RANDOLPH BEDFORD

FOURTEEN FATHOM BY QUETTA ROCK

AND OTHER STORIES

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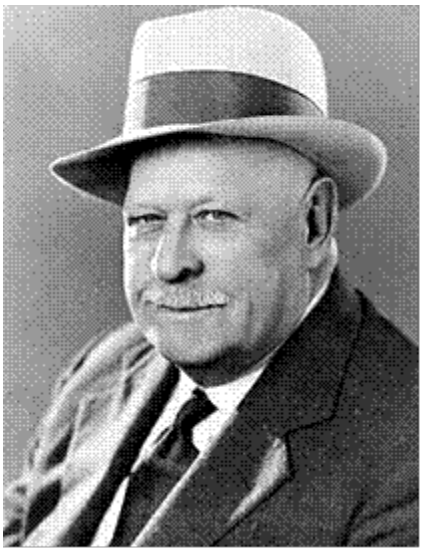
Edited and Produced by Terry Walker, April 2025



Randolph Bedford (1868-1941) led an improbably colourful and adventurous life, from roaming Australia and New Guinea searching for mining opportunities, to serving several terms in the Queensland parliament. He wrote several novels and plays, numerous poem and short stories, and was a vigorous and opinionated freelance journalist. So far as I can establish, no collection of his short stories or poems was ever published.

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"Wagstaff" stories

Bedford wrote numerous stories featuring Captain Jack Wagstaff, a sort of shipping adventurer. The first six were published weekly in the Sydney Mail *during 1911 under the general heading "Find Out Wagstaff". The seventh is from 1915; and the 8th (and the last) is from* Smith's Weekly*, 1939.*

1: The Dancing Trees

Sydney Mail (NSW) 3 April 1912

CAPTAIN JACK WAGSTAFF and I— who am his mate, George Crayth— went to the Solomons on a wild goose chase, but we liked Papua more, and the rubber boom sent us back to it.

We returned to Papua to look for rubber country, and didn't like the coast. Therefore we went up to the plateau of the Astrolabe— and forgot all about rubber. The bird of paradise trade caught us, so we engaged twenty niggers to shoot the fowl for us, and twenty carriers for stores from the coast, and laid in a lot of trade tobacco, and turkey red, and calico, and salt, and rations, and jews' harps, and sat down to plan.

We had climbed up the range of silicious limestone and lava and conglomerate from Port Moresby, past the great mile-long canon cut by the Laloki River, after falling sheer over its scarp of weathered volcanic ash; and then east of the Warino Creek junction to Tabouri. It was a precipitous climb of the volcanic hills, crowned with jungle, flame tree, and lawyer vine, with groves of bamboo wherever luck had given soil a foothold, and the big, white, scented lily blooming in the rock shadows.

On the way Jack Wagstaff told me of the money we should make from bird slaughter for the adornment of women. Then over the roar of Rona Falls, and from the heights above, came a harsh cry.

"That's the raggiana, George."

"That the cry of a bird of paradise? I expected beauty to have a beautiful voice."

"Why? Pretty women, as a rule, can't sing."

"But that sounds like a crow."

"And the bird of paradise is a crow— a glorified crow. That's the raggiana you hear; or, as the nigs call it, the lokohu."

He went on to explain that bird of paradise values are various. The raggiana is worth, in London or Paris, 26s to 30s; the blue raggiana is worth £6, not because it is more beautiful, but because it lives at an altitude of 4000 feet, and, therefore, is more difficult to shoot. The value of the beautiful little king

bird is only 6d, because fashion is a fool. The magnificent is worth only 1s 6d, the dalbertis, the superb, and the twelve wire are each worth 6s, and the sexpennis is worth 20s.

We paid our native shooters a bonus of a stick of tobacco for each raggiana, in addition to the regular wage of £6 a year, and exported 100 to 150 birdskins a month.

We were surrounded by beauty, even when it was beauty in death— the red, brown, white, chocolate, and bronze-green king bird, and the green, orange, mus-tard-yellow, iron-red and black magnificent bird; but mostly the great plumed lokohu or raggiana, their yellow silken heads brought very low, black velvet melting into sage-green under the throat, the back of golden brown, the brown and red side plumes, whose beauty condemns the bird to death.

"We get twenty-six shillings each," said Find Out Wagstaff, "and some scoundrels in London gum diamond dust and small diamonds on to the plumes an' sell 'em for £1000. There are people, George, who would put frills on the morning star if they could reach it. And now we've packed the birds, we'll eat a bit of lunch."

We sat under the bough-shed of our camp, and completed the colour scheme— formed by the sky and the col-ours of the dead raggianas, brilliant as in life— with pink taro boiled and brown kangaroo roasted. Jack Wagstaff did not talk until his pipe was lighted. Then he looked at the boxes of birds packed for shipment, and at two of the yelping curs of Taburi village, eating the bodies of two raggianas, and he spake his parable.

"Y'KNOW, George, I was intended for the priesthood, and if me poor father could see me now, giving birds of paradise to dogs, and living on selling raggianas for women's hats, 'twould hurt the poor gentleman. I went away to sea for the romance of it! The romance of it! And now I'd like to get the man who wrote *A Life on the Ocean Wave*, and roll him in the rolling deep until he died. I've had twenty years of sea, and I've got £200, and a master's ticket, and a knowledge of a few million acres of coral on the Barrier Reef, and two pairs of elastic stockings, which I had to wear because of years of standing about on wet decks. And that's all I've got except a few hundred bird skins. And here's Deapona, the pretty girl of Taburi, come to be paid for slaying raggianas. Hello! Deapona, how many been shootem? How much for battle, murder, and sudden death?"

The plump girl walked to him, shyly, understanding only the first half of the inquiry, and wondering as to the rest of it. Her face was pleasantly rounded, and her eyes lustrous; she was naked but for the short lava-lava of grass. There

was a white cowrie shell between her breasts; she wore a dog's tooth necklace and armlets of plaited cane, and in each armlet a spiky red and yellow orchid, with a scent as of lavender and magnolia mixed. She halted before Wagstaff, and held up a piece of knotted fibre. Wagstaff took it, and counted the knots, and handed her the bonus of fifteen pieces of tobacco. Then he looked at her again, and from mere pleasure of the look of her gave her an extra stick, and said:

"Christmas box alonga you, Deapona."

She took it and thanked him silently, and, backing clear of the Presence, walked off with much dignity, the flowers in her armlets flashing new colour from the sunlight.

"Nice little girl that," said Wagstaff. "She fancies Marbobo, but Aku has more money and trade."

"Marbobo is our best shooter boy, isn't he?"

"Yes; the handsome chap with a skin like a newly blackened tan boot."

"And Aku is the thin, sneaking fellow, with the bandage and the leaf poultice always on his leg?"

"That's the man. Look at him."

I looked up, and there, on the track from Tabouri village, were Marbobo, the young bird shooter, walking as proudly as a buck, and Aku. Thin! He was the genius of famine; a face merely skin stretched on articulated bones, so making his naturally hungry and villainous expression the more repulsive. There were not "salt cellars" between his collar bones, but "pie dishes." His breast bones appeared ready to break the skin, the ribs were raised from the muscles; the only sign of nutrition was the protuberant "pot-belly" of the taro eater. His legs seemed to be all the same girth, from the thigh to the knee! And every principal joint— shoulder, elbow, and wrist, hip, knee, and ankle— stood out square and solid, like the joint pieces of a Dutch doll. To his starveling figure was opposed his great mop of hair, so that he looked like an umbrella, whereof his body was the stick.

"If the girl has eyes, Jack," said I, "it will be Marbobo— not this empty barrel, with half its staves gone."

"Oh, Deapona's right enough. The man would get her before the trade, but that little skeleton has the reputation of being a sorcerer, and they're all scared of him. 'Buikima' they call it. 'Witchcraft.' "

"Puri-puri, too, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the act of sorcery. I suppose buikima is the name for the science."

Aku and Marbobo came up with their knotted strings, and were paid their tobacco, but Aku lingered after Deapona's lover had departed. At close

quarters he was hideous in his nakedness, and he had a fine taste in jewellery, wearing a bracelet made of the lower jaw of a man.

Aku said that he wished Marbobo to be discharged from shooting, or else that Deapona should go.

Asked as to his reason for separating the two, Aku related that he was a great man and rich, and would have Deapona for a wife.

Wagstaff grew angry. "You're the walking delegate of the Skeletons' Union, are you?" he said to the wondering scoundrel before him. "And you want a non-unionist disqualified because he has flesh on his bones; and if the Employers' Federation don't agree you'll stop eating and call out the cannibals."

Then with a gesture of contemptuous tolerance he motioned Aku away. As he obeyed slowly Wagstaff made him get a move on. The Senior Sorcerer of Taburi explained that such treatment made him wild and dangerous. He went away muttering, his ugliness made bestial by his rage.

At short intervals drums were beaten in the village all next day, but as we knew that another of the long-drawn-out feasts, ending only with the necessity for hunting and growing more food, was about due, we did not notice the disturbance particularly. A few natives called at the camp, but they seemed in haste. Deapona had said at parting "Puri-Puri," and then covered her face and hurried away.

IT WAS on the second day after the anger of the skeleton man that I called Jack Wagstaff from the hut where he was shaving to look at the accounts of our last shipment of birds. He came out with half his face still lathered, and the razor in his hand, and we talked for three minutes or so before he grumbled that the lather dried so quickly in that climate. He returned to the camp to complete his toilet and facial repairs, and raised a yell. "Why did you take away my shaving paper? You did the same thing yesterday."

"I didn't, Jack. Why should I take it?"

"Well, it's gone— just as it disappeared yesterday."

"It's blown away, then. Who wants a bit of paper with soap and whiskers on it? I've got two rubber shaving cups, Jack. They're cleaner than paper. I'll give you one."

"Thanks," said Wagstaff.

But next morning, when as is usual with him in camp, at sea, or in a city, but not when in the bush, Wagstaff finished the daily shave, his objection became profane. For the new lather dish of red rubber had disappeared, and the little bits of beard had disappeared with it.

"H'm," said Wagstaff; "the wind didn't take it, and it isn't a practical joke, and we are the only two in the camp. I left that lather dish twenty minutes ago, and there's been nobody here, and now it's gone. Did you see any strange nigs about, George?"

"No, only that chap you call the walking delegate of the Skeletons' Union."

"Aku?"

"Yes, he was here— but very early. I haven't seen him for an hour."

"Aku? Well, the wind may take one piece of paper with whiskers on it, and my mate may steal another to paste it in his autograph album, but a rubber lather dish weighs four ounces, and I don't believe in the supernatural. Let's look around! Hullo!"

He stopped in his tracks as the sound of a drum and the whirring of a "bullroarer" struck our ears, and looked in the direction of the grove to the west.

There were the big, orchid-covered arbors of the jungle that formed the play-ground of the birds of paradise— the dancing trees where our shooters, from their concealment among the leaves, killed the cock raggianas as they danced the love dance to their audience of hens. We could see a crowd of naked boys and grass-petti-coated women watching the antics of a man. He was masked and fantastically dressed, and he announced that which seemed from his actions a prohibition— by the siren of wood on a long string wielded from a bamboo.

"One of their damfool ceremonies," I said. "Might be," replied Wagstaff. "But it looks special. Well! Let's see the entrance of the two-footed wind who robbed me of my rubber shaving dish."

He led the way to his hut of palm trunks and thatch of the Nipa palm, set upon stilts to escape the earth damp; crouched and walked under it. There was no break in the floor, but we found the palm frond back wall had been cut open by a knive.

"The thief came in that way, and went back that way," said Jack Wagstaff. "I can understand Aku stealing that dish. He'd eat it at the cannibal feast as a third course to roast brother-in-law. But why did he take bits of paper with soap and whiskers on them? That beats me."

We were beaten for four days, and then as none of the shooting boys put in an appearance Wagstaff went to the village. He returned more puzzled than ever.

"They're dancing and yelling there," he said to me. "But Deapona and Marbobo are not there, and neither is Aku. When I put a question to the others they left me as if they were scared, just as if I were a heretic in the good old days asking a Sevillian the way to the Inquisition Office. And all our shooting

boys are there, howling and leaping as if they'd never heard of work. Let's go over to the dancing trees. Marbobo and Deapona and Aku may have stuck to business."

We approached the grove of dancing trees. A tall, thin man, his head and body covered in painted native cloth, his petticoat of banana leaves giving his hips a bulk which the pipe-stem legs below it contradicted, blew a conch when he saw us, and then disappeared. We crossed the outer belt of jungle. Before us was a raffle of trees and creepers— the dark brown trunks and glossy yellow leaves of the manati, the mao pine, crowfoot elm, cedar, and koru palm and rubber vine, and we reached the first dancing tree. The harsh cries of the raggiana tore the silence; so it was not scarcity of birds of paradise that had driven the shooter boys away.

"Look ahead," said Jack. "See those four dancing trees. There's a wide piece of paper-mulberry cloth tied on to each trunk with fibre. This is trouble, and we're up against it. It's Tabu, and that must have been Mr. Aku we saw."

"Then that must have been a Tabu ceremony he was doing with the bullroarer the other day?"

"Yes, but he's given it a special finish now; he's done it with a conch."

"And while it lasts the boys won't shoot for us?"

"No. They hate Aku; but they respect him because he's the hereditary sorcerer, as well as the walking delegate of the Skeletons' Union. If I get hold of him there'll be no more hereditary sorcerers on this plateau."

"Government would give him a year's gaol, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. But Government is a long way off. Let's tear down this comic opera witchcraft."

We tore down the cords and the tabu cloth from the dancing trees, and carrying them, we went back to the village. In the long lane of peaked palm-frond houses on stilts the dance still went on perspiringly, and the food-loaded platforms at the end of the street showed us that the proceedings would last for weeks. The women clapped hands, and the old men beat the drums, and the warriors pranced, while the small boys practised spear-throwing at rolling coconuts.

Jack Wagstaff walked to the human fence surrounding the dance. He threw into the open space the cloth and strings that had been the tabu of the dancing trees, and coolly jumped on them.

There was a moment of horror as they looked at the properties of Shibboleth, then a silence; then a yell of rage; and then a movement as of attack. But Wagstaff addressed the chief— a dirty old gentleman with a Scotch cap skewered into his greasy hair— and at the tone of authority they remembered the power of the white man and paused.

"Who been tiem this one on dancing trees?"

"Aku. Tabu."

"Oh, Aku, was it. I thought as much. Where Marbobo? Where Deapona?"

The chief paused, and when he spoke again he was careful not to mention their names, as if he believed that already they were dead.

"That one been fufu— altogether other one been fufu."

"Fufu! Sick! What makem sick?"

The chief lowered his voice to a whisper and said, "Puri-puri."

"Sorcery? Witchcraft? That one Aku. You show me Marbobo."

The chief led us to a peaked house, where dogs, like pigs, and pigs like dogs, sprawled and quarrelled and struggled with small boys for standing room on the bamboo ladder.

Within lay Marbobo, naked but for his perineal band and his grass anklets, and his armlets of cane. His face was turned to the wall, and his mind was going out to meet death three-quarters of the distance, and so save death a journey.

"What matter longa you, Marbobo?" asked Wagstaff. Marbobo turned his once handsome face and showed white eyes, and cheeks almost green with fear.

"Puri-puri, he stop," said Marbobo. "Aku been puttem puri-puri on me— puttem puri-puri on Deapona. Soon die: you give white calico, Taubada?"

"What for?"

"When dead wantem white calico— white man plenty strong, no been die."

"Why me die?" "Aku send puri-puri stop alonga you, Taubada." "When that one?"

"Four day he stop— then he see you no die— then tabu tree— then puri-puri stop along me."

"How did he puri-puri you?"

"He catchem wallaby, takem out inside, then put stone inside— then callem that one wallaby 'Marbobo.' By em bye me die."

"You die? No fear! Aku poor feller— he no kill white man. Puri-puri belonga old woman, not big man."

"I die, Taubada."

"No fear. How Aku puri-puri me?"

"Getem big feller stone— puttem alonga dead cassow-ary—then him say 'Name that one dead cassowary Iwastaffi.' "

"I see. Named a dead bird 'Wagstaff,' did he? That's an insult, and I'll boot Mr. Aku for that."

"Me die, Taubada."

"No fear. S'pose you get up. I been show you Aku die."

The tone, quite as much as the promise, brought back courage to the green man who was dying as an act of faith. By-and-bye he consented to postpone his demise for a day or two, and accompanied us to the house of Aku. His passage through the village street was regard-ed as something approaching a resurrection.

The house of Aku was untenanted, and we three searched the sorcerer's property while the tribe waited without, and expected the sky to fall. We found some very smellful things in that house. The wallaby which had been named Marboba and the cassowary called after Wagstaff were very dead. And then we opened a packet containing things less noxious— to wit, a fish bone with pig's bristles glued to it for a beard, a few seeds, a flat, waterworn stone of basalt, wrapped in tobacco leaves, Wagstaff's shaving papers, and the rubber shaving dish.

"He gave me two lots, George. Why he do this one cassowary, Marbobo?"

"First time he do this, then you not die. Then he call that one cassowary Iwastaffi."

"I see. All this garbage and whiskers wouldn't do it because I was too ignorant to die, and then he gave me the cassowary. Good job be kept it here. It he'd planted it under my bed I'd have died of typhoid. Now, Marbobo, takem that one wallaby, throwem out— go on— quick feller."

The trembling Marbobo threw the witchcraft into the street, and the crowd separated in horror. Then the village dogs, having no superstitious fears, ate the offal, and with it destroyed much of the superstition.

"Now— throwem out cassowary. I take this one. Throwem out that feller, bones and seeds."

Marbobo, with growing courage, threw out the rubbish, and Jack Wagstaff pocketed the rubber dish before the horrified villagers, and said loudly, "Puri-puri altogether finish."

But Marbobo and the chief presented him with arguments based on the etiquette of sorcery. According to them, tabu and sorcery can only be removed by the sorcerer, and they suggested he should compel the sorcerer to do the deed of exorcism. They pointed out Aku, still in his clerical attire, entering the village from the direction of the dancing trees, and then they scuttled to their house platforms, and left Wagstaff and myself to our fate.

But first Marbobo and the chief walked around us and expectorated copiously, to guard us from any new witchcraft.

My mate and I walked down the street and met Aku, who relied on the clothing of his office for respect, and attempted to pass with dignity. But Wagstaff seized him suddenly by the hair with his left hand, and with his right

tore off the sorcerer's face and body covering of painted cloth and his petticoat of banana leaves. It was all done in three motions.

The naked and disgraced clergyman, uttering cries of anger, wrenched away his head with a violence not to be expected of such a starveling, and ran, leaving a handful of black and frizzled hair in the white man's hand. Then an inspiration came to Wagstaff, and he shouted after his beaten enemy.

"Now I puri-puri you."

That afternoon to our camp came a deputation. Aku, very humble and contrite, was understood to have serious objections to sorcery used against himself. He argued that the witchcraft of a white man, who could break tabu and not fall dead, who could defy sorcery, and throw its emblems and oracles to the dogs must be witchcraft indeed. He offered to remove the puri-puri from Wagstaff, and Wagstaff laughed, and said the old thing was dead, and the dogs had eaten it.

He offered to remove the tabu from the dancing trees, and Wagstaff told him to get work.

He further offered to lead us to a forest 4000 feet above sea level, where blue raggianas were as common as king birds, and Wagstaff, seeing that blue raggianas are worth £6 each, assented. And then Wagstaff told him that he must also lift the sorcery from Marbobo, and the threat of it from Deapona, and Aku agreed with an ill grace. Ordered, further, to abandon sorcery forever, he explained that owing to his extreme attenuation he required the aid of witchcraft to secure himself a wife, and Wagstaff yielded the point.

Then Aku asked for the return of his hair, parted from with much pain, but he had to be content with a promise of its delivery, subject to the capture of the blue raggianas, and a further promise that the hair should not be used as witchcraft against its owner, pending the completion of the contract.

Aku lifted the tabu and the sorcery, and was furthermore expected to look pleasant when Wagstaff and I next morning distributed gifts to the chief and others, and, lastly, to the reborn Marbobo and to Deapona his wife— dressed in the brief authority of the bridal rami, which is an ordinary petticoat shortened by half.

"One piece turkey red, Deapona."

"A-a-ah! Taubada!

"Two white feller rami, Deapona."

"O-o-oh! Taubada!"

"One big feller piece salt, Deapona."

"O-o-oh! Taubada!"

"Plenty tobacco— two jews' harps, Deapona."

"A-a-a-a-ae! Taubada!"

"Trot along with your trousseau, Deapona."

"Io! Taubada!" and she went.

"Aku! One day we stop— then we go find Blue Lokohu!"

"Io! Taubada!"

"Yes, master!" The sorcerer had lost his sorcery. Next day we started for the blue raggianas— over beyond Eworogo and higher up the range.

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2: The Black Prize

Sydney Mail (NSW) 10 April 1912

AKU, THE SKELETON SORCERER, had made his contract good, and Jack Wagstaff and myself were camped near Cageri with many bird of paradise skins, of which eighty-four were blue raggianas, worth to us £6 a bird.

"You have done well, Aku," said Jack Wagstaff, and presented him with gifts of the better sort, an imitation meerschaum pipe, and carved on its body an undressed lady fleeing where none pursued; a walking stick from Germany, a dress shirt, an old hat, and one old glove, and we wondered as to how such things had smuggled themselves into the trade chest.

Aku's eyes flashed at the gifts, but a mixture of pleasure, cupidity and resentment seemed to be still in his expression, though in view of his faithful guidance of us to the place of the blue birds of paradise, I put such thoughts away.

From the verandah of the thatched homestead of Cageri, we looked down on the lines of coffee and para rubber trees of the plantation, and the naked, wet, red earth gleaming between the rows and in the daily rains of afternoon. Maize stalks lifted thirteen feet of height from the dense carpet of sweet potato leaves in the native gardens, and on the fences grew wild tangles of convolvuli and heliotrope. The cedar-like tops of the rubber trees waved between the white and red and glossy green of coffee, the red earth, and the great prone cedars rotting red in the recurrent rains and the sun glare relieved the green of the long hedges of flowering limes and the living palisades of sticks that had taken root; the cocoanut and banana threshing their fronds in the spicy air, and a grove of a thousand betelnut palms lazily moving their feathery tops, made the colour scheme complete. The rain drummed on our roof of thatch, but ceased at dusk, and left us to a clear moonlight—not cold, but cool enough for blankets.

"Aku is broken to harness, Jack," I said as we sat on the verandah that night.

"Hm-m-m— I don't trust him much— he's a bad-looking lot. But a few old hats and a dress shirt will buy a lot of fidelity, even if it's only for ten minutes."

"Do you think he'd have the gall to mean mischief after you pulling his hair out?"

"I don't know. But it's too beautiful here to worry. I wouldn't move for anything less than a railway collision to-night. And there's £500 worth of blue birds ready for all sorts of women on the other side of the earth, and I'm just comfortably tired with to-day's march. So don't think, George."

The peaked roofs of the native houses cast queer shadows; the korn palms swayed stately under the moon; black tree shadows massed to the lucent blue; scent fell from blossom of lime, mandarine, and Seville orange through the moon's rays to the earth.

"Augh!" yawned "Find Out Wagstaff" and stumbled sleepily to bed.

THERE SEEMED to be little reason next day to doubt the sincerity of Aku. He became a courtier, after the Papuan fashion. Dressed in the old hat and the crackling starched shirt of Wagstaff's giving, he marched around the house as we sat on the verandah at breakfast, and solemnly spat mastications of aromatic bark to warn the devils of our nobility.

"Why," said I, "he's exorcising us, Jack."

"H'm!" said Wagstaff, as Aku disappeared at the angle of the house, still expectorating for our protection. He rose from the table, tiptoed through the house, and quick-ly returned and sat down.

"H'm!" "What's up, Jack?"

"Aku discounts the magic by fifty per cent. He stops spitting when he's out of sight. We're only half exorcised, George."

"Better give him another boiled shirt."

"I'll give him a raw stick if he starts any funny busi-ness. But I may be doing him an injustice. He led us to the blue birds right enough. Pass the coffee pot, George."

Aku made another ungraceful round to keep us from harm, and halted at the verandah steps.

"Taubada."

"Oo! Aku!"

"Lo eregima lokohu dukuka."

"What? eregima— to see— dukuka— black. What do you think of that yarn, George? He says he knows of black raggianas."

"Aku was there, too, talking confidentially to the Chief."

"Black birds of paradise— there's no such thing."

"We think not, but you never know."

"Ask him if it's all black."

"Obur dukuka?"

"Vegiti taubada—ogopavaisi."

"He says 'No,' and I'm more than master now. He calls me chief of chiefs. My stock is going up."

"Dukuka da tago—da beri; tagerikaike."

"It's black and blood colour, and iridescent like a pearl shell, and green, too."

"It's a dragoon bird."

"But he says it's a bird of paradise. We'd get twenty pounds each for them, George."

He turned to Aku, and asked him where the black raggianas lived, and the sorcerer replied, pointing to the north, that it was far away, and high up in the clouds.

"That sounds all right," said Jack Wagstaff to me. "The brown raggiana lives 2000 feet up, and the blue raggiana 4000 feet above the sea— why not the black at 8000 feet? I'll ask him if he can lead us there; we'll send our birds from here down to the coast, and if Aku knows the place we'll go to it hot foot."

Aku replied that he could lead us to the new birds— over many rivers and mountains in the clouds. He did not dare to go alone, as it was enemies' country far ahead but with that Master Sorcerer, Senior Magician, and Chief of Chiefs "Find Out" Wagstaff, he knew that he was safe.

That day we packed the blue birds, and next morning, having seen the carrier boys depart for the coast, we made our preparations for the expedition of the black prize. Aku guided us west of north through the jungle and basaltic rocks to the Beccari River, thence through hilly country to mad gorges of conglomerate and great boulders of slate and granite, to dense forest— jungle and vine rafle and prone trees, torn by sudden deep rivers. There, Wagstaff, who had been criti-cal of the guidance from the beginning, turned him more to the east, and we made the cataracts of the Navro River, ten days after leaving Cageri. We had travelled all kinds of country, black soil flats and swamps and pandanus belts, and infrequently tongues of jungle, Australia's zamias, gums, and spear grass in pockets; the yellow flowers of the kapok tree and jungle again, with crowfoot elms and rubber vines, canes and okeri nuts. And Jack Wagstaff, always in the van of the expedition, marched ahead, apparently tirelessly, and as if this long tramp were a picnic.

As we crossed a pocket of kangaroo grass a few golden butterflies, all glossy yellow, and with-out a touch of white or splash of colour, flitted before us, and Jack Wagstaff said: "Catch them!— No! They're fine where they are. One two, three— eight! There's eight pounds' worth of butterfly going to waste because of my sentimentality. Each of those fellows is worth a pound in London. They must know the market, too; see how high they fly when a white man comes near."

Once we waded along a torrential river bed, thigh-deep for a mile, between steep banks covered with a dark blue, sweet-scented creeper, whose flower systems were shaped like birds in flight, and here and there a fallen tree, meshed by the forget-me-not blue flowers of the clitorea; often the flying buttresses of the pandanus tore as with fish hooks, the devlish thorns of the

lawyer vines scored us in the jungle, though two black boys went ahead with great cane-knives, slashing at the green and stubborn wall. Once we struck a thorny swamp, succeeded by an exhausting viscous mud, so evil smelling that the carrier boys plucked little branches of sweet scented verbena and carried them, spiked like flowers, in their armlets. We were walking a mile or more behind the carriers, and Aku's skeleton figure was that of the only native in sight.

Jack Wagstaff had been watching Aku in silence, and suddenly he spoke. "I don't like that unemployed wizard somehow, George."

"What's wrong with him?"

"I can't put my finger on anything specific, but he seems to have a better understanding with the villagers for nothing than we can get with presents. And that might mean that he has promised all where we've given a little." "But how could he redeem a promise like that?"

"If the owners of the trade died, who would be the legatees? Why, the victors."

"You expect treachery then?"

"Do you trust Aku?"

"Not a great deal."

"I trust him not at all. When he wanted to get his hair again, so that I shouldn't use it for witchcraft against him he had to say 'Master,' and he nearly choked at being humbled. But after getting the blue birds, and I'd given him his hair, and he had nothing else to expect, he called me 'Chief of Chiefs.' "

"Well?"

"He wanted to secure another advantage, and be thought that he had become loyal, and only desired us get the black raggianas. Thinking coldly over it, it looks to me that he wanted to get us into strange and difficult country. Why? Loot and revenge. If this country we're passing through turns against us now, Aku would try for our heads, and the villagers would get the loot."

"What can we do? Turn back now?"

"That might be missing a big profit in the black raggianas. And we can't run back home on mere suspicion. No. We must go full speed ahead, and keep the lead going and the weather eye open always. I've no fancy to let Aku have my lower jaw for a bracelet."

"Then, on the off-chance of Aku meaning mischief, he must not be allowed out of the sight of one of us."

"More than that, George; if it is possible to prevent him, he must not be allowed to talk with the chiefs separately. After all, he's my guide and interpreter, and I'm sure that when he's alone with the chiefs there are twenty words for himself and only one for us."

We quickened our pace and joined Aku, and Jack Wagstaff asked him when he would come to the place of the black birds of paradise. He replied with apparent readiness that another day would do it; that we were already "near the clouds," as the course had been ascending for many days.

Our aneroid had registered an altitude of 5400 feet that morning, and we were still ascending. Early in the afternoon the sun drove the mist away, in preparation for the daily rains. We came to a river at two o'clock, and had to wait two hours while the natives made a suspension bridge of rattan cane.

And it was scarcely completed when we crossed it, and we had scarcely reached the other side before trouble broke out among the carriers. They could not go further, they said. There were wild men ahead; they themselves were sand beach boys, and did not like bushmen; they thought of their wives and children, too, and wanted very much to go home.

By threats and promises and cajolery we got them ahead with their burdens again, and when the rain came it found us in a deep jungle, where the atmosphere tasted like steam. Then came dusk and thunder, and we were still far from the camping place Aku had been directed to by the chief of the last village passed through.

We walked along the narrow jungle path in almost tangible darkness, the soaked track visible only when the lightning flashed. Phosphorescent wood and lichens look-ed out from the jungle like the eyes of tigers; fireflies glimmered in the rain, and steam showed the way across a brawling creek on a prone tree, with its guide rail of vines. A piece of rotten and phosphorescent wood carried in the hand made the travelling even worse, and we threw away the wood and staggered on in the dark.

A lightning flash showed Aku for a minute; five minutes later Jack Wagstaff called to him, and had no reply. We called again and again, and only the falling rain answered. Then the darkness became absolute, as the lightning flashed no more.

"It's no good, George," said Jack Wagstaff; "we'll blunder into the heart of the jungle as we're going. Sit down and wait for moonlight, and moonlight won't be any use unless the rain stops."

"And if it isn't moonlight, the wait will be till sun-light?"

"Yes. Can't be helped! We'll pull a few branches down for a shelter, and as we've got nothing to eat, we must smoke. Lucky I've got waterproof matches. So down with a few branches, and we'll sit in the boudoir if the leaches will let us."

It was a long wait, sitting under the dripping trees in a footbath of mud and leaves, tearing off occasionally a predatory leech that had to travel to our hands because it couldn't bite through the clothes. And when the night

lightened, tiger-eyes by the hundred glimmered and winked at us malevolently from the phosphorescence of decaying wood.

It was the longest night I have ever known, but dawn did come, and we walked stiffly forward in soddened clothes that seemed already mouldy. The heat of a Turkish bath came at eight o'clock, but we saw light ahead— the flood of sunlight on a grass patch, after the long shadow-dappled aisles of the jungle. We heard drums beating as we entered the grass patch, and found the village of Vaikari, a collection of tree houses and a short lane of thatched huts on stilts, with a dubu, or long house, at the end.

We found all our carriers there, and badly scared men they had been, and very glad to see us again. Aku was there, too, talking confidentially with the chief, and Aku was full of sorrow and excuses.

Jack Wagstaff shot a great goura pigeon, to the trepidatious admiration of the village, and we breakfasted off it as soon as it could be roasted, and left enough to feed a third man too, for the goura pigeon is as big as a large duck.

As we ate, Jack Wagstaff was more than usually silent and thoughtful. Occasionally he looked towards the chief's house, which Aku entered as soon as we sat to lunch. The people seemed to have disappeared as by magic, and the street, closed by a grove of feathery-topped and very tall and slender areca palms, was empty.

"What do you think of it, Jack?"

"I don't like it. Aku left us purposely last night, and I'd have roped him this morning only that it's best to wait till we get back to our own territory before putting on laws."

"The villagers look sulky."

"They're worse; their sullenness is almost menacing. We'll rush out of it, George. Leave a few presents and then hurry the carriers ahead, and take Mr. Aku with us. I feel like handcuffing myself to him now. And it's lucky I didn't miss that goura pigeon with the first shot."

"Why? You'd have got him with the second."

"Yes, and the villagers would have seen that there are chances in marksmanship. As it is they think my rifle carries death infallibly. And here's Marbobo. What matter, Marbobo?"

"Two feller been try stealem tommy-hawk. I beat one feller."

"Good boy! Tell all carrier boy we go now."

Marbobo left us as if he didn't like the position, and we sought the chief. He was with Aku, and Wagstaff's glance, as much as Wagstaff's words, sent the ex-wizard to a humbler position in the rear.

Despite all their entreaties that we should stay till next day, Wagstaff ordered the carriers ahead, and having given a few beads, two ounces of salt,

and an old knife to the chief we continued the march— Aku closer to us than usual, for Jack Wagstaff talked to him like a Dutch uncle. We marched into forest country; great trees indefinite with the misty rain. Aku said we would reach the place of the black birds of paradise that evening and could begin shooting next morning. And a little encouraged by this we plodded on.

Between 11 o'clock and 2 in the afternoon we travelled a mile and a half; fog descended, a warm fog, almost steam. The country became broken into ravines and rug-ged spurs. We came to a spur almost perpendicular, and could find no better ascent, in the fog. The trees, roots, trunks and branches were wrapped in thick coverings of moss; for ten minutes or more at a time there was not a bird call; it was all as quiet as the grave.

Late in the afternoon we came to an open grassy space of about 100 acres, a small plateau on the flattened top of the mountain. To be able to see ahead clearly, even in the deceptiveness of dusk, was a relief, and Aku said that we should see the black raggianas at daylight in the trees around the pocket.

We slept well, too weary to meet trouble half-way, and in the morning the sun shone bright and early for us, and we greeted him as if he were a long lost friend. Ordering Aku to stay in camp, and Marbobo to accompany us to the edge of the forest, we took our guns and walked across the plateau on the last stage of the journey to the black prize.

"I saw in the first tree the bird we had come to find, and with a hastily whispered "Don't move" to Marbobo, I fired. Marbobo brought the bird back to us, and Wagstaff took it from my hand.

"Nothing," he said. "A rainbow pitta. For all its beauty it isn't worth the cartridge."

"Could Aku have mistaken this? Is the dragoon bird his black raggiana?"

I was answered from a tree fifty feet away.

"Qua-a-a-a-a."

"Our old friend the crow," said Jack Wagstaff.

"H'm!"

"But Aku said it was black and iridescent, and orange and splashed with bronze green."

"Aku said that to bring us here. Aku wants our heads."

Then Marbobo told us something he had been afraid to tell us before. He had arrived in camp one carrier boy short.

"Lost in the fog, Jack?" I hazarded. "I hope so; it's better than the other alternative. Let's get back to camp."

And there another surprise awaited us. Aku was gone.

We breakfasted quietly, and held a council of two. To go forward was impossible, now that we knew the black raggiana to be a myth, founded on an

unglorified crow; to go back was full of danger. Aku had deserted to the enemy, and the enemy, village after village, would be waiting for us and the coveted burden of our carriers. Should we go forward across the plateau, and make back south by a more westerly track?

"You see," said Jack Wagstaff, "if we do that Aku will get ahead, and make hornet's nests for us on the new track. He must be friendly in those villages too; you remember how I had to turn him more easterly."

"Yes."

"Then the best thing is if fighting's to be done— do it quickly; start right away and surprise them, I think."

Then Marbobo came to voice the fears and opinions of the carrier boys, and that decided us.

"Taubada," said Marbobo, "that one boy lost yes'aday not been lost longa fog. Bad feller been stealem that boy longa track, take him alonga village; kai kai that boy."

"Cannibals?"

"Yes, George; they've cut him out of the procession for pork."

"And Aku in it!"

"We'll let him have it in the neck before long. Go on Marbobo."

"Plenty bad feller longa that one village walkem longa us in fog. Master no see him— alonga bush he stop— my boys been frikened plenty; then bad feller men longa bush plenty shake spear at my boys—then bad feller say been kai kai my boys, kai kai me, kai kai white Taubada altogether."

"Oh, we're to be in the menu too, George."

"Altogether all feller boy say Iwastaffi good master, ask Iwastaffi go back quick feller, no good bad feller kai kai me; more better all boy stop longa home, longa wife, shootem lokohu, plenty eatum pork, plenty sleep, plenty play jew's harp. That more better. We say go back, master. All boy good feller— all boy like master, all boy like see'em master shoot that one Aku altogether."

"It's a deal," said Jack Wagstaff. "Marbobo, all boy get ready we go back longa village quick feller, then we fight all bad feller longa gun."

The road home is always shorter than the track of the outward bound; we travelled quickly, and were in Vaikari village at noon. On its outskirts we halted at the noise of the villagers— drums beat deafeningly, a dance was going on, and Marbobo offered the information that it was the death dance of victory over the fallen. All these scoundrels were singing their own praises of their conquest— the killing of the carrier boy by twenty men who had kept on the wings of the carriers' line, intimidating the unarmed men with their spears, and whispering murder and cannibalism to the poor scared wretches in the fog.

Jack Wagstaff ordered Marbobo and the shooting boys to load their guns and surround the carriers and the trade and camp gear; then shouting to be heard above the noise of the war drums of wood and iguana skin and the thunderous feet of the dancers he said:—

"Come on, George; into the street with me?"

"Right, old man; but isn't it foolhardy?"

"No! We may beat them without a shot. We're in charge of the white man's dignity, and if we want our lives we must keep the white man's prestige higher than ever."

We left the carriers and shooting boys and the cover of the trees, and advanced into the street. Some of the dancers wore caps of cuscus fur, fronted with white shells ground down to thin plates, and cheek pieces of black cassowary feathers. They had all their finery in use— necklaces of boar tusks and dog's teeth and they were shouting, bragging, and dancing in full war canopy of paint and feathers.

Aku stood outside the ring of dancers, again talking to the chief. He saw us first, and drew the chief's attention. The dance stopped, the war drums ceased reverberating, the bragging and the shouting stilled. The village became very quiet as we advanced, and a giant of a man quietly knelt on the wet and steaming earth, and fitted an arrow to his bow.

"Human bone and cassowary claw arrows," said Jack Wagstaff. "You take Aku, George: fire between his legs— don't hit him if you can help it. I'll take the dog near the archer."

Before the archer could draw the bow, Wagstaff fired, and killed the dog, and the archer dropped his bow and ran. At the same time I fired after Aku, who had attempted to run as soon as he saw the rifles pointed his way. I won't say that I tried not to hit him, but that was the result. The bullet struck the ground behind him, and splashed him with mud, but he got away safely, disappearing behind the long house.

The shots were followed by a yell of fear from the dancers. In a minute we were alone in the street, and we advanced to the platform, where was piled food for the dancing feast. There were pigeons, and taro, and bananas, and sugar cane, and some queerly shaped packages of flesh.

"Don't touch it," said Wagstaff.

"Why not?"

"Don't; it's the carrier boy. And, by Heaven! Look there."

Pale with disgust of it all he pointed to a cooking pot on a fire behind the food platform. From it rose a thin brown hand as if calling to the sky to avenge its most cruel end.

"I am almost sick, Jack. Horrible!"

"I'll take Mr. Aku down to the coast to stand his trial for this—if I can. And if I can't—"

"We'll be our own law if he resists."

"They won't come back again while we're here, George. Let's get out of sight, and they'll return. I must have Aku, and to have him I must get the chief."

We returned to the carriers, and Marbobo reported that they had been under arms since we left them, but had seen nothing.

We waited for nearly half an hour, and then the villagers, apparently believing we had retreated, returned to the food platform, to dance and brag and boast of the killing of the carrier boy.

"This time," said Wagstaff, "I'll go alone. You and Marbobo keep me covered with your guns. If they rush me I'll get close to the houses, and you can sweep the street."

They saw him and attempted a rush. Wagstaff back-ed to the house and fired at the same time as myself and Marbobo. Two men fell wounded, but were helped out of the street, and then Aku, brandishing a two-handed stone club, sprang across the street to try close quarters with Wagstaff. My mate let him come almost within striking distance before he fired, and Aku fell with a rifle bullet in his brain.

And that was the end of the trouble.

The chief delivered up the two men who had killed the carrier boy to be taken by us for trial. Later he apologised. His apology weighed more than a hundredweight, and squealed without ceasing until the butcher claimed him. His apology was the finest pig in the village, and his crackling was ample excuse for the execution.

We made for the coast— nearly three weeks away, but got through without much incident, and believed that we had finished with Aku for ever.

We were wrong. Aku was dead, but his deeds lived after him, and to our hurt. At the coast we found that our five hundred pounds worth of raggianas had not arrived; that no white man had seen the birds nor the carriers after leaving Cageri, and that therefore twenty carrier boys and one hundred and fifty-six birds of paradise had vanished.

In the chase for the shadow of the black prize we had lost the certainty of the blue.

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3: The Lost Raggianas.

Sydney Mail (NSW) 17 April 1912

"SO you've got a lot of birds," said Spalding, the manager of the big store at Port Moresby.

"Yes," replied Jack Wagstaff. "Ninety-four raggianas, and about two hundred of the little yellow fel-lows, and that's on top of the eighty-four blue raggianas and—"

"Eighty-four blue raggianas?"

"Yes, eighty-four and ninety-two others— a hundred and seventy-six birds consigned to you for shipment nearly two months ago."

"You're dreaming," said Spalding. "We haven't received a bird on account of Wagstaff and Crayth for over two months."

"Nonsense, man! Six weeks ago or more we sent the carriers away from Wageri with a hundred and seventy-six paradise skins, including eighty-four blue raggianas consigned to you for shipment to London."

"Eye hath not seen them, my gentle boy."

"You've really not had them."

Spalding looked at him reproach-fully, and asked if he— Spalding— ever jested on sacred subjects such as money.

"But we came down the same track from the Astrolabe— if they're not on the plateau and they're not on the track, therefore they must be here in Moresby. You can't lose eight or ten carrier boys as you can a pearl."

"You might be able to lose them easier when they carry six hundred pounds worth of feathers than if they were only loaded with sago."

"But where could they have got to? They may have mistaken their orders, and delivered the birds to another agent."

Spalding shook his head. "Not likely," he said. "Now if you've really lost the birds, including eighty-four blue raggianas——"

"Do you mean to say that we didn't have them?"

"No, no; not in the sense you mean. I put it down to a touch of fever. Eighty-four blue raggianas. You're the only man who ever saw so many."

"George Crayth saw them, too; didn't you, George?"

"I packed them, too," I replied.

"Then," said Spalding. "You're up against it. I'll bet you that those birds have never come to this port."

"Stolen on the road? And the carrier boys vanished. If they stole them there's no way out for them; if they stole them this is the only port they'd bring them to."

"The only inhabited port, Mr. Wagstaff; but there are others."

"That would mean arrangement, plot— conspiracy."

"Something like that. And you won't be able to export any more birds after three weeks."

"Why?"

"The Government has decided to stop the shooting of the birds, and has, therefore, prohibited their export. Get all your birds away from here in the next three weeks, or they'll be put in irons."

"So if we can't get the blue birds out of the country in three weeks we're out of it?"

"Yes, right out. For all they're worth to you the eighty-four blue raggianas might as well be in the dancing trees."

We left Spalding, and walked silently to the other store, troubled by this new loss after all our work, and just as we were beginning to think ourselves in funds again.

"Don't bother about it, Jack! If this game is lost we'll try something else."

"I'm not troubled about the game so much as the mys-tery, George. I don't believe the birds ever came to Port Moresby; but if they didn't, where did they get to? Aku's brother was the man in charge of the carrier boys. Why shouldn't this be all part of the one plan? We started out with Aku, and Aku looked on us as dead men. So Aku's brother might have known of that plot and he collared the estate before the testators died."

A round of the other stores was as resultless as our visit to Spalding. None of the storekeepers had heard of eighty-four raggianas and ninety-two ordinary lokohus; in each case we drew a blank. "What next, Jack?" "Back to the plateau; we'll find those carriers alive or dead."

"We struggled through for some days of agonising effort in the Turkish bath heat of the swamped lowlands."

We borrowed Government horses and rode as swiftly as the track would let us up to Wageri. From Wageri we traced the carriers to Taburi, and there found four of them. Their story was that Aku's brother had told them on the second day that the birds were to be taken, not to Port Moresby, but westward down the Laroki River; that they did as they were bid, and after two days' journey westward they met a man who was not white and not black, and he had a white beard and black hair. He took them a little further on to a camp he had made there, and there they delivered the birds to him, and he gave them presents, and they parted, and the man went down the river. They left

him in low, flat country, heavily wooded and with many swamps. They believed they were doing right, as Aku's brother, Waisisi, was in command. And as to Waisisi, a rival sorcerer, in the absence of Aku, had made witchcraft over Waisisi, and Waisisi died three weeks before that day of our inquiry.

In the circumstances, there was nothing to be gained by punishing the carriers; we did better by giving them presents to accompany us to the place where they had delivered the bird skins. We went down the north bank of the Laroki for thirty-five miles or so, and reached the place of delivery. There was still the rubbish of a trader's camp scattered about, and the fragments of the boxes that had held our property.

"See that, George?" said Jack Wagstaff. "It's a clear case of planned robbery. He had other boxes here to pack the birds in."

"Well, what now?"

"Right on to the mouth of the Vanapa River, anyhow."

"You think he's shipped them from Galley Reach?"

"I think so. He certainly isn't camping in the swamps, admiring the blue raggianas' feathers. It will be a tough job, but we can't turn back."

We struggled through some days of agonising effort in the Turkish bath heat of the swamped lowlands, followed up to the mouth of the Vanapa, and inquired for a plotting thief, neither black man nor a white man, and were told that many weeks before he had crossed Galley Reach to Ikohir. We got an outrigger canoe for the passage across the estuary, and on the beach at Ikohir found traces of our thief's occupation, broken boxes and meat cans, but no thief.

Inquiry brought no satisfaction. The man who was neither black nor white had been seen for days in his camp, and then had disappeared. No; the natives knew of no ship— and had neither lost nor missed any canoes.

