulty. The mangroves sprawled in a sort of angular horizontal scaffolding over the water. Roots sloped tautly into the water, like the legs of spiders. Footholds among these roots were always slanting and slippery, and were treacherously concealed by the bright juicy disks of the leaves. The branches were breast-high. Doctor Bligh, bruised about the shins and wet to the knees, negotiated three mangrove entanglements, and then he felt that he would rather press on in the hope of finding an end to them than return by such an arduous and revolting route. Inviting stretches of firm pale rock in front tempted him with promises of better going presently. But these promises always proved to be illusory; the mangrove strips stretched wider and wider, and finally Doctor Bligh, achieving a strip of rock after an hour's frenzied battle

with fifty yards of malevolent swamp roots, gave up. He sank down almost fainting, his set sweating face buried in his hands. The heat of the sun seemed to throb about his body. He could not keep his face covered, in spite of the glare; his hands suffocated him. He decided to drink half the brandy and water he had in his flask, and to eat one of the biscuits the steward had given him. He looked about wildly as he ate. Where the rock again surrendered to the swamp, a graceful grey bird like a small crane, too young to fly, threaded itself like a silver hook among the angular lacy intricacies of the mangroves. Its parents, less innocent about the dangers of human proximity, flew in the air above it, planing with outstretched neck and legs in a tilted obtuse angle.

"I must strike inland," thought Doctor Bligh, noticing that a promontory of dry scrub pierced the swamp to a point quite near him. Now he realized that by following the lake shore he had lost his Cow's Head. The ridge was still there, with its two pin shapes of century palm, but perspective had completely robbed it of any suggestion of a cow. "I must strike west again across country." Certainly the matted brush could not be more heartbreaking to walk through than the mangroves were. He crossed the intervening yard or two of swamp-growth and struggled in the clawing stubborn brush, like a fly in a spider's web. At least, as he at first thought, he was spared the glare on the water. Then he realized that he was robbed also of the slight coolness of stirring air that belonged to the lake. He made slowly towards a twisted casuarina tree which, in that low thicket, seemed to stand like a memorial and spread a sanctuary of shade. Not only were the close-growing shrubs difficult to push through, but deep mazy pits continually waylaid the lost man's steps— pits sometimes ten feet deep— traces of rolling seas long dried— holes made often perfectly circular by the bowling of imprisoned uneasy stones— galleries pierced by long-departed tides between one curvy cell and another. Bananas were planted in the rich black earth that lined such pits. The banana fronds, down in the pit where no wind disturbed them, were virgin and whole, like the pages of unread books, but the topmost plumes, which Doctor Bligh came to appreciate as warnings of the deep traps laid in the wilderness, were tattered and torn by exposure to the creeping hot wind. Doctor Bligh hoped that these bananas, which must have been planted by men, meant that he would presently come upon a path or a cabin. But he reached the casuarina after hours of effort without finding any further trace of men.

The tree stood on the edge of a low knoll, and its roots, mostly exposed, clung to the dusty bank like knuckles. Between the roots was a blackness— the crooked mouth of a cave. Doctor Bligh walked straight across the band of shade he had so ardently longed for, and, in a stride and two stumbles, he was down in the cave. He found himself in a kind of antechamber in a half-light

striped by gaunt and crumbling columns. Behind these columns a black passage led downward. Doctor Bligh felt in his pockets. He had a few matches— seventeen, to be exact. He was so deeply exhausted that he had but little sense, and he started down the black gallery, lighting his first match as soon as he came to the end of level ground. The passage led downward over unsteady red boulders. Some of the stones were set rolling by his tread, but he went carefully and did not fall. By the time the ground became level again, he had used five matches. He tried now to be cautious, not only in actual economy of matches, but also in economy in the glances he threw here and there into each brief dazzle. He tried not to waste glances on the fluted white ceiling, the bats, the sinuous water-carvings on the walls, the fantastic half-articulate friezes of pattern, the pendulous needles of runed coral, the pinnacled pillars aspiring from the floor. He tried to look first and last at the floor before him. It was the fourteenth match that showed a black patch on the floor immediately in front of him. He had noticed these patches before, but since they had not lain actually in his path he had passed them by without investigation. The concentration of light on this last patch seemed to be too much for the poor spirit of the match. He lit another more carefully, as he crouched on the ground. Before him he now saw an abrupt pit, showing bottomless to the scope of matchlight. Doctor Bligh, an already overstrained man, began to quake. "I must get out of this," he thought. "Why did I come down here?" and as he turned to retreat, he heard the sipping rustle of water scores of feet below in the pit. He lit another match. Behind him a ridge of rock not more than two feet across divided the fluted rims of two more pits, between which he must have walked in the fitful light without suspicion. He had one match left now.

Doctor Bligh was, after all, an old man. His whole dilemma, from the beginning of the expedition till now, had been the result of an old man's rebound into youthful irresponsibility from a life spent in arduous and precise duty. The same tired old brain that had re-read so hopefully the scribble on the fly-leaf of Beauty's Dower, had now failed to allocate reasonable resources of light and time in the search. Now the thin staff of romantic excitement gave way. He sank down and lay, half-huddled against the wall, for a long time in the dark.

He could hardly have slept, but he must have been sunk in a sort of trance, for when he noticed at last that a distant light shone ahead of him— how far away he could not guess— he realized that his eyes had long been fixed senselessly upon it. He shouted; his heart nearly strangled him as the raucous echoes crashed about him; a rustle began, which he diagnosed after a moment as the bats waking in the hollows of the ceiling. The distant light did not move.

He lit his last match, as an answer and an appeal to the light. No sign of recognition. Groping very cautiously on hands and knees, he felt the rim of the pit in front of him. His hand did not dare to leave the solid stone— he felt that if he should suddenly find clear space beneath his hand he would tip forward and fall headlong into terrible depths. But his hand made sure at last that the rim curved away from him, leaving a shelf several feet wide between the pit and the wall. He crawled along this, inch by inch, never trusting a first scouting hand, but verifying its discoveries with agonized and repeated pressure. He gathered no courage from his successful circumvention of this pit. His imagination bored more frightful shafts of space in every direction in which he moved his tremulous hand. But after some hours of this painful progress, the corner of a curtain of rock seemed suddenly lifted, and a powdering of stars spangled the space thus revealed. The further he crawled, the more widely did this blessed pricked doorway into freedom seem opened. The roaring of the clear sea now drowned the deadly subterranean sucking and moaning of secret channels. He identified the light he had first seen as the reflection of a star in a water-cup formed in the peak of frustrated stalagmite by a too impetuous dripping from the hanging point above it. The little crater full of water, when he reached it, seemed to accumulate more than its share of light; it almost glowed. He thought it looked as brittle and fey as a moon crater. He drank the cool water most gratefully. He tried not to quicken his painful crawl as he found himself facing an apparently unobstructed passage to the stars. There might still be traps. But at last, there he was, on the lip of a cave half-way down an overhanging cliff. The sea knocked at the under surface of a deep shelf below him. Only the stars, the moon and a giddy silvered screen of vertical stone towered above him. He ate his last biscuit, finished what he had in his flask and slept.

When he awoke, after a confused and painful sleep, it was daylight, and the first thing that he realized was the next headland. It was quite close, and it was unmistakably the neck of yesterday's Cow's Head. There was that overhanging fluted flap of stone that had, from a distance, seemed to lead so appropriately from the cow's lower jaw to its chest. The romancer had seen it from a vantage-point that had not been high enough to show him that nothing but the deep sea lay at the foot of the jut. Under the Cow's Lick— under the sea, his imagination had placed the fifty thousand pounds of his vision. Only the slow green waves shone at the foot of that bovine fantasy in stone. Doctor Bligh looked for a time at the hopeless face of the stone, feeling disillusionment pervade his heart. He saw then, pricking out of the profile of the cliff, a pimple, a hair, a brown wart, the bows of a boat, finally the whole of a little brown fishing-boat tacking along the coast.

When the boat was within hailing distance, Doctor Bligh gave a loud cry. His voice sounded to him like the new voice of a dumb man. The boat turned towards the cliff. An old brown man was sitting in her, picking over some small fish that lay in the wash in her bottom.

"No way da-an from thar, za," shouted the old man thinly. "You'll ha-ave to make a dive of it. Best go ba-ack troo the ca-aive."

Doctor Bligh, who during the first few words had been looking down appalled at the deep swinging water, when he heard the last suggestion, threw himself instantly, all askew, from the lip of the cave into the sea. After several choking centuries, he was able to breathe air instead of water. In a moment he was grasping the old man's hand and, after a breast-bruising, shin-bruising struggle, he was in the boat, treading on a squirming fish.

"You'd best a gone ba-ack troo the ca-aive, za," piped the old man.

"I'll give you anything you like to get me to the Cove before high water."

" 'Z aba-at four hours sa-ail, za," said the old man. "Yer on the wra-ang shore of Lily A-aland."

Doctor Bligh sat in the bows, getting gradually dry, looking with incredulous distaste at his scarred and blood-caked legs— one entirely denuded of trouser from the knee down, the other clad only in tatters. He found it impossible to reconcile this sight with the fact that one month ago he had been a medical man in good standing at Monmouth. For a dreaming second it seemed to him that though the blood came, in appearance, from superficial scratches on his legs, really it flowed from a wound in his spirit that was mortal. He dozed a little, presently, and when he woke he began to believe again in a probability he had lost sight of— the hope that he had a future of fastidious old age at Monmouth in front of him— that all this nightmare of melodramatic misfortune was a thing that would pass. Never again would blood flow from this trespassing young spirit in his breast.

As the little boat made the final tack that would bring it round the ultimate headland, Doctor Bligh saw for the last time the corroded overhang that had seemed to him to join his Cow's Head to boundless treasure below.

"Did you ever hear of a place-name like Cow's Lick connected with any spot on this island?" he asked the old fisherman.

"Nuzz'n excep' the Ca-aw's Lick they fa-and the fifty tha-asand pa-and under," said the old man.

Doctor Bligh stared at him, paralysed for a moment with astonishment. "Did they find Fifty Thousand Pounds under a Cow's Lick?"

"Na-za— not just like that, they didn'.... It's an a-alanders' sayin', that— why, ye must have heard people on the a-aland sayin' Fifty Tha-asand Pa-and under a Ca-aw's Lick. It's a saying fer a piece of luck.... My fa-ather he tol' me

the true ta-aile aba-at that sayin'— how a man called Havens ha-ad a ca-aw, an' ca-aw went astray da-an to beach, an' Havens went a-lookin' fer the ca-aw an' fa-and 'er lickin' at a lomp salt that got thar some way, and all aroun' the ca-aw thar floated that grease stuff— hunreds a ya-ards of that thar grease stuff— what you call that thar grease stuff that's worth sa moch money—?"

"Ambergris?"

"Yeah— A guess so— ambergris.... An' Havens made a fortune outa what he fa-and, an' he built a ha-ase an' mek a sugar farm— just a ruin now, it is— near the Cove an' he had his da-ater eddicated— pretty girl, my fa-ather useter say, but spiled wiz bookla-arnin'— though Havens was just ornery tra-ash himself— an' she married a ja-adge in United Sta-aites. But Havens lost all his money when the sla-aives was freed by Queen Victa-aria. And that's how the sayin' comes, my fa-ather useter say— Fifty Thaa-asand Paa-and Under a Caa-aw's Lick."

"Beauty's Dower," thought Doctor Bligh! "It belonged to the pretty daughter of Heavens Sugar Farm. And my susceptible young papa...." And he now saw it all as a romance after all— the last shred of the callow young Hairy Carey's romance. He said nothing more. The little boat slid on towards the Cove. He had looked for his destination so long, yet he reached it unexpectedly. Tacking round a headland they came abruptly in sight of the Rising Day.

"Why— woz goin' on?" exclaimed the old man, looking not at the ship but at the shore. A group of men stood on the green grassy seam that joined the white sand to the scrub. The old man sailed close inshore and after a moment Doctor Bligh said, "Why— there's the skipper— there's Mr. Wilkins— there's Tom and Veery Joe."

"Thar's a ca-affin," said the old fisherman. "It's a buryin'."

"Can you land me on this beach?" asked Doctor Bligh. The boat drew alongside a rough natural pier in the pockmarked rock at the curve of the bay. As Doctor Bligh, conscious of his tattered trousers and peeling face, drew near to the rigid, Sunday-best-looking group, Captain Fink came to meet him.

"Well, I'm damned," said Captain Fink, looking unlike himself and certainly more damned than blessed. "Where in hell did you get to, Doctor?"

"Whose grave is that?" asked Doctor Bligh.

"It's Young Rummie's.... Good Lord, poor little brute, and he's got a mother in Cardiff and all that.... The kid lent a hand loading pines yesterday and Wilkins says he nearly broke his heart over it... seemed to think you were coming back to take him on a trip or something.... Good Lord, I wish you had happened to take him along, Doc.... It would have saved his life.... Wilkins wasn't too hard on the little chap about the work— he was kind of sorry for

him— the kid fretted so— God knows why— and anyway, there wasn't more than an hour's work. He consoled himself eating spoilt pineapples— the niggers say he put away over a dozen— and by midnight he was off his head— raving and screaming with pain.... Gosh, I tried every bleeding thing I could think of— but of course I hadn't an idea really.... I thought you'd turn up any minute. I had a couple of men out all night looking for you... and one with a boat, up and down the coast.... I'm sure a doctor could have saved him.... There are three black parsons in this bloody hole and not one doctor— black or white. The kid died at sunrise."

"So this was the crooked curse," thought Doctor Bligh, forgetting that his futile search had endangered no pirate's secret. He said nothing. He walked up the beach and stood by Young Rummie's grave, dug just where the sand marched with the limit of the red rock-strewn earth. And as he stood, spent and strained, beside the grave, time seemed to spin about him— yesterday seemed almost within his grasp, and youth a thing returning, like a thunderstorm, against the wind. Yesterday— that freak day astray at the wrong end of his life— he saw it glamorously now— it was terribly desirable to him— and only an hour ago he had dismissed it with relief. But— oh, now— come back, deferred bright day— come back, lost gleam— lost youth....

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12: Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

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"AND SO, PETER, you won't even consider of the business?" said Mr. John Brown, buttoning his surtout over the snug rotundity of his person and drawing on his gloves. "You positively refuse to let me have this crazy old house, and the land under and adjoining, at the price named?"

"Neither at that, nor treble the sum," responded the gaunt, grizzled and threadbare Peter Goldthwaite. "The fact is, Mr. Brown, you must find another site for your brick block and be content to leave my estate with the present owner. Next summer I intend to put a splendid new mansion over the cellar of the old house."

"Pho, Peter!" cried Mr. Brown as he opened the kitchen door; "content yourself with building castles in the air, where house-lots are cheaper than on earth, to say nothing of the cost of bricks and mortar. Such foundations are solid enough for your edifices, while this underneath us is just the thing for mine; and so we may both be suited. What say you, again?"

"Precisely what I said before, Mr. Brown," answered Peter Goldthwaite. "And, as for castles in the air, mine may not be as magnificent as that sort of architecture, but perhaps as substantial, Mr. Brown, as the very respectable brick block with dry-goods stores, tailors' shops and banking-rooms on the lower floor, and lawyers' offices in the second story, which you are so anxious to substitute."

"And the cost, Peter? Eh?" said Mr. Brown as he withdrew in something of a pet. "That, I suppose, will be provided for off-hand by drawing a check on Bubble Bank?"

John Brown and Peter Goldthwaite had been jointly known to the commercial world between twenty and thirty years before under the firm of Goldthwaite & Brown; which copartnership, however, was speedily dissolved by the natural incongruity of its constituent parts. Since that event, John Brown, with exactly the qualities of a thousand other John Browns, and by just such plodding methods as they used, had prospered wonderfully and become one of the wealthiest John Browns on earth. Peter Goldthwaite, on the contrary, after innumerable schemes which ought to have collected all the coin and paper currency of the country into his coffers, was as needy a gentleman as ever wore a patch upon his elbow. The contrast between him and his former partner may be briefly marked, for Brown never reckoned upon luck, yet always had it, while Peter made luck the main condition of his projects, and

always missed it. While the means held out his speculations had been magnificent, but were chiefly confined of late years to such small business as adventures in the lottery. Once he had gone on a gold-gathering expedition somewhere to the South, and ingeniously contrived to empty his pockets more thoroughly than ever, while others, doubtless, were filling theirs with native bullion by the handful. More recently he had expended a legacy of a thousand or two of dollars in purchasing Mexican scrip, and thereby became the proprietor of a province; which, however, so far as Peter could find out, was situated where he might have had an empire for the same money— in the clouds. From a search after this valuable real estate Peter returned so gaunt and threadbare that on reaching New England the scarecrows in the corn-fields beckoned to him as he passed by. "They did but flutter in the wind," quoth Peter Goldthwaite. No, Peter, they beckoned, for the scarecrows knew their brother.

At the period of our story his whole visible income would not have paid the tax of the old mansion in which we find him. It was one of those rusty, moss-grown, many-peaked wooden houses which are scattered about the streets of our elder towns, with a beetle-browed second story projecting over the foundation, as if it frowned at the novelty around it. This old paternal edifice, needy as he was, and though, being centrally situated on the principal street of the town, it would have brought him a handsome sum, the sagacious Peter had his own reasons for never parting with, either by auction or private sale. There seemed, indeed, to be a fatality that connected him with his birthplace; for, often as he had stood on the verge of ruin, and standing there even now, he had not yet taken the step beyond it which would have compelled him to surrender the house to his creditors. So here he dwelt with bad luck till good should come.

Here, then, in his kitchen— the only room where a spark of fire took off the chill of a November evening— poor Peter Goldthwaite had just been visited by his rich old partner. At the close of their interview, Peter, with rather a mortified look, glanced downward at his dress, parts of which appeared as ancient as the days of Goldthwaite & Brown. His upper garment was a mixed surtout, woefully faded, and patched with newer stuff on each elbow; beneath this he wore a threadbare black coat, some of the silk buttons of which had been replaced with others of a different pattern; and, lastly, though he lacked not a pair of gray pantaloons, they were very shabby ones, and had been partially turned brown by the frequent toasting of Peter's shins before a scanty fire. Peter's person was in keeping with his goodly apparel. Gray-headed, hollow-eyed, pale-cheeked and lean-bodied, he was the perfect picture of a man who had fed on windy schemes and empty hopes till he could neither live

on such unwholesome trash nor stomach more substantial food. But, withal, this Peter Goldthwaite, crack-brained simpleton as, perhaps, he was, might have cut a very brilliant figure in the world had he employed his imagination in the airy business of poetry instead of making it a demon of mischief in mercantile pursuits. After all, he was no bad fellow, but as harmless as a child, and as honest and honorable, and as much of the gentleman which Nature meant him for, as an irregular life and depressed circumstances will permit any man to be.

As Peter stood on the uneven bricks of his hearth looking round at the disconsolate old kitchen his eyes began to kindle with the illumination of an enthusiasm that never long deserted him. He raised his hand, clenched it and smote it energetically against the smoky panel over the fireplace.

"The time is come," said he; "with such a treasure at command, it were folly to be a poor man any longer. Tomorrow morning I will begin with the garret, nor desist till I have torn the house down."

Deep in the chimney-corner, like a witch in a dark cavern, sat a little old woman mending one of the two pairs of stockings wherewith Peter Goldthwaite kept his toes from being frost-bitten. As the feet were ragged past all darning, she had cut pieces out of a cast-off flannel petticoat to make new soles. Tabitha Porter was an old maid upward of sixty years of age, fifty-five of which she had sat in that same chimney-corner, such being the length of time since Peter's grandfather had taken her from the almshouse. She had no friend but Peter, nor Peter any friend but Tabitha; so long as Peter might have a shelter for his own head, Tabitha would know where to shelter hers, or, being homeless elsewhere, she would take her master by the hand and bring him to her native home, the almshouse. Should it ever be necessary, she loved him well enough to feed him with her last morsel and clothe him with her under-petticoat. But Tabitha was a queer old woman, and, though never infected with Peter's flightiness, had become so accustomed to his freaks and follies that she viewed them all as matters of course. Hearing him threaten to tear the house down, she looked quietly up from her work.

"Best leave the kitchen till the last, Mr. Peter," said she.

"The sooner we have it all down, the better," said Peter Goldthwaite. "I am tired to death of living in this cold, dark, windy, smoky, creaking, groaning, dismal old house. I shall feel like a younger man when we get into my splendid brick mansion, as, please Heaven, we shall by this time next autumn. You shall have a room on the sunny side, old Tabby, finished and furnished as best may suit your own notions."

"I should like it pretty much such a room as this kitchen," answered Tabitha. "It will never be like home to me till the chimney-corner gets as black

with smoke as this, and that won't be these hundred years. How much do you mean to lay out on the house, Mr. Peter?"

"What is that to the purpose?" exclaimed Peter, loftily. "Did not my great-grand-uncle, Peter Goldthwaite, who died seventy years ago, and whose namesake I am, leave treasure enough to build twenty such?"

"I can't say but he did, Mr. Peter," said Tabitha, threading her needle.

Tabitha well understood that Peter had reference to an immense hoard of the precious metals which was said to exist somewhere in the cellar or walls, or under the floors, or in some concealed closet or other out-of-the-way nook of the old house. This wealth, according to tradition, had been accumulated by a former Peter Goldthwaite whose character seems to have borne a remarkable similitude to that of the Peter of our story. Like him, he was a wild projector, seeking to heap up gold by the bushel and the cart-load instead of scraping it together coin by coin. Like Peter the second, too, his projects had almost invariably failed, and, but for the magnificent success of the final one, would have left him with hardly a coat and pair of breeches to his gaunt and grizzled person. Reports were various as to the nature of his fortunate speculation, one intimating that the ancient Peter had made the gold by alchemy; another, that he had conjured it out of people's pockets by the black art; and a third— still more unaccountable— that the devil had given him free access to the old provincial treasury. It was affirmed, however, that some secret impediment had debarred him from the enjoyment of his riches, and that he had a motive for concealing them from his heir, or, at any rate, had died without disclosing the place of deposit. The present Peter's father had faith enough in the story to cause the cellar to be dug over. Peter himself chose to consider the legend as an indisputable truth, and amid his many troubles had this one consolation— that, should all other resources fail, he might build up his fortunes by tearing his house down. Yet, unless he felt a lurking distrust of the golden tale, it is difficult to account for his permitting the paternal roof to stand so long, since he had never yet seen the moment when his predecessor's treasure would not have found plenty of room in his own strong-box. But now was the crisis. Should he delay the search a little longer, the house would pass from the lineal heir, and with it the vast heap of gold, to remain in its burial-place till the ruin of the aged walls should discover it to strangers of a future generation.

"Yes," cried Peter Goldthwaite, again; "to-morrow I will set about it."

The deeper he looked at the matter, the more certain of success grew Peter. His spirits were naturally so elastic that even now, in the blasted autumn of his age, he could often compete with the springtime gayety of other people. Enlivened by his brightening prospects, he began to caper about the kitchen

like a hobgoblin, with the queerest antics of his lean limbs and gesticulations of his starved features. Nay, in the exuberance of his feelings, he seized both of Tabitha's hands and danced the old lady across the floor till the oddity of her rheumatic motions set him into a roar of laughter, which was echoed back from the rooms and chambers, as if Peter Goldthwaite were laughing in every one. Finally, he bounded upward, almost out of sight, into the smoke that clouded the roof of the kitchen, and, alighting safely on the floor again, endeavored to resume his customary gravity.

"To-morrow, at sunrise," he repeated, taking his lamp to retire to bed, "I'll see whether this treasure be hid in the wall of the garret."

"And, as we're out of wood, Mr. Peter," said Tabitha, puffing and panting with her late gymnastics, "as fast as you tear the house down I'll make a fire with the pieces."

Gorgeous that night were the dreams of Peter Goldthwaite. At one time he was turning a ponderous key in an iron door not unlike the door of a sepulchre, but which, being opened, disclosed a vault heaped up with gold coin as plentifully as golden corn in a granary. There were chased goblets, also, and tureens, salvers, dinner-dishes and dish-covers of gold or silver-gilt, besides chains and other jewels, incalculably rich, though tarnished with the damps of the vault; for, of all the wealth that was irrevocably lost to man, whether buried in the earth or sunken in the sea, Peter Goldthwaite had found it in this one treasure-place. Anon he had returned to the old house as poor as ever, and was received at the door by the gaunt and grizzled figure of a man whom he might have mistaken for himself, only that his garments were of a much elder fashion. But the house, without losing its former aspect, had been changed into a palace of the precious metals. The floors, walls and ceilings were of burnished silver; the doors, the window-frames, the cornices, the balustrades and the steps of the staircase, of pure gold; and silver, with gold bottoms, were the chairs, and gold, standing on silver legs, the high chests of drawers, and silver the bedsteads, with blankets of woven gold and sheets of silver tissue. The house had evidently been transmuted by a single touch, for it retained all the marks that Peter remembered, but in gold or silver instead of wood, and the initials of his name— which when a boy he had cut in the wooden door-post— remained as deep in the pillar of gold. A happy man would have been Peter Goldthwaite except for a certain ocular deception which, whenever he glanced backward, caused the house to darken from its glittering magnificence into the sordid gloom of yesterday.

Up betimes rose Peter, seized an axe, hammer and saw which he had placed by his bedside, and hied him to the garret. It was but scantily lighted up as yet by the frosty fragments of a sunbeam which began to glimmer through

the almost opaque bull-eyes of the window. A moralizer might find abundant themes for his speculative and impracticable wisdom in a garret. There is the limbo of departed fashions, aged trifles of a day and whatever was valuable only to one generation of men, and which passed to the garret when that generation passed to the grave— not for safekeeping, but to be out of the way. Peter saw piles of yellow and musty account-books in parchment covers, wherein creditors long dead and buried had written the names of dead and buried debtors in ink now so faded that their moss-grown tombstones were more legible. He found old moth-eaten garments, all in rags and tatters, or Peter would have put them on. Here was a naked and rusty sword— not a sword of service, but a gentleman's small French rapier— which had never left its scabbard till it lost it. Here were canes of twenty different sorts, but no gold-headed ones, and shoebuckles of various pattern and material, but not silver nor set with precious stones. Here was a large box full of shoes with high heels and peaked toes. Here, on a shelf, were a multitude of phials half filled with old apothecary's stuff which, when the other half had done its business on Peter's ancestors, had been brought hither from the death-chamber. Here— not to give a longer inventory of articles that will never be put up at auction— was the fragment of a full-length looking-glass which by the dust and dimness of its surface made the picture of these old things look older than the reality. When Peter, not knowing that there was a mirror there, caught the faint traces of his own figure, he partly imagined that the former Peter Goldthwaite had come back either to assist or impede his search for the hidden wealth. And at that moment a strange notion glimmered through his brain that he was the identical Peter who had concealed the gold, and ought to know whereabout it lay. This, however, he had unaccountably forgotten.

"Well, Mr. Peter!" cried Tabitha, on the garret stairs. "Have you torn the house down enough to heat the teakettle?"

"Not yet, old Tabby," answered Peter, "but that's soon done, as you shall see." With the word in his mouth, he uplifted the axe, and laid about him so vigorously that the dust flew, the boards crashed, and in a twinkling the old woman had an apron full of broken rubbish.

"We shall get our winter's wood cheap," quoth Tabitha.

The good work being thus commenced, Peter beat down all before him, smiting and hewing at the joints and timbers, unclenching spike-nails, ripping and tearing away boards, with a tremendous racket from morning till night. He took care, however, to leave the outside shell of the house untouched, so that the neighbors might not suspect what was going on.

Never, in any of his vagaries, though each had made him happy while it lasted, had Peter been happier than now. Perhaps, after all, there was

something in Peter Goldthwaite's turn of mind which brought him an inward recompense for all the external evil that it caused. If he were poor, ill-clad, even hungry and exposed, as it were, to be utterly annihilated by a precipice of impending ruin, yet only his body remained in these miserable circumstances, while his aspiring soul enjoyed the sunshine of a bright futurity. It was his nature to be always young, and the tendency of his mode of life to keep him so. Gray hairs were nothing— no, nor wrinkles nor infirmity; he might look old, indeed, and be somewhat disagreeably connected with a gaunt old figure much the worse for wear, but the true, the essential Peter was a young man of high hopes just entering on the world. At the kindling of each new fire his burnt-out youth rose afresh from the old embers and ashes. It rose exulting now. Having lived thus long— not too long, but just to the right age— a susceptible bachelor with warm and tender dreams, he resolved, so soon as the hidden gold should flash to light, to go a-wooing and win the love of the fairest maid in town. What heart could resist him? Happy Peter Goldthwaite!

Every evening— as Peter had long absented himself from his former lounging-places at insurance offices, news-rooms, and book-stores, and as the honor of his company was seldom requested in private circles— he and Tabitha used to sit down sociably by the kitchen hearth. This was always heaped plentifully with the rubbish of his day's labor. As the foundation of the fire there would be a goodly-sized back-log of red oak, which after being sheltered from rain or damp above a century still hissed with the heat and distilled streams of water from each end, as if the tree had been cut down within a week or two. Next there were large sticks, sound, black and heavy, which had lost the principle of decay and were indestructible except by fire, wherein they glowed like red-hot bars of iron. On this solid basis Tabitha would rear a lighter structure, composed of the splinters of door-panels, ornamented mouldings, and such quick combustibles, which caught like straw and threw a brilliant blaze high up the spacious flue, making its sooty sides visible almost to the chimney-top. Meantime, the gloom of the old kitchen would be chased out of the cobwebbed corners and away from the dusky cross-beams overhead, and driven nobody could tell whither, while Peter smiled like a gladsome man and Tabitha seemed a picture of comfortable age. All this, of course, was but an emblem of the bright fortune which the destruction of the house would shed upon its occupants.

While the dry pine was flaming and crackling like an irregular discharge of fairy-musketry, Peter sat looking and listening in a pleasant state of excitement; but when the brief blaze and uproar were succeeded by the dark-red glow, the substantial heat and the deep singing sound which were to last throughout the evening, his humor became talkative. One night— the

hundredth time— he teased Tabitha to tell him something new about his great-granduncle.

"You have been sitting in that chimney-corner fifty-five years, old Tabby, and must have heard many a tradition about him," said Peter. "Did not you tell me that when you first came to the house there was an old woman sitting where you sit now who had been housekeeper to the famous Peter Goldthwaite?"

"So there was, Mr. Peter," answered Tabitha, "and she was near about a hundred years old. She used to say that she and old Peter Goldthwaite had often spent a sociable evening by the kitchen fire— pretty much as you and I are doing now, Mr. Peter."

"The old fellow must have resembled me in more points than one," said Peter, complacently, "or he never would have grown so rich. But methinks he might have invested the money better than he did. No interest! nothing but good security! and the house to be torn down to come at it! What made him hide it so snug, Tabby?"

"Because he could not spend it," said Tabitha, "for as often as he went to unlock the chest the Old Scratch came behind and caught his arm. The money, they say, was paid Peter out of his purse, and he wanted Peter to give him a deed of this house and land, which Peter swore he would not do."

"Just as I swore to John Brown, my old partner," remarked Peter. "But this is all nonsense, Tabby; I don't believe the story."

