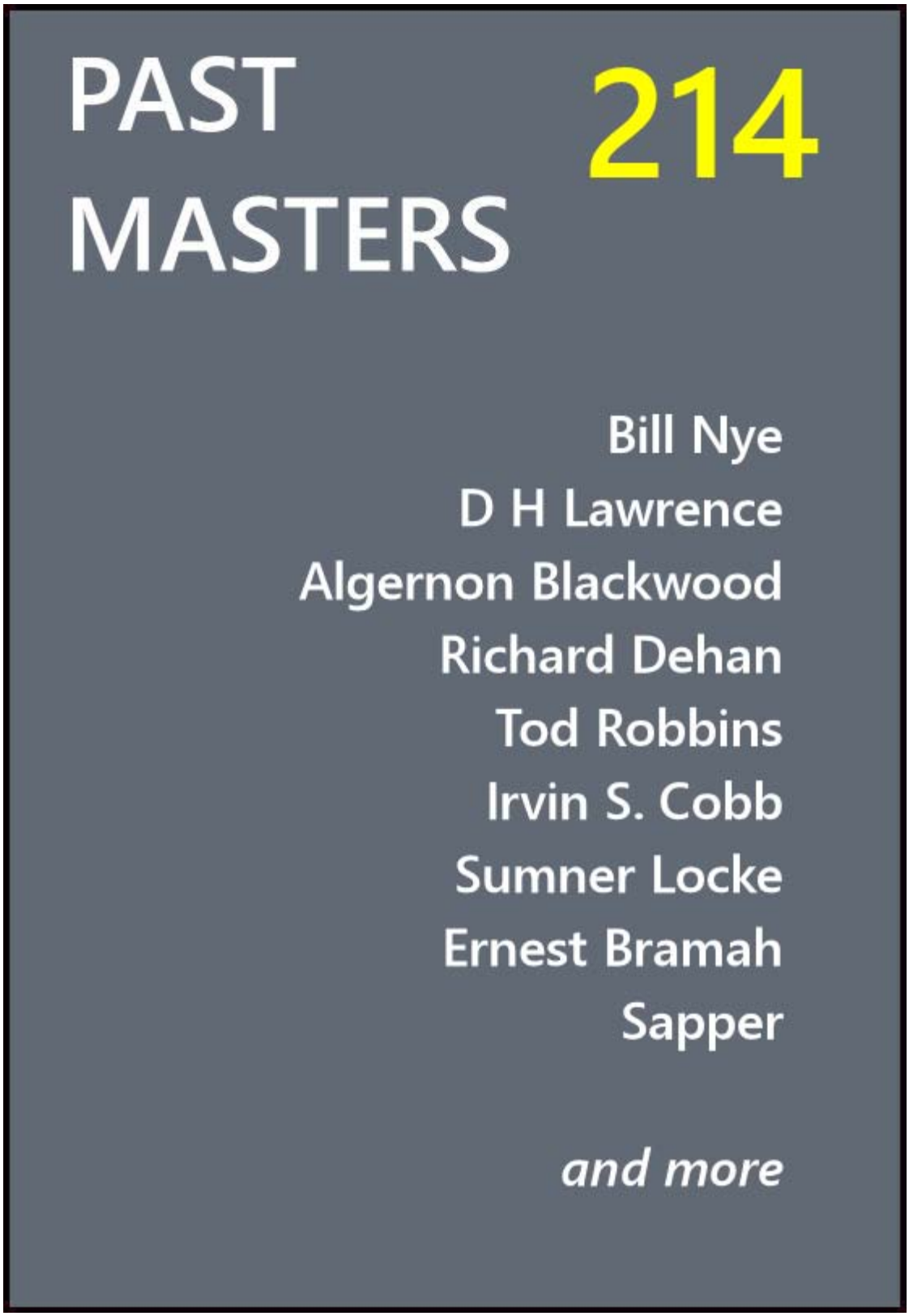
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PAST MASTERS 214

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

21 April 2025

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1: Glad Ghosts

D. H. Lawrence

1885-1930

The Dial, Jul, Aug 1926

I KNEW CARLOTTA FELL in the early days before the war. Then she was escaping into art, and was just "Fell". That was at our famous but uninspired school of art, the Thwaite, where I myself was diligently murdering my talent. At the Thwaite they always gave Carlotta the Still-life prizes. She accepted them calmly, as one of our conquerors, but the rest of the students felt vicious about it. They called it buttering the laurels, because Carlotta was Hon., and her father a well-known peer.