"Back to Port Moresby, George," said Jack Wagstaff. "We'll get a couple of outrigger canoes and sail back and find if any ship has cleared from here. Our thief isn't in New Guinea, I feel sure. Neither a black man nor a white man. You'd think of a chow or a Jap, but the white beard and moustache rather contradict that. But it's back to Port Moresby, anyhow. We've got to find the man who helped a robber to escape by the back door when he was too modest to go out of the front."

"Can you see much to go on yet?"

"Only that this was arranged be-tween Aku and the skunk who had pinched our raggianas before Aku started out to guide us to the black birds. And if that were so the robber had laid his plans to get away by sea from Galley Reach— not to any other part of New Guinea, but right out of the country.

"Australia?"

"Of course. And no little port either— to Sydney or Brisbane or Melbourne."

"Why?"

"He'd know we'd inquire elsewhere, and a man who is looked for can do things in a city and be seen by nobody, whereas these little ports mark a stranger so closely that they can tell afterwards the exact time of day he blew his nose. And now for sea."

A great canoe, with a huge spread of matsail, bore us across Bedscar and over Canton Bay to Port Moresby, and next morning we inquired at the post offices for clearances. Besides steamers cleared for Samarai, Thursday Island, and Cooktown, there were only clearances of recruiting vessels, and that of an auxiliary schooner— a mission schooner— the *Day Spring*. She had cleared for Sydney, with liberty to call at New Guinea ports, probably Vanapa and Hall Sound.

"That'll be it."

"But a mission schooner, Jack."

"The rain falls on the just and the unjust, George, and there's no reason why a mission schooner shouldn't carry a thief. We'll go to Sydney and chance our brigand leaving the schooner at Hall Sound."

Thus decided, we faced the misery of two days' waiting, and then an archaic little steamer, the *Ysabel*, called and carried us to Cooktown.

The *Day Spring* had called there for water; nothing had been landed, no passenger who was neither a black man nor a white man had been seen aboard her.

We went to Sydney, and ill luck pursued us. There was no evidence on her manifest or by Custom House entry of the existence of 172 bird skins, of which 84 were blue raggianas, worth £6 each, and there was no possibility of inquiry, because the *Day Spring* had left for the New Hebrides a week before our arrival.

"A dead end, Jack."

"Looks like it, George. Well, if the worst comes to the worst we've got a few hundred pounds, and we'll look around. If the raggianas were brought to Sydney they're either in Sydney or on the way to London; they haven't gone on the missionary expedition to Santa Cruz. Let's go and dig up the exports, and see where the bird skins are."

So we gave all the morning to the work, and found nothing, and stopped work, and I was disheartened enough.

But not so "Find Out" Wagstaff. He was almost cheerful, and I asked him the reason.

"Don't you see that unless the birds have been sent overland to Melbourne or Adelaide for shipment they are still in Sydney?"

"That is to say if they did come south on the *Day Spring*, and unless the man who is between white and black is not still in New Guinea."

"The birds are out of New Guinea long ago. Exportation of birds of paradise is stopped, and that thief didn't wait for the last moment of the prohibition notice to get them away from a place where they were dangerous holding. No! The birds are in Sydney, because the man is out of New Guinea, and the *Day Spring* was his only means of getting out. Well, it's a fine day, and September in Sydney is heaven; let's go to Randwick and look at the horses."

We had been out of civilisation for nearly a year, and the people at the races interested us more than the races themselves. The human side of the sport dwarfed the sport itself; the constant procession of ladies, showing off their dresses, splashed the new spring grass like many brilliant and gigantic flowers on a green lawn. Seeing all those happy people, my thoughts moved to the tragedy of the Coral Sea, which had made me again a lonely man, and I held to the bitter-sweet memories of that time, so that I forgot the brilliant scene seen still by my physical sight, but refused by my brain, when Jack Wagstaff clutched my arm and brought me back to earth.

"See there, George, the big overdressed woman in blue silk."

"What of her, Jack?"

"Her hat."

"Hat! What, nothing. Yes—it's trimmed with a blue raggianai."

"It may not be ours." "How many blue raggianas have been exported this year? Only a score, and they went to London. It's ours! Come closer! There! She has sewed that bird to the hat this morning."

"How do you know that?"

"It's been done in a hurry, and by herself. No milliner would have sent out that hat unfinished. See where the eyes should be? There's a little cotton wool showing through. A milliner would have had glass eyes fixed in the bird's head."

"What do we do then? Speak to her?"

"Not much Wait here if she stays all day, and follow her if the pursuit lasts a week."

All the afternoon we followed the overdressed woman, but with such discretion that she did not suspect the shadowing, and when she left after the last race we followed her still. By electric car we accompanied her to the city, and then from King-street, by another car, we followed her to George-street South. Near the Haymarket she left the car, and we saw her enter a pawnshop.

A minute later we sauntered past the shop. On its window these words were painted—

HERMANN MANDELSTAM
Licensed Pawnbroker

And in the window were two lokohus and three blue raggianas hung to a brass rod, and surrounded by a col-lection of old watches, cheap jewellery, and South Sea curios.

"Ours," said Jack Wagstaff. "Look at the eyes."

Their eye pits were not artificially filled; a little of the cotton wool stuffing protruded, as in the case of the bird worn by the overdressed woman, the wife or widow of Hermann Mandelstam.

"What now, Jack?"

"Go and buy one. If she is suspicious she'll only be able to describe you, and it's unlikely that she's been given the description of both members of the firm." I entered the shop; the overdressed lady had removed her hat, and was giving instructions— that decisively stated her ownership— to a small be-ringleted Hebrew. As he left the shop to do her bidding she turned to me and I asked the price of the blue birds— caution prompted me not to show that I knew anything of the birds by using their island name.

"Them's birds o' paradise," said Mrs Mandelstam, "an' they're four pound each."

"It's a big price for a bird."

"No, 'tisn't, gentleman, beggin' your pardon. In London they fetch pounds an' pounds."

"I'll take one, but I'd like a few more. To give away to ladies, you know."

"Oh, you're a cunning one, gentleman. You know what the ladies like. I wore one in me 'at to-day at Randwick, an' everybody was admirin' me. I got three of 'em here. How many would you like?"

"Could you get six?"

"I'll try. I mean I'll have to go round the trade a bit?"

"Do you buy them at a warehouse?"

"Arst no queschuns, an' you'll be told no lies. I've a friend gets 'em for me."

"Well, I'll take one now, and I'll call back in a week. There's no hurry."

"Come in again the day after to-morrow. I could tell you to-morrow, I think, but better leave it till next day."

I agreed, and having paid for the bird left the shop, and joined Jack Wagstaff. Half-an hour later, in the safety of our hotel we opened the packet. Jack Wagstaff turned back the feathers of the left leg, and showed me a little red berry pierced and tied to the leg with native thread.

"Marbobo shot this bird," said Jack Wagstaff. "That red berry is his mark. These are our blue raggianas, stolen on the Laroki River, and retailed for two thirds of their wholesale value. Back to George-street; we'll take it in turns to watch. The bid lady will go to the chap she got these off, and when we find him we've got the thief."

The watch before the shop in George-street South was shorter than we anticipated. At seven o'clock Mrs Mandel-stam left the shop and boarded a north-bound car, and Wagstaff followed alone. Mrs. Mandelstam would suspect trouble if she saw me again, and I dropped out of the pursuit.

I waited at the hotel till nigh to midnight, waiting as patiently as I might till the return of my mate.

"Well?" I said.

"It is well, George. I've got the man."

"And the birds? Did you have the thief arrested?"

"Not yet, and that is why I can't arrest him yet, or let him suspect that he is not quite safe and unsuspected. Now, I'll tell you where we are. I followed Mrs. Solomon in all her glory down George and King streets to the Balmain ferry, followed her aboard the ferry, followed her ashore at the dry dock, and saw her go down the rowing boat stairs, and hire a waterman's boat.

I had to stay ashore, of course. Even if there had been another boat at the stairs, it would have been too risky to follow. In the moonlight I saw the boat rowed to a small steamer— about four hundred or five hundred tons, I suppose— anchored off the slip. Mrs. Solomon the king went up the ladder, and I saw her no more for two hours. Meantime I got into careless conversation with a waterman, who had returned to the landing about half an hour after the lady who is wearing one of our blue raggianas had gone to the steamer."

"I asked him the steamer's name, and he poured out information as if a reservoir of knowledge had burst and flooded. The steamer was the *Campaspe*, owned by Jefferson and Wrench, and chartered to Captain Agatho."

"A Greek?"

"Yes. The man who was neither black man nor white man, and who has black hair and a white moustache."

"You've seen him, then?"

"Yes, but I'm ahead of the yarn."

"Go on, I won't interrupt again."

"The *Campaspe* is chartered for the South Seas by Agatho. Her owners here docked her and repainted her, and in the daylight she must look good— good

enough for a man to get credit for stores on the face value of another man's ship as security."

"Why do you think that has been done?"

"The waterman told me that drapery, and fancy goods, and cutlery cases have been going into her all day. And as this ruffian stole my blue raggianas, I'll bet that he's done a swindle for the charter, and then gone in for other frauds on the strength of the charter. Well, after my waterman had left for the night I waited and waited, and at somewhere between ten and eleven the waterman rowed back from the ship with two passengers— Mrs. Solomon-all-her-glory and Captain Agatho, the between-colours man with the white moustache and the black hair and a darned villainous countenance to boot. He handed her a parcel as he bade her good-night, and off she went to the ferry, and back he went to the steamer in the rowing boat."

"And you didn't follow him?"

"No! That would have bungled it."

"But he may not be the thief; he may not have our raggianas after all."

"He has them, and they're all hidden aboard the steamer."

"But what proof is there of that, Jack?"

"He gave the overdressed lady a package at parting. Go to the shop to-morrow, and she'll be ready to deliver the blue birds. But don't buy them. It's too much of a joke buying your own property, and the police will get them back for us— once we find they are there."

"And how are you to find out that without taking out a search warrant, which will mean arresting the Greek right away."

"I'll go to Jefferson and Wrench, and if the charter is crook, as I suspect, I'll ask them to seize the ship. Now, first thing to-morrow, George, go to Mrs Mandelstam's; tell her you are leaving Sydney at once, and say that she is not to trouble; then come back to me, and we'll see Jefferson and Wrench together."

EARLY NEXT MORNING I visited Mrs. Mandelstam's shop, and told her the story we had agreed on, and she said that I need not be disappointed, as the half-dozen blue birds had been delivered. Then I had to make the excuse that I had not been prepared, and so had not the money.

"Then I'll never see you again, mister?"

"Oh, yes you will."

"Promise on the word of a gentleman that you'll come back."

I promised, and her relief to find that the stock was not to be left on her hands convinced me that she was merely a trader, buying raggianas

ridiculously cheap, and making a profit by retailing them at less than the wholesale price.

I rejoined Jack Wagstaff, and together we walked to the offices of Jefferson and Wrench, shipbrokers and owners. We were admitted to Mr. Jefferson's office with little delay. The senior partner was a quiet, staid, little, white-bearded man, the personification of respectability, the incarnation of financial regularity.

Jack Wagstaff introduced me and himself, and plunged into the business without preamble.

"You have a steamer, Mr. Jefferson, the *Campaspe*, under charter to Captain Agatho for island voyages."

"Yes. Well?"

"Will you tell me if you have yet received any money under the charter party."

"Really—"

"Well, can you tell me when the Campaspe goes to sea?"

"Not for a fortnight."

"You know that Agatho is aboard already?"

"Yes, he told me that he had some furnishing to do to the cabins after she came out of dock, and as he wanted to get to work at once we permitted him to stay aboard before she was really handed over.

"Then he is practically in possession now?"

"No; we have a watchman aboard."

"A watchman who can be thrown overboard if he's not bribeable."

"But, my dear sir, you hint at seizing the ship— piracy, no less."

"I mean it, Mr. Jefferson."

"Dear, me—but—"

"Do you now that for the last two days the *Campaspe* has been taking in stores and cargo— drapery, and so on— trade goods."

"No! She is anchored in the stream."

"And her stuff has been lightered to her; why that expense if something crooked is not intended?"

"Well, I can't say. You are a sailorman yourself, Mr. Wagstaff?"

"Captain Wagstaff. I've held a mate's ticket since I was twenty-eight, and that's seven years ago."

"And your friend?"

"Mr. Crayth is a diver and a pearler, but he knows blue water, too."

"But what makes you think this, Captain?"

"The man Agatho plotted with my black boys in New Guinea, and stole over six hundred pounds worth of birds of paradise from me; he has them hidden in

your ship now. Tell me, Mr. Jefferson, after he signed the charter party did Agatho ask you for introductions to warehouses."

"No, but he took a very unwarrantable liberty. He re-ferred certain warehouses to me, and I had to tell them of the charter, and that our dealings with Agatho so far had been satisfactory."

"Had he paid anything then?"

"Yes, two hundred pounds cash. He didn't give any reference here, but he gave us demand drafts on a good house in Fremantle, and we took them, telling him that possession would not be given till the drafts were cleared."

"And at the same time you gave him possession?"

"Expecting that the watchman is there."

"Yes, one man. Now this fellow can get a clearance while you are waiting for the Fremantle drafts, and he can take your ship away before you know whether the drafts are waste-paper or not, and I've got ten pounds that says they are; on the other hand, if I have Agatho arrested and we don't find the birds in his possession I'm in a hole."

"Yes, and if I break into my ownership while it's under charter, and Agatho makes good after all, my firm will be in a hole," said Jefferson. "And if I try to get the warehouse-men to move by casting unjustified suspicion on Agatho I may be prosecuted for defamation of credit, and find myself in a much deeper hole than the other."

"Appoint me captain. Can you?"

"Yes! It's in the charter party, but after it was signed Agatho said he wanted his own master, and I agreed verbally, but without altering the writing."

"Then the verbal agreement is only air compared to the signed deed. Appoint me master to-day; I can sack myself to-morrow, and I'll search the ship. If I find nothing, you're no worse off; if I find the birds, I've prevented the piracy of the Campaspe."

"I'll make inquiries about you, Captain Wagstaff, and I'll say yes or no in an hour."

"Make it half an hour; it's safer."

"But I can't find out about you in the time."

"Yes, you can. Take a cab if you are not satisfied with evidence on the 'phone. There's my master's ticket, I'll leave it with you. Ask Souter, of the B.I.; Bell, who owns the tramp line up Java ports; ask the Torres Straits Pilot Association, and we'll come back in half an hour."

Jefferson took the captain's certificate, and was satisfied with us before we left the office, but Jack Wagstaff gave him time to ratify his own beliefs. When we returned Jefferson was more than satisfied.

"I've had your letter of appointment typed, Captain," he said. "Here it is—and Mr. Crayth, he has no ticket?"

"No, I can't make him a mate, but we'll chance his right to be there. He goes as my guest."

Jefferson shook hands with us warmly as we left his office, and we hurried to begin the raid. But first Jack Wagstaff led the way to the police office in Phillip-street, and after a little talk and the production of his letter of appointment to be master of the *Campaspe*, the Inspector of Police ordered two plain-clothes men to follow us quickly to Balmain, and act as circumstances and Wagstaff's counsel suggested.

"Aboard now, Jack?" I asked, as we stood on the boat-landing at Balmain in the pleasant heat of the spring after-noon.

"No. I don't want Agatho aboard while I search. If by any accident we should be wrong it would compromise Jefferson and Wrench, because I am now their agent, and so we mustn't risk anybody but ourselves."

He had evidently so instructed the plain-clothes men, for they stayed some distance from us, and were apparently in assiduous study of the water lapping on the piles and stay-pieces of the wharf.

At dusk the long wait was over. A boat was rowed to the landing, and a dark brown-faced man with black hair and white moustache ascended the stairs and walked up the steep and stony street.

Agatho! We waited for a few minutes, and then Wagstaff hired Agatho's ex-boatman. Followed by the two plain-clothes constables in another boat we rowed to the *Campaspe*. A bull-necked man, dark as Agatho, disputed our entrance to the ship, but by then we were more than half-way up the ladder, and Jack Wagstaff said coolly to the man: "I'm the master of the ship. What are you?"

"I am sooper cargo for Captain Agatho. He is captain, and two mates come to-night."

"You're in a hurry to ship hands, apparently," retorted Jack Wagstaff, "but that doesn't matter. I'm appointed captain by the owners, Jefferson and Wrench. Come up, gentlemen," he added to the detectives, whose boat had

hooked up to the ladder. "I've business in my cabin for a moment; stay on deck, please. Come with me, George." The dark man had opened his mouth to protest, but he was given no opportunity. Leaving the detectives with him at the ladder head, I followed Jack Wagstaff to the cabin under the bridge. He closed the door and lighted the swinging lamp, for darkness was rapidly closing in.

The lockers were all securely fastened. Jack Wagstaff went into the chart-room, and returned with a gleaming half axe, and one by one the lockers were

prised open. The first two were blanks so far as the search for the raggianas was concerned, but on the forcing of the third locker we cried "Turka."

It and the other three lockers were heaped full of birds of paradise— the lokohu and the little king bird, and the sixpenny and the blue raggianas of price.

"You were right, Jack. What made you decide they were here in the first place?"

"I just thought I'd find out, that's all."

"What do you do in this cabin; in my shep; you are thief!"

We turned to the door now open, and saw in the dim light of the swinging lamp that egress was blocked by Agatho. But behind him we saw that which he did not see, the faces of the two detectives.

"You are Captain Agatho?"

"Yes; what you break my lockers?"

"Because I'm captain of the *Campaspe*, appointed to-day by Wrench and Jefferson in the terms of your charter, and I'll do as I like with the ship."

"I have other captain; I am captain, too. I do not want you."

"I want you. Do you know my name?"

"No! I do not care."

"It's Wagstaff. You don't understand? The niggers couldn't say Wagstaff, they called me Iwastiffi, and you stole six hundred pounds worth of blue birds from me, and here they are, and I've got them."

"You leave this shep. I tell you while you safe— go!"

His eyes glared his hatred, as with one hand under his coat, as if feeling in his belt for a weapon, he advanced slowly towards Wagstaff— a tiger of a man walking like a cat.

"You have not them," he said. "You have not them."

"I have them, and I have you," cried Jack Wagstaff, as at the moment Agatho drew his revolver the two police seized his arms and, twisting him against the lockers, put the handcuffs on his wrists. I accompanied the police to sign the charge, and Jack Wagstaff remained aboard in charge of the *Campaspe*.

"SO AGATHO got three years, did he?" said Jefferson to us a month later. "Pity we couldn't fit him for intended fraud and piracy, too, but we've got our ship, and you've got your birds of paradise, and the warehousemen have their goods back, so it's wise not to have the firm's name mixed up with law any further. Do you know why I consented to your risky way of making inquiries with an axe in a cabin, Captain?"

"No; I suppose your inquiries satisfied you."

"Yes, but more than that. Your friends told me you liked solving a problem for its own sake. They call you 'Find Out' Wagstaff."

"Well?"

"Well, I thought then that a man nicknamed 'Find Out' wouldn't be likely to be deceived by empty suspicions. Now, I've a proposal to make. I've got a cargo for the *Campaspe* for Thursday Island, Port Darwin, and Keopang, and I'm told that at Keopang I can get freight for Derby and Broome and nor'-west coast ports. Now what about going as master?"

Jack Wagstaff shook his head.

"No more sailorman's life for me. Liberty's too sweet."

"Well, I want you to go in her. There are inquiries to be made, and you could carry a mate with a master's ticket, and leave him the ship when you had to."

"What sort of inquiries?"

"We had a ship, the *Ocean Prince*, a four-master— under charter to an Italian. He's over his charter time. We can't find the man or the ship. She was last reported in the Arafura Sea."

"And what else?"

"We want to find Stephen Bond— there's money and a girl waiting for him; he's hiding somewhere in the Coral Sea or around the Barrier Reef."

"Eight thousand square miles of sand, water, and coral. It's a big address."

"We'll pay you handsomely, and a bonus for results, and you'll be your own master. We want a man, clever and trustworthy; it's an unusual combination, but I'm sure if we get you we'll get him."

"And what becomes of the mate of the clever and trustworthy man?"

"Mr. Crayth? Take him with you. We'll pay him enough to interest you and to interest him."

"I wouldn't go without him. We hunt as a couple. Well, if George agrees I'm with you."

"Of course I agree," I said. "Then it's a deal?"

Within two days we left Sydney in the *Campaspe*, bound for Thursday Island, Port Darwin, and Keopang, with a general cargo and two mysteries to be solved upon the way— the finding of the *Ocean Prince*, lost with her charterer for nine months, and the search for Stephen Bond, lost or hiding from money and a girl somewhere in the Coral Sea.

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4: The Ocean Prince Charter

Sydney Mail (NSW) 24 April 1912

WE made a good run from Sydney to North Australia in the *Campaspe*, and at Thursday Island we discharged 150 tons of cargo. No one had heard directly of Stephen Bond, for whom money and a girl waited in Sydney, but a Coral Sea trader spoke of a white man on an island near Dutch New Guinea, whose name was said to be Bond, and he agreed to leave a latter at the island, a letter stating the facts, and that "Find Out" Wagstaff was agent for the inquirers, and would call at the island on knowledge of encouraging developments from his letter at any time within two months.

As to Eredo Cardella, the charterer of the *Ocean Prince*, nothing had been heard of the man or the ship since she passed through the Torres Straits from Bramble Cay, nine months before.

We steamed to Port Darwin, escorted by the gorgeous sun birds for two days, and then alone for two days, till we pierced Dundas Strait at the dawn, into the great gulf of Van Diemen, the water crinkled by its depth, and the airs of morning parting before the onrush of the Campaspe in~broad and glassy swells. And so to Port Darwin, to stay two days for the discharge of cargo— sometimes above the steel jetty, and sometimes below it, according to the rise and fall of its 26ft of tide.

I accompanied my mate Wagstaff on his round of inquiry for Eredo Gardelia and the *Ocean Prince*, but, as at Thursday Island, we drew blanks, and left Port Darwin again, still at a loose end, and so steamed west-nor"-west across the Timor Sea, then due west through Rotti Straits, and a little east of north to Keopang. There we heard of Gardelia and the *Ocean Prince* as having sailed from Keopang for the Ashmore Islands to load guano.

A cargo offered for the now discharged *Campaspe* from Keopang to Macassar, so Captain Jack Wagstaff arranged with his first officer to take her to Macassar and return to Keopang, while we, Wagstaff and myself, sailed to the Ashmores to find the *Ocean Prince*.

We left Keopang in an Arab dhow that leaked like a basket when we got to sea, and was manned by a crew of complaisant fatalists.

"We"ll never make a land fall this tack," said Wagstaff to me on the second day out. "Why, Jack?"

"Look at the gear; grass sails and grass ropes. I saw these coffee-coloured wowsers painting her before we left, but I didn"t know they were putting a dab of paint over the cracks so they can"t annoy themselves by seeing the leaks."

"They are backing their luck."

"They do nothing, and trust to Providence, George. They are the most religious and shiftless gang on earth. We"re in for trouble."

We were, and we got it. Great seas, or rather seas great for the 20-ton of ill-found dhow, water-logged us in the night; we were in the breakers at midnight, and we hung on to a capsized dinghy, and got ashore at daylight, and back to Keopang in a week. And that time we waited for the *Campaspe*, and in her sailed for the Ashmores.

On the second day we picked up flocks of mother birds flying to the islands.

The Ashmores are atolls, varying in area from thirty to fifty acres, and are only the bared peaks of mountains, with deep water right up to the shore. We found no trace of either Gardelia or the *Ocean Prince* ; only noddy terns and wideawakes by the thousand trying to make their mouths wide enough to bite our feet off as we walked between the lines of nest ing birds.

So we made to Wyndham, and there we heard of a big ship that might be a four-master, seen backing and filling about Browse Island, as if she couldn"t find good anchorage, and yet had to wait around. We made Browse Island in a little less than three days, having slowed down to bring us to the island in daylight. Browse Island is lonely enough; a hundred and fifty miles off the main, with the Indian Ocean pitting it in the teeth, with only Scott and Seringapatam Reefs to break the sea, and they distant 170 miles west. Northward, fifty miles away, is a reef in the Timor Sea, but other protection there is none. Except for Scott Reef, the nearest land westward is Christmas Island, 1150 miles away, and the green turtle come ashore from Timor Sea and the Indian Ocean by their thousands, to lay eggs by the hundred thousand. White men steal the eggs from the incubators in the sand; the Malays turn the animal over and cut the eggs out of it, and then absent-mindedly leave the ovariotomised turtle to die of slow agony in the sun.

Dawn came with all the suddenness of the latitude, and we saw her as the rising sun tinted her close reefed topsails with the colour of the crest of a galah parrot, the tint called by milliners vieux rose; a great four-master, lifting slowly and hugely her great bulk out of the long stale purple swells of the Indian Ocean, floating up with the very size of it to the horizon, as if it sought to swamp the sky.

"Is it the *Ocean Prince*, Jack?"

"Must be. There are not too many steel four-masters kicking about on a desert like this. It's the *Ocean Prince* alright, and she's deep in the water, so she must have a cargo. But if that"s so why didn"t he let the owner know? Silence in cases like this always means something fishy."

"Then if she's loaded, why is she backing and filling around here, Jack?"

"I don"t know. But she is loaded, and therefore she's ready, and her captain isn't. But if that's so, why isn"t she at anchor? Well, we"ll try to get aboard."

But as he was giving the order, the morning breeze freshened from westerly, and the four-master slipped through the water more rapidly. Then an order was given, her hands set sail on her, her yard,s came round, her helm went up, and she drew rapidly off the land on a nor-«jst erly course. Wagstaff ordered full steam ahead, and we went in pursuit of her, and when abeam approached her as closely as we dared. Wagstaff took the megaphone, and shouted: "What ship is that?"

"The *Ocean Prince*."

"Is the captain aboard?"

"No, on the reef; look for him there."

We turned the *Campaspe* back for the island, half-doubting the prudence of immediate belief in men who had stolen a charter, but as we drew up to the island we saw the great four-master change her course again. She was only cruising. But why?

"It can't be," said Wagstaff, "because there's no anchorage, or a bad one. They must have had her anchored to load her; it's all funny, but we'll soon see now."

He coursed the *Campaspe* slowly through a passage in the almost surrounding reef, and then when well protected and in sight of a few ant-like men, working on a distant reef northerly and seaward, and a few rough tents and houses ashore we dropped anchor in six fathoms. We pulled ashore to a deafening clamour of birds.

The island was singularly uninteresting— thickets and shrubs, sands and eggs, and screaming terns. Within the reef the light green lagoon was spotted with blacker water, where holes carried the lagoon to depth, and dappled with the continuous reflections of flying birds. We walked as gingerly as if we were tight-rope performers, for the ground was covered with sitting birds, and they trapped viciously at our legs. As we advanced the birds rose in thousands, darkening the sky as with a tent, shrieking and screaming at our intrusion, which no amount of use made common to them— screeching from wide-open throats, and viciously-darted beaks, so that we had to shout in talking, and pull our hats over our ears as a protection against the constant snapping.

We came to a space of clear sand, and there were a score or more of new laid eggs upon it.

"That's the pouitry-yard," shouted Jack Wagstaff. "They're sure of fresh eggs that way. The month is October, so the breeding season has only just started. But, man alive, six months of an egg diet; a man would grow feathers."

"They may be well provisioned, Jack."

"A wind jammer— nine months overdue, and afraid to be anywhere but in hiding, because he's holding the ship by what is practically piracy. No! It's eggs for breakfast and lunch and dinner, and an omelet for supper, and egg pie on Sundays. And if there is one sort of egg to make the stomach feel tired, it's the egg of the tern— noddy or sooty— and there's both sorts here."

"How do you know that, Jack?" I shouted to him.

"The noddy tern lays the egg on the naked ground; the seaweed nests in the bushes belong to the sooties. They're small, those eggs— but strong, dead strong. Let's get along to the huts."

We went southward along the beach, with our screaming retinue overhead, the chocolate coloured noddies and the black and white sooties leaving us only as we approached the rough dwellings on the shore.

"Poor devils," said Wagstaff. "The men of the Ocean Prince must have been driven almost Insane by the continuous screaming of the birds, and had to pitch their tents here by the cliffs, a long way from the landing place, so as to he quiet sometimes."

"And it doesn't stop at night, Jack?"

"It didn't at the Ashmores, and there are more birds here; look at that black cloud to the south, and hanging over the island— it's birds. You may say that there are two hundred acres of nests on the island, and one hundred acres of air space, almost filled by birds above. For every tern on the Ashmores, there's a hundred here. And six or eight months of it— it must be hell."

We passed the rough bough huts and the tents, and looked in; there was no man there, and we went on— the clamour of the birds' colonies we were approaching deafened in their turn. There were trees dead of the weight of bird droppings on leaf and branch, smothered by recent guano. Then we turned an angle of the cliff, and found there an old and almost worked out deposit of the guano of centuries, with the surface of a ploughed field of chocolate soil, and a beaten track down to a boat harbour, and a rough and weathered sledge, half sunken in the sand.

"An old guano quarry of theirs, Jack."

"Yes, this is a new sort of pirate; he works hard digging guano, but it's the queerest reason I ever heard of for stealing a ship."

"They must have got a full cargo from here?"

"No; it's only a superficial deposit, except in the holes where the coral hasn't been able to grow. And it's dirty guano, too. They've been screening the coral out of it. No; they've had other patches than this to work on. The *Ocean Prince* can carry six thousand tons, and not more than a thousand tons has

been taken away from here. Well, we'll turn back, and go out to the reef, where we saw the boat working this morning."

As we retraced our steps we heard the noise of an explosion seaward, and our eyes turned to the distant reef. We saw smoke rising above the breakers smashing on the reef and mounting almost above the background of mirage. A doll-like man ran along the reef, gesticulating to two other dolls in the boat, and the boat put back to the reef.

"What are they up to, Jack?"

"I can't think, but that was the noise of an explosion, wasn't it? And why are they dynamiting the coral? I have it! The ship is sent to sea to cruise around because they haven't an anchor, and they're breaking an anchor off an old wreck but of the coral. Let's go out there to the reef, George."

We returned to our boat, but our men found it a long pull, for the tide was making in, and a tide at Browse Island is no mere rise and fall of a fathom, but a tremendous inpouring of sea, as if the well-heads of the ocean were rising and lifting the deeps with them.

"Great tides here, Jack."

"Big enough to run all the machinery of the world. There's a rise and fall of about thirty feet at Port Darwin; here it must be nearer thirty-five."

The ocean rose flatly, silently; the sea too deep for foam. As we approached the reef we saw that the three dolls were now in the boat, and that the three dolls were men. They strained at the oars, but without making headway, as if they were anchored to the sea floor.

"Can't make it out," said Wagstaff. "They seem to be towing something, but what is it? Give way, men."

"There are three barrels and two spars."

"That"s it; they've got an old anchor; they've broken it out of the reef, and are towing it. They're the queerest pirates afloat."

The tide rose triumphantly and submerged the reef as we came abeam of the boat; and iIn it we saw two hairless men and a boy, who was hairless, too. They were too intent on their work to notice us; with lowered heads, so that they might get more power into their stroke, they pulled doggedly at the great weight that did not seem to move, and we were too interested to distract their attention from their work. We saw the anchor now, shell encrusted, but recognisable by its form, and rising as the tide lifted the barrels; and our admiration was caught by the dogged persistence of it all. And then that tide rose high above the coral, rising as if it would lift the tremendous reef with it. The hairless men in the little boat strained at the tow, and the anchor came to sea on the barrels and the spar.

Jack hailed the little sea-scarred boat, and the seamed and salt-dried hairless man forward stopped with his oars indrawn, and replied:— "Hallo! What do you want?"

"I want Eredo Gardielia and the *Ocean Prince*."

The hairless man stood up in his boat, and showed that he was small and of graceful build under his torn clothing, although the rents in it were so large and frequent that it was more a ventilation than a covering, and said not without pride.

"Ecco! I am Eredo Gardelia, and the *Ocean Prinz* is there— he wait for the anchor."

"I'll give you a tow," said Wagstaff, "and then we can have a talk ashore."

Gardelia's appreciation of the surprise of this sudden encounterment was apparent, but a rising tide on a reef and a small boat towing an anchor so hardly won are not easy circumstances for explanations, and he accepted Wagstaff's offer. We passed a line to their boat, and, aided by the tide, towed the clumsy raft and its shell-eaten anchor to the *Campaspe*, and made it fast to the *Campaspe* anchor-chain. Then Wagstaff invited the hairless man aboard. Their captain refused for them all.

"No." he said, "we go on shore, then we talk; then, if good friends, we isome aboard this *vapore* steamer. *Ecco*!"

"Why did you think we will not be good friends?" demanded Wagstaff, speaking from his boat to Gardelia in his boat twenty feet away.

"I not know," replied Gardelia. "Sup-pos you come from *proprietario* of *Ocean Prinz*."

"I do. I represent the owners of the ship you have hidden in this deserted end of creation, and we want to know if it's piracy or plain madness."

"We go shore," said Gardelia again, "then I tell you."

"Heave ahead," said Wagstaff. "Pirates don't work all round the clock as a rule, and I trust you. "

And so we pulled ashore into the deafening shrieks of the birds. The hairless men landed after us, and we were disarmed by pity before Gardelia spoke a word in extenuation. The hairless men were half-naked: they were mere skin and bone. The boy had held some of his Roman beauty and that gorgeous colouring of the black-haired youths of Tuscany, but the men were red-brown spectres. Yet as they ran their clumsy boat up the beach they were the most energetic spectres sunlight or moon has ever seen— sinews of wire and whipcord under their mahogany skins, long-winded from their hard labour and frugal fare.

Gardelia motioned to us not to speak until we were out of ear-shot of the deafening terns, and led the way to the bough-shed and the ragged tents,

while his men waited on the shore. Arrived there, he gave us two kerosene cases to sit on, with as much dignity as If he were the host in a palace of his own land, and himself squatted on his hocks in the sand. Then he said:—

"The owner of the shep, he think the shep is wrecked?"

"Yes; or taken by pirates."

"Ker, ker, *si gnore*— no— your name?"

"Wagstaff, and this is Mr. Crayth."

"Wag-a-staff! I hear of you in Torres. You are called "Fine Out" Wag-a-staff! An' so you fine out Eredo Gardelia. *Ecco*!"

"I want the ship delivered to me immediately, Captain Gardelia."

"*Capitano* Wag-a-staff, it is not possible. But I will take back the shep to Sini, in *Nuona* South Wailse."

"I must have the ship, captain."

"Capitano Wag-a-staff, I did not go aboard your steamer. *Perche*? Because I think I will be arrested. If you will not arrest me I will go to your shep; tell you why I do keep for so long months the *Ocean Prinz*, and then you will let me take the shep— I know. But if not we must fight. The shep I will not makes the abandonment."

"Captain Gardelia, I'll do this much. Come aboard and I promise not to detain you, and if you can make out a good case I'll try to square it with my duty to the owners, and consider you as the charterer until you deliver ship and cargo at Sydney."

"It is good affairs," said Gardelia, joyfully. "I go with you. To be at sea where I cannot hear a bird; it will be Heaven."

So we went back to the boats and rowed to the *Campaspe*. The two men and the boy so long lost to the world stood on the steamer deck, scarecrows in all that polished orderliness. Jack Wagstaff asked me to attend to them, so I took them forward, and rigged them out from the trade chest in clothes that bettered their appearances greatly, and then I had some fresh beer and vegetables ordered, and left them eating steaks and cabbage as if they could never have enough. Then I went to the cabin table, and found Eredo Gardelia in an old suit of the first officer's, and looking more like a hairless scarecrow than when he wore his ventilated rags.

That lunch was an epoch in the brave little Italian's existence; his hand went below the table and unbuttoned his waistcoat; he held his glass of Australian hock to the sunlight that it repeated in the golden tint of its liquid, and sighed in the pure enjoyment of its contemplation. When at last he had eaten enough, and had inhaled the bouquet of the coffee as one enjoys the perfume of a flower, Jack Wagstaff passed him the cigars.

Gardelia took one and smelt it, and put it in his mouth, and turned it over with his tongue, but did not light it. I struck a match, and he lighted the cigar, but puffed it only for a moment. And, then, to my consternation, the face of the little hairless pirate and hero, who was all wire and whipcord and resolution that could not be destroyed, softened indescribably; his mouth twitched emotionally, and tears welled out and rolled down his cheeks.

"Not used to tobacco lately," said Wagstaff kindly, and offered Gardelia the refuge of an excuse.

But the man had borne too much to disguise his feelings any longer. He folded his arms upon the table, put his head down, and cried quietly, like a weary child.

Jack Wagstaff motioned non-interference to me, and we sat and smoked quietly, and by-and-bye this indomitable man with the child's heart looked up and wiped his eyes, and said: "I am asham-ed."

"No fear, captain," said Wagstaff. "We know you— a man who never recognises defeat can afford to be soft after a victory."

"*Grazie*! *Capitano*, *grazie*! I tell you now all things. My *moglie* and my childs are in Liguria— at Porto Felice. It is necessary I make the money. My little girls, they go nex' year for *confirmazione*. It is for me to work the sea, sometime away, one year," sometime more. My *famiglia* they stay at Porto Felice, makes the prayer for my safety. Per Baccol makes prayer do no good, also no harm. I have *barque*, I am half *proprietario*; she is wreck; we not inaine. Then I get this charter. Pay while I have the money, then no money. Cannot get guano at Ashmore— other man is *proprietario* there. If I send to owner of *Ocean Prinz* that I haven't the money he will take his shep. It is my last opportunita! For my *moglie* and my girl childs in Liguria. I come here. I say nothing. I hide! I work! And while I work, I hide.

"I am so long kep' in the loading because I know that it is not good that I v#:t in guano without the assay of the *chymics*. Once *capitano* from Scotelande he come here, he load quick, he laugh at my assay; he load his shep with sand an' corral an' guano — all *misto*; an' he sail away— but I know when he shall go to Scotelande they shall refuse to apprehend it, so his work is *niente*.

"But I learn chymics long time, and my assay *macincetta* is *abordo*; so I am slow but right. *Otto mese fa*; eight months ago we come this island. You see us now. No clothes, all rags on the reef; no foods to eat, so I do like the. meat to-day; no wine, no tobacco for three months.

"We find the guano so! Seven centimetres of guano, one metre corral; seventy centimetres guano, and then more corral. There is not too much stlnks in the guano: the rainy time he have absolved the ammonia, and he stink not. It is so rich in the phosphates, but to sell it the agricultural chymics shall add

some stinks, for the farmer will say it is not good if it not *puzzare*— if it stink not.

"It is birds — birds — birds, *sempre* the birds. There is the Pacific gull, and the petrel, and the sea eagle of the white belly, and the osprey, and the tern. And we live on the eggs, and we load so slowly the guano; of the sand— two point *ottante sei per cente*; of the moisture, the percentage six point fifteen; of the phosphate, *signore*, of the phosphate sixty-two point sixty-five! By my chymics of assay, worth the six pounds the ton. *Bene*!

"Sometimes we get the fish, most time we are loading the boat— slow carrying four thousan' tons guano in eight boats. Eight months we work; we have not time to fish; when we stop the work we are weary of the sea. The time it is bad. Everyday my men will come, they say, *'Capitano, via*! it is no use we work. Go to sea.' But I think of Porto Felice in Liguria, and I stay.

"For eight month we stay— the ship anchored in the good profundity of water, two kilometres from the shore. In the boats we carry the guano to the ship; we go in the sea to load the boats. We are cut in the thighs and in the belly where we slip c-c-rash on the green coral. We dust the skin off our behind parts like salt when the hot sun burn us. When we nearly loaded we lose our anchors and our chains when the wind come to blow, and we must send the *Ocean Prinz* to sea, so he shall not lose-ed, too.

"All our clothes is rotted, our food is rotted. The birds everywhere— all place; all day they are against our legs like little boys in crowd of tall men. For months we eat the egg. We sweep away a clean place of the sand. We call it our poultry house; every morning there is more as three hundred eggs there.

"Sometimes the wind blow strong; the ship must stay to sea— for days we must stay upon reef. We sleep on our faces, because our backs the sun has bruised in the water.

"One day, I think I am sick of my heart, and I will make the abandonment of the guano, and sail away, because we are weak for good foods, and our mouths are leaking for tobacco. There is a reef pool, I see my face! and I see that I am bald, and my eyebrows gone, and my beard fall out. It is the lice of the birds, the *bestiaccia* which crawl. The reef crawl, and the men crawl. My poor men, so good, so *patiente, tutti amici, dimi*, they shall have share of the *profita.*

"When I see I lose my hair, I say '*Per Dio*! I stay till the shep full or the hair grow.'And I stay! We load and we make the assay an' we load, an' we eat the egg till we grow the feather, nearly. I think I shall go mad. I see the great crayfish in the reef pool, his eyes is on foot stalks; he wink at me with his feet. Then I find beche-de-mer— very pretty pink and golden brown spots— and I think he will make me mad, too, if I will look at him for long time. We walk so

softly in the water, and the sea urchins sting us like porcupines; his spines will not be extracted, and cause much pains, but in two weeks they are not— they are carbonate of lime, and make themselves dissolved in the blood.

"Then, when the shep nearly full, more wind, and all the anchor is lose-ed. I send the shep to sail up an' down for safety, and I search that reef where I am to-day for old wreck.

"Per Dio! There is anchor of a ton. The crossbar is gone with grinding on the reef— the fluke part is under one metre of cor-ral that grow over it in five years. We wait for the tides to be low, and we break the corral with dynamita; we make many pickaxe sharp and chisels hard in the fire, and we cut the corral, and with powder when the dynamite is all gone. For seventeen days, one man, one boy an' me, we cut cor-ral between the tides to get the one of the wrecked shep. To-day we erupted the last of the power, and when we heavea the anchor loosed we fast it to a spar and many casks and take a cable to our boat and propel most strongly, and the tide rise in one time quick and pour out like a man suck with much wine. It pour out high above the reef, and the anchor come to sea on the barrel and the spar."

"Good man," I cried, carried away by the story.

"Good man," echoed Jack Wagstaff, and filled Gardelia's glass.

"An' now, am I pirate? Will you take this shep?"

"You'll take her back yourself, captain, and we'll stand by."

"*Amico di mio*!" said the hard, soft, little man, and looked as if he would embrace us both and cry too. "There are four thousand tons of sixty-two point sixty five phosphate," he continued, "of value, six pounds the ton. I shall go back to Porto Felice, my hair shall grow again in a clean sea—"

"We've a gallon of cocoanut oil on board, captain, and it's yours," said "Find Out" Wagstaff.

"*Mille grazie*! *Capitano*! the wound of the corral he shall stop on my belly, and the places where I burn by the sun shall stay on my back. But my hair shall grow, and I sail to Porto Felice and see my *ragazzi* conjugated in matrimony, and there shall be no more sea."

There was a dead calm next dawn, so the *Campaspe* took the *Ocean Prince* in tow, and steamed west of south, beginning her life thousand miles of voyage along the Australian coast to Sydney, and leaving a turquoise island and the rice-white reefs glowing in silver sea.

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5: "Sisewa"

Sydney Mail (NSW) 1 May 1912

AT Thursday Island we began the search for Stephen Bond. Jack Wagstaff's letter had been delivered to him two months before at his camp on the island of Waintessra, and the answer to it was written in a paragraph in the local paper, *The Pearler's News*. It was to the effect that Stephen Bond had died three weeks before, and was buried on Waiweera.

"This settles the inquiry, Jack," said I, as we sat on the verandah of the Grand Hotel, looking seaward through the threshing fronds of cocoanut palms.

"Not yet, George."

"What's the good of going any further with it? The man is dead, and there's an end of the matter."

"He's reported dead— that's all. The report of the death of a man in hiding makes him safe. But supposing he is dead, a mere paragraph in a newspaper isn't a sufficient certificate of burial, old man— and so as Jefferson and Wrench are paying us to find him we've got to be able to say authoritatively that at least we found his body or such evidence of it that there can be no doubt."

"I see. Well, what's the programme?"

"We'll get a cutter or a lugger, and sail to Waiweera."

The lugger *Carpentaria* was ready by the afternoon, and next day we made the island and anchored. Before the rushing keel of the dinghy a green turtle, which had been floating without motion on the quiet water, sank to safety in a hurry a foot from the bows. The tide was out, and we left the boat and waded and splashed over a mile of coral trash rotting in the sun. Cocoanut palm, papaya, and bread fruit grew to the tide limit; a few grass huts, a dozen men and half a dozen women and many small polished brown-red children in a belt of wongi trees chattering and eating the astringent red fruit at the same time. A Rotumah man, who spoke good English, made himself the man of the moment, and it seemed quite natural that we should address ourselves to him.

Yes, he knew Mr. Bond, Mr. Bond was dead— died of fever a few weeks ago, and was buried in the bush a mile from the shore. He would show us if we liked; he seemed very ready to oblige.

Jack Wagstaff assented.

The Rotumah man led us through the tree belts for less than a mile, and stopped suddenly. We saw before us a little clearing already besieged anew by trees and vine growth; the mound that no man may mistake— the grave of Stephen Bond.

"No other white man was with him?"

"No — only a few boys."

"Where are they?"

"They go back to their island— far away."

"And nobody here saw him die?"

"No."

"Did you?"

"No— master. I not see him— other boy see him— then he finish."

We went back to the shore, and Jack Wagstaff was strangely silent, and we sat there for half an hour without speaking. Then seeing a curly-nosed, swan-black islander, a newcomer, walking along the shore, Jack Wagstaff rose and hailed him, walking towards the islander as he hailed, and I followed.

The native waited obediently, and as we joined him it seemed to me if his look was one of fear. But he lost that expression as Wagstaff opened the conversation, and he became communicative.

"You know white man die— you boy?"

"Yes, master— me not see him— other' boy say he altogether finish.. Me not belonga this island."

"So nobody saw him die— only somebody saw him buried— you see him put alonga hole?"

"No, master, I see him grave."

"Who see him put alonga hole?"

"Taurabiana see him."

"That's the Rotumah man, George, and he strikes me as a particularly robust liar."

"What white man stop on island, boy?"

"Sisewa stop."

"Sisewa. H'm, where?"

"Round two feller point— the one long feller beach, then house longa Sisewa. More better master go alonga boat."

"I see. All right, boy— there's some tobacco. You go along my boat, take in this letter, tell white man come back quick, feller."

The curly-nosed boy took the tobacco, and the hurriedly-scribbled note, and' splashed over the coral trash to the dinghy, which was making inshore with the rising tide. We went back to the collection of grass huts in the Wongi trees, and there we sat down, and Jack Wagstaff thought hard, and I smoked and did not disturb him. I saw the boat turn back to the *Carpentaria* after a few minutes of delay alongside, and return inshore. They were able to bring the boat within a quarter of a mile of high-water mark, and as our boys walked through the shallow pools in the dead coral I noted with surprise that they carried picks and shovels.