"Well, it may not be just the truth," said Tabitha, "for some folks say that Peter did make over the house to the Old Scratch, and that's the reason it has always been so unlucky to them that lived in it. And as soon as Peter had given him the deed the chest flew open, and Peter caught up a handful of the gold. But, lo and behold! there was nothing in his fist but a parcel of old rags."

"Hold your tongue, you silly old Tabby!" cried Peter, in great wrath. "They were as good golden guineas as ever bore the effigies of the king of England. It seems as if I could recollect the whole circumstance, and how I, or old Peter, or whoever it was, thrust in my hand, or his hand, and drew it out all of a blaze with gold. Old rags indeed!"

But it was not an old woman's legend that would discourage Peter Goldthwaite. All night long he slept among pleasant dreams, and awoke at daylight with a joyous throb of the heart which few are fortunate enough to feel beyond their boyhood. Day after day he labored hard without wasting a moment except at meal-times, when Tabitha summoned him to the pork and cabbage, or such other sustenance as she had picked up or Providence had sent them. Being a truly pious man, Peter never failed to ask a blessing— if the food were none of the best, then so much the more earnestly, as it was more

needed— nor to return thanks, if the dinner had been scanty, yet for the good appetite which was better than a sick stomach at a feast. Then did he hurry back to his toil, and in a moment was lost to sight in a cloud of dust from the old walls, though sufficiently perceptible to the ear by the clatter which he raised in the midst of it.

How enviable is the consciousness of being usefully employed! Nothing troubled Peter, or nothing but those phantoms of the mind which seem like vague recollections, yet have also the aspect of presentiments. He often paused with his axe uplifted in the air, and said to himself, "Peter Goldthwaite, did you never strike this blow before?" or "Peter, what need of tearing the whole house down? Think a little while, and you will remember where the gold is hidden." Days and weeks passed on, however, without any remarkable discovery. Sometimes, indeed, a lean gray rat peeped forth at the lean gray man, wondering what devil had got into the old house, which had always been so peaceable till now. And occasionally Peter sympathized with the sorrows of a female mouse who had brought five or six pretty, little, soft and delicate young ones into the world just in time to see them crushed by its ruin. But as yet no treasure.

By this time, Peter, being as determined as fate and as diligent as time, had made an end with the uppermost regions and got down to the second story, where he was busy in one of the front chambers. It had formerly been the state-bedchamber, and was honored by tradition as the sleeping-apartment of Governor Dudley and many other eminent guests. The furniture was gone. There were remnants of faded and tattered paper-hangings, but larger spaces of bare wall ornamented with charcoal sketches, chiefly of people's heads in profile. These being specimens of Peter's youthful genius, it went more to his heart to obliterate them than if they had been pictures on a church wall by Michael Angelo. One sketch, however, and that the best one, affected him differently. It represented a ragged man partly supporting himself on a spade and bending his lean body over a hole in the earth, with one hand extended to grasp something that he had found. But close behind him, with a fiendish laugh on his features, appeared a figure with horns, a tufted tail and a cloven hoof.

"Avaunt, Satan!" cried Peter. "The man shall have his gold." Uplifting his axe, he hit the horned gentleman such a blow on the head as not only demolished him, but the treasure-seeker also, and caused the whole scene to vanish like magic. Moreover, his axe broke quite through the plaster and laths and discovered a cavity.

"Mercy on us, Mr. Peter! Are you quarrelling with the Old Scratch?" said Tabitha, who was seeking some fuel to put under the dinner-pot.

Without answering the old woman, Peter broke down a further space of the wall, and laid open a small closet or cupboard on one side of the fireplace, about breast-high from the ground. It contained nothing but a brass lamp covered with verdigris, and a dusty piece of parchment. While Peter inspected the latter, Tabitha seized the lamp and began to rub it with her apron.

"There is no use in rubbing it, Tabitha," said Peter. "It is not Aladdin's lamp, though I take it to be a token of as much luck. Look here, Tabby!"

Tabitha took the parchment and held it close to her nose, which was saddled with a pair of iron-bound spectacles. But no sooner had she begun to puzzle over it than she burst into a chuckling laugh, holding both her hands against her sides.

"You can't make a fool of the old woman," cried she. "This is your own handwriting, Mr. Peter, the same as in the letter you sent me from Mexico."

"There is certainly a considerable resemblance," said Peter, again examining the parchment. "But you know yourself, Tabby, that this closet must have been plastered up before you came to the house or I came into the world. No; this is old Peter Goldthwaite's writing. These columns of pounds, shillings and pence are his figures, denoting the amount of the treasure, and this, at the bottom, is doubtless a reference to the place of concealment. But the ink has either faded or peeled off, so that it is absolutely illegible. What a pity!"

"Well, this lamp is as good as new. That's some comfort," said Tabitha.

"A lamp!" thought Peter. "That indicates light on my researches."

For the present Peter felt more inclined to ponder on this discovery than to resume his labors. After Tabitha had gone down stairs he stood poring over the parchment at one of the front windows, which was so obscured with dust that the sun could barely throw an uncertain shadow of the casement across the floor. Peter forced it open and looked out upon the great street of the town, while the sun looked in at his old house. The air, though mild, and even warm, thrilled Peter as with a dash of water.

It was the first day of the January thaw. The snow lay deep upon the housetops, but was rapidly dissolving into millions of water-drops, which sparkled downward through the sunshine with the noise of a summer shower beneath the eaves. Along the street the trodden snow was as hard and solid as a pavement of white marble, and had not yet grown moist in the spring-like temperature. But when Peter thrust forth his head, he saw that the inhabitants, if not the town, were already thawed out by this warm day, after two or three weeks of winter weather. It gladdened him— a gladness with a sigh breathing through it— to see the stream of ladies gliding along the slippery sidewalks with their red cheeks set off by quilted hoods, boas and

sable capes like roses amidst a new kind of foliage. The sleigh bells jingled to and fro continually, sometimes announcing the arrival of a sleigh from Vermont laden with the frozen bodies of porkers or sheep, and perhaps a deer or two; sometimes, of a regular marketman with chickens, geese and turkeys, comprising the whole colony of a barn-yard; and sometimes, of a farmer and his dame who had come to town partly for the ride, partly to go a-shopping and partly for the sale of some eggs and butter. This couple rode in an old-fashioned square sleigh which had served them twenty winters and stood twenty summers in the sun beside their door. Now a gentleman and lady skimmed the snow in an elegant car shaped somewhat like a cockle-shell; now a stage-sleigh with its cloth curtains thrust aside to admit the sun dashed rapidly down the street, whirling in and out among the vehicles that obstructed its passage; now came round a corner the similitude of Noah's ark on runners, being an immense open sleigh with seats for fifty people and drawn by a dozen horses. This spacious receptacle was populous with merry maids and merry bachelors, merry girls and boys and merry old folks, all alive with fun and grinning to the full width of their mouths. They kept up a buzz of babbling voices and low laughter, and sometimes burst into a deep, joyous shout which the spectators answered with three cheers, while a gang of roguish boys let drive their snow-balls right among the pleasure-party. The sleigh passed on, and when concealed by a bend of the street was still audible by a distant cry of merriment.

Never had Peter beheld a livelier scene than was constituted by all these accessories— the bright sun, the flashing water-drops, the gleaming snow, the cheerful multitude, the variety of rapid vehicles and the jingle-jangle of merry bells which made the heart dance to their music. Nothing dismal was to be seen except that peaked piece of antiquity Peter Goldthwaite's house, which might well look sad externally, since such a terrible consumption was preying on its insides. And Peter's gaunt figure, half visible in the projecting second story, was worthy of his house.

"Peter! How goes it, friend Peter?" cried a voice across the street as Peter was drawing in his head. "Look out here, Peter!"

Peter looked, and saw his old partner, Mr. John Brown, on the opposite sidewalk, portly and comfortable, with his furred cloak thrown open, disclosing a handsome surtout beneath. His voice had directed the attention of the whole town to Peter Goldthwaite's window, and to the dusty scarecrow which appeared at it.

"I say, Peter!" cried Mr. Brown, again; "what the devil are you about there, that I hear such a racket whenever I pass by? You are repairing the old house, I suppose, making a new one of it? Eh?"

"Too late for that, I am afraid, Mr. Brown," replied Peter. "If I make it new, it will be new inside and out, from the cellar upward."

"Had not you better let me take the job?" said Mr. Brown, significantly.

"Not yet," answered Peter, hastily shutting the window; for ever since he had been in search of the treasure he hated to have people stare at him.

As he drew back, ashamed of his outward poverty, yet proud of the secret wealth within his grasp, a haughty smile shone out on Peter's visage with precisely the effect of the dim sunbeams in the squalid chamber. He endeavored to assume such a mien as his ancestor had probably worn when he gloried in the building of a strong house for a home to many generations of his posterity. But the chamber was very dark to his snow-dazzled eyes, and very dismal, too, in contrast with the living scene that he had just looked upon. His brief glimpse into the street had given him a forcible impression of the manner in which the world kept itself cheerful and prosperous by social pleasures and an intercourse of business, while he in seclusion was pursuing an object that might possibly be a phantasm by a method which most people would call madness. It is one great advantage of a gregarious mode of life that each person rectifies his mind by other minds and squares his conduct to that of his neighbors, so as seldom to be lost in eccentricity. Peter Goldthwaite had exposed himself to this influence by merely looking out of the window. For a while he doubted whether there were any hidden chest of gold, and in that case whether it was so exceedingly wise to tear the house down only to be convinced of its non-existence.

But this was momentary. Peter the Destroyer resumed the task which Fate had assigned him, nor faltered again till it was accomplished. In the course of his search he met with many things that are usually found in the ruins of an old house, and also with some that are not. What seemed most to the purpose was a rusty key which had been thrust into a chink of the wall, with a wooden label appended to the handle, bearing the initials "P.G." Another singular discovery was that of a bottle of wine walled up in an old oven. A tradition ran in the family that Peter's grandfather, a jovial officer in the old French war, had set aside many dozens of the precious liquor for the benefit of topers then unborn. Peter needed no cordial to sustain his hopes, and therefore kept the wine to gladden his success. Many half-pence did he pick up that had been lost through the cracks of the floor, and some few Spanish coins, and the half of a broken sixpence which had doubtless been a love-token. There was likewise a silver coronation medal of George III. But old Peter Goldthwaite's strong-box fled from one dark corner to another, or otherwise eluded the second Peter's clutches till, should he seek much farther, he must burrow into the earth.

We will not follow him in his triumphant progress step by step. Suffice it that Peter worked like a steam-engine and finished in that one winter the job which all the former inhabitants of the house, with time and the elements to aid them, had only half done in a century. Except the kitchen, every room and chamber was now gutted. The house was nothing but a shell, the apparition of a house, as unreal as the painted edifices of a theatre. It was like the perfect rind of a great cheese in which a mouse had dwelt and nibbled till it was a cheese no more. And Peter was the mouse.

What Peter had torn down, Tabitha had burnt up, for she wisely considered that without a house they should need no wood to warm it, and therefore economy was nonsense. Thus the whole house might be said to have dissolved in smoke and flown up among the clouds through the great black flue of the kitchen chimney. It was an admirable parallel to the feat of the man who jumped down his own throat.

On the night between the last day of winter and the first of spring every chink and cranny had been ransacked except within the precincts of the kitchen. This fated evening was an ugly one. A snow-storm had set in some hours before, and was still driven and tossed about the atmosphere by a real hurricane which fought against the house as if the prince of the air in person were putting the final stroke to Peter's labors. The framework being so much weakened and the inward props removed, it would have been no marvel if in some stronger wrestle of the blast the rotten walls of the edifice and all the peaked roofs had come crashing down upon the owner's head. He, however, was careless of the peril, but as wild and restless as the night itself, or as the flame that quivered up the chimney at each roar of the tempestuous wind.

"The wine, Tabitha," he cried— "my grandfather's rich old wine! We will drink it now."

Tabitha arose from her smoke-blackened bench in the chimney-corner and placed the bottle before Peter, close beside the old brass lamp which had likewise been the prize of his researches. Peter held it before his eyes, and, looking through the liquid medium, beheld the kitchen illuminated with a golden glory which also enveloped Tabitha and gilded her silver hair and converted her mean garments into robes of queenly splendor. It reminded him of his golden dream.

"Mr. Peter," remarked Tabitha, "must the wine be drunk before the money is found?"

"The money *is* found!" exclaimed Peter, with a sort of fierceness. "The chest is within my reach; I will not sleep till I have turned this key in the rusty lock. But first of all let us drink."

There being no corkscrew in the house, he smote the neck of the bottle with old Peter Goldthwaite's rusty key, and decapitated the sealed cork at a single blow. He then filled two little china teacups which Tabitha had brought from the cupboard. So clear and brilliant was this aged wine that it shone within the cups and rendered the sprig of scarlet flowers at the bottom of each more distinctly visible than when there had been no wine there. Its rich and delicate perfume wasted itself round the kitchen.

"Drink, Tabitha!" cried Peter. "Blessings on the honest old fellow who set aside this good liquor for you and me! And here's to Peter Goldthwaite's memory!"

"And good cause have we to remember him," quoth Tabitha as she drank.

How many years, and through what changes of fortune and various calamity, had that bottle hoarded up its effervescent joy, to be quaffed at last by two such boon-companions! A portion of the happiness of a former age had been kept for them, and was now set free in a crowd of rejoicing visions to sport amid the storm and desolation of the present time. Until they have finished the bottle we must turn our eyes elsewhere.

It so chanced that on this stormy night Mr. John Brown found himself ill at ease in his wire-cushioned arm-chair by the glowing grate of anthracite which heated his handsome parlor. He was naturally a good sort of a man, and kind and pitiful whenever the misfortunes of others happened to reach his heart through the padded vest of his own prosperity. This evening he had thought much about his old partner, Peter Goldthwaite, his strange vagaries and continual ill-luck, the poverty of his dwelling at Mr. Brown's last visit, and Peter's crazed and haggard aspect when he had talked with him at the window.

"Poor fellow!" thought Mr. John Brown. "Poor crack-brained Peter Goldthwaite! For old acquaintance' sake I ought to have taken care that he was comfortable this rough winter." These feelings grew so powerful that, in spite of the inclement weather, he resolved to visit Peter Goldthwaite immediately.

The strength of the impulse was really singular. Every shriek of the blast seemed a summons, or would have seemed so had Mr. Brown been accustomed to hear the echoes of his own fancy in the wind. Much amazed at such active benevolence, he huddled himself in his cloak, muffled his throat and ears in comforters and handkerchiefs, and, thus fortified, bade defiance to the tempest. But the powers of the air had rather the best of the battle. Mr. Brown was just weathering the corner by Peter Goldthwaite's house when the hurricane caught him off his feet, tossed him face downward into a snow-bank and proceeded to bury his protuberant part beneath fresh drifts. There seemed little hope of his reappearance earlier than the next thaw. At the same

moment his hat was snatched away and whirled aloft into some far-distant region whence no tidings have as yet returned.

Nevertheless Mr. Brown contrived to burrow a passage through the snow-drift, and with his bare head bent against the storm floundered onward to Peter's door. There was such a creaking and groaning and rattling, and such an ominous shaking, throughout the crazy edifice that the loudest rap would have been inaudible to those within. He therefore entered without ceremony, and groped his way to the kitchen. His intrusion even there was unnoticed. Peter and Tabitha stood with their backs to the door, stooping over a large chest which apparently they had just dragged from a cavity or concealed closet on the left side of the chimney. By the lamp in the old woman's hand Mr. Brown saw that the chest was barred and clamped with iron, strengthened with iron plates and studded with iron nails, so as to be a fit receptacle in which the wealth of one century might be hoarded up for the wants of another.

Peter Goldthwaite was inserting a key into the lock.

"Oh, Tabitha," cried he, with tremulous rapture, "how shall I endure the effulgence? The gold!— the bright, bright gold! Methinks I can remember my last glance at it just as the iron-plated lid fell down. And ever since, being seventy years, it has been blazing in secret and gathering its splendor against this glorious moment. It will flash upon us like the noonday sun."

"Then shade your eyes, Mr. Peter!" said Tabitha, with somewhat less patience than usual. "But, for mercy's sake, do turn the key!"

And with a strong effort of both hands Peter did force the rusty key through the intricacies of the rusty lock. Mr. Brown, in the mean time, had drawn near and thrust his eager visage between those of the other two at the instant that Peter threw up the lid. No sudden blaze illuminated the kitchen.

"What's here?" exclaimed Tabitha, adjusting her spectacles and holding the lamp over the open chest. "Old Peter Goldthwaite's hoard of old rags!"

"Pretty much so, Tabby," said Mr. Brown, lifting a handful of the treasure.

Oh what a ghost of dead and buried wealth had Peter Goldthwaite raised to scare himself out of his scanty wits withal! Here was the semblance of an incalculable sum, enough to purchase the whole town and build every street anew, but which, vast as it was, no sane man would have given a solid sixpence for. What, then, in sober earnest, were the delusive treasures of the chest? Why, here were old provincial bills of credit and treasury notes and bills of land-banks, and all other bubbles of the sort, from the first issue— above a century and a half ago— down nearly to the Revolution. Bills of a thousand pounds were intermixed with parchment pennies, and worth no more than they.

"And this, then, is old Peter Goldthwaite's treasure!" said John Brown. "Your namesake, Peter, was something like yourself; and when the provincial currency had depreciated fifty or seventy-five per cent, he bought it up in expectation of a rise. I have heard my grandfather say that old Peter gave his father a mortgage of this very house and land to raise cash for his silly project. But the currency kept sinking till nobody would take it as a gift, and there was old Peter Goldthwaite, like Peter the second, with thousands in his strong-box and hardly a coat to his back. He went mad upon the strength of it. But never mind, Peter; it is just the sort of capital for building castles in the air."

"The house will be down about our ears," cried Tabitha as the wind shook it with increasing violence.

"Let it fall," said Peter, folding his arms, as he seated himself upon the chest.

"No, no, my old friend Peter!" said John Brown. "I have house-room for you and Tabby, and a safe vault for the chest of treasure. To-morrow we will try to come to an agreement about the sale of this old house; real estate is well up, and I could afford you a pretty handsome price."

"And I," observed Peter Goldthwaite, with reviving spirits, "have a plan for laying out the cash to great advantage."

"Why, as to that," muttered John Brown to himself, "we must apply to the next court for a guardian to take care of the solid cash; and if Peter insists upon speculating, he may do it to his heart's content with old Peter Goldthwaite's treasure."

13: The Man Who Eventually Did

Edward Dyson

(As by Dy Edwardson)
1865-1931
Punch (Melbourne) 24 Oct 1918

HE CAME TO SUNUP (Sunup being an exclusive sort of resort for sore-heads, contrite drinkers, nerve sufferers, and convalescents of sorts), and put up at Wallington's Hospice; but, finding that Hammil's Zephyr Place, was more expensive, commodious, and tony, had his traps and ware carted over next day, and entered into possession of two of the next-best rooms looking east, only because the first best rooms looking north were all occupied.

W. Hanniwell Guest, which was the name scored all over his luggage, was very much hurt to find there was no very best room available, and said so frequently, and with every evidence of exasperation.

"It's the same everywhere, sir. Dem!— the same everywhere," he said, severely, addressing Hammil. "Wherever I go somebody else has got the things I want. Dem! Most aggravating. I say, most— most aggravating and irritating, sir. Dem!"

Zephyr Place was much frequented by a certain type of valetudinarian ladies of elderly airs, even if not always of marked antiquity. There were fattish widows and slimmish spinsters in quantities; and their habit was to sit iii the cool, commodious hall-way, or in the large garden, and knit inexplicable things that had never had a beginning, and would never have an end, and chatter and drink tea.

Mr. W. Hanniwell Guest created commotion among these simple people.

"Most impressive," said Miss Dix.

"Reminds me of Lord Kitchener," said Mrs. Cobb. "Not so much in appearance as in manner. You would think he was always drilling an army."

Guest was a slim, tallish, sandy man of about fifty, with the bones of his face rigidly outlined, and a tall, thin, imperial nose with two humps like a dromedary. His temper has been described as uncertain. It wasn't. It was dead certain. There was never a more reliable temper afflicted upon a peaceful community. Sun or gloom, warm or cold, wet or dry, W. Hanniwell Guest, was always exasperated.

Guest had a curious habit of talking to himself, particularly at meals. At breakfast, over his bacon, he would fix an intense, watery, grey eye, blinking through a sandy fringe of lashes, on the party directly opposite, and say:

"I will. I will. I'll do it. By Jimminy, I'll do it!"

The party opposite, assuming that he was supposed to be in the conversation, suavely replied: "What is it you will do, sir?"

Guest blinked at him for a moment, recalled himself to his bacon with an effort and retorted :

"Dem! How dare you, sir? How dare you interfere, sir? Go to the deuce, sir!" Which was most disconcerting.

Guest had other extraordinary qualities. He was a ruthless borrower, and his method amounted almost to pillage. If he saw an article he fancied, and he could get his hands upon it, he said:

"Dem! I like this. I'll take a little loan of it. No, no, no, no. I'll hear of no refusal. Just a loan. Dem!" And off he would go.

In this way, William Hanniwell Guest secured Bean's shaving set, Bell's silver-backed brushes, Nicholl's bull-hide travelling bag, Kingham's dressing-gown, Mrs. Patterson's gold-top sunshade, Sloan's calf-bound set of Robert Louis Stevenson's works, and Weber's silver cornet.

Everybody protested, but nobody got any satisfaction out of Guest, and the talk of calling in police assistance and the protection of the statutes concerned him about as much as if they had threatened him with the vengeance of the moth.

But William's most successful efforts were among the spinsters. He was not altogether a dismal failure with the pining widows, but the afflicted spinsters were carried off their heels by his tremendous snorting manner, and his air of a generalissimo dealing with a refractory regiment.

W. Hanniwell Guest made love to ladies in an extraordinary way.

"You're a dem fine little woman, Lucy," he told Miss Dix, when he had known her rather less than two hours— "an uncommonly dem fine little woman. Never saw a dem finer pair of eyes in all my life. Dem!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest!" exclaimed the spinster, quite overcome.

"Now, you are," persisted Guest, threatening her with a forceful forefinger. "No denials. I'll take no denials. I wonder you never married. Dem, if it isn't wholly inexplicable to me, the number of dem fine women who have never married. This will have to be altered. It'll have to be seen to."

"But, Mr. Guest," tittered Miss Dix, "one may have had one's chances. One may not have wanted to get married. Te-he! Te-he-he."

"Stuff!" thundered Guest, in his best military manner. "Stuff and dem nonsense! Every woman wants to get married." Then he fell into his sudden habit of self-communing. "I'll do it!" he said. "I'll do it! Yes, by gad, I will!"

Miss Dix was a timid little thing of thirty-eight, with hair that curled naturally after nine hours close confinement in curl-papers, a long thin neck, too much nose, and a strange, insistent, and most despicable simper.

"Te-he!" she tittered. "What will you do, Mr. Guest. Te-he-he!"

Guest was recalled to himself. "Don't interfere!" he commanded. "Mind your own dem business, if you please."

"But you said—"

"Nothing of the kind." Guest transfixed her with his probe-like digit. "Nothing of the kind, I tell you." Then with one of his surprising lightning changes. " 'Pon my word and soul, that's a lovely bangle you're wearing dear lady. Would you permit me? Black opals and diamonds. Yes, yes. Never saw anything finer. Would you mind if I took this to compare it with a set in my collection? Superb! Superb! Ah, thank you, thank you."

Miss Dix had not said a word, but Guest put her diamond and opal bangle in his pocket. A wild idea had taken possession of her maiden heart.

"Pie wishes to get an engagement ring to match," she whispered to her own soul.

Guest had paid his first fourteen days' board with a wonderful blue and purple cheque, signed with a paralyzing arabesque; but it was met all right, and when the bill for the next fortnight was presented, W. Hanniwell Guest suffered a whirlwind of indignation, tore it up, and threw the fragments at Hammil.

"Dem if I'll pay oftener than once a month. Dem if I'll be bothered," he said. "Dem if I ever met such a man. Dem!"

And all this while, W. Hanniwell had been voicing his absurd asides all over the house. "I'll do it! I'll do it! Wouldn't you? I will. I will, by gad!"

Newcomers within hearing usually replied, whereupon Guest, awakening from his trance, would retort:

"Dem, madame, never said a word. Dem! Suggest that you mind your own dem business. Dem!"

Guest had since borrowed Plover's gold-top umbrella, Miss Quine's scent spray, MacFarland's telescope, Henty's shaving-mirror, Earle's camera, and Mrs. Pett's hand-painted fan.

ONE AFTERNOON W. Hanniwell rang up for a stout cord. A length of clothes-line was sent him. He went to the proprietor, raving.

"Dem!" he said, "what you mean? What you mean, sir, by sending a gentleman an abominable thing like this? Dem! Dem, sir, I want something better. I want your best. Dem! Yes, dem!"

He got twelve feet of fine window cord, and seemed content.

"I'll do it," he said that evening over the soup. "I'll do it, by Jove! Why not?''

"Most remarkable man," whispered Miss Dix to Bean, on her right. "Tremendous brain. Always active— thinking, thinking, thinking."

"Dippy as a headless hen," growled Bean. "That's his greatness, if you ask me. The confounded fellow's always going to do it, but he never does—whatever the 'deuce it may be."

"Ah, but he will. Te-he-he-he-he! He will. He's going to."

"Going to what?"

"He's meditating a— te-he-he!— I don't like to say. I really am so shy. But he is meditating a great event, dear man."

Miss Cobb had fixed the tittering Miss Dix with a cold, hard, scornful eye.

"Much you know about it," she said. "If William has any confidante, it is I. If he were meditating any serious action I am certain he would not keep it from me. Would you, William?"

Miss Cobb had addressed W. Hanniwell Guest, pointedly, across the table. Mr. Guest had borrowed a gold-top umbrella of hers, also a scent bottle of beautiful silver filigree. Miss Amelia Cobb imagined that these facts and same few emphatic remarks on the dem folly of a dem fine girl of Miss Cobb's proportions remaining single gave her right of familiar address.

"Did you address me, young lady?" demanded Guest. He pulled his Norseman moustache, and his high old Norman nose was inflated threateningly. "Did you presume to address me in that way? Well, don't do it. Won't have it! Dem impertinence."

Miss Cobb gasped like a cod out of water; she flushed crimson; she half arose.

"Well, I never!" she said. "Well, I never did t In all my life I never did hear of such a thing!"

There were others, of course. From Mrs. Steven Howe, William had taken a handsome wrist-watch, with the accompanying bracelet.

"I want it," he said. "Not for long, perhaps, but it's necessary." He put it in his pocket.

MRS. Steven Plowe was a little fat widow, full of dimples, a comfortable lady whom the late Howe had left well cared for, and who, although the afore-mentioned, definitely-departed Plowe had not been the sort of husband to induce a woman to repeat the matrimonial experiment, was still willing to try her luck, especially with a gentleman of undoubted breeding and apparent wealth, like William Hanniwell Guest, for instance.

And William had only said: "You're the type of woman that should marry again, and again, and again, if necessary. You should not remain unmarried. It's wrong. Dem me, it's a sin. I— I almost ask 'How dare you?' "

"But, Mr. Guest, one has to be so careful."

"No. Drop that. Don't talk dem nonsense to me. A woman hasn't to be careful. That's for the man. You ought to marry. By gad, you shall marry!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest— William!"

"I'll do it," said Guest, in a half-whisper, again dropping into his absurd habit of soliloquy. "I'll do it. One of these days, I'll do it."

Mrs. Steven Howe took his hand, and pressed it. She had forgotten all about her watch,

"When?" she said, shyly.

"I'll do it," said Guest. "I'll do it!" and he left her without another word.

THEN came Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was a tall, fair, full-busted, severely corsetted woman of forty. She had a nose of marked character, and carried a dog, and a lorgnette.

William encountered her as she entered the hall before the knitting guests. He seemed amazed.

"Sophie!" he gasped. Then he seized her clog. "By gad I'm glad you've come. You're going to marry me!" he said. "It's agreed, then?"

"William, don't be an idiot," said Mrs. Beanleigh. "Before all these people, too. I have just come up to have a little rest and change. I have not altered my mind at all."

"You won't marry me? You are still the same dem obstinate, pig-headed, blackguard of a woman." Guest was dancing with indignation. He dropped the dog.

Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was now conscious of the fact that she was the centre of a throng of distinctly hostile females.

"Excuse me, madam," said one, "but that is my wristlet watch you are wearing."

"And that is my lorgnette," said another.

"And that is my gold-topped sunshade," observed a third.

"I'll do it!" said Guest. "Dem, I'll do it!" He fled upstairs. From the first landing he cried. "I'll do it! I'll do it!"

The lodgers at Zephyr Place had made an astounding discovery. Guest had been sending all the articles of value secured from them to Mrs. Beanleigh, in Melbourne. He had even sent her Bean's shaving set. "

"He has been wanting me to marry him for two years," Mrs. Beanleigh explained— "ever since soon after my first husband's death. He left me in a rage because I refused him. He sent me these things, and many more, as love gifts."

HAMMIL, the proprietor, having heard all this, perceived that the moment was opportune to urge a settlement of his bill. He headed a deputation to the rooms of W. Hanniwell Guest,

On the table was a parcel addressed to Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. It contained a clock valued at seven pounds— Hammil's clock.

In the bedroom hanging from the chandelier by a length of window cord was the body of W. Hanniwell Guest. Pinned to the shirt of deceased was a card, oh which was written in bold black letters:

"Done it!"

"Unsound mind!" said the coroner's jury.

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14: My Astral Body

Anthony Hope

1863-1933

In: *Sport Royal and Other Stories*, 1893

"THERE'S no doubt at all about it," said the rajah, relighting his cigar. "It's perfectly easy, if you know how to do it. The skepticism of the West is nothing less than disgusting."

The rajah had come to Oxford to complete his education and endue himself with the culture of Europe; and he sat in my rooms, in a frock-coat of perfect cut (he always wore a frock-coat), smoking one of my weeds and drinking a whisky-and-soda. The rajah took to European culture with avidity, and I have very little doubt that he learned many new things with which it might or might not be expedient to acquaint his fellow-countrymen and subjects when he returned to India. But all the intellectual interests of Oxford were not strong enough to wean him from his love for the ancient lore of his own country, and he was always ready to expound the hidden wisdom of the East to any inquiring spirit. As soon as I found this out, I cultivated his acquaintance sedulously; for, in common with all intelligent men of the present day, I took a keen interest in that strange learning which seemed to give its possessors such extraordinary powers.

"Can you do it?" I asked.

"I should hope so," said the rajah contemptuously. "If I couldn't do that, I'd turn Mahommedan."

"I wish you'd teach me."

The rajah took in a deep puff of smoke. "You're sure you could manage it?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, of course, like anything else, an astral body must be treated with tact, or it gets out of hand."

"Does it?"

"Why, yes; you must be firm and yet kind. Don't let it take liberties, or you don't know where it will land you. I rather doubt if I ought to show you."

I implored him to do so. I was young, rash, self-confident, and I thought I could manage an astral body as easily as I did the dean.

"Don't blame me if you find it too much for you, that's all," said the rajah. "And of course you must promise not to tell anyone."

"Oh, must I?"

"Yes, you must; because it's quite irregular in me to show you like this. You ought, by rights, you know, to go to Thibet for seven years."