She was by way of being a beauty too. Her family was not rich, yet she had come into five hundred a year of her own, when she was eighteen; and that, to us, was an enormity. Then she appeared in the fashionable papers, affecting to be wistful, with pearls, slanting her eyes. Then she went and did another of her beastly still-lives, a cactus-in-a-pot.

At the Thwaite, being snobs, we were proud of her too. She showed off a bit, it is true, playing bird of paradise among the pigeons. At the same time, she *was* thrilled to be with us, and out of her own set. Her wistfulness and yearning "for something else" was absolutely genuine. Yet she was not going to hobnob with us either, at least not indiscriminately.

She was ambitious, in a vague way. She wanted to coruscate, somehow or other. She had a family of clever and "distinguished" uncles, who had flattered her. What then?

Her cactuses-in-a-pot were admirable. But even she didn't expect them to start a revolution. Perhaps she would rather glow in the wide if dirty skies of life than in the somewhat remote and unsatisfactory ether of Art.

She and I were "friends" in a bare, stark, but real sense. I was poor, but I didn't really care. She didn't really care either. Whereas I did care about some passionate vision which, I could feel, lay embedded in the half-dead body of this life. The quick body within the dead. I could *feel* it. And I wanted to get at it, if only for myself.

She didn't know what I was after. Yet she could feel that I was It, and, being an aristocrat of the Kingdom of It, as well as the realm of Great Britain, she was loyal— loyal to me because of It, the quick body which I imagined within the dead.

Still, we never had much to do with one another. I had no money. She never wanted to introduce me to her own people. I didn't want it either. Sometimes we had lunch together, sometimes we went to a theatre, or we drove in the country, in some car that belonged to neither of us. We never flirted or talked

love. I don't think she wanted it, any more than I did. She wanted to marry into her own surroundings, and I knew she was of too frail a paste to face my future.

Now I come to think of it, she was always a bit sad when we were together. Perhaps she looked over seas she would never cross. She belonged finally, fatally, to her own class. Yet I think she hated them. When she was in a group of people who talked "smart", titles and *beau monde* and all that, her rather short nose would turn up, her wide mouth press into discontent, and a languor of bored irritation come even over her broad shoulders. Bored irritation, and a loathing of climbers, a loathing of the ladder altogether. She hated her own class: yet it was also sacrosanct to her. She disliked, even to me, mentioning the titles of her friends. Yet the very hurried resentment with which she said, when I asked her: Who is it—?

"Lady Nithsdale, Lord Staines— old friends of my mother," proved that the coronet was wedged into her brow, like a ring of iron grown into a tree.

She had another kind of reverence for a true artist: perhaps more genuine, perhaps not; anyhow, more free and easy.

She and I had a curious understanding in common: an inkling, perhaps, of the unborn body of life hidden within the body of this half-death which we call life: and hence a tacit hostility to the commonplace world, its inert laws. We were rather like two soldiers on a secret mission into enemy country. Life, and people, was an enemy country to us both. But she would never declare herself.

She always came to me to find out what I thought, particularly in a moral issue. Profoundly, fretfully discontented with the conventional moral standards, she didn't know how to take a stand of her own. So she came to me. She had to try to get her own feelings straightened out. In that she showed her old British fibre. I told her what, as a young man, I thought: and usually she was resentful. She did so want to be conventional. She would even act quite perversely, in her determination to be conventional. But she always had to come back to me, to ask me again. She depended on me morally. Even when she disagreed with me, it soothed her, and restored her to know my point of view. Yet she disagreed with me.