"What for, Jack?"

"We're going to dig up Stephen P-3U(1.'

"Great Scott, man— don't do that!"

"It's necessary, but there'll be no disrespect to the dead. There's an estate dependent on this, and there's a girl waiting in Sydney for Stephen Bond. No white man saw him die, and the principal witness of the burial is that Rotumah man who can lie no better in his own language than he can in English, and he can break the best record of Ananias and Titus Oates in both. Come on! I'll take the responsibility, and I'll answer to the law— when we get back to Australia, where the nearest law lives."

I accompanied him unquestionihgly, and, followed by the men of the *Carpentaria*, the curly-nosed black boy, and watched by the now sulky and suspicious Rotumah man, we returned to the grave of Stephen Bond.

The sand and coral splinters had not yet consolidated in the grave, and the digging was easy. We bottomed on many folds of worn canvas— evidently an old tent, and this was carefully lifted from the grave. Jack Wagstaff stooped and tore away the folds. Within the canvas was a blanket, and within the blanket not the body of a white man, but a cocoanut log. Jack Wagstaff, the only one of us who seemed neither surprised nor disappointed, broke the spell of stupefaction:

"Put it all back," he said, "and fill in the hole."

So we re-buried the cocoanut log which had been advertised as the body of Stephen Bond.

"What is it, Jack?" I asked, as we reached the shore again, and boarded the dinghy. "Foul play?"

"Foul play of some sort, though perhaps not the foul play you mean."

"And what's to do, now?"

"Let the lugger stay here— it will keep that coffee coloured liar Taurabiana busy while we go to work. We'll take the dinghy and sail round the island. And we'll take along our talkative nigger with the nose like a rostrum."

It was a fair wind, but we did not require it for long, We doubled the two capes, and sailed along the great gleaming sickle of the succeeding' beach; half-way to the third cliff we ran the boat ashore, landed, and walked along the crescent till we came to a little creek, tinkling its way to the sea, over boulders of limestone.

"We'll go inland from here," said Jack Wagstaff. "This should lead to a spring, and springs are not so common on these islands that the sprimg will not be close to a camp."

We climbed over the dead coral, and the coralline limestone lifted a dune of wind-piled sand; and entered Paradise.

Seaward leaned a great magnolia leafed tree almost at right angles to the roots, its primrose trunk hidden by scented orchids of lilac and cream. Behind It the rich soil grew a wild raffle of yam growth; papaya trees, with each of its rotten ripe fruit holding a satin bird eating the fruit to a shell from within as rats gouge out an uncut cheese; the great, glossy serrated leaf of the breadfruit making welcome shade, and the tinkling of the creek and the ripple of the coral sea dying to a murmur under the susurret threshing flashes of crimson and emerald among the palms, which were the painted lories of the island. The little, porcelain, white-shelled sea spiders took their legs inside their houses, and rolled seawards to safety as our foot-falls shook their little world; pigeons and lories in tbe palms, and through the gap in the green wall a frigate bird slowly wheeling over the straits. The breeze lulled for a moment, and the music of the retreating ripples tinkling over coral splinters and shells came to us, and then the coo of the pigeons and the breeze re-asserting itself, and the soft threshing of frond on frond. We walked on, still ascending with the singing creek, and in a little clearing to the right of the track was a great mould of defying leaves— the incubator of the scrub hen; we passed it, and the tree belts made the green half darkness again. The Torres Straits pigeons came from their nests in the mangroves to feed on the purple fruit of a figtree, and thousands of birds were there to help; white nutmeg pigeons massing the green with white, and making the silence drowsy with a soft cooing; the noisy love-making of the honey-eatery the splendour of the chattering dragon bird, a bird like black opal; fruit pigeons, green, gold, yellow, blue, purple, and maroon.

We pressed on, the creek running slowly and flatly. Now and then a belt of flame trees splashed the green with- fire, raising their domes of crimson as a foothold for the gorgeous sun birds. A bee-eater of brown and black, with a throat of yivid blue, and two long narrow feathers in his tail, flew before us. Then we reached a clearing— the jungle broke into a garden— yams and maize and sweet potato, coffee, and a few rubber trees, and living fences where the thrust in sticks of the palisade had taken root and sprouted, and beyond that a great figtree that had grown from a tree that was not a parasite, and then had conquered it; gradually strangling it with fingers of lace and arms of cordage. And then we came to the spring; before it was a velvet lawn between the dried cocoanut palms; an avenue of gay crotons and dracenas, an umbrella tree dropping from its crimson cups nectar for a many thousand birds. To the right a little lake, its surface hidden with the leaves of the sacred lotus and the water lily broken by their flower cups of pink and blue. Left of the lawn, was a bungalow surrounded by a garden on fire, with flames of green and red, and a

head seen through a cutting in the jungle wall, the sea floating high up in the sky from its shallows under an invisible cliff.

Beneath a palm between the house and the lotus lake sat two brown boys plaiting a basket of a single palm frond, using the central stalk as the basket's backbone; beyond the palm and flattened against the house wall, frangipanni trees saturated the air with scent, and dropped their clean and ivory volutes softly to the soft grass. We crossed a little sand patch, where once had been an old hut of thatch, and driven nearly half deep in the sand, six bayonet cutlasses, that may have been at Trafalgar.

"How did they come here, Jack, I wonder?"

"This must have been an old trading station. From the time the first white man came to the Coral Sea old armoury stores came instead of money."

We had halted on the sand patch to drink in the beauty.

"It's enough to make a man give up the world, George."

"Yes!"

"Once I thought of leasing an island for ninety-nine years, and plant cocoanut, and while the plants were growing for copra I'd trade in shells and shark fin and beche-de-mer; buy tortoise shell at sixpence a pound, and sell it at forty shillings. And I'd shoot and trade and catch pigs."

"You gave up the idea, though?"

'I'm too interested in the ways of men for that. Now, you boy— is this the place?"

The curly-nosed boy replied, "Yowi! This one place Sisewa he stop."

"Who is Sisewa, Jack?"

"You'll see directly. Come on! You stop there, boot polish."

Leaving the nigger we advanced over the grass patch towards the house, as a glossy-backed Binghi man, dressed in a septal stick, an apron of a single pearl shell, depending from a girdle of human hair, came around the corner of the building, looked at us, and hastened his return on his . own tracks. We walked up to the verandah . steps, and as we reached the verandah a rather thin but strongly-built white man came out of the bungalow, slightly lame, and leaning on two sticks. He had a fine face and a fine eye; here was no criminal in hiding, I was sure of that.

'Good day, gentlemen,' he said but coldly, as if he resented the intrusion. 'You are Captain Wagstaff, I presume?'

"And my friend, Mr. Crayth."

"Will you sit down, gentlemen.... Now, what can I do for you, Captain?"

"We are inquiring for a Mr. Stephen Bond, and we believe he is on this island. I came from Jefferson and Wrench, who acted as agents for him once, because a lot of money has been left him. A lady also, a Miss North, is inquiring

for him. She has written many times— we know they have been delivered to him, as the last three were registered— and she has had no reply. There is a paragraph in the *Pearlers News*, to the effect that Stephen Bend died some weeks ago."

"I read the paragraph myself, Captain."

"And I saw the grave, but he's not buried there."

"How do you know that, Captain?"

"Because he is here, Mr. Bond, and I am talking to him."

The lame man was no more surprised than I, but he was too surprised to speak for a few minutes, and when he did speak he stammered— "Well— I— I am. But how did you know?"

"I talked to a curly- nosed nigger like a black Jew. I knew he was a Kiwai boy by his nose, and when he said 'Sisewa' was here I knew that Sisewa was the nearest approach to Stephen he could ever make. So we dug up Stephen Bond's grave, Mr. Bond, and we found a cocoanut log wrapped in an old blanket and canvas. So then we came on here to find Sisewa, and we found him."

"And, now what do you want, Captain?"

"Ask you to come back with us to Sydney."

Bond answered resolutely, "No!"

"Your duty is there, Mr. Bond— your money and the lady you were engaged to."

"And who turned me down when l was in trouble? No, Captain, no civilisation for me. The white man is welcome; sometimes I hunger for the sight of a white man's face; but the white man has spoiled his women, made an insolent doll of her— and I never want to see a white woman again."

"You say that now— but how long will it last?"

"It has lasted three years already, Captain, and it can last thirty more. Why should I ever want to leave here? I have my books and as much work as I wish, and if I don't do the work, one season it waits for me till next year: There's an opera going on in the flame trees now, and a thousand sun birds in the front row of the chorus."

"It won't last, Mr. Bond. A man craves change; he would grow weary in. Heaven.'

'Speak for yourself, Captain. When I lived in a city I didn't weary of it, for I am a quiet man, and prefer thought to action. And I have all I want and more."

"You'll miss the tramcar and the policeman yet, Mr. Bond."

"Never— nor the grocers' shops, nor the drapers, nor the other smug thieves of the world. All we want is in the coral garden, food and beauty; they trap the finch and take him to London to shrivel in the cold; we see his beauty

here and never hurt a feather of him. We hear the rainbow pitta waking the jupgle at dawn, and a hundred thousand white pigeons come and go, at dawn and dusk, and we see the sun birds and the sulphur-crested cockatoo coming when the flame trees bloom. We hunt the dugong on the reefs and harpoon him in the moonlight. We get pearlshell from the reefs; golden lip and black lip— my last parcel of Fine White Selected Bold brought eleven pounds, twelve and six a hundred-weight in Hatton Garden; but mostly it's Bold Wormy Defective, worth four pounds seven and sixpence. We get trepang, and that more than keeps us; and food, we get for a hook or a cartridge or a little murder. But the tiger nautilus, putting up his sail like a bleached cockscomb, and a new lotus budding on the lake are more to me than new fortunes are to the money hunter. When we find a pearl l give it to Flamina. Around that point is a reef of the big shells, the helmet and the melon and the siphon shell; tiger cowries, big white muires, and frilled clams and green snail shell. I found a trochus shell, too, just the thing for making buttons, and there's a lot of money in it, but somebody else can have it for me. And I leased the island, and when— I died, you know, I left it to Flamina all in regular form."

"And you won't go back— you're determined not to go back to the money and the girl?"

"Absolutely. Apart from everything else I hate civilisation. Do you know what it does with the heart and the honour of a man? Well— look at that fig tree. A bird dropped a fig seed into the fork of a fine eucalypt— such as that was— and the parasite grew, and sent its tentacles downward to strangle his host, and upward to keep the air away from him. That's what civilisation did for me. It found me a frank and trusting fool, and my friends got all I had. It made my girl, who I thought loved me disinterestedly, throw me down when she founds I was broke.

"She repented of it, Mr. Bond. She sought for you, her message was sent for you before anybody knew of, this new fortune of yours."

"She was once, in doubt— that's, enough. Whether she regrets it now or not, she bilked me, and there's no forgiveness for that, even if forgiveness were asked for; and that I do not believe. If she had loved me as I loved her, she would never have doubted, and there would have been no necessity for regret had there been no treachery. No; she bilked me; and that ended my days in civilisation. I'm only glad I lost my money, otherwise I'd have married her, believing in her, and loved the hypocrite to the finish."

"A woman to spoil the world for you, Bond? Nonsense! What do you expect of women?"

"I expect one woman never to doubt herself or me. Miss North doubted herself, Flamina wouldn't. She bilked me! Flamina couldn't."

"Who is Flamina, Mr. Bond?"

"Flamina is Mrs. Bond."

"Mrs. Bond?"

"By the law of Torres Straits— which is usage."

"I see!" said Jack Wagstaff, and he was silent for a few minutes thinking of this new development, while the two brown boys, having finished two palm frond baskets, sang as they selected material for more.

"And Miss North?"

"Tell her what you like. When I was up against hard luck she threw me down."

"And the money?"

"Let it go to the next lot. I've enough."

"Look here, Mr. Bond. This isn't fighting like a white man. You weren't born black, and the white skin carries its duties, and if it doesn't it hasn't any privileges."

"I ask for none. Man— Man! Am I not refusing them all the time?"

"But there is work to do in the world."

"I'll do mine here."

"Mr. Bond, you've been ill; you're not feeling too good, and you're lame. Come away South with me and get proper attention."

"I am not lame, Captain. I've lost a foot. My left leg ends at the ankle. I've got a substitute for a foot, a rough substitute Coral Sea fashion."

"I'm very sorry, but come away with me, and we'll fix you up all right."

"I'll have to tell you why, I see you're a man, Captain Wagstaff, not a sentimental fool or a preacher. I can see that in once. I'll tell you, and then I'll leave it to you, and if you don't say to me when I'm finished, 'Let Stephen Bond stay dead, and let Siwesa live the life he likes'— well, then, you're not the man I take you for. Do you believe in luck, Captain?"

"In hard luck, yes. I've had enough to make me believe."

"I do, too. I once knew of an unlucky man who drowned in four inches of water, and a lucky man who lived through a cyclone on a spar. I've known a woman to stand her trial as a murderess half a dozen times, and the dock door opened and let her out every time, and I knew of a decent girl who died of blood poisoning through a pin scratch."

"Yes."

"Well, I was unlucky, but my luck has turned good at last. And this was the how of it... But I'll get you a drink?"

He hobbled to the door of the bungalow and called— "Hey! Aseli, got you Flamina, tell Aseli bring drinks— cocoa-nut milk, whisky-limes— all drinks."

And then he came back to his chair, bringing with him a box of cigars from the table, and asked us to smoke. Aseli came with the tray and the glasses and three pigs and a bottle. He was a fine figure of a man in his clean cotton singlet and red sulu, and I asked if he were not the man we had seen, dressed only in the septal stick and the apron of pearly shell.

Bond said, "Yes— he wore what he liked in the jungle, and there has been a dance further along the beach, but as house servant he had to don his uniform of singlet and sulu."

"Good luck, Mr. Bond," said I, raising my glass.

"Thanks, Mr. Crayth, I've got it. Yes, the man with the luck had to lose a foot to find it. And this was the way. I came to the Straits close up broke; but I had enough to lease the island, and in two years I built the bungalow. I got beche-de-mer, pearl shell, tortoise shell. I got thirty of the finest niggers you ever saw, diving for shell and trepang; they'd give their lives for me, I think. Binghis, Kiwais, and all."

''One is a Rotumah man, who holds the first-class diploma for lying, isn't he, Mr. Bond?"

"Taurabiana? Yes. Well! Six months ago the letters from Miss North came, registered. Then three months ago I heard of the legacy, which goes to charities if I don't claim it in three months more. Flamina, washing on the island with her father, she's half Samoan, pretty as the test of them, but educated too— the Catholic mission at taru taught her; she can read and write and sing. Her father is a trader. I am seriously thinking of trying to beieve that. Miss North's treatment of me was merely the independability of a girl, not the cold throw down of a mercenary woman. One day I went out to long reef— two miles from the island— dry at low water except for the reef pools, and under fifteen feet or so of water at spring tides. I was mooning about there at low water picking up scorpion shells, and ready to rave like a child at a show over the beauty of the pool, when suddenly I stepped on a bed of waving grass and weed about six inches under water. It gave, and my foot sank lower. Before I could pull it out the valve of the shell, with the disguising sea and weed growths on it, closed on me. I felt an agonising contraction of the foot just below the ankle, and then I saw that I was trapped."

"The giant clam," said Wagstaff.

"*Tridacua gigas* had me right enough; thank the Lord he was very small for a clam, or I would have been held by the thigh. I could feel the crinkles and frills of the shell trying to join the upper valve to the lower, and the pain was awful. And then I saw near by me, one reef pool overflow, and a thread of silver water run to join another pool. The tide was coming on."

"Terrible," I said.

"I was there a living man, in the sunlight, as strong as a bull, and feeling that I had sixty years of life ahead, ind my heel was held by a clam shell. I could see the cliff and the bungalow and the flame tree with the birds above it in hundreds; I could see the long white lines of pigeons flying over the Straits to dinner in my figtrees; could see even the top of the figtree, with its strangling M on the gum tree. I never saw so beautiful a day; and now I was held with my leg in a trap to wait for the tide to rise and end up with two fathoms of the Straits over my head, and that fat-headed clam hanging on to the foot that was hurting his flesh.'

"And the foot had to go?"

"Wait! The water had joined all the pools around me, and now ran into the pool my foot was sharing with the clam. And I saw Flamina in her canoe a quarter of a mile away.

"Yell? I did! I yelled like a crowd in a panic, and she heard, and paddled over the reef. I told her the trouble, arid told her to get an axe.

"Paddle! The canoe flew through the water to the island, the landed, she ran into the bush, and disappeared, and I waited for years, and the tide crept up. She came back alone to the boat. All my boys were away; she had been unable to find help. But she paddled back, and when she came close to the reef I saw that she was crying like a woman and working like a man. You know how the tides rise here. The reef had disappeared when she landed, the water was breast high. And with the tide comes the enemy. To be eaten by a shark while a clam holds you on a fork— it's a bit shuddersome."

"A bit! It's enough to make a man swear off all his decent vices and live on illuminated texts."

"Flamina paddled the canoe right up to me— a good job that the sea was heavy and flat like quicksilver spilled on a level floor. Any sea break on the reef would have beaten her. She stood in the water by me, and felt around my foot for the place to hit. She was crying all the time, and she lifted the axe, and hit old Mr. Clam a whack that would have broken all his teeth only for the resistance of the water taking the force of the blow.

"The water was rising up tb near my collar, and I said to her, 'Cut my leg off if you can't break the shell.'

"She's quicker at taking a hint than most people. She chopped at the ankle, and gashed it a bit, though she couldn't cut it through, and even the axe cut was a relief to the other pain of the teeth and the pressure. But how many of your city women would have had the sand to try to chop a man's leg off to save him. Then she came up and said, 'That way is no good,' she took a knife out of my belt, and dived, and I thought she'd never come up again. She came up black in the face, and said, 'I tried to cut the sinew of the hinge of the valve,

but I can't. I'll try the axe again.' Down she went, and stayed longer than before. The water was at my chin, and I threw my head back so that the nose would be out of water when the mouth had to be closed up. Suddenly I felt relief come, the pressure relaxed. I felt I was in Heaven, and then a hell of pain told me I wasn't. I fell flat in the water as she came up without the axe, and I wasn't any good. I must have fainted. I came to with that girl grabbing me, holding me up against the canoe. She helped me into it, and brought me to the island, and when the boat touched coral I stood up to walk ashore, and fell down whack in the water. She got me up to the bungalow somehow, and she sent a boat to Thursday Island for a surgeon, and he amputated the jelly that had once been a good foot to walk on, and had walked me into all sorts of mischief in my time. She nursed me till I began to move about a month ago. And then I heard of your inquiries, Captain, and got more sugary letters, registered, too— and I made up my mind for Flamina."

"I understand, Mr. Bond," said Wagstaff— "but it's bad business turning down big money—"

"I'm not a business man, Captain. I'm a romantic fool who believes in the unfashionable virtues of justice— gratitude — and sticking like wax to anybody who does me a good turn. And I won't take money that might one day be a temptation for me to return to the flesh pots so that I might spend it. It's no use, Captain— and there's Flamina."

Walking very delicately over the soft grass came a girl of eighteen or twenty years; pearls around her throat, a chemisette of white linen, a white skirt bordered with that t key pattern which is as native to the Coral Sea as it was to Ancient Athens. Her feet were bare; the coils of straight black hair were piled high upon her shapely head; the nose and mouth delicate, and giving no hint of any but Caucasian ancestry, the eyes lustrous and starry, and filled now with the joy of returning to the beloved. She wore armlets of tortoise shell, and in the armlets had fastened spikes of frangipanni flower in island fashion. The nuns of Daru had not been able to educate her out of the island love of flowers. She waved her hand gaily to Stephen Bond, and disappeared around the angle of the bungalow.

"And that's why I'm reported dead, that and because the few distant relations I've got would be hurt because my wife is a black woman, as they call her," concluded Stephen Bond, "and that is why I'll stay dead as long as I'm being looked for. But Flamina will be Mrs. Bond officially next week."

Jack Wagstaff rose— "I'll look for you no longer, Mr. Bond. I think you're doing the right thing, and I'll tell Jefferson and Wrench so."

WE SAILED back to Thursday Island next day, and Wagstaff sent his report of the facts to Jefferson and Wrench. They were men discreet and circumspect, and they said in their turn that the charities must succeed to the legacy, as Stephen Bond was reported dead after an amputation of the foot, and further reported as buried at Waiweera.

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6: The Mystery of the Six Twigs

Sydney Mail (NSW) 8 May 1912

WE found our new work so interesting, and it bade fair to be so remunerative, that Jack Wagstaff and I decided to go right into the private inquiry agency business as the firm of Wagstaff and Crayth with as little as possible of the office work to fall to the lot of Jack Wagstaff, because he hated it, and as much as possible of the field work to come to me— because I liked it.

"We'll hang the shingle out as soon as we can get clear of Jefferson and Wrench's retainer, banks and fidelity companies— that's the class of work to educate a man and interest him so much that he thinks he's playing all the time. Banks, financial companies, shipping work, cargo broaching, and all that sort of thing— but divorce work barred—"

"I should think so," said I, "and there's the *Maranoa* coming up the strait, Jack, so we'll pack our trap and light out for Cairns."

We made Cairns on the third day out from Thursday Island, and found one of the flattest places in Australia prosperous in the wreck of its jungle a foot or so above high-water mark, and sweltering in its summer steam. Our objective was the Russell River to inquire into the trade doings of Stuart and Wilmington.

"They're the bosses of the place, aren't they, Jack?" I asked Wagstaff as the train climbed the Dividing Range through rich alluvial lands, dense vegetation, of ferns and orchids, tangles of cedars, pines, vines, wild bananas from the steaming flats of Trinity Bay.

The little narrow gauge train squealed on its sudden curves, and plunged into many tunnels; the coach splashed by mountain cataracts until we reached the height of the kauri grown canyon of the Barron, and stopped at Kuranda. And while the train continued its journey through burned tracks of dwarf eucalyptus to the rich jungle lands of Atherton, Jack Wagstaff told me of the affairs of Stuart and Wilmington in their relation to their financial backing by Jefferson and Wrench.

"Stuart and Wilmington are practically the developing force of the Russell River scrub and the gold alluvials of the Upper Russell. They shipped timber and maize, cedar in the log; they buy practically all the gold produced from the alluvials. They are also storekeepers and big debtors to the trading side of Jefferson and Wrench's business. They're a long way behind in their payments, and Jefferson and Wrench were about to force them to pay or get out. Then they made an arrangement to consign all produce to Jefferson and Wrench's steamers only, and to consign the gold to Jefferson and Wrench's bank, being

allowed to draw against the gold up to the price they had to pay for it on the field. There was a profit of 7s 6d an ounce in it. Well! the position is worse than ever. Jefferson and Wrench know that they are selling cedar in Sydney and Melbourne, and that all the produce is not consigned to Jefferson and Wrench, although they still order store supplies from Jefferson and Wrench's trading business. It's a long job, George, and we've got to straighten things out. I've got full power, and my job is to see that the money goes into the right pockets. But I think it will require a bankruptcy to straighten things out."

From the railway terminus we rode through the everlasting rain on a narrow track carved out of the towering mountain ash, the great figs, and the lawyer vines, and the stinging trees. Rain in drops, eheets, showers, waves! Rain feathery and as if powdered, and when no rain then an atmospheric saturation— the wraith of fog, and emulsion on water. Along the bridle track our horses Struggled, treading only in the great furrows of volcanic mire— the furrows that earned for the squidgey alley through the scrub the name of the "potato field," and, knee-deep as they were, were luxurious safety compared to the treacherous, slimy crowns, between them. The soil, by the action of traffic and rain, fell away from the entanglements of roots and left dangerous traps, but the scrub horses struggled and schemed— swinging themselves dovn the precipitous walls of a hill with the careless exactitude of cats giving way to the sudden steepness and somewhile sliding on their buttocks. Red slide below, and damp air above, and the green surf of the unbroken scrub before, ruffled by the wind. Then came a break in the wall, and we could ride abreast again.

We saw patches of sky, the air lost its balsamic moisture, broken shafts of light were lost in a flood of sun rays, and we emerged into a pocket of tussocks of silver and kangaroo grass— an exercise yard in the jungle prison.

We rode across the pocket, and had to ride single file again. In the half darkness some great bastard ash fell in the heart of the jungle, and the pocket echoed the crash. We rode on, ascending all the time, till just before dusk a column of smoke, rising surely from a hearthstone, pierced the air with a lighter blue. And we were at Upper Russell, where men sluiced for gold old river beds that had been lifted 1000 feet above the newest course of the stream.

Stuart and Wilmington's store was half the township. The other half was the hotel; but the tent dwellers were there as well, and the number of people was so disproportionate to the apparent lodging capacity that for a moment I thought that they knew of Wagstaff's coming, and were collected to welcome him. I told Wagstaff so, but he shook his head.

"No, George, there's something serious forward. D'ye notice how silent they are?"

We rode up to the group by the store, and without dismounting Jack Wagstaff said, "My name is Wagstaff. I have business with Stuart and Wilmington. Are they in the store?"

The ruddy-faced, short-bearded man, who was leaning against the lintel of the door, answered him: "I am Stuart."

"And Mr. Wilmington?"

"Dead— murdered yesterday."

"Murdered! Do they know who did it?"

"They've a good idea. We've sent for the police, and they came here this afternoon and arrested Tommy Alligator."

'A black boy?'

'Yes, he was wild about Wilmington and a girl, and the evidence is pretty strong. But don't stay here, Mr. Wagstaff, I'll take the horses round to the stable, and you two gentlemen go into the store. You'll find it not so noisy as the hotel, will be to-night, and I've got plenty of blankets.'

We thanked him, and dismounted, and entered the store as Stuart led the horses away.

'This complicates matters, Jack.'

'It will make me become the receiver of the business against my will. Death is like insolvency, and we must take hold of the proposition right away. I expect Stuart will make a last kick to maintain control, but his kicks won't help him.'

But to our surprise Stuart agreed to everything. He was ready to assign his estate for the benefit of his creditors. He was sick of struggling, he said, and the tragic death of his partner had removed his last desire to win out there. He would make another try elsewhere, and win out in a new place.

'There'll be nothing left for you, you know,' said Jack Wagstaff. 'You'll go out without a penny, and you'll have to start from behind scratch again.'

Stuart replied that he knew all about it, and for a man utterly ruined he appeared a very cheerful and courageous man. And we drifted on to talk of the murder.

Wilmington had been found in the scrub at the back of the store, and on the camp of Tommy Alligator, shot and speared. The spear was Tommy Alligator's without doubt, the revolver had not been found till that morning, when it was found in the scrub near where the body had lain. This revolver had been stolen from the store stock a week before, and the police had taken it.

Tommy Alligator had threatened Wilmington some days before, and there was not the slightest doubt that he had fired the shot. Stuart told us this as we sat at supper, and after it Jack Wagstaff said that he would visit tlie police

camp, and if Stuart could assist me in the beginning of the long job of taking stock of the store, and making an inventory, so much the better.

So Stuart and myself began the long, and tedious job, and Stuart was as light-hearted as a boy, as he called the items, and I wrote them down. He was the happiest bankrupt I ever met, seeming to experience all the joy of a schoolboy escaping from drudgery and unwelcome tasks.

Jack Wagstaff did not return until midnight, and he seemed disinclined to talk. Having arranged that the business should be handed over to us as receivers pending a meeting of creditors or the appointment of a trustee, and that the transfer should be made the following day he smoked a pipe and turned in. I tried to ask Lira about the murder and the accused aboriginal, but ho stopped me with a look, and I was left wondering and silent.

Next morning he was still uncommunicative, but at noon when he returned to lunch he signalled to me to follow him, and with an excusable curiosity pricking me I joined him at the edge of the clearing in which the store had been built, and we took the soddened bridle track into the jungle, and did not speak until we were quite sure we were out of earshot.

'You've got on to something, Jack.'

'Yes. I've seen the body, I've seen Tommy Alligator. The revolver shot killed Wilmington, and the black boy's spear was thrust into him after death.'

'After death?'

'Yes. And Tommy isn't the man who gave the spear thrust.'

'What reason have you for saying that, Jack?'

'The spear was pressed into the body from above— by a man standing up, say— while the body lay on the ground. Not much weight was put on to it, either; it was thrust in from a distance of not more than a foot, and the wound was almost superficial. A man who had already killed and was unnerved and made irresolute by his crime would make just such a futile blow.'

'But with what object if the man were already dead?'

'To make suspicion point to the owner of the spear, who had been robbed of the spear so that, the spear should be evidence against him. Why, if Tommy Alligator had used that spear it would have transfixed Wilmington at 50 yards. Yet, here it is thrust into the body from the distance of a foot, and it doesn't penetrate deeper than the upper surface of the ribs. Therefore Alligator didn't use the spear on Wilmington; therefore he did not shoot him, and therefore he should be at liberty, and some other man, now free and unsuspected, should be in double irons.'

'But why was his spear used?'

'To throw suspicion on him. But the evidence against the nigger is strong enough without that.'

'What does it consist of?'

'A threat against Wilmington about a half-caste girl. I went to see Alligator. He says he didn't kill Wilmington the day before yesterday; he had intended to kill him to-day, that is, unless he cleared out of the country.'

"But why to-day, and not the day berore yesterday?"

"I'll tell you. You know something of the magic and message stick business of the aboriginal? Well, how would Alligator threaten Wilmington— by word of mouth or by message? There is evidence to the effect that Alligator had threatened to kill Wilmington, but not in Wilmington's presence. He had said before other niggers in the camp, and he had said in the presence of Stuart and other white men: 'S'pose that one Wilmington no been clear out, I been killem that one, he been altogether finish.' Then he makes matters worse by telling them that he intended to' kill Wilmington to-day (Friday), and that therefore he could not kill him the day before yesterday, which was Tuesday."

'But it's ridiculous.'

'It isn't, George.'

He halted on the narrow track, and looked about him cautiously, and then unbuttoned his shirt and drew from its inner pocket a small switch of haze-green, and with a few leaves left on its right side.

'When we were going through the safe on taking control of the store yesterday I found this under some papers on the top of the safe. Do you see that on the right side the twigs have been stripped, leaving only a few leaves. On the left side are six twigs, five, are broken, and the broken ends are bent over, the sixth twig is sound. Now, what does that say to you?'

'It says five broken twigs and one sound twig?'

'It says more. That is Alligator's message to Wilmington, and it says that on the sixth day after delivery Alligator will kill Wilmington.'

"A message in code?"

"Yes, and not to be broken on or acted before notice. I got access to Alligator; he's a very intelligent boy, and I showed him the message stick. Then he told me what he had told the police— that he intended to kill Wilmington to-day. I asked him when he had delivered the twigs, and he said Saturday. And that would make Friday the correct day for the killing. I got this much corroboration. Alligator was seen at the store on Saturday, and he was absent at the Lower River until the day before yesterday. He said he came back to find whether Wilmington had taken the warning or not, and if he had not to prepare to kill Wilmington to-day."

"Did Wilmington take the message seriously?"

"He did. He had prepared to leave yesterday. He had borrowed two pack horses, and had brought his own riding horse into the stable overnight. And that night he was murdered."

"He was afraid of Alligator, then, and had decided to save his life by running away?"

"Not only that— the business, as you know, was on the rooks; Wilmington took advantage of the threatened murder to hurry his own departure; Stuart told me as much. And now there are your questions to be answered. Who stole the revolver from the store, who stole Alligator's spear, who killed Wilmington, and who has the gold?"

"The gold?"

"Yes— four hundred ounces of it. Some of it belongs to the men who mined it, and who didn't know Stuart and Wilmington were in the breaker, and trusted it to them as. agents. Some of it was bought, paid for with the money of Jefferson and Wrench and other creditors, and so some of that gold belongs to Jefferson and Wrench and other creditors, and I've got to find it. And by answering any one of those four questions I'll answer them all."

"Alright, I'm ready— which first?"

"The revolver stolen from the store. Let's go back and look into the stock sheets, and say nothing to anybody. Let it look as a mere checking of the inventory. There should be little trouble in finding it."

'But even if Alligator didn't kill Wilmington, do you think he stole the gold?'

'A nigger who takes his murders so honourably as to give six days' notice of it, and count it an act of treachery to kill before the time is up! Do you think that man has any idea of the value of property, except in the form of hunting, camp gear, food, decoration, and a wife? Put it out of your mind. If Alligator did kill Wilmington, someone else has the gold Wilmington stole. And now, let's get to that inventory.'

We returned to the store, and examined the stock sheets— there was not one revolver in stock.

'Who swore to the revolver, Jack?'

'Stuart. He identified it as one of a dozen recently put into stock.'

'But where are the other eleven?'

'That's interesting. There's just a chance. Look in the new invoices.'

'But they only relate to three cases of goods not yet unpacked.'

'Look at them all the same.'

Together we pored over the 7 invoices— 'Cartridges, sash lino, D sharps— here, George. Twelve revolvers, C.F. 38, at 21 shillings. And they're still in cases. Then why did the thief open the case to steal only one revolver, and

how did he know it was there? A peculiar thief who reads the invoices first, so that he may know where to lay his hand on the goods without searching.'

'What does it mean— that Wilmington committed suicide?'

'He may have done so. Alligator did not kill him, but he may have spitefully nicked the dead man with the spear. But that doesn't explain the gold. Stuart is out; now is a good time to look through the cases.'

'Here's one that's been opened and reclosed, Jack?'

'Try that first, then.'

We opened the case. Its zinc lining had been cut and folded back, and immediately, beneath it was a box with smaller boxes inside it. They were revolvers: C. F. 38.

'Count the boxes, George: there are eleven. So the man who stole the revolver knew where to look. Close it up again quickly, and we'll go back on our tracks. I'll give the six twigs to the police; they know that Alligator sent the slaying stick, and it helps him a bit. And now, where are we? We're nowhere till we've found the gold. That will prove, everything, and in its absence we can only make hazardous speculations.'

'Well, what shall we do, then?'

'We'll see the police and ask them to show us where the body was found, and we'll go there and begin the book at the first chapter. We only know to be continued in our next, and without knowing what it is that's being continued.'

We were directed to the place of the discovery of the body. Branches had been thrown over it to preserve as much as possible the marks of the struggle, yet the heavy rain that falls almost every day had dimmed the footprints and blurred their outlines.

'By good luck there's been no rain to-day,' said Wagstaff, 'and we can get some idea of the character of these naked footprints, though there's nothing certain about the outline.'

He threw some leaves down at the edge of the space that had. been covered with branches, and, with the strong magnifying glasses that had told us that the gold of Guadalcanal was not worth mining he studied the prints of the naked feet. Suddenly he appeared interested, and then the interest mastered him, so that he made no reply to my questions, but hunted like a beagle.

'What is it, Jack?'

Take the glass— under the naked footprints are the marks of a boot made about the same time, too. See the rows of hobnails, the horseshoe-shaped steel plate of the heel, and the toe plate and the marks of its screws.'

'Yes. Yes. I see.'

'That boot was worn by a white man, and I'll swear that the naked footprints are those of a white man, too.'

'A white man barefoot in this country! Why, he couldn't travel— his feet would be torn to pieces.'

'Who said he travelled barefoot? But he was barefoot here, and for a strong reason. See the mark of the little toe! It's turned in under the other toe; it has been pressed into the fourth toe by a tight boot. Now, a nigger's little toe is as free an individual of action as his big toe— I can reconstruct a bit of it now. It's no use going outside this little patch; all the marks on the bridle track are valueless, because of the traffic.'

He walked about on the edge of the disturbed space, talking as he moved.

'Wilmington came in there— that's his track. I saw his boots. The other fellow came behind him; they faced each other here and talked; the murderer shot him through the head, and he fell and died without a struggle. The murderer took his boots off; he would have to sit down. Where did he sit? The naked tracks came back from that log, consequently the booted tracks went to it, to be covered up subsequently by the naked footprints. Yes! Here we are— this fallen tree. The moss is bruised off it. And by grief! here are the marks of the boots on the moss of the log, rather faint, so that there was no weight in them. He took off his boots here and rested them on the log.'

'Yes, that seems plain enough now.'

'Mind where you walk, George. He threw the revolver away while he was sitting on the log. It was found at the butt of that tree, and it was intended to be found.'

'Do you think so?'

'Of course; it was hidden so that the first man who nosed around would find it. Then he walked back to the body and thrust the spear hesitatingly into it. But there is no mark of the spear except the long line in the mud where it was thrown by the murderer after he had used it on the body. He didn't have it in his hand when he fired— he'd be prepared, and would have one hand free. But he used the spear immediately; therefore he had the spear planted here, and ready for use, and therefore he had selected this place as the scene of Wilmington's murder. What are you doing with- that cane, George?'

'There's a round hole here about a foot deep; it's been made with a stick.'

'Let me see, yes, and the stick was the spear, planted here before the murder, and used after Wilmington's death... Now! back to the centre. The murderer has used the spear on the body, and thrown it away for the reason that he threw away the revolver, so that it might have been found without trouble. And then he walked back to the track barefooted, and when he get to

the place where the traffic marks started, he put his boots on again. And here is where the footprints end to prove that what I say is right.'

'And this nigger is innocent?'

'As we are. But if he hadn't threatened Wilmington, and if I hadn't found the Six Twigs I would never have questioned the belief that they had got the right man.'

'And who is the right man?'

'We can find that only by finding the gold. Tomorrow we'll ride down, to Atherston and see whan luck we can find on the road.'

Jack Wagstaff told Stuart that evening of our change of plans.

'I've been thinking over all this, Mr. Stuart— the death of your partner complicates matters so much that. my first plan must be destroyed, or at least considerably modified. So as I don't know whether I've done right or wrong— in the circumstances I'll withdraw my action of yesterday. Mr. Grayth and myself will ride to the nearest telegraph station, send full particulars to Jefferson and Wrench, and wait instructions. Meantime please do nothing out of the usual way of business; I suppose that if we leave here at noon we could get through to Herbtnton by night easily.'

Stuart assented, and we made lists of the book debts that night, and prepared a rough balance-sheet for Jefferson and Wrench. Next day we bade good-bye to Stuart, and left the mystery of the six twigs to itself for a time while we went in search of 400oz of gold stolen by Wilmington's murderer. We had two packhorses with tent and supplies, and reached the crossing of the Upper Barron early. But in the late afternoon as we were approaching farm clearings among the tall dead trees, Jack Wagstaff called a halt.

'What's the game, Jack?'

'We'll put the tent up here, and camp till to-morrow morning.'

'Why?'

'I expect a visitor, and I'm sure he'll come to-morrow morning.'

And as that was all he would say, without pressure, I did not argue the point. We rigged the tent, and had the tea made before dark, and turned in early, and slept till nearly dawn.

I was awakened by Jack Wagstaff shaking my shoulder, and opening my eyes in confusion I saw by the soft light of the waning stars his figure standing by the open flaps of the tent.

'What is it, Jack?'

'I expect our visitor by dawn, but he. might be early, so it's best to be prepared.'

I left the blankets, and sat with him just within the tent flaps, and we smoked while the stars paled to dawn, and the breeze of morning blew.

'I let you sleep as long as I could, George,' said Find Out Wagstaff. 'I've saddled the horses.'

'Why?'

'We might have a chase. No; there's no hurry; in this clear air we can hear a man half a mile away.'

'The man with the gold?'

"I hope so."

Cr-crack!

Like a pistol shot it come from the black depths of the jungle; the sound of a whip cracking over a horse.

"That's the packhorse, I suppose," said Wagstaff, "heavy laden and tired enough to want the whip. Mount, George, and ride out on to the track."

"Bail him up?"

"Yes— I'll go first."

Following him I rode out of the scrub that hid our tent and entered the track of the potato furrows. The sun was already gilding the tree tops, but the moisture of the earth lifting in mist obscured the track. Two whipcracks tore the silence, and seemed to tear the mist, too; out of the obscurity the weary packhorse rushed to us and stopped by my horse, glad of the companionship.

"Catch the packhorse, George."

I leaned out of the saddle and caught the halter of the packhorse, and. faced the track from the Upper Barron as the ascending sun lifted the mist with it. The legs of a chestnut showed first, and Jack Wagstaff said:

"Here's our man."

And then, as the mist quite lifted a man rode in full view of us, and his mouth opened in amazement as he saw Wagstaff facing him, and that I held his packhorse by the halter. It was Stuart!

He looked at us for a moment in surprise and fear, and then, as his hand went over to turn his horse, Jack Wagstaff covered him with his revolver, and Jack Wagstaff's voice called to him:

"Hands up, Stuart, or I'll shoot."

And Stuart, paralysed with fear, waited trembling while Wagstaff searched him with one hand, and menaced him with the right. But he was unarmed, and after that first desperate thought of escape had passed he was quiet, and we lodged him in Atherton lockup and 400 ounces of gold with the police, and were ready for breakfast.

"How did you know you'd meet him this morning, Jack?"

"I didn't know, but I thought I would. You see I found yesterday that his horses were ready for the road in the paddock a mile this side of the store. Therefore he would come this road when he did take a journey. I believed the gold was hidden in the store, and that he would never look for it while we remained. He wouldn't leave in daylight nor at night while the public-house was open, nor would he dare recover the gold until everybody had left the store. He believed we had ridden through to Herberton, and he figured on getting through Atherton before anybody was moving, or arriving at Mareba as if he had slept at Atherton last nights. And there's the gold to prove he carried out the nigger's threat of killing Wilmington. Wilmington intended to abscond with the gold, and Stuart heard of Alligator's threat, and stole his spear, and did all the juju business to make the death look like vendetta. But he gave himself away by doing the killing two days before Alligator's notice expired. If Stuart had killed his partner on the Friday nothing could have saved Alligator from the gallows. The six twigs would have been absolute proof against him."

"But what made you satisfied of Stuart?"

"Many things! Among others he wears hobnailed cossacks, and with steel toe plates. But the taking the revolver out of the case and then reporting it stolen was fatal to him. After that I had only to find the gold, and the man who had it killed Wilmington. But Alligator should be glad that when he wants to kill a man he sends him notice in legal form; his spear threatened to kill him, but he saved himself with the Six Twigs."

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7: Filamena's Hula

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 2 Jan 1915

JACK WAGSTAFF came aboard at Daru from his visit to the Mission, thinking deeply, and I waited, though impatiently, for ten minutes before questioning him. He was captain and half-owner, and I was super-cargo and half-owner of the auxiliary schooner *Orokolo*.

The year had seen us moving steadily to a competence, trading in shell and copra and the pearls that come by chance; salving a ship that had grounded on Bramble pay and seemed to be a total loss; recruiting labor for Papuan plantations, and doing all a man may find to do in the hundred ways of combing money from the floors and beaches of the Coral Sea.

We had ten luggers pearling, and in the season worked at high pressure running round the fleet to deliver stores and collect shell, finding: that delay in clearing shell from the luggers had the peculiar effect of making pearls disappear. That we later bought our own pearls from our own divers was part of the game, and we obstructed that part of the game, as far as possible by speed.

Yet though Caesar did not secure all Caesar's due, the firm of Wagstaff and Crayth, pearlers and traders, and staunch friends, prospered— both working double tides and each protecting the other.

"It's the end of a bag, George," said Jack Wagstaff at last; "and somewhere outside the bag is the mystery of William Jones."

"William Jones! That's the Rotumah man— a missionary of sorts, isn't he?" I asked.

"Yes. A colored lay brother until a month ago, and then made a missionary authorised to baptise and marry and bury all converts from Darnley to Nagheer."

"But where do we come in on it?"

"You know the rivalry among the islanders to build a better and bigger church with more galvanised iron in it than any other island?"

"Yes! Mobiag against Murray Island, and Badu trying to build more big teller church than Nagheer."

That's it! Well, William Jones was out for money to build a swell church in Nagheer. He's fixed up a meeting, services, and native dances for this month. All the village lads are in from the boats, and after the dance they were to be held up for the donations for the new church. All the boys are along with new and comfortable clothes, but William Jones has disappeared."

"How and where?"

"That s what we don't know; but there's something that looks like the why of it. One of the newest converts gave the colored missionary a big pearl as a donation. He was one of the boys of the Torres Company fleet, so that the pearl was almost certainly stolen in the first place. That doesn't matter, though, to Jones; because, nobody can identify a pearl he never saw and the boy who gave it was probably the only man who saw the pearl before Jones received it."

"Jones may have been murdered for the pearl!"

"I can't see it! No sooner was the donation of the pearl known than it was also known that Jones had left it with somebody for safe keeping He publicly stated that at Darnley two days before he disappeared."

"Is it known who the banker is?"

"No; Jones simply said that he had left it with one of the most reliable people in the Straits, one of his own color. It wasn't a missionary, because Jones was the only colored missionary here.

"And now the mission wants you to find Jones and the pearl?"

"Scandal is busy already. The people who don't like the mission say that Jones has levanted and taken the pearl for ballast."

"It might be so."

"Not likely. Jones was such an enthusiast."

"Then it's foul play?"

"I think so— but the first thing is not to look for Jones, but to find Jones by looking for the colored man to whom he gave the pearl. He can I tell us where Jones is."

"A long chase, Jack."

"Yes, only narrowed down to three places. After he was given the pearl Jones went only to three places: Darnley, Mobiag, and Nagheer. He went to Nagheer last, and probably left the pearl there."

"Why?"

"The mission station people say that lie did not intend to visit the other two places until after the festival at Nagheer. The church was to be built at Nagheer, and at Nagheer he was to announce the amount subscribed at the end of the festival."

"Then, we go to Nagheer?"

"Yes— to Thursday first, and then on to the island. Hey, boy, too much water go alonga cabin. Hold him that one feller hose alonga deck."

His instructions were shouted at Robina, the Kiwai boy, who was so full of the joy and importance of hosing the decks that he had carelessly directed a stream full into the cabin, and grinned in appreciation of the joke— a grin that faded to sulkiness as Jack Wagstaft corrected him.

At the island there was no, news. The swift telegraph of lugger to lugger had brought the news of the missionary's disappearance, but none in the island had heard of him or of the pearl, whose value mystery had now made fabulous.

We left for Nagheer in the early dawn, and saw ahead a pearling fleet, its sails touched to pink by the swiftly rising sun. The luggers beat up and down as the divers collected the shell, working a swathe of the sea floor and coming to the deck of the lugger as it beat up against the tide to fish another section of the shallows.

As we passed through the fleet a brown man, naked but for a sarong, suddenly jumped overboard and swam weakly towards us. Quickly a boat pursued him, but, aided by the current, he came towards us, and sank as Wagstaff went over the side into the dinghy, cast off the painter, and pulled swiftly towards " the drowning man. He dropped the. oars in the rowlocks, tumbled to the stern, and seized the native by the hair as he rose for the second time. Then, depressing the stern of the boat with his own weight, he stooped for a hold under the armpits, and dragged the native into the boat. The pursuing boat came up, and the *Orokolo*'s anchor flashed down.