"That would be rather a bore."

"Beastly," said the rajah; "but of course they insist on it, because they get the fees."

He swore me to secrecy by all manner of oaths, and lastly on my word as a gentleman; and then he showed me. I practiced all that evening, and was tolerably proficient by the time the rajah knocked out his last pipe and went off to bed. I must not tell how it is done, as I promised not to; besides, if anyone reads this narrative through, he will never want to know.

At first it was very convenient. I always used to project it to chapel instead of going myself. It did capitally there, because it had only to behave itself and hold its tongue. At lectures it was a failure; it was such an inattentive beggar that its notes were worth nothing. And it was no sort of use in the Torpid; I was told that I should be turned out if I went on "sugaring" like that— there's no pluck or endurance in these Orientals. On the whole, however, I was very well satisfied with it, and came to rely upon it more and more for all the unpleasant duties of life.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked the rajah one day in Quad.

"My dear fellow, it's splendid," I answered. "It's up in town, being measured for trousers, now. You can't think how much trouble it saves."

The rajah smiled and shook his head.

"Be moderate," he said. "You mustn't use it too much, or it'll presume on it."

"Will it? What will it do?"

"Why, if it's always being projected, it's as likely as not it'll learn the trick of it, and take to projecting itself. Then you'll be left in the lurch."

"What shall I do then?"

"I don't see what you can do," said the rajah, scratching his head. "Of course, I should merely report it at headquarters; but you can't, because you've no business with it at all."

"Well, I shan't grudge it a holiday now and then," I said magnanimously.

The rajah was right. It did begin to take French leave. Several times when I wanted it I found it had, without a word of apology, projected itself off to Iffley or somewhere, and was not available. I spoke very severely to it. It said nothing, but listened with an unpleasant sort of smile. "We all have our duties," I remarked, "and yours is to be here"— and I pointed to my chest— "when you are wanted. You're as bad as a scout."

"I ought to have a little relaxation," it answered sulkily.

"I never heard of such a thing in connection with you. Isn't it enough for you to meditate in four dimensions when you're not at work? That would satisfy most people."

"It's all very well in Thibet," it grumbled; "but a fellow doesn't come to Oxford to do that."

"One would think you had nothing to do with me. You seem to forget that you are simply a projection of mine."

We had some high words and parted— I mean, united— in very bad temper with one another. It was in the middle of a most impertinent and positively threatening speech, when I terminated the interview by resuming it. It was very unreasonable and irritating, and I made up my mind to ask the rajah to speak to it the next morning. I had an engagement that evening, or I would have done it then. How I wish I had!

At half-past nine I went to an "At Home" at Professor Drayton's. As a rule, "At Homes" are dull; but I had a reason for going to this one. The professor had a very pretty daughter, and I was vain enough to think that my presence was welcome to her. In fact, we were great friends, and I had not been at the house a quarter of an hour before I had forgotten all my worries with my unruly Astral Body, and was sitting by Bessie in the small drawing room, enjoying myself immensely. Suddenly— mysteriously— I felt something like a violent push. Bessie vanished; the drawing room vanished; and I found myself in the High, standing in dripping rain, without a hat or coat. I stood still in bewilderment. What had happened? A moment later the proctor was upon me. I gave my name and college in a mechanical way, and he passed on, leaving me still standing in the rain. What had happened? Then it flashed across my mind. I understood its threats. It had projected me!

I woke up next morning, determined to have it out with it. I found, as I expected, that it had waited till I was asleep; then it slunk in and united without my knowing it. I went and paid my fine, and then, not waiting to breakfast, I proceeded to project it. It wouldn't move! I tried again and again. I had no more power over it than a child. I knew it was there; but I could not move it an inch. In wrath, I jumped up, seized my cap, and started for the rajah's rooms. The rogue saw what I was up to. I give you my word, I had not reached the door when it projected me most viciously, and I landed down in the Parks.

I was not to be beaten. I came back to college at a run, and made straight for the rajah's rooms. It was on the lookout for me. As I ran by my oak, which I had to pass, it rushed out on me, united, and projected me back again to Magdalen Bridge. This happened three times. Then I sat down in the Parks, just where I dropped, and acknowledged to myself that I was in a pretty fix.

I had a fearful week of it. Of course, wherever I was, it could unite at once by just thinking of me; and, directly it had united, it used, I believe out of pure malice, to project me somewhere where I did not want to go. It was lucky for

me that it was new to the business; its powers were as yet very undeveloped, and, consequently, it did not carry very far. If it could, I am sure it would have sent me to the Antipodes; but as it was, I never went further than the University boat-house— a pretty tidy step on a bad morning. Still, it was improving; and I felt that I must act at once if I did not want to be a permanent wanderer on the face of the earth.

My only chance was to engross its attention in some way, so that it would forget me for a little while, and leave me free to speak to the rajah. I pinned all my hopes on the rajah. Well, one morning, about a week after it first projected me, I went for a walk in Christchurch Meadow. We were united, and it had actually left me in peace ever since breakfast. I hoped its better feelings were beginning to get the mastery of it, and, in order to see, I tried to project it. No, it wouldn't move! The creature was still recalcitrant.

Suddenly I saw Bessie Drayton just in front of me. In delight at seeing her, I forgot about it, and, quickening my pace, overtook her, and lifted my hat. She smiled divinely, saying, "Why, Mr. Nares, I just going to write—" At that moment, when I was listening to her sweet voice, it projected me! Could ill-nature go further? But, luckily, its mind was not really concentrated on what it was doing. I believe it was thinking of Bessie, and consequently it only carried about a hundred yards. I landed behind one of the big elms, where I lay perdu till it had gone by. It and Bessie passed me together, and it was grinning from ear to ear, and looked as pleased as Punch. And poor Bessie, who thought she was talking to me, was being most charming to it.

I did not waste time in swearing. I ran like the wind back to college, hoping that Bessie's society would prevent it coming after me till I had spoken to the rajah. I still retained one pull over it. In order to unite, it had to come where I was; it could not resume me from a distance, as I used to resume it; so if it united now it would have to leave Bessie.

By a blessed chance, the rajah was at home, and in trembling haste I poured my story into his ear. He burst out laughing.

"I was afraid of it!" he gasped, holding his sides. "How splendid!"

I restrained my annoyance, and after a time he became a little more grave.

"Do help me!" I urged. "It may unite at any moment, and project me the deuce knows where."

"Oh, it'll be all right with the young lady."

"Not for long. She's very particular, and won't let it walk far with her."

"Oh, then we must act. You don't feel it yet?"

"No; but do be quick!"

The rajah sported his oak, took off his coat, lay down on the floor, and went into strong convulsions.

I regretted putting him to so much trouble, but my need was urgent, and I knew that he was a good-natured man. Presently he cried (and I was just getting alarmed about him):

"Are you there, Nani-Tal?"

"Certainly," said an old white-haired gentleman, dressed in a sheet, who sat in the rajah's armchair.

"That's all right," said the rajah, getting up and putting on his coat. "You were very difficult."

"We're so busy just now," said Nani-Tal apologetically. "I'm demonstrating three nights a week, and the preparations take all my time."

"Well, you can't have a boom for nothing," said the rajah, smiling.

"I don't complain," said Nani-Tal; "I only mentioned it to excuse myself for keeping you waiting. I was in New York when you began materializing. It's a lively city."

"You must tell him all about it," said the rajah to me; "he won't be very hard on us."

Nani-Tal was, however, rather severe. He said it was too bad of the rajah. How were they to live, if that sort of thing went on? Then he turned to me, and added, "Of course you couldn't manage it. If you'd gone through the course, you would have been all right. But there, it's everything for nothing nowadays!"

"My friend couldn't go to Thibet."

"He might have paid the fees anyhow," grumbled Nani-Tal, "and taken correspondence lessons."

We smoothed him down with the promise of a handsome donation, and at last he consented to help us. It was only just in time, for at that very moment I felt my Astral Body uniting. A second later it made a violent effort to project me; of course, it saw Nani-Tal, and knew it was in for it. The old gentleman was too quick for it.

"Come out of that!" he cried imperiously, and the wretch stood in the middle of the room.

It did my heart good to hear Nani-Tal fall on the creature. After giving it no end of a lecture, he concluded, "And now, young man, you'll just go back to your jackal for a thousand years, and learn better manners."

The wretch protested; it asked for an elephant or even a tiger. Nani-Tal was obdurate.

"A jackal will just suit you," he said. "Be off!" The creature vanished. Simultaneously Nani-Tal began to disintegrate.

"Wait a bit!" cried the rajah.

"I can't. I'm summoned to St. James' Hall. There's a large audience, and the professor has been in convulsions seven minutes."

I tried to grasp his hand in thanks. "If you want another," he said, "you must go through the course— the full course. There's no other way. Let this be a lesson to you." And with this parting remark he disintegrated.

The rajah lit a cigar, and I, lighter at heart than I had been for many days, followed his example.

"It was wrong of me," said the rajah; "I won't do it again."

"It's a pity it turned out so badly," I remarked; "it was quite a comfort at first."

"They're all like that, unless you keep a tight hand on them. Shall you take the course?"

"Not I. I've had enough of it."

"Perhaps you're right. Excuse me; I have to go to the Deccan on business."

He fell back on the sofa, apparently in a trance, and I went off to the dean's lecture. It makes all the difference whether you know how to do a thing or not.

15: Silent, White and Beautiful

Tod Robbins

Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949

Smart Set, Apr 1918

In: *Silent, White and Beautiful and Other Stories* (1920)

TOMORROW at this time I shall be dead! I have repeated this phrase over and over since breakfast with the utmost calmness, with the utmost resignation. In no way have I attempted to blind myself to the truth. He who does that is lost. The philosopher alone is wise. Before the clear calm eyes of reason, the imaginary terrors of dissolution become infinitesimal specks of dust. I breathe upon them and they are gone.

And yet I cannot visualize my death. I have tried to many times, but have failed. Sitting down on the left hand corner of my cot, I attempt to picture the execution. My imagination has always been supernaturally acute. I can see the room and the chair— the chair dreaded by so many. And the witnesses? Yes, I can see them all those sensation-mongers. There is one fat old gentleman in a striped flannel waistcoat— an old gentleman who keeps on smiling and smiling. One would think he were at a wedding, his smile is so forced and unreal. And the others are like statues, grouped together to represent something.

Yes, I can see them all. But they are not looking at me. No, they are looking at another man— a man who has seated himself in the chair. But this man is not I. No, though he sits in my place, wears the new suit which was given me, bears my dishonored name, he is not I. And although I attempt to analyze this man's emotions, read the secret workings of that brain, understand the feelings of one in the shadow, the blade of imagination bends in my mind, becoming useless and dull.

Tomorrow at this time I shall be dead! This phrase no longer conjures up anything. Like a child who has repeated the Lord's Prayer over and over, so have I repeated, "Tomorrow at this time I shall be dead," till the words have become meaningless, sinking back into the black unexplored caverns of sound. And that this hand which guides the pencil— this live human hand— will in so short a space be motionless and powerless, cold and senseless, seems as impossible as the wildest dream. The voice of reason pounds dully against my eardrums, but cannot gain admittance. Perhaps it is better so.

Am I afraid of death? No. Then why have I taken up the pencil? Because, although I am not afraid of death, I am afraid of something which lurks on the invisible frontier— something which is quite apart from both life and death— something which reads my words, my looks, my gestures. And because of this silent sentinel in my cell, I have become a stranger to myself— an uncouth

awkward stranger. The egoist has fled, the artist who crushed conventionality beneath his heel; and in his place stands an unknown, terrible fellow— a fellow who needs watching. I could have pleaded insanity at my trial and escaped the chair. It is so easy for me to act. But now— Why could not the judge and jury see me now?

But I must not peer too long into my soul. Introspection looks down the shaft, and soon sees the grinning face of Madness floating on the black water. The austere countenance of the philosopher casts back a reflection which he recognizes with a shudder. The moon may be— But I must not wander.

One source of solace has been with me constantly during my days of imprisonment. To a man such as I— a man condemned to death— the daily newspapers are of great value. It is comforting to realize that there are thousands, nay millions, of human beings who are cognizant of my existence, perhaps intimately interested in the outcome of my career. During these last few weeks, as never before, I have felt myself to be an important link in the human chain— a link which daily holds the attention of a multitude of minds. I, the unknown sculptor, the young man of limited means and limited reputation, am now something of a celebrity. What an enduring hold has egotism! I caught myself smiling a self-satisfied smile when I wrote, "something of a celebrity." Avaunt, False Pride! You are in the presence of the shadow. Back, back to the highway of life, where the multitude sit in the sunlight. I have no need of you here.

I realize perfectly what a storm of curiosity my actions have aroused and it is not my purpose to leave this planet without a satisfying answer to the question which I myself have raised. You, who have so often studied my striking portrait in the papers, you, who have so puzzled over my whimsical acts during the ill-fated month of March, you, my friends and admirers, shall learn of everything which prompted me to a series of crimes destined to set the world of sensation agog.

And you, my fair readers, you, whose soft cheeks so quickly change from rose to lily, you, who shudder and turn away, look again into the face which you have covertly abstracted from the newspaper— the face of René Galien, your humble servant; Rene Galien who created that group "The Happy Family." Respect is akin to fear, is it not? You shall respect me.

II

I COME of an old French family. There is the blood of kings in my veins. You smile; but it is a fact, I assure you. Have you not noted in my many portraits, the finely chiseled features, the aristocratic curl to the lips, the small shell-like

ears? But my hands! They are what tell the story. The long tapering fingers, the delicacy of wrist and palm— yes, these are the hands of one refined by the gradual process of centuries. Why do my eyes hold your attention then, when I have such hands as these?

After the Revolution, my great grandfather emigrated to America. Since then the Galiens have been bobbing up and down like corks. You know how it is one year a mansion, servants, horses, dogs; another year a boarding house, genteel respectability, a single suit shiny at the elbows and knees. That comes from an excess of aristocratic blood in a plebeian age. The male members of my family have never been saving with their money. My father cried out on his deathbed:

"It is glorious to die in debt. One has succeeded in cheating one's enemy, the world."

A strange man was he, with a laugh like the cackling of a frightened hen and dry, shriveled hands which rustled in the empty pockets of his frock-coat like banknotes.

My mother died before I can remember. At an early age I was sent to a school in Paris. Once a year I was allowed to cross the sea and visit my father in New York. He would meet me each time at the pier, looking very somber in his frock-coat. I remember that towards the last his face seemed as yellow as the pale bloodless oranges one buys.

He resided at a small boarding-house in Thirty-third street— a French boarding-house where one encountered all manner of odd characters. Madame Fabien, the landlady, was a woman well on in middle life. At the time of which I speak, she attempted to maintain a semblance of youth by a plentiful use of cosmetics. Her face, as haggard as a death's head, had a vivid splash of color beneath each prominent cheekbone; and above it, her hair, yellow and fuzzy, reminded me of sun-dried weeds. Her eyes were a bitter blue, but they softened when they looked upon my father.

In some way— perhaps by his glib tongue and polished manners— he had wormed himself into the landlady's good grace. The pitcher of cream always stood beside his place at the breakfast table; and, when he came to die, for many nights she went about the house mewing like a sick cat. No doubt with him was buried the last romance of her checkered career. Perhaps the realization of this added to the poignancy of her grief.

Madame Fabien had a daughter of about my own age who did much to make my visits to New York agreeable. She was a pretty vivacious child, with a mind far too precocious for her years. Looking through keyholes had given one of her eyelids an unconscious droop. She had made herself the bane of the boarders' existence. It is needless to say that what youthful innocence a French

boarding-school had left me, vanished after a month's sojourn at Madame Fabien's.

After my father's death, I returned to Paris with a letter of introduction to an old friend of the landlady's— a certain Paul Montaigne. He was a successful sculptor of the period— a man, who, if he had not been addicted to drugs, might have reached high places.

From the first I loved him, There was something restful in his companionship— something which reminded me of a calm autumn day. He gave me the key which opened the door to a new resplendent world. Art was his mistress. She soon became mine. Before long I, too, could see the beauty in ugliness, the joy in tears. If he had lived, what might I not have done?

Paul Montaigne adopted me. I posed for him; I swept up the studio; I enlivened him when he was plunged into one of those fits of melancholy which followed his excesses. In return for this, he taught me his art. I was an apt pupil. Soon I conceived several small pieces of my own, which I sold on the Paris streets. Once a week I took my stand on the Rue Montmartre and peddled my wares to any passerby.

One afternoon I returned to the studio and found my benefactor dead. He was lying at the feet of a statue upon which he had been working— a statue representing Justice. His body seemed to be in an attitude of supplication. A thin ribbon of blood crawled towards the door like a miniature river of red. He had cut his throat. It seemed unbelievable at first. When I saw him lying thus, I felt that I had lost everything in the world. Dropping the bag which contained several tiny statues I had not sold, I sank to my knees and began to blubber like a baby. There the concierge found me an hour later, sobbing as though my heart would break.

After Paul Montaigne's death, I returned to America. It seemed to me that I could make my fortune there much more readily. Surely in the United States competition was not so great. My four years with the sculptor had given me a foundation few could boast of Montaigne had often told me that I possessed a talent which was in no way inferior to his own. It was with high hopes that I set sail from France.

On arriving in New York, I took a cab to the familiar boarding-house. Madame Fabien opened the door for me. I scarcely recognized her. In the four years which had elapsed she had become an old hag and looked every day of sixty. After my father's death she had evidently buried her cosmetics. Her face, wrinkled and yellow, was so thin that the sharp protruding cheekbones seemed at any moment about to penetrate the skin; her scanty hair was now a splotched gray; and she leaned heavily on her cane in the doorway, reminding me of the witches in Macbeth. But her eyes had not changed. No, they were

that same bitter blue. Now they looked at me suspiciously from be neath a ragged boudoir cap.

"Well?" said she.

"Is this Madame Fabien?" I asked, suspecting that my memory had played me tricks.

"Yes, this is Madame Fabien. What is it you wish of me, young man?"

"I am René Galien," I answered, stepping forward. "Do you not remember me?"

"*Mon Dieu*!" The old woman's expression changed from suspicion to joy. She tapped me playfully on the shoulder with her cane. "Come in, come in! course it is René. Why, you are your father over again! The same carriage of the head, the same air distingué. Only the eyes are different. But come to these old arms. I have heard such things of you from Paul! You are the great sculptor now, is it not so?"

In spite of an inner qualm, I submitted myself to the old hag's embraces. She pinched my cheeks with fingers as yellow as sticks of cinnamon; she rose on tiptoe to press her lips to my forehead; she smoothed my silky hair with the palm of her hand— a palm which was as rough as a nutmeg grater. She was like the cracked dusty vase in which lies buried the trampled rose-leaves of the preceding spring. Once a vessel of desire, she had been quaffed to the very dregs.

"Louise will be delighted to see you, René," she said, leering up at me. "Ah, you blush, eh! You remember her— the little cat that she was. But now! How she has changed! Like you, she has grown tall and beautiful. And such a figure! The art students draw her twice during the week. How the pencils shake in their hands, how their eyes stare and stare! They are like men in a trance— so beautiful is she!"

"Is she a model?" I asked.

"Yes; but there is none other like her in New York. When my last boarder left, it was necessary that she do something. We must live, is it not so? But I will tell her that you are here. She will be overjoyed."

Madame Fabien hobbled down the passageway, leaving me standing in the hot stuffy hall. As I watched her figure receding in the shadows, I made up my mind to remain in her good graces. I had been barely able to scrape up enough money in Paris to pay for my passage; I was now in a well-nigh penniless condition. Of course I would soon be successful, but in the meantime I must not neglect any slight smile of fortune. Before the old woman returned with her daughter, I had made up my mind to be enthusiastic.

Louise did not make my rôle difficult to play. She had, indeed, matured into a kind of rare if sulky beauty. Her full lips, although pouting and discontented,

were still inviting; and, although her figure was rather buxom according to my standard, still there were men who would have thought it perfect. My raised hands and upturned eyes therefore, while delighting both mother and daughter, even to myself had no savor of the ludicrous.

"Is she not changed?" asked Madame Fabien.

"Changed!" I cried. "*Ma Foi*! she is transfigured!"

Louise blushed and smiled. Evidently I had pleased her.

"You, yourself, have altered for the better," she said, looking at me quaintly. "You are no longer the ugly duckling."

I murmured a graceful acknowledgment, then, turning to her mother, immediately reverted to the point in hand.

"Do you still take boarders?" I asked. "If so, I would consider myself fortunate in securing—"

"Most certainly you may board here," the old woman answered. "At present there is no one, and we can give you the better attention. My fees are moderate to the son of an old friend."

Again Louise smiled, disclosing two rows of large white teeth.

"Follow me," she said, picking up my valise in spite of my protests. "I will show you to your room."

Madame Fabien leered at me as I passed her. She again reached up and pinched my cheek. It nauseated me. Without the slightest compunction, I could have put my hands on her weed-like throat and choked the life out of her. Even then I felt that she and I could not live under the same roof without disastrous results. I hesitated for a moment on the landing before I followed Louise up the creaking staircase.

iii

I MUST BREAK OFF for the time. Father Flynn has been shown into my cell. Why does he insist on offering ghostly consolation to me? Can he not realize that I am a man of adamant will, of unshakable determination?

This priest in the sunshine dares to come to me in the shadow— dares to come to me and cry:

"See, there is everlasting life!"

Everlasting life? Bah! Rather everlasting death— everlasting death with its calm immobility— everlasting death with its enigmatic smile. Yes, there I will be reigning like a mountain peak, cold, still and thoughtful.

But now Father Flynn is approaching. His long black robe brushes over the floor of my cell with a swishing sound. His solemn eyes are fixed upon my face. About his neck a crucifix is suspended. Christ hangs on this crucifix, tiny, weak,

and helpless— Christ made into a doll. When he speaks of life everlasting, I shall point at his toy Christ and laugh.

iv

FATHER FLYNN has left me. His brain, heavy and ponderous as a medieval battle-ax, was no match for the lightning thrusts of mine. I have hurt him in a sensitive spot beneath his armor of religion; I have penetrated his self-esteem. He now doubts himself, which is far worse than doubting God. Like an old woman who suddenly encounters a mouse in her bedroom, like an old woman with dragging skirts and downcast eyes, he has hurried from the cell. In his opinion, I am eternally damned— a man for whom the jaws of Hell are yawning. I have refused to reverence the doll dangling from his neck, therefore I am as one lost.

Poor old man! I pity him for his childish credulity, while I envy him his simple trust. But if I had had a Christ, if I had had a sacred symbol of something greater than myself, I would not hang it about my neck and be content. Ah no! I would build for it a pedestal; and on this pedestal I would place it so that it could sneer down on the passing people, sneer down on the passing people in the dust. And in its eyes would be hot anger; and in its hand, a reeking sword. Away with your tiny toy Christ, Father Flynn. Mine would be gigantic and terrible gigantic, terrible, and red! But I must compose myself. Already night stretches out her ebony wings over the world. When the first rays of dawn creep into my cell, they will come and take me away. Meanwhile Death is waiting in the corner. He, alone, does not fear me; He, alone, can return the look in my eyes. Before that grim sentinel my glance wavers and falls. I will take up the pencil and finish my record; yes, although the pitiless specter continues to stare at me with his dull lackluster eyes.

v

WHEN I took up my residence with Madame Fabien, I intended remaining there only a short time. It seemed to me that my genius would find recognition before many weeks went by. In the meanwhile it was necessary for me to live— and where could I live on credit except at Madame Fabien's?

The old Frenchwoman ensconced me in a large room on the topmost floor— a room which had once served as an artist's studio. It had a north light; and was in every way suitable for a workshop. I had brought over with me from Paris the tools of my trade; and it was not long before I started working in

dead earnest. Ere a month went by, I had created several miniatures which I thought I could dispose of for a fair sum.

My moments of leisure were spent with Louise and her mother. I felt it necessary to keep in the good graces of both women. But what a bore it was! My flesh fairly crawled when Madame Fabien touched me. It was as much as I could do to submit to her caresses. And then the atmosphere of the house began to get on my nerves. It was so hot and stuffy downstairs, and a sweet sickening odor hovered about everything. In the parlor there were a multitude of photographs, representing Madame Fabien in her youth. She had evidently been a vaudeville performer of versatile repertoire. There were pictures of her walking a tightrope, a parasol above her head, smiling sentimentally at space; pictures of her in knickerbockers, riding an old-fashioned bicycle; pictures of her in tights, toe-dancing on a horse's back. And in all these photographs she resembled Louise. Yes, there was the same haggard face with high cheekbones and petulant lips, the same full-bosomed, broad-hipped figure, the same sensual drooping eyelids. Thirty years ago my landlady had been another Louise. And, when I realized this, what little affection I had for the girl faded. Although I continued to ply her assiduously with compliments, my words no longer had the slightest ring of truth.

And as the weeks went by, I came to realize that it would be difficult to escape my environment. Daily a web of attachment took shape. Both these women regarded me now with an air of ownership. To Madame Fabien, I was a living embodiment of one to whom she had given the last dying sparks of passion; to Louise I was a companion of childhood suddenly transformed into a fairy prince who had crossed the seas to win her.

And I? Why, struggle as I might to free myself, my feet were sinking in the quicksand. A month passed, and I had not sold a single piece of work. Where else could I go? I was penniless and in debt. Contrary to my expectations, my miniatures went begging. These imaginative figures which I had sold so easily in Paris— these weird gargoyles, nymphs and satyrs, were shuddered at, but never bought.

I found myself battering my head against an obstinate senseless wall of optimism. The beauty which lurks in ugliness, the transcending horror depicted in my work, the morbid terror which enwrapped those tiny figures— all was quite lost on the stupid smiling people who passed me by. They hurried on, these people; hurried on through the tunnel of life unheedingly, looking neither up nor down, quite immersed in their own bright dreams and unwilling to contemplate the stern austere countenance of Art. I might have gone on for centuries in my garret, striving, creating, and quite unnoticed, were it not for that group "The Happy Family."

At last my affairs reached a climax. I could no longer avoid Fate. I married Louise. Yes, loathing her with all my soul, seeing in her a future Madame Fabien, I married her. It came about like this:

One afternoon, while I was at work, a knock sounded on my door. It was Louise. The night before she had heard me express a wish for a female model. She had come to offer her services. Yes, she was quite willing to pose for me. It was no trouble at all. She would be ready in a moment now.

With brazenness, even for a professional model, she began to disrobe. I attempted to detain her. I put my hand on her arm, but she only kissed me and called me a foolish boy.

"Are we not already as good as married?" said she. I did not realize how truly she spoke until I looked over her shoulder and saw Madame Fabien standing in the doorway. I was positive that something was about to happen. My landlady, among her other accomplishments, had at one time been a melodramatic tragedienne. On her face was mirrored the rôle which she was about to play.

"So!" she cried in a voice which squeaked like a violin out of tune. "So! I find you thus! Is this how you repay me, René? Has it not been enough to live here week after week, to take board and lodging from me gratis, to receive from my hands all the attention of a mother, without attacking the virtue of my daughter? No, don't attempt to explain away your guilt. Thank God my eyes can still be trusted! Louise, go to your room! I will talk to this young man alone."

Fifteen minutes later, all was over. I had agreed to marry Louise on the following day. That old virago had so battered me with words that my brain was reeling. I would have signed my death-warrant to have gotten rid of her. And she, when the victory had been won, when my promise had been gained, immediately relapsed into a sickly sentimental air. She pinched my cheek and lavished me with endearments; she called me her own beautiful boy; she bade Louise fetch a bottle of Madeira from the cellar, and pledged my health in the sweet wine till her eyes grew misty and her voice sounded dull and indistinct.

And I? Why, I bowed and smiled, and kept on bowing and smiling till I felt like a mechanical doll attached to a giant's finger. And the smile seemed to grow and grow till it covered my face with painful agitated wrinkles; and my head grew heavy and bulbous, so that it became difficult to raise and lower it in time to the old woman's eager, querulous questions.

At last they left me to myself.

ON THE following day Louise and I were married. What a mockery! As the words fell slowly from the priest's mouth— words which weighed me down as though they had been so many pellets of lead— I had a wild impulse to leap to my feet, to shake the girl's hand from my arm and dash out of that church never to return. My one cowardly trait, my dread of penury and hunger, forced me to remain. And as I knelt before the altar, looking up into the priest's wrinkled face, I became unpleasantly conscious of Madame Fabien's proximity. I felt her breath fanning the back of my neck. Involuntarily I shuddered and yet beads of perspiration dotted my forehead. At last the ceremony was over, and we returned home.

Home! What a blasphemous title to apply to such a place! And yet the roof sheltered my head, the walls shut out the darkness and the cold. Where else could I find as much, I asked myself. Think of the irony of it! I, a young man of talent, an individualist, an artist, and yet forced to acknowledge such a defeat. It was then I came to the realization that there was something wrong with the world. Surely it had been rolling downhill for ages— a wicked ball bent on destruction. In vain we Supermen seek to push it up, to place it on the heights— it evades our eager hands and descends into the black depths. To this day, I cannot contemplate its final degradation without a feeling of regret, even of horror.

It is not my purpose to dwell too long on my married life. Suffice it to say, that it soon became unendurable to me. Living with one woman constantly is prone to wear on the nerves of the sensitive man; but, when this woman is lacking in both mentality and feeling, artistic appreciation and higher aspirations, she becomes a burning coal of agony which one is forced to hold to one's bare breast. Before a week had passed, I hated Louise as I had never thought to hate any human being.

What made it worse, the girl positively adored me. She gave me no peace. She would break into my studio while I was at work, and shower me with loathsome caresses. I had no solitude of the soul so necessary to an artist. She sought to occupy every cranny of my life. If I reprimanded her, if, driven to desperation, I struck her, waves of hysterics would follow— hysterics, that abomination of woman— and to avoid this shrieking inferno it was necessary for me to calm her with kisses and protestations of affection.

Then there was Madame Fabien— Madame Fabien with her fishy eyes! How her tongue clattered! have often thought that she must have assassinated my father with it. And life was still strong in this bag of old bones! It shown evilly out of her bitter blue eyes; it spoke volubly through her dry, shriveled lips. She might live twenty years more— live and persecute me.

One night inspiration touched me the inspiration of "The Happy Family." True perception springs from contrast. It has always been my experience that in the city one can visualize the country with an acute clarity. So it is with all things. The musician composes a dirge on a bright spring day; the starving poet writes an ode to sparkling wine and luscious fruit. Thus it was in my case. From a confirmed unbeliever in marriage, I could now see the joys of wedlock. My own unfortunate affair had conjured up in my mind an ideal picture of wedded bliss— a happy family, united in thought and deed; a silent, happy family who found mere speech unnecessary to a complete mental understanding.

And as I sat at dinner, listening to the shrill voices of the women, watching their distorted mouths and glistening eyes, in an instant it became apparent what made them so hideous, so revolting. It was life that marred them; hot, noisy life which twisted them into repellent shapes; life which made them detestable and unforgivable. As statues— deprived of breath, motion, speech— they would no longer cause me any pain. On the contrary, I might be proud of them. Madame Fabien could very well have been Rodin's 'Courtesan,' alive, clothed and speaking. Such ugliness was beautiful in art. It was only when it stepped down from its pedestal that it became loathsome and degraded. And Louise? If she would not speak in that whining tone, if her face could always remain calm and placid, if she could be placed in an artistic posture with her chin resting on her hand— why, she would be beautiful!