"One of your boys?" asked Wagstaff of the dark, black-moustached man who sat at the helm.

"Yes— he mad, I tink.. He not work, he not dive, he not pump, he not clean shell. He mad."

"You are Peter, the Greek?"

"Yes-a; I know you, Wagstaff. He no good, that boy."

"He's very sick. Why don't you take him ashore?"

"No time— I tink you take him— more better."

"Well, we're not a hospital ship, but— he's very sick. What's his island?"

"I tink he belong Prince Wales Island. You take him I like."

"All right. If I get a chance I'll put him ashore, and, anyway, we'll do our best."

The lugger's boat pulled for the-fleet again as Jack Wagstaff headed for the *Orokolo*. We got the half-drowned man aboard and hurried him forward. Jack Wagstaff and I looked down at the insensible figure that lay limply in the bunk as if life had already left him.

"Why did they let you take him so easily, Jack?"

"They're frightened he'll die on their hands."

He lifted the man's head, and drew his hand away with an exclamation of pity.

"Blood," he said. "No wonder the poor wretch couldn't swim. He's had a knock on the head."

"Shall we go back to the Greek?"

"We can get him any time. I must go on the Nagheer, and the man is better aboard here than anywhere else."

We gave the native all the rough surgical treatment we knew, and a few hours later his partial collapse changed! to the heavy sleep of utter exhaustion, and the mate called to us that we were off Nagheer.

Ten minutes later we found we were on the sand. The tricky winds died away, and we drifted idly in sight of the palm-grown shore, and then touched on a sandy bed, and bumped there for six hours, until a current, which had no business there, lifted us into deep water.

Jack Wagstaff conned the *Orokolo* through, the reefs by sundown, and in the beginning of a brilliant moonlight night— so brilliant that the air seemed saturated with rays that poured from the great yellow-orange that was the moon— we anchored half a mile from the shore at low tide, rowed in a boat for a hundred yards, and then splashed through ankle-deep water and over the sand and the rotten and crackling trash to the white sickle of the beach.

Nothing was quiet but the-moonlight. Fires of driftwood blazed to give light to the noisy dancers and over all the unconcerted sounds came the song of deep-voiced men singing an interminable chant that would have wearied but for the wonderful harmony of it.

"Au Mara! Au Mara! Au Mara!
La hala! haia! Hoowau."

The back cloth of this great stage was a cocoanut grove, a few belts of papaw and many wongi trees, and in them a score of polished brown-red children chattering like parrots and eating the astringent red date-like fruit at the same time. Further along the beach was a taro patch and a yam garden. The boomerang of beach white sand, silent and only lipped by the quiet lagoon; the drift above highwater beaten and stirred by many feet. No finer surface is possible than the street whose final preparation is constant pressure by the naked feet of humans; soft as dust and firm as a camel pad; but the continuously sifted sand of the "stage" was one moment beaten hard by the stampings of the dancers and in the next figure of the dance torn to atoms by the tireless side movements of two hundred feet.

The human color fell in gouts and splashes on the silver blue night; red men, copper men, black men, dressed in grass petticoats, grass anklets, and anklets of wood, and with flowers and feathers in their abundant and glossy black hair.

Men, with skins of burnished copper dressed in a red sarong and a bunch of red leaves; Kiwai boys— the black jews of the Gulf of Papua, tremendously energetic in sarongs and palm leaf dresses; Binghis, black as swans, and the earnest Semitic faces of the Papuans as their feet beat the sand and spurned it— dancing with wild abandon and inexhaustible energy— every muscle working in these dances of menace and of battle, dances of Dutch courage to screw up the courage of the warrior to the sticking place, dances of home-coming and farewell.

They were bone dry with weariness, the voices of the old men husky with singing: and the breathing of sand-laden air— for they had been dancing almost continuously for four and twenty hours— yet they finished each figure of the dance with blood-curdling yells as they rushed to the palm grove which was their green-room, yells that in the old days often led to a frightened trader firing a gun and a massacre to follow.

They sang the last of the chant the old men sobbing their exhaustion rushed to the green-room and returned immediately as . if one swift touch of nature in the grove had renewed their youth. The small, naked boys came from the wongi trees and imitated the dance at the edge of the set. The new dance was of sea fighting and hunting the dugong— that sea-pig which was the siren of the ancients; there was the song of the sea and of man's strength, the hiss of the snake, the barking of the village dogs at the return of the hunters, and a howl for a death in the tribe.

"Look at the leader," said Jack Wagstaff. "What a man!"

He was Hercules in shiny black marble— strong but not too strong for grace. His tremendous voice led the chant of the warriors— the painted Papuans, the, swan-black Binghis, and the browner men of the Straits, in the cry for war drowning the feebler advice of peace from the old men.

Hercules led his chorus, "*Hoff Yalowra! Hoff Yalowra*!" and the old men replied "*Turi ti ti ti! Turi ti ti ti*." The snake actor hissed "*Sssh! Sssh! Sssh! Sssh*!" and his feet moving the sand seemed to echo the voices. The dog actor growled "*Wow! Wow! Wow*!" and so to all the drama of it; with men for the sound of the sea and men for the noises of the land.

Suddenly, as they appeared to be exhausted, the black Hercules seemed to find a new energy; he sang louder and leaped higher in the drama.

"Is the new capering for us, Jack?"

"No— he hasn't looked our way.... Yes, there's the reason for it—the girl, he's dancing for her; she's all the audience he wants."

I had not seen her before— Filamina, a girl of Samoa and the belle of Torres. Her face, but for the high cheek bones, was full of that good handsomeness which is the beauty of perfect health, her eyes fine, her teeth

perfect, her body instinct with grace. Her calico smock brought back the Hornan toga; her smiling dignity made her a Roman matron of classic times. She met the look of Hercules, saw that he was hungry for her applause and smiled at him and then her smile changed to something like fear as an olive skinned man in the dress of a missionary, came from behind her and stood so close that she moved away a little, whereat he followed her.

"She's afraid of the missionary," said Jack. "I wonder what he's discovered of her."

He continued suddenly in Island patois to the highly superior native who stood nearest— a man so civilised by white man's clothes that his attitude to the more primitive men had become supercilious.

As if proud to tender information on terms of equality, the native was communicative in the twinkling of an eye.

"Him new missionary come alonga Darnley when him Missa Jones altogether finish."

"How you know Missa Jones altogether die?"

" 'Spose him not die, then him come alonga dance; him been like this one Island strong feller; him been want build him big feller fine church altogether."

"What name this one missionary him stop?"

"Altogether name belong him Brown— John Brown him stop. My word! pray him strong feller! Yabba alonga Heaven long time!"; then conclusively he imitated the action of kneeling, and added, "He stop long time alonga and like that one, likeit kangaroo bend wrong way altogether."

"From which we gather," said Jack Wagstaff to me, "that the Reverend John Brown is a more robustly devout missionary than William Jones, who looked more after his people, and didn't give so much time to kneeling in the sand. But he's not kneeling now."

He was not— he was sneaking around Filamina like a snake after a bird. One thing was certain, that the girl did not like him, and that the black Hercules hated him. In the concluding figures he danced at the Reverend John Brown, menacing him with the spear while the earth shook to the tramp of two hundred dancers growling defiance to all the world.

Then, with a shout, the dance ended; Hercules, with a final yell of hatred at the missionary, led the exhausted dancers to the green room; King Jimmy of Nagheer took a kerosene can and a stick, and beat it as solemnly and as proudly in the exercise of the functions of Maestro as if he led a mutually opposed orchestra of incomprehensible Wagner.

The Reverend John Brown stopped him with a word, and, taking a hymn book from his pocket, read the first verse of a hymn, and the women sang it in English, little more broken than that of the missionary. Filamina sidled away

from him, and he followed her. She appeared glad when the hymn ended, and King Jimmy's music on the kerosene tin called her to lead the Hula.

Filamina marshalled her forces as if she were a white stage manager— the middle, aged, and ugly in the "back row; the second row of the Semitic curly-nosed women of Western Papua and a black Jewess also on each corner of the long front row, and in its centre a tireless Binghi girl and Filamina.

King Jimmy rattled his stick on the kerosene can.

"He's as proud as a billygoat on a high rock," said Jack Wagstaff. "Look at the Reverend John Brown now.

The missionary could not take his glance from Filamina, who, with a flower crowned head and wind-blown smock of white, swayed to the dance, as the voices of the girls drowned the music of King Jimmy.

"Seems struck on the ewe lamb in the flock, Jack?"

"Why not? A good match really, both colored; but Filamina prefers Black. Hercules to Brown Missionary..."

Filamina seemed to forget everybody in the dance— John Brown, Hercules, and all men. The moonlight and the fire glare shone on her handsome and intelligent face as she led off the dance of the life of women— the household tasks, the bearing of burdens, while the buck walks easily, carrying a spear before courtship; the unwelcome lover and his repulse, marriage, maternity, the departure of the husband to the battle or the hunt, his return, and the dragging of the canoe up the bleached sand, the little feast of pork and cocoanut, fish, sago and yam under the Nipa thatch. And always the fine harmony of the chanters.

Then Filamina danced forward alone, and performed a new pantomime to Hercules, who sat by King Jimmy and clapped his hands to the lime set by the kerosene tin. Then he seemed suddenly interested in Filamina's new dance, and put his hands to the ground as he leaned forward to her. The Bev. John Brown seemed interested, too; he followed her every action almost anxiously.

"What is she dancing, Jack?"

"I don't know. What do you think, White Eyes?"

"Mine not know," replied the Binghi, who had seemed to know everything.

"I've seen this dance fifty times or more," said Jack Wagstaff. "But it beats me, George; let's watch closely. It's a message to Hercules; we'll tap the wire if we can."

Filamina, with an air of deepest grief, described with her dance an irregular oblong on the ground.

"It's a grave— the grave of somebody she loved."

"Yes; and that's a suggestion that he may not be dead. Now she's describing something hidden away— something held in safety— now, what is it?"

But Filamina's message was finished because she saw that Hercules understood. I looked at the missionary, and he appeared suddenly satisfied as if he understood too.

"What to do now, Jack?"

"Wait for Filamina. She is sitting with the women a little behind Hercules, and a little to the right of the missionary. There's something queer in all this— wait and don't let any of them see that you are waiting."

The old women followed with an emu dance of the continent, prancing in their grass petticoats in the queerly undulatory movements of the emu, who moves with grotesque dignity.

"All this old woman come alonga Poll, Betsy, and Sue," said our self-appointed guide again.

"The islands of the Three Sisters." supplemented Wagstaff. "They have more pluck there than judgment."

They had; the place was too hot for them; the vagrant dog's in the crowd snapped at them; yet they danced on, and Filamina and the Hula girls sat down exhausted, and waited for midnight, to tire them out. But whenever they appeared willing to rest the men squatting in the sand encouraged them with howls and shouts of victory, and the thud of snake-skin drums, and the old women returned to their prancings.

"We've been here five hours," said Wagstaff. "It's midnight, and where are Filamina, and Hercules, and the Reverend John Brown?"

"They've gone very quietly, Jack."

"Yes; but who went first?"

"Filamina. I should say."

"Yes; and what was the order of the other two. I say the Reverend Brown first and Hercules after him—"

"Why?"

"While these dances are actually going— the sexes stay apart. So Hercules is probably stalking the missionary, who is stalking Filamina. We'll ask King Jimmy. Hey, Jimmy. Where Filamina sit down? Where him hut?"

"No fear," replied Jimmy with much dignity. "No fear hut. House like him white man down alonga garden."

He pointed down the beach westerly.

"Come on," said Jack "Wagstaff "We'll go. George, and we'll hurry once we're out of the crowd."

The moon was ahead of us going to her setting. Ten minutes took us out of the crowd and round a big breadfruit tree at the easterly horn of a little crescent bay. Ahead was an empty beach, and as Jack Wagstaff broke into a run I followed him

Suddenly he stopped, as a white shadow started from the sand.

"Filamina!"

"Oh; oh! Capitan— that one bad missionary he come after me— take me along boat."

"Where's the boat?"

"Other end this one bay. Already go sea, then he tie me up— he say me wife alonga him. I hate him plenty. Then I bite him rope; I come look alonga Tauriabiana."

"That's the big fellow in the dance."

"Yes— he good feller."

"Where's the missionary? A nice missionary. I don't think."

"Come along. He intends to come back to you. We'll bring more to the meeting than he wants."

We ran along the beach, came to the boat, and found it with the mast shifted, and the sheet ready to set

"Water ready, and food, too," said Jack Wagstaff. "He intends to take you to sea, Filamina: but why should he leave the prize when he'd got it? Why? Because he wasn't ready. Come on."

We walked along the beach still easterly, and suddenly saw a light in a clump of palms glow, die and glow again.

"My house," said Filamina.

"Quiet now. No Noise. Come to the light."

As we entered the palm grove we made out the form of a small house little better than a hut, but respected as "liken house belong white man," because it has an ugly galvanised iron roof instead of the harmonious native thatch of *nipa*. Looking through the little window, we saw the Rev. John Brown turning over the contents of a camphor wood chest— madly searching for something, and casting the reject on the floor. His missionary alpaca coat usually worn tightly buttoned to the neck had been cast away, and Wagstaff, seeing a livid scar upon his neck, cried: "Raftopulos."

The missionary started as if stung, and dashed out of the light as Wagstaff and I ran to the doorway. I expected him to close the door, but came out like a shot from a gun, over threw me in his own fall, but being more prepared for the struggle than we recovered his feet first, and, eluding us, ran along the beach towards the boat. We followed, running better than he after the first

surprise, and were within fen yards of him when he reached the boat, pushed her off, and threw himself over the stern.

He thought he had escaped, and laughed at us, when suddenly the boat canted to the weight of a gigantic black man. John Brown or Raftopulos stopped jeering to find himself in the clutch of Tauriabiana. In the moon rays, as bright as late afternoon, we saw Tauriabiana shorten his hold on the spear, and stab Raftopulos, and stab again and again. Raftopulos still clung to him, and in his fall dragged the black man overboard. Filamina cried in despair, and changed her cries for laughter as the form of Tauriabiana arose and waded to her through the shallows.

"Where's the big pearl he was searching for, Filamina?" asked Jack Wagstaff.

She was surprised, but too shaken by the events of the night to disobey. She put her hand into the bosom of her smock, and brought out a little leather bag.

"That one plenty money pearl, Capitan. I keep him for Misser Jones."

"My word," said Tauriabiana. "that one no good missionary."

"He wasn't a missionary, he's a Greek trader, named Raftopulos. Black birder, slaver, and pirate. I knew the scar on his neck."

"He no good," said Tauriabiana. "He try catchem Filamina."

"He was after the girl and the pearl."

"How he know that one pearl, Capitan?"

"Because Jones told him. Then he came to the island, saw Filamina, decided to steal both the girl and pearl, and got the boat ready to clear off with both in the confusion of the dance."

"When I give pearl longa Misser Jones? He dead."

"No fear. You see Misser Jones, pretty quick— on my ship."

"The man who escaped from the pearling fleet, Jack?"

"Yes. Bought by them in good faith, and when they found he was no good for work they were glad to get rid of him. I'll bet Raftopulos gave him that clout on the head. Come on, Filamina, and get rid of that pearl. The tide's going out. Raftopulos has gone to sea without a boat. Did you kill him, Tauriabiana?"

"That one altogether finish," replied Tauriabiana complacently. "He no good missionary that one. More better die."

"And now for the Rev. William Jones," said Jack Wagstaff. "I think he'll even provide the ring for you, Filamina."

Filamina flushed with pride. It was a direct promise that she and Tauriabiana should be mission-married "altogether likeit white man."

8: The *Atacan* and a Pair of Boots

Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 15 April 1939

Written many years later… what became of Wagstaff.

THE fog, wet to saturation, dripped upon the flat sea. The ocean surface unruffled; its only movement the slow winding heaves that expressed immensity of depth.

The *Atacan*, bound from Newcastle, New South Wales, with coals for San Francisco, after many years of carrying beyond her strength and seaworthiness, lay sluggishly upon the sea; all the loveliness of a well-found ship gone out of her. The few flares about her decks were the lights of her funeral.

Greed and selfishness had starved her to death. Condemned in Valparaiso, bought for next to nothing; a few barrels of cement put into her bilge to hold her rotting frames together; a donkey engine and pump installed; and so pumped across the Pacific to Sydney. There a perfunctory marine survey was answered by a little more cement and patching; and so to Newcastle for a coal cargo to San Francisco. Continuous pumping at sea had given her landfall—staving off her fate for a little more time for the earning of profits. Pumped as she loaded and pumped to sea again. And now she ended like a street woman, too old for vice; and glad to be in hospital and die in clean cool sheets.

"Pump, you wasters," cried the red little first mate, stripped to the waist and pumping still. "Pump, or drown," he said to the men who had quitted the work.

A black-bearded, pale-faced Finn answered him,

"We finish... What is good of pump? We must drown; why must we drown weary?" The red little mate cursed him; and pumped on.

"There is but one boat that can live," said the Finn, his mental stress showing on his flat face, that suggested a Mongol strain. "And there is 16 men; and 12 will give her only a few inch of free board 1"

A CRY arose from the work weary, water-blown, and despairing men. The ship, hogging the water, suddenly found motion. She turned half round.

"She thinks it is time," cried the Finn. "Turning round in the vasser like a dog, making to lay down. Out with the boat, and back to Sydney Bay."

The weary men had needed a leader; and the Finn supplied the need. Quickly they got the boat into the water, and put food and water in it. It could carry eight men and now must be overloaded with 12.

There was the question: Who are the 12 to go, and the four to remain?

The Finn supplied the answer. He brought a wooden bucket, and spread over it a covering of canvas. With his knife he slashed an opening to admit a hand. "What for marbles?" he asked. "We draw lots."

"Have it your own way," said the mate. "I've got some poker chips. Wait a sbaice." He ran to his cabin under the poop, and returned with a handful of chips, red and black. He counted out 12 red and four black chips; and threw the remainder overboard. The Finn solemnly counted the chips, and dropped them into the bucket.

"I draw first?" he asked.

"No," said the mate. "There are 12 red and four black, and the first draw has an advantage. Let the first draw be by chance."

"He last," said the Finn sourly, indicating Wagstaff. "He has known all of this since we sailed."

Wagstaff said nothing.

"He'll have the same change as everybody," said the mate. "The old man's gone and I'm master.... I'll pick a man to start. You! Chips!"

The carpenter advanced to the bucket. His breathing quickened by the risk, he put in his hand, and drew forth a red chip.

"One," said the Finn. The drawing continued. The Finn was sixth in the lottery, and drew a red. And then a black came, drawn by the mate. He smiled grimly, as if he had anticipated the lot; and stood away from the group as one already separated from the last chance of life. Wagstaff drew— a black chip. He smiled as he joined the mate. That cheerful optimist, said, "I don't go much on that cockle shell, anyhow, and this old bitch is still above water."

The voice of the Finn called on the boat's company to embark. Most responded silently; ashamed that they must leave four men on the derelict, and unable to bring themselves to say, "Good-bye."

The *Atacan* suddenly recommenced her slow turning; made a half revolution, and stopped. It was enough for these of the boat; remembering the accepted significance of the ship in that quiet water moving around like a full-fed dog making ready to lay him down. A flare was lighted in the boat, and made the fog visible. The yellow wet curtain of it thickened.

"Cast off!" cried the Finn. "Pull your hardest."

The boat shot out from the ship; and the fog hid it. For a minute or so the four on the wreck heard mingled cries of direction and farewell.

"On that course, Jan." "Goodbye, lads...." and from one sailor, "See you in George Street, boys!"

The *Atacan* moved a little, as if swinging on a pivot at the centre of her keel. Silence! — and darkness.

JACK WAGSTAFF, two months before he sailed on the *Atacan*, escorted his girl from Ultimo, on the electric tram, through the city to Miller's Point.

The tall ships lay hidden behind the two and three-storied houses, built when Miller's Point and The Rocks were the homes of wealthy colonists.

The little woman of thirty, respectable with the uncompromising respectability of decent people thrown back on their own society by enforced living in mean streets, was the question which had made the answer.

Wagstaff had met her two years ago; and had changed his ways. He had worked and roared round about the seas; until he met little Miss Fordyce. Every year of her twenty-eight had been disciplined— first by her mother and then by herself. The little music teacher's poise and control impressed Wagstaff at their first meeting; the more because he had never tried to control himself.

"A lady," said big Jack Wagstaff to himself; and was afraid.

At last he "asked" her; and she, being very fluttered at the idea of anybody wanting her, wept a few tears of gratitude, and thanked him. Then he confessed— that he had been a "bad man." It made them very happy; she the salvor, and he the salvage who could lift the salvor in one hand.

In this way, after many partings and reunions at the call of the sea, bound by love and the determination to honor all the promises he had made to it, their course of action was quickly decided. He must go to Newcastle, and sell the little suburban house he had.

JACK WAGSTAFF boarded the night boat for Newcastle and arrived at the Hunter River port at dawn. A local betterment of value gave him four hundred pounds for the little property, he had bought for three hundred, paying by instalments over years, as to a savings bank. He was rich at last. Two hundred pounds in cash and a mortgage for two hundred; and the little woman who had brought him all the luck.

He booked his berth on the night boat for Sydney and telegraphed her of his return next day. He left the mortgage-deed in his baggage, but he carried the money with him in notes. At ten o'clock that night, he entered the dark street leading to the wharf. At midnight, he came to himself; and slowly thought his way back to full consciousness of the tragedy.

At the back of his head, where the blackjack had struck him, there was much soreness. His suitcase was in the water channel; his pockets were torn out; the two hundred pounds that had represented the new life for them was gone.

Now he had nothing but a mortgage-deed. So, back to the old habit of seamen; which, in Newcastle, was Charlie Lane's boarding house for sailors.

Jack Wagstaff posted to Miss Fordyce the mortgage-deed, already assigned to her. And then he faced the inevitable— which was the sea. Without money, there could be no marriage; no happy breathing-time provided while he looked for a shore-job. There must be an advance to pay for his food and lodging at Charlie Lane's. Without the certainty of it, he felt that he should not eat while waiting.

The friendly Charlie Lane told him not to worry; and Jack Wagstaff replied, "But it always hurts me to be in debt. And this time I promised I'd never go into debt any more."

"Then I'll pick you a ship, Bos'n."

"Don't pick it, Charlie. I'll take the first that comes."

Thus Jack Wagstaff shipped on the *Atacan*. He was received by a red little energetic first officer; a kindly soul, disguising his kindliness in the gross language that once was deemed necessary by mates and bullock drivers, for the direction of effort.

"Ship on the *Atacan*, without a crimp? Come aboard the *Atacan* sober? D'ye want to commit suicide?" asked the mate.

Jack Wagstaff replied that he was broke, and had to ship quickly.

THE seamen's agent brought a sick and sorry crew aboard. As the tug took the *Atacan* In tow, she groaned from her overfull belly, as if she were an old man with the colic.

And then the weather changed; so that the fatalists found something to alarm. The sun set in a dingy smoke, glowing like an ill-snuffed candle; and then came calm, followed by haze next morning. The haze seemed to call up a long underswell, as it flattened the surface; and on that first suggestion of strain the tortured ship began to talk.

To every new fear, the thin razor-nosed captain answered: "Keep her so, Mister. She'll do very well as she is." And then a gale that was nothing to a well found ship found the *Atacan* not so. She plunged her broadsides to the seas; and seemed to open every joint and pore in the plunging.

While so wallowing her failing bulk, and rolling so that her spars looked at the sea, her main mast— that had been talking of its aches and pains to the frames, like two old women comparing their ailments— broke off a few feet above the deck and killed the quiet old master in its fall. They were too busy clearing the hull of wreckage, that until it was done, and the ship righted herself a little, they had no time to talk of the master's death.

They hastily sewed him in canvas, and gave him to the sea; and the big Finn spoke his epitaph with fist upraised.

"He knew his goffin ship. He knew— dam him."

The mate stopped him; driving them all to work with boot and fist. They worked at intervals all day, until the fog thickened and took the courage out of them. And then the drawing of lots; the departure of the boat; the waiting in the fog by men weary of all things and craving only sleep. Thus on the sinking derelict they dozed, and cared for nothing.

THE boat had disappeared in the fog. The *Atacan* was steady. Wagstaff, looking over the side, saw in the uncertain light of the flare the black water floating up to him.

"Is she settling, Bos'n?" asked the mate.

"Looks to me like it — the light's bad."

"We'll make a mark."

They did so, lowering a rope's end until it touched the flat sea. "Looks like finish, Bos'n— but it might not be. If her coals go, she'd float like a raft. You might meet her years hence, with a good ship on a dark night. And that s all she'll ever be at her best; a dirty derelict sinking a well-found ship."

"If the bottom holds the coal, she'll sink then?"

"Most likely. If she were loaded with Baltic deal, we could float twice round the world with her, and never have our feet out of the water... Anyhow, we'll have some chow."

It was preceded by a good serving of rum, and again rum; and the spirit heartened them above their condition. They carried plates, and food and gear to the deck; and, without saying it, agreed on that part of the deck nearest to the breach in the rail. Unconsciously they felt that, if they were to die, death must find them in the open.

"Hell," said the mate, between mouthfuls of pork. "What's a man want to go to sea for? First three years at sea I was always hungry— even in my sleep. What started you, Sims?"

The smaller of the two seamen replied:

"Me old man ropes-ended me, Sir."

"And you, Thomas?"

"Fair's fair," replied the other seaman— "and it's no good tellin' lies now. I pinched a bag, and it was gaol or the pier-head jump. That was me first ship; and I got the 'abit first v'yage."

"You can pay your bills with a pier head jump; but you cannot baulk your fate, Jack. What does it matter?"

"Not much," said the man who had run away because his father ropes-ended him, "but I'd like to see my missus again."

"Me, too," said the mate; "and a fine kid I got. You married, Bos'n?"

"Not yet," replied Jack Wagstaff. "But there's a girl in Sydney."

"And did she send you on here to square your yards?"

"No," said Wagstaff— "and yes— a little. I was always honest and she made my honesty stronger."

"Was that right that the Finn said? You knew she was a coffin-ship and wouldn't slay ashore because you couldn't pay back the advance note. Was that it?"

"Something near that."

"How much? Ten, wasn't it?"

"Four pounds, and a pair of boots."

WHILE Wagstaff talked, the mate had hauled up the rope's end. He now showed its five inches dripping salt water.

"Allow two inches for the dip, Bos'n," he said calmly, although with a queer little catch in his voice.

"She could float a year like this," said the man who had run away from the police.

"Maybe," said the mate. "Maybe not"

The fog was impenetrable around them. Wagstaff thought of little Miss Fordyce, who now must return to her old loneliness. He had but a passing curse for the thief who had destroyed their promised paradise, and felt that he had wasted lime in thinking of him.

He bent his mind to remembering little Miss Fordyce. Their walks together; the tram journeys to Miller's Point, and the tall ships showing a masthead here and there over the houses; the Pacific thundering on Coogee beach; the night ferries to Mosman and Manly and Kirribilli passing back and forth in shuttles of light; the girl and himself, once real, and now only part of the land of Once Upon a Time. Unwittingly he spoke aloud—

"It's very pretty on the Mosman boat."

"It isn't pretty on this hooker, Bos'n. The cargo's falling out of her lap."

A wind arose, and tore the curtain of the fog. They saw a glimmering of stars. Motion returned to the *Atacan*. She made that movement the Finn had likened to a full-fed dog making ready to lay him down. At the end of that first slow revolution the deck was almost level with the sea. The water lipped the wreck and ran into the scuppers. A deadly weariness came over them. They looked at the dark gleam of water, as if it rested their tired eyes.

"Hauled to blocks, Bos'n," said the mate. "Good-bye, boys! Good bye, Bos'n. You're all of a man."

The *Atacan* turned half round again, and the weight of the ocean invaded her. Silence and empty sea.

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8: A Samaritan of the Riverine

Adventure Feb 1911

IN THE wild, burning sheep-walk of Central-Eastern Australia, watered by the mighty Darling and sundry smaller and deceitful streams; where the Winter is a flood; where the Summer is a furnace, and the sun and the baked dust and the parched gums are of a uniform dull red; and where the early Spring is as delicate as its sister seasons are fierce, the Samaritan of the Riverine lived in the body. And there he lives in the memory even unto this day.

But the people of the rivers did not generally know him as the Samaritan, nor do they. His real name was Stephen Been. The wags styled him "The Has Been."

He was over seventy years of age, erect as a gum-bole, strong almost as a man thirty years his junior, and, withal, gentle as a child, for his feet were very near the grave; and already there were whisperingly chanted in his ears the forewords of the wonderful song that all men shall one day, dying, hear, and that the new-born have not yet forgotten.

The world had dealt with him more cruelly than it does with its beasts, for he was merely a man, and a dull one, which is an animal of no fixed commercial value. This simple soul had been intended to pass through the furnace of the world unsullied. Here was a child's heart in a man's body, and everything had seemed to combine to degrade the mind of the man to the level of the beast.

When Stephen Been was arrested in a suburb of London, long ago when the last century was young, he might have been described on the charge-list thus: "A clod, eighteen years old." At any rate the law recognized that he was a clod, and immediately set about breaking him in twain as a preliminary to fertilizing the barren soil of his mind.

The poor, shivering, frightened animal had stolen half a sheep, value five shillings, and the law sentenced him to seven years' penal servitude to square the accounts. "Debit, one-half sheep, five shillings. Received payment, with thanks, seven years' transportation."

If the law had made out the account in a businesslike manner, that is the way it would have read.

So the Clod, with a number of other clods, and a fair sprinkling of genuine criminals, was embarked for Botany Bay to serve his sentence.

Botany Bay was not the Clod's destination, by the way. Port Jackson was the particular hell he was bound for, but the knowledge of Australian geography held by English state officials at that time was limited.

If that voyage did not make of the Clod a fiend, it was not his fault. The genuine criminals just referred to were bad enough; the marines and the crew were worse. An earlier voyage of this very ship had lasted nearly two years, for the transport had taken out a cargo of female convicts on that occasion. And now it had been entrusted with the conveyance of mostly first offenders, whose chief crimes had been poverty and hunger, and whom the state alleged it intended to reform. And the state's methods of reformation were the lash, the chain, the tube-gag, the collar, the scaffold; in a word, its instrument was the executioner, its example was blood.

That orgie was forty years old and strengthened by its experiences when Stephen Been landed at Sydney Cove. Being stupid, he was very quiet, and his jailers, mistaking his stupidity for stubbornness, brought him up for punishment on the paltriest of excuses.

"They would flog the mule out of him," said they, and instead they flogged a devil in. So he became an animal, and as he passed from the lower vegetable state he had been born in, to the higher life of the carnivora, he was made what the system called "a dangerous felon." He attempted to escape. Seven years were added to his first sentence— his floggings were more frequent; then Hobart Town and Maria Island, the aggravated hells of convictdom followed. Just before his additional sentence had expired, a member of the Clod's gang— a hybrid creature, half convict, half convict's jailer, proposed that the gang should escape in a body. The gang acted on his suggestion and attempted to break jail. Mr. Hybrid sold them to the commandant of the station, and all of them were captured.

More floggings, more jail, for the animal clod. The law limited the term of imprisonment then passed on him, but it did not specify the number of lashes he was to receive. The commandant could attend to that trivial question, and to do him the justice due to a zealous Government official, the commandant did.

The informer was at that time about twenty-four years of age. He had yet to serve five years of his sentence for forgery, but the Crown granted him a free pardon as the reward of his treachery, and he left Tasmania for the mainland.

Stephen Been returned to his cell in Hobart Jail and received the first of his new series of floggings. He did not feel the strokes; he was repeating to himself— as if he could forget it— the oath he had sworn to kill the informer. He did not flinch from the flogger, for he thought of his revenge, and revenge is the kindest liniment for wrong. So at last the most meritorious convict system had made the inoffensive Clod first an animal, now a devil. In '52 he was discharged from Hobart Jail after serving twenty-four years in a hell that

could have been made only by man. Twenty-four years of a life that might have been made a source of good to the living, thrown away in expiation of an alleged crime that had long been dead!

THE name of the hybrid Informer was Abel Shaw. He went to Australia, as stated, and when gold was discovered at Bendigo he went to the field, and was allowed to mine, for he held a free pardon. His claim was one of the lucky holes— the informer's fortune was assured from the hour.

In '54 Stephen Been also reached Bendigo and stepped into a new world. His intention was to raise himself into a respectability he had never known in the days of his innocence, and to do this only money was necessary; for the one-time Clod saw now that respectability is merely accumulated money in its most portable form. He had never borne the appearance of a typical criminal, and as the police inspection was lax, owing to the smallness of the force, he was allowed to secure a claim unquestioned.

In three days he had bottomed. With what trembling eagerness he washed his first pan of dirt ! The result of his labor with the pick and the shovel and the cradle and the dish meant more than gold to him. Good — they meant peace; bad — they were the prophets of a return to the old life. But the results were good. The Clod-animal poured the water from the dish very carefully, and saw seven water-worn pebbles, which he took up on the point of his clasp-knife, and felt anxiously with his tongue. Then he began to tremble and to flush hot and cold, and at last the tears came.

He had found gold. More, he had found hope. For over a fortnight he won at the rate of upwards of three ounces a day. Fortune, as if to atone for his twenty-four years in perdition, courted him and gave him gold. The ring of the pick was gold. The sweat of his brow, which had been agony at Maria Island, was wealth at old Bendigo.

And then the determination to kill the informer came back to him and blotted out all his visions of happiness. He had been planning what he would do with the money. Of course he would go back to his own little village in Devonshire, provided, of course, that he could escape the vigilance of the police. And when he reached England he would play the banker to his family and all of his old friends.

His people should never toil again. Happiness should be theirs for the rest of their days, and all the old daddies who had mumbled their kind-hearted commonplaces over him as a boy— worn old figures whose joints had been curved and gnarled by the bitterness of their unproductive labor, clods who had wrought to make the master rich— the master whose clay they were— should have their pipes alight and their glasses filled for ever and ever.

So the poor heart that wanted to buy love at any price, or to steal it if need be, builded his castles and day-dreamed between the pick-strokes. All the people he intended to benefit were long since dead and freed at last from the dread of starvation which had accompanied them as a shadow through all their cheerless, songless lives. But Stephen did not consider that death might have spoiled his plans. He had suffered so much and yet had lived, and he thought it must be terribly difficult to die. And so he planned lovingly for the few people who had given him a kind word or look in the days of his cloddishness— planned to requite them as their misery deserved— not with the measure of man, but with the measure of love, brimful and running over.

But a product of the old, half-forgotten hell, Shaw, the Informer, to wit, stepped in and blasted all these unselfish intentions.

Stephen Been met his enemy in a busy street, or rather track, of the camp some months after he began to win a fortune. The Samaritan-to-be forgot all his dreams of benevolence to the dwellers in the little English village he had left so long ago. Within the space of a thought he sprang at the informer, closed with him, and bore him to the ground, and there deliberately began to strangle him. A trooper, probably for the first time in the history of the world, was at hand, and he promptly struck Stephen Been with the blunt edge of his sword, and towed him to the large hut, with many intermissions in the slabs thereof, which served as a jail. Final result— the Informer was regarded as a martyr who had clone his duty to society and had been undeservedly punshed therefor; and Been was once again sentenced— to two years' imprisonment.

A few months after his sentence had expired he fell in with his enemy again, this time at Wood's Point. A little more gold-winning, another assault, another sentence, this time for five years. And when that sentence had expired he found himself with only a few pounds as capital— his gold had been deposited with a man who was shortly after detected robbing a sluice-box, and all the metal in the possession of the thief was handed to the robbed company as being their property.

Said Stephen Been, as he left Beechworth Jail in '62 and shook his impotent hand at its heavy blue-stone walls: "I'll kill the dog next time— I'll kill you if I live long enough!"

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BUT he did not stay long in the country of gold. The metal meant men, and the presence of men meant police and the law. Even to find his enemy and wreak a just vengeance on him was not inducement to brave these terrors; he saw that only in comparative solitude could he find peace. Wherefore he

shouldered his swag and stepped bravely north— an indescribably pathetic old man of fifty-five.

The System had done one good turn for him. Truly the torture of its rigorous discipline had brought the sorrow that whitens the hair and furrows the face. It had made his heart old before his heart had known youth, but it had also developed in him wonderful physical endurance— it had deadened his body to pain, made it indifferent to hunger; converted him into a perpetually adaptable creature to all, however rapidly changing, conditions of existence.

And as he trudged along the rough track his heart began to beat with youth as it had never beaten before. He had never felt love, except that dull half-awakening to human sympathy in old Bendigo in '54, and now the million scents and voices of the eternally beautiful bush told him that such pure attractions as it could offer were the especial property of such as he.

"Ting-a-ling," said the bell-bird, and the swag was heavy no more. "Tweet Tweet," said the minah, and the jail and the Informer were forgotten.

North, farther north, through the giant granite ranges, through the valleys of the Murray, and into the plains of the West he traveled, flying from man always, going deeper into the heart of the great wild whose message of peace had been breathed to him three hundred miles nearer the sea.

At the stations in his track he never asked for the usual ration of flour and mutton; he demanded it and paid for it, and then tramped to his lonely camp, a mile removed from even the horse-paddock. This sullen reserve lasted long after the Murrumbidgee had become a daily sight to him, and the speed of the current heralding its junction with the mighty Murray showed longer and stronger in the eddies at the bends. There, venturing near to a homestead unusually early in the day, a horseman rode up to him and inquired if he wanted work.

"Yes, sir," said Stephen Been, humbly pulling at his hat, as if he were still a number and not a man.

"I want a man to load wool and to take charge of a barge to Echuca."

Of course Stephen Been accepted, and a new era began for him. He fulfilled his contract satisfactorily and made many trips on the river, which he began to love as he loved children and all things that were young and were not men. He could not read, and yet he was the best freight clerk the rivers ever had.

"Two tons of wire for Burrabogie," said the carrier at Echuca, "and a case of whisky for Mungadal," and so on; and Stephen Been could have told you all his freight before he was out of port a day. He used to run over the names of the stations on the river just for the pleasure of feeling his importance as a freight

clerk. You might find him a dozen times a day chanting the euphony of the station nomenclature thus: "Groongal, Pevensey, Mungadal, Eli Elwah, Burrabogie, Illillawa, Albemarle, Terrywalka, Ulonga," to infinity.

And then it was a new life. His importance as steersman of the barge, the quiet, green, leaf-tinted water, the sobbing of the engine of the towing steamer as it breasted the current— all had the charm of novelty; and the appreciation of newness which is surely God's best gift to the adventurous man with a soul.

By-and-by he became a property-holder. The "boss" liked the strong old man who could work without a word; who never used the usual language of the river and the shearing-shed— (the boss could curse fluently, by the way, and the "super" was exceedingly profane and blastiferous), and who could be trusted alone with a barge-load in a " strange " port, because he never drank. So one day, being present at the sale of a river navigating company's fleet, the boss, having previously sounded his bargeman on the subject, purchased the *Tilpa*, a sidewheel steamer, ordinarily used for trading purposes, and her attendant giant, the *Bunyip* barge. Then he arranged instalment terms with the ex-convict, and Been entered on his new line of ship owning.

On the strength of being a shipowner, he secured long credit with several firms for the supply of miscellaneous stores, and started from Echuca one Summer night with steamer and barge laden almost hull-down with everything that the inhabitants of the West might require— sheep shears and moleskins, fencing-wire and onions, boots, saddles and tobacco— a floating store.

It was a happy life from the beginning. He managed to pay for the barge; he opened a bank-account; he was respected; men called him "Captain Been"; he had never to leave the beloved rivers. Most of his dealings with the stations lying on the three thousand miles of water were on the credit system, and here his absolute dearth of education told much against him. However, his faultless memory and a unique method of bookkeeping invented by himself and consisting chiefly of sundry knife-cuts on the starboard paddle-box enabled him to collect at least seventy-five per cent, of his money. That and one hundred per cent, profit considered left him very much on the right side of the ledger. He would sell his stock at the head of the Darling, and then load with wool for Echuca, to return with stores on the next fresh.

The life drew from him all sourness. He became the Samaritan of the Rivers. The *Tilpa*, up or down trip, continually carried men who wanted to work their passage and who evidently translated that phrase as meaning the consumption of as much tucker as the cook could prepare. And be the end of their stage at Brewarrina or Bourke or Tilpa or Louth or Wilcannia or Menindie,

they left with half a pint of whisky in their stomachs and a shilling or two in their pockets and some tobacco and rations in their swags.

Did not Bathurst, the educated loafer of the rivers, get three pounds of Captain Been by telling a story of an asthmatic mother, and did he not a year afterwards tell me that Been was the Samaritan of the Riverine, and wherefore is not this history written?

The loafers who sponged on him loved this simple old man who knew of nothing but the rivers and would talk of them for hours.

"You know that bend near 'Crismus Island'?" he would say, "There's two of the cunningest water-hens you ever see— I believe they know the *Tilpa* now. Why they've been there this five years, an' whenever we passes there they flies around to the stern's much as to say, 'Let's see if it's the dear old *Tilpa*, or that puffing Billy, the *Saddler*, what's always firin' rifles at us. I believe they can read the name of my boat, too."

And then he would repeat that only boast of his to the effect that he could take the *Tilpa*, what was drawing four-feet-seven, over a four-foot-six bar; and he could steer her from Dunlop to Albemarle blindfold— yes! he could! Oh, ye might stare, and yer might say no, but he could. If it comes to that, he'd give you a passage an' prove he could do it blindfold— there!

His friends loved him, and he knew no enemy. There was in his nature a stubborn good, which even the great penal system had been unable to destroy. From Fort Bourke to the Campaspe he was known and he was honored, and yet most men knew his history.

His moments of sadness were few. He felt fiercely revengeful when he thought of the Informer, but the memory of his wrong was beginning to fade in his prosperity. Only when he saw children playing he realized what he had lost and their voices were as the touch of a hand on his old loveless heart. If he could have stolen one of those curly-haired babies at Culpaulin or Dunlop I believe he would have done it. But '78 brought him the love he craved for.

NEAR Easter Island the *Tilpa* stopped i n the early moonlight to "wood up," and the gentlemen of the river who worked their passages wrestled languidly with the ax on the rottenest and therefore the most easily cut and the worst fuel they could find.

In the center of a space embayed in the shore by the island, a solitary traveler's fire gleamed fitfully. The traveler was extremely disgusted with his situation; he had been intended by nature to be the most gregarious of men, and circumstances had made him an Ishmael on the track. This was his second night away from home, and the prospect of the road, which had seemed to

him free and independent and glamoured with the romance of the bush, was now very, very dreary.

Therefore when he saw the *Tilpa* moored to the bank and all hands, from captain to cook, cutting wood for the engine, he walked over to the workers, wishing to lend a hand and too proud to risk a snub. So he stood by while they worked, and would very probably not have spoken to them but for the fact that he saw a tall, spare, magnificent old man bowing under the weight of a dead branch.

"I'll take that, daddy," he said.

"Daddy?"

Stephen Been staggered with amazement, and the weight fell on the traveler's shoulders.

WHEN the work was finished the Captain almost forced the young man to accompany him to the little saloon, where they drank a tot of whisky each. He questioned the young fellow in a kindly, inquisitive manner, which proved his interest and, little by little, he found that the traveler's name was George Garth, that he had quarreled with his father, whom he said he did not like, and there was an end to the matter. He had set out from Louth two days before to walk until he met something to do.

And then the Captain insisted on Garth 's remaining aboard, and he sent one of the gentlemen who were "working their passage" for the swag by the new chum's fire. Then he installed his friend in the best berth on the wheel-deck, and saw Garth, worn out with his unusual tramp, fall asleep as the Tilpa steamed down the moonlit river.

That word "Daddy" from such a man had given Stephen Been the son of his loveless dreams and won the Samaritan forever.

Next day Garth asked to be given something to do, and the old man, who had very hazy ideas on the subjest, suggested that he ought to take stock. And Garth did so, and placed the *Tilpa*'s financial condition in such a light that the Samaritan thought his knife-notch style of bookkeeping might not be absolutely perfect after all.

He broached the subject to the mate in the wheelhouse that evening. "Seems to me, Jim," said he, "that the young man might's well stay on an' look after the bills— be a what's-it?"

"Supercargo," said the mate shortly.

"Yes, that's it," assented Stephen Been. "Won't do makin' any more 'oles in the paddle-box."

"That's a fact. If you chop it much more there'll be no starb'd sponson at all. Bimeby you'll have a ship made of holes."

AND so George Garth became supercargo, and the trade with the young women at the stations increased amazingly, and the old man found the young one more valuable than he had dreamed, and loved him more dearly with the birth of each successive day.

The affection was mutual. The old man was lovable, and then they had so much in common; both loved the river— that was everything. And Been showed the supercargo the wonderful water-hens in the bend near Christmas Island, and told numberless stories of driving the steamer full speed ahead when the river was dangerously low because the banks were streets of fire, and of shooting the punt rope at Wilcannia when the stream was in flood— he sang, in his rough vocabulary, the epic of the river men. And when they passed a tortoise paddling and spluttering in an insanity of fear of the smoking bulk of the steamer, Been would remark that the terrapin was very like an old jew lizard he had known at Fort Bourke in '74 and " that there jew lizard— he was a terror for santypedes an' such like, an' he once et half a pound o' shin o' beef at a sittin', he did."

For his part, Garth was in paradise. The preliminary work of setting affairs in order being ended, he had nothing to do while the boat was between stopping places, and so he roamed over the steamer at his will, now in the wheelhouse, now on a sponson, then in the bows. With the first streak of the day the steamer's whistle ran along the river reaches, and as she steamed away the nude figure of the supercargo appeared on a paddle-box— he dropped a bucket into the foaming wheel-wash, drew it up, and drenched himself with the contents. And after that, by the time he was dressed, the steamer woke the life of the river before the sun had touched it, and the mallards started for the day's flight, for they were unreasoning creatures and flew on a straight line ahead of the steamer, too foolish to think of getting out of the way. And the ghostly cockatoos fled daily before the *Tilpa* westward, when the Summer was waning, for they intended to Winter in the Murray.

At eight o'clock the bell sounded breakfast, and Garth joined the Captain and his mate in the saloon, which was about the size of a fairly large packing-case, and after that, smoke-ho, and a revel in the careless knowledge that the next homestead would not be sighted till the afternoon. It is a fine life, this innocent exis.ence of the rivers; it is a paradise for whoever has a soul, and souls were owned by Been, the Captain, and his supercargo, Garth.