And then in my imagination I saw them as statues; saw them sitting there, silent, white and beautiful; saw them sitting on a pedestal, united and peaceful, cleansed of life's impurities, quietly waiting for the children yet unborn— I saw "The Happy Family"!

Why was it not possible to make them so? A few drops of poison in their coffee, and life would quickly fade away. And then? Why, then I would carry them up to my studio where I had so often worked before. But this time I would not work in vain. No, I would make statues of them— enclose them in a special preparation of clay which might last through all the centuries. Their bodies would not decompose in such a covering. It would be easy— easy! Perhaps I could sell them to an art dealer. At this thought, I laughed aloud.

"Why are you laughing, René?" asked Madame Fabien with one of her quick, suspicious looks.

"I was thinking of what an excellent statue you would make, mama. May I use you for a model?"

She shook her bony head at me like an old vulture.

"Careful, René, careful," she mumbled. "Don't bite the hand that feeds you. Youth should respect age."

"But I was in earnest, mama," I assured her.

"Bah!" She rose and hobbled off on her cane, leaving Louise to wash up the dinner things.

For the moment I was free.

Telling my wife that I had to post a letter, I put on my hat and left the house.

When I returned I had a small vial of poison in my waistcoat pocket.

As I lay beside Louise that night, I dreamed peacefully of "The Happy Family."

vii

HAVE YOU ever considered what a childishly simple thing it is to take a human life? We are all so trusting with our fellows, so guileless and trusting, that, when the murderous hand reaches out to cut the cord of existence, we stand blinking our eyes stupidly, quite unable to realize the danger. If it were not for the bodies of his victims— bodies which, although silent, bear unfaltering testimony to the truth— the assassin might stalk unmolested through the world. Our immortality seems so assured to us, that we seldom question the eyes of those who may have it in their keeping.

Louise and her mother suspected nothing. On the following evening, when I suggested that I prepare their coffee in a manner new to them— a method which I had picked up in Paris— they assented readily. It was only when I placed the two steaming cups upon the table that any difficulty arose.

"I should not drink any coffee," said Madame Fabien, shaking her head sorrowfully.

I felt a sudden flicker of fear.

"Why not, mama?" I murmured, bending over her solicitously.

"It keeps me awake at night. I cannot sleep when I drink coffee."

I could not refrain from smiling.

"Never fear, mama," I answered reassuringly. "This coffee is so prepared that you will not be troubled by insomnia. I guarantee that you will sleep soundly tonight— very soundly."

And then, without hesitation, without fear, almost without taking breath, these two women drank their poisoned coffee. I watched them with a calm, impersonal curiosity. And yet the next few moments were the most embarrassing moments of my life. I felt. that I was conversing with specters. Everything I said rang out of tune. I attempted to joke, and my witticisms fell far below humor. I attempted to laugh, and my own familiar laugh sounded as hoarse and guttural as the cawing of a crow. And these two women seemed like stiff formal strangers who could not in any way be amused.

Madame Fabien was the first to go. One side of her shriveled face drew up into knots, as though a cord in her cheek had been suddenly pulled. She clapped her hand to her stomach.

"Oh!" she cried."I suffer! I— I—. Get the doctor. Get the—"

She rolled to the floor, and lay there kicking and clawing like a wounded wildcat.

Louise rose and bent over her.

"René, run out and get Dr. Milburn," she called over her shoulder in an agitated voice.

I had no desire to see them die. A wanton taste for cruelty has never been one of my characteristics. I quitted the room, and, mounting the stairs to my studio, spent a few peaceful moments over a cigar. When I returned to the dining room, I found both women dead. Louise's body lay across her mother's. Her upturned face wore an expression of amazement. It was as though I had given her a sudden surprise.

Then the real work began. That night I toiled like a galley-slave. I carried the bodies up to my studio; I disrobed them; I burned the clothing piecemeal; and then I commenced my famous group, "The Happy Family."

With the firm, sure hand of an artist, I enclosed them in clinging garments of clay; I gave them immortal skins which might last through all eternity. And now that the life had gone out of them, these women were no longer repulsive to me. No, on the contrary, I felt a sensation of ennobling pride as I busied myself about them, placing them on the pedestal, making of them enduring works of art. When the sun finally peered in at me through the blind, two statues confronted me two statues so lifelike, so virile, that the hand of Rodin himself could not have done better.

My work enraptured me. At last I had created something which might live. What a contrast was this!— Madame Fabien so thin and withered, cowering in the early light; and beside her, Louise, so strong and buxom, her chin resting in the hollow of her hand. This was art! For the first time in my life I loved them. I was so proud of them that it was all I could do to refrain from running out into the street and bringing back with me the first passerby to see what I had done. For the moment I was living on the sunlit heights of great achievement.

viii

UNFORTUNATELY the artist is never satisfied with his first creation. He must go on and on, enlarging his original conception, until sometimes it winds itself about him like a many-membered octopus and sucks the life out of him.

So it was with me. For a week I busied myself in the studio, constructing a large pedestal for my statues; but at the end of that time, I found myself longing to add to the group. What was a happy family without children, I asked myself. A mother-in-law and a wife were all very well; but surely, without tender human plants sprouting up about them, they were meaningless and thrown away. Yes, both were lonely and must have childish companionship. The longing look on Louise's face touched my heart.

It was shortly after this that I began to visit the park. With bags of candy in my pocket, I soon made friends with a multitude of children. Finally I selected two rosy-cheeked little dears— a boy and a girl of four and five, who seemed worthy to join "The Happy Family." By promises of sweets beyond their wildest dreams, I enticed them to my house one afternoon. The rest was easy. Two sticks of peppermint, the vial— and that night, cleansed and beautiful, white and spotless, turned into tiny statues, they knelt at Louise's feet.

Another week of blissful contemplation went by; and then the loneliness on Louise's face again caused me an acute pain. Madame Fabien, of course, was perfectly content to sit silent in the sunlight with her grandchildren about her; but Louise was still young, still imbued with thoughts of love, still desirous of male companionship. She must have a husband. It was necessary that I procure her one. Then indeed "The Happy Family" would be complete.

One afternoon, as I sat pondering in my studio, the doorbell rang. When I answered it, I found a tall good-looking young man on the stoop. Evidently fate was again playing into my hand. This young man would make an ideal husband for Louise. I could not refrain from smiling, as I stood aside and bade him enter.

"Is this Madame Fabien's house?" he asked, stepping into the hallway.

"Yes."

"Is she at home? May I see her?"

"No, she has gone to the country for a month," I murmured. "She may be away even longer." I shrugged my shoulders.

"Well," said the young man, eyeing me suspiciously, "I have a warrant to search the house. I am a police officer. See this." He threw back his coat, disclosing a metal badge.

In spite of myself, my voice was a trifle unsteady when I spoke.

"But why do you wish to search the house?"

"For evidence," the young man answered. "Several children have been kidnapped lately. Two of them were seen entering this house."

He pushed past me and began mounting the stairs. I followed him. My heart was beating wildly; but my face, I feel convinced, was as expressionless as a bare wall. As he searched the different rooms on the second floor, it

became quite clear to me that I was perfectly safe. How could he suspect my statues of concealing what he sought? Soon I would lead him to my studio and thus divert all suspicion from "The Happy Family." And afterwards, when he had found nothing, I would offer him a cooling drink of my own concoction— a drink which would contain an everlasting sleeping potion. Already I could see him on the pedestal beside Louise— a silent, loving husband.

"If you are ready," I said to the young man, "I will show you my studio. I am a sculptor. You will find children there, but they are only statues."

He ignored my pleasantry and merely nodded. He was a very brusque young man.

"Show me your studio," he said.

I conducted him to it in silence. Opening the door, I stood aside and motioned him to enter. My heart was now beating calmly and evenly. No fear lurked in my soul. I would show this young man my statues, and perhaps he would appreciate what art could do. I was introducing him to his future family. Soon he would be sitting there, white, motionless, and smiling.

He looked about the room carelessly, and finally his eyes became fixed on the statues.

"They're good," he muttered, "— damnably good!"

And then turning to me with a new respect, he said: "I had an ambition to become a sculptor myself. I studied at the school, but couldn't make a go of it. I know enough about the game though, to realize how good these are. Rodin himself wouldn't be ashamed of that old woman. What do you call this group?"

"'The Happy Family,'" I answered

"'The Happy Family'?" he repeated thoughtfully. "They don't look very happy— any of them. They look as if they had just been surprised by something— unpleasantly surprised. Take that old woman, for instance. She looks—"

"Nonsense!" I broke in angrily. "They are happy— happy." This young man's stupidity began to aggravate me. "In life they would have been loathsome and repulsive. But here? Look at this old woman!"

I approached and put my hand proudly on her shriveled shoulder. "She is a masterpiece. She—"

"Look out!" cried the detective suddenly. "Look out! She's falling!"

I uttered a cry of horror and clutched at Madame Fabien. But it was too late! Unconsciously I had leaned my full weight for an instant on her shoulder; and now, swaying once or twice, she was falling forward. In vain I sought to clasp her in my arms, to shield her body with mine, she bore me over backwards and we both came toppling to the floor. The plaster, covering her face, was broken into a thousand bits; and then the head of Madame Fabien—

the head with its ghastly grin and glassy eyes— like some evil Jack-in-the-box, popped out into the sunlight.

I remembered nothing more. The room, the detective, the statues, were swallowed up in blackness. I fainted. When I regained consciousness, it was to find myself jolting through the streets on my way to prison.

ix

IT IS MORNING. Already the gray light of dawn is sifting through the window. My task is over. I have told you faithfully the story of "The Happy Family." And now that the tale is told, now that the time grows short, I want to impress upon you, the reading public, you who have become so interested in my fate, that I, René Galien, am not afraid of death. Tomorrow they may lie about me in the papers; they may say I had to be carried to the chair, that I wept, that I pleaded, that I even prayed. But you, my admirers, my friends, my brothers, shall not believe them. No, I only fear something which lurks on the invisible frontier; something which is approaching steadily and relentlessly. What is this something? I do not know. But it is not death…. No, it is not death.

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16: That Ever-Loving Wife of Hymie's

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

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IF ANYBODY ever tells me I will wake up some morning to find myself sleeping with a horse, I will consider them very daffy indeed, especially if they tell me it will be with such a horse as old Mahogany, for Mahogany is really not much horse. In fact, Mahogany is nothing but an old bum, and you can say it again, and many horse players wish he is dead ten thousand times over.

But I will think anybody is daffier still if they tell me I will wake up some morning to find myself sleeping with Hymie Banjo Eyes, because as between Mahogany and Hymie Banjo Eyes to sleep with, I will take Mahogany every time, even though Mahogany snores more than somewhat when he is sleeping. But Mahogany is by no means as offensive to sleep with as Hymie Banjo Eyes, as Hymie not only snores when he is sleeping, but he hollers and kicks around and takes on generally.

He is a short, pudgy little guy who is called Hymie Banjo Eyes because his eyes bulge out as big and round as banjos, although his right name is Weinstein, or some such, and he is somewhat untidylooking in spots, for Hymie Banjo Eyes is a guy who does not care if his breakfast gets on his vest, or what. Furthermore, he gabs a lot and thinks he is very smart, and many citizens consider him a pest, in spades. But personally I figure Hymie Banjo Eyes as very harmless, although he is not such a guy as I will ordinarily care to have much truck with.

But there I am one morning waking up to find myself sleeping with both Mahogany and Hymie, and what are we sleeping in but a horse car bound for Miami, and we are passing through North Carolina in a small-time blizzard when I wake up, and Mahogany is snoring and shivering, because it seems Hymie cops the poor horse's blanket to wrap around himself, and I am half frozen and wishing I am back in Mindy's Restaurant on Broadway, where all is bright and warm, and that I never see either Mahogany or Hymie in my life.

Of course it is not Mahogany's fault that I am sleeping with him and Hymie, and in fact, for all I know, Mahogany may not consider me any bargain whatever to sleep with. It is Hymie's fault for digging me up in Mindy's one night and explaining to me how wonderful the weather is in Miami in the winter-time, and how we can go there for the races with his stable and make

plenty of potatoes for ourselves, although of course I know when Hymie is speaking of his stable he means Mahogany, for Hymie never has more than one horse at anyone time in his stable.

Generally it is some broken-down lizard that he buys for about the price of an old wool hat and patches up the best he can, as Hymie Banjo Eyes is a horse trainer by trade, and considering the kind of horses he trains he is not a bad trainer, at that. He is very good indeed at patching up cripples and sometimes winning races with them until somebody claims them on him or they fall down dead, and then he goes and gets himself another cripple and starts all over again.

I hear he buys Mahogany off a guy by the name of O'Shea for a hundred bucks, although the chances are if Hymie waits a while the guy will pay him at least two hundred to take Mahogany away and hide him, for Mahogany has bad legs and bum feet, and is maybe nine years old, and does not win a race since the summer of 1924, and then it is an accident. But anyway, Mahogany is the stable Hymie Banjo Eyes is speaking of taking to Miami when he digs me up in Mindy's.

'And just think,' Hymie says, 'all we need to get there is the price of a drawing-room on the Florida Special.'

Well, I am much surprised by this statement, because it is the first time I ever hear of a horse needing a drawing-room, especially such a horse as Mahogany, but it seems the drawing-room is not to be for Mahogany, or even for Hymie or me. It seems it is to be for Hymie's ever-loving wife, a blonde doll by the name of 'Lasses, which he marries out of some night-club where she is what is called an adagio dancer.

It seems that when 'Lasses is very young somebody once says she is just as sweet as Molasses, and this is how she comes to get the name of 'Lasses, although her right name is Maggie Something, and I figure she must change quite a lot since they begin calling her 'Lasses because at the time I meet her she is sweet just the same as green grapefruit.

She has a partner in the adagio business by the name of Donaldo, who picks her up and heaves her around the night-club as if she is nothing but a baseball, and it is very thrilling indeed to see Donaldo giving 'Lasses a sling as if he is going to throw her plumb away, which many citizens say may not be a bad idea, at that, and then catching her by the foot in mid-air and hauling her back to him.

But one night it seems that Donaldo takes a few slugs of gin before going into this adagio business, and he muffs 'Lasses' foot, although nobody can see how this is possible, because 'Lasses' foot is no more invisible than a box car, and 'Lasses keeps on sailing through the air. She finally sails into Hymie Banjo

Eyes' stomach as he is sitting at a table pretty well back, and this is the way Hymie and 'Lasses meet, and a romance starts, although it is nearly a week before Hymie recovers enough from the body beating he takes off 'Lasses to go around and see her.

The upshot of the romance is 'Lasses and Hymie get married, although up to the time Donaldo slings her into Hymie's stomach, 'Lasses is going around with Brick McCloskey, the bookmaker, and is very loving with him indeed, but they have a row about something and are carrying the old torch for each other when Hymie happens along.

Some citizens say the reason 'Lasses marries Hymie is because she is all sored up on Brick and that she acts without thinking, as dolls often do, especially blonde dolls, although personally I figure Hymie takes all the worst of the situation, as 'Lasses is not such a doll as any guy shall marry without talking it over with his lawyer. 'Lasses is one of these little blondes who is full of short answers, and personally I will just as soon marry a porcupine. But Hymie loves her more than somewhat, and there is no doubt Brick McCloskey is all busted up because 'Lasses takes this run-out powder on him, so maybe after all 'Lasses has some kind of appeal which I cannot notice off-hand.

'But,' Hymie explains to me when he is speaking to me about this trip to Miami, ''Lasses is not well, what with nerves and one thing and another, and she will have to travel to Miami along with her Pekingese dog, Sooey-pow, because,' Hymie says, 'it will make her more nervous than somewhat if she has to travel with anybody else. And of course,' Hymie says, 'no one can expect 'Lasses to travel in anything but a drawing-room on account of her health.'

Well, the last time I see 'Lasses she is making a sucker of a big sirloin in Bobby's Restaurant, and she strikes me as a pretty healthy doll, but of course I never examine her close, and anyway, her health is none of my business.

'Now,' Hymie says, 'I get washed out at Empire, and I am pretty much in hock here and there and have no dough to ship my stable to Miami, but,' he says, 'a friend of mine is shipping several horses there and he has a whole car, and he will kindly let me have room in one end of the car for my stable, and you and I can ride in there, too.

'That is,' Hymie says, 'we can ride in there if you will dig up the price of a drawing-room and the two tickets that go with it so 'Lasses' nerves will not be disturbed. You see,' Hymie says, 'I happen to know you have two hundred and fifty bucks in the jug over here on the corner, because one of the tellers in the jug is a friend of mine, and he tips me off you have this sugar, even though,' Hymie says, 'you have it in there under another name.'

Well, a guy goes up against many daffy propositions as he goes along through life, and the first thing I know I am waking up, like I tell you, to find

myself sleeping with Mahogany and Hymie, and as I lay there in the horse car slowly freezing to death, I get to thinking of 'Lasses in a drawing-room on the Florida Special, and I hope and trust that she and the Peke are sleeping nice and warm.

The train finally runs out of the blizzard and the weather heats up somewhat, so it is not so bad riding in the horse car, and Hymie and I pass the time away playing two-handed pinochle. Furthermore, I get pretty well acquainted with Mahogany, and I find he is personally not such a bad old pelter as many thousands of citizens think.

Finally we get to Miami, and at first it looks as if Hymie is going to have a tough time finding a place to keep Mahogany, as all the stable room at the Hialeah track is taken by cash customers, and Hymie certainly is not a cash customer and neither is Mahogany. Personally, I am not worried so much about stable room for Mahogany as I am about stable room for myself, because I am now down to a very few bobs and will need same to eat on.

Naturally, I figure Hymie Banjo Eyes will be joining his ever-loving wife 'Lasses, as I always suppose a husband and wife are an entry, but Hymie tells me 'Lasses is parked in the Roney Plaza over on Miami Beach, and that he is going to stay with Mahogany, because it will make her very nervous to have people around her, especially people who are training horses every day, and who may not smell so good.

Well, it looks as if we will wind up camping out with Mahogany under. a palm-tree, although many of the palm-trees are already taken by other guys camping out with horses, but finally Hymie finds a guy who has a garage back of his house right near the race track, and having no use for this garage since his car blows away in the hurricane of 1926, the guy is willing to let Hymie keep Mahogany in the garage. Furthermore, he is willing to let Hymie sleep in the garage with Mahogany, and pay him now and then.

So Hymie borrows a little hay and grain, such as horses love to eat, off a friend who has a big string at the track, and moves into the garage with Mahogany, and about the same time I run into a guy by the name of Pottsville Legs, out of Pottsville, Pa., and he has a room in a joint downtown, and I move in with him, and it is no worse than sleeping with Hymie Banjo Eyes and Mahogany, at that.

I do not see Hymie for some time after this, but I hear of him getting Mahogany ready for a race. He has the old guy out galloping on the track every morning, and who is galloping him but Hymie himself, because he cannot get any stable-boys to do the galloping for him, as they do not wish to waste their time. However, Hymie rides himself when he is a young squirt, so galloping Mahogany is not such a tough job for him, except that it gives him a terrible

appetite, and it is very hard for him to find anything to satisfy this appetite with, and there are rumours around that Hymie is eating most of Mahogany's hay and grain.

In the meantime, I am going here and there doing the best I can, and this is not so very good, at that, because never is there such a terrible winter in Miami or so much suffering among the horse players. In the afternoon I go out to the race track, and in the evening I go to the dog tracks, and later to the gambling joints trying to pick up a few honest bobs, and wherever I go I seem to see Hymie's ever-loving wife 'Lasses, and she is always dressed up more than somewhat, and generally she is with Brick McCloskey, for Brick shows up in Miami figuring to do a little business in bookmaking at the track.

When they turn off the books there and put in the mutuels, Brick still does a little booking to big betters who do not wish to put their dough in the mutuels for fear of ruining a price, for Brick is a very large operator at all times. He is not only a large operator, but he is a big, good-looking guy, and how 'Lasses can ever give him the heave-o for such a looking guy as Hymie Banjo Eyes is always a great mystery to me. But then this is the way blondes are.

Of course Hymie probably does not know 'Lasses is running around with Brick McCloskey, because Hymie is too busy getting Mahogany ready for a race to make such spots as 'Lasses and Brick are apt to be, and nobody is going to bother to tell him, because so many ever-loving wives are running around with guys who are not their ever-loving husbands in Miami this winter that nobody considers it any news.

Personally, I figure 'Lasses' running around with Brick is a pretty fair break for Hymie, at that, as it takes plenty of weight off him in the way of dinners, and maybe breakfasts for all I know, although it seems to me 'Lasses cannot love Hymie as much as Hymie thinks to be running around with another guy. In fact, I am commencing to figure 'Lasses does not care for Hymie Banjo Eyes whatever.

Well, one day I am looking over the entries, and I see where Hymie has old Mahogany in a claiming race at a mile and an eighth, and while it is a cheap race, there are some pretty fair hides in it. In fact, I can figure at least eight out of the nine that are entered to beat Mahogany by fourteen lengths.

Well, I go out to Hialeah very early, and I step around to the garage where Mahogany and Hymie are living, and Hymie is sitting out in front of the garage on a bucket looking very sad, and Mahogany has his beezer stuck out through the door of the garage, and he is looking even sadder than Hymie.

'Well,' I say to Hymie Banjo Eyes, 'I see the big horse goes today.'

'Yes,' Hymie says, 'the big horse goes to-day if I can get ten bucks for the jockey fee, and if I can get a jock after I get the fee. It is a terrible situation,'

Hymie says. 'Here I get Mahogany all readied up for the race of his life in a spot where he can win by as far as from here to Palm Beach and grab a purse worth six hundred fish, and me without as much as a sawbuck to hire one of these hop-toads that are putting themselves away as jocks around here.'

'Well,' I say, 'why do you not speak to 'Lasses, your ever-loving wife, about this situation? I see 'Lasses playing the wheel out at Hollywood last night,' I say, 'and she has a stack of cheques in front of her a greyhound cannot hurdle, and,' I say, 'it is not like 'Lasses to go away from there without a few bobs off such a start.'

'Now there you go again,' Hymie says, very impatient indeed. 'You are always making cracks about 'Lasses, and you know very well it will make the poor little doll very nervous if I speak to her about such matters as a sawbuck, because 'Lasses needs all the sawbucks she can get hold of to keep herself and Sooey-pow at the Roney Plaza. By the way,' Hymie says, 'how much scratch do you have on your body at this time?'

Well, I am never any hand for telling lies, especially to an old friend such as Hymie Banjo Eyes, so I admit I have a ten-dollar note, although naturally I do not mention another tenner which I also have in my pocket, as I know Hymie will wish both of them. He will wish one of my tenners to pay the jockey fee, and he will wish the other to bet on Mahogany, and I am certainly not going to let Hymie throw my dough away betting it on such an old crocodile as Mahogany, especially in a race which a horse by the name of Side Burns is a sure thing to win.

In fact, I am waiting patiently for several days for a chance to bet on Side Burns. So I hold out one sawbuck on Hymie, and then I go over to the track and forget all about him and Mahogany until the sixth race is coming up, and I see by the jockey board that Hymie has a jock by the name of Scroon riding Mahogany, and while Mahogany is carrying only one hundred pounds, which is the light-weight of the race, I will personally just as soon have Paul Whiteman up as Scroon. Personally I do not think Scroon can spell 'horse,' for he is nothing but a dizzy little guy who gets a mount about once every pancake Tuesday. But of course Hymie is not a guy who can pick and choose his jocks, and the chances are he is pretty lucky to get anybody to ride Mahogany.

I see by the board where it tells you the approximate odds that Mahogany is 40 to 1, and naturally nobody is paying any attention to such a horse, because it will not be good sense to pay any attention to Mahogany in this race, what with it being his first start in months, and Mahogany not figuring with these horses, or with any horses, as far as this is concerned. In fact, many citizens think Hymie Banjo Eyes is either crazy, or is running Mahogany in this

race for exercise, although nobody who knows Hymie will figure him to be spending dough on a horse just to exercise him.

The favourite in the race is this horse named Side Burns, and from the way they are playing him right from taw you will think he is Twenty Grand. He is even money on the board, and I hope and trust that he will finally pay as much as this, because at even money I consider him a very sound investment, indeed. In fact, I am willing to take 4 to 5 for my dough, and will consider it money well found, because I figure this will give me about eighteen bobs to bet on Tony Joe in the last race, and anybody will tell you that you can go to sleep on Tony Joe winning, unless something happens.

There is a little action on several other horses in the race, but of course there is none whatever for Mahogany and the last time I look he is up to fifty. So I buy my ticket on Side Burns, and go out to the paddock to take a peek at the horses, and I see Hymie Banjo Eyes in there saddling Mahogany with his jockey, this dizzy Scroon, standing alongside him in Hymie's colours of red, pink and yellow, and making wise-cracks to the guys in the next stall about Mahogany.

Hymie Banjo Eyes sees me and motions me to come into the paddock, so I go in and give Mahogany a pat on the snoot, and the old guy seems to remember me right away, because he rubs his beezer up and down my arm and lets out a little snicker. But it seems to me the old plug looks a bit peaked, and I can see his ribs very plain indeed, so I figure maybe there is some truth in the rumour about Hymie sharing Mahogany's hay and grain, after all.

Well, as I am standing there, Hymie gives this dizzy Scroon his riding instructions, and they are very short, for all Hymie says is as follows:

'Listen,' Hymie says, 'get off with this horse and hurry right home.'

And Scroon looks a little dizzier than somewhat and nods his head, and then turns and tips a wink to Kurtsinger, who is riding the horse in the next stall.

Well, finally the post bugle goes, and Hymie walks back with me to the lawn as the horses are coming out on the track, and Hymie is speaking about nothing but Mahogany.

'It is just my luck,' Hymie says, 'not to have a bob or two to bet on him. He will win this race as far as you can shoot a rifle, and the reason he will win this far,' Hymie says, 'is because the track is just soft enough to feel nice and soothing to his sore feet. Furthermore,' Hymie says, 'after lugging my one hundred and forty pounds around every morning for two weeks, Mahogany will think it is Christmas when he finds nothing but this Scroon's one hundred pounds on his back.

'In fact,' Hymie says, 'if I do not need the purse money, I will not let him run to-day, but will hide him for a bet. But,' he says, 'Lasses must have five yards at once, and you know how nervous she will be if she does not get the five yards. So I am letting Mahogany run,' Hymie says, 'and it is a pity.'

'Well,' I say, 'why do you not promote somebody to bet on him for you?'

'Why,' Hymie says, 'if I ask one guy I ask fifty. But they all think I am out of my mind to think Mahogany can beat such horses as Side Burns and the rest. Well,' he says, 'they will be sorry. By the way,' he says, 'do you have a bet down of any kind?'

Well, now, I do not wish to hurt Hymie's feelings by letting him know I bet on something else in the race, so I tell him I do not play this race at all, and he probably figures it is because I have nothing to bet with after giving him the sawbuck. But he keeps on talking as we walk over in front of the grandstand, and all he is talking about is what a tough break it is for him not to have any dough to bet on Mahogany. By this time the horses are at the post a little way up the track, and as we are standing there watching them, Hymie Banjo Eyes goes on talking, half to me and half to himself, but out loud.

'Yes,' he says, 'I am the unluckiest guy in all the world. Here I am,' he says, 'with a race that is a kick in the pants for my horse at fifty to one, and me without a quarter to bet. It is certainly a terrible thing to be poor,' Hymie says. 'Why,' he says, 'I will bet my life on my horse in this race, I am so sure of winning. I will bet my clothes. I will bet all I ever hope to have. In fact,' he says, 'I will even bet my ever-loving wife, this is how sure I am.'

Now of course this is only the way horse players rave when they are good and heated up about the chances of a horse, and I hear such conversations as this maybe a million times, and never pay any attention to it whatever, but as Hymie makes this crack about betting his ever-loving wife, a voice behind us says as follows:

'Against how much?'

Naturally, Hymie and I look around at once, and who does the voice belong to but Brick McCloskey. Of course I figure Brick is kidding Hymie Banjo Eyes, but Brick's voice is as cold as ice as he says to Hymie like this:

'Against how much will you bet your wife your horse wins this race?' he says. 'I hear you saying you are sure this old buzzard meat you are running will win,' Brick says, 'so let me see how sure you are. Personally,' Brick says, 'I think they ought to prosecute you for running a broken-down hound like Mahogany on the ground of cruelty to animals, and furthermore,' Brick says, 'I think they ought to put you in an insane asylum if you really believe your old dog has a chance. But I will give you a bet,' he says. 'How much do you wish me to lay against your wife?'

Well, this is very harsh language indeed, and I can see that Brick is getting something off his chest he is packing there for some time. The chances are he is putting the blast on poor Hymie Banjo Eyes on account of Hymie grabbing 'Lasses from him, and of course Brick McCloskey never figures for a minute that Hymie will take his question seriously. But Hymie answers like this:

'You are a price-maker,' he says. 'What do you lay?'

Now this is a most astonishing reply, indeed, when you figure that Hymie is asking what Brick will bet against Hymie's everloving wife 'Lasses, and I am very sorry to hear Hymie ask, especially as I happen to turn around and find that nobody but 'Lasses herself is listening in on the conversation, and the chances are her face will be very white, if it is not for her make-up, 'Lasses being a doll who goes in for make-up more than somewhat.

'Yes,' Brick McCloskey says, 'I am a price-maker, all right, and I will lay you a price. I will lay you five C's against your wife that your plug does not win,' he says.

Brick looks at 'Lasses as he says this, and 'Lasses looks at Brick, and personally I will probably take a pop at a guy who looks at my ever-loving wife in such a way, if I happen to have any ever-loving wife, and maybe I will take a pop at my ever-loving wife, too, if she looks back at a guy in such a way, but of course Hymie is not noticing such things as looks at this time, and in fact he does not see 'Lasses as yet. But he does not hesitate in answering Brick.

'You are a bet,' says Hymie. 'Five hundred bucks against my ever-loving wife 'Lasses. It is a chiseller's price such as you always lay,' he says, 'and the chances are I can do better if I have time to go shopping around but as it is,' he says, 'it is like finding money and I will not let you get away. But be ready to pay cash right after the race, because I will not accept your paper.'

Well, I hear of many a strange bet on horse races, but never before do I hear of a guy betting his ever-loving wife, although to tell you the truth I never before hear of a guy getting the opportunity to bet his wife on a race. For all I know, if bookmakers take wives as a steady thing there will be much action in such matters at every track.

But I can see that both Brick McCloskey and Hymie Banjo Eyes are in dead earnest, and about this time 'Lasses tries to cop a quiet sneak, and Hymie sees her and speaks to her as follows:

'Hello, Baby,' Hymie says. 'I will have your five yards for you in a few minutes and five more to go with it, as I am just about to clip a sucker. Wait here with me, Baby,' Hymie says.

'No,' 'Lasses says, 'I am too nervous to wait here. I am going down by the fence to root your horse in,' she says, but as she goes away I see another look pass between her and Brick McCloskey.

Well, all of a sudden Cassidy gets the horses in a nice line and lets them go, and as they come busting down past the stand the first time who is right there on top but old Mahogany, with this dizzy Scroon kicking at his skinny sides and yelling in his ears. As they make the first turn, Scroon has Mahogany a length in front, and he moves him out another length as they hit the back side.

Now I always like to watch the races from a spot away up the lawn, as I do not care to have anybody much around me when the tough finishes come along in case I wish to bust out crying, so I leave Hymie Banjo Eyes and Brick McCloskey still glaring at each other and go to my usual place, and who is standing there, too, all by herself but 'Lasses. And about this time the horses are making the turn into the stretch and Mahogany is still on top, but something is coming very fast on the outside. It looks as if Mahogany is in a tough spot, because halfway down the stretch the outside horse nails him and looks him right in the eye, and who is it but the favourite, Side Burns.

They come on like a team, and I am personally giving Side Burns a great ride from where I am standing, when I hear a doll yelling out loud, and who is the doll but 'Lasses, and what is she yelling but the following:

'Come on with him, jock!'

Furthermore, as she yells, 'Lasses snaps her fingers like a crap shooter and runs a couple of yards one way and then turns and runs a couple of yards back the other way, so I can see that 'Lasses is indeed of a nervous temperament, just as Hymie Banjo Eyes is always telling me, although up to this time I figure her nerves are the old alzo.

'Come on!' 'Lasses yells again. 'Let him roll!' she yells. 'Ride him, boy!' she yells. 'Come on with him, Frankie!'

Well, I wish to say that 'Lasses' voice may be all right if she is selling tomatoes from door to door, but I will not care to have her using it around me every day for any purpose whatever, because she yells so loud I have to move off a piece to keep my ear-drums from being busted wide open. She is still yelling when the horses go past the finish line, the snozzles of old Mahogany and Side Burns so close together that nobody can hardly tell which is which.

In fact, there is quite a wait before the numbers go up, and I can see 'Lasses standing there with her programme all wadded up in her fist as she watches the board, and I can see she is under a very terrible nervous strain indeed, and I am very sorry I go around thinking her nerves are the old alzo. Pretty soon the guy hangs out No.9, and No. 9 is nobody but old Mahogany, and at this I hear 'Lasses screech, and all of a sudden she flops over in a faint, and somebody carries her under the grandstand to revive her, and I figure her nerves bog down entirely, and I am sorrier than ever for thinking bad thoughts of her.

I am also very, very sorry I do not bet my sawbuck on Mahogany, especially when the board shows he pays $102, and I can see where Hymie Banjo Eyes is right about the weight and all, but I am glad Hymie wins the purse and also the five C's off of Brick McCloskey and that he saves his ever-loving wife, because I figure Hymie may now pay me back a few bobs.

I do not see Hymie or Brick or 'Lasses again until the races are over, and then I hear of a big row going on under the stand, and go to see what is doing, and who is having the row but Hymie Banjo Eyes and Brick McCloskey. It seems that Hymie hits Brick a clout on the beezer that stretches Brick out, and it seems that Hymie hits Brick this blow because as Brick is paying Hymie the five C's he makes the following crack:

'I do not mind losing the dough to you, Banjo Eyes,' Brick says, 'but I am sore at myself for overlaying the price. It is the first time in all the years I am booking that I make such an overlay. The right price against your wife,' Brick says, 'is maybe two dollars and a half.'

Well, as Brick goes down with a busted beezer from Hymie's punch, and everybody is much excited, who steps out of the crowd around them and throws her arms around Hymie Banjo Eyes but his ever-loving wife 'Lasses, and as she kisses Hymie smack-dab in the mush, 'Lasses says as follows:

'My darling Hymie,' she says, 'I hear what this big flannel-mouth says about the price on me, and,' she says, 'I am only sorry you do not cripple him for life. I know now I love you, and only you, Hymie,' she says, 'and I will never love anybody else. In fact,' 'Lasses says, 'I just prove my love for you by almost wrecking my nerves in rooting Mahogany home. I am still weak,' she says, 'but I have strength enough left to go with you to the Sunset Inn for a nice dinner, and you can give me my money then. Furthermore,' 'Lasses says, 'now that we have a few bobs, I think you better find another place for Mahogany to stay, as it does not look nice for my husband to be living with a horse.'

Well, I am going by the jockey house on my way home, thinking how nice it is that Hymie Banjo Eyes will no longer have to live with Mahogany, and what a fine thing it is to have a loyal, ever-loving wife such as 'Lasses, who risks her nerves rooting for her husband's horse, when I run into this dizzy Scroon in his street clothes, and wishing to be friendly, I say to him like this:

'Hello, Frankie,' I say. 'You put up a nice ride to-day.'

'Where do you get this "Frankie"?' Scroon says. 'My name is Gus.'

'Why,' I say, commencing to think of this and that, 'so it is, but is there a jock called Frankie in the sixth race with you this afternoon?'

'Sure,' Scroon says. 'Frankie Madeley. He rides Side Burns, the favourite; and I make a sucker of him in the stretch run.'

But of course I never mention to Hymie Banjo Eyes that I figure his ever-loving wife roots herself into a dead faint for the horse that will give her to Brick McCloskey, because for all I know she may think Scroon's name is Frankie, at that.

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17: The Risen Dead

Max Pemberton

1863-1950

Pearson's Magazine, July 1898

THE SUN was setting on the second day of June, in the year 1701, when Pietro Falier, the Captain of the Police of Venice, quitted his office in the Piazzetta of St. Mark and set out, alone, for the Palace of Frà Giovanni, the Capuchin friar, who lived over on the Island of the Guidecca.

"I shall return in an hour," he said to his subordinate as he stepped into the black gondola which every Venetian knew so well. "If any has need of me, I am at the house of Frà Giovanni."

The subordinate saluted, and returned slowly toward the ducal palace. He was thinking that his Captain went over-much just then to the house of that strange friar who had come to Venice so mysteriously, and so mysteriously had won the favor of the republic.

"Saint John!" he muttered to himself, "that we should dance attendance on a shaven crown— we, who were the masters of the city a year ago! What is the Captain thinking of? Are we all women, then, or have women plucked our brains that it should be Frà Giovanni this and Frà Giovanni that, and your tongue snapped off if you so much as put a question. To the devil with all friars, say I."

The good fellow stopped a moment in his walk to lay the flat of his sword across the shoulders of a mountebank, who had dared to remain seated at the door of his booth while so great a person passed. Then he returned to his office, and whispered in the ear of his colleague the assurance that the Captain was gone again to the island of the Jews, and that his business was with the friar.

"And look you, Michele," said he, "it is neither to you nor to me that he comes nowadays. Not a whisper of it, as I live, except to this friar, whom I could crush between my fingers as a glass ball out of Murano."

His colleague shook his head.

"There have been many," said he, "who have tried to crush Frà Giovanni. They grin between the bars of dungeons, my friend— at least, those who have heads left to grin with. Be warned of me, and make an ally of the man who has made an ally of Venice. The Captain knows well what he is doing. If he has gone to the priest's house now, it is that the priest may win rewards for us again, as he has won them already a hundred times.

He spoke earnestly, though, in truth, his guess was not a good one. The Captain of the Police had not gone to the Island of the Guidecca to ask a service of the friar; he had gone, as he thought, to save the friar's life. At the

moment when his subordinates were wagging their heads together, he himself stood in the priest's house, before the very table at which Frà Giovanni sat busy with his papers and his books.

"I implore you to listen to me, Prince!" he had just exclaimed very earnestly, as he repeated the news for the second time, and stood clamorous for the answer to his question.

The friar, who was dressed in the simple habit of the Capuchins, and who wore his cowl over his head so that only his shining black eyes could be seen, put down his pen when he heard himself addressed as "Prince."

"Captain," he said sharply, "who is this person you come here to warn? You speak of him as 'Prince.' It is some other, then, and not myself?"

The Captain bit his lip. He was one of the four in Venice who knew something of Frà Giovanni's past.

"Your Excellency's pardon," he exclaimed very humbly; "were we not alone, you would find me more discreet. I know well that the Prince of Iseo is dead— in Venice at least. But to Frà Giovanni, his near kinsman, I say beware, for there are those here who have sworn he shall not live to say Mass again."

For an instant a strange light came into the priest's eyes. But he gave no other sign either of surprise or of alarm.

"They have sworn it— you know their names, Captain?"

"The police do not concern themselves with names, Excellency."

"Which means that you do not know their names, Captain?"

Pietro Falier sighed. This friar never failed to humble him, he thought. If it were not for the honors which the monk had obtained for the police since he began his work in Venice, the Captain said that he would not lift a hand to save him from the meanest bravo in Italy.

"You do not know their names, Captain— confess, confess," continued the priest, raising his hand in a bantering gesture; "you come to me with some gossip of the bed-chamber, your ears have been open in the market-place, and this tittle-tattle is your purchase— confess, confess."

The Captain flushed as he would have done before no other in all Venice.

"I do not know their names, Excellency," he stammered; "it is gossip from the *bravo's* kitchen. They say that you are to die before Mass to-morrow. I implore you not to leave this house to-night. We shall know how to do the rest if you will but remain indoors."

It was an earnest entreaty, but it fell upon deaf ears. The priest answered by taking a sheet of paper and beginning to write upon it.

"I am indebted to you, Signor Falier," said he, quietly, "and you know that I am not the man to forget my obligations. None the less, I fear that I must disregard your warning, for I have an appointment in the market to-night, and

my word is not so easily broken. Let me reassure you a little. The news that you bring to me, and for which I am your debtor, was known to me three days ago. Here upon this paper I have written down the name of the woman and of her confederates who have hired the *bravo* Rocca to kill me to-night in the shadow of the church of San Salvatore. You will read that paper and the woman's name— when you have my permission."

Falier stepped back dumb with amazement.

"The woman's name, Excellency," he repeated, so soon as his surprise permitted him to speak, "you know her, then?"

"Certainly, or how could I write it upon the paper?"

"But you will give that paper to me, here and now. Think, Excellency, if she is your enemy, she is the enemy also of Venice. What forbids that we arrest her at once? You may not be alive at dawn!"

"In which case," exclaimed the priest, satirically, "the Signori of the Night would be well able to answer for the safety of the city. Is it not so, Captain?"

Falier stammered an excuse.

"We have not your eyes, Excellency; we cannot work miracles— but at least we can try to protect you from the hand of the assassin. Name this woman to me, and she shall not live when midnight strikes."

Frà Giovanni rose from his chair and put his hand gently upon the other's shoulder.

"Signer Falier," said he, "if I told you this woman's name here and now as you ask, the feast of Corpus Christi might find a new Doge in Venice."

"You say, Excellency—?"

"That the city is in danger as never she was before in her history."

"And your own life?"

"Shall be given for Venice if necessary. Listen to this: you seek to be of service to me. Have you any plan?"

"No plan but that which posts guards at your door and keeps you within these walls—"

"That the enemies of Venice may do their work. Is that your reason, Signor Falier?"

"I have no other reason, Excellency, but your own safety and that of the city."

"I am sure of it, Captain, and being sure I am putting my life in your hands to-night—"

"To-night; we are to follow you to the Merceria, then?"

"Not at all; say rather that you are to return to the palace and to keep these things so secret that even the Council has no word of them. But, at ten o'clock, take twenty of your best men and let your boat lie in the shadow of

the church of San Luca until I have need of you. You understand, Captain Falier?"

Falier nodded his head and replied vaguely. Truth to tell, he understood very little beyond this— that the friar had been before him once more, and that he could but follow as a child trustingly. And the city was in danger! His heart beat quick when he heard the words.

"Excellency," he stammered, "the boat shall be there— at ten o'clock— in the shadow of the church of San Luca. But first— "

"No," said the priest, quickly, "we have done with our firstly— and your gondola waits, I think, signorè!"

ii

THE BELLS of the Chapel of St. Mark were striking the hour of eight o'clock when, Frà Giovanni stepped from his gondola, and crossed the great square toward that labyrinth of narrow streets and winding alleys they call the Merceria.

The Piazza itself was then ablaze with the light of countless lamps; dainty lanterns, colored as the rainbow, swayed to the soft breeze between the arches of the colonnade. Nobles were seated at the doors of the splendid cafés; the music of stringed instruments mingled with the louder, sweeter music of the bells; women, whose jewels were as sprays of flame, many-hued and dazzling, hung timidly upon the arms of lovers; gallants swaggered in costly velvets and silks which were the spoil of the generous East; even cassocked priests and monks in their sombre habits passed to and fro amidst that glittering throng, come out to herald the glory of a summer's night.

And clear and round, lifting themselves up through the blue haze to the silent world of stars above, were the domes and cupolas of the great chapel itself— the chapel which, through seven centuries, had been the city's witness to the God who had made her great, and who would uphold her still before the nations.

The priest passed through the crowd swiftly, seeming to look neither to the right nor to the left. The brown habit of the Capuchins was his dress, and his cowl was drawn so well over his head that only his eyes were visible— those eyes which stand out so strangely in the many portraits which are still the proud possession of Venice. Though he knew well that an assassin waited for him in the purlieus of the church of San Salvatore, his step was quick and brisk; he walked as a man who goes willingly to a rendezvous, and anticipates its climax with pleasure. When he had left the great square with its blaze of lanterns and its babel of tongues, and had begun to thread the narrow streets

by which he would reach the bridge of the Rialto, a smile played for a moment about his determined mouth, and he drew his capuce still closer over his ears.

"So it is Rocca whom they send— Rocca, the poltroon! Surely there is the hand of God in this."

He raised his eyes for a moment to the starlit heaven, and then continued his brisk walk. His way lay through winding alleys; over bridges so narrow that two men could not pass abreast; through passages where rogues lurked, and repulsive faces were thrust grinning into his own. But he knew the city as one who had lived there all his life; and for the others, the thieves and scum of Venice, he had no thought. Not until he came out before the church of Santa Maria Formosa did he once halt or look behind him. The mystery of the night was a joy to him. Even in the shadow of the church, his rest was but for a moment; and, as he rested, the meaning smile hovered again upon his wan face.

"The play begins," he muttered, while he loosened slightly the girdle of his habit and thrust his right hand inside it; "the God of Venice give me courage."

A man was following him now— he was sure of it. He had seen him as he turned to cross the bridge which would set him on the way to the church of San Salvatore— a short, squat man, masked and dressed from head to foot in black. Quick as the movements of the fellow were, dexterous his dives into porches and the patches of shadow which the eaves cast, the priest's trained eye followed his every turn, numbered, as it were, the very steps he took. And the smile upon Frà Giovanni's face was fitful no more. He walked as a man who has a great jest for his company.

"Rocca the fool, and alone! They pay me a poor compliment, those new friends of mine; but we shall repay, and the debt will be heavy."

He withdrew his hand from his habit, where it had rested upon the hilt of a dagger, for he knew that he had no need of any weapon. His gait was quick and careless; he stopped often to peer into some windowless shop where a sickly lamp burned before the picture of a saint; and wares, which had not tempted a dead generation, appealed unavailingly to a living one. The idea that his very merriment might cost him his life never entered his head. He played with the assassin as a cat with a mouse, now tempting him to approach, now turning suddenly, and sending him helter-skelter into the door of a shop or the shadow of a bridge. He was sure of his man, and that certainty was a delight to him.

"If it had been any other but Rocca the clown!" he said to himself, his thoughts ever upon the jest; "surely we shall know what to say to him."

He had come almost to the church of San Salvatore by this time. His walk had carried him out to the bank of a narrow, winding canal, at whose quays once-splendid gondolas were rotting in neglect. It seemed to him that here

was the place where his tactics might well be changed and the *rôle* of the hunted put aside for that of the hunter. Quick to act, he stepped suddenly behind one of the great wooden piles driven into the quay for the warping of barges. The *bravo*, who did not perceive that he had been detected, and who could not account for the sudden disappearance of his prey, came straight on, his cloak wrapped about his face, his naked sword in his hand. The wage would be earned easily that night, he was telling himself. No one would miss a beggarly monk— and he, Rocca, must live. A single blow, struck to the right side of the back, and then— and then—

This pleasant anticipation was cut short abruptly by the total disappearance of the man whose death was a preliminary to the wage he anticipated so greedily. Mystified beyond measure, he let his cloak fall back again, and began to peer into the shadows as though some miracle had been wrought and the priest carried suddenly from earth to that heaven whither he had meant to send him so unceremoniously.

"Blood of Paul!" he exclaimed angrily, turning about and about again, "am I losing my eyes? A plague upon the place and the shadows."

He stamped his foot impotently, and was about to run back by the way he had come when a voice spoke in the shadows; and at the sound of the voice, the sword fell from the man's hand and he reeled back as from a blow.

"Rocca Zicani, the Prince is waiting for you."

The assassin staggered against the door of a house, and stood there as one paralyzed. He had heard those words once before in the dungeons of Naples. They had been spoken by the Inquisitors who came to Italy with one of the Spanish princes. Instantly he recalled the scene where first he had listened to them— the dungeon draped in black— the white-hot irons which had seared his flesh; the rack which had maimed his limbs, the masked men who had tortured him.

"Great God!" he moaned, "not that— not that—"

The priest stepped from the shadows and stood in a place where the feeble light of an oil lamp could fall upon his face. The laugh hovered still about his lips. He regarded the trembling man with a contempt he would not conceal.

"Upon my word, Signer Rocca," he exclaimed, "this is a poor welcome to an old friend."

The *bravo*, who had fallen on his knees, for he believed that a trick had again delivered him into the hands of his enemies, looked up at the words, and stared at the monk as at an apparition.

"Holy Virgin!" he cried, "it is the Prince of Iseo."

The priest continued in the jester's tone:

"As you say, old comrade, the Prince of Iseo. Glory to God for the good fortune which puts you in my path to-night! Oh, you are very glad to see me, Signor Rocca, I'll swear to that. What, the fellow whom my hands snatched from the rack in the house of the Duke of Naples— has he no word for me? And he carries his naked sword in his hand; he has the face of a woman and his knees tremble. What means this?"

He had seemed to speak in jest, but while the cowed man was still kneeling before him, he, of a sudden, struck the sword aside, and, stooping, he gripped the *bravo* by the throat and dragged him from the shelter of the porch to the water's edge. As iron were the relentless hands; the man's eyes started from his head, the very breath seemed to be crushed out of him in the grip of the terrible priest.

"Signor Rocca, what means this?" the friar repeated. "A naked sword in your hand and sweat upon your brow. Oh, oh! a tale, indeed! Shall I read it to you, or shall I raise my voice and fetch those who will read it for me— those who have the irons heated, and the boot so made for your leg that no last in Italy shall better it. Speak, rascal, shall I read you the tale?"

"Mercy, Prince, for the love of God!"

The priest released the pressure of his hands and let the other sink at his feet.

"Who sent you, rogue?" he asked. "Who pays your wage?"

"I dare not tell you, Excellency."

"Dare not! *You* dare not— you, whom a word will put to torture greater than any you have dreamed of in your worst agonies; *you* dare not."

"Excellency, the Countess of Treviso; I am her servant."

"And the man who sent her to the work— his name?"

"Andrea, Count of Pisa, Excellency."

The priest stepped back as one whose curiosity was entirely satisfied.

"Ah! I thought so. And the price they paid you, knave?"

"Forty silver ducats, Excellency,"

"Ho, ho! so that is the price of a friar in Venice."

The *bravo* sought to join in the jest.

"Had they known it was the Prince of Iseo, it had been a hundred thousand, Excellency."

Frà Giovanni did not listen to him. His quick brain was solving a strange problem— the problem of the price that these people, in their turn, should pay to Venice. When he had solved it, he turned to the cringing figure at his feet.

"Signor Rocca," he said, "do you know of what I am thinking?"

"Of mercy, Excellency; of mercy for one who has not deserved it."

"But who can deserve it?"

"Excellency, hearken to me. I swear by all the saints—"

"In whose name you blaspheme, rascal. Have I not heard your oath in Naples when the irons seared your flesh? Shall I listen again when the fire is being made ready, and there is burning coal beneath the bed you will lie upon to-night, Signor Rocca?"

"Oh! for God's sake, Excellency!"

"Not so; for the sake of Venice, rather."

"I will be your slave— I swear it on the cross— I will give my life—"

"Your precious life, Signor Rocca!— nay, what a profligate you are!"

Frà Giovanni's tone, perhaps, betrayed him. The trembling man began to take heart a little.

"Prove me Excellency," he whined; "prove me here and now."

The friar made a pretence of debating it. After a little spell of silence he bade the other rise.

"Come," he said, "your legs catch cold, my friend, and will burn slowly. Stretch them here upon the Campo while I ask you some questions. And remember, for every lie you tell me there shall be another wedge in the boot you are about to wear. You understand that, signorè?"

"Excellency, the man that could lie to the Prince of Iseo has yet to be born."

It was a compliment spoken from the very heart; but the priest ignored it.

"Let us not speak of others, but of you and your friends. And, firstly, of the woman who sent you. She is now—"

"In the Palazzo Pisani waiting news of you."

"You were to carry that news to her?"

"And to receive my wage, Excellency. But I did not know what work it was— Holy God, I would not have come for—"

Frà Giovanni cut him short with a gesture of impatience.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, "the Count of Pisa, is he not the woman's lover?"

"They say so, signorè."

"And he is at her house to-night?"

The man shook his head.

"Before Heaven, I do not know, Excellency. An hour ago, he sat at a café in the great square."

"And the woman— was she alone when you left her?"

"There were three with her to sup."

The priest nodded his head.

"It is good!" he said; "we shall even presume to sup with her."

"To sup with her— but they will kill you, Excellency!"

"Ho, ho! see how this assassin is concerned for my life.

"Certainly I am. Have you not given me mine twice? I implore you not to go to the house— "

He would have said more, but the splash of an oar in the narrow canal by which they walked cut short his entreaties. A gondola was approaching them; the cry of the gondolier, awakening echoes beneath the eaves of the old houses, gave to Frà Giovanni that inspiration he had been seeking now for some minutes.

"Rocca Zicani," he exclaimed, standing suddenly as the warning cry, "*Stalè*," became more distinct, "I am going to put your professions to the proof."

"Excellency, I will do anything—"

"Then, if you would wake to-morrow with a head upon your shoulders, enter that gondola, and go back to those who sent you. Demand your wage of them—"

"But, Excellency—"

"Demand your wage of them," persisted the priest, sternly, "and say that the man who was their enemy lies dead before the church of San Salvatore. You understand me?"

A curious look came into the *bravo's* eyes.

"Saint John!" he cried, "that I should have followed such a one as you, Excellency!"

But the priest continued warningly:

"As you obey, so hope for the mercy of Venice. You deal with those who know how to reward their friends and to punish their enemies. Betray us, and I swear that no death in all Italy shall be such a death as you will die at dawn to-morrow."

He raised his voice, and summoned the gondolier to the steps of the quay. The *bravo* threw himself down upon the velvet cushions with the threat still ringing in his ears.

"Excellency," he said, "I understand. They shall hear that you are dead."

iii

FRÀ GIOVANNI stepped from his gondola, and stood at the door of the Palazzo Pisani exactly at a quarter to ten o'clock. Thirty minutes had passed since he had talked with the *bravo*, Rocca, and had put him to the proof. The time was enough, he said; the tale would have been told, the glad news of his own death already enjoyed by those who would have killed him.

Other men, perhaps, standing there upon the threshold of so daring an emprise, would have known some temptation of fear or hesitation in such a fateful moment; but the great Capuchin friar neither paused nor hesitated.

That strange confidence in his own mission, his belief that God had called him to the protection of Venice, perchance even a personal conceit in his own skill as a swordsman, sent him hurrying to the work. It was a draught of life to him to see men tremble at his word; the knowledge which treachery poured into his ear was a study finer than that of all the manuscripts in all the libraries of Italy. And he knew that he was going to the Palazzo Pisani to humble one of the greatest in the city— to bring the sons of Princes on their knees before him.

There were many lights in the upper stories of the great house, but the ground floor, with its barred windows and cell-like chambers, was unlighted. The priest saw horrid faces grinning through the bars; the faces of fugitives, fleeing the justice of Venice, outcasts of the city, murderers. But these outcasts, in their turn, were silent when they saw who came to the house, and they spoke of the strange guest in muted exclamations of surprise and wonder.

"Blood of Paul! do you see that? It is the Capuchin himself and alone. Surely there will be work to do anon."

"Ay, but does he come alone? Saint John! I would sooner slit a hundred throats than have his shadow fall on me. Was it not he that hanged Orso and the twelve! A curse upon the day he came to Venice."

So they talked in whispers, but the priest had passed already into the great hall of the palace and was speaking to a lackey there.

"My friend," he said, "I come in the name of the Signori. If you would not hear from them to-morrow, announce me to none."

The lackey drew back, quailing before the threat.

"Excellency," he exclaimed, "I am but a servant—"

"And shall find a better place as you serve Venice faithfully."

He passed on with noiseless steps, mounting the splendid marble staircase upon which the masterpieces of Titian and of Paolo Veronese looked down. At the head of the stairs, there was a painted door, which he had but to open to find himself face to face with those who were still telling each other that he was dead.

For an instant, perhaps, a sense of the danger of his mission possessed him. He knew well that one false step, one word undeliberated, would be paid for with his own blood. But even in the face of this reckoning he did not hesitate. He was there to save Venice from her enemies; the God of Venice would protect him. And so without word or warning, he opened the door and stood, bold and unflinching, before those he had come to accuse.

There were four at table, and one was a woman. The priest knew her well. She had been called the most beautiful woman in Venice— Catherine, Countess of Treviso. Still young, with a face which spoke of ambition and of

love, her white neck glittered with the jewels it carried, her dress of blue velvet was such a dress as only a noblewoman of Venice could wear. A queenly figure, the friar said, yet one he would so humble presently that never should she hold up her head again.

As for the others, the men who had cloaked conspiracy with a woman's smile, he would know how to deal with them. Indeed, when he scanned their faces and began to remember the circumstances under which he had met them before, his courage was strengthened, and he forgot that he had ever reasoned with it.

He stood in the shadows; but the four, close in talk, and thinking that a lackey had entered the room, did not observe him. They were laughing merrily at some jest, and filling the long goblets with the golden wine of Cyprus, when at last he strode out into the light and spoke to them. His heart beat quickly; he knew that this might be the hour of his death, yet never had his voice been more sonorous or more sure.

"Countess," he exclaimed, as he stepped boldly to the table and confronted them, "I bring you a message from Andrea, the lord of Pisa!"

He had expected that the woman would cry out, or that the men would leap to their feet and draw their swords; but the supreme moment passed and no one spoke. A curious silence reigned in the place. From without there floated up the gay notes of a gondolier's carol. The splash of oars was heard, and the low murmur of voices. But within the room you could have counted the tick of a watch— almost the beating of a man's heart. And the woman was the first to find her tongue. She had looked at the friar as she would have looked at the risen dead; but, suddenly, with an effort which brought back the blood to her cheeks, she rose from her seat and began to speak.

"Who are you?" she asked; "and why do you come to this house?"

Frà Giovanni advanced to the table so that they could see his face.

"Signora," he said, "the reason of my coming to this house I have already told you. As to your other question, I am the Capuchin friar, Giovanni, whom you desired your servant Rocca to kill at the church of San Salvatore an hour ago."

The woman sank back into the chair; the blood left her face; she would have swooned had not curiosity proved stronger than her terror.

"The judgment of God!" she cried.

Again, for a spell, there was silence in the room. The priest stood at the end of the table telling himself that he must hold these four in talk until the bells of San Luca struck ten o'clock, or pay for failure with his life. The men, in their turn, were asking themselves if he were alone.

"You are the Capuchin friar, Giovanni," exclaimed one of them presently, taking courage of the silence, "what, then, is your message from the Count of Pisa?"

"My message, signorè, is this— that at ten o'clock to-night, the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live."

A strange cry, terrible in its pathos, escaped the woman's lips. All had risen to their feet again. The swords of the three leaped from their scabbards. The instant of the priest's death seemed at hand. But he stood, resolute, before them.

"At ten o'clock," he repeated sternly, "the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live. That is his message, signori, to one in this house. And to you, the Marquis of Cittadella, there is another message."

He turned to one of the three who had begun to rail at him, and raised his hand as in warning. So great was the curiosity to hear his words that the swords were lowered again, and again there could be heard the ticking of a clock in the great room.

"For me— a message! Surely I am favored, signorè."

"Of that you shall be the judge, since, at dawn to-morrow, your head will lie on the marble slab between the columns of the Piazzetta."

They greeted him with shouts of ridicule.

"A prophet— a prophet!"

"A prophet indeed," he answered quietly, "who has yet a word to speak to you, Andrea Foscari."

"To me!" exclaimed the man addressed, who was older than the others, and who wore the stola of the nobility.

"Ay, to you, who are about to become a fugitive from the justice of Venice. Midnight shall see you hunted in the hills, my lord; no house shall dare to shelter you; no hand shall give you bread. When you return to the city you would have betrayed, the very children shall mock you for a beggar."

Foscari answered with an oath, and drew back. The third of the men, a youth who wore a suit of white velvet, and whose vest was ablaze with gold and jewels, now advanced jestingly.

"And for me, most excellent friar?"

"For you, Gian Mocenigo, a pardon in the name of that Prince of Venice whose house you have dishonored."

Again they replied to him with angry gibes.

"A proof— a proof— we will put you to the proof, friar— here and now, or, by God, a prophet shall pay with his life."

He saw that they were driven to the last point. While the woman stood as a figure of stone at the table, the three advanced toward him and drove him

back before their threatening swords. The new silence was the silence of his death anticipated. He thought that his last word was spoken in vain. Ten o'clock would never strike, he said. Yet even as hope seemed to fail him, and he told himself that the end had come, the bells of the city began to strike the hour, and the glorious music of their echoes floated over the sleeping waters.

"A proof, you ask me for a proof, signori," he exclaimed triumphantly. "Surely, the proof lies in yonder room, where all the world may see it."

He pointed to a door opening in the wall of mirrors, and giving access to a smaller chamber. Curiosity drove the men thither. They threw open the door; they entered the room; they reeled back drunk with their own terror.

For the body of Andrea, lord of Pisa, lay, still warm, upon the marble pavement of the chamber, and the dagger with which he had been stabbed was yet in his heart.

"A proof— have I not given you a proof?" the priest cried again, while the woman's terrible cry rang through the house, and the three stood close together, as men upon whom a judgment has fallen.

"Man or devil— who are you?" they asked in hushed whispers.

He answered them by letting his monk's robe slip from his shoulders. As the robe fell, they beheld a figure clad in crimson velvet and corselet of burnished gold; the figure of a man whose superb limbs had been the envy of the swordsmen of Italy; whose face, lighted now with a sense of power and of victory, was a face for which women had given their lives.

"It is the Prince of Iseo," they cried, and, saying it, fled from the house of doom.

At that hour, those whose gondolas were passing the Palazzo Pisani observed a strange spectacle. A priest stood upon the balcony of the house holding a silver lamp in his hand; and as he waited, a boat emerged from the shadows about the church of San Luca and came swiftly toward him.

"The Signori of the Night," the loiterers exclaimed in hushed whispers, and went on their way quickly.

VERY EARLY next morning, a rumor of strange events, which had happened in Venice during the hours of darkness, drew a great throng of the people to the square before the ducal palace.

"Have you not heard it," man cried to man— "the Palazzo Pisani lacks a mistress to-day? The police make their toilet in the boudoir of my lady. And they say that the lord of Pisa is dead."