BUT discord came to the paradise. One day in June of '79, when the river was lowest and the Tilpa and her laden barge passed Dunlop on the last upward trip for the season, the super of the station hailed the steamer and

came aboard. He wanted only a few trifling things, he said, but he delayed the Tilpa half an hour, and in his desultory conversation with the Captain told him that Coruna, the next station eastward, had changed hands. The new owner, he remarked, was Mr. Garth, a J. P., and no end of a swell.

The Captain retailed the news to the supercargo later on, and was amazed at the confusion of the young man.

"You ought to know all about it, I suppose, dad," said Garth at last. "This Mr. Garth is my father, and we've never agreed— that's why I left him, that's why I don't want to see him again till I'm independent."

These remarks, of course, resulted only in making Been all the more curious, and by judicious pumping he learned all the facts. Garth Senior was very unscrupulous. He had done shady things in stock deals and mining transactions. Garth Junior objected, and the old man had told him to clear out with his honesty and not come back again unless his honesty brought him enough to live on. And therefore Garth Junior had cleared. "You're a white man," commented Been, when the young fellow had concluded. "We'll let him see that honesty does pay— I 'aven 't much longer to live, and the craft's yours when I go. No, no talk now— I've said it, and I wouldn't go back on my word for no man."

They stopped at Coruna to canvass the new owner before some other trading rivertramp secured the business. Captain Been, now quite an experienced diplomat in his way, sent a message by the mate requesting Mr. Garth, J. P., to honor the steamer with his presence, and five minutes after a whitehaired old gentleman stepped on the *Tilpa*'s deck. He was Mr. Garth. He started violently as the supercargo came forward saying, "How are you, father?"

He did not start when the supercargo introduced him to Captain Been; he merely said, "Glad to meet you, Captain. I hope we shall be able to do business together."

But Stephen Been, as he took his customer's proffered hand, felt sick with long-thwarted revenge, for Mr. John Garth, J. P., and the Informer of the old Maria Island were one man.

iii

THE shock to the Samaritan had been very great. There, in the new life of fairness and clean hands and free goings out and untrammeled comings in, the corpse of the convict-time had come to resurrection. For several hours following the departure of the Informer, who had left the Tilpa without any idea of her Captain's identity, he sat in the little cabin next the wheelhouse

with his arms folded and his head fallen on his breast. The supercargo looked in once or twice to ask where the steamer was to tie up, and was told to "steam easy till I tell you." The dusk crept over the river, and the great sponson and bow lamps were lighted, and the cook rang the bell for supper, but the Captain still sat in the cabin on the wheel-deck arid told his friendly querists that he was 'all right— never better— leave him alone.'

He sat there and thought until he was almost mad. At nine o'clock the mate went to him and insisted on being heard. 'The night was very dark, the river was dangerously low, the stream was sown with snags; hadn't they better tie up?'

Stephen Been aroused himself by great effort; rose and went into the wheelhouse. There he went over the rough chart— which was rolled up in a great box and was almost as long as the river itself— and told them to tie up in the next bend. His voice, hollow as the voice of the dying, made mate and supercargo look at him surprisedly. They saw that the face was not the face of the Samaritan. Always clean-shaven, it had resumed the expression of the hunted convict at bay; its lines had hardened, the lips seemed to have become thin and sneering and cruel; the eyes were shot with yellow gleams of revengeful madness; the mouth was half open in a horribly hungry fashion; the eye-teeth, standing conspicuously in the bare and livid gums, were like the fangs of the wild dog.

"You are ill, dad," said the supercargo pityingly.

"No, I'm not," answered Been. "I lifted a big weight to-day, an' I've strained my back."

The mate suggested a sweating bath in a wet sheet, but Stephen Been refused all the remedies of the river, and, without waiting to see the beloved *Tilpa* snug for the night, turned in.

In the darkness there came to him strange old shapes he hoped he had forgotten— the ghosts of the gang who attempted the escape for which Abel Shaw had sold them to the commandant. There came the ghost of young Hitchins— the boy who had in the frenzy of recapture killed the constable who had attempted his arrest, the boy who had, in the awful desperation of his gallows-death, uttered blasphemies that made even the executioner shudder. There came the shape of Peter Wells who died on the triangles during his punishment as ringleader of the escape; there came to him others— sad shapes saying hesitatingly that the time for justice had arrived; noisy, blasphemous shapes, calling on him in the name of his manhood and of his oath to avenge their stripes and the greatness of their old-time misery. Some were cold and half apathetic, some despairing, some hot with the white heat

of long-nursed wrong. But all of them commanded him to do the one deed— to slay their common enemy.

And as if they had been so many men and he were indeed their captain, too, he had told them that justice should be done, and had waved them aside as if they interfered with his thoughts. Then the shapes left him to decide on the manner of Garth's death.

All sorts of schemes, mostly impracticable, suggested themselves to him. He would decoy the informer into the dry wastes in the backblocks of the river, kill his horse, and leave him to die of thirst; he would invite him aboard the steamer and leap into the river with him; he would lock him in the cabin and shoot him. These and a hundred other plans worked in his brain.

He rose early the next morning, still undecided on the manner of Garth's death— still determined to exact full payment of the revenge owing him. However, for that week at least he could do nothing. He must mature his scheme.

The *Tilpa* resumed her journey up-stream with her Captain in the same undecided frame of mind. Three days after they had reached Brewarrina the river fell alarmingly, and the *Tilpa* was forced to remain tied up at the wharf until the next fresh. During this period of enforced idleness the Captain came to a conclusion as to the way the death sentence passed by the ghosts of the murdered on the Informer should be carried out. The accepted plan was grotesquely horrible— the jury of dead felons by their foreman, Stephen Been, had both found the verdict and imposed the expiation. Garth, the owner of Coruna, was sentenced to be dressed in the old Canary costume, then to be tied up and flogged to death. The labor of decoying and binding him was easy to the Samaritan's diplomacy, and the Samaritan's strength and revenge would make his arm tireless of the scourge until the end. A fine revenge, truly. The Samaritan felt almost happy as he thought over it.

THE fresh did not arrive until August, and then it was small, and carried them only a score of miles west of Louth. The mate and supercargo worried and fretted under the delay. They cursed the river, which was not much more than a chain of pools. They stamped the deck, because September was very close at hand. Ere this they should have been half way back from Echuca, ready to sell out the store to the shearers and to get the earliest bales of the clip, and beat the hated *Saddler* and the *Warrego* on the down-stream journey.

Stephen Been smiled calmly at the delay. There was plenty of time, he said; he did not care if the barge went down-stream empty— let the *Saddler* have the wool— what did he care? A few homestead lessees,— men with a paltry ten thousand sheep or so— had cut out early, and the clip of these small men

came to the *Tilpa* and filled the barge fairly well, and this fact served to cheer the supercargo and the mate. They would not be able to trade very much, because the store was almost empty, but they could get wool-loading in early, so that they would be ready to race to the market on the rise when it did come. But they felt uneasy for all that, simply because all the life of the stream seemed uneasy also.

The rats began to leave the river and scurry up the banks and on to the plains; every day saw an exodus of rabbits. And then there came that leaden hush of everything which precedes any unusual occurrence in nature. The river did not seem to ripple as it struck the floats of the *Tilpa*'s wheels; and the ducks flew away from their natural home; the screaming cockatoos screamed no more and flew south instead of west as usual; the gum leaves murmured not; the air was heavy with suppressed fear— even the birds of the month, the parakeets, which were merely animated shrieks in a dress of emerald and crimson flying athwart the gold of the sun, were strangely mute; the whole earth seemed to hold its breath so that it might not sigh the apprehension which filled it.

And Stephen Been, noting these signs, stretched a wire cable from the towing-frame of the *Tilpa* to the great eucalypt growing in the billabong inside the southern bank, and the engine, rusted by its long rest, drove the steamer to an opening in the tree-fringe just abeam of the anchoring gum. They prepared, in short, with the impudent daring of man, for a standing fight with an inundation.

They saw no man belonging to the land; they were as much alone as if the river had been a trackless sea. No news of the flood had come to them; they blamed Bourke for not having sent warnings. But Bourke itself was wrestling despairingly with the water giant. The founders of the town have built it in the shorter parallel of a horseshoe bend, just where the river can do its greatest, most destructive work. While the people of the *Tilpa* grew sick with anxiety, Bourke was up to its arm-pits in water— Bourke was disheveled and drunken with the flood.

It came to the *Tilpa* in a wall of water and wreckage— a wall of water that broke and reformed and fell upon itself with the sound of thunder; a wall that tore patriarchal trees from their roots and hurled them along like matches; a wall that hissed like a great serpent, and gathered and crushed the face of the world in its constricting folds. It came with the battering-rams of trees, of wreckage covered with snakes and other creeping things huddled together like friends, their venom sapped by fear.

As the *Tilpa* and her barge rose with the flood the crew hauled on the cable and started the engines, and so by-and-by drew the steamer and her charge up to the tree, which the mate said would stand forty floods.

But at three o'clock the next morning, when the rain was falling in sheets, the mate recanted. The fastening of the cable disappeared; the water crept into the limbs of the tree and shook it till it groaned. And still they held on.

In mid-current the water was black with timber and living trees; rafts of debris carrying hopeless animals— opossums swooning with fear, bears wailing like little children lost in the streets of a great city.

At four o'clock they heard a steamer's whistle shrieking above the roar of the water, and a few minutes later a wool-laden barge shot past them. Then followed a steamer, her red lights tinging the water as with blood, her stack vomiting sparks. The men on the *Tilpa* could see that one wheel had been carried away by the battering of wreckage; very probably the rudder had gone also and she was attempting to steer out of the current with the remaining wheel. It was the *Warrego*; she had ridden from Louth on the face of the flood.

The *Warrego* disappeared. Then came more wreckage; the flood drew back for an effort, advanced again, and passed triumphant, carrying with it the *Tilpa*'s barge and £3,000 worth of the season's clip.

Just after daylight the savior eucalypt was torn from the soil. Stephen Been sprang to the towing-frame and cut the cable with two lightning strokes of the axe, and the *Tilpa* went full speed ahead, steering south on to the plain which was now a sea. Any one of these logs that came down with the current like stones from a sling would sink the steamer in an instant, and they tried to make for the dead water. But it took time to leave the current; its force was so great that the helm answered spasmodically, and between the spasms the engine drove the steamer down the stream with a frightful velocity. They were not caught by the dreaded wreckage— they caught it.

FINALLY, at eleven o'clock, they reached the still water covering a treeless plain and there they anchored. That plain, although the Samaritan knew it not, covered Corona station.

They breakfasted at noon, and the captain was unusually jolly. The loss of the barge did not matter much, he thought, with a curious smile on his face. He wouldn't want it any more, but he was sorry for the boy's sake, all the same.

During the afternoon the wreckage became larger. It was not confined to tree and river debris now; fence-rails, boxes, furniture and, to show how far the water could penetrate, a cradle came bobbing and turning into the haven of the steamer. They found that the cradle, by virtue of its shape, was an ark of

this deluge, the rescued being mostly snakes and tarantulas and scorpions and centipedes and all the insect horrors and creeping things which no living man may imagine.

At four o'clock a hut came down, escaped from the current, careered wildly in the eddies, and then collapsed with a noise like the discharge of artillery against a tree which had so far been too strong for the flood. Then a minute later another hut, swimming high out of the water, ran down in midstream and then abeam of the Tilpa, suddenly shot athwart the current and collided with the same tree.

But it did not go to pieces. A projection in the timber wedged it in the tree fork, and there it stood, exposing its bulk to the swirl of the deluge. Stephen Been and the mate and Garth looked at the arrested shanty, expecting it to break up. Suddenly the Captain exclaimed, "if there ain't a man on the thing!" Quite as suddenly he lowered the dingey, one of the two only boats of the Tilpa, sprang into her, and pulled for the wreck before anybody fairly understood his intention.

He had become a Samaritan again. He had forgotten his revenge at the sight of a man in danger; he had left a haven for the jaws of death.

The man on the hut was still now. He had been waving his arms to the *Tilpa* until he saw the boat put off to his rescue.

The Samaritan pulled to the wreckage as if his own existence depended on his speed. His struggle to keep the broadside on to the boiling current was almost titanic, but at last he reached the lee of the anchored hut, and after fastening the dinghy to a projecting spar, swung himself into the tree.

The castaway greeted him with a cry of joy. Stephen Been clambered on to the hut and straddled the ridge-pole, so that he was face to face with the man who had suffered the perilous voyage on the quaking building.

And then the Samaritan Been became the Convict again. His face was transfigured— he looked at the wretch whose eyes were so close to his as a terrier might look at a rat. His face expressed an awful joy— the happiness of the strong, courageous devil who finds a coward devil in his grasp.

The Informer noted that sudden change, and in the space of a thought recognized his old enemy and shrieked aloud.

"So I've got you," said Stephen Been very slowly, enjoying to the full Shaw's accession of fear. "I knew I'd get you sometime." And then, with the snarl of a wolf, "D'ye remember little Hutchins an' Peter Wells, you dirty liar? Do yer? D'ye remember Bendigo and Wood's Point? An' you're a swell now, are you? An' a squatter an' a J. P., an' all— an' ye've got a son who'd drown yer if he knew what y'are; and I've been playin' a lone 'and all me life. Through you, you dog; through you!"

The Informer opened his mouth to shriek for mercy, but the roar of the water drowned his voice, and the grip of the Captain on his wrist made him dumb.

"I'm goin' to leave ye here," said Been again. "An' it's an easier death than I meant for yer— it's an easier death than they'd agree to— they'll 'ave ter content themselves with it."

He spoke of "them" as if they were indeed men and not impotent shadows.

The Informer made no answer— he was dumb with terror.

"So good-by to yer," concluded the Captain. "May ye go to the hell ye sent those boys ter, an' may ye meet 'em there!"

He ceased and swung himself from the roof, but ere his foot touched the tree the Informer, mad with fear, caught his wrists in a grip of steel and screamed aloud above the artillery of the flood.

The struggle was very brief. Stephen Been wrestled with his enemy on the swaying hut for a moment and, freeing himself, reached the tree and looked down for a foothold in the boat.

But that struggle had given them both to death. The swaying of the hut had loosed the spar, and spar and boat had darted off with the current.

The convict gnashed his teeth in rage and climbed higher into the tree to signal for the other dinghy. To his surprise it was not more than a dozen lengths away— the mate and the supercargo had seen the struggle and had hastened with their assistance. They steered the boat under the gum and called to Stephen Been to drop in.

"It'll hold only one more safely," advised the supercargo.

Stephen Been prepared to take the jump, and seeing him, the Informer shrieked again. Then the supercargo looked to the figure on the hut and recognized in the blood-eyed, foam-flecked, wild animal in the coverings of man— his father.

Still he did not falter. "There's only room for one," he repeated to the man whom he respected. "Jump, dad!"

Been hesitated— the expression of affection had half killed the wolf in him.

The Informer began to cry and pray and blaspheme by turns, his big round face working convulsively.

"Jump, dad!" said the supercargo. "Jump quick— we can't hold on here much longer!"

Stephen Been had decided. The wolf was altogether dead; the Samaritan breathed again.

"I'll wait till nex' time," he said. "Take this snivellin' vermin, though he ain't good enough to sit in the boat with you, George."

Even in that awful moment George Garth wondered at the words and the expression of dying hatred, but he had no time to think just then.

A crying, shivering bundle fell through the air and into the boat, and the dinghy headed for the steamer, the mate calling to the Captain to hold on a little longer. But before they could reach him the great gum tree went down, and the hut, with Stephen Been perched on its roof, drifted with the boiling current.

They got away from their moorings, and had the engines going in a marvelously short time, but the hut was not then in sight. The darkness did not end the search. All through the night the *Tilpa* was a blaze of red lights tramping up and down the water-road, one moment staggering painfully up-hill against the swift stream, the next shooting like an arrow from a bow with the current; and the whistle shrieking at every pile of wreckage. At dawn they spoke of him as dead, yet they persevered in the search. They intended to find his body if they tramped the river as long as Philip Vanderdecken cruised off Table Mountain.

And at ten o'clock they found him, and he was yet alive. The house had collapsed against a heap of debris, and the timber had pinned him by the waist. During the night the pile had largely increased, and the great weight almost cut him in two. Yet he had survived the awful experience. His feet had been frozen in the icy water; his middle had been crushed by the weight of the floorwreck, and still the wonderful vitality the convict system had developed in him had strengthened him to triumph.

He did know them as they hailed his discovery with cries of pity and affection; as they dug him clear of the debris; as they tenderly lifted his bruised body and dangling, useless limbs from wreck to raft, and from raft to the steamer-ark. He heard only the fearful chorus of the flood— the rushing of great waters and the clarion song of the New-born at its antiphon.

In the afternoon he awoke to find himself in his own berth with the supercargo bending anxiously over him.

"Oh, dad, dad!" said the young man. "You're all right, ain't you? You don't feel any pain?"

Stephen Been smiled. " I'm not all right, George; but I ain't feelin' any pain. My back's broke— that's what it is."

And then he dozed again. As the lamps were lighted he asked if the river had gone down.

"Not enough to be safe out of the dead water," the mate told him, "but they could get a boat ashore in the back-wash easily."

Then Stephen Been cried fiercely, "Let him go ashore, then! Put the vermin ashore! I'm the last of them all— don't let him see me dead!"

And wondering, they obeyed him. The supercargo, quite at a loss to account for the hatred of his father, told Garth Senior that he must quit the steamer, and a deck-hand rowed the pariah to the edge of the flood near to a point where the sight of a slush lamp said very plainly: "I am the cheer of a man. "

AT NINE the Samaritan made his will in a style peculiarly his own. He called into the cabin the cook, the engineer, the deck-hands and the gentlemen of leisure who had, in the search for him, probably for the first time in their lives become energetic, and there verbally transferred the *Tilpa* and her trade to the mate and the supercargo.

"Ye've all been called as witnesses that this day, the twenty-seventh of September, eighteen seventy-nine, I've given the *Tilpa* an' two barges at Echooky, an' the book debts, an' trade, an' all to Jim Drake an' George Garth, so help me Gawd."

And they all said they witnessed the bequest, and the ceremony was over.

Only Drake and the supercargo were to watch the sick man that night and when the cabin was cleared of the others he lay on his pillow quite exhausted.

They suggested sending to Louth for a doctor, but he said, 'A doctor could do him no good— he was cast right enough,' and so they fed his flickering strength with brandy. Despite his exhaustion, he insisted on giving them full particulars of the trade. In this way: "There was a man on Burrabogie who owed twenty-six shillings in seventyfour— nex' time you're on the 'Bidgee collect it— I don't reck'lect his name, but ye're bound to find 'im— he was a little cove with a wart under his ear and a ginger beard. When ye're up that way, too, leave a bag o' loolies with the super at Benduck; 'e's got a lot of babies an ' one of 'em useter cotton ter me quite reg'lar. An' alwus give a nip to the puntman at Wilcannia, and he'll drop the rope for yer any time at night."

He fell into a half sleep towards midnight, and the watchers turned the lamp-light low. The change of light seemed to awaken him, but although he spoke again he did not regard their presence. "Up at Crismus Island there's the cunningest water-hens you ever see and when the old *Tilpa*—"

And again— "Yer can drive this yer *Tilpa* over a four-foot-six bar, an' she draws four-foot-seven." And yet again— "the *Saddler*! I'll beat her to Echooky blindfold!"

At two o'clock in the morning he awoke out of the present to the memories of his old life— the little Devonshire village, Maria Island, Norfolk, the beautiful hell of the Pacific, of the boy Hitchins, of Peter Wells, of old Bendigo, and then, as he came to the association with the supercargo, he made Garth's tears well anew.

"That vermin can't be yer father," said the Samaritan. And then he added, "For I love you, George, my boy." He lay there with his brain strangely active, thinking and sorrowing for the life that had known nor wife, nor child, nor friend— for, of even the love George Garth held for him he was as uncertain as a girl with her first sweetheart— sorrowing for his wrongs a little, but glad to know the long journey was to end at last. He had known only the embraces of the gyves and the caresses of the flogger's lash, and the memories made him break into words anew.

"I've had a hard life," he said. "A hard life it's been ; an' only me an' Gawd knows it— only me an' Gawd."

After that he lay very still for the night and most of a day, and when he awoke again the flood had retreated to the river and the *Tilpa* was stranded on the plain. Like her Captain, she would never move again.

In that hour before the dawn when the wind, laden with the death-fog, springs from the river, the Samaritan spoke with a material tongue for the last time.

"Only me an' Gawd knows it— only me an' Gawd."

And as the first rose spire of the dawn leaped from the land-rim and tinged the stranded steamer and the haggard earth with light, Stephen Been received his absolute pardon.

In the new joy of the world reprieved for yet another day, the watchers seemed to hear the song of the New-born swelling triumphant.

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9: Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock

The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 7 Dec 1910
McClure's, (USA) May-Oct 1911 (as *A Tale of the Coral Sea*)
The Telegraph (Brisbane) 21 Nov 1931 (as *Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock; this text*)

There are two slightly different versions of this story by the Australian author and politician. So far as I can tell, it was first published in the Sydney Mail *in 1910, as "Fourteen Fathoms S E of Quetta Rock". Trimmed by a paragraph or two, it became "Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock" in all subsequent reprints. In 1931 it was the subject of a lawsuit when it appeared to be the basis of Columbia movie "Fifty Fathoms Deep" without the author's permission.*

THE palm-fronds threshed softly; odors of frangipanni bloom, reek of seaweed and coral trash, and of the Chinaman and the incense of his joss-house mingled and were destroyed and produced again by the fitful land breeze. Nigh to midnight the land breeze became too strong for anything but the frangipanni scent; the palm-fronds threshed through the air saturated with moonlight; the red lamp on the jetty showed as a purple stain.

The last of the pilots of Torres Straits went to bed; the Grand Hotel of Thursday Island closed its bar: but the two barefoot men on the veranda still talked on the topic that had lasted since dusk—the wreck of the *Pandora*; and one man, Pipon, tried to soothe the other, Moresby, who talked without ceasing of the wreck and twenty thousand pounds of pearls.

"Can't we get a launch, Jim?" he asked, for the twentieth time. "A steamer or a launch?"

"I told you no," replied Pipon.

"Bear up, old man; y' can have a lugger."

"A lugger and a dead calm? It would be worse than waiting here."

"Well, quiet a bit!"

"Quiet! How can I be?—when I am in a fever to be there!"

He looked south as if trying to make out the coast of Australia, now the ghost of a shadow in the moon haze and sea blur.

"What could you do if you were there Martin? You couldn't do anything."

"I could stand by the wreck; I could—"

"You couldn't do any good. It's lucky Phil Regard is coming to-morrow. He's the British India diver. He'll do all there is to be done."

"My pearls, Tom! The big one and nine ounces of little ones. Oyley was bringing them up. What depth did the *Pandora* sink in?"

"Nobody knows, old man; or how she went. The skipper was a good man— exempt, too. Knew every key and every inch of reef— and there's millions of 'em."

"It was my rotten luck, Tom, to miss the *Pandora* by five minutes, and then pick up the *Maranea* to catch her here, and find, when I did get here, that she'd sunk fifty or a hundred miles south. And there's my pearls— Oyley was taking charge of 'em— and then I missed the ship. Oh, gimme a raft— gimme a kerosene-tin— and I'll start!"

"Not you! Come on; take a fool's advice and sleep. You'll wait for the morning, and then leave it all to Phil Regard. He'll be here to-morrow."

The grass trees rustled softly to the poinciana as the men went to bed; the breeze strengthened to a wind, and replaced perfume with a taste of salt; from the veranda above a man began to whimper— a man that had seen death and terror and was now dreaming it all over again and shrieking out the story in his recurrent nightmare— the one survivor of the *Pandora*, who had been picked up by a pearling lugger.

"She's going! Two minutes— you can't get the boats out of the chocks. Why didn't they have boat practice? You can't! You can't! Don't scream, women— dear women, don't scream— it's better to drown than— ah, my God, the sharks! the sharks!"

DRUCE, the pilot of Torres Straits, boarded that slow, comfortable, old-time high-pooped steamer of the tea clipper type, the *Airlie*, at Goode Island, and brought her up in the early dawn to the wharf at Thursday. A big, bearded, brown-eyed man was the first to land; he was a man in a hurry— in a hurry for news, at least. He waited for neither bath nor breakfast, but aroused an irritated postmaster, and begged so for telegrams that the postmaster gave him his mail long before the beginning of office hours. There were many newspapers, and he did not look at them; a dozen letters, all man-directed and official, and he put them in his pocket. A bitter disappointment settled on his face— the letter from the beloved was not there. He found new hope in the telegrams. Alas! They were as the letters; and his heart was heavy then. This diver of the sea, who knew no fear that he could not fight down, fought against this disappointment and could not conquer it.

"I telegraphed her from Darwin, and she hasn't wired a reply. She's thoughtless, not cruel, not cruel— my girl."

He took from his pocket-book a faded photograph— faded not by age but by wear; looked at it, and put it back again.

"God bless her! I'll telegraph again, and in seven days we'll be together— for a month, anyhow. But—she might have made sure of not missing the post; a letter would make me a king to-day."

He returned to duty by taking a telegram from his pockets, and a fierce resentment held him for a moment as he read it:

Pandora sunk; locate wreck; if not impossible recover gold, ship's papers. B. P. provide tug and tender; made splendid terms.

So he would not see her in a week— happiness was to be postponed again. He thought of the long two months of salvage diving in the Flores Sea. Three months since he had seen her, and now there was to be another fortnight of hunger for her!

But hope came to his comfort. "Another year and I'll have made enough to retire on, with this new chance. And then, no separation till dead finish comes!"

So he went to Burns Philip and arranged for the departure of the little steamer, hired diving tenders, and had his diving gear brought from the *Airlie's* hold. It was then that Moresby found him— Moresby of the drowned pearls; and the new commission made Phil Regard almost gay.

"Oyley had 'em," said Moresby. "I gave them to him to mind because I was going on a spree in Brisbane."

"Was he straight, d'ye think?"

"I think so. He put 'em in a little steel box in his trunk,— he had his own pearls in the box,— and his wife had the key on a chain round her neck."

"What was the number of his cabin, and what was he like?"

"A dark, red-mustached chap— cabin number 41-43 B, port side, near the music-room."

"You know the ship?"

"I tell you, I sailed on her from Sydney to Brisbane, and lost my passage at Brisbane through going to the races. I gave the pearls to Oyley when I was going ashore. But you will get 'em again, mate?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows where she foundered. But, if I do?"

"Five hundred pounds."

With the lack of ceremony characteristic of the latitude, every man in the bar joined in the conversation.

"Five hundred pounds!" said Druce, the pilot. "Five hundred pounds for dredgin' fifteen or twenty thousand pounds out o' the Pacific Ocean! Five hundred to find a ton of scrap-iron in eighty thousand square miles o' coral?

It's worth that to find the old hulk that hit the rock somewhere, and sank on it, and jewed me out o' pilot fees."

"I thought it wouldn't be hard to find the wreck," said Moresby hesitatingly. "If—"

"Oh," replied Druce, "if your aunt had whiskers she'd be your uncle. Why, I know ten wrecks about here that no man knows the name of— ships that were never missed. You know, too, don't you, Dan'l?"

An old man, bent and wizened, replied quaveringly: "I've seen below me— when I've been down— old Spanish ships, an' old Dutch ships, an' old Portugees down below; me in twenty fathom water, an' them deep below, me man—"

"Twenty fathoms— too much," said the big diver. "I've got a girl at home, and she wants me. Fifteen fathoms is all I care to go."

"Aa-ah," said the old diver, nipping with his strong and crooked fingers the arm and leg muscles of Phil Regard, "I was as strong and straight as ye; but deep divin', an' showin' off above the other min, an' takin' no notice o' the shootin' pains in me legs— callin' it rheumatics, an' all the time 'tis the paralyzer warnin' ye. An' then twenty-eight fathom I went, an' hauled up— I was a cripple."

He laughed as he spoke, but there was in his eye a tear of sorrow for his own dead strength; and, to cover his self-pity, he said, with a feeble attempt at gaiety:

"But 'tis only here I am a cripple! Put me down in fifteen or twenty fathom and give me the pressure on me skin again an' a four-knot tide, an' I'll fly along the floorin' of the sea like a sunbird."

"And you're offering five hundred pounds for the chance of that?" said Druce to Moresby.

"Open your heart, Moresby. A mean man makes me spit blood."

"A thousand, then," said Moresby. "I want to be fair, and it's all to nothing."

"It isn't," said Phil Regard. "I've got to go below on another contract, and you think I've only got to open a cabin door and take a key from some poor, dead woman, and open a box. But that means two extra corners to go round, and the more corners the more chances of fouling. It's your pearls to my life. I want a certainty."

"Here y' are, then," said Moresby. "A hundred pounds for opening the cabin door, and I'll take your word for it; and a thousand if you bring back the pearls."

"It's a deal," agreed Phil Regard, and they shook hands on it.

The warning bell of the *Airlie* clanged, and Druce departed to his pilotage. Phil Regard, as yet only half resigned, saw the steamer that should have borne him south disappear down the channel, rounding the Residency, and so away to open sea. Then he resolutely put regrets behind him and went to his tug and tender to prepare for his attempt to find a few thousand tons of foundered metal in an immensity of blue.

The survivor of the *Pandora* had become quiet enough to talk of the horror of the wreck.

"I was steerage steward," he said, "Mister. I can't think! Stay by me, Mister— don't leave me alone."

"Hold on to my coat, if you like. I'll stand by."

"We never had a boat practice— rottin' in the chocks, the boats were. It was about eleven at night— moonlight— quiet; y' could hear the scrapin' of shovels in the stoke-hole on the flat sheets, and the noise came up the ventilators. An' not a ripple. An' there I'm smoking by the rail, waitin' till I can sneak out on the boat deck to sleep— the glory hole bein' so hot. An' then it comes. It was like a kid tearin' brown paper for fun. It seemed to get her amidships— that was because she was drawing a lot more water aft. Only one man came out of the engine-room. The man on the bridge was mad! I was mad! The quiet people in the cabins had the best death. Sharks got all the deck lot. She ran a minute or two, an' I saw the water risin' closer up— an' loosed a raft and went over. It was like hell. Mister, the howls. Her deck blew up amidships. I think she's sound aft. An' the steam jumped out of her funnel as thick as wool, an' down she goes. An' then on the raft I seen white fire cutting the water all over, crisscrossin' it. It was sharks. An' then a veil, an' more crisscrossin' of fire, o' white lightnin', an 'another yell."

"I know! I know!" said Phil Regard soothingly. "Don't think of it! Help me. Tell me where you think she went down."

"I can't help thinkin' of it. Heads o' people in the moonlight, an' then rushin' fire, an' a scream like a horse burnin', an' another head pulled under. Oh— oh! Another head gone."

"Steady! Steady! Take a pull at yourself. Where did she go down?"

"A girl of twenty or so— I heard her singing in the saloon the night before— a song about 'Mine, forever mine,' an' her husband lookin' at her as if he was dyin' for her while she was singin'. He was swimmin' with her when the sharks took him; an' I beat the sea with me 'ands, an' brought the raft close, an' I was bringin' her up to the raft— swish! comes the shark fire, an' she went too. Oh, mate, hell it was!"

The diver's eyes grew moist at that; he thought of his beloved safe at home, and the tragedy touched him nearly. But he said again:

"Where's the *Pandora*?"

"I drifted to an island, an' then I went mad, an' the lugger found me."

"To-day is Wednesday. When did the *Pandora* sink? Now, think— listen! We may pick up somebody yet. Tell me."

"She sunk on Monday night."

"Where?"

"We made twelve knots to Cape Grenville; then we slowed to ten to bring her in at daylight."

"What time at Cape Grenville?"

The survivor of the *Pandora* wrinkled his brows as if thought were a physical pain, and replied: "Twelve o'clock in the mornin'. Y' can't find her— she's got no masts, on'y hydraulic winchpoles."

Phil Regard, with the dividers in his hand, said inquiringly: "And she struck at eleven in the night?"

"It might have been later. I don't remember."

"We'll go on that. Where were you picked up?"

"The lugger came from Bushy Island."

Regard pricked off one hundred and ten miles on the chart.

"Somewhere east of New Castle Bay," he said.

Before noon he had left Thursday Island, taking the direct track with his light-draft tugboat— east between Tuesday and Horn islands; and then, after easting Mount Adolphus Island and thridding the reefs to the south of it, steering south through the turquoise of shallow water and into the sapphire of deep sea, he ran south to Bushy Island, and then east over reefs, and then north again, and then west, and then zigzag. And the next day he drove slowly over a blackness in the coral bed; a monstrous black thing surrounded by lazy sharks and darting brilliant fish that made the sea-green water alive with swaying and flashing color, like the air of a tropical jungle: the *Pandora*— almost on an even keel and sunk in fourteen fathoms.

With a little reluctance, Regard made the preparations necessary for such as dive in dress and helmet, and shaved clean the mustache that had grown since he had dived in Flores Seas. The growing of the mustache had been an innocent vanity for the pleasure of his wife, who objected to his professionally beardless face, just as the new suit was for her benefit and not to be worn until the day of happy meeting, that he might shine all freshly in her eyes. Then, in the warm shadow of the white awning, he stripped, and donned the many woolen undergarments and the canvas dress, with its water-tight red-rubber bands at wrists and ankles.

The tender put on his feet the great brass-toed boots of twenty-eight pounds weight; and when he had climbed to the ladder and placed his feet

upon the rungs, they screwed his twenty-eight-pound copper helmet on the collar-ring, and hung thirty-eight pounds of lead upon his breast and thirty-eight pounds of lead at his back. Life-line, piping, corselet, helmet, brass boots, and leaden weight complete, the men at the pump began to turn; the tender screwed the face-glass into the helmet and tapped upon it as a signal; the pumps lifted the pressure of the weights from the diver's chest. The air thudded irritatingly into the copper prison that was the helmet; the sense of confinement, and the close smell of the natural breathing element of man unnaturally compressed, returned to Phil Regard. He thought of the wife in Sydney—the last thought of the divinity before bracing himself to work that had the chance of death in it always, though use had brought danger into contempt; then he opened the valve that he might get way to sink with, and dropped easily and gently into the caresses of the water. The sun's shimmer on the sea dimmed to a great pervading shaft of tawny light that made the sea-green lucent, as the white sand below reflected the rays of the breathing world.

The black corpse of the *Pandora* seemed to rise to him. He closed the valve, and sank as through a cataract of feathers. Avoiding the deck, he dropped to the bottom for a survey of the hull. The current hurried him; he might have to wait until slack water. But the lugger drifted too, and he walked rapidly on his toe-tips around the wreck. There could be no doubt of the impossibility of raising her. From the great gaping hole amidships, that extended from one side of her to the other, swam fish of all colors, playing in those puzzling tunnels. Moving lightly as a feather-weight, as if the laws of gravitation had been repealed, Regard studied the situation. All about him stretched tangles of seaweed and coral with white walks between the spongy copses and the brakes. A yellow water-snake followed his every movement with curious imitation, and white fish circled around his helmet so that a green hand must have become dizzy. From a rift in the rock wavered the tentacles of a devilfish feeling its way to crime with every cup and sucker; immense shoals of young fish were being driven to the surface by stronger bullies. Yet, with all its clamorous hunger and insolent murder, it was a world of bewildering loveliness.

Upon the ribbed sand the starfish; above, the brilliance of living coral: the great violet bouquet-shaped madrepora, its coral flowers with buff branches and petals of magenta; staghorn corals in brown and yellow and lilac and green; coral valleys of myrtle green, coral ridges of golden brown, all the glorified forms of carbonate of lime— beautiful as the fish, brilliant as the painted finch, and tinted like the Raggiana bird of paradise. Regard stepped on a branch of heliopora coral, and it broke in indigo.

Brakes of broad-bladed sca-grass grew as in a swampy meadow for the sea-cow; trepang like black cucumbers slumbered on the sand; weed-grown pearl oysters protected themselves with water made turbid by Regard's footfalls; a big blue-spoked stingray faltered by a rock; and prone on the ruffled floor lay a great skate, which is a flattened shark. Everywhere the water swarmed with strange and beautiful forms: the parrot-fish in his livery of black and gray and scarlet; the giant anemone and his galaxy of sea-stars; the peacock blue and green frills and furbelows of the giant clam shells, spotted turquoise and barred black; the grotesque tobacco-pipe fish of golden and azure spotted brown; the placid brown oxray, so blundering that it is often unintentionally malevolent, since if it once takes hold upon air-pipe or life-line it never lets go; yellow-finned and ultramarine-bodied fish; black and electric-blue fish; fish arabesqued in green and salmon and black and gray and orange and blue and yellow; fish of protective fin and tassel and little body; fish with long brown pennants growing from their heads; mad fish with upturned noses; tasseled, branded, striped, speckled, barred, spotted fish, each painted like a Carpentaria finch.

The weight of ocean pressed the diver softly in his armor of the air; his body felt as if stroked by the silky hands of the caressing sea—kindly even to the little fragile sea flowers. And then from the great tunnel in the hull of the *Pandora* came floating, gorged and lazy, the horrors of the deep.

Used as he was to these cruel cowards, in the light of the story of the bride who had died in the wreck, they held for him a new horror, and for a moment he was afraid. Their gorged habit, their slow, plethoric movements, their dull eyes, forgetting for a moment to be greedy, told the tale. Regard felt almost physically sick. All those eyes looked at him threateningly, contemptuously; the little fish that swam up to his face-glass and gazed at him did not seem to be frightened as quickly as usual by the movement of his hands.

The sharks came nearer, and Regard, lifting the rubber wrist-band, shot air at them in a succession of silver bullets, and the cowards became energetic and fled. A carpet-bag shark, the incarnation of filthy malevolence, hovered above him until Regard turned the escape-valve on his helmet and shot a madness of fear into the horrible thing.

He finished his survey of the hull with difficulty, attended always by the yellow sea-snake, which followed him as if it expected food from this strange monster, accompanying him to within a few fathoms of surface. For an hour Regard rested and fed; then he went to the ladder, and was loaded and imprisoned again, and sank down to the deck of the *Pandora*.

His retinue of enemies left him at the entrance to the saloon; but the small fish, their brilliance seeming to light the half-gloom, swam into the depths and

in and out at the portholes—"like schoolboys playing a game," thought Phil Regard. Even there some little things had begun already to benefit by the fall of greatness; little pearl shells as big as a thumb-nail— born in motion from the spat, floating in the current, and sucked down by the foundering ship— had here spun their byssus to tie them to the saloon stairs, hiding their weakness in this unexpected asylum.

"All this death to make a safe hiding-place for a shell," thought Regard bitterly, as he walked on tiptoe through this silent world where all values of vision were distorted, where a waving shadow seemed to be a fish and a fish of sober hues was as shadow until the hand felt its form.

He thought hard— racking his brains inside his copper prison for the memory of the plan of the ship.

"The ship's papers will be in the captain's safe; I'll get them to-morrow. The specie-room is inside the mail-room; I'll find that." So, with due regard for the safety of air-pipe and life-line against projections and fittings, he left the saloon, its decorations already dimmed by the traveling slime of the sea, and found the mail-room, and beyond it the specie-room intact.

He talked to himself, and the words reverberated to him from the helmet: "I'll bring dynamite and a wire down and blow the specie-room open, rig a winch, and haul out the gold boxes. That'll be to-morrow. And while I'm here I'll do the horrible job— Moresby's pearls."

He went back to the saloon stairs. Above it a great gray shape hung watchfully, patiently, as if it had all eternity to wait in. Regard, with never a quickening of the pulse, fired the silver bullets from his wrist-band, and the gray shape backed and fled. Regard laughed and went on to find Moresby's pearls.

He opened a cabin door. Two fish fled through the porthole, and the body of a woman came at him in the swirl of the water. The dead face struck his helmet. Regard cried out in horror, and backed away. But in a moment he caught his courage and closed the porthole; then he shut the cabin door again and went to the next. He could not distinguish the letter denoting the corridor, nor the number either. He opened an inner cabin, and a drowned man came out and struck him. He opened another, and there were in it a dead man and a dead woman trying with her floating skirts to hide a little child from the sea. The man had tried to save another child, and that other child had fixed his teeth in his father's arm, and so had died in cruel fear of the green death that had shipped with them. Horror gripped the diver as with fingers of cold steel.

Yet his duty was to be done, and he did it. He found B corridor, and the first cabin had in it a dead girl with her hands clasped as if she still prayed. He closed the cabin reverently, and came to another in which an old man and an

old woman had died in their bed places; and then to an outer cabin opposite the one he had first entered. The light was better there; he saw that this was B 41 at last, and that by a little care he might have saved himself the awfulness that had shaken him.

The lock of B 41 did not yield to the lifting of the handle, so Regard inserted the point of his small ax between the door and the beading and levered it open. Two bodies, those of a man and a woman,— the man's as if he had died standing, the woman's in the lower berth floating up against the wires of the upper berth,—moved queerly in the disturbed liquid— as if they were alive.

"Porthole closed," said Regard to himself, trying not to look at the dead for a moment. "He had the fan going— the lever's on the top speed."

He looked at the body of the man, and shudderingly turned him around in the water.

"That'll be the man Moresby gave the pearls to. Oyley was the name, and he looks it. There's the trunk under the berth. And this poor soul has the key round her neck. I cant do it... But I promised. I'll do it to-morrow... No; better now—get it done with. Forgive— whoever you are, forgive me. Young, too, and pretty." With a shaking hand and covering his face, he touched the woman's neck, and there he felt the necklet and the key.

"It's horrible. I'll have to use both hands for the fastening."

As if he were physically afraid of it he looked back at the sinister dead man floating near the porthole; then, swiftly and without looking, he unfastened the necklet and held it up—a necklet and a key. The movement floated the body from its position against the springs of the upper berth; it turned upright, floating by his head— through the little circle of the face-glass its dead eyes looked sorrowfully into his own.

And then— madness! Unbelief! Doubt! Unbelief again! And again madness! clamored through his brain. The air seemed to be withdrawn; the helmet became a mountain of copper; the weights upon his back and breast were each a ton of lead. He looked at the necklet— yes, it was so! He had given it. He released it, and it sank to the ooze upon the sodden carpet. He looked at the bracelet of opal before the mirror, and recognized it, too; and then at the dead woman gazing at him mournfully with eyes that seemed to plead: "Forgive; I have been punished, and repented so; forgive."

Still unbelieving, but stunned, he pushed the dead man through the door and out of the alleyway (evicting it as if its presence in that cabin still outraged propriety); and it floated up, bobbing queerly in the tide eddies. Then he turned back, mad but unbelieving, and re-entered the cabin. There could be no doubt— no doubt! He left her there, and fastened the cabin door behind him. And then his heart broke.

He could not live! With his last conscious instinct, he hacked with uncertain hand at the air-pipe, and missed it; then the weight of all the ocean settled on his heart and he wavered to the floor.

He had a conscientious tender. At that sudden jag upon the life-line the tender hauled carefully, and, by that luck which shames the best judgment, drew Philip Regard safely through the alleyway to the deck of the *Pandora* and up to sunlight.

But they might as well have left him there, for the strong man who had dived never returned to the surface.

"Beats me!" said Druce, looking pityingly at the withered wreck that sat every day, and through all the daylight hours of every day, upon the veranda of Thursday Island hospital. "Can't understand it. A fine, big, strong world-beater of a man paralyzed in fourteen fathoms. It beats me!"

10: The Man who Held the Wires

The Grand Magazine, Sep 1905
Sunday Times (Perth) 5 Nov 1905
In: *Billy Pagan, Mining Engineer*, Sydney, 1911

Randolph Bedford wrote ten short stories featuring Billy Pagan, initially published in The Grand Magazine*, London, and then collected in 1911.*

A WILLY-WILLY blowing over Coolgardie filled with dust our camp on the twenty-five mile road. We ate dust, breathed dust, and wore it as our most intimate garment; we wrote in a mixture of organic matter and mud.

'Twenty-five per cent moisture, twenty-five per cent dust, and fifty per cent dead blowfly,' said Billy Pagan as he decoded the cable from London.

'What does it say?' said I, when he had closed the codebook.

'It's from Harmer. There's a show at English Flag under offer to him, and his option expires in four days. Did you ever hear of a big mine there, Harry?'

'No,' I replied. 'Is it supposed to be big?'

'Judging by the price, yes. Harmer says it's under offer to them for fifty thousand pounds, and that other people are ready to take it up when his option expires. He's had a report on it, and it's so good he wants me to confirm it.'

'Whose report was it?'

'Manning's. He says it's a two-ounce show with unlimited quantities of ore proved.'

'Do you know Manning?'

'Only by reputation, and that says he's very straight but not very smart.'

'And you've got to confirm in four days?'

'Yes. Do you feel inclined for a trip? It's not a nice day but there's only fifty miles of it.'

'I'll come, certainly.'

'Right, old man. I'll get the buggy round.'

Late that night we drove up to the mine— a mile or so beyond the grogshop of galvanized iron roof, salmon gum wallplates and rafters, and hessian sides— having been directed to the track to the mine by the owner of the shanty. A great blow of quartz, a mountain in size and of precipitous steepness, loomed grey and mysterious at our right, but the light of a camp to the left bore us away from the mammoth outcrop. At the sound of buggy wheels the door of the camp opened, and the white rays of a kerosene lamp invaded the darkness, except where it was broken by the figure of a man who appeared in the doorway.

'All right, Mr Pagan,' said the man. 'Jim'll take care o' your horses.'

'H'm,' said Billy Pagan to me, and I saw that he was not pleased at the meeting, although he replied, 'Hullo, Swainger. What are you doing here?'

'Just come along to measure up for the contractor tomorrow, Mr Pagan.'

'H'm.' We had alighted and entered the hut when Billy Pagan spoke again. 'Sinking the shaft on contract, are you?' he said.

'Yes, Mr Pagan. Sit down here. I've got a bunk ready for you. Didn't expect your mate.'

'Never mind troubling about the bunk,' said Billy Pagan. 'We've got our blankets and I'd rather camp outside.'

There were three men at the rough table— two of the usual type of young Australians, very tall and spare, very silent— their faces wrinkled by blinding suns to the semblance of middle-aged men, whereas they were little more than youths. The third man was short, broad and black-bearded— every hair of him gave the impression of the immense strength of their owner. He received us sullenly, as if we were men he was forced to meet and would be glad to part with. Peculiar glances as of enquiry on one side and of warning in reply passed between this pocket Hercules and Swainger.

'Have a drink, mates,' said the Hercules almost commandingly, and although neither of us desired it, we could not be guilty of a refusal— which is a serious infraction of bush law. But after we had drunk the whisky and the hot water, which proved that it had known the condenser only a few minutes before, Billy Pagan said that we were tired and would talk in the morning. Without waiting for a reply, he said 'Goodnight,' and led the way out to our buggy, and I followed him.