"Worse than that, my friends," a gondolier protested, "Andrea Foscari crossed to Maestre last night, and the dogs are even now on his heels."

"Your news grows stale," croaked a hag who was passing; "go to the Piazzetta and you shall see the head of one who prayed before the altar ten minutes ago."

They trooped off, eager for the spectacle. When they reached the Piazzetta, the hag was justified. The head of a man lay bleeding upon the marble slab between the columns. It was the head of the Marquis of Cittadella.

In the palace of the police, meanwhile, Pietro Falier, the Captain, was busy with his complaints.

"The lord of Pisa is dead," he said, "the woman has gone to the Convent of Murano; there is a head between the columns; Andrea Foscari will die of hunger in the hills— yet Gian Mocenigo goes free. Who is this friar that he shall have the gift of life or death in Venice?"

His subordinate answered—

"This friar, Captain, is one whom Venice, surely, will make the greatest of her nobles to-day."

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18: Wireless Confusion

Algernon Blackwood

1869–1951

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"GOOD NIGHT, UNCLE," whispered the child, as she climbed on to his knee and gave him a resounding kiss. "It's time for me to disappop into bed— at least, so mother says."

"Disappop, then," he replied, returning her kiss, "although I doubt…."

He hesitated. He remembered the word was her father's invention, descriptive of the way rabbits pop into their holes and disappear, and the way *good* children should leave the room the instant bedtime was announced. The father— his twin brother— seemed to enter the room and stand beside them. "Then give me another kiss, and disappop!" he said quickly. The child obeyed the first part of his injunction, but had not obeyed the second when the queer thing happened. She had not left his knee; he was still holding her at the full stretch of both arms; he was staring into her laughing eyes, when she suddenly went far away into an extraordinary distance. She retired. Minute, tiny, but still in perfect proportion and clear as before, she was withdrawn in space till she was small as a doll. He saw his own hands holding her, and they too were minute. Down this long corridor of space, as it were, he saw her diminutive figure.

"Uncle!" she cried, yet her voice was loud as before, "but what a funny face! You're pretending you've seen a ghost"— and she was gone from his knee and from the room, the door closing quietly behind her. He saw her cross the floor, a tiny figure. Then, just as she reached the door, she became of normal size again, as if she crossed a line.

He felt dizzy. The loud voice close to his ear issuing from a diminutive figure half a mile away had a distressing effect upon him. He knew a curious qualm as he sat there in the dark. He heard the wind walking round the house, trying the doors and windows. He was troubled by a memory he could not seize.

Yet the emotion instantly resolved itself into one of personal anxiety: something had gone wrong with his eyes. Sight, his most precious possession as an artist, was of course affected. He was conscious of a little trembling in him, as he at once began trying his sight at various objects— his hands, the high ceiling, the trees dim in the twilight on the lawn outside. He opened a book and read half a dozen lines, at changing distances; finally he stared carefully at the second hand of his watch. "Right as a trivet!" he exclaimed aloud. He emitted a long sigh; he was immensely relieved. "Nothing wrong with my eyes."

He thought about the actual occurrence a great deal— he felt as puzzled as any other normal person must have felt. While he held the child actually in his arms, gripping her with both hands, he had seen her suddenly half a mile away. "Half a mile!" he repeated under his breath, "why it was even more, it was easily a mile." It had been exactly as though he suddenly looked at her down the wrong end of a powerful telescope. It had really happened; he could not explain it; there was no more to be said.

This was the first time it happened to him.

At the theatre, a week later, when the phenomenon was repeated, the stage he was watching fixedly at the moment went far away, as though he saw it from a long way off. The distance, so far as he could judge, was the same as before, about a mile. It was an Eastern scene, realistically costumed and produced, that without an instant's warning withdrew. The entire stage went with it, although he did not actually see it go. He did not see movement, that is. It was suddenly remote, while yet the actors' voices, the orchestra, the general hubbub retained their normal volume. He experienced again the distressing dizziness; he closed his eyes, covering them with his hand, then rubbing the eyeballs slightly; and when he looked up the next minute, the world was as it should be, as it had been, at any rate. Unwilling to experience a repetition of the thing in a public place, however, and fortunately being alone, he left the theatre at the end of the act.

Twice this happened to him, once with an individual, his brother's child, and once with a landscape, an Eastern stage scene. Both occurrences were within the week, during which time he had been considering a visit to the oculist, though without putting his decision into execution. He was the kind of man that dreaded doctors, dentists, oculists, always postponing, always finding reasons for delay. He found reasons now, the chief among them being an unwelcome one— that it was perhaps a brain specialist, rather than an oculist, he ought to consult. This particular notion hung unpleasantly about his mind, when, the day after the theatre visit, the thing recurred, but with a startling difference.

While idly watching a bluebottle fly that climbed the windowpane with remorseless industry, only to slip down again at the very instant when escape into the open air was within its reach, the fly grew abruptly into gigantic proportions, became blurred and indistinct as it did so, covered the entire pane with its furry, dark, ugly mass, and frightened him so that he stepped back with a cry and nearly lost his balance altogether. He collapsed into a chair. He listened with closed eyes. The metallic buzzing was audible, a small, exasperating sound, ordinarily unable to stir any emotion beyond a mild

annoyance. Yet it was terrible; that so huge an insect should make so faint a sound seemed to him terrible.

At length he cautiously opened his eyes. The fly was of normal size once more. He hastily flicked it out of the window.

An hour later he was talking with the famous oculist in Harley Street… about the advisability of starting reading-glasses. He found it difficult to relate the rest. A curious shyness restrained him.

"Your optic nerves might belong to a man of twenty," was the verdict. "Both are perfect. But at your age it is wise to save the sight as much as possible. There is a slight astigmatism…." And a prescription for the glasses was written out. It was only when paying the fee, and as a means of drawing attention from the awkward moment, that his story found expression. It seemed to come out in spite of himself. He made light of it even then, telling it without conviction. It seemed foolish suddenly as he told it. "How very odd," observed the oculist vaguely, "dear me, yes, curious indeed. But that's nothing. H'm, h'm!" Either it was no concern of his, or he deemed it negligible…. His only other confidant was a friend of psychological tendencies who was interested and eager to explain. It is on the instant plausible explanation of anything and everything that the reputation of such folk depends; this one was true to type: "A spontaneous invention, my dear fellow— a pictorial rendering of your thought. You are a painter, aren't you? Well, this is merely a rendering in picture-form of"— he paused for effect, the other hung upon his words— "of the odd expression 'disappop.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed the painter.

"You see everything pictorially, of course, don't you?"

"Yes— as a rule."

"There you have it. Your painter's psychology saw the child 'disappopping.' That's all."

"And the fly?"— but the fly was easily explained, since it was merely the process reversed. "Once a process has established itself in your mind, you see, it may act in either direction. When a madman says 'I'm afraid Smith will do me an injury,' it means, 'I will do an injury to Smith,'" And he repeated with finality, "That's it."

The explanations were not very satisfactory, the illustration even tactless, but then the problem had not been stated quite fully. Neither to the oculist nor to the other had *all* the facts been given. The same shyness had been a restraining influence in both cases; a detail had been omitted, and this detail was that he connected the occurrences somehow with his brother whom the war had taken.

The phenomenon made one more appearance— the last— before its character, its field of action rather, altered. He was reading a book when the print became now large, now small; it blurred, grew remote and tiny, then so huge that a single word, a letter even, filled the whole page. He felt as if someone were playing optical tricks with the mechanism of his eyes, trying first one, then another focus.

More curious still, the meaning of the words themselves became uncertain; he did not understand them any more; the sentences lost their meaning, as though he read a strange language, or a language little known. The flash came then— someone was using his eyes— someone else was looking through them.

No, it was not his brother. The idea was preposterous in any case. Yet he shivered again, as when he heard the walking wind, for an uncanny conviction came over him that it was someone who did not understand eyes but was manipulating their mechanism experimentally. With the conviction came also this: that, while not his brother, it was someone connected with his brother.

Here, moreover, was an explanation of sorts, for if the supernatural existed— he had never troubled his head about it— he could accept this odd business as a manifestation, and leave it at that. He did so, and his mind was eased. This was his attitude: "The supernatural *may* exist. Why not? We cannot know. But we can watch." His eyes and brain, at any rate, were proved in good condition.

He watched. No change of focus, no magnifying or diminishing, came again. For some weeks he noticed nothing unusual of any kind, except that his mind often filled now with Eastern pictures. Their sudden irruption caught his attention, but no more than that; they were sometimes blurred and sometimes vivid; he had never been in the East; he attributed them to his constant thinking of his brother, missing in Mesopotamia these six months. Photographs in magazines and newspapers explained the rest. Yet the persistence of the pictures puzzled him: tents beneath hot cloudless skies, palms, a stretch of desert, dry watercourses, camels, a mosque, a minaret— typical snatches of this kind flashed into his mind with a sense of faint familiarity often. He knew, again, the return of a fugitive memory he could not seize…. He kept a note of the dates, all of them subsequent to the day he read his brother's fate in the official Roll of Honour: "Believed missing; now killed." Only when the original phenomenon returned, but in its altered form, did he stop the practice. The change then affected his life too fundamentally to trouble about mere dates and pictures.

For the phenomenon, shifting its field of action, abruptly became mental, and the singular change of focus took place now in his mind. Events magnified

or contracted themselves out of all relation with their intrinsic values, sense of proportion went hopelessly astray. Love, hate and fear experienced sudden intensification, or abrupt dwindling into nothing; the familiar everyday emotions, commonplace daily acts, suffered exaggerated enlargement, or reduction into insignificance, that threatened the stability of his personality. Fortunately, as stated, they were of brief duration; to examine them in detail were to touch the painful absurdities of incipient mania almost; that a lost collar stud could block his exasperated mind for hours, filling an entire day with emotion, while a deep affection of long standing could ebb towards complete collapse suddenly without apparent cause…!

It was the unexpected suddenness of Turkey's spectacular defeat that closed the painful symptoms. The Armistice saw them go. He knew a quick relief he was unable to explain. The telegram that his brother was alive and safe came *after* his recovery of mental balance. It was a shock. But the phenomena had ceased before the shock.

It was in the light of his brother's story that he reviewed the puzzling phenomena described. The story was not more curious than many another, perhaps, yet the details were queer enough. That a wounded Turk to whom he gave water should have remembered gratitude was likely enough, for all travellers know that these men are kindly gentlemen at times; but that this Mohammedan peasant should have been later a member of a prisoner's escort and have provided the means of escape and concealment— weeks in a dry watercourse and months in a hut outside the town— seemed an incredible stroke of good fortune. "He brought me food and water three times a week. I had no money to give him, so I gave him my Zeiss glasses. I taught him a bit of English too. But he liked the glasses best. He was never tired of playing with 'em— making big and little, as he called it. He learned precious little English…."

"My pair, weren't they?" interrupted his brother. "My old climbing glasses."

"Your present to me when I went out, yes. So really you helped me to save my life. I told the old Turk that. I was always thinking about you."

"And the Turk?"

"No doubt…. Through *my* mind, that is. At any rate, he asked a lot of questions about you. I showed him your photo. He died, poor chap— at least they told me so. Probably they shot him."

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19: The Benefit of the Doubt

L. Maxwell Pyke

Lillian Maxwell Pyke, 1881-1927

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 6 Oct 1917

Many short stories of this period resonate with war themes, directly or indirectly, as Australian forces fought and died in fierce battles at Gallipoli in Turkey, and on the Somme in France. L Maxwell Pyke is remembered as an author of childrens books, and also of adult novels as by "Erica Maxwell".

SYBIL BENTLEIGH made her way to the river where she hoped to find a breath of cool air. Her frame tent was stifling at eleven o'clock on this Queensland summer morning. She was interested in the bridge that was being built across the river where it formed a boundary of the camp. She carried a thermos of tea, and her, knitting bag, and soon found a shady gum overlooking the works, and began to ply her needles as she watched the concrete workers on the bank, and the gradual building up of the piles on the rocky bed of the river. She could see the assistant engineer Robinson, with his instruments, on the far side of the bridge, and thought what an exceptionally well-built fellow he was, and what a splendid figure he would make in khaki.

Sybil was paying one of her periodical visits, to her brother at the Wanda Railway Construction Camp. She liked to come up to him occasionally in the Never Never to see he was still behaving like a civilised being. She had no time for Herbert's wife, who was too much of a lady to rough it in camp with her husband, but not too much so to spend the money he earned so strenuously. Sybil was a keen nature lover, and in the primaeval bush where the camps were situated, she found many a rare butterfly specimen for her collection.

This visit to the. "Wanda camp, Sybil would thoroughly have enjoyed, had it not been for Bob Robinson, the assistant engineer.

As she shut her eyes from the glare, somehow her thoughts went to this quiet, self-controlled man. She despised herself for giving a second thought to one who was not serving his country. Sybil had seen widowed women giving up only sons to go to the Front, yet here she was in daily contact with this man, and never once had she tried to make him see his duty. Her patriotism urged her, while her sensitive soul shrank from the task. But it made her shy and abrupt with him, and he, blind fool, mistook this attitude for something quite different.

Suddenly she opened her eyes at the sound of twigs breaking near her, and there, stood the object of her thoughts before her, fanning himself with his old felt hat, his shirt open at his throat, his blue dungarees not a whit different

from those worn by his men toiling on the river bank. Sybil thought she had never seen him look so attractive or so fit.

"May I?" he said, as he took a seat near her, and lit a cigarette.

"I saw the glint of your flask from , down below, and thought you might have something good to drink. I'm as dry as the river in a drought. There's not a breath of air down there, and I've been out since sun-up. I deserve a spell, don't I?"

Sybil was busy with the flask.

"Why, of course," she said. "This is a special flavor. I sent some at Christmas to my young brother at the front, and he wrote that he was the most popular man for miles while it lasted.

Robinson looked at her queerly. "So you've a brother in the firing line, have you?" he asked.

Sybil spoke rather quickly.

"Yes, indeed; he was hurt very badly about a year ago, and was rescued by another Australian from a very perilous position. The man was recommended for a V.C., but we heard later he was missing." Her eyes glowed." I wish I could have met him. I would do anything for a man like that."

The other's face worked, strangely. "You have a great admiration for courage, haven't you, Miss Sybil? Got no time for anyone who could just offer you love and a wonderful life?"

Sybil's heart beat a trifle faster. "No time indeed," she said scornfully, "a man's no man these times who offers a woman his love and life when he won't offer them to his country. If ever I marry," she looked at him defiantly, "God send me a soldier, and if He is extra good, may it be one who has proved himself in battle."

Robinson went white under his tan. "But wouldn't love, the real kind, you know, Miss Sybil, count at all? Couldn't you like a fellow just for himself, just because he worshipped you and was quite decent in himself, putting on one side courage and all that heroic business?"

Sybil got up and faced him as he lay there on the grass. "I'd sooner marry a man who knew what honor and courage meant, even if I felt none of what you call the real kind of love, than a man whom my heart adored, but my mind put down as a coward."

Robinson pulled himself up with a deep sigh. "But don't you think love between man and woman comes unbidden, because of what they are, not because of what they do? Suppose you married such a man as you describe, and after all the excitement of these times had died down, you found what you had so much admired was but a mood born of the hour, and the man but an

ordinary fellow. I shouldn't like to take a woman on those terms, because she was carried away by an heroic deed done in the excitement of a moment."

He spoke slowly and deliberately, looking the flushed girl straight in the face. Sybil broke in quickly.

"Well, you're never likely to do that, anyway," she said, "so don't worry," and picking up her things, she walked away in as dignified a manner as the situation would allow.

NOT very many days after Sybil's declaration of her policy in love, the Chief came to Robinson's tent about six o'clock, and called to him, as he was trying to get, with a blunt razor and cold water, a couple of days growth off his chin, "I say, Robinson, have you seen anything of Sybil?"

"Why, no, sir," answered the assistant, deftly placing a piece of cotton wool where his razor had jibbed at the sound of Bentleigh's voice. "Isn't she about the camp?"

"Can't see her," replied, the engineer. "Cook tells me she saw her going off into the bush awhile back. I suppose she's after a case-moth or some other beast in its chrysalis."

"Shall I hunt round and see if I can see her, sir?" asked Robinson eagerly.

"I wish you would," said the worried engineer. "I've got to see those platelayers at 6.15, and though, of course, Sib is a good bushwoman, it isn't like her not to be back by teatime. There's some scrub fires around, too, I don't like the look of."

So Robinson set off, expecting every moment to see Sybil returning, tired and dusty, on the homeward track. There was a hot westerly blowing. As he left the track and took a side path into the bush, his nostrils detected the unmistakable and dreaded smell of burning undergrowth. A little puff of smoke met him from further on, and he hastened in the direction where he expected Sybil had gone.

Just then he felt the air was certainly growing hotter, and the smell of fire clearer than ever, and at that moment, too, he picked up his first track of her, a ribbon caught by an overhanging bush, a little bow of golden brown such as she wore to match her eyes. He eagerly picked it up and thrust it in the bosom of his shirt, and pressed on with renewed energy.

The smoke was beginning to be unpleasant now. and to make his eyes smart. The crackling of scrub could clearly be heard; it seemed he was going into the thick of the fire. He knew these scrub fires were common enough at this season, and usually burnt themselves out without doing much harm, but if anyone should be caught and surrounded, and for some reason helpless to move, ten to one there would be no escape.

At last, smoke-blackened and scorched, he pushed through to a little clearing. "What was that on the ground, near a log, not a hundred yards away? He broke into a run. There lay Sybil in a dead faint, her foot twisted under her, as she had fallen. Robinson raised her in his arms. The pain of the movement brought her returning consciousness.

"My foot," she murmured, her face twisted with agony.

"Sybil, Sybil," he called, as she showed signs of fainting again, "we must get out of this. There's a scrub fire spreading all around us. Here, drink this," and he held his flask to her lips. The raw spirit revived her.

"I was chasing such a beauty," she panted, "and tripped over a hidden stump. I think my ankle's broken. It feels dreadful."

"Can't you walk at all?" he asked.

"Not possibly," she groaned, then suddenly becoming conscious of the danger herself.

"Oh, look! The flames are spreading right over here. My God! the way out will be blocked in a minute. Go, quickly, or you'll never get out. It's no good two of us being burnt alive."

Robinson's only answer was to pick her up in his arms, put her across his shoulder, and make a dash for the narrow track. The flames were making great headway, running up sapling and bursting forth in spurts of smoke and sparks.

Robinson found his burden no light one, and his task harder even than he had supposed. It was difficult to breathe in the smoke-laden air, and the track narrow and littered with falling scrub was hot to his feet. Rut he was making headway. He felt the girl's weight grow heavier. She had fainted again, for which he was savagely thankful.

God gave him strength to go on. It could not be far now through this bit of burning scrub, to where the wide trace wound past the bush and led to the camp. But it seemed endless. Every moment the flames leapt out to meet them. Once they caught Sybil's hair, from which the hat had fallen, and Robinson, not having a hand to spare, put his cheek down and pressed out the little flame, blistering the skin as he did so.

Ah! there at last was the track. At the entrance stood an Immense gum with overhanging branches, burning and crackling where the fire had caught them. On to the safe open place the assistant stumbled, blind with flying cinders and faint with the horror of the thing. He swung from the danger zone, tripped on a branch, and dropped his burden, which rolled into safety. At that moment a burning limb fell, striking him across the chest as he rose after the stumble, and for him the world went black.

Sybil woke to life at the shock of her fall, and saw in an instant what had happened. She pulled herself to where Robinson lay. The branch was

smouldering across his chest. She pulled it off, and in a moment realised all that this man had done for her, and what it might mean to him. And she had called him coward!

She caught her breath in a sob, and bent over him. "Bob, Bob," she said, "I loved you so; that's why it hurt to think you weren't brave."

She pulled his shirt on one side that she might see the extent of his hurt. The pain of her ankle was forgotten.

Nothing remained to her of consciousness but that this was her man, and she loved him, and now he was dying, or even dead. She put her hand over his heart. Thank God, it was beating faintly. As she did so, something cold and hard touched her palm. She moved, it gently from the burn and held it on her hand. Something in its shape took her attention. A bronze cross, and on it the words "For Valour," and the date 1916. God! what did it mean? He had been to the war, and had won a Victoria Cross! Oh, why hadn't she known? Why had he kept this thing a secret?

His words came to her mind. "I wouldn't like a woman to marry me because of an heroic deed done in the excitement of the moment." She saw it all so clearly then. She kissed the little cross as it lay in her hand, mute testimony of a brave deed. Suddenly she realised that now she had lost him indeed. He would know when ho came to himself that she had seen his cross. She could never tell him now that she loved him. He could not help but think of what she had said, and believe that she was taking him because she wanted to marry a hero. The little bronze cross lay between them.

Behind them the scrub fire which had so nearly ended their lives was slowly burning itself out.

In the meantime, his business completed, the engineer caught sight of the red glow in the distance, and he called up his clerk.

"Better come and see for ourselves," he suggested; and with anxious faces they set out to look for the strayed pair, each, however, pooh-poohing any idea of danger. A faint coo-ee greeted their ears, and before long they came upon Sybil and the assistant engineer. They learnt in a few halting words from the girl of their plight. The clerk went back at full speed for the ambulance bearer, and in a very short time he was on the spot with his stretcher; Sybil insisted that Robinson should be taken first, and as his injuries and collapse seemed serious, she had her way.

It was not long before the bearers returned for the girl, and the camp was soon alive with the doings of the night. The story of Robinson's Victoria Cross was in everyone's lips, for it was the first thing noticed by the bearers, and they made the most of their news.

Robinson was found to have his chest badly crushed and burned and a return of the trouble from his old wound was anticipated. His extraordinary vitality and the good attentions of the doctor, however, did wonders towards quick recovery. As soon as he was sufficiently convalescent he had a long talk to his chief. That worthy was not long in seeking out Sybil after his interview, and told her that the patient wished to see her.

Sybil flushed, but did not vouchsafe a reply, After he had gone out, however, she sent her teeth and hobbled over to Robinson's tent. The man's whole face lit up as he saw his visitor.

"Miss Sybil,", he said. "This is more than good of you."

Sybil took a seat as far away from him as she could, which in a 12 x 10 tent was not very distant.

"I want to ask your pardon," she said, speaking with an effort. "The more I add to that, the worse case I will make out for myself. I only want to tell you that before I saw your V.C. I knew you for the hero you were. Thanks are but poor things to offer for the saving of my life, and for all you have suffered, but they are all I have to give."

"Sybil," he said, "come nearer. It still hurts me to talk" (base schemer). "Are you sure that's all? Can't you give me what I asked before ever you knew of this little bit of bronze? If that is to come between us I will begin to wish I had never saved your brother and won the Cross."

Sybil's eyes widened, and spoke the astonished question her lips could not frame.

"See, dear, I won't tease you any longer. I have the very good fortune to be the one who happened to be on the spot when your brother was in danger. I came through it without being knocked out altogether, and was soon back in the firing line. I was among those reported missing, after a violent bomb explosion, but was lucky enough to escape and to receive this decoration. I became, much to my disgust, among a certain set, what is known as a popular hero when I returned to Australia. I hated posing for the part as I have always held such deeds are done in the heat of the moment, and because the opportunity is there. I was not fit for active service again, and had no desire to go through life labelled, proud as was of my bit of bronze. I got this billet after extracting a promise from the Department to say nothing of my experience, as I wanted to make my way on my own merits. I loved you, Sybil, as soon as I saw you. You said just now you could only give me thanks. Couldn't you throw in your self with them?"

Sybil fell on her knees beside the bed, and began to sob quietly beneath her breath.

This was more than the invalid could bear.

"Stop, Sybil. Oh, don't cry for that. I have one more confession to make. Do you remember before you saw the Cross? I was just conscious enough to hear, darling, though I couldn't speak."

Sybil hid her face.

"Say it again, dear," he pleaded.

"Bob, I loved you," she whispered low, "and that's why it hurt to think you weren't brave."

"That was it, sweetheart. I knew it was myself all the time. Now, I can't be a soldier any more, will you be satisfied I tried to be a good one while I was at It? And can you ever forgive me for the trick I played to get your love?"

And Sybil, bending close to that scarred cheek, whispered in his ear, "All's fair in love and war," and Robinson V.C. seemed perfectly satisfied with her answer.

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20: The Haunted Camp

C. J. Dennis

Clarence Michael James Stanislaus Dennis (1876-1938)

Weekly Times (Vic.), 3 Oct 1914

There are several Aussie short stories by this title. Almost any old abandoned hut in the outback attracted this reputation.

"I WOULDN'T camp there," said the old age pensioner, "I wouldn't camp in that clearin', not fer five 'undred pound. There's not one bushman in the mountain is game to pass it after dark."

"Ghosts?" asked Norris.

"Not what yer'd call visible ghosts," replied the pensioner, "but sounds, 'orrible sounds, especially o' windy nights like this. An' lights there are, sometimes. I've seen 'em meself, across the gully."

Norris and Weir were on a walking lour, and towards nightfall on a boisterous day had reached an almost virgin forest near the top of the Great Dividing Range. Anxious to find a safe camping-place among the huge trees that swayed ominously in the high wind, they had stopped at the hut of the old-age pensioner to inquire of a possible clearing where they might sleep, secure from the danger of falling trees. The old man smiled at what he regarded as the childish fears of the new chums. His own hut appeared to be in imminent danger of annihilation from the swaying forest giants that towered above it, but, in his case, familiarity had bred, if not contempt, at least indifference.

The pensioner assured the tourists that there was only one clearing within ten miles of the spot— an old camp that had belonged to timber-getters of a bygone day, and upon which still stood two dilapidated huts. Then he went on to tell them of a tragedy— a sordid bush tale of jealousy and hate and revenge, which ended in the killing of a woman in one of the lonely huts in the clearing. All this happened many years ago, but the pensioner assured them, the woman's spirit still haunted the clearing and the echoes of her dying shrieks could be heard on certain nights, especially on windy nights such as this; for, he explained, it was upon such a stormy night that she had been done to death.

"In all this forest yer'd not find one man who'd camp one night in that clearing for a year's wages," said the pensioner. "I've lived here this twenty year, an' I've never met one who's had the pluck to do it yet."

The fact that this recital seemed to increase the desire of the travellers to pass a night in the clearing caused the pensioner no small amazement, and an

evident suspicion that they failed to realise the possible horrors that awaited them.

"If yer take my advice yeh'll stay where yeh are for tonight," he said. "I've heard them shrieks from half a mile away, an' they're enough to turn a man's hair grey; it's not healthy, I tell yer, for any man to camp there."

Both Weir and Norris smiled at the old man's warning, and assured him that they were well able to look after themselves.

"If yer found dead in the morning," i he called after them, "don't say that ! I never gave yeh fair warning."

"The old man seems to take his ghost story pretty seriously," laughed Norris, as they strode off down the mountain track.

Weir made no reply for some moments, and then muttered something about "foolish bush stories." His companion half suspected that the subject was distasteful to him.

Weir was a good deal older than his fellow-traveller, and the two had not been very long acquainted. Norris had met him casually at a city club some months previously, and the present walking tour was the outcome of what appeared to be a mutual desire to get away from the turmoil of the city.

Weir was a man of scanty conversation, and Norris knew little or nothing of his previous history. But he had already conceived a liking for the elder man, whose bushcraft and resourcefulness had so far helped to make the trip more than ordinarily pleasant.

"The old man said three miles. We seemed to have walked so far already," said Norris, after they had travelled for some time in silence.

"It's not much further," replied Weir absently. "Just behind that clump of scrub yonder."

"Why?" asked Norris in surprise. "I didn't know you had been there before."

"I haven't," answered Weir hastily. "I am relying on the old man's directions."

Norris felt quite sure that the pensioner had mentioned no such particulars, but he said nothing, thinking perhaps that Weir had misunderstood the old man.

However, as they rounded the clump of high saplings, the clearing came into sight, with the two weatherbeaten huts, desolate and deserted, standing in the middle.

The wind, which had been high since morning, had now dropped to a light breeze; but the roaring in the tree-tops on the higher ridges told that it had not yet spent Its full force.

Five minutes later the men reached the clearing, and proceeded to examine the huts. Neither appeared desirable habitations, but for weary travellers even the shelter they afforded was welcome. In places slabs had fallen from the walls, the shingle roofs were sadly out of repair, and the chimneys had fallen awry.

"I vote for this one," said Norris, indicating the hut to the north. "Neither will be much good if it rains; but this seems to be the least badly damaged."

Weir appeared to hesitate for a second. "If you don't mind," he said, "I would much rather camp in the other one. It will serve as better protection against the wind."

Norris could hardly see the force of this argument, but the question was hardly worth arguing, and the two men proceeded to spread their sleeping-bags upon the rude bunks that still remained in the southern hut.

Then Weir, who somehow had naturally assumed the position of camp cook, set about preparing the evening meal, while Norris inspected the age-stained decorations that still hung upon the waifs of the hut. He paused before a newspaper clipping, that was pasted above the chimneypiece, and read it through with growing interest.

"Come here, Weir," he called, pointing to the clipping. "This is evidently an account of the local tragedy that our old pensioner mentioned. Rather, here's portion of it; the rest has been torn away."

Weir came over, and, with an expressionless face, read through the tattered clipping. "Rather fragmentary," he commented, and went back to his cooking.

"All the same," said Norris, ' it s interesting, seeing that we are on the probable scene of the tragedy. I'ni sorry it's not all here." And he began to read it through again.

Only the centre portion of what was evidently the original clipping remained. It read :

....pson, splitter, said, 'My hut is about twenty yards from that occupied by the Skinners. Skinner was my mate," and we worked at paling-splitting. There is no other habitation within eight miles. Skinner lived with his wife, and I batches In my own hut. On the night of the tragedy I went to bed about eight o'clock. Some time during the night— I think it was after midnight— I was awakened by loud screams which lasted for half a minute. Thejse were followed by low moaning and sounds of bumping, as though someone was moving about in the Skinners' hut. I feared that something serious was happening, as the Skinners had been quarrelling, sometimes violently, on and off, for some days; and I knew Skinner to be a violent man. I dressed hastily and went over to the other hut. Mrs Skinner was lying on the floor with her head...

Here the paper had been torn away; but below, another small fragment still adhered to the wall upon which Norris was able to decipher :

....trackers have been engaged, but recent rains have obliterated any possible traces of the suspected man, and the delay in notifying "the police has enabled him to get a long start. The country is rough and overgrown with scrub, and Skinner is said to be an expert bushman. The detectives think...

"I wonder if they ever caught him," said Norris. "The usual sordid tragedy. Jealousy, I suppose."

"Tea's ready," said Weir, briskly. "Oh, that?" he commented. "I have no doubt he was caught and hanged years ago,"

The two men ate their evening meal almost in silence. Wier, particularly, seemed disinclined for conversation. Tired out with the long day's tramp, they went early to bed.

"The wind's getting up again," was Norris' final observation as he leaned over to put out the light. And five minutes later he was sunk in a dreamless sleep.

Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps two hours, later— he could not say exactly how long— when Norris awoke suddenly with an uncanny feeling that sonethinghorrible was happening. He had a vague, subconscious feeling that he had heard, or seen, something terrifying in his sleep. He ssit up in bed and listened. intently. The wind had risen in volume, and was now roaring hrough the tree-tops. Glancing toward the broken window opposite his bunk, Norris gaw that the night was pitch daifc.