In silence we spread our blankets near the buggy, filled the last pipe for the night, removed our boots, and turned in. We smoked for a few minutes in silence— a silence broken by the first of the questions that tormented me.

'Why don't you like Swainger, Billy?'

'S-s-sh— not so loud… I don't know anything against him except indefinite hearsay, but I don't like him on sight, and I trust to my instinct.'

'But how can your likings affect this business?'

'He was in Coolgardie when we left. He was loafing about the post office when I drove down Bailey street… looking as if he were at rest and likely to stay so. Yet he turns up here to receive us.'

'How could he know where we were going?'

'A cable from whoever is trying to sell this mine in London, or leakage in the telephone office here.'

'I see, but—'

'S-s-sh—'

A quartz splinter cracked under a heavy boot. I looked in the direction of the sound and saw two figures so indefinite as to appear mere shadows. They had approached from the back of the camp.... now they stood motionless.

Billy Pagan's whisper came to me, 'Talk— laugh— so they can go away again.'

I took the cue.

'Hang this pipe… It's foul. Got your knife, Billy?'

'No,' replied he as loudly. 'There's saltbush growing near you— get a twig.'

He continued talking advice as to pipe cleaning while I turned over to pluck the saltbush, and I heard the quartz splinter crepitate as if its broken edges were relieved of weight. I looked up and the two shadows had vanished.

The midnight winds sprang up and ruffled the plain; the night showed fever stars and darker than usual.

'What's their game, Billy?'

'S-s-sh— no more talking tonight… It's risky.'

There were sounds as of shovels being moved from the ground behind the camp. Then the noise of retreating footsteps.

'But what are they doing?'

'They're going to the shaft. It's none of our business, though.'

'What shall we do then?'

'S-s-sh. When in doubt, keep quiet— go to sleep.'

He rolled over, his face set from the dawn. In a few minutes his deep and regular breathing told me that he had followed his own advice. For myself, I was too excited by the mystery I felt afoot, and by turns dozed and awakened to every sound from the camp, the shaft and the plain.

Morning showed us the great outcrop of quartz that had been grey mystery in the starlight, a white crystalline mountain glaring and eye-wearing in the sun. In the centre it had weathered to fragments that strewed the plain— rising again in towers and pinnacles of whiteness, showing only the infrequent discoloration of millions of years of moss.

'H'm,' said Billy Pagan, chipping a boulder as if with his prospecting hammer— hungry as a swamper.'

Swainger interpolated hastily, 'She's not all brick quartz like this. She's better below— and she'll get richer with depth.'

'H'm,' said Billy, as Swainger and the sullen Hercules walked before us to the shaft. 'Same old lie, Harry— the stone will get richer with depth. Will it? I've never known a reef that did— it's always the other way.' We reached the shaft, and the engineer, addressing Swainger, said, 'What's the depth?'

'Two hundred and twenty; we've opened out and driven at the hundred and the two hundred. I suppose you like to do the sampling alone?'

'Yes, my friend and myself will go.'

'Right you are— we'll lower you then'. As he spoke he looped and knotted the end of the windlass rope as a foothole.

'No thanks. We'll go down the ladders. Will you lower the sample bags, Harry, after I've got down? There's a connection between the hundred foot level and the two hundred, isn't there, Mr Swainger?'

'Yes, there's a winze through and ladders in it.'

'Right. Is your friend here'— he indicated the sullen Hercules— 'the leaseholder?'

'I'm one of 'em, mister,' replied Hercules, answering for himself, and truculently, as if he expected opposition and wanted to anticipate it.

Swainger silenced him with a look.

'And you, Mr Swainger?' pursued Pagan imperturbably, as if he had neither heard nor seen the truculence nor its correction.

'I've got the option,' replied Swainger, flushing uneasily.

'And who has given the option to my people?'

'Coakley—'

'He's in London, I think?'

'Ye-e-es— he's in London.'

'H'm… Lower away when I call, Harry.'

I sat in the hundred foot level, looking at a glistening mass of quartz. Billy Pagan's candle burned steadily in its spider-socket driven into the soft slate of the reef-enclosing rock. I held my candle in my hand and the tallow guttered to my fingers.

He had spread a long sampling sheet of canvas on the floor of the drive and drove the pick at random into the quartz that stood up well, although it was shattered in all directions.

We had sampled the drive in sections of ten feet, had then roughly quartered each sample, packed it in its bag— numbered for identification— and sealed it.

When he had finished every section of the level Billy walked back into one of the crosscuts and measured the width of the lode.

'She's a beauty for size,' he said. 'Thirty feet if it's an inch… Let's go down the winze… Wait a minute. What about a sample from the floor?'

'But you didn't knock it down. All you knocked down fell on the sapling sheet.'

'Never mind that. We'll see what it's worth.' He scraped away half an inch of the surface and smiled as he saw moisture in the debris below.

'Who would have expected water? Eh! hold the bag, Harry. That'll do… Now to No. 2.'

I climbed down the hundred feet of crazy Jacob's ladder and Billy Pagan lowered the tools and sample bags, threw down the sampling sheet, and followed slowly— holding the candle to the white walls around him, scanning each point and crevice of the rock.

'Won't you sample the winze?'

'Yes,' he said loudly— and then whispered, 'S-s-sh, this place carries sound like a railway tunnel… No. It's not worth the smell of gold to the acre.'

'But it's the same stone as in the level.'

'S-s-sh— what if it is? We'll sample number two now, and then we'll get away.'

The reef at the lower level showed the same characteristics as the upper stone, but with fewer of the laminated veinings that had distinguished the reef at shallower depths. He sampled it quickly, and then he took a sample of the floor, which the sampling sheet had hidden, bagged it and sealed the bag, enclosed the samples in two gunny bags and sealed them. We carried them along the drive and to the shaft, and as he prepared to ascend by the ladders he handed me the last half inch of his candle— guttering tallow and sealing wax and nigh extinction.

'I'll climb quickly and lower the rope for the samples. Don't take your eyes off the bags, Harry— not for a moment.'

'Why— there's no one here?'

'There's always somebody everywhere… keep one eye on each bag. I won't be long.'

He climbed out of the circle of candlelight and into the half gloom of the shaft.

I looked at the bags as he had bidden, but the eye wearied of them, and I must have been looking at the candleflame for some minutes when I was conscious of the nearness of a man. There is a sensation something approaching horror at the sudden consciousness of the espionage of an enemy; and at the moment I must confess I was at least disagreeably startled.

I turned swiftly, and there, in the entrance to the drive, stood the sullen Hercules— his black beard and piercing eyes more commandingly sinister than usual, his left foot arrested suddenly in the act of taking another step towards me.

'Hallo!' said I, astounded at finding him behind me. 'How did you get here?'

'Same way as you. Down the ladders to the hundred foot and then down the winze, and along this level.'

'But in the dark?' For I saw he had no candle.

'Yes. I know every stone in this show… You finished sampling pretty slick.'

I did not immediately reply— I felt a new dislike to him. This man who went wandering through a mine and down crazy Jacob's ladders in the dark and then showed that he wished me to believe that he had taken the risks carelessly, motivelessly and merely to pass the time, was not at all to my taste or understanding.

'You got through the sampling in quick time,' he said again.

'Yes,' I replied, then, 'Mr Pagan is a quick worker.'

'It isn't fair to a mine to jump through it like that,' he replied, plainly showing that the rapid sampling had not been anticipated by him and had disarranged his plans.

'Mr Pagan doesn't scamp his work,' I replied with some warmth.

'More haste— less speed, I think,' he said doggedly, and then his eye suddenly flamed as he saw the sampling sheet folded up, with all Billy Pagan's finnicky orderliness, on the bags. I saw the glance, shifted the candle to my left hand, and prepared for war.

'Under below,' called the voice of Billy Pagan cheerily, and with feelings of relief I heard the hook on the windlass rope strike metallically against the walls of the shaft. There were two slings on the hook. I slung the two bags of samples, called to the men on top to 'haul away,' and as soon as the samples were out of reach took the sampling sheet over my shoulder, put the prospecting hammer in my belt, blew out the candle and started for the surface.

I expected Hercules, maddened by his black and silent rage, to wrench me from the ladder, and I climbed through the half gloom with only one sensation, and that, the instinct to reach the good earth's surface quickly; but I had no need for fear. Hercules warred in no such open ways. I could hear him muttering curses in the blackness of the drive, but I was on the last ladder before he began to climb.

BILLY PAGAN stood on guard over the bags. At the mouth of the shaft Swainger, looking furtively depressed and making his anxiety more apparent by affecting an air of good fellowship, deprecated an immediate departure.

'Give the show a chance, Mr Pagan,' he said. 'There's another reef further over there.'

'But no work done on it?'

'Not as much as on this one— just potholes.'

'Well, I don't trouble to see them,' replied Billy Pagan. 'My instructions were to sample a mine not potholes.'

'But you'd better wait and drive back in the cool. Your horses are getting a bit of green feed, too.'

Billy Pagan smiled— he knew how much 'green feed' there was in that drought-stricken wilderness, and then he suddenly snapped rather than said, 'Green feed! Much more likely poison plant… Hallo! What's that fellow doing with my horses?'

I looked in the direction of his gaze and saw one of the over-tall youths stoning Pagan's two greys. They had halted to browse on the ridge three hundred yards from us, and the lanky youth attempted to drive them on. Another minute and they would have been driven down the ridge and out of our sight in the gullies.

'Hey, you! Leave those horses alone,' Billy shouted, and at the sound of his voice the lanky youth dropped behind a boulder and disappeared, and the horses resumed feeding on the scanty salt-bush.

Billy Pagan's eyes glittered, but he said no word to betray the fact that his suspicions were aroused to their highest pitch.

'Will you bring my horses back here, Harry,' he said quietly, and I threw the sampling sheet on the bags. At sight of it Swainger's eyes were filled with murder.

As I turned to go the sullen face of Hercules appeared at the mouth of the shaft.

WHEN I RETURNED with the horses the group of three at the shaft mouth were waiting in silence; Hercules, with his strong, sullen head bent, relieving his passion by pulling fragments of stout chip with fingers that seemed to be made of steel— so hard and irresistible seemed their grip upon the wood. Swainger, in doubt, glaring at the sampling sheet; Billy Pagan, cool, calmly smiling his superiority in the struggle.

As I came up he said, 'Will you put the horses in, Harry? The harness is in the buggy', and as I nodded acquiescence, his tone became stern as he hailed the second lanky youth who hovered round the buggy with an axle-nut wrench.

'Hey, you! What are you doing?'

'Goin' to put a drop o' neatsfoot in the axleboxes,' replied the youth sulkily.

'Well, why don't you?' I, who knew him, detected irony in the question— irony that was sure of the weakness of its opponent.

'Our wrench won't fit,' said the youth, even more sulkily than before.

'Won't it? Well, there's a wrench in the box under the seat.'

The youth started towards it.

'Wait a minute— the box is locked.'

The youth stopped with an oath.

'Never mind— I'll oil the axles myself. I like greasy work… Come here, my lad.'

The youth slouched to the mouth of the shaft. 'Take one of these bags, will you? I'll take the other.'

'I'll carry one,' said Hercules with a little badly disguised eagerness in his voice.

'I won't trouble you,' said Billy soothingly, as if he were merely careful that Hercules should not overtax his strength. 'But you may carry the sampling sheet.'

Hercules snatched up the canvas and cursed in a whisper as audible as a stage aside.

The little procession came to the buggy. Billy Pagan stacked the bags in the front of the vehicle, took his seat and put a foot on each bag. I handed him the reins as Swainger came from the camp with a bottle and glasses.

'No thanks,' said Billy; 'I never drink before twelve.'

'But it's after twelve now,' said Swainger.

'I mean before twelve midnight then.'

Swainger scowled, but affected to laugh off his disappointment.

I fastened the traces to the bars and mounted to the buggy beside the engineer.

He bore upon the reins to feel the mouths of the horses and let them know the journey was beginning. Then he shook hands with Swainger, thanking him for the hospitality of the camp in the usual set terms, and concluded to the lanky youth.

'Good-bye, sonny— I take the will for the deed in the matter of greasing the axles… Good-b'— Hallo! Where's your mate, Mr Swainger?'

Hercules had disappeared.

'In the camp, I think,' replied Swainger confusedly.

'All right… Well, good-bye.'

He put the horses up to the collar as he spoke, and the buggy moved.

'Good-bye, Mr Pagan… Hey! You're left the sampling sheet.'

'Never mind… I'll give it to you. You'll find it handy next time.'

If Swainger made reply he never heard it. The beautiful team took us swiftly past the spurs of gleaming quartz into the deep-milled dust of the main track.

'SO THE MINE'S a fraud, Billy?'

'Fraud's no name for it… And those fellows would stick at nothing. That black scoundrel sneaking after us in the dark; the murder in the eyes of both of them when they saw the sampling sheet, and knew that the little game of

salting the bottom edges of the drive was no good to them… I knew when I saw the stone it was N.G… They sunk that shaft on the strength of little rich leaders that I could see at the surface *had* been payable… Then they say, Well, here's a boom. We'll be in it. We've got any quantity of stone, and we'll make the quality good enough… I don't grumble at them doing that… It's all in the game— their game; and it's all in my game to crab them if I can.'

'What are you hot about then?'

'Because they've done things that are not in the game. They'd have thrown us both down that shaft and the samples after us, only they hadn't quite enough courage for it. If we had shown the least sign of fear we were done. But they couldn't understand a man having sufficient front to laugh at 'em. And what clumsy liars! Swainger had come along to measure up the work of the contractors, and there's no contractors there and not a foot of work has been done for months. They tried to lose our horses, didn't they?— and that long-necked young thief who was monkeying round with a wrench— trying to kindly grease the wheels and lose an axle-nut or two… They've put my back up. We've only two days to stop Harmer paying the money to the other thief in London— less than two days, because Australia is nine hours ahead of England.'

'And where did the black ruffian go to?'

'Did you see a cloud of dust away to the right— two miles back?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'll lay a wager that was Mr Hercules rounding up his horses and galloping them back to the English Flag.'

'They'll follow us then?'

'My colonial oath they will. The game's just begun, but we'll win it.'

'We! What do you get out of it, Billy?'

His face hardened at that, and he replied almost coldly, 'My fee— and so far as actual inspection goes, it's the easiest two hundred and fifty I ever earned.'

'But you'll get it whether you beat these fellows or not?'

'Harry,' said Billy Pagan severely, 'I'm surprised at you. You're no sportsman!'

'NOW, Mr Manning,' said Billy, the night after our arrival in Coolgardie, 'will you please tell me how you took your samples?'

'In the usual way,' replied the older man, but deprecatingly— 'all along the drive diagonally in six feet sections.'

'But you didn't use a sampling sheet. All the stone you broke down fell to the floor and you shovelled it up from there and then quartered it.'

'Yes, but—'

'And the result is this. I've crushed and panned all my samplings, and I can only get a few grains to the ton. But I took a special sample of the broken stuff along the side of the drive and I got twelve ounces to the ton for one sample and fourteen ounces for the other.'

'Good heavens! Then I was salted?'

'You were.'

'I'm ashamed of myself. I am sick of myself. I might have known by the character of the rock, but I don't trust my eyes, as I'm shortsighted.'

'It can't be helped— you got an average of two ounces for all the stone in sight, didn't you?'

'Yes— two ounces.'

'Then we've just got time to stop the swindle… Now don't be downhearted. Nobody could doubt your straightness.'

The old man smiled sadly. 'But I doubt my own ability now, Mr Pagan.'

'We must go now… Good-bye. See you later… Off to the telephone office, Harry.'

THE TERMINUS of the telegraph line was twenty miles further west, and from Coolgardie telegrams were sent by telephone to the operator at the terminus at Pink Rocks.

Billy Pagan coded a cable that was translatable thus,

'Refuse to complete. The mine is an absolute swindle.'

We walked to the Post Office feeling very successful and confident, but Billy Pagan stopped at the entrance as Swainger's figure disappeared within.

'They're here, Harry— but they're later than I thought. And what's the good of them being here now and cabling?'

We entered. Hercules leaned against the wall of the inner office and glared at us, drunkenly truculent.

Billy rapped at the wooden shutter of the telephone room, and the clerk appeared and demanded our business.

'I've got a cable I want sent right away.'

'Can't send it till I've got this message through.'

'And how long will that be?'

'About two hours.'

'Two hours! Man, it must go through at once. I'll pay urgent rates.'

'It's an urgent I've got on now, and it's a long message.'

Billy thought a moment and then replied, 'All right, I'll come back in two hours. You must arrange to break the long message if it's not through then.'

The clerk said 'All right,' and closed the shutter. The telephone bell rang again— the voice of the transmitter spoke again.

We left the office, Billy leading me into the scrub beyond the office, and then by a detour back to the Post Office, but at its side and not its front.

'Quiet,' he whispered. 'Keep out of the ray of the lamp. Now… crawl behind me.'

We crawled through a little belt of scrub and past the piles of a building— built, as usual, high from the ground on zinc-covered piles to delay the ravages of white ants.

We were under the Post Office.

'Listen— Harry— what is it?'

We listened and heard this:

'In the last summer number of The Clarion *we reviewed the Westralian discoveries by sea— 'Have you got that? eh. … Never mind whether it's rot or not -this is the message and I'm being paid for it—' By sea. Inseparably connected with the land discoveries are the travels of John Forrest, Alexander Forrest, Fyre Austin and others whose names we know and of that great and nameless legion of explorers and prospectors and adventurers who have beaten the ways for the little men of the cities in all countries and at all times. And if there is one thing that calls for the adventurous Australian's gratitude it is— - 'Got that?"*

'Come away quietly,' whispered Billy, and knowing the uselessness of questioning him I backed out silently after him.

He did not speak until we were well clear of the scrub and near his camp again.

'What's the game, Billy? What does it all mean? What is it they are telephoning?

'You'll laugh at the idea. That was an article out of the '*Clarion*'. They are probably telephoning the whole paper.'

'But what for?'

'To hold the line, man. While they pay they hold the wires, and I can't get my cable through.'

'But the cost?'

'They cut that down by waiting until they saw me leave Manning's house. They're probably only telegraphing it as far as Fremantle, and what's a penny a word to fifty thousand for a shicer?'

'So you're beaten?'

'Not yet— the horses have had a day off. We'll yoke 'em up.'

'Where away now?'

'To the telegraph station at Pink Rocks.'

CAN I EVER forget the romance of the track that night— the beauty of the bush lying under the starlight without a breath to ruffle it; the smoke of our pipes curling up as incense; the ghostly track lying coiled and mysterious through scrub and forest; the horses enjoying their own rapid motion through the cool air; the only sounds the occasional clicking of shoe on shoe, the straining of the harness and the silky rustling of tyres in the sand.

As we sped through the divinely soft air, he told me my part of the programme.

'I'll drop you at twenty miles out, drive the other ten alone, get my cable away and drive back to you.'

'But if the operator has started on the long message he won't stop it for the cable.'

'I won't ask him to, but as there'll be a sudden interruption of communication with the place we've come from, he'll take my cable all right.'

I looked at him, and in the half darkness could just see that he was smiling.

'You mean to cut the telephone wire?'

'I mean that you shall. It's half past twelve now— you mustn't cut it till a quarter past two. I'll be in the office at Pink Rock then.'

'I see— that gives you an alibi.'

'Of course— they'd suspect me at once if I first cut a wire and then drive to the next office to get a cable through.'

'I see— all right, old man. How do I get up the poles?'

'There are no poles. Civilisation hasn't come along yet. The insulators are spiked to trees.'

'Good. And what do I cut the wire with?'

'This.'

He pressed a fencing wire cutter into my hand, and we drove on in silence and I dozed.

A touch brought me to consciousness, and I found he had stopped the buggy.

'There you are, old man. There's the wire. What's your time?— five minutes to one! Right. I can do the ten miles by twenty past two, easy. Cut at twenty past. Good luck, old man— I'll be here again at four thirty, but it will be best for you to walk west, and I'll meet you sooner.'

'Good-bye, Billy, and good luck.'

We clasped hands. I lit my pipe and settled down to waiting— the buggy disappeared in the long perspectives of the aisles of salmon gum.

'CAN'T DO it— I've got a long message,' said the operator.

'All right, I'll wait,' replied Billy Pagan, with one eye on his sweating but still strong team at the door, and the other on the telephone.

'It won't be much good waiting unless you've brought your blankets,' said the operator, laughing. 'Some crank up on the field has taken a ninety-nine years lease of this 'phone. He's sent half *The Clarion* up to now— all except the illustrations— and I suppose when he's through with that he'll start on Johnston 's *Dictionary* and poor Doctor Watt's hymns. Sorry to keep you, but I can't help it.'

'I know,' replied Billy. 'It's not your fault. Fire away. Give that lunatic asylum at the other end another chance.'

'All right— you take it easily, anyhow— Hello! Are you there? Yes. Go on. What's my last? 'Repeat' did you say? All right? Here you are— 'Governor Denison writing to H. Labouchere of the Colonial Office, respecting the formation of the first New South Wales Ministry, said—'

'Can you hear that?… Can you hear that? Hello!— Shake your battery… Oh, damn!'

Billy Pagan looked at his watch. It was *fifteen* minutes past two.

At that moment I had climbed the tree and cut the wire.

IN THE EARLY DAWN I met him driving gaily through the dewy bush, and he stopped the buggy to pick me up, and laughed. And when he had me in the buggy he laughed again, as at an excellent joke, and called me his good mate and his blood brother and many other pleasant things.

'Swainger will be on our track when they know of the broken wire. I'm game to bet that he's been admiring through my window a dummy in the bed, supposing it to be me.'

The wire must have been repaired the next day, for twenty-four hours after we reached Coolgardie came a cable for Billy Pagan and its decodation said this:

'Many thanks. We were on the point of paying. Please make complete examination Jindabine mines and cable report.

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11: The Secret of Ledger D.

Eastern Recorder (Kellerberrin, WA), 4 July 1924

DAVID PLOWMAN, importer and exporter, director of several industrial concerns, chairman of the Metropolitan Gas Company, and president of the Bank of Hobson's Bay, was in a bad temper. The immediate cause of his ill-humour was that he had just been told by the manager of the bank that £810 was missing from the note reserve, and while he valued money as all traders value it, Plowman's loss lay not in the sum, but in his hatred of all irregularity.

He was a bald, slight, hard-eyed man with preciseness in every wrinkle of him. More than middle-aged, he had neglected all the joys of youth in favour of making money while he was young, believing that when his fortune was made he might purchase all the pleasure of living. He had awakened, however, to the fact that age brings no dividends of happiness unless youth has made investments of service. Even at middle age he might have found happiness, for happiness is largely physical, but moneymaking not only demands the sacrifice of youth, but health also, and overwork had leeched the sweetness of his blood. On his bad days even the girl typists in his office fled at the sound of his step.

And now to his physically bad day was added the trouble of the missing notes. On his way to the manager's office, Mr. Plowman's glance fell on a bank messenger, and seemed to shrivel him, leaving the lad trembling.

John Giles, the keeper of ledger "D to H," glanced furtively and afraid at Plowman as he disappeared into the manager's office. Giles had been twelve years in the service of the bank, and he was still a ledger keeper. The marks of his experience of long hours, small pay and deferred hopes of promotion were visible in his eyes. He was a man of thirty-five, and looked fifty.

As Plowman returned from the manager's room, accompanied by the manager, his roving, irritable eye caught the half-questioning, half furtive glance of Giles. Giles shifted his glance as soon as he saw that he had been observed; and to Plowman the diffidence translated itself into a sense of guilt.

"What's the name of that ledger keeper?'' "Giles, John Giles."

"How long in the bank?"

"Twelve years."

Plowman suddenly felt intuitively that Giles' half frightened, furtive glance was so absolutely guilty that the move he thought of it the move he decided that Giles was in some wav connected with the missing notes. He stated his opinion to the manager and, although that officer smiled incredulously, Plowman remained firm.

"I know that there's something sly about that man, and if it isn't that he's taken the notes, what is it?'

The manager urged Giles' twelve years of attention to duty.

"What are his weaknesses?" Plowman demanded.

"He hasn't any that I know of."

"Ah! 'That you know of.' Does he gamble?"

"No, I would swear to that."

"Well, I think the gentleman needs an investigation. Where does he live?"

"At South Yarra, in a high-class boarding house."

"H'm, that must cost him thirty shillings a week. What's his salary?"

"A hundred and sixty-five pounds year."

"H'm— and he probably spends ei.ultv for board and laundry. How does he travel?"

"By rail to South Yarra."

"That's another eight pounds a year for travelling. Clothes, say thirteen pounds a year. He still has over fifty pounds a year to speculate with."

"Would you like to have him watched?"

"No. Leave this to me. I'm going to make a few inquiries."

And David Plowman walked back to his office with a pleasurable consciousness of a new interest in life. For he was a lonely man.

And that night he began his pursuit of Giles.

For the first week of his detective work. Plowman was content to follow the ledger keeper from the bank to the railway station, realising that Giles' irregularities, if there were any, belonged to the suburbs. Then, one evening, he boarded the ledger keeper's train, taking the next coach behind the one Giles had entered, thinking to watch his employee's movements at South Yarra.

But at South Yarra a surprise awaited him, for when Plowman looked along the platform he found that Giles had not left the train! Plowman thought deeply for several minutes, and then, as he had Giles' address, he decided to walk there and make inquiries. He set off almost youthfully, and after ten minutes he reached No. 7 Wistaria Terrace.

"Mr. Giles is not in," the woman who answered the door told him. "He never has lived here, you know. He only pays a little to have an address for his letters."

Mystery! Plowman turned awav, and his suspicions gave him a sleepless night. The next morning he detailed his experience to the bank manager.

"Shall I call him and demand an explanation?" the manager asked.

"No, I'll prove something against him before long, and I'm pretty sure of tracing the missing notes to him."

"You won't do that, Mr. Plowman, because they were found last night. They were in the strong-room all the time; it was a case of nine hundred pound notes getting in with the tens and being counted as tens."

Plowman shook his head. He was more and more puzzled. Also, he was determined to solve what he called the mystery of ledger D.

That night he followed Giles again, getting into the coach behind him, but keeping a sharp look-out so that Giles should not escape him again. At the second station, Windsor, he saw Giles leave the train, and he followed. For several blocks Giles led the way until he reached a quiet little street where gardens bloomed before the houses. Before one of these houses Giles stopped, opened the gate, and then let himself into the front door with a latchkey.

Plowman stopped short. So this was where Giles lived.

But had he in any way solved the mystery? Plowman had just decided not, when there came to him children's and a woman's voices, and then the voice of Giles with a new note in it— the voice of the master who is beloved. Suddenly the rays of a lamp broke the dusk, and two children ran onto the small verandah; then came a sweet-faced woman with a large tray, and then Giles, holding the lamp high with one hand, the other steadying a golden-headed boy who rode on his shoulder. The woman placed the tray on a table, and Giles put the lamp beside it. Plowman, hidden away in the dusk, saw that Giles and his family were going to have a picnic supper on the verandah.

For many minutes David Plowman stood there in contemplation of this picture of family life, his thoughts wandering. He had never known poverty, even the respectable poverty such as Giles knew. No, he had made a good start, and earned much money, and for it he had thrown away his chance of love in youth, of children in his middle age, of contentment in his last days.

He turned to go. His work was done. His suspicions of Giles were at an end. Giles had covered up virtue as if it were a crime; had trembled with fear of discovery as if he were a felon. Plowman knew it all now. The false address at South Yarra. the posing as a single man, were merely Giles' cloaks to his infraction of the rule of the bank— "No employee of this bank shall marry until his salary has reached two hundred pounds a year."

The absolute alternative was dismissal. Plowman recognised its unalterableness, while for the first time questioning its justice. That night David Plowman lay awake, while all his little sins and greeds came to him in the darkness and danced insultingly on the foot-rail of his bed.

"Look at this man Giles," they seemed to say. "He gets a little more than three pounds a week, but he keeps his family. He's worried about little things, and behind it all is the fear of discovery and discharge— and that he keeps to

himself, and smiles all through. His wife doesn't know he married her against the rules of the bank; she wouldn't or, be happy if she did. He's happy; happy, all through, and once he opens his gate at night he's loved. He's happy and loved, David Plowman, and you're not."

The red and black devils gibbered at him through the darkness.

"And now that you've found out that he's married you must report it, and Giles will be discharged," the imps went on. "He's broken a rule and you will have to discharge him."

With the morning, though a certain strange kindliness filled him, David Plowman was swayed by his respect for system, and his hatred of irregularity.

He was at the bank early, and asked that Giles be sent to him at once.

"Giles," he commenced, "you have broken the rule against marrying while under the minimum salary, and you must go. Have you anything to say?"

"No, sir, nothing." Giles paled, and his eyes burned with misery. "The rule is unjust, but I accepted it at the beginning." Plowman nodded his approval.

"That's the spirit, the spirit I expected in you. I agree with you that the rule is unjust. Are you sorry you broke it?"

The ledger keeper looked down and replied slowly:

"No, if I had to be alone again I'd die."

"Well, Giles, I'm sorry for you. The bank's rule is what it is. I wouldn't break it if I could. It's the system."

He spoke as reverently of the system as if its origin had been divine.

"Yes, sir, I don't blame anybody."

"Not even yourself?"

"No, sir, I've been happy for ten years."

"Well, you've got to leave the bank. You must resign to save yourself dismissal."

"Very well, sir."

He turned to go but Plowman stopped him. "Would you like to know how we found out?"

"No, sir, it wouldn't interest me." He spoke bitterly, and Plowman decided that the play had gone far enough.

"Well, I found it out. I've followed you for days and had fine tramps after you— more exercise than I've had for years. It has really done me good. Don't you think I am looking better?"

At this intimate inquiry Giles plucked up enough courage to be interested.

"Yes, sir, you're not so badly marked under the eyes as you were."

"That's right, that's right," said Plowman with a sudden pleasant ring in his voice. "It's the exercise; we'll go for walks together."

"Together, sir?"

"Why not? It's just this, Giles, you're a good man, a straight man."

"Oh—"

"Listen a minute. I found your South Yarra address was bogus. I followed you to your home in Windsor, saw you at supper, saw the children."

The ledger keeper smiled.

"And I've been thinking a great deal," Plowman went on. "You must, leave the bank, but I want a confidential man. You can have two hundred and fifty pounds a year for a start. Will you take it?"

"Take it? Why— why, I'll serve you as if you were my father. You don't, know what it, means, Mr. Plowman. ''

"Oh yes, I do. That's settled. So put in your resignation and take a week off, on full pay from me, of course. And don't thank me. Taking an interest in you has given me the habit of exercise. I'll live ten years longer for it. Good-bye. I'll see you in a week."

Giles backed out, incoherently murmuring gratitude, and thinking what his news would mean to the cottage at Windsor.

Plowman also thought of that cottage in Windsor, and there was a lonely ache in his heart. But, presently the thought of the happiness he had brought to the ledger keeper came to comfort him, and the virtuous glow of the benefactor spread through his veins like wine. He was happy, because he had made others happy. He smiled as he turned to his work.

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12: Poor Relations

The Bulletin, 22 Aug 1928

THE most lovable of insurance men pressed a drink and two cigars on Whaley, taking no denial for the triple hospitality.

"I know, my boy," he said as they stood in the bar-room of the Caravanserai, "it ithn't Auththralian, but I'm the oldetht Auththralian in the bar, and when it comth to thigarth I'm a chartered libertine. Take another thigar."

"No, thanks," said Whaley. "These millionaire cigars make me feel so prosperous that I'll forget I have creditors if I smoke two within the hour. But I would like to know something about your job. A man in your game was telling me the other day that you're the most competent insurance adjuster in Australia."

"Do they thay that? Well, I like it. Everybody loveth praitle. I know they thay that becauth I never fought a jutht claim, and I never let a crooked demand get by. You thee, I don't look tho much at the fire ath at the owner of it. In thethe dayth of better buildingth and better fire fighting I look at the moral rithk more than the phythical. When there are big drapery thtockth, ath there are now, imported at high pritheth and when overbuying and a fall in exthange and retail pritheth come, ath they're doing now—look for fireth. And if, on the top of that, the bankth are reduthing overdrafth, look for more fireth."

"I see— incendiarism."

"If you could prove it. Now that man coming in remindth me that although I think the moral rithkth with hith polithieth ith ath dangerouth ath Bramble Cay to collierth for China, I could prove nothing. All I could do wath to cut hith claim ath far ath I dared. I want you to meet that man— he'th Mullholland. Wait till he finitheth with hith friend. But for the fire he'd have been talking to the offithial athignee.... There wath tho much talk and thuthpithion over it that the relief from the thuthpithion ath well ath the payment hath made him launch out. He'th giving a dinner to-night in honor of the thettlement, and he had the cheek to invite me to go."

"Not going?"

"Not for all the fireth in the thity. But look here; you go. He'th a queer fith and worth thtudying."

"But I don't know him. Why should he ask me?"

"You'll know him when I introduthe you, won't you? And he'll athk you quick enough. He lovth newthpaper men— until they don't give him a paragraph, and then he hateth 'em."

Mullholland came to them smiling to show all his teeth.

"Ah!" said he, as warmly as if the insurance man had not been fighting the claim ever since the fire. "I'm so glad to see you. Of course, you're joining our little festive gathering to-night."

"I'm thorry. The doctorth thay I muthn't be out after dark. My athma, you know. But Mithter Whaley ith my friend; and he'th a newthpaper man, and I think he would be interethted."

"Glad to ask Mr. Whaley, then," said Mullholland. "Will you join us at seven o'clock, Mr. Whaley? The big supper-room upstairs."

WHALEY found about eighty diners ready and waiting, including Mullholland receiving the guests and introducing them to Lascelles, the long, thin-necked, round-shouldered man who stood at the entrance with his principal and who was introduced with much importance as the "manager of the Fancy."

Whaley passed on from his introduction to the butler's table, and asked for vermouth.

"And I'll have one, too," said something below his head level, and looking down Whaley saw a little thin man with a faded face and watery-blue eyes like a kitten's. He was the only man not in a dinner-suit, but he was so insignificant that even that fact could not make him conspicuous. The tone he used to order his vermouth was foreign to the appearance of the little man, and Whaley, regarding him more closely, was not surprised to note that a gesture of recklessness accompanied the order and that tone and gesture were due to earlier orders and their fulfilment.

"It's all right," said the little man, "I can have another. I'm Harry Ruddle, the boss's cousin."

He drank the vermouth as if he didn't like it. and moved off to another man so like himself that they were patently brothers— the poor relations at the rich man's feast. Whaley began to think better of Mullholland, who had not been spoiled by financial success sufficiently to make him forget the connections who had stayed where birth had put them.

Then Mullholland made a move to the top of the table, and Mr. Lascelles, the manager of the Fancy, took the chair, and the great man sat on a chair to the right of him. Whaley found himself seated next Mr. Henry Ruddle, and his presumed brother as vis-a-vis. And so to dinner, and a very good dinner; sherry and hock and claret and champagne.

Mr. Harry Ruddle enjoyed it all, and knew no due season; alternating his drinks and buzzing from bottle to bottle like a bee educated by a Man of Belial. His tongue was soon loosened, and he gave a very excellent imitation of a

conspirator, without cloak or mask; but so far his revelations were limited to nods and winks and improper and dangerous use of a fork to indicate Mullholland as the object of his increasing contempt. His brother— the gloomier little man— was mainly engaged in providing argument favorable to prohibition. His liquor did him no good: as he drank slowly and silently his gloom increased. He did not show any signs of life even when the chairman, Mr. Lascelles, manager of The Fancy, rapped on the table and asked the company to charge its glasses.

"Rear ear!" said the company, and obeyed. Lascelles rose, and looked down affectionately at Mullholland.

"In proposing the toast of the health of our respected chief," said the manager of the Fancy. "I need hardly say that he is endeared to us all."

"Rear ear!"

"His kindness and generosity to us during our times of prosperity have in no way altered during his anxiety over the late disastrous fi-ah."

" 'Fraid to quarrel with anybody since er fire," hissed Mr. Ruddle to Whaley's left shoulder.

"Surrounding the festal board to-night are the men who have grown up with the business from its inception right up to the time of the late disastrous fi-ah. We see also some of our chief's relatives here— may be in lower walks of life than we, but still most hearti-lay welcome; most hearti-lay."

"Rear ear."

"He didn' want us to come," hissed Mr. Ruddle again, "but he had to arsk us at the point-a bay'net."

"We are glad to know that our chief, while we have been opening up the new season's goods in our temporary premises, has signed the contract for a new and greater and up-to-date emporium on the old site of our most glorious victories."

"Rear ear!"

"I predict in those new premises even more splendid triumphs than Mullholland's stores have enjoyed in the past. I will leave our chief to tell you about the new building, and content myself with saying that he will in the future have only loyal co-operation, as lie has had our loyal service in the—in the—er, past— prior to the date of the late most disastrous fi-ah."

"Rear ear!"

"We all know the slanders suggested by unsuccessful rivals in the trade; the mean attempts to escape payment of claims by insurance companies which for years had received premiums; even suggestions that sinister methods had been used to bring about the late disastrous fi-ah. I ask you all, does our chief look like a man who would at dead of night sneak into his own emporium with

a firestick— or torch— concealed in his clothing and there deliberately set fire to the work of a lifetime?"

"No! No! Rear ear!"

The manager of the Fancy had pointed to Mullholland, and that gentleman, all pretty whiskers, smirk and crockery-ware teeth, certainly did not look like a man who would carry a firestick in his clothes; but Mr. Ruddle's heated breath bore words that sounded like "bisulphide carb'n cott'n waste."

Mr. Lascelles went on. "When I resume my seat, and before our chief responds to the toast, I shall ask Mr. Canfield, manager of the Dress department, to sing the tenor ballad, 'Maid of Athens.' I now ask you to be upstanding to drink to the health of our chief who has triumphantly conquered all the complexities and disappointments of the late disastrous fi-ah."

They drank, and unbuttoned— some literally, all mentally, except Mullholland, rehearsing his reply, and Mr. Ruddle, breathing fire and slaughter as if he were bound for Damascus. Dignified and stately shop-walkers pulled bonbons with reverend seigneurs of the Clothing and Manchester. They extracted paper fools' caps from the bonbons and put these on their heads, so that Whaley saw the pillars of the soft-goods trade wearing clown hats of blue and green and red and yellow, thus proving themselves mere mortals, after all.

It was during Mr. Canfield's bitter cry to the Maid of Athens to give him back his heart that Mr. Harry Ruddle, as one suddenly yielding to a new idea, left big seat and stole up to the great Mullholland. Whaley, watching him, saw that he had a green paper cap in his hand. Arrived behind Mullholland, Mr. Ruddle lighted a match on his own flank, fired the cap and put it on the great man's head.

They were all aghast at the sacrilege. Mullholland, tearing the burning cap off before it could become another disastrous fi-ah, turned furiously on the joker, discovered Ruddle and immediately calmed down and placated his assaulter. His motions showed Whaley that he was trying to persuade Ruddle to return to his seat, and then they had another shock. Ruddle, the poor relation, slapped the great man on the back and left Mullholland to return to his place. As he left Mullholland, he said:

"Right oh. Cockiewax."

The large man at the right of Whaley turned purple with indignation, saying, with the earnestness of a bishop repudiating blasphemy:

"Cockiewax! That fellow said 'Cockiewax'! To call the chief 'Cockiewax' means instant dismissal."

Whaley saw Mullholland pale to the lips as if the ridiculous word carried some deadly insult; and then he began to admire the man for his patience.

"This ill-conditioned little brute," thought Whaley, "is bent on insulting his host, and the host boars it because he's a poor relation. This Mullholland has a lot of fine points, although he is a draper."

Whaley slightly drew away from Mr. Ruddle on his return— slightly, though pointedly; but Mr. Huddle's successful baiting of the great man without incurring a penalty had made his drunkenness good-humored. He chuckled openly to himself and hissed of conspiracies no more. The brother opposite, whose potations were leaching the color from his face, stammeringly advised him to be careful, and Henry Ruddle laughed and uttered the ridiculous word again:

"Cockiewax!"

Whaley's right-hand neighbor exploded.

"What does it mean?" asked Whaley.

"I don't know, except that to say it in our chief's hearing means dismissal— instant dismissal, sir. I understand that it is an obscure insult used in Mr. Mullholland's schooldays. That frightful person next you was at school with our chief, and he knows it makes the chief frantic."

"Cockiewax," said Ruddle again, and emptied his glass— also again.

"Rear ear," said the company, as Mullholland rose to speak.

"My friends," said Mullholland, with the gentle, chastened air of a reformed courtesan at a christening, "for I may call you my friends, this token of your goodwill is a most pleasant surprise. A man in the Trade becomes used to misrepresentation. His consciousness of an honorable feeling keeps him healthy under the abuse that, without that consciousness, would sap his vitals—"

"Cockiewax!"

"Shame! Withdraw! Rear ear! Withdraw!"

"My friends," said Mr. Mullholland, with uplifted hand and a ghastly smile, "Mr. Ruddle forgets himself, but in his condition we must be patient— we must be gentle, we must even ignore him. Now, we know the part the Trade played during the war. Despite all the socialistic charges of profiteering, charges made by the enemies of the Empire, we know how modest was our— er— re-arrangement of prices, and how the customers themselves were responsible for increases. With all the war-money the public had to spend, we could have adhered to our old prices and had the pleasure of seeing our customers going to the other shops which know what the public wants. If we opened a line of coats and skirts at ten guineas and found them unsaleable, and then had the public rush the same line at fifteen guineas, were we to blame in raising the prices as they desired?"

"No! No! Rear ear!"

"It was just that insistence of the public on, not big prices, but prices— er— higher than formerly, that encouraged the Trade to buy heavily abroad, to find to their dismay that the public— always fickle— did not want high prices any more. That led to many realisations; overdrafts were called up; the ruin of years of effort stared us in the face."

"Cockiewax!"

"Now, by cripes!" said Mullholland. forgetting his statesmanlike pose, "I'll break your damned neck!"

He recovered himself immediately, and as if afraid that he had gone too far. "But, as I said, we must take our friend's condition into consideration and bear with him. Now, the position was as I have said. Banks calling up overdrafts; shipments arriving on falling markets; the spending power of the people curtailed. Little do these glib socialists know the anxious time we had devising ways and means so that the Trade should do its noble work in keeping commerce alive for the good of our country."

"Rear ear!"

"All the disloyal and socialistic elements outside the Trade made all sorts of accusations and insinuations against us. Even l did not escape! When the late disastrous fire occurred there were not wanting people to say that Our Emporium had been deliberately burned down."

"Shame! Rear ear!"

"You know how the insurance companies delayed our claims until forced to pay: and you know how that payment showed the Trade and the public generally that our hands were clean."

"Cockiewax!"

"That's the end of the section," snarled the Chesterfield of the Trade. He leaped for Mr. Ruddle, but Whaley's right-hand neighbor got him first, lifted him from his chair and ran him out, receiving the applause of Mullholland and the others as he closed the door and returned to the table. Ruddle's brother, his face now quite white but for the little nose that looked like a ripe cherry, left his seat and followed the disturber of private peace; and Whaley, seeing the solution with him, followed him.

Henry Ruddle collapsed in a settee half-drugged by his mixed liquors.

"He was outed at last," said Whaley to Ruddle's brother. "I'm surprised Mullholland bore it for so long."

The whitefaced man grinned horribly.

"Mullholland couldn't help it— he had to ask us. Henry insisted on it."

"Had to ask you....I say— tell me— does your brother know if Mullholland set fire to the store?"

The pale face trembled.

"Too dangerous to talk about," said Ruddle's brother.

"And what's 'Cockiewax'?"

"It used to make Mullholland mad at school."

"But why does Mullholland stand Henry?"

The pale-faced man looked about him fearfully before replying, and then whispered:

"Henry made Mullholland's fortune."

"Nonsense— how?"

"One engine got there before the place was well alight, and Henry cut the hose."

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13: Aim at the Pigeon

The Bulletin, 11 Mar 1920

"Aim at a pigeon and shoot a crow"... justice in the 1870s.

JAMES CHARLTON walked briskly from Flinders-street to his chambers in Temple Court, then, away back in the 'seventies, the place of lawyermen; of little legal offices in two tiers, strangely suggestive of a modern gaol; with a long stone-flagged court, broken by a fountain out of commission. He had been at the Bar for two years with never a brief big enough for him— merely the defence of little thieves, appearances for publicans before the Licensing Courts and County Court actions for little causes of debt. He knew he was big enough for greater things; and, unknown to himself, he had been noticed. The Melbourne agents of an important Riverina firm had sent him the brief to defend in the cause of the Queen against Phyllis Railton, charged with attempted murder.

Charlton, in the first joy of the mark on the brief which had made a new standard of fees for him, had discounted all its difficulties. Now, with a right to think it over, he was as glad as ever, but with a new anxiety at back of it. The evidence for the Crown was conclusive; defence seemed impossible, and yet he knew that he must succeed, not for the client's sake any more than for his own.

Charlton put down his bag and newspaper, hung up his hat on the portable stand which supported his gown, and sat at his paper-littered table, thinking deeply. He already knew that his defence must be absolutely new and audacious; that only the element of surprise— the essence of tactics— could break down the web his client had spun around herself. All the old ways of answering a charge, from destroying the credibility of the Crown witnesses to old Sam Weller's alibi, were impossible; to succeed in this impossible case, conventions must be destroyed, audacity must answer and out-stare the truth. Feeling helpless seated, he arose and paced the room, acting his thoughts aloud to himself with that histrionic ability which is at the base of all greatness of a preacher, advocate, statesman.

"Phyllis Railton is twenty or so. I hope she is good looking, or at least that she looks good and innocent. She is engaged to Mark Cobham; he suddenly jilts her and marries another woman. If the other woman is ugly and has money, so much the better. I'll get that in about the money, anyhow. Find her religion; and what's the prevailing religion of the jury panel. Get the strength of the majority, and challenge the minority. On the day Cobham married the other woman my client openly buys a shot-gun and practises openly with it just

outside the town; and three or four weeks later, as Cobham is mounting his horse in the main street of the town, she shoots him. Nearly kills him; he is three months in hospital. She's charged with attempted murder. Capital charge. I'll scare her for a start, if necessary; tell her they still hang women in New South Wales. No possibility of mistaken identity, and the girl has lived in that town all her life; and it was market day, and three or four hundred people saw the shooting. So I've got to get the jury. How? A fool would get flurried over tins, and try to square that country jury with money. I'll square them by getting at their sympathies. How, again? I can do no more here; I'll go up to New South Wales to-morrow. That coach drive will give me all the time I want to think."