Suddenly, with a waxing of his uncanny fear, Norris became aware of a low moaning that appeared to come from without. With his hands convulsively clutching the sides of his bunk, the man sat and listened. The strange moaning hid in it a note horribly human-like in quality, and he was almost convinced, against his better sense, that there was someone in pain within twentj' yards of him, outside the hut.

Then a shriek, sudden, shrill, and terrifying, arose high above the roaring of the wind. The man felt himself grow cold with the sudden horror of it. Then, as the shriek died down, again to the incessant, agonised moaning, his trembling hand groped for the matches.

"Weir!" he called. "Weir! What the devil's going on outside? Did vou hear it?"

No reply came from the bunk opposite.

By now Norris had managed to get the candle alight, and he glanced across at his companion's sleeping place.

Weir lay upon his back, his white face sharply silhoutted against the dark wall, and wide-open eyes staring straight up at the broken shingles of the roof.

With a chilling fear upon him, Norris strode across the room, calling as he went. In the next second his worst fears were confirmed. His companion was quite dead; and the horror of his last moments was plainly written on the dead face.

To a man of weaker nerves than Norris possessed, that long night's terrible vigil would have proved unbearable. At intervals the piercing shriek, to which he vainly sought to apply some natural and common-place cause, was repeated; and the moaning went on almost without cessation. But towards davlight both sounds died away, a fact that almost forced Norris, against his will, to attribute them to some supernatural agency.

With the first light of dawn Norris set about seeking assistance. The only habitation within many miles was that of the old-age pensioner whom he had seen the previous day, and he resolved to see the old man first with the object of seeking directions. He had got half way upon his errand when he met the old man coming towards him. The pensioner greeted him with evident delight.

"I'm pleased to see yeh alive," were the old man's first words. "When yeh told me yeh were going to camp down there I had me doubts of seeing yeh alive again. Where's yer mate?" he added, gazing apprehensively down the truck.

As well as he could Norris related his experiences of the night, and with difficulty persuaded the old man to accompany him back to the hut.

Once inside the pensioner stood for some minutes gazing searchingly at the features of the dead man. Then, with a sudden movement, he opened the front of the shirt and pointed to a tattoo mark upon the chest.

"I had me suspicions yesterday," he said, quietly; "and now I'm certain. It's him."

"What do you mean?" asked Norris, "That man," said the old bushman, "was my mate, Tom Skinner. Fifteen year ago he killed his poor wife in that very hut over there."

"Are you sure?" asked Norris.

"I couldn't make no mistake," replied the pensioner. "I was mates with him for many a year, and there's the mark I've seen upon him often."

"But the shrieks?" said Norris. "The sounds I heard last night? What could they have been?"

"They was the dead woman,'' said the pensioner with conviction. "She's had her revenge. Yeh can be sure; she'll rest at peace now."

They went out into the sunlight, and to Norris, despite the ghastly evidence within the hut, the events of the night seemed unreal as a dream. The wind

had risen again, and the tall trees upon the ridge opposite began to bend and sway before it. They paused beside an old withered tree, while the pensioner pointed out to Norris the road he should take to the nearest town, whither he purposed to go for assistance.

With raised hand the old man was pointing out the track, when, without warning, a piercing shriek sounded directly over their heads. The man's hand dropped to his side, and, his speech arrested in the middle of a sentence, he stood gazing at Norris with terrified eyes.

"My Gawd! it's 'er!" he managed to whisper, with trembling lips.

But the friendly daylight gave Norris a confidence and a desire for investigation he had not felt upon the previous night.

As before, the shrieking had died down to a low quavering moan, which Norris located with certainty within the tree beneath which they stood. While the pensioner stood rooted to the spot with terror, Norris investigated further.

"It's the tree!" he said at last, "It's nothing but the wind in the tree!"

"It's the dead woman," replied the pensioner. "She ain't satisfied yet."

"Come here," said Norris, reassuringly; "it's easily explained." And he pointed out to the bushman the cause of his superstitious fears. The tree was hollow, and, near its base on the windward side was a hole of about a foot diameter. Higher up, and upon the opposite side, was another hole of smaller dimensions owing to its peculiar construction the whole thus formed a gigantic whistle through which the wind shrieked when it rose high, and fell away to the strange, human-like moan as it diminished in force.

"You see, after all," said Norris "it bears a quite natural explanation."

"Maybe, maybe," said the old splitter glancing towards the hut. "But, tree or no tree, she's had her revenge."

21: In the Era of the Wireless

M. E. J. Pitt

Marie Elizabeth Josephine McKeown Pitt, 1869-1948
Weekly Times (Melbourne) 16 July 1910

Australian poet and short story writer. Her verse first appeared in 1901 in the Bulletin *news magazine, then in specialist literary magazines. Several volumes of her collected verse were also published.*

SMITH-JONES had had a bad day—The morning had been a brickfielder— the afternoon had lost its identity in the infernal twilight of a dust storm, and he was in it— indeed, he got so tangled up with the scheme things that he came out of it without his hat.

Smith-Jones was a patient man, but when, to crown all, the telephone took sides against him, he lost his temper.

"Hullo!" he whispered, coaxingly.

"I just want to"— (*bizz-iz-iz*!)

"And it was just the sweetest coat!"— (*biz-iz-iz*!)

Smith-Jones was cool yet. "Hullo!— er— is that you, Bloggs?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I just rang up to tell you—"

"Yes, lovely! I'm trimming mine with 'blue, fancy' "— (*biz-iz-iz*!!!)

This sort of thing had lasted for quite twenty minutes. His train was due in five and a four minutes sprint was required to catch it. He rang up savagely, jammed on his hat and hit out for the station.

The world was against him.

"About time this wretched, obsolete system was fired out" he said to himself. "One won't have these troubles in the era of the wireless."

Smith-Jones prided himself on keeping in touch with the advance guard of scientific research. Somehow he felt a sense of deep injury to-night. The world was out of joint and he was getting squeezed in the hinge-flaps. Tea didn't fix him up much. He sat down, with the latest sporting news in front of him— (if Smith- Jones wasn't an Australian and a sport he was nothing). No good— his mind went back to the wireless.

"That will be the time for a man to enjoy life— elements all harnessed— wretched struggle now — not worth—"

SMITH-JONES yawned, rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

"Great Jehosaphat!" he spluttered. "Where?— what— where am I?"

"You are in the Central Recording Sound Station of the Universe!" replied a calm voice. Smith-Jones's jaw dropped, and his blood froze.

"Then I— I suppose I'm— I'm dead?" he said, breathing feebly.

"Dead? — you must be one of the primitive beings that live in one of the inferior stars!"

"I live— I lived in the earth," said Smith-Jones sadly.

"Oh, you did? Well, earth-man, you have a lot to learn, but you're not by any means necessarily dead because you've left the earth planet. You don't anticipate any evil results there because of your absence, do you?"

Smith-Jones thought a moment; he had money in African diamond mining concerns, and he was one-third owner in a coal mine, his horse had won a Melbourne Cup, he always patronised sport, and had presented several trophies for competitions; he had always been a supporter of law and order; and he was keen, very keen, on Australian defence. Yet somehow he couldn't truthfully imagine the earth running amok and violently assaulting the satellites of Alpha Centauri just because he (Smith-Jones) had left his corner therein.

"No," he said at last, reluctantly, no, I suppose not."

A stiletto of violet light danced at incredible speed— a sort of devil dance on a great white screen. Smith Jones shivered with the awe of the situation, but a remnant of his old interest in scientific research stirred within him.

"What do you call this system? " he asked in a faint voice.

"It's the Universal System of Eternal Registration. Beings from different quarters of the four winds call it by different names. If I remember rightly, the earthfolk call it The Scroll of the Book of General Judgment."

"How old is this universal registration business?" Smith-Jones was getting interested.

"As old as time."

"Whew! What is the principle of the system? It isn't Morse. It—'

"It is the Cosmic Fluid Thought Process. It is very simple; everything in creation is simple when you are wise enough to understand it. You see the white screen where the light plays?"

"Yes."

"Well that is a section, just as much as your eye is fitted to take in, of the Ether Scroll of Eternity. It runs on the great wheel of perpetual motion which is the universe."

Smith-Jones gasped.

"Is it patented?" he whispered.

"Is it what?" The calm voice was sarcastic.

"I mean, that is, I didn't mean anything disrespectful," he apologised. He watched the violet stiletto stabbing the screen in a mad maze of rapid movement. At last he mustered courage.

"I suppose you can read the register?" he asked timidly.

"Oh, yes; it is plainness itself when you have reached the necessary condition of comprehension."

"Didn't you say it was the Sound Recording Station? I don't hear anything," said Smith-Jones.

"That is because you don't know how to listen. You earth folk have been so long in the habit of continuous idle speech that you have lost the true faculty of listening. You must empty the mental sound chambers of the obsessing echoes of self-sufficiency before the real sound can become present with you.

"Just think for a time of the immensity of space as it seemed to you on the earth and your proportion thereto. It may have the effect desired."

Smith-Jones tried to fix his thoughts on the immensity of space— but somehow his mind wandered. What did it matter about space, anyhow? He wanted solid ground, and suddenly he remembered that he didn't own enough to build a hen roost on— that others had taken his belongings, his position, his work, his name even. In the whole machinery of earth-life he had no meaning or place. He was squeezed out.

Smith-Jones began to feel like a grain of sand on the rim of a big flywheel— unutterably deficient and sorely afraid. Then it was that he began to hear a murmur, soft, as if he held a sea-shell to his face, beginning softly, and swelling as a wave swells before it breaks. Only the sound didn't break, but diminished softly as it rose— rising and falling at perfectly regular intervals, it seemed to him like listening to the breathing of some sleeping giant. He was so interested in the strangeness of his position and surroundings that Smith-Jones faded altogether out of sight, and wonder, almost reverence, took possession of him.

From away in the distance somewhere, he didn't know where, came the wail as of a thousand orchestras, bitter with the sorrow of all the ages. Smith-Jones wept without restraint. He didn't know why, but it reminded him somehow of all the things he had done that he ought not to have done, of all the right things that he had always intended to do when he had time.

"That," said the voice, "is the cry of the homeless and distressed coming up from the cities of the earth planet."

Smith-Jones began to shake at the knees. Property and respectability seemed to count for nothing up here.

"Can you interpret it all ?" he asked.

"Certainly!" answered the voice, "but it is enough yet for you to hear the sound. You could not bear to hear the full interpretation."

"Is everything done down there registered?"

"For Eternity!" answered the voice.

Smith-Jones groaned aloud as he thought of wild-cat shares and certain small affairs in dummying. There were no rocks on which to call, to fall upon him and hide him, so he had perforce to remain exposed while the awful recital of earthly iniquities went on. He felt very humble and inconsequential.

And now he heard another sound, which rose and swelled till it melted and dispersed in indescribably exquisite fragrance.

"That," said the voice, "is the record of harmonious thoughts of the beings on the earth planet, and their equivalent expression in words and deeds— justice, fellowship, altruism."

Smith-Jones swept the dim horizon of his history and was so delighted to find an action that pleased him that he lost his proper altitude— all that he could hear now was the regular breathing— if it could be called such— of an invisible giant, which somehow or other he now seemed part. He was filled with loneliness, which gave place to joy when hearing again came to him. He wished he could send his people a message, but the voice told him that was impossible to a being in his stage of evolution. To hear would tax him to his fullest capacity.

He found this quite correct. In spite of the simplicity of everything to a mind familiar with it, he still found it exasperatingly complex. The planetary records first grew intelligible to him. He had not gone deeply into astronomy in his life; still he knew a few of the grouped wonders in the heavens, and now he was able to distinguish them by another sense than sight. Mars, Jupiter, Saturn were voices, separate, distinct— very gradually, recording to his ability for keeping the proper altitude (the voice told him); he would become able to read, just the record of wild, natural things— the speech of the living rocks— on through trees, plants, animals, up to reasoning aspiring beings— god Children. He had no idea of how time was going— or, rather, he had forgotten all about time, for there was no such thing as time there, though he felt as if he was ten thousand years old in wisdom when he could recognise the sound of the sap rising in the Magnolias by the Amazon, and tell when the first rosebud burst, confining sepals in the valley of Cashmir.

But it was humanity that focussed his desire. The eagerness with which he used to turn to the cablegram column in the morning and evening papers was nothing compared, with his impatience to read the earth sound-record.

The voice warned him of possible disappointment, but Smith-Jones was like a boy waiting for his birthday.

"I do hope," he said, "that I can hear Australia!"

"Surely," said the voice, "we have much manifestation of energy from the beings in Australia— more energy than harmony; but they are a young branch of the old family of Earth-beings— we must be patient."

Smith-Jones was too anxious to allow indignation to take hold of him, which was fortunate, or the reverse, according to how one looked at it. At any rate, it was responsible for cutting short his wonderful experience. He watched the violet pencil in its weird dance, all his faculties concentrated on the sense of sound. But all he heard was a confused humming. Slowly it resolved itself into the murmur of a crowd, a human crowd.

He almost choked with excitement. It was Flemington— Flemington on Cup Day! Smith Jones wept for joy.

"I can hear them at last!" he said. "O! If I could only hear words!"

"You must be patient," the voice reminded him. "The Earth-bias will spoil your altitude. Unless you maintain your acquired neutrality hearing will be impossible. Now, listen."

Something like an exaggerated echo of a mixture of Chinese concert and Aboriginal corroboree for solo, with an obligato of kerosene cans, came to his ear.

"Can you hear the words now?" asked the voice in an amused tone.

"No! What is it?— civil war?— revolution?" Smith-Jones was trembling violently.

"Nonsense!" said the voice. "It was only one of your pushful Australian poets blowing his own trumpet. They're quite harmless, the words—" but something happened. Smith-Jones fell, and kept on falling for what seemed like 50 years— so he says— and when he came to himself he was sitting in his chair, very cold and uncomfortable, and the milkman was warbling on the next doorstep.

But he won't believe it was only a dream. He doesn't talk so much about wireless eras now; he isn't quite as sure as of old about many things, but he holds doggedly to the opinion that Australian poets should be bound over to keep the peace if they are not brought under the Dog Act, or the Noxious Weeds Act, or any that deals with pests.

———————

22: The Haunted Shanty

Bayard Taylor

1825-1878

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AS THE principal personage of this story is dead, and there is no likelihood that any of the others will ever see the *Atlantic Monthly*, I feel free to tell it without reservation.

The mercantile house of which I was until recently an active member had many business connections throughout the Western States, and I was therefore in the habit of making an annual journey throughout them, in the interest of the firm. In fact, I was always glad to escape from the dirt and hubbub of Cortland Street, and to exchange the smell of goods and boxes, cellars and gutters, for that of prairie grass and even of prairie mud. Although wearing the immaculate linen and golden studs of the city Valentine, there still remained a good deal of the country Orson in my blood, and I endured many hard, repulsive, yea, downright vulgar experiences for the sake of a run at large, and the healthy animal exaltation which accompanied it.

Eight or nine years ago (it is, perhaps, as well not to be very precise as yet with regard to dates), I found myself at Peoria, in Illinois, rather late in the season. The business I had on hand was mostly transacted; but it was still necessary that I should visit Bloomington and Terre Haute before returning to the East. I had come from Wisconsin and Northern Illinois and, as the great railroad spider of Chicago had then spun but a few threads of his present tremendous mesh, I had made the greater part of my journey on horseback. By the time I reached Peoria, the month of November was well advanced, and the weather had become very disagreeable. I was strongly tempted to sell my horse and take the stage to Bloomington, but the roads were even worse to a traveller on wheels than to one in the saddle, and the sunny day which followed my arrival flattered me with the hope that others as fair might succeed it.

The distance to Bloomington was forty miles, and the road none of the best; yet, as my horse "Peck" (an abbreviation of "Pecatonica"), had had two days' rest, I did not leave Peoria until after the usual dinner at twelve o'clock, trusting that I should reach my destination by eight or ine in the evening, at the latest. Broad bands of dull, gray, felt-like clouds crossed the sky, and the wind had a rough edge to it which predicted that rain within a day's march. The oaks along the rounded river-bluffs still held on to their leaves, although the latter were entirely brown and dead, and rattled around me with an ominous sound, as I climbed to the level of the prairie, leaving the bed of the muddy Illinois below. Peck's hoofs sank deeply into the unctuous black soil, which resembled

a jetty tallow rather than earth, and his progress was slow and toilsome. The sky became more and more obscured; the sun faded to a ghastly moon, then to a white blotch in the gray vault, and finally retired in disgust. Indeed, there was nothing in the landscape worth his contemplation. Dead flats of black, bristling with short corn-stalks, flats of brown grass, a brown belt of low woods in the distance, that was all the horizon inclosed: no embossed bowl, with its rim of sculptured hills, its round of colored pictures, but a flat earthen pie-dish, over which the sky fell like a pewter cover.

After riding for an hour or two over the desolate level, I descended through rattling oaks to the bed of a stream, and then ascended through rattling oaks to the prairie beyond. Here, however, I took the wrong road and found myself, some three miles farther, at a farm-house, where it terminated.

"You kin go out over the prairie yonder," said the farmer, dropping his maul beside a rail he had just split off. "There's a plain trail from Sykes's that'll bring you onto the road not fur from Sugar Crick."

With which knowledge I plucked up heart and rode on.

What with the windings and turnings of the various cart-tracks, the family resemblance in the groves of oak and hickory, and the heavy, uniform gray of the sky, I presently lost my compass-needle— that natural instinct of direction on which I had learned to rely. East, west, north, south— all were alike, and the very doubt paralyzed the faculty. The growing darkness of the sky, the watery moaning of the wind, betokened night and storm; but I pressed on, haphazard, determined, at least, to reach one of the incipient villages on the Bloomington road.

After an hour more, I found myself on the brink of another winding hollow, threaded by a broad, shallow stream. On the opposite side, a quarter of a mile above, stood a rough shanty, at the foot of the rise which led to the prairie. After fording the stream, however, I found that the trail I had followed continued forward in the same direction, leaving this rude settlement on the left. On the opposite side of the hollow, the prairie again stretched before me, dark and flat, and destitute of any sign of habitation. I could scarcely distinguish the trail any longer. In half an hour, I knew, I should be swallowed up in a gulf of impenetrable darkness; and there was evidently no choice left me but to return to the lonely shanty and there seek shelter for the night.

To be thwarted in one's plans, even by wind or weather, is always vexatious; but in this case, the prospect of spending a night in such a dismal corner of the world was especially disagreeable. I am— or at least I consider myself— a thoroughly matter-of-fact man, and my first thought, I am not ashamed to confess, was of oysters. Visions of a favorite saloon, and many a pleasant supper with Dunham and Beeson, (my partners,) all at once popped

into my mind, as I turned back over the brow of the hollow and urged Peck down its rough slope.

"Well," thought I, at last, "this will be one more story for our next meeting. Who knows what originals I may not find, even in a solitary settler's shanty?"

I could discover no trail, and the darkness thickened rapidly while I picked my way across dry gullies, formed by the drainage of the prairie above, rotten tree-trunks, stumps, and spots of thicket. As I approached the shanty, a faint gleam through one of its two small windows showed that it was inhabited. In the rear, a space of a quarter of an acre, inclosed by a huge fence, was evidently the vegetable-patch, at one corner of which a small stable, roofed and buttressed with corn-fodder, leaned against the hill.

I drew rein in front of the building and was about to hail its inmates when I observed the figure of a man issue from the stable. Even in the gloom, there was something forlorn and dispiriting in his walk. He approached with a slow, dragging step, apparently unaware of my presence.

"Good evening, friend!" I said.

He stopped, stood still for half a minute, and finally responded:

"Who air you?"

The tone of his voice, querulous and lamenting, rather implied, "Why don't you let me alone?"

"I am a traveller," I answered, "bound from Peoria to Bloomington, and I have lost my way. It is dark, as you know, and likely to rain, and I don't see how I can get any farther tonight."

Another pause. Then he said, slowly, as if speaking to himself— "There a'n't no other place nearer 'n four or five mile."

"Then I hope you will let me stay here."

The answer, to my surprise, was a deep sigh.

"I am used to roughing it," I urged; "and besides, I will pay for any trouble I may give you."

"It ain't that," said he; then added, hesitatingly— "fact is, we're lonesome people here— don't often see strangers; yit I s'pose you can't go no further. Well, I'll talk to my wife."

Therewith he entered the shanty, leaving me a little disconcerted with so uncertain, not to say suspicious, a reception. I heard the sound of voices— one of them unmistakable in its nasal shrillness— in what seemed to be a harsh debate, and distinguished the words, "I didn't bring it on," followed with, "Tell him, then, if you like, and let him stay," which seemed to settle the matter. The door presently opened, and the man said:

"I guess we'll have t'accommodate you. Give me your things, an' then I'll put your horse up."

I unstrapped my valise, took off the saddle, and, having seen Peck to his fodder-tent, where I left him with some ears of corn in an old basket, returned to the shanty. It was a rude specimen of the article a single room of some thirty by fifteen feet, with a large fireplace of sticks and clay at one end, while a half-partition of unplaned planks set on end formed a sort of recess for the bed at the other. A good fire on the hearth, however, made it seem tolerably cheerful, contrasted with the dismal gloom outside. The furniture consisted of a table, two or three chairs, a broad bench, and a kitchen-dresser of boards. Some golden ears of seed-corn, a few sides of bacon, and ropes of onions hung from the rafters.

A woman in a blue calico gown, with a tin coffee-pot in one hand and a stick in the other, was raking out the red coals from under the burning logs. At my salutation, she partly turned, looked hard at me, nodded, and muttered some inaudible words. Then, having levelled the coals properly, she put down the coffee-pot, and, facing about, exclaimed— "Jimmy, git off that cheer!"

Though this phrase, short and snappish enough, was not worded as an invitation for me to sit down, I accepted it as such, and took the chair which a lean boy of some nine or ten years old had hurriedly vacated. In such cases, I had learned by experience, it is not best to be too forward: wait quietly, and allow the unwilling hosts time to get accustomed to your presence. I inspected the family for a while, in silence. The spare, bony form of the woman, her deep-set gray eyes, and the long, thin nose, which seemed to be merely a scabbard for her sharp-edged voice, gave me her character at the first glance. As for the man, he was worn by some constant fret or worry, rather than naturally spare. His complexion was sallow, his face honest, every line of it, though the expression was dejected, and there was a helpless patience in his voice and movements, which I have often seen in women, but never before in a man. "Henpecked in the first degree," was the verdict I gave, without leaving my seat. The silence, shyness, and puny appearance of the boy might be accounted for by the loneliness of his life, and the usual "shakes"; but there was a wild, frightened look in his eye, a nervous restlessness about his limbs, which excited my curiosity. I am no believer in those freaks of fancy called "presentiments," but I certainly felt that there was something unpleasant, perhaps painful, in the private relations of the family.

Meanwhile, the supper gradually took shape. The coffee was boiled, (far too much, for my taste,) bacon fried, potatoes roasted, and certain lumps of dough transformed into farinaceous grape-shot, called "biscuits." Dishes of blue queensware, knives and forks, cups and saucers of various patterns, and a bowl of molasses were placed upon the table; and finally the woman said, speaking to, though not looking at, me—

"I s'pose you ha'n't had your supper."

I accepted the invitation with a simple "No," and ate enough of the rude fare (for I was really hungry) to satisfy my hosts that I was not proud. I attempted no conversation, knowing that such people never talk when they eat, until the meal was over, and the man, who gladly took one of my cigars, was seated comfortably before the fire. I then related my story, told my name and business, and by degrees established a mild flow of conversation. The woman, as she washed the dishes and cleared up things for the night, listened to us, and now and then made a remark to the coffee-pot or frying-pan, evidently intended for our ears. Some things which she said must have had a meaning hidden from me, for I could see that the man winced, and at last he ventured to say—

"Mary Ann, what's the use in talkin' about it?"

"Do as you like," she snapped back; "only I a'n't a-goin' to be blamed for your doin's. The stranger'll find out, soon enough."

"You find this life rather lonely, I should think," I remarked, with a view of giving the conversation a different turn.

"Lonely," she repeated, jerking out a fragment of malicious laughter. "It's lonely enough in the daytime, goodness knows; but you'll have your fill o' company afore mornin'."

With that, she threw a defiant glance at her husband.

"Fact is," said he, shrinking from her eye, "we're sort o' troubled with noises at night. P'raps you'll be skeered, but it's no more 'n noise— unpleasant, but never hurts nothin'."

"You don't mean to say this shanty is haunted?" I asked.

"Well yes, some folks'd call it so. There is noises an' things goin' on, but you can't see nobody."

"Oh, if that is all," said I, "you need not be concerned on my account. Nothing is so strange but the cause of it can be discovered."

Again the man heaved a deep sigh. The woman said, in rather a milder tone—

"What's the good o' knowin' what makes it, when you can't stop it?"

AS I WAS NEITHER sleepy nor fatigued, this information was rather welcome than otherwise. I had full confidence in my own courage; and if anything should happen, it would make a capital story for my first New York supper. I saw there was but one bed, and a small straw mattress on the floor beside it for the boy, and therefore declared that I should sleep on the bench, wrapped in my cloak. Neither objected to this, and they presently retired.

I determined, however, to keep awake as long as possible. I threw a fresh log on the fire, lit another cigar, made a few entries in my notebook, and finally took Dumas' The Man in the Iron Mask from my valise and tried to read by the wavering flashes of the fire.

In this manner another hour passed away. The deep breathing— not to say snoring— from the recess indicated that my hosts were sound asleep, and the monotonous whistle of the wind around the shanty began to exercise a lulling influence on my own senses. Wrapping myself in my cloak, with my valise for a pillow, I stretched myself out on the bench and strove to keep my mind occupied with conjectures concerning the sleeping family. Furthermore, I recalled all the stories of ghosts and haunted houses which I had ever heard, constructed explanations for such as were still unsolved, and, so far from feeling any alarm, desired nothing so much as that the supernatural performances might commence.

My thoughts, however, became gradually less and less coherent, and I was just sliding over the verge of slumber when a faint sound in the distance caught my ear. I listened intently, certainly there was a far-off, indistinct sound, different from the dull, continuous sweep of the wind. I rose on the bench, fully awake, yet not excited, for my first thought was that other travellers might be lost or belated. By this time the sound was quite distinct, and, to my great surprise, appeared to proceed from a drum, rapidly beaten. I looked at my watch; it was half-past ten. Who could be out on the lonely prairie with a drum at that time of night? There must have been some military festival, some political caucus, some celebration of the Sons of Malta, or jubilation of the Society of the Thousand and One, and a few of the scattered members were enlivening their dark ride homewards.

While I was busy with these conjectures, the sound advanced nearer and nearer and, what was very singular, without the least pause or variation one steady, regular roll, ringing deep and clear through the night.

The shanty stood at a point where the stream, leaving its general southwestern course, bent at a sharp angle to the southeast, and faced very nearly in the latter direction. As the sound of the drum came from the east, it seemed the more probable that it was caused by some person on the road which crossed the creek a quarter of a mile below. Yet, on approaching nearer, it made directly for the shanty, moving, evidently, much more rapidly than a person could walk. It then flashed upon my mind that this was the noise I was to hear, this the company I was to expect! Louder and louder, deep, strong, and reverberating, rolling as if for a battle-charge, it came on; it was now but a hundred yards distant— now but fifty— ten— just outside the rough clapboard

wall— but, while I had half risen to open the door, it passed directly through the wall and sounded at my very ears, inside the shanty!

The logs burned brightly on the hearth; every object in the room could be seen more or less distinctly. Nothing was out of its place, nothing disturbed, yet the rafters almost shook under the roll of an invisible drum, beaten by invisible hands!

The sleepers tossed restlessly, and a deep groan, as if in semi-dream, came from the man. Utterly confounded as I was, my sensations were not those of terror. Each moment I doubted my senses, and each moment the terrific sound convinced me anew.

I do not know how long I sat thus in sheer, stupid amazement. It may have been one minute, or fifteen, before the drum, passing over my head, through the boards again, commenced a slow march around the shanty. When it had finished the first, and was about commencing the second round, I shook off my stupor and determined to probe the mystery.

Opening the door, I advanced in an opposite direction to meet it. Again the sound passed close beside my head, but I could see nothing, touch nothing. Again it entered the shanty, and I followed. I stirred up the fire, casting a strong illumination into the darkest corners. I thrust my hand into the very heart of the sound, I struck through it in all directions with a stick— and still I saw nothing, touched nothing.

Of course, I do not expect to be believed by half my readers, nor can I blame them for their incredulity. So astounding is the circumstance, even yet, to myself, that I should doubt its reality were it not therefore necessary, for the same reason, to doubt every event of my life.

At length the sound moved away in the direction whence it came, becoming gradually fainter and fainter until it died in the distance. But immediately afterwards, from the same quarter, came a thin, sharp blast of wind, or what seemed to be such. If one could imagine a swift, intense stream of air, no thicker than a telegraph-wire, producing a keen, whistling rush in its passage, he would understand the impression made upon my mind. This wind, or sound, or whatever it was, seemed to strike an invisible target in the center of the room, and thereupon ensued a new and worse confusion. Sounds as of huge planks lifted at one end and then allowed to fall, slamming upon the floor hard— wooden claps, crashes, and noises of splitting and snapping, filled the shanty. The rough boards of the floor jarred and trembled, and the table and chairs were jolted off their feet. Instinctively, I jerked away my legs whenever the invisible planks fell too near them.

It never came into my mind to charge the family with being the authors of these phenomena: their fear and distress were too evident. There was

certainly no other human being but myself in or near the shanty. My senses of sight and touch availed me nothing, and I confined my attention, at last, to simply noting the manifestations, without attempting to explain them. I began to experience a feeling, not of terror, but of disturbing uncertainty. The solid ground was taken from beneath my feet.

Still the man and his wife groaned and muttered, as if in a nightmare sleep, and the boy tossed restlessly on his low bed. I would not disturb them, since, by their own confession, they were accustomed to the visitation. Besides, it would not assist me, and, so long as there was no danger of personal injury, I preferred to watch alone. I recalled, however, the woman's remarks, remembering the mysterious blame she had thrown upon her husband, and felt certain that she had adopted some explanation of the noises at his expense.

As the confusion continued, with more or less violence, sometimes pausing for a few minutes, to begin again with renewed force, I felt an increasing impression of somebody else being present. Outside the shanty this feeling ceased, but every time I opened the door I fully expected to see someone standing in the center of the room. Yet, looking through the little windows, when the noises were at their loudest, I could discover nothing.

Two hours had passed away since I first heard the drum-beat, and I found myself at last completely wearied with my fruitless exertions and the unusual excitement. By this time the disturbances had become faint, with more frequent pauses. All at once, I heard a long, weary sigh, so near me that it could not have proceeded from the sleepers. A weak moan, expressive of utter wretchedness, followed, and then came the words, in a woman's voice— I know not whence, for they seemed to be uttered close beside me, and yet far, far away— "How great is my trouble! How long shall I suffer? I was married, in the sight of God, to Eber Nicholson. Have mercy, O Lord, and give him to me, or release me from him!"

These were the words, not spoken, but rather moaned forth in a slow, monotonous wail of utter helplessness and broken-heartedness. I have heard human grief expressed in many forms, but I never heard or imagined anything so desolate, so surcharged with the despair of an eternal woe. It was, indeed, too hopeless for sympathy. It was the utterance of a sorrow which removed its possessor into some dark, lonely world girdled with iron walls, against which every throb of a helping or consoling heart would beat in vain for admittance. So far from being moved or softened, the words left upon me an impression of stolid apathy. When they had ceased, I heard another sigh and some time afterwards, far-off, retreating forlornly through the eastern darkness, the

wailing repetition "I was married, in the sight of God, to Eber Nicholson. Have mercy, O Lord!"

This was the last of those midnight marvels. Nothing further disturbed the night except the steady sound of the wind. The more I thought of what I had heard, the more I was convinced that the phenomena were connected, in some way, with the history of my host. I had heard his wife call him "Ebe," and did not doubt that he was the Eber Nicholson who, for some mysterious crime, was haunted by the reproachful ghost. Could murder, or worse than murder, lurk behind these visitations? It was useless to conjecture; yet, before giving myself up to sleep, I determined to know everything that could be known before leaving the shanty.

My rest was disturbed; my hip-bones pressed unpleasantly on the hard bench; and every now and then I awoke with a start, hearing the same despairing voice in my dreams. The place was always quiet, nevertheless, the disturbances having ceased, as nearly as I could judge, about one o'clock in the morning. Finally, from sheer weariness, I fell into a deep slumber, which lasted until daylight.

The sound of pans and kettles roused me. The woman, in her lank blue gown, was bending over the fire; the man and boy had already gone out. As I rose, rubbing my eyes and shaking myself, to find out exactly where and who I was, the woman straightened herself and looked at me with a keen, questioning gaze, but said nothing.

"I must have been very sound asleep," said I.

"There's no sound sleepin' here. Don't tell me that."

"Well," I answered, "your shanty is rather noisy; but, as I am neither scared nor hurt, there's no harm done. But have you never found out what occasions the noise?"

Her reply was a toss of the head and a peculiar snorting interjection, "Hngh!" (impossible to be represented by letters,) "it's all her doin'."

"But who is she?"

"You'd better ask him."

Seeing there was nothing to be got out of her, I went down to the stream, washed my face, dried it with my pocket-handkerchief, and then looked after Peck. He gave a shrill whinny of recognition, and, I thought, seemed to be a little restless. A fresh feed of corn was in the old basket, and presently the man came into the stable with a bunch of hay, and commenced rubbing off the marks of Peck's oozy couch which were left on his flanks. As we went back to the shanty, I noticed that he eyed me furtively, without daring to look me full in the face. As I was apparently none the worse for the night's experiences, he rallied at last and ventured to talk at— as well as to— me.

By this time, breakfast, which was a repetition of supper, was ready, and we sat down to the table. During the meal, it occurred to me to make an experimental remark. Turning suddenly to the man, I asked, "Is your name Eber Nicholson?"

"There!" exclaimed the woman, "I knowed he'd heerd it!"

He, however, flushing a moment, and then becoming more sallow than ever, nodded first, and then as if that were not sufficient added, "Yes, that's my name."

"Where did you move from?" I continued, falling back on the first plan I had formed in my mind.

"The Western Reserve, not fur from Hudson."

I turned the conversation on the comparative advantages of Ohio and Illinois, on farming, the price of land, etc., carefully avoiding the dangerous subject, and by the time breakfast was over had arranged, that, for a consideration, he should accompany me as far as the Bloomington road, some five miles distant.

While he went out to catch an old horse ranging loose in the creek-bottom, I saddled Peck, strapped on my valise, and made myself ready for the journey. The feeling of two silver half-dollars in her hard palm melted down the woman's aggressive mood, and she said, with a voice the edge whereof was mightily blunted:

"Thankee! It's too much for sich as you had."

"It's the best you can give," I replied.

"That's so!" said she, jerking my hand up and down with a pumping movement, as I took leave.

I FELT a sense of relief when we had climbed the rise and had the open prairie again before us. The sky was overcast and the wind strong, but some rain had fallen during the night, and the clouds had lifted themselves again. The air was fresh and damp, but not chill. We rode slowly, of necessity, for the mud was deeper than ever.

I deliberated what course I should take, in order to draw from my guide the explanation of the nightly noises. His evident shrinking, whenever his wife referred to the subject, convinced me that a gradual approach would render him shy and uneasy; and, on the whole, it seemed best to surprise him by a sudden assault. Let me strike to the heart of the secret at once, I thought, and the details will come of themselves.

While I was thus reflecting, he rode quietly by my side. Half turning in the saddle, I looked steadily at his face, and said, in an earnest voice:

"Eber Nicholson, who was it to whom you were married in the sight of God?"

He started as if struck, looked at me imploringly, turned away his eyes, then looked back, became very pale, and finally said, in a broken, hesitating voice, as if the words were forced from him against his will:

"Her name is Rachel Emmons."

"Why did you murder her?" I asked, in a still sterner tone.

In an instant his face burned scarlet. He reined up his horse with a violent pull, straightened his shoulders so that he appeared six inches taller, looked steadily at me with a strange, mixed expression of anger and astonishment, and cried out:

"Murder her? Why, she's living now!"

My surprise at the answer was scarcely less great than his at the question.

"You don't mean to say she's not dead?" I asked.

"Why, no!" said he, recovering from his sudden excitement, "she's not dead, or she wouldn't keep on troublin' me. She's been livin' in Toledo, these ten year."

"I beg your pardon, my friend," said I; "but I don't know what to think of what I heard last night, and I suppose I have the old notion in my head that all ghosts are of persons who have been murdered."

"Oh, if I had killed her," he groaned, "I'd 'a' been hung long ago, an' there'd 'a' been an end of it."

"Tell me the whole story," said I. "It's hardly likely that I can help you, but I can understand how you must be troubled, and I'm sure I pity you from my heart."

I think he felt relieved at my proposal— glad, perhaps, after long silence, to confide to another man the secret of his lonely, wretched life.

"After what you've heerd," said he, "there's nothin' that I don't care to tell. I've been sinful, no doubt, but, God knows, there never was a man worse punished.

"I told you," he continued, after a pause, "that I come from the Western Reserve. My father was a middlin' well-to-do farmer, not rich, nor yit exactly poor. He's dead now. He was always a savin' man, looked after money a leetle too sharp, I've often thought sence; hows'ever, 'tisn't my place to judge him. Well, I was brought up on the farm, to hard work, like the other boys. Rachel Emmons, she's the same woman that haunts me, you understand, she was the girl o' one of our neighbors, an' poor enough he was. His wife was always sickly-like, an' you know it takes a woman as well as a man to git rich farmin'. So they were always scrimped, but that didn't hinder Rachel from bein' one o' the likeliest gals round. We went to the same school in the winter, her an' me,

('tisn't much schoolin' I ever got, though,) an' I had a sort o' nateral hankerin' after her, as fur back as I can remember. She was different lookin' then from what she is now, an' me, too, for that matter.

"Well, you know how boys an' gals somehow git to likin' each other afore they know it. Me an' Rachel was more an' more together, the more we growed up, only more secret-like; so by the time I was twenty an' she was nineteen, we was promised to one another as true as could be. I didn't keep company with her, though leastways, not reg'lar: I was afeard my father'd find it out, an' I knowed what he'd say to it. He kep' givin' me hints about Mary Ann Jones—that was my wife's maiden name. Her father had two hundred acres an' money out at interest, an' only three children. He'd had ten, but seven of 'em died. I had nothin' agin Mary Ann, but I never thought of her that way, like I did towards Rachel.

"Well, things kep' runnin' on; I was a good deal worried about it, but a young feller, you know, don't look fur ahead, an' so I got along. One night, howsever, 'twas just about as dark as last night was. I'd been to the store at the Corners, for a jug o' molasses. Rachel was there, gittin' a quarter of a pound o' tea, I think it was, an' some sewin'-thread. I went out a little while after her, an' fullered as fast as I could, for we had the same road nigh to home.

"It weren't long afore I overtook her. 'Twas mighty dark, as I was sayin', an' so I hooked her arm into mine, an' we went on comfortable together, talkin' about how we just suited each other, like we was cut out o' purpose, an' how long we'd have to wait, an' what folks'd say. O Lord! Don't I remember every word o' that night? Well, we got quite tender-like when we come t' Old Emmons's gate, an' I up an' giv' her a hug and a lot o' kisses, to make up for lost time. Then she went into the house, an' I turned for home; but I hadn't gone ten steps afore I come agin' somebody stan'in' in the middle o' the road. 'Hullo!' says I. The next thing he had aholt o' my coat-collar an' shuck me like a terrier-dog shakes a rat. I knowed who it was afore he spoke; an' I couldn't 'a' been more skeered, if the life had all gone out o' me. He'd been down to the tavern to see a drover, an' comin home he'd fullered behind us all the way, hearin' every word we said.

"I don't like to think o' the words he used that night. He was a professin' member, an' yit he swore the awfullest I ever heerd." Here the man involuntarily raised his hands to his ears, as if to stop them against even the memory of his father's curses. "I expected every minute he'd 'a' struck me down. I've wished, sence, he had: I don't think I could 'a' stood that. Howsever, he dragged me home, never lettin' go my collar, till we got into the room where mother was settin' up for us. Then he told her, only makin' it ten times

harder 'n it really was. Mother always kind o' liked Rachel, 'cause she was mighty handy at sewin' an' quiltin', but she'd no more dared stan' up agin' father than a sheep agin' a bulldog. She looked at me pityin'-like, I must say, an' just begun to cry, an' I couldn't help cryin' nuther, when I saw how it hurt her.

"Well, after that, 'twa'n't no use thinkin' o' Rachel any more. I had to go t' Old Jones's, whether I wanted to or no. I felt mighty mean when I thought o' Rachel, an' was afeard no good'd come of it; but father just managed things this way, an' I couldn't help myself. Old Jones had nothin' agin' me, for I was a steady, hard-workin' feller as there was round, an' Mary Ann was always as pleasant as could be, then; well, I oughtn't to say nothin' agin' her now; she's had a hard life of it, 'longside o' me. Afore long we were bespoke, an' the day set. Father hurried things, when it got that fur. I don't think Rachel knowed anything about it till the day afore the weddin', or mebby the very day. Old Mr. Larrabee was the minister, an' there was only the two families at the house, an' Miss Plankerton her that sewed for Mary Ann. I never felt so uneasy in my life, though I tried hard not to show it.

"Well, 'twas all just over, an' the kissin' about to begin, when I heerd the house-door bu'st open, suddent. I felt my heart give one jump right up to the root o' my tongue, an' then fell back ag'in, sick an' dead-like.

"The parlor-door flew open right away, an' in come Rachel without a bonnet, an' her hair all frozed by the wind. She was as white as a sheet, an' her eyes like two burnin' coals. She walked straight through 'em all an' stood right afore me. They was all so taken aback that they never thought o' stoppin' her. Then she kind o' screeched out, 'Eber Nicholson, what are you doin'?' Her voice was strange an' unnatural-like, an' I'd never 'a' knowed it to be hers, if I hadn't 'a' seen her. I couldn't take my eyes off of her, an' I couldn't speak : I just stood there. Then she said ag'in, 'Eber Nicholson, what are you doin'? You are married to me, in the sight of God. You belong to me an' I to you, forever an' forever!" Then they begun cryin' out 'Go 'way!' 'Take her away!' 'What d's she mean?' an' old Mr. Larrabee ketched hold of her arm. She begun to jerk an' trimble all over; she drawed in her breath in a sort o' groanin' way, awful to hear, an' then dropped down on the floor in a fit. I bu'st out in a terrible spell o' cryin'; I couldn't 'a' helped it, to save my life."

The man paused, drew his sleeve across his eyes, and then timidly looked at me. Seeing nothing in my face, doubtless, but an expression of the profoundest commiseration, he remarked, with a more assured voice, as if in self-justification:

"It was a pretty hard thing for a man to go through with, now, wasn't it?"

"You may well say that," said I. "Your story is not yet finished, however. This Rachel Emmons you say she is still living. In what way does she cause the disturbances?"

"I'll tell you all I know about it," said he "an' if you understand it then, you're wiser 'n I am. After they carried her home, she had a long spell o' sickness— come near dyin', they said; but they brought her through at last, an' she got about ag'in, lookin' ten year older. I kep' out of her sight, though. I lived awhile at Old Jones's, till I could find a good farm to rent, or a cheap 'un to buy. I wanted to git out o' the neighborhood. I was uneasy all the time, bein' so near Rachel. Her mother was worse, an' her father failin'-like, too. Mother seen 'em often; she was as good a neighbor to 'em as she dared be. Well, I got sort o' tired, an' went out to Michigan an' bought a likely farm. Old Jones give me a start. I took Mary Ann out, an' we got along well enough, a matter o' two year. We heerd from home now an' then. Rachel's father and mother both died, about the time we had our first boy— him that you seen— an' she went off to Toledo, we heerd, an' hired out to do sewin'. She was always a mighty good hand at it, an' could cut out as nice as a born manty-maker. She'd had another fit after the funerals, an' was older-lookin' an' more serious than ever, they said.

"Well, Jimmy was six months old, or so, when we begun to be woke up every night by his cryin'. Nothin' seemed to be the matter with him; he was only frightened-like, an' couldn't be quieted. I heerd noises sometimes— nothin' like what come afterwards, but sort o' crackin' an' snappin', sich as you hear in new furnitur', an' it seemed like somebody was in the room; but I couldn't find nothin'. It got worse and worse. Mary Ann was sure the house was haunted, an' I had to let her go home for a whole winter.

"When she was away, it went on the same as ever— not every night, sometimes not more 'n once a week, but so loud as to wake me up, reg'lar. I sent word to Mary Ann to come on, an' I'd sell out an' go to Illinois. Good prarie land was cheap then, an' I'd ruther go further off, for the sake o' quiet.

"So we pulled up stakes an' come out here, but it weren't long afore the noise follered us, worse 'n ever, an' we found out at last what it was. One night I woke up, with my hair standin' on end, an' heerd Rachel Emmons's voice, just as you heared it last night. Mary Ann heared it too, an' it's little peace she's giv' me since that time. An' so it's been goin' on an' on, these eight or nine year."

"But," I asked, "are you sure she is alive? Have you seen her since? Have you asked her to be merciful and not disturb you?"

"Yes," said he, with a bitterness of tone which seemed quite to obliterate the softer memories of his love, "I've seen her, an' I've begged her on my knees to let me alone; but it's no use. When it got to be so bad I couldn't stan' it, I

sent her a letter, but I never got no answer. Next year, when our second boy died, frightened and worried to death, I believe, though he was scrawny enough when he was born, I took some money I'd saved to buy a yoke of oxen, an' went to Toledo o' purpose to see Rachel. It cut me awful to do it, but I was desperate. I found her livin' in a little house, with a bit o' garden she'd bought. I s'pose she must 'a' had five or six hundred dollars when the farm was sold, an' she made a good deal by sewin', besides. She was settin' at her work when I went in, an' knowed me at once, though I don't believe I'd ever 'a' knowed her. She was old, an' thin, an' hard-lookin'; her mouth was pale an' set, like she was bitin' somethin' all the time; an' her eyes, though they was sunk into her head, seemed to look through an' through an' away out th' other side o' you.

"It just shut me up when she looked at me. She was so corpse-like I was afraid she'd drop dead, then and there, but I made out at last to say, 'Rachel, I've come all the way from Illinois to see you.' She kep' lookin' straight at me, never sayin' a word. 'Rachel,' says I, 'I know I've acted bad towards you. God knows I didn't mean to do it. I don't blame you for payin' it back to me the way you're doin', but Mary Ann an' the boy never done you no harm. I've come all the way to ask your forgiveness, hopin' you'll be satisfied with what's been done, an' leave off bearin' malice agin' us.' She looked kind o' sorrowful-like, but drawed a deep breath, an' shook her head. 'Oh. Rachel,' says I an' afore I knowed it, I was right down on my knees at her feet. 'Rachel, don't be so hard on me. I'm the unhappiest man that lives. I can't stan' it no longer. Rachel, you didn't used to be so cruel, when we was boys an' girls together. Do forgive me, an' leave off hauntin' me so.'

"Then she spoke up at last, an' says she:

" 'Eber Nicholson, I was married to you, in the sight o' God!'

" 'I know it,' says I; 'you say it to me every night, an' it wasn't my doin's that you're not my wife now. But, Rachel, if I'd 'a' betrayed you, an' ruined you, an' killed you, God couldn't 'a' punished me worse than you're a-punishin' me.'

"She giv' a kind o' groan, an' two tears run down her white face. 'Eber Nicholson,' says she, 'ask God to help you, for I can't. There might 'a' been a time,' says she, 'when I could 'a' done it, but it's too late now.'

"'Don't say that, Rachel,' says I; 'it's never too late to be merciful an' forgivin'.'

" 'It doesn't depend on myself,' says she; 'I'm sent to you. It's th' only comfort I have in life to be near you; but I'd give up that if I could. Pray to God to let me die, for then we shall both have rest.'

"An' that was all I could git out of her.

"I come home ag'in, knowin' I'd spent my money for nothin'. Since then, it's been just the same as before, not reg'lar every night, but sort o' comes on by

spells, an' then stops three or four days, an' then comes on ag'in. Fact is, what's the use o' livin' in this way? We can't be neighborly; we're afeard to have anybody come to see us; we've get no peace, no comfort o' bein' together, an' no heart to work an' git ahead, like other folks. It's just killin' me, body an' soul."

Here the poor wretch fairly broke down, bursting suddenly into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. I waited quietly until the violence of his passion had subsided. A misery so strange, so completely out of the range of human experience, so hopeless apparently, was not to be reached by the ordinary utterances of consolation. I had seen enough to enable me fully to understand the fearful nature of the retribution which had been visited upon him— for what was, at worst, a weakness to be pitied, rather than a sin to be chastised. "Never was a man worse punished," he had truly said. But I was as far as ever from comprehending the secret of those nightly visitations. The statement of Rachel Emmons, that they were now produced without her will, overturned supposing it to be true the conjecture which I might otherwise have adopted. However, it was now plain that the unhappy victim sobbing at my side could throw no further light on the mystery. He had told me all he knew.

"My friend," said I, when he had become calmer, "I do not wonder at your desperation. Such continual torment as you must have endured is enough to drive a man to madness. It seems to me to spring from the malice of some infernal power, rather than the righteous justice of God. Have you never tried to resist it? Have you never called aloud, in your heart, for Divine help, and gathered up your strength to meet and defy it, as you would to meet a man who threatened your life?"

"Not in the right way, I'm afeared," said he. "Fact is, I always took it as a judgment hangin' over me, an' never thought o' nothin' else than just to grin and bear it."

"Enough of that," I urged, for a hope of relief had suggested itself to me; "you have suffered enough, and more than enough. Now stand up to meet it like a man. "When the noises come again, think of what you have endured, and let it make you indignant and determined. Decide in your heart that you will be free from it, and perhaps you may be so. If not, build another shanty and sleep away from your wife and boy, so that they may escape, at least. Give yourself this claim to your wife's gratitude, and she will be kind and forbearing."

"I don't know but you're more 'n half right, stranger," he replied, in a more cheerful tone. "Fact is, I never thought on it that way. It's lightened my heart a heap, tellin' you; an' if I'm not too broke an' used-up-like, I'll try to foller your advice. I couldn't marry Rachel now, if Mary Ann was dead, we've been drove

so far apart. I don't know how it'll be when we're all dead. I s'pose them'll go together that belongs together; leastways, it ought to be so."

Here we struck the Bloomington road, and I no longer needed a guide. When we pulled our horses around, facing each other, I noticed that the flush of excitement still burned on the man's sallow cheek, and his eyes, washed by probably the first freshet of feeling which had moistened them for years, shone with a faint luster of courage.

"No, no none o' that!" said he, as I was taking out my porte-monnaie; "you've done me a mighty sight more good than I've done you, let alone payin' me to boot. Don't forgit the turn to the left, after crossin' Jackson's Hill. Good-bye, stranger! Take good care o' yourself!"

And with a strong, clinging, lingering grasp of the hand, in which the poor fellow expressed the gratitude which he was too shy and awkward to put into words, we parted. He turned his horse's head, and slowly plodded back through the mud towards the lonely shanty.

ON MY WAY to Bloomington, I went over and over the man's story in memory. The facts were tolerably clear and coherent: his narrative was simple and credible enough, after my own personal experience of the mysterious noises, and the secret, whatever it was, must be sought for in Rachel Emmons. She was still living in Toledo, Ohio, and earned her living as a seamstress; it would, therefore, not be difficult to find her.

I confess, after Eber's own unsatisfactory interview, I had little hope of penetrating her singular reserve; but I felt the strongest desire to see her, at least, and thus test the complete reality of a story which surpassed the wildest fiction. After visiting Terre Haute, the next point to which business called me, on the homeward route, was Cleveland; and by giving an additional day to the journey, I could easily take Toledo on my way. Between memory and expectation the time passed rapidly, and a week later I registered my name at the Island House, Toledo.

After wandering about for an hour or two, the next morning, I finally discovered the residence of Rachel Emmons. It was a small story-and-a-half frame building, on the western edge of the town, with a locust-tree in front, two lilacs and a wilderness of cabbagestalks and currant-bushes in the rear. After much cogitation, I had not been able to decide upon any plan of action, and the interval between my knock and the opening of the door was one of considerable embarrassment to me. A small, plumpish woman of forty, with peaked nose, black eyes, and but two upper teeth, confronted me. She, certainly, was not the one I sought.

"Is your name Rachel Emmons?" I asked, nevertheless.

"No, I'm not her. This is her house, though."

"Will you tell her a gentleman wants to see her?" said I, putting my foot inside the door as I spoke. The room, I saw, was plainly, but neatly furnished. A rag-carpet covered the floor; green rush-bottomed chairs, a settee with chintz cover, and a straight-backed rocking-chair were distributed around the walls; and for ornament there was an alphabetical sampler in a frame, over the low wooden mantel-piece.

The woman, however, still held the door-knob inher hand, saying, "Miss Emmons is busy. She can't well leave her work. Did you want some sewin' done?"

"No," said I. "I wish to speak with her. It's on private and particular business."

"Well," she answered with some hesitation, "I'll tell her. Take a chair."

She disappeared through a door into a back room, and I sat down. In another minute the door noiselessly reopened, and Rachel Emmons came softly into the room. I believe I should have known her anywhere. Though from Eber Nicholson's narrative she could not have been much over thirty, she appeared to be at least forty-five. Her hair was streaked with gray, her face thin and of an unnatural waxy pallor, her lips of a whitish-blue color and tightly pressed together, and her eyes, seemingly sunken far back in their orbits, burned with a strange, ghastly— I almost said phosphorescent— light. I remember thinking they must shine like touch-wood in the dark. I have come in contact with too many persons, passed through too wide a range of experience, to lose my self-possession easily; but I could not meet the cold, steady gaze of those eyes without a strong internal trepidation. It would have been the same if I had known nothing about her.

She was probably surprised at seeing a stranger, but I could discern no trace of it in her face. She advanced but a few steps into the room, and then stopped, waiting for me to speak.

"You are Rachel Emmons?" I asked, since a commencement of some sort must be made.

"Yes."

"I come from Eber Nicholson," said I, fixing my eyes on her face.

Not a muscle moved, not a nerve quivered, but I fancied that a faint purple flush played for an instant under the white mask. If I were correct, it was but momentary. She lifted her left hand slowly, pressed it on her heart, and then let it fall. The motion was so calm that I should not have noticed it, if I had not been watching her so steadily.

"Well?" she said, after a pause.

"Rachel Ernmons," said I, and more than one cause conspired to make my voice earnest and authoritative, "I know all. I come to you not to meddle with the sorrow— let me say, the sin— which has blighted your life; not because Eber Nicholson sent me; not to defend him or to accuse you; but from that solemn sense of duty which makes every man responsible to God for what he does or leaves undone. An equal pity for him and for you forces me to speak. He cannot plead his cause; you cannot understand his misery. I will not ask by what wonderful power you continue to torment his life; I will not even doubt that you pity while you afflict him; but I ask you to reflect whether the selfishness of your sorrow may not have hardened your heart and blinded you to that consolation which God offers to those who humbly seek it. You say that you are married to Eber Nicholson, in His sight. Think, Rachel Emmons, think of that moment when you will stand before His awful bar, and the poor, broken, suffering soul, whom your forgiveness might still make yours in the holy marriage of heaven, shrinks from you with fear and pain, as in the remembered persecutions of Earth!"

The words came hot from my very heart, and the ice-crust of years under which hers lay benumbed gave way before them. She trembled slightly; and the same sad, hopeless moan which I had heard at midnight in the Illinois shanty came from her lips. She sank into a chair, letting her hands fall heavily at her side. There was no more merit of her features, yet I saw that her waxy cheeks were moist, as with the slow ooze of tears so long unshed that they had forgotten their natural flow.

"I do pity him," she murmured at last, "and I believe I forgive him; but, oh! I've become an instrument of wrath for the punishment of both."

If any feeling of reproof still lingered in my mind, her appearance disarmed me at once. I felt nothing but pity for her forlorn, helpless state. It was the apathy of despair, rather than the coldness of cherished malice, which had so frozen her life. Still, the mystery of those nightly persecutions!

"Rachel Emmons," I said, "you certainly know that you still continue to destroy the peace of Eber Nicholson and his family. Do you mean to say that you cannot cease to do so, if you would?"

"It is too late," said she, shaking her head slowly, as she clasped both hands hard against her breast. "Do you think I would suffer, night after night, if I could help it? Haven't I stayed awake for days, till my strength gave way, rather than fall asleep, for his sake? Wouldn't I give my life to be free? And I would have taken it, long ago, with my own hands, but for the sin!"

She spoke in a low voice, but with a wild earnestness which startled me. She, then, was equally a victim!

"But," said I, "this thing had a beginning. Why did you visit him in the first place when, perhaps, you might have prevented it?"

"I am afraid that was my sin," she replied, "and this is the punishment. When father and mother died, and I was layin' sick and weak, with nothin' to do but think of him, and me all alone in the world, and not knowin' how to live without him because I had nobody left, that's when it begun. When the deadly kind o' sleeps came on, they used to think I was dead, or faintin', at first and I could go where my heart drawed me, and look at him away off where he lived. 'Twas consolin', and I didn't try to stop it. I used to long for the night, so I could go and be near him for an hour or two. I don't know how I went; it seemed to come of itself. After a while I felt I was troublin' him and doin' no good to myself, but the sleeps came just the same as ever, and then I couldn't help myself. They're only a sorrow to me now, but I s'pose I shall have 'em till I'm laid in my grave."

This was all the explanation she could give. It was evidently one of those mysterious cases of spiritual disease which completely baffle our reason. Although compelled to accept her statement, I felt incapable of suggesting any remedy. I could only hope that the abnormal condition into which she had fallen might speedily wear out her vital energies, already seriously shattered. She informed me, further, that each attack was succeeded by great exhaustion, and that she felt herself growing feebler from year to year. The immediate result, I suspected, was a disease of the heart, which might give her the blessing of death sooner than she hoped.

Before taking leave of her, I succeeded in procuring from her a promise that she would write to Eber Nicholson, giving him that free forgiveness which would at least ease his conscience and make his burden somewhat lighter to bear. Then, feeling that it was not in my power to do more, I rose to depart. Taking her hand, which lay cold and passive in mine, so much like a dead hand that it required a strong effort in me to repress a nervous shudder, I said, "Farewell, Rachel Emmons, and remember that they who seek peace in the right spirit will always find it at last."

"It won't be many years before I find it," she replied calmly; and the weird, supernatural light of her eyes shone upon me for the last time.

I REACHED New York in due time and did not fail, sitting around the broiled oysters and celery with my partners, to repeat the story of the Haunted Shanty. I knew, beforehand, how they would receive it; but the circumstances had taken such hold of my mind, so burned me, like a boy's money, to keep buttoned up in the pocket, that I could no more help telling the tale than the man I remember reading about, a great while ago, in a poem called "The

Ancient Mariner." Beeson, who, I suspect, doesn't believe much of anything, is always apt to carry his raillery too far; and thenceforth, whenever the drum of a target-company marching down Broadway passed the head of our street, he would whisper to me, "There comes Rachel Emmons!" until I finally became angry, and insisted that the subject should never again be mentioned.

But I none the less recalled it to my mind, from time to time, with a singular interest. It was the one supernatural, or, at least, inexplicable experience of my life, and I continued to feel a profound curiosity with regard to the two principal characters. My slight endeavor to assist them by such counsel as had suggested itself to me was actuated by the purest human sympathy, and upon further reflection I could discover no other means of help. A spiritual disease could be cured only by spiritual medicine, unless, indeed, the secret of Rachel Emmons's mysterious condition lay in some permanent dislocation of the relation between soul and body, which could terminate only with their final separation.

WITH THE extension of our business, and the increasing calls upon my time during my Western journeys, it was three years before I again found myself in Toledo, with sufficient leisure to repeat my visit. I had some difficulty in finding the little frame house; for, although it was unaltered in every respect, a number of stately brick "villas" had sprung up around it and quite disguised the locality. The door was opened by the same little black-eyed woman, with the addition of four artificial teeth, which were altogether too large and loose. They were attached by plated hooks to her eye-teeth, and moved up and down when she spoke.

"Is Rachel Emmons at home?" I asked.

The woman stared at me in evident surprise.

"She's dead," said she, at last, and then added, "let's see, ain't you the gentleman that called here, some three or four years ago?"

"Yes," said I, entering the room; "I should like to hear about her death."

"Well, 'twas rather queer. She was failin' when you was here. After that she got softer and weaker-like, an' didn't have her death-like sleeps so often, but she went just as fast for all that. The doctor said 'twas heart-disease, and the nerves was gone, too; so he only giv' her morphy, and sometimes pills, but he knowed she'd no chance from the first. 'Twas a year ago last May when she died. She'd been confined to her bed about a week, but I'd no thought of her goin' so soon. I was settin' up with her, and 'twas a little past midnight, maybe. She'd been layin' like dead awhile, an' I was thinkin' I could snatch a nap before she woke. All 't once she rose right up in bed, with her eyes wide open, an' her face lookin' real happy, an' called out, loud and strong, 'Farewell, Eber

Nicholson! Farewell! I've come for the last time! There's peace for me in Heaven, an' peace for you on Earth! Farewell! Farewell!' Then she dropped back on the piller, stone-dead. She'd expected it, it seems, and got the doctor to write her will. She left me this house and lot. I'm her second cousin on the mother's side, but all her money in the Savin's Bank, six hundred and seventy-nine dollars and a half, went to Eber Nicholson. The doctor writ out to Illinois, an' found he'd gone to Kansas a year before. So the money's in bank yet; but I s'pose he'll git it, some time or other."

AS I RETURNED to the hotel, conscious of a melancholy pleasure at the news of her death, I could not help wondering. Did he hear that last farewell, far away in his Kansas cabin? Did he hear it, and fall asleep with thanksgiving in his heart, and arise in the morning to a liberated life? I have never visited Kansas, nor have I ever heard from him since; but I know that the living ghost which haunted him is laid for ever.

Reader, you will not believe my story; *but it is true*.

End