In the wine-like air of Riverina Jim Charlton's thoughts were, clearer, and the new optimism of the region came to ease his way. Near to the sun-setting, and in the perfect late afternoon only to be known in the Central Plain of Australia or on the plains back of the Nile, five horses pulled the swaying coach as if it were a feather at their tails— over the wooden bridge that spanned the Murray: and then north to the town where Phyllis Railton lay in her cell in the red-bricked gaol, waiting trial for her life "for that she did attempt to feloniously kill and slay one Mark Cobham against the peace of our Sovereign Lady the Queen," and all the rest of the jargon.

The solicitors next day introduced him to Mrs. Barton, the elder and married sister of Phyllis Railton. Mrs. Barton was the pretty mother of two small girls— a woman tense and haggard from the suspense of these long weeks that un-nerved Phyllis Railton while Mark Cobham slowly mended in hospital. And Mrs. Barton gave Charlton a new fear; she told him that her sister Phyllis was careless of the future— refused to defend herself, and prayed only that she might die.

Charlton, finding that he had his own client as well as the Crown to fight, felt his burden grow heavier; but that did not destroy his method. He searched the local directory, and found a fact, to cheer him. Phyllis Railton was of Irish extraction; and most of the names in the directory ended with -lone or -egan and began with O or Mac. And the list of the jury panel had sampled the local directory fairly and at an average. That much done, he took counsel with the prisoner's solicitors, and found that Phyllis Railton had been known to the townspeople from childhood— a good daughter, a good friend; all that is comprised in the term "a good girl." Further, her solicitors added, she was now a suicidal girl; strangely calm, uninterested in the proceedings, refusing to help herself, and craving only to be forgotten.

With such unpromising material Charlton fared forth to his duty to his client and himself. The solicitor took him to the girl, and they found her in her

cell, which had known her for two months, and she gave the bare walls distinction. Being on remand, the gaol rules as to clothes did not apply to her. Charlton's hazel-eyed, brown-haired client, in a pink dress of the princess-robe fashion of the period, was like a flower in a cave. Charlton, used to appraise beauty and character with some correctness at a glance, saw that she was more than pretty though etiolated by imprisonment; for the pallor was clear like marble, not waxy like lard.

The solicitor introduced him and withdrew by design; he had already found a difficulty in getting her to talk before one man, and knew the impossibility of making her speak before two.

"Now, Miss Railton," said Charlton, "I am here as yourself, with your own interest in your life and welfare."

The girl sat down on her bed, her attitude that of calm despair. "I don't care for either my life or my welfare, Mr. Charlton."

"Now," said Charlton, trying to brighten her, "if you won't help me for your own sake, help me for mine— the most promising young advocate in Australia, if I may say it without immodesty."

But she did not smile— merely sat there, straight-backed and immovable, and let him talk.

"You see, my dear girl, the position we are in. It's useless to talk of mistaken identity; it's farcical to say that somebody else shot him."

That moved her. She rose from the bed, indignant as if she were being robbed of the reward of merit.

"Nobody else shot him. I did it. I won't have it said that I didn't. I shot him. I glory in it."

"Then we've got to take another line— the line of justifiable provocation."

"What!"

"We must say he seduced and jilted you."

Then she raved, but raved coherently; her words coming in a stream, full of white-hot indignation of Charlton's proposition and hatred of the man she had tried to kill.

"How dare you? That fellow! How dare you say that to me? Any medical man can disprove it. Oh, how dare you say that!"

"My dear young lady, I didn't say it. I said 'Let us pretend it.' It's our only hope— the only defence that can hold."

"It shan't be said. It shan't be said."

"Attempted murder is still a capital crime here; and they still hang women in this country."

"Let them! I'd rather die of a rope than die of shame— and that's what you are asking me to do!"

"And if you were reprieved it would be worse. Fifteen years with the scum of civilisation— it would be worse than death!"

"Death or forgetfulness, I don't care. Now I'll ask you to go. This is my private room, even if it is a gaol."

Charlton went away defeated; but the sight of the wardress in the corridor gave him an idea. In pursuance of it he returned to speak a commonplace, merely with an eye to future arrangements, and so left the gaol to seek Phyllis Railton's married sister. On the road he made his plan. He found the piquant little woman not with the strong character of Phyllis, and therefore more dismayed at the thought of the procession-to-be— prisoners, judges, policemen and the shadow of the rope. Her two dainty little girls played at her feet.

"Yes, I saw her," said Charlton. "What pretty little girls! Both yours?"

"Yes, Mr. Charlton. My sister—"

"What age is this one?"

"Three, Mr. Charlton. Myra is five. But Phyllis?"

"I can do nothing with her. She refuses to help herself."

"Oh, what can we do?"

"Mrs. Barton, suppose when your little girls grow up their happiness was wrecked through your sister's obstinacy? Just a minute! Suppose your sister were hanged?"

"Oh, oh, Mr. Charlton!"

"Suppose she got 15 years. In 15 years your daughters will be marriageable. Imagine their lives being smashed because some cruel gossip goes to their lovers and says 'Don't marry her— her aunt killed a man' —or 'Don't marry Myra— her aunt was a lifer'?"

"Oh. Mr. Charlton—anything!"

"Well, first—now attend. You'll have trouble with your sister, but she must be brought to do as I say. I've noticed that most of the names of the directory and the panel are Irish. Now get a big green shawl, with a big harp of Erin on the corner of it, and give the wardress a couple of pounds to throw the harp-end of the shawl over the spikes as soon as Phyllis gets into the dock."

"I will— anything."

"It must be well stage-managed. Make the wardress rehearse it half a dozen times, so that she throws the shawl over the dock-rail with the proper amount of carelessness."

"Yes— yes!"

"And now we come to a more delicate part of it. The green shawl is only for the first good impression of the jury. It can't affect the evidence. Now, we've got to manufacture evidence."

"Perjury!"

"No ! Only the perjury of a pillow or so and the Law doesn't prosecute bed-furniture. I told Phyllis the only possible line of defence was that Cobham had seduced her."

"Oh, Mr. Charlton, she's a good girl!"

"I know she is. We've got to save the good girl's life and liberty. That's my defence that Cobham seduced and deserted her, and that, crazy with the insult, she shot him. Now— it's up to you!"

"She'll never forgive me, she's so proud."

"You'll never forgive yourself if once you see the black cap, or hear the long sentence."

"I'll do anything you say— anything."

"Ever read about the French Revolution?"

"Very little, sir."

"Well, owing to revolution and wars the male population dwindled very low and new population was urgently wanted. To be about to become a mother was then thought even more honorable than maternity should always be. So fashionable was motherhood that ladies counterfeited pregnancy."

"Oh, Mr. Charlton !"

" 'With mere pillows and stuffing sometimes,' says Montgaillard. Will you do it? It's her life."

"Anything— anything!"

WHEN the case of the Queen against Phyllis Railton was called, a great crowd resented the encroachment on the body of the court by the solicitors and solicitors' clerks, who had overflowed from the barristers' table— overcrowders of the Bar and alleged lawyers, curious to hear this new, young man from Melbourne attempting to tray the rope already spun for his client.

Charlton glanced at the dock, and saw that Phyllis Railton looked as if she hated him for his part in the farce she had been forced to play. She held her head high as she looked at him, her eyes full of scorn; the red patch of rage burned in her pale cheeks. She gestured impatience, and then dull resignation, as the wardress lifted the right-hand corner of the green shawl the prisoner wore and threw it over the dock, so exposing a harp of Erin worked in yellow silk.

Charlton for all his anxieties smiled to himself. "The wardress has had her forty bob all right, and the harp is big enough to play on. What's the wardress doing now?"

The wardress had had other instructions. She pulled the shawl aside from the prisoner's body; and the prisoner replaced it impatiently.

"H'm," said Charlton—"instructions carried out, but overdone. It's the bolster instead of the pillow."

And then the jury came; and Charlton, hearing the long string of names—"Nolan, Fitzpatrick, Clooney, O'Regan"— challenged not at all. It pleased him to see that the jury, looking at the dock, saw the shawl, and were fascinated.

Charlton was almost light-hearted. "It's the harp that once through Tara's halls has got 'em. Here I go to make history and precedent!"

His cross-examination of the arresting constable and of the storekeeper who sold the gun to the prisoner was so soft and aimless that it shocked the old stagers at the barristers' table.

"Did they have any doubt that it was the prisoner who bought the gun and fired the shot?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Why unfortunately?"

Because she was a good girl. One of the best. They had known her tor many years. And they had no doubt that it was she who tired the shot?

They had none.

"Thank you."

The old stagers buzzed one to the other.

"What's he mean by it? He's putting the rope around his client's neck."

Mark Cobham entered the box. He gave his evidence haltingly and reluctantly. He had been engaged to Phyllis, had jilted her, had married the other woman and then Phyllis shot him.

Charlton arose to cross-examine, hitching up the gown that always slipped low on the left shoulder, slapping his wig where the perspiration tickled him. He had Cobham's measure quickly— a mean, slant-eyed fellow, thick-lipped and flat-footed. He had seen him padding to the box as if he had no heels, walking like a cat, and immediately recognised him as one of those mean, treacherous, sneaking egoists to whom really fine women of character become plastic; maybe to equilibrise quality, as the pony woman equilibrises size by marrying a Clydesdale man. Charlton looked him squarely in the eye. and saw the sneak, aided by his rudimentary conscience, become all a coward, beaten by glances before entering the ring. To complete the nervousness of the witness Charlton delayed to turn over some papers as if searching for something; took up the book nearest him, opened it impressively, looked accusingly at Cobham: and so completed the rout. Charlton paused again, and Cobham's nervous hands showed the barrister the utter demoralisation of the man. Then Charlton looked at the prisoner. Her brown hair, disarranged in the last friendly struggle to prepare her for Charlton's dramatic situation, shone like powdered gold in the sunlight that touched the dock. In the stony

quietness of her face, with the red flags of shame half-masted in her cheeks, she seemed to that jury, won by her beauty and the harp of Erin on the green shawl, to be not accused, but accuser; and the finger of her counsel pointed at the real criminal, in the witness-box.

"You have known the prisoner for some time?"

Cobham wetted his dry lips, moved his red, nervous hands and replied. "Ye-es, sir."

"You went to school with her?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"But that gave you no chivalry to her— no sense of duty?"

Silence.

"You became engaged to her six months ago ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And three months ago you suddenly deserted her and married another girl?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you desert her?"

"Be—because I liked the other girl more."

"Because the other girl had more money— even if she had not a fraction of her beauty?"

Silence.

"You didn't want to prosecute her?"

"No —no, sir."

At that moment the prisoner, who had leaned forward over the door, blazing all her hatred at the witness, let the shawl slip from her shoulders, and it hung from the dock-rail. She recovered it instantly, but all had seen. Compassion came to the tired eyes of the Judge, weary of hearing all the sins and transgression of the world.

"The police made you prosecute her?"

"Yes, sir."

"I say nothing against the police— they have done their delicate duty like gentlemen— the Law gives them no option; but they feel all the pity due to that girl. Pardon the digression, your Honor; the feelings of a man sometimes overcome respect for the forms of law. Now, witness, again— you didn't want to prosecute?"

"No, sir."

"After you married the other girl Miss Railton bought a gun and practised with it quite openly?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Practised with it for your benefit?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And then, a month after your marriage, the prisoner came out into the open street on a market day; came there mad, with four hundred witnesses of what is merely a technical crime— pardon me, your Honor— and as you mounted your horse shot you?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Shot you in the buttocks?"

And then ridicule came to take the last shred of sympathy from the man and hand it to the woman. The jury felt a personal grudge against Cobham, and the hunter became the hunted.

"If any unseemly levity is indulged in the court will be cleared."

"Yes— shot you in the buttocks?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"The only place you're ever likely to be shot in, as you seem to be in a chronic condition of running away!"

Silence.

"Shall I tell you why you didn't want to prosecute? Because you know that poor girl bears the result of your cruel gratification, and even a scoundrel such as you hesitates at sending his unborn child to the living death of a prison or the infamy of the scaffold. Get out of the box!"

YEARS LATER, down in that tavern which looks like a boy-monastery that was dwarfed in youth and has never grown up, Charlton, K.C., told me the end of the story.

"After that trial anybody would think I had sentenced my client to death instead of opening the gaol-door for her to go out. All the boys congratulated me; the jury, once it was discharged, wanted to kiss me and kill the man Phyllis shot, and, taking everything by and large, I would rather have been killed than kissed. And then I went round to see my client and have her weep tears of gratitude on my neck for working up that emotional jury to acquit her without leaving the box. I found her in the witnesses' room— normal again as far as appearances went. She'd thrown the shawl under the table, and all the rest of it ; and she was as mad as a Polar bear in a menagerie in summer.

" 'Congratulations, Miss Railton,' I said; and then she opened out.

"She had been insulted— deeply, horribly traduced, and she'd rather have died by the hangman than have the Court believe she'd been weak to the chap she shot. She gave me pepper. At last she said:

" 'My reputation's gone.'

"And I said, 'But your life is saved.'

" 'What do I care!' says she. 'My character is wrecked ; and I must go away and take another name.'

''I was getting tired of this ungrateful unreasonableness, and I said in self-defence, 'I needn't change my name— it's made for life.'

"So with that I went away, and she heaped scorn and more ingratitude on me as I left her. But I laughed, and went back to Melbourne; and after that the briefs came like leaves in the Fitzroy Gardens."

"I suppose she was honest in saying she preferred death, Jim?"

"She was— quite. But to show you how a man builds better than he knows— five months later she became the mother of a child the exact likeness of the gentleman she shot before four hundred witnesses. A man builds better than he knows."

My friend Charlton was not the first man who made a great reputation by aiming at a pigeon and shooting a crow.

14: "Come, My Love, and Go with Me"

The Bulletin, 30 Dec 1915

THE Reverend Mr. Pennychook, northward bound on the *Arawatta,* was so enamored of the beauty of Whitsunday Passage that he began to quote the *Book of Job* in its incidence to the wonders of the Lord. He had been but a day on the track of the 1200 miles of mill-pond calm from Keppel Bay to Torres Strait; ordinarily a wretched sailor, in that heaven of unbroken water, where the ship floated so evenly that the gulls stood for hours flat-footed on the jumper stay, he waited impatiently for the gong that summoned him to such lust of the flesh as cooks provide for; hurrying to the saloon at the first sound of the tocsin, and going steadily through the menu from soup to nuts. After a meal, he dozed an hour in his deck chair under the awning— dozed a poor imitation of the slumber of the blackfellow drugged with food.

Then for another hour he lazily drank the beauty of it— the perfumed breath of a bush-fire from the land, the sea scents of the distant, tide-bared reef, mingled with the odors of towns that smelled as if they were made of pineapples; the vision of the Mountains of the Main, blue in haze; the lazy inner sea, dead but for its tides, lipping the purple islands; the sage-green water shining like a shield under the sun, and by night a mobile silver plane that bore the ship as placid as a resting gull.

Before high noon the ship passed the couchant lion shape of Pentecost; and there and at Jesuit Point, the Cid and Orpheus Isle and Miranda, the Rev. Mr. Pennychook with some irrelevance quoted Job re Behemoth and Leviathans, the bands of Orion, the Pleiades and the treasures of the snow.

It was in Whitsunday Passage that, as he stood by the starboard rail, having left his deck chair in sheer weariness of rest, he was joined by Miss Spencer. She was fleshed to a comfortable stoutness, her chin beginning to ripple, 42 and comely with the comeliness of the old maid in the rare Indian summer which has never known a spring.

Mr Pennychook. who had wrestled with Predestination. Faith. Works and the Demon Alcohol until the drabness of life called for a change— although he called it a "rest-hour for brain fag"— had been friendly with Miss Spencer for a year, and had regarded as Providential the coincidence of their holiday and the surprise meeting on the ship at Sydney. The attraction of the cheerful, fleshly lady for the thin, sun-freckled, red-whiskered ascetic was more physical than mental; alas! Miss Spencer was not orthodox. She was a Christian Scientist, and lived by lecturing on the non-existence of pain to audiences prone to toothache, boils, hayfever and the gnawings of malassimilation.

''You poor thing," she had said to Mr. Pennychook at Sydney— "no, I'm not on holiday because I'm ill. I'm always well and I'm going north to enjoy myself."

"Mine is brain fag," Mr. Pennychook said, with the melancholy satisfaction that the fag proved the brain.

"Nonsense!" replied Miss Spencer, with cheerful rudeness. "There's no such thing as brain fag. There's no ill in all the world except bad thoughts."

Mr. Pennychook eagerly disclaimed the possession of bad thoughts; nevertheless, two days out from Sydney, when he seemed brighter at the sight of Brisbane River, she insisted that the bad thoughts must have fallen overboard betwen Seal Rocks and Moreton Light.

They were very good friends for all their differences of shibboleths; and Mr. Pennychook talked with her when not eating, dozing in the deck chair, or in his bath wallowing like a thin grampus, or sleeping or quoting the *Book of Job* to the scenery. Miss Spencer leaned on the starboard rail by the side of Mr. Pennychook and looked at the beauty of the great Stone Lion of Whitsunday Passage laving hia purple paws in the lettuce-green seas.

"Isn't it beautiful, Mr. Pennychook?" she said.

"Beautiful indeed!" replied Mr. Pennychook.

"It is all so beautiful because there have been no bad thoughts there," corrected Miss Spencer, ignoring the fact that all that beauty had seen piracy, slavery, sorcery, cannibalism, tribal fights, battle, murder and sudden death.

"I did not know the world could be so beautiful," said Mr. Pennychook, wisely sidestepping the contest of Christian Science versus Orthodoxy. "Since leaving Brisbane I seem to have a new idea of what beauty can be. My brain-fag must be disappearing."

"No, you have left that suburban parish and its bad thoughts behind you."

Mr. Pennychook opened his mouth to say that his suburban parish had other products than "bad thoughts," but the fingers of the light air of the Coral Sea were smoothing out his wrinkles and he passed it by.

"At any rate," he said gently, "I see the change in myself. I happened to mention it at lunch to the captain, and he said it was owing to the higher temperature; the chief-engineer said he defied anybody to go north of Rockhampton and not become human. I scarcely understood, and he explained that 'wowserism' (by which I presume he meant narrow-mindedness— though I confess I feel a physical repulsion at the word) a sudden death 10 miles north of Keppel Bay. However that may be— and it seemed a trifle ribald then, though it is not so now— I am better, much better, thank God!"

"I wonder if there are any people on these islands, or whether all the beauty goes to waste?"

"The chief-officer tells me there is a sawmill on one of those pine islands — the Cid, I think he said."

"Is pine wood all they produce?"

"I asked the second-officer— a wild young man he is, I fear— I asked him if the natives cultivated anything, and he replied—"

Mr. Pennychook blushed furiously and stopped short, concluding, "But I mustn't tell you that."

The Christian Scientist forgot the differentiation of good thoughts and bad thoughts; she desired only to know all the thoughts of Mr. Pennychook. Suspending the practice of Christian Science she reverted to type— real woman, persuasive, warm, inquisitive, confiding. She leaned closer to Mr. Pennychook. His thin body felt the atmosphere of womanhood. Their elbows touched as they leaned npon the rail, and Miss Spencer said softly and seductively: "Tell me."

Mr. Pennychook coughed. "Well— er— I don't think I should give a lady his description of the manners and customs of the natives, though the study of ethnology is— er— highly interesting."

"Do tell me," begged Miss Spencer, nearer and nearer.

"Well— er— then— I asked the second officer what the natives cultivated, and he replied— er— he replied 'Coconuts and— dear me— coconuts and polygamy.' "

"Coconuts and polyg"— repeated Miss Spencer— "h—how wicked! Oh!"

She left him not at all concerned with the bad thoughts of the second mate. Looking after her, Mr. Pennychook saw that her ample shoulders were shaking. Then the mercury climbed the thermometer a few degrees, and Mr. Pennychook laughed too. And thus they forged a mutual bond.

Mr. Pennychook asked her to walk ashore during the six hours' wait at Bowen. They threw stones at the porcelain-blue soldier-crabs marching and counter-marching—like Broadmeadows mobilising for war. And they bought mangoes and ate them together, and further cemented their friendship with sticky hands.

At sea again that night Mr. Pennychook walked the deck with Miss Spencer, and after she had retired he walked again and thought thoughts leading nowhere in particular, but at least in a direction opposed to Faith, Works, Predestination and the *Book of Job*. He remembered the touch of elbow on elbow at the rail; the naughty bond of the second mate's joke on the details of island cultivation; the kindly weight of her upon his arm as they reviewed the manoeuvres of the soldier crabs.

The *Arawatta*'s passengers awoke at the anchorage off Townsville by Magnetic Island. It was one of those steaming mornings late in March, and the

lighters that were tugged out of Ross Creek to tranship cargo from the *Arawatta* sweated in company with the sea, the sky and the ship.

Mr. Pennychook descended to the deck as the greasy rain ceased, and the sun came out to make Cleveland Bay and Magnetic Island a beautiful sort of Turkish-bath. Miss Spencer leaned by the rail at the head of the well-deck, and Mr. Pennyehook heard of her before he saw her. She had slightly raised her dress to clear the rain-soaked deck, and Mr. Pennyehook heard a man in the lighter far below calling to his mate that here was a good chance for a prodigal.

His mate demanding the good chance to be explained, the lighterman indicated Miss Spencer as the owner of the fatted calf. Mr. Pennychook, following the glance of the men, discovered Miss Spencer and saw a very neat leg, and blushing turned his eye away. Miss Spencer hearing the talk let her skirt out to its length; but calmly, and quite at ease, as one knowing the excellence of her understanding. Then Mr. Pennyehook looked again, and Miss Spencer met his glance fully. He blushed again as he joined her, and they moved from the rail to the port side of the ship and farther aft. There was a lighter working cargo from the *Arawatta*'s after-hatch; looking down at the grimy Titans toiling in that sweating hold with sling and doghook, Mr. Pennychook suddenly withdrew Miss Spencer from an indecency— though it was only that the lightermen worked navel-naked in that thick-tasting and steaming air.

They talked constrainedly until eight bells, often stopping tongue-tied in the middle of a sentence never to be finished, momently regarding one another with a new interest, and momently turning away ashamed. They were separated for breakfast as usual, but after their ploughman's meal— for Miss Spencer was a good doer too— Mr. Pennyehook sought her again as if it were inevitable.

They sat under the boat deck, for again rain fell; its splash and ripple in the scuppers were dominant sounds, for the winches had stopped and the lumpers were smoking after breakfast. Suddenly from the lighter in the greasy tide below a big, clear, cheerful voice of a big man began to sing, and all the lumpers were a chorus in response:—

Come, my love, and go with me.
The Chorus*: Yes, my love, I'll meet you,*
Meet you down in Tennessee.
The Chorus*: Meet you by-and-bye,*
Soon the parson he will come.
The Chorus*: Yes, my love, I'll meet you.*
Soon he'll make two niggers one.
The Chorus*: Meet you by-and-bye.*
Hoe the corn!

The Chorus*: Hoe the corn, Moses,*
Hoe the corn,
Moses, hoe the corn!

Get away from my window,
My love and my dove,
Get away from my window,
Don't you hear! Oh, my!
Come some other night,
For there's going to be a fight,
For the razors are a-flying in the air.

"They sing very nicely," said Miss Spencer awkwardly and with dry lips.

"Indeed, charming!" stammered Mr. Pennyehook. "I —I think it very nice indeed. It is—apparently— a negro's courtship song, judging by the line to the effect that the parson will come practically immediately. Hoeing the corn, Moses, shows that they were agriculturists; but I deprecate the idea of razors.... And the day will be beautiful. Will you not come ashore now?"

"I'll get my hat," said Miss Spencer, adding with unconscious plagiarism, "and meet you by-and-bye."

While he waited Mr. Pennychook discovered that he was thinking of Miss Spencer deeply and not as a sister. His mind told him, however, to "Tut! Tut!" and he put the new idea resolutely from him.

They went ashore silent with shyness, scarcely able to look at one another, and quite unable to refrain from looking. Ashore Mr. Pennychook hired a cab to drive along tlie Strand. On the landward side were coconut palms waving their fronds through the heavy air; the dumb sea lay swooning on the beach: Magnetic Island was purple in the sunlight.

"Our boat goes two-tliirty." said Mr. Pennyehook. "We'll go back and sit on the verandah of the hotel covered with the flaming scarlet flower."

On the balcony of the Queen's Hotel, with the reflection of the bougainvillaea deepening Miss Spencer's pink cheeks to a fired blush, Mr. Pennychook drank tea while waiting for lunch, and schooled himself to look at Miss Spencer with unfaltering gaze. And by-and-bye they were looking at each other almost in shame, yet unable to take their eyes away. Mr. Pennychook was about to relieve the tension by stammering some commonplace on the eternal subject of the weather, when, shrieking with the joy of distancing his pursuer, Eros ran from a room on to the balcony.

Eros was five years old, naked and happy, followed by a black-haired nurse who carried his clothes on her arm and pursued the child to dress him. He was one of those beautiful children a decent man thanks God for— fair, yellow-

haired, violet-eyed, his face like a flower, beauty enveloping him in aura, a skin of sunlight, lips of the tint of Marvel of Peru.

He stopped between the chairs of Mr. Pennychook and Miss Spencer; his hair was still damp from the bath, and in that warmth his splendid body despised the use of clothes. He laughed loudly at distancing the nurse. So exquisitely alive was he that he hugged himself and trembled at the ecstasy of breathing.

"Pete! Come and be dressed!" said the nurse.

"No!" shouted Pete; then, trying to swear like a man, "Dash Heaven."

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" said Mr. Pennychook as the nurse executed a flank movement to take the beauty prisoner.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Peter, showing a pomegranate of a month full of pearls.

"Dash Heaven."

Miss Spencer put out a faltering hand towards him; but the child, laughing, avoided it, ran under her arm and down the length of the long verandah, the sunlight gilding his body— Eros in flight and the black-haired nurse in close pursuit. They watched him until he disappeared laughing into a room at the end of the verandah— whence shrieks of disgust and rage told of his capture.

Miss Spencer's gaze was fixed upon that room as if she expected Eros to come back again, and only Mr. Pennychook's voice, husky and faltering with passion, made her look again at him to see the little man transfigured. All the processes of love were in the crucible, and a temperature of 98 Fahrenheit helped the smelting.

"Come, my love, and go with me!" stammered Mr. Pennychook from dry lips.

"Yes, my love, I'll meet you," replied Miss Spencer.

"Meet you down in Tennessee,'' said Mr. Pennychook, solemnly, and kissed her. Miss Spencer swayed to his breast. It was bony and uncomfortable, but the Christian Scientist believed more than ever that there is no such thing as pain.

"Meet you by-and-bye," said Miss Spencer, and put her mouth up to be kissed again.

They were, as the Jack Harkaway stories used to put it, locked in a deadly embrace when the bell rang for lunch.

15: Trouble in Banana Row

The Bulletin, 25 Feb 1915

MR. THOMAS PERTH felt that he looked pale as he thought of his monstrous danger. There was still trouble to be anticipated from the Darlington quarter. Being quite healthy he blamed— himself; not finding time even to blame Miss Darlington, whose ripe age might easily have acquitted him. When was a 22-year-old youth the equal in ability to escape, of a woman of 32 in her capacity for pursuit?

It had occurred so easily— easily as lying, adventitious as the careless blow that kills a man and charges the striker with murder. The first step only he had taken. The lady had done all the rest of the journey, and encouraged him to the first step as well. And it is the first step that counts— the first smoke, the first drink, the first sixpence embezzled from the petty cash, the first marriage and the first divorce. After that there is no event but monotony and no energy but ennui. Kill a man without discovery and without remorse, and thereafter killing is as tame as making your own cigarettes. For this reason it is as well to think deeply on the subject before killing your first man.

Thomas, for the first time in his life, had had five shillings' worth of masked ball— total cost 12 shillings, including one and sixpence for a mask and two shillings for the hire of a black domino. It was a cheap disguise, and he called himself a Spanish inquisitor.

For Thomas the ball had all the newness of Heaven, which surely palls after the first day. Amid all these dresses which made women the more beautiful because their faces were hidden, Thomas was attracted by a graceful girl in ruff and stomacher and farthingale, made the more alluring by the fact that immediately next her was a most villainous, low-browed, old, white-armed village blacksmith who looked as if he had never struck anything harder than lard and had struck it with a feather.

Feeling as gallant as he was nervous, Thomas spoke to Queen Elizabeth, and she turned and showed him of her face only a rounded chin and eyes shining glamor, mystery and seduction. The mask made him wondrously brave for such a shy young man as he. His eyes and his voice spoke caresses, and the lady had been in possession of her own eyes for so many years that every trick possible to eyes she knew. She got his name out of him, and when he unmasked she, still masked, introduced him to her brothers— large, horrible men, one dressed as an executioner, and looking the part to the life; the other as a butcher, and he seemed not to be disguised at all. She commandeered him, saying with an affectation of girlishness that did not seem much amiss

while she remained masked: "Mr. Perth will take me to supper." Thomas blushed and accepted.

She laid her right hand on his left arm, and he saw a finger like a talon. That shocked him a little, but he still believed, for his name was not Didymus, but Perth. He led this angel, who should be fed on asphodel, to where a drink the color of an old Axminster carpet, and tasting like water that has had table-knives washed in it, retained its mask all the night and called itself "Claret Cup." The angel drank three glasses of this red sherbet, and he brought her sandwiches, and asked her to pity him and unmask.

She raised the little eye-pierced foolishness of black lace and satin board, and he saw her face, a face that would make most men burn the topmost towers of Ilium and launch a thousand ships to escape from her.

The eyes that had appeared so, large, so liquid, so full of glamor in the frame of the black satin now showed as mean and little— the eyes of the woman looking for a name that carries with it board and lodging for life— with luck, board and lodging and a husband anyhow, for a time. Under the powder which made her look like a badly-burned baby hurriedly treated with flour he saw, as with the eyes of a grown man, the withered skin beginning to yellow. And he was so generously young that he tried to reason himself into the belief that the unmasking had not altered her. That reasoning was his first wrong step. His eyes saw truly, his instinct was correct, and his kindness refused the evidence.

She affected to be unable to find her brothers after the last dance— although he saw plainly enough the backs of the natural executioner and of the butcher-by-habit, and then she affected a terror of being alone in the cruel city at half-past two in the morning, and Thomas chartered a cab— a waggonette, luckily, which is a foe to darkness, propinquity and tenderness— and went with her along a weary road to dreary flat country. She dragged out of him the promise that he would call on her next evening, and the bewildered youth returned to his own home in the dawn —after paying £1-7s. For the cab. He went to bed wondering why cabmen do not make enough money to retire on sound investments within a year.

That evening he went, like a snail, unwillingly to court, and was charged with coldness by this over-mature virgin, who was nigh winter and threatening frosty. Before her family— including the executioner-by-nature, and the butcher-by-instinct— she called him "Tommy," captured his unwilling hand, and gave herself the last touch of proprietorship of him by settling his necktie and picking invisible fluff off his coat. If a woman picks fluff off your coat you are hers, unless you can run faster.

As he was leaving, too, she said before them all: "It will be all right, dear. Father doesn't object to me keeping company with you— only he says we're too young yet, and we must wait!" Her father looked bewildered at the statement that had been put into his mouth, and opened that mouth as if in denial, but he intercepted her quick warning glance, which plainly said: "Don't spoil my chances, you ridiculous old fool." So he shut his mouth and opened it again with- out sound, like a fish gasping for the sea.

Tommy Perth's spine trembled at the suggestion that his unwilling philandering had been accepted as playing for keeps. He could not get out of the house fast enough, though they detained him at the alleged "musical evening" arranged by Miss Darlington in his honor. The "music" was of the most lugubrious of hymn tunes, for the Darlingtons were staunch Wesleyans— though they let the daughter of the house ogle at a masked ball once a year ever so shamelessly. Miss Darlington's own contribution was a cheerful song setting forth the advantages of dying and finding a better world than this, and her backward lover walked quickly away from the house, seeming still to hear her thin and colorless treble slurring the words so that any Grand Master of an Orange Lodge could not but differ:—

Inite-lee pitch my moving tent
A day's march neara Rome.

Three days later, finding that Tommy Perth was making a Mariana and a Moated Grange of her, she called at his boarding-house to inquire of hint, and that night Tommy paid up and shifted his moving camp a day's march nearer Manly. But the removal did not affect the bloodhound-persistence of Miss Darlington. She called at his place, of business, the wholesale softgoods house in York-street, and though he tried to dodge her behind great stacks of blankets in the Manchester Department she caught him at last and bore him triumphantly to her mother, who waited in the "silks" on the first floor.

Miss Darlington's mother was as like her daughter as an irritable poodle may resemble a determined bloodhound. She snapped at him because she believed he didn't want to be her son-in-law, and when Tommy Perth, with a sudden accession of courage, remarked that she had guessed right at the first try, Miss Darlington cried and threatened, and her mother threatened and snapped, withdrawing at last with loud statements that the law would be invoked, and this wrecker of happiness punished if justice could he found in the country. Tommy sorrowfully watched them go, and was filled with apprehension. He knew that in the pursuit of their prey both the bloodhound and the poodle would swear to anything.

The manager of the Manchester Department also bullied him for "not keeping his domestic affairs apart from business," and Tommy Perth ate his lunch seated on a roll of matting and wished that all the eight floors of the warehouse and the softgoods thereof might fall on him, and cheat the poodle and the bloodhound. The small boys who were learning to be noble drapers and gathering the craft and mystery of clearing sales, job lots and of making double profits by selling unseasonable rubbish at exorbitant profits regardless of cost, spread the story of the mortifying pursuit of him about the warehouse. And he was chaffed and insulted, and advised to marry the poor little thing, until he passed from rage to despair, and from despair to thoughts of suicide. For a week he wandered about the streets during the lunch-hour, afraid to face the merciless mirth and humor of the warehouse. And when work was done he slunk back to his boarding-house by lonesome streets, turning at every corner to see if the bloodhound and the poodle were yet on his track.

Three days after the visit to the warehouse of mother and daughter he walking moodily back to work at the end of the lunch-hour. He turned into York-street by the Town Hall, rounding the corner of the old Central Police Station and its wall of white-washed brick. North of the police station were the old Central Markets of weather-pitted galvanised iron, and a dozen wholesale banana stores— twelve low-roofed dark shops given to the fruit of Fiji. Small boys from Surry Hills and Ultimo and Pyrmont and the Rocks haunted the place for bananas fallen from the great stalks. Bananas green and yellow and rotten-ripe littered these sidewalks and the street. A squashy crossing led over the road to the old Flower Pot Inn, where gardeners and fruit merchants and greengrocers moistened their occupations with rum.

Tommy Perth walked slowly and sadly down Banana Row, reflecting on the monstrous injustice of the pursuit of unwilling youth by edacious age, and sweated with sudden fear as he saw Miss Darlington and her peevish ma turn into York-street from Market-street. He turned to flee by the way he had come, and he saw, advancing upon him from that direction, the brother who was an executioner-by-habit and the brother who was a butcher-by-nature. In the north were the irritable poodle and the persistent and indomitable virgin; to the south threatened battle, murder and sudden death.

As a man confronted with death by burning on the top of a skyscraper he hesitated for a moment while they quickly approached, cutting off escape except to the east and to the west. Then he desperately leaped into the second store on Banana Row.

It was a banana world. There were bananas by the hundreds of bunches, each bunch holding from six to ten dozen. It seemed to the heated fancy of

Tommy Perth that millions of bananas were there, and that in the scheme of Creation there was room only for Fiji and the Darlington family.

A Chinaman, his face as blank as a brick wall, looked at him with little eyes of cunning.

"What you want?" he asked with growing suspicion as Tommy Perth's gaze wandered indecisively from bananas to the door and the street beyond.

"Have you any— ba— ba—bananas?"

"You see— plenty banana— what you want?"

"Aah— er three dozen."

"Ahi! Shixsypen dozhin." said the Asiatic taking a paper bag and blowing into it that it might open for the reception of the fruit. Tommy Perth lost all interest in him as he saw the hat and feather of Miss Darlington and the stern bonnet of her mother pass the door. Southward he was saved, then. He forgot the Chinaman, whose face was turned from him, and he forgot the bananas, and ran out of the shop. It was impossible to resist the desire to look around after the retreating enemy. He sighted the Unholy Family 100 ft. away and comparing notes, and in that moment they saw him and shouted at him unitedly as dingoes give tongue in unison when they see the quarry weakening and know that feeding-time is near. Then the bloodhound sister and the poodle mother and the executioner-and-butcher-by-birth-and-habit gave chase. Tommy Perth ran down Banana Row, and saw at the market entrance Mr. Napery— the head of his department. He knew Mr. Napery to be an uncompromising wowser—of that specially uncomfortable form of self-righteousness which believes the worst of everybody, and when it says that it hopes for the best really means that it hopes the worst is true.

Caught between two fires Tommy ran into store number nine on Banana Row. A double store it was, with stacks of bananas serving as a partition, and dividing the wide entrance into two. A large, black-moustached, sloe-eyed, greasy-ringleted Italian was in charge and he looked up quickly as the unhappy young man entered gasping.

"H'lo!" he said genially. "You makea the *passegiata* too queek— losea the breathe. Whatta you want?"

"Ha —ha —have you any bananas?"

"*Per Dio*! the banan'! We havea the banan' *di millione* — *Securo*! the banan'! How much you want?"

"Th-th-three dozen."

The Italian began to count to 36. "*Una*! *due*! *tre*! *Per Cristo*, the fine banan' *quattro*." But he never got beyond five in the presence of his customer, for Tommy Perth, seeing the feathers of the Family at the southern door, ran around the stack of bananas, out at the northern door and onward. He tore

past Mr. Napery, and that splendid and Christian gentleman scented something naughty and pursued. Behind Tommy rose the hues and cries of the Family, of one Chinaman, with three dozen bananas ordered and not paid for; of one Italian still counting up to 36 and breathing revenge and slaughter against practical jokers who order bananas and leave without the goods and make no attempt at payment. And well in the chase ran Mr. Napery, and he cried "Stop Thief" as he saw a policeman on the other side of Market-street. The policeman did not hear the cry, but the panting absconder did. Desperately he turned into No. 22 Banana Row, the biggest banana store of all, and with its wide doorway divided into north and south entrances like that of No. 9. The badgered young man tore in at the south door and rounded a banana stack. He saw a grey-moustached, grey-bearded man, whose whiskers were foreign and seemed to be made of wire.

"What shall you wish?" he asked, still eating the cold pork he had been engaged with prior to Perth's entrance.

"Bub— bub— bananas."

"I sell you one-twenty- undered-thousan' bunch. What you want?"

"I don't know," stammered Perth, sparring for wind, waiting for the pursuit to pass him, or permit him to dodge it, or to capture him. He cared not which.

'Won don' know," repeated wire whiskers. "You don' know! That verra funny. You not know!"

"Never mind," said Perth, hearing the nearness of the pursuit, and in that moment he dashed to the northern door as the pursuers entered at the southern. He ran full into the policeman's arms. He was quite despairing and distracted. His hand touched a banana as if he were a drowning man. He gripped it and squeezed it and then gripped another, quite unconscious of the action.

Babel raged. The Nasty Family and the Chinaman and the Italian were all talking at once.

"Tlee dozhin," said the Chinese. "One shileen shicksypen. No pay."

"Due shilleen," said the Italian. "Due shillen— *trente-sei* banan', due shilleen."

"Stole the bananas, did he?" asked the policeman.

"I never had the bananas," said Tommy Perth, squeezing more bananas in his cruel nervousness.

"Well, what did you order them for?"

"I was running away from those people."

"He calls me 'those people,' " wailed Miss Darlington.

"Pay for the bananas and get rid of that anyhow," said the policeman.

"I can't!" explained the despairing Perth. "I haven't any money."

"There you see," said the policeman.

"He's done nothing. You can't charge him with stealing because he never took them."

A cry of agony arose from the wire-whiskered Greek.

"See what he havea done! He squeeza the poor banan'— makea all the poor banan' squeeza outa the skin."

Tommy, feeling that he was awakening from a horrible dream, dropped that last banana he had squeezed— it was the eighth.

The cry of the wounded Greek arose again.

"Pleeceman! He shall be taked to the yale. He notta the monna have— makea the damagement."

"If you can't pay you've got to come with me." And Perth, much relieved, answered the policeman: "Right! Take me anywhere away from here."

"Why did you run away in the first place?" asked Mr. Napery.

"He was running away from me," said Miss Darlington, "from me and me mother and brothers. But if there's justice in the land he shall marry me or pay."

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Napery, glad to find that his worst fears might yet be realised. "Poor girl! Poor, injured girl! Deceived and abandoned."

"Abandoned— not deceived. It would take a real splendid man to deceive me— not a miserable little wretch like that."

"You'd better come along," said the policeman, and Tommy Perth, deafened by the clamor of the Darlingtons and of the Chinaman and Mr. Napery and the Italian and the Greek was about, to crawl away gladly to his prison, when the petulant poodle who was Miss Bloodhound's mother, leaned over the shoulders of Mr. Napery and struck the prisoner on the face with a squashy and highly-fermented banana.

Then did the little draper become as Samson when he bowed himself between the middle pillars of Her Majesty's Theatre at Gaza, and dragged it down on top of the Philistine melodrama.

He saw before him, coolly, for all his rage, a great, top-heavy pile of bananas in bunches, and immediately under them the Abandoned One, and her mother who had struck him, and the accursed vendors of bananas, and the utterly-to-be-condemned Mr. Napery. He sprang at the crazy stack and heaved with his shoulder, and the Unholy Family, and Mr. Napery, and the Greek, and the Italian and the Chinaman went down in an avalanche of bananas that were beginning to "turn."

When they had dug themselves out of the ferments and the filthy softness of over-ripeness there were four charges against Tommy Perth. The total costs were £3 10s.— but Tommy thought it a cheap amusement. He lost his billet,

and the horror of Mr. Napery's society, and the nightmare of possible alliance with the Family in that one lucky heave at the waist of the banana stack.

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16: Limelight at Sudden Jerk

Weekly Times Annual (Vic) 4 Nov 1915

THE Sudden Jerk mill, with its five stamps of eleven hundred pounds each running on 15-pennyweight ore, changed its note with the variation of the wind. The Westralian air, all lucent gold, flooded the sky as if by diffused electrics around the spring of a blue dome; it was an atmosphere of wine, and the sun gilded the pink shafts of the salmon gum, the flutings of the gumlet woods, and the harsh and funereal needles of the sheoak.

Tony Basteel, who, with his very English mate, Egbert de la Touche, owned the Sudden Jerk, listened to the growl of the crazy mill; uplifted as a musician hearing a great orchestra performing R. Wagner's imitation of Krupp's foundry at Essen. He loved every note of its thunder, and knew the time for every cam to lift, each to the second; the two hits, and then a trip, with the last three together, and each stamp turning gravely and slowly around with the suggestion of a dignified old gentleman forced to dance. He looked appreciatively at the small heap of tails by the cyanide vats; for the tails were run to the stopes for filling, and the little heap meant that work was running its cycle faithfully and well.

Tony's white-washed camp and bough shed on a rise to the west of the battery hill stood in a belt of salmon gum and bull-oak, and the red earth before it was dotted with the delicate green of young saltbush. A splash of white on the dead green of a belt of bulloak was the tent-hut of de la Touche.

Mrs Tony came down from the house to where her husband stood well within earshot of the beloved music of the mill. She was like Tony in her meagreness— tall, thin, strong, tireless, and with eyes swift and piercing. Tony's face was harder of skin, and there were the marks of old Barcoo on his mahogany-tinted hands, strong, knotted, sinewed with steelwire; but otherwise they seemed a male and a female hop-pole, dry, seasoned and strong. Of great kindliness, and very helpful to each other; steadfast friends, helpers in time of trouble. The virtues of many people are like blind reefs, covered with the alluvium of habit; and discovery comes only by sinking. Tony and his wife were like that; knowledge of them gave them beauty in the eyes of understanding people. A great lady, who was a cad, laughed aloud at first sight of them, and then was silent when she found herself alone in the joke, her audience seeing Mrs Tony and Tony as they were— a lady and gentleman of the bush.

Mrs Tony arrived at her husband's side as de la Touche drove up from the horse yard in the light jinker of the mine. De la Touche was still English, though

he had been in Australia long enough to learn bushcraft. His pink and chubby face, his little and round figure, his close-cropped fair hair and "toothbrush" red moustache spoke of Piccadilly Circus, and he still talked as if he had never left the little street around St. James's. There was a new self-consciousness in him that day, as there was in Tony and his wife. They were six miles from the township of Golden Cape, and they rarely had a visitor; and the knowledge that His Excellency the Governor, Sir Dyke Acland Cowley Hoodman Groves, K.C.M.G.. was to visit Sudden Jerk that day had brought the shyness of the three of them to the surface, so that they were ready to be rude in order to conceal self-consciousness. And Mrs Tony had come down to say, with the air of a woman bettering the discoveries of Columbus, that the roast fowls were cooling for the Governor's lunch, and that the wild turkey was browning splendidly.

"An' don't you go pickin' the fowls, Tony," she concluded. "They're for the Gov'nor."

Tony growled shamefacedly that he wasn't a kid, and his wife replied that she knew his ways, and didn't want no pickin' the fowls anyhow. Then she consolidated her position as speaker of the last word by addressing de la Touche.

"Egbert," she said, "while y'r in at the Cape get five bobs' worth o' scones at the baker's."

"By Jing, yes," replied Tony's mate. "And look here, I say, His— ah— Excellency might want ca-ake. What?"

"I got plenty er tins o' cake—jest ther scones.".

"The old Guv'nah can take his tot," said de la Touche. "Got any—ah— whiskay, Ton-ay?"

"Whips!"

"I'll get a box of— ah— cigahs and some cigarwettes. What?"

"Right-o, Egbert."

De la Touche flicked the big bay horse, and drove down the track between the dumps and disappeared in the thick salmon gum and gimlet scrub eastward of the mine. Tony and his wife were left with their selfconsciousness growing into something like fear of this being from another world: a Governor with something of the divine right of kings.

They had no need. Sir Dyke Acland Cowley Hoodman Groves, K.C.M.G., was new to the business, a gentleman of a rich heart and a poor brain, very anxious to please; and more frightened of his "subjects" and the knowledge that had come to them by touching the real things of life every day, and being always at grips with the bush that gave them neither food nor water, but only sunlight and gold.

When Sir Dyke, and all the rest of it, drove up with his aide and an escort of two mounted police, they found him to be a tall, thin, pink man with foolish blue eyes, an indecisive chin, and a "toothbrush" moustache so like de la Touche's that it seemed as if both owned a common origin. He spoke very Englishly, too: but more so than de la Touche, whom the bush had leached of many mannerisms. He had developed a kindliness that made more friends for him than genius finds admirers; and to his self-deprecating grin there was added the persistence of the bloodhound, to which fact he owed his job as Governor. Persistently deprecating himself as a poor thing in Downing street, he persistently showed that he should be given a job, if only in recognition of his tremendous modesty. And his job came to him for two reasons; he had the high-placed influence which counts so much in England as a help to wealthy posts "abroad," and the Government was irritated into appointing him to get rid of him. The Governorship of Westralia was going, and "he might have that if he wished." It sounded like cold meat to a beggar, but Dyke Acland, &c., took it gratefully, and fitted it as water Avater shapes itself to the cup by reason of his unfailing good humor, and ever-present desire to please.

They were all feeling good to him by the time de la Touche arrived, unaccountably annoyed because accident had delayed him beyond lunch and the distinction of breaking bread with the Governor. He admired everything—the sun and the salmon gum, the mine and the shaft. He temporarily lost the respect of Tony by remarking that the stopes at the 125ft. leA'el, Avliere a little specimen gold Avas shoAving, were "sAveetly pretty," and Avon the respect again by complimenting Mrs Tony on the cooking of the turkey and the foAvls. They Avere like old friends Avhen de la Touche returned as they AA'aited for afternoon tea.

"You must— ah— have had— ah— striking adventures while prospecting, Mistah Bas-teel," said the Governor.

"Betcher life," replied Tony. ' "I had whips o' tucker an' no water. I tell y' I was worse off than the Nolan's Perish. Jim an' Joe an' Paddy an' Hubert—four brothers from the Loddon— way back in eighty-one— back o' the Bidgie— before there was any Broken Hill or Silverton, either "

But he was too slow on the uptake, and de la Touche rushed into the silence of a moment and secured all the limelight at Sudden Jerk.

"Y'r Exeellen-say," said de la Touche, "I re-mem-bah a rather peculiah occurrence that happened me while coming up from Lake Lefroy towards Widgemool-ah. I had been twelve how-ahs without wat-ah—"

"Twelve 'ours!" grunted Tony; "I been three days. I

"Well, how-evah, I was twelve how-ahs, and in very bad case. Suddenly I came to a des-ert-ahed camp with a four hundred gallon tank at the corn-ah to

collect the wat-ah from the roof. I ah— dismount-ahed and examined the interi-ah of the tank through the manhole. There was but two inches of wat-ah in the bottom of the tank. I had no vessel or pannikin or quart pot, and if I had such it would have been useless owing to the shallow state of the wat-ah. I therefore decided to ent-ah the interi-ah, which I did by the manhole. I had a drink, which was delicious; though three rath-ah ah— grouchy hornets disputed the tank with me. I was just about to leave the tank when the bally— beg pardon— firm-ah-ment was darkened. My horse in the direness of his thirst had put his head through the manhole, and was now unable to withdraw it. I tried for an hour sweating inside the tank: the atmosphere had become unpleasantly sultry, the horse was breathing into my e-ar with a loud and whistling sound, and the three grouchy hornets stung me till they could sting no mo-ah."

"Deah! Deah!" said Dyke Acland, &c. "How very ah-unpleasant!"

"Why diden' y' stick y'r knife in his nose?" demanded Tony, in a voice full of unbelief; " 'n the pain 'd make him pull out."

"I had left my sheath knife in the pack. I had but a small pen-knife, which I use as a— ah— mani-cu-ah, and in any case the horse's head was fixed in the manhole. The position was extremely dis-enjoyable; my eyes were swollen by the stings of the hornets, which were now *hors de combat*."

"Y' said the horse wasn't in the tank at all," interrupted Tony, seeing the limelight quite gone away from him.

"I mean the hornets were out of the fight and dying. His Excellen-say understands."

"Meanin' I'm too ignorant," said Tony. "Why, what was you? When you first came here, a sore-foot immigrant, did y' know the difference between quartz an' di'rite? Could y' run a condenser till I showed y'—"

"My dear chap," said de la Touche, "I do not mean anything of the kind. Everybody knows how good you've been."

"Everayboday, Ai'm shuah, Mistah Basteel," supplemented the Governor, and Tony allowed himself to be flattered into silence, though still unconvinced.

"Well, the hornets were hors— I mean, dying; the horse's head was immovahble, and I was suffocating. In my great distress I adopted a desperate measure of cu-ah. I was almost drowned by the blood resulting and the operation was horrible, but at last the horse's head fell into the tank, his body fell outside, and I emerged, almost dying, but safe."

"What did y' do? No flamin' lies. What?"

"I cut the horse's head off, Ton-ay."

"With what? Your teeth?"

"No; with the little penknife I use as a— a mani-cuah!"

"Most interesting— most interesting, indeed!" said Dyke Acland, &c.; but Tony Basteel regarded de la Touche with an air of suspicion and dislike.

"Dam funny y' never skited about that before," he said. "Gen'ral rule, y' can't keep anything to yerself as long as a leatherhead can stop squeakin'. Now, I had somethin' happen t' me at Tibooburra in eighty-four, an—"

Mrs Basteel opened the door and brought in the tea-tray. "Bring them scones off the stove. Tony," she said— and spoiled the story.

The Governor emphasised his attitude of a good King visiting his subiects: of a beneficent monarch acting the part of father of his people. A gentleman all through, he gave Mrs Tony the treatment prescribed by custom for ailing duchesses; and Mrs Tony, being a real woman, responded to the homage, which was more of demeanor than of words.

And so His Excellen-say, as de la Touche styled him, drank his tea and asked for a third scone.

"You cook beautifull-ay, Mrs Basteel," he said. "The scones are simplay delis-e-us."

Tony Basteel lifted his head again; some of the limelight was returning, and it was so pleasant to Mrs Tony that she hesitated to say that she had not made the scones, and was immediately lost in a tacit lie. But Tony welcomed it.

"That's right, Gov'nor," said Tony. "The missus ain't much to look at, but, by cripes, she can lick any other woman's 'ead off makin' scones."

"Indeed, they are simply delis-e-us.' Ai have nevah tasted such scones any-whah in Australy-ah. They remind me of the scones a de-ah old nurse of mine used to make in Berksher before Ai went to Injure."

"Went to what?"

"To Injure— Calcutt-ah. But these are the best scones I have ev-ah had since then."

"Yes, your Excellen-say," said de la Touche, butting in as usual quite innocently, and only in the interests of the sacred truth. "I brought them from Snooks, the baker's, at Golden Cape this morning."

Mrs Basteel crimsoned with shame and went out. Tony glared at his mate, the Governor opened his mouth and closed it again, like a fish dying of air, and the Aide said, "Indeed! Indeed! What?" Then de la Touche saw what he had done and babbled excuses and withdrawals; but even the Governor's geniality was at fault. They made their adieus as seon as decency permitted, and the house at Sudden Jerk was left to the Basteels and de la Touche. Tony went silently to the mill office, and Mrs Basteel ran to warn de la Tourhe.

"You know what Tony is! Been on the water waggon six months, and now you started him again. You clear before he comes back. We don't want dead bodies around here."

So Egbert de la Touche, his movements quickened by the thought of dead bodies, went to the stable, and the big bay and the jinker took him to Golden Cape and thence down the railroad; until his mate should again be on the water waggon, and the quarrel over-past.

Meanwhile a wild man of the bush, with a bottle of whisky in him, raged into Golden Cape and demanded the body of Egbert, dead or alive.

"I find him a sorefoot pommy, an' I give him a charnst an' make money for him, and then he bites me hand, tellin' the flamin' lord the flamin' scones is made at the flamin' baker's. The flamin' wife can make flamin' scones with any ole nurse in Berkshers or Injure eether. He tells flamin' lies about cuttin' off flamin' 'orse's 'eads with toofpicks, an' I don't give 'im away f'r a flamin' liar; and then when me poor missus is thankin' he's lordship for bein' kind the flamin' Englisher butts in an' says he bought the flamin' scones from the baker's. O-oh, just let me get Egbert, an' I'll cut his head off with me finger nails, better'n he ever cut off a 'orse's head with a toofpick.... Me poor missus, she can make the best flamin' scones in the flamin' world!"

Then the whisky turned another corner, and Tony Basteel shed bitter tears.

His Excellency Dyke Acland, &c., in deprecating developments to his Aide, said:

"It was unfortunate that Ai mentioned the bally scones. They were indeed verray ordinaray, but Ai had to be kaind."

It was Dante who doomed batterers to a river of filth, but no particularly terrible hell was reserved for vanity; probably because it is the one passion that finds expression after death in the splendor of the funeral.

For Buttinskis the punishment seems to be flight from Golden Cape with great velocity, until Tony Basteel is again on the water waggon.

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17: Eight Stone Six

The Bulletin, 27 Jun 1928

PHYSICAL greatness and heavy financial tonnage were the features of that meeting in the board-room of the Hematite Range Mining Company. Only the secretary was small, and he would have been bigger than the average in a community of normal human beings. All five directors were very big men; tall and massive and big boned and bearded men of great presence; of gigantic frames and girth almost Falstaffian. They had all been raised in the open had lived to manhood outside of cities, most of them in the Central or Far North. They had grown on the limestone of the great plains that grow bone in horses and men; the free winds of wide, open spaces had expanded their lungs; the long days in the saddle provided the appetite, and three meat meals a day satisfied it.

There was Mailey, who at sixty looked forty, a big, boyish-mannered man, keen and thorough; Bowles, who had left the management or a million sheep to manage the industry of five thousand men; Templeton, who had surveyed great areas of the continent until a share in a world-beater mine had caused him to abandon chain and theodolite for ever; and Baxter, broad, big, blue-eyed, optimistic as spring, light-hearted as a boy despite difficulties that seemed endless— although nearly seventy, a white-bearded boy, who refused to grow up; also a man of swift understanding of character, swift sympathies and able to call the best out of others. Which is to say that he had imagination. The other director was McNair, also a man who did things. He had begun in a little Victorian town with a lathe and a horse-gear for power and had grown to great stature, with work as food and tonic, until his engineering works covered forty acres or so, and the single horse-gear had become thousands of horsepower and his one anvil the father of two hundred forges. They were all men whose small beginnings had made them masters of detail, as their growth had made them rulers of great affairs.

The Hematite Range Promised to be a worthy addition to their string. A great mineralised hill in slate carrying rich copper in bands in a channel two hundred feet across and a mile long, and between the bands ore, comparatively low grade, but yet payable. The freak of an iron range in a great plain of saltbush and salt lake and claypan; almost in Central Australia, with a railway still hundreds of miles away and crawling to it slowly, but quickly enough to meet the end of development, as yet scarcely begun.

"There's three or four years dead work in it," he said "And we've seen too many big shows handled in the little way that means waste. Hematite range is

big enough to call for a big man at the beginning. This chap— what's his name?— Fawcett-Brown, is probably only good enough for a prospecting show. He doesn't look big enough to me. About eight stone six."

"He's little, but I think he's good," said Mailey. "I met him only once, and he didn't seem to have the conceit that most little men use to make up for size." Templeton and McNair didn't think that the little man was big enough for the job of general manager now that the mine was to be developed for big production, and they said so. Baxter said it all depended on whether Fawcett-Brown had imagination, or not; and the others, hearing the word imagination" for the thousandth time, smiled. At the last they decided to invite applications, which could include Fawcett-Brown if he desired, and before the applications were considered Baxter, as chairman of directors, should visit the distant mine— in itself a serious expedition— and on his return the question of management should be answered.

The meeting dispersed, and Baxter remained with the secretary to arrange details of the visit and wire to the railhead for transport into the wilderness. The secretary showed the last letter from the manager signed "J. H. J. Fawcett-Brown."

"He's got full weight in his name, anyhow," said Baxter, "even if he goes only eight stone six on the weighbridge. But a big mine wants a big man— although a big mine makes a big man, just as a good horse makes a good jockey."

BAXTER left the railhead in a solid-tyred bug-mobile, a high-swung buggy with a good engine; around the sides and the back of it narrow tanks of new galvanised plain iron holding eighty gallons of water. At a distance this quaint vehicle seemed made of by the sunlight reflected from the new iron. With its high body the bug-mobile travelled safely over gutters and low scrub, and, as Baxter said, it was a great steeplechaser. So at sunset on the fourth day they approached the range that had been steel blue the forenoon, and then cobalt blue at noon, and purple at three o'clock and was now black and green with a thin feather of smoke rising from the hidden camp in the mulga at its foot

Baxter, with twenty years slipped from him in the divine air, asked him if that was Fawcett-Brown's camp, and the driver replied that it was the only possible camp for a hundred miles, Fawcett-Brown having thrown a rough dam across the lowest of a series of rock holes, impounding enough water to see him through to the next rain

the dark masses of the iron range rising four hundred feet above the plain were gloomy and forbidding in the growing dusk and the contrast of the smoke of the camp made a home in the wilderness. The quaint motor struck a dusty

cart track through the mulga, and the plain wind died as they entered the scrub. A dog barked as the bug-mobile turned the last bend in the track that curled to avoid tree roots as a creek twists to evade rocks, and there before the bough shed that served as a dining-room stood a lithe, wiry little man shaven as if he were in the city, his curly little moustaches trimmed to leave his mouth clear. J. H. Fawcett-Brown, M.I.M.M., M.I.M.E.

"Mr. Baxter?"

"Yes. And Mr. Fawcett-Brown? Glad to meet you and glad to be here. Had a fine trip, but four days but four days is just about enough. Solid tyres are all right, but we have no springs to brag about."

"You've been the shock absorber, Mr Baxter," said the engineer, laughing pleasantly.

Baxter laughed with him, warmed to him, knew even in that half light that he had a good eye.

A black boy lighted the hurricane lamps in the bough shed, and came forward with another; and Fawcett-Brown conducted the Chairman of directors to a roomy half-tent half-building with a boarded floor. And then he showed Baxter a bathroom with a shower home-made, of a perforated kerosene can and later fed him and smoked with him until Baxter dozed almost standing; so he withdrew early and was asleep as soon as his head found the pillow. Baxter's last thoughts that night were "Good chap, very pleasant. All right for a prospecting show, but not big enough for a great business. Eight Stone Six hasn't enough imagination."

The morning showed him that Eight Stone Six (as he mentally labelled the Engineer as being shorter than alphabetical Brown) had order. The camp below the dam, the tents of the men in almost street order, all the camp rubbish to the fire. After breakfast they scaled the short range, walked its length and saw the many pot-holes and costeens sunk by Eight Stone Six; three small prospecting shafts in course of sinking in the eastern slope of the hill; great precipices of low-grade ore and boulders of very rich copper.

"All of it can go to the smelters one of these days," said Fawcett-Brown. "Meantime I'm getting the lay of the rich runs— all on the eastern side they are. We'll go down the shafts to-morrow, and there's going to be a big body of rich stuff further north when we hit the great mass of the iron. At least I think so. This is the cave that really found the copper. It's iron oxide, and the niggers have come here for centuries and from hundreds of miles away to get pigments to paint themselves for war or tribal initiation, or merely for dances. They brought a bit of copper-glance back on one trip and the prospectors got on to it that way."

The three days of Baxter's stay made them very friendly, but Baxter had already made up his mind that Eight Stone Six was too light for an administrator. He liked him, but Fawcett-Brown's future position seemed that of sub-manager. Baxter had been strengthened in that belief by the fact of Fawcett-Brown's opposition to Baxter's plan of development.,

"No," said the engineer, as if his opinion settled it. "No big shafts for production yet. I've taken up a double depth of block leases east and the working scheme is tunnels and open-cuts."

They were in the westerly crosscut from the bottom of the central shaft, which had cut at twenty feet a great body of glance that filled the shaft and extended into the crosscut. It was banded with graphite, which had made a negro of the dapper little engineer and blackened his grey moustache, and had dyed the white beard of Baxter and patched his face with black as if he were a chimney-sweep.

"Tunnels are too slow for the proofs we want."

"But why, Mr. Baxter? We've plenty of time before the railway gets here. What's the use of proving ore with an elaborate and costly series of shafts and crosscuts and winzes when we can put in adits and keep the little prospecting shafts cheap and efficient, moving down to the tunnel-levels for ventilation."

Baxter was too big for that. In his mind he saw the drives and crosscuts of a subterranean town in metal, and he said again of Eight Stone Six— " Little miner— no imagination."

So with all his liking for the little man he had definitely decided against him, when on the last night of his stay they sat smoking in that clearing which was a mere white pocket of air in the black and breathless mulga. Above them the marvellous Central Australian sky sown with stars as a fertile field grows wheat, and all that soaring light deepening the darkness of the violet sky about it with the rays of millionous stars falling to earth gently in a rain of illumination. Then Baxter suddenly discovered a fine thing in this little man— the clean hobby in the study of a miracle that lifted him.

Said the engineer suddenly: "D'ye know Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mr. Baxter— American poet, you know?"

"No, I can't say I do."

"I don't know much of him, but when I sit out here at night I can't forget four lines of his:

Teach me your mood, ye patient stars,
That nightly climb the distant sky;
Leaving on Time's old face no scars,
No trace of age —no fear to die."

"That's very good," said Baxter, rather lamely, he thought himself. "Read much poetry?"

"Not a great deal, but somehow all that is about the stars sticks to me. We came from them, I suppose. Our world is only compacted stardust and the residuals of gases now escaped, and some instinct tells us we belong. That's why men in all ages have dreamed of the stars, and tried to measure them, even to reach them; and when a real poet talks of the stars he gets a bit of their majesty. I remember a line or two— don't know whose: 'The god Thor sitting naked as a child, seven stars in his right hand and Charles's Wain.' That doesn't fit this hemisphere, of course— it's the northern; but a thing like that sticks."

"I never knew any stars but the Evening star when I was making camp late at night; and the Morning star when I was moving around among restless cattle, and the good old reliable Southern Cross."

"The Portuguese call it the Virgin's Brooch, saying that it fell from her cloak as she was ascending to Heaven; and after Vanderdecken it was called the Dutchman's Hope as a sign that the Flying Dutchman would find forgiveness one day. But legends about the stars are waste of time because the facts have more romance than the human mind can hold. See that big fellow? That's Sirius. His light takes twenty years and more to reach the earth. So if Sirius was suddenly extinguished twenty years ago we wouldn't know it for six months yet."

He stopped as if he felt he talked too much, and Baxter encouraged him to it again with, "The Milky Way must be longer than from here to the railhead; but I'll swear it's not as bumpy."

"It's length is into the hundreds of thousands of millions of miles. There's a tribe here in Central Australia that believe it's the mother of everything, and their belief is like the old Roman myth of it being milk that flowed from Juno when she thrust Hercules away from the breast. I talk a lot of this. The loneliness here makes a man think and study, and there's nothing more beautiful than the sky."

"Go on," said Baxter, and the engineer went on...

Baxter, silent in that little pocket of light in the darkness of the great continent that surrounded it, felt his insignificance the more in feeling the relation of that continent to the limitless space above and around, its serried ranks of light, its girdled constellations and its black gulfs. The moon rose above the mulga, a flattened orange of golden red, and they watched it lifting in the sky, changing shape and color as it soared above the heats and mists of earth. The engineer spoke again and said something that made Baxter gasp ;

and then, as if he felt he had bored Baxter, he turned to commonplaces and went to bed early.

Baxter at parting next morning pressed the engineer to call on him whenever he found himself south, and they parted with great regard for each other.

"Good Eight Stone Six," said Baxter, looking back at Fawcett-Brown with something like affection. "Multum in Parvo's his new name."

"NEVER MIND the applications," said Baxter at the board meeting called the day after his return. "There's only one to be considered— Fawcett-Brown's the man."

"What you say goes," said Templeton.

"You've seen him and you've seen the show, and you know. But what makes you stand for him particularly "

"I found he had imagination."

They laughed and Bowles said: "We don't want him to write the prospectus."

"Prospectus be damned! He's got imagination. He can see the mine plan before there's a foot sunk. He's no little man. He's great on quantities. D'ye know what he said to me on the night before I left? We'd been talking about the stars— at least he had, and I'd been listening. Did you know the earth is a few times bigger than the moon? Well, so did I, in a general way; but not to know really. We were sitting out in that little pocket in the mulga scrub, and the moon rose. A big golden-red moon that seemed twice the size it looks down here in the south. I've only seen it bigger once and that was coming up to Manila, and it seemed to fill the sky. And what do you think that little Eight Stone Six said to me?"

"Well, what?"

"He said 'By God! Wouldn't it be fine to be on the moon and see the earth rise'! See the earth rise! That settled me. I said to myself: 'He's our man! A man who can measure the Milky Way on four sides and think of a moon as big as the earth is just the man we want for shifting two million yards of muck."

"What you say you say," said Bowles. "Minute the appointment of Eight Stone Six."

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18: Come Day, Go Day

The Bulletin, 17 Jan 1924

MILLY CLEGHORN grew to beauty as the sunlight grows from the mists of dawn. It was no sheltered pink-and-white prettiness: the sun saw to that. But the features were there and the fine figure and the good blood; a mouth that laughed and eyes that were eloquent. Her life in the open had left its tattoo-marks in little freckles upon her nose; she was straight as a young palm, tiptoe for woman-hood and ripening.

Bill of Bringalily, the friend of her brother Jimmy, ached when he watched her at her cheerful tasks— all her lithe young body in play to her extended arms grasping the broom, or with the most recent Cleghorn baby in her arms in the cool of the evening. If Bringalily had been Joseph, his brethren would have put him down a well; for he dreamed dreams.

Meantime he dug the catch-crops— early potatoes designed to harvest the quick big money of the city that pays for the early lamb to be garnished with green peas. This day was one of the two in the week that he gave to Cleghorn, partly because of his mate-ship with Jim, partly because by helping Jim he was helping Milly, serving a lazy Laban for a finer Rachel, and playing no Jacob tricks on Cleghorn's cows.

Suddenly he straightened his back and stood up all of his six feet-odd of height, and looked at the sun of the late forenoon making splendid the black pines, and the ancient granite still living, and the great granite dice spilled about the hills. He lifted his head higher and looked the sun in the eye, and lowered his glance again to the pink blur that was his own orchard in bloom, seemingly hacked out of the black-green pines and the brown-green eucalypts and the majestic confusion of the great rocks. He turned west and saw the white smoke rising straight up from Cleghorn's chimney, and remembered that he had helped to build it; and the verandah covered in a purple riot of the morning glory whose vines he and Milly had tended for their delicate month while the roots were finding the way to safety in the rubble. All that trim house and the healthy catch-crops and the long avenues of pears and peaches in bloom, and the two acres of budding vines and the flower garden in the granite sand, gay with hollyhock and mignonette, pansy and stock and rose, represented effort with love behind it; stood for the hunger of the new generation for the beauty of life, and its battle with the laziness and selfishness of the old. And then he bent again to the work, driving the potato-fork at a wide angle to the crop below; for he saw, framed in the isle of bloom, Milly bringing him morning tea. As she pretended that her object was not Bringalily

Bill but merely tea, so Bringalily Bill pretended that he couldn't see her yet. She stopped by him and they began the formula:

"Bringalily!"

"Yes, Mil! Hullo!"

"I brought you a cup of tea."

"Well, that's kind. I was just thinkin' what I'd like, an' I couldn't think what it was. And it was just a cup of tea."

He stood while he drank, and then looked at the girl with the bloom of the new orchard round her; the trees loaded with blossom, but not yet so tall as she. The three years since fire had swept over the orchard had given her height, slenderness and beauty, as it had given the peaches girth and spread of bearing branches; they had lifted Bringalily out of the clumsy stage of youth, and now he was real man, broad in the shoulder, thin in the flank and tapering to the feet— the human wedge. His mental clumsiness had not departed, though— at least, in her presence. Among men he laughed and had his say— a long say, too. But she made him tremble, and in his painful self-consciousness he took refuge in the formula: "Spuds lookin' well, Mil!"

"They're the best in the mountain. Jim says we ought to top the market."

"If there's any market after the commission agent's got his bit."

"They do take us down, don't they?"

Bringalily heard the tone he had been waiting for— the tone of deference to the male, highly proper in the female, and rarely assumed if the lady be not anxious to please. The tone loosened his tongue.

"Worse than bushrangers. Of course they say they only get commission, but it must be a hundred an' two per cent. Two blokes over at Tully's Gap sent fifty cases of t'maters to Brisb'ne, an' they got a cheque for fourpence a case nett, an' t'maters were six bob a case that week. But it'll be different with these new spuds. The market will be short and they can't steal all the price."

"Got your own away yet?"

"Only a few bags. I found it'd be a good market, so I came over early this mornin' to get some of yours away with mine."

"You're a good chap. Bringalily. I don't know what we'd have done without you— you and Timmy."

"Where's the old bloke?"

"Father? Oh, he's somewhere about, talkin' with Uncle."

"Uncle! Has that old waster come back?"

"On'y for two days. There's no bellringing in the township till Saturday."

In the discussion of Uncle, Bringalily's self-consciousness vanished utterly, and he grinned as he talked.

"The bell-ringin' artist comin' out for a Spring call! He's the limit, is that Pommy uncle."

"D'ye think he's lazier than father?"

"Yes— no— I couldn't say. It'd take a good judge to separate them at the winnin' post. I don't want to say nothin' nasty about your old man. Mil, for your sake—"

"That's all right. *You* couldn't be like that, Bringalily. There's your own farm and you've been here three days this week."

"Never mind that, Mil," said Bringalily, horribly embarrassed by her praise. "It isn't me, it's the country. How can we stand our clean land gettin' dirtied by these old fellers used to dirty streets in the old country? An' the cheek o' them! While we work they flute about bein' pioneers! Pioneers! Spare me days, they couldn't pioneer through a bloomange without explosives. But we're different. It's the sunlight and the big land about us. Look at you, Mil. Your mother's a good woman, an' hard workin' "

"She was born in Tasmania."

"An' she was the only man in your family till Jimmy grew up. But you're ahead of her, just as she's ahead of your old man."

"Don't say that, Bringalily."

"Yes, I will," replied Bringalily, suddenly bold. "Listen! Behind the log!"

A great fallen tree-trunk blackened by the fires that had been unable to consume it broke the lines of the orchard two avenues away. The sudden voices betrayed the fact that those indomitable pioneers, Cleghorn and Mrs. Cleghorn's uncle, had been sunning themselves in the bracken beyond the tree, and in the heat of debate they had become audible.

"I'll betcher," said the voice of Uncle.

"What'll y' bet?"

"I'll betcher all the rice in China."

"I'll bet y' all the wheat in Noo South Wales."

"That's them!" said Bringalily. "Makin' speewaa bets. My station against your station; and then Uncle wagers Mount Morgan against Broken Hill."

They laughed loudly and heartily— the laughter of healthy youth at superstition and ancient fraud. And then they were sorry because the laughter brought ancient fraud to its four feet, and the fierce white whiskers of Uncle and the long, protesting face of Cleghorn appeared above the log. The man and the girl saw not only the two impostors, but the travelling store of Denny Deneen, from Quart Pot, stop before the gate, and the children running from the house to meet it, as Denny jumped from the cart and entered the orchard through the top and middle wires.

"Whatcher mean, laughin' at *me*?" demanded Uncle, with his bellman's dignity well established.

"It's disrespec'ful, Mil," said Cleghorn, carefully confining his indignation to his own flesh and blood that could not revolt.

"Laughed at by a farm laborer!" continued Uncle.

"He's no farm laborer," said Milly, all protective; "he's a friend."

"Won't have no friends larfin' at me," said Cleghorn. "They ain't friends, anyways."

"An' who would be friends of yours? Answer me that," said Denny Deneen, behind them; and without waiting for the answer, he continued as he joined the group: "What's the matter wit' you, annyway?"

"Me an' Uncle was talkin' about pioneering, and he offered to bet me—"

"Pioneerin' you were talkin' about, were you? Pioneerin'! An' there's these two terrible devils of pioneers, an' they're so hard worrked pioneerin' that not wan of them has had the strent' to lace up his boots this day."

Bringalily, looking at the feet of Uncle and Cleghorn, saw the fact, laughed again, and said "Too true."

"Too true?" said Uncle. "Don't y' insult me with yer 'too true'. We was talkin' Mister Deneen— me an' Cleghorn— an' he ses a man 'e knows at Cir'clar 'Ead died of noomoanya, an' I ses it ain't 'noomoanya,' an I wouldn't prenounce it like that in me profession."

"God help you, the profession of the Quart Pot bellman! Go on wit' you, God help you! So that's what your great labor an' thriles an' thribulations is about, is it? An, then an' honest farrmer of the land diggin taties for loafers, wit'out wages, he commit the abominable crime and threason of laughin at you, is ut? Why, he should take you by the shlack uv the pants an' trow you agin' the blue shky; an' your boots would fall oft then, because you haven't the strent to lace 'em up. How long have ye been workin' here this blessed week for 'Noomoanya,' Bringalily?"

"Nothin' much," replied Bringalily, not liking this personal turn of the debate.

And then he found another protector— "He's worked here three days this week," said Milly. "Neglecting his own place, too!"

"Not three days," corrected Cleghorn, magisterially ready to correct the world. "Not three days—on'y one day nineteen hours ackshal workin' time."

"Not free days; on'y one day nineteen hours," mimicked Denny Deneen. "God help you, me poor blashted pioneer wit' the down-heel boots. Was he to work in the night-time whin you're shlapin', as in the day-time, too, was he?"

" 'Tain't my place he's workin' on," said Uncle. "Why was he larfin' at *me*?"

"Back to your bell!" said Denny. "Back to your Mary Pickfords, an' if y' don't sing out 'At Deneen's Hall' ivery time you shpruik, I'll have you shacked. You loafer! 'Tis honor for you to be laughed at be a fine man that loves his work like Bringalily."

"Loves his work!" repeated Uncle, stung to the heart. " 'Tain't work he's after— 'tis Milly there."

"Wot!" exclaimed the virtuous Cleghorn, as one devoted to saving his lamb from the wolf. "Wot! After me dorter?"

"Oh!" said Milly, shamed by the publicity of the fact she had known a long while.

"You dhirrty loafer!" said Denny, seizing Uncle, by the collar. "You'd bring a young girrl into it, lookin' like the Rose of Darlin' Downs she is. Whin Bringalily bought new flannen uv me for the new baby, didn't I see it round your neck for a comf'ter, an' your little white-lace whiskers shtickin' out a front uv it. Out wit' you— back to your bell!"

He threw Uncle out of the group, and simultaneously out of the argument.

"If he's after me dorter," said Cleghorn, stubbornly, "I don't want him here no more, anyways."

"No, 'ceptin' whin there's threes to fall an' ploughin' to do, an' new shpuds to be digged tor the dam' commission agent you left Denny Deneen for, because ye thought the bigger the agent the more money ye'd get."

"I don't want 'im 'ere."

"That's good enough for me," said Bringalily, reaching for his coat. "I won't stay anywhere I'm not wanted."

He had put the right arm into its sleeve, and then Milly entered into possession by holding the other sleeve.

"I want you, Bringalily ; and if anybody tells you to go, they tell me to go, too."

At that Denny delicately drew the unwilling Cleghorn away until there were friendly trees between the lovers and authority. Denny further bore patiently the pain of listening to the story of Cleghorn's troubles— a story designed to prove Cleghorn's goodness and the world's malevolence, but failing signally in its object.

19: Two Hundred Tons o' Pig

The Bulletin, 25 Oct 1917

FORSAYTH, in his habit when pleased or complaisant, put his two big thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and leaned back in his office chair looking at the photograph on his desk the photograph of the rather herring-gutted steamer *Marandana*, 1200-tons register, and told himself that he had done well. She was old, but indestructible; built long ago in the days of iron ships, before steel ships came, and then ships of thinner steel to cut down weight of metal and cost of construction.

"A bit narrow in the beam for her length, Forsayth thought as he gloated over the new possession; "but quick of her heels and a small coal eater. She's a prize."

So he had bought her and sent her to dock; and the photograph showed her growing clean under the scrapers of her hull, where at time of docking there had been the weeds of her laying-up trailing in the water like the hair of drowned women. He heard the clerk enter, and ask for his books for the safe; but he sat there long after that, figuring the earnings of the old new ship or the blotting-pad ; turning over the telegrams offering freights. And her boiler repairs alone would take a fortnight. At last the dusk surprised him ; he pocketed the photograph and the telegrams, closed his desk and left the office, still busy on schemes to make the *Marandana* sweat profits from every square inch of her.

His wife listened to him, smiling faintly, as usual, at his enthusiasms, which were all for the making of money, but as much for the making as for the money itself. She felt that money had robbed him of her a little, and being well-fed and housed she could know no warmth for projects to make more food and housing. So she answered him as ever, "Yes, my dear," until he had finished dinner and sat back in his chair full and complaisant for a minute.

Then, also as usual, he transferred himself from the chair at the head of the table to the little room he called his "study," because there were maps on the walls, and he smoked and schemed there. But before he reached the big, low saddle-bag chair his schemes left him for a nearer memory. He walked to the study door and called to his wife in the dining-room.

"Where's Gwen, Alice? She wasn't at dinner."

"She had her dinner early, George. She—"

"Has she gone out?"

His -daughter answered him from the stair-foot: "Not yet, Daddy, 'but I'll have to hurry."

He met her half-way, put his arm around her shoulders, accepted her kiss, and led her back to the study. He in the chair and she on the arm-rest thereof, he filled his pipe; and she, as knowing her duty from long practice, took a match from the holder on the table before her, lighted the pipe, and threw the match away.

She showed against his burly strength as a daisy to a fading sunflower, and was yet a subtly-idealised copy of him. Fair, pink-cheeked, bright-eyed, red-lipped, glowing, dead gold of hair and very young, she was unmarried, and twenty-four; and yet she had in face and carriage a suggestion of the happy matron. Certainly an observant stranger would have said that for her the spring of girlhood was gone. These, her father and mother, seeing her every day, saw her not truly. Absent from her the eyes of their memory saw her but as a little child, her frocks as short as her hair was long.

Forsayth puffed at his pipe for a minute, then took it from his mouth to talk to her.

"And where to to-night, Gwen?"

"To the theatre, Dad— I don't know where; it might be pictures."

"I see—you don't know until you meet your friends. Who are they?"

"Er— er— Mrs. Tolson and her husband, and—"

"Who else?"

"Oh, well, there's a party."

"I see. Want .any money, dear?"

"No, Dad— the Tolsons are calling for me, and they'll bring me home in their car, too."

"There's a note for chocolates, anyhow. Trot along. You'll be late."

The girl kissed him, sighed relief as if she had feared the lead of the conversation, and left him as the horn of Tolson's car sounded in imitation of swine choking at the abattoirs. Forsayth leaned back and smoked, smiling between the puffs— the smile of a man who lived in an excellent world.

But, half an hour later, when his wife joined him, his thoughts had taken a new turn. From the *Marandana* he had gone over his list of her officers: skipper, Captain Jack Druce ; second, that young devil Sharland, a flyaway lad, but a good seaman, and with a captain's ticket to boot; chief engineer, old Preston. Druce all right; all of them all right, even young Sharland. Sharland got in to-night in the *Karaba*, but was already promised the berth in the better ship. Sharland—"

"Mother," he said suddenly— "Gwen hasn't seen that young devil Sharland since I told her to drop him?"

His wife faltered in reply— the reply of a peace-lover who hated war so much that she would wade through murder to prevent it.

"I—I don't think so, George."

"Don't you know? I told you to look after her."

"George! They're both young; and he's really fond of her."

He became suddenly the Terror of the Family.

"Both so young! Good God ! He'll never be anything but a twenty-pound-a-month man if he's lucky and keeps his ticket clean; and Gwen— good God, woman, she could marry anybody, after I've got a few more ships like this one!"

"Gwen says she can't lose him. Oh, be kind! And she went out so happy to-night."

Then he raved. "She went out to-night to meet him! I suspected something. He's one of Tolson's party —answer! Answer me! Isn't he?"

"If you must know— yes."

"Well, by ——!"

"We were young once ourselves— be kind to them."

"Kind to them? I'll be kind to her. I'll save her from herself. Don't bother! I'm not going after her to make a scene. I'll wait up for her, and I'll send that scoundrel adrift to-morrow. He'll wear his boots out looking for a berth. I'll cruel him."

So the girl's happiness ended in tears that night. Her mother felt that her grief was greater than the mere exercise of parental authority called for. Her sobbing had an undertone, not only of wounded affection, but also of fear.

Next morning Forsayth sent for Sharland, and thought again while he waited. To immediately discharge him might lead to trouble; it would certainly make the girl the more in love with him, in that spirit of perversity often masquerading as the maternal instinct in protection of the weak.

Forsayth argued with himself that he would forbid Sharland to see his daughter again, while hurrying the young man off to sea, and then he decided to cut out the first part of his decision and keep Sharland at sea— for ever and ever, if it could be done. Sharland came— a clean, trim figure of a young man of twenty-seven or so, with the little puckers around his eyes that told of wind and sun, and the slightly rolling gait of a very young sailor. He asked if he might lay off for three weeks while the *Marandana* was in dock, and was told that the *Karaba* would leave within two days with himself as master. Then Sharland cursed and thanked Forsayth with the one glance, and withdrew to take his good news and the bad news to the girl; to hear her despairing story of the night before, and to comfort her therefor in the only manner known to either art or nature.

Two days later he went to sea with the *Karaba*, bound to open roads and mad little ports; and his girl went about the house, pallid, listless, and as if

something more oppressed her than the course of true love running unsmoothly. Her observant mother pleaded for her with the father. He was more than obdurate— he was irritated.

"Good Lord!" he said, "you women were born unreasonable. Here am I up to my neck in work, and you, too, worry me. I've sent that fellow to sea, and I'll keep him there all I can."

"She's fretting, George."

"She'll have to get over it. Love and marriage! There'll be no time for that in the world soon. D'ye know there's going to be war?"

"War? Who with?"

"Everybody—the whole world will be in it. It will the war for years. Freights! A man who owns an old windjammer will be able to sell it for the price of a new Cunarder before the shindy's over. I'm buying all I can beg, borrow or steal first payments for; and then you worry me about this!"

"But what in heaven's name do you want me to do?"

"Let her have a change. Send her away."

"Well, that's all right— all the less chance of meeting that fellow, too. Where will she go?"

"To Launceston. Mrs. Tolson is going over."

"All right. The *Ivaraba* will never see Launceston. Nor the *Marandana* either. Poor old Gwen! I'll fix it."

So they shipped her with her friends to Launceston, and she wanted to go and to stay, both; and at the actual moment of parting wanted most to stay. When the ship had swung in the Basin and steamed slowly down river, Forsayth put his wife into a cab and went back to his office in a great hurry to find ships to take up the work certain to be abandoned by the big coasters which inevitably become commandeered as transports. By reason of bigger ships being taken into Government service, he found freight in ports which he had before deemed valueless. The one disadvantage of the war was that he lost men whom he had believed to belong to the Forsayth house-flag for life. Captain Jack Itruce left him for State service; so did Chief-Engineer Watson. Boiler repairs on the *Marandana* went more slowly too; but he comforted himself that freights were rising. And Gwen had written from Launceston quite affectionately and cheerfully, and therefore she must be forgetting Sharland. He argued so, although that which seemed to him resignation was really hope.

In the loss of the two best men in the service he had recast his intentions for Sharland. Good officers were scarce, and would assuredly be more so. The girl was safe in Launceston; and Sharland, like any good sailorman, would be married to his ship. The day before Sharland returned from his fourth voyage as master of the *Ivaraba*— five weeks after Gwen had sailed for Launceston—

Forsayth determined on making him master of the Marandana, now ready for sea. Then the report of the survey of the ship told him something new— something that made the purchase of the *Marandana* even more like an epic of success. The ship had been found to have two hundred tons of pig-iron in her bilge.

"Two hundred ton o' pig!" said Forsayth jubilantly to his best man. She's tramped the sea with two hundred ton o' pig in her bilge— making round trips with a lot of iron that never earned a copper in freight! Out it comes, and in goes hard cargo!"

"It was meant to stiffen her— is it safe?"

"Safe when I load 'em full? Of course! And two hundred ton of iron is going to be worth money. Before this war is a year old you'll see pig worth eighty bob a ton. Let the mate bring her up-river; get it out of her and into store, and give her the railway iron we've got for Tassy instead."

It was done. The Marandana came up river, berthed, discharged the pig and loaded the railway iron, put a solid cargo into the holds, and had almost completed her loading when Sharland brought the *Ivaraba* up river, a day and a half late.

He took the *Marandana* to sea with an alacrity that made his owner wonder, seeing that the young man had had less than a day in port. But Forsayth could not know that the master of his new ship went to sea with the glad knowledge of a telegram already despatched to Launceston— a telegram which read: "Sailing for Devonport to-day. Hope meet you to-morrow. Love. Sharland."

The addressee was "Mrs. Sharland." Forsayth's daughter had taken Mrs. Tolson into the joke.

Forsayth saw the *Marandana* swing, watched her fine lines and narrowness go down river, and hurried back to freights and charters.

SHARLAND was glad with his new command.

Stiffly loaded and with fine weather she produced all her turn of speed across the Straits. He tied up at Devonport wharf in a dawn of beauty; got away from the ship without the loss of a minute, hurried to his wife and forgot the harshness of the sea. Four hours saw the Devonport cargo out of the ship; and Sharland brought his wife aboard, and went to sea. They made their calls at Ulverstone and Burnie, and tied up at Stanley next day to discharge the solid part of the cargo— the, railway rails and machinery. When Sharland and his wife returned to the ship she was empty, and ready for the return cargo to Melbourne.

"She's got a list, Mr. Banks," said Sharland to the mate.

"She does look a bit cock-eyed, leaning up against the breakwater," replied Mr. Banks. "But that'll come out of her when she's stiffened with a bit o' freight. She'll stand up all right then."

Sharland looked at the return cargo— much measurement and little dead-weight: potatoes, cheese, hay and logs of stringy bark and blackwood, a little copper ore. The mate followed his glance.

"There's forty ton o' that copper ore," he said. "I'll give her that first, of course."

Sharland agreed and left him re-assured; but when Forsayth's daughter walked into his arms as he entered his cabin a little of the uneasiness returned.

"Girlie," he said. "I wish you'd stay here the night and go on by motor to the rail-head to-morrow. You'd be back in Launceston to-morrow night."

"No, dear. I won't leave you. Dad will forgive me when I tell him."

"Not yet. Gwen. Wait a little."

"I can't, dear— I can't wait. I must be with my mother. A girl must be with her mother when her baby is born.... and it's so near now.... and I want you!"

He could not force her from him after that. He heard the rattle of the winches, and his heart was heavier than the freight. There came to help him habit, the hope of youth, the fatalism of the sailor, and the sailor's contempt of the sea. He went to the chart table, his wife following and leaning lovingly upon his shoulders as he bent over it. He kissed her and forgot the danger, strangely elated at her presence in face of a glass that seemed inclined to fall. On deck again he saw that the *Marandana* leaned more to the wharf than before. He called the mate, and Banks coolly agreed to the complaint.

"Looks like a city loafer trying to lean against a post, don't she, Captain? Never mind. I'll get better stowage on her. Hey! Below there! Stow her even."

They did; and whether for that reason, or because the wind blew in strong puffs from the westward, she straightened up again. The Marandana went to sea just before dark— a wicked darkness that came on the heels of black clouds gridding a sunset like a smelter in blast, or as if flames poured through the bars of the grid. To starboard the light of Kooky Cape stained the darkness for a minute, and then was lost. Sharland left the bridge for a minute, kissed his wife to comfort her, saw that the glass was falling, and got no comfort for himself as he returned to duty. Half an hour later absence of comfort became active fear— for her.

The *Marandana* slithered on through a sea raised by a half-gale, rapidly shrieking itself into the madness of tempest. The blackness of the night seemed to deepen the troughs and heighten the waves. Her pacing screw kicked her from wave to wave as if she were a cork; she carried half her capacity in light goods of great bulk, and seemed not to feel the forty tons of

copper-ore stiffening at all. Besides the body of a ship there is the soul of her. Build two ships to the same plans, to the quarter of an inch off measurement and the last pound of metal, and one ship shall be stable and the other cranky. Just like men, all different— good, bad, half-good, half-bad; all the same, but differing.

Despite all the coddling of cargo-stowage and making it fast when her hull was struck by the western gale she heeled over to port in a long arc that left them all breathlessly believing she could not recover. Sharland turned her head to the east, putting her before it, and she seemed a little easier, although even then she did not recover the list— floating, as Banks said, like a headed barrel.

When the wind lulled a little Sharland put her on her course again, and she went over heavily to port. He turned her head easterly, and in the turning her list changed to starboard. Now the seas lifted the tall ship out of the water far below her run, and when she fell again she seemed to have lost her lightness, hitting the seas heavily as a traction-engine running wild over boulders. Sharland put her back a point or two nearer her course; and wind and wave made a see-saw of her— port list to starboard list, starboard list to port; never with a plumb keel. They did not feel any great anxiety; for, although dangerously listed, she seemed to do not so badly before the wind, and Sharland, giving up the idea of making his direct voyage, turned her definitely eastward. Then the seas found new heights and depths. The *Marandana* plunged her nose into it and shipped it green; the vibration of the racing propeller set their teeth on edge. Suddenly, with a jarring whir, the engines raced madly as the propeller shaft broke at the boss, and the revolving metal plunged to the ocean floor.

With the way off her the *Marandana*'s head slipped to the northward. The gale shrieked triumphantly as she settled into the sea, re-found her list to starboard, and began to roll.

The engines stopped and the ship quivered only with the assault of the seas. Sharland, white with fear, ordered out a sea-anchor, and went down to the cabin, and the white-faced girl ran to his spume-drenched arms. The ship, finding her crankiness again with the loss of the two hundred tons of pig-iron which had kept her stable, began to roll tremendously, with the starboard list increasing, and the recoveries slower and lessened as the cargo moved to starboard ever so little. The thrust of the wind on her top hamper pressed her more heavily to starboard; then she stood up a little, as if resisting. The wind pressed again, and the arc of her rolling grew longer. A cry came from the deck as the ascending firemen saw the water rise to them in all its hugeness. Sharland and his wife, holding fast against the portside wall of the cabin, and

embracing, calmly but hopelessly, kissed to forget the hell that was without. Then the wind came with a shriek, thrusting at the port side as the seas fell away to starboard. The air whistled out of the ship as the invading water compressed it. A puff, as of a man's pipe, leaped from her funnel against the blackness of the night; and the *Marandana* sank with all her company.

MRS. FORSAYTH fought her fears for a week, and then gave her husband Mrs. Tolson's telegram in answer to her own:—

Gwen left for Devonport, meet husband, Captain Sharland, Marandana*; intended return with him to Melbourne.*

Forsayth read it, and, trembling like a very old man, gave her another telegram:—

Boat with painted name Marandana, *now six days overdue Melbourne, found stove in on coast near Wynyard.*

Forsayth's best man sold two hundred tons of pig at fifty-five shillings a ton. Men in the trade said it was a foolish deal. He should have held it for a year till the market hardened to eighty-two shillings and sixpence. But Forsayth couldn't bear to have it about the place.

End