We had then a curious abstract intimacy, that went very deep, yet showed no obvious contact. Perhaps I was the only person in the world with whom she felt, in her uneasy self, at home, at peace. And to me, she was always of my own *intrinsic* sort, of my own species. Most people are just another species to me. They might as well be turkeys.

But she would always *act* according to the conventions of her class, even perversely. And I knew it.

So, just before the war she married Lord Lathkill. She was twenty-one. I did not see her till war was declared; then she asked me to lunch with her and her husband, in town. He was an officer in a Guards regiment, and happened to be

in uniform, looking very handsome and well set-up, as if he expected to find the best of life served up to him for ever. He was very dark, with dark eyes and fine black hair, and a very beautiful, diffident voice, almost womanish in its slow, delicate inflections. He seemed pleased and flattered at having Carlotta for a wife.

To me he was beautifully attentive, almost deferential, because I was poor, and of the other world, those poor devils of outsiders. I laughed at him a little, and laughed at Carlotta, who was a bit irritated by the gentle delicacy with which he treated me.

She was elated too. I remember her saying:

"We need war, don't you think? Don't you think men need the fight, to keep life chivalrous and put martial glamour into it?"

And I remember saying: "I think we need some sort of fight; but my sort isn't the war sort." It was August, we could take it lightly.

"What's your sort?" she asked quickly.

"I don't know: single-handed, anyhow," I said, with a grin. Lord Lathkill made me feel like a lonely sansculotte, he was so completely unostentatious, so very willing to pay all the attention to me, and yet so subtly complacent, so unquestionably sure of his position. Whereas I was not a very sound earthenware pitcher which had already gone many times to the well.

He was not conceited, not half as *conceited* as I was. He was willing to leave me all the front of the stage, even with Carlotta. He felt so sure of some things, like a tortoise in a glittering, polished tortoise-shell that mirrors eternity. Yet he was not quite easy with me.

"You are Derbyshire?" I said to him, looking into his face. "So am I! I was born in Derbyshire."

He asked me with a gentle, uneasy sort of politeness, where? But he was a bit taken aback. And his dark eyes, brooding over me, had a sort of fear in them. At the centre they were hollow with a certain misgiving. He was so sure of *circumstances* , and not by any means sure of the man in the middle of the circumstances. Himself! Himself! That was already a ghost.

I felt that he saw in me something crude but real, and saw himself as something in its own way perfect, but quite unreal. Even his love for Carlotta, and his marriage, was a circumstance that was inwardly unreal to him. One could tell by the curious way in which he waited, before he spoke. And by the hollow look, almost a touch of madness, in his dark eyes, and in his soft, melancholy voice.

I could understand that she was fascinated by him. But God help him if ever circumstances went against him!

She had to see me again, a week later, to talk about him. So she asked me to the opera. She had a box, and we were alone, and the notorious Lady Perth was

two boxes away. But this was one of Carlotta's conventional perverse little acts, with her husband in France. She only wanted to talk to me about him.

So she sat in the front of her box, leaning a little to the audience and talking sideways to me. Anyone would have known at once there was a *liaison* between us, how *dangereuse* they would never have guessed. For there, in the full view of the world— her world at least, not mine— she was talking sideways to me, saying in a hurried, yet stony voice:

"What do you think of Luke?"

She looked up at me heavily, with her sea-coloured eyes, waiting for my answer.

"He's tremendously charming," I said, above the theatreful of faces.

"Yes, he's that!" she replied, in the flat, plangent voice she had when she was serious, like metal ringing flat, with a strange far-reaching vibration. "Do you think he'll be happy?"

"*Be* happy!" I ejaculated. "When, *be* happy?"

"With me," she said, giving a sudden little snirt of laughter, like a schoolgirl, and looking up me shyly, mischievously, anxiously.

"If you make him," I said, still casual.

"How can I make him?"

She said it with flat plangent earnestness. She was always like that, pushing me deeper in than I wanted to go.

"Be happy yourself, I suppose: and quite sure about it. And then *tell* him you're happy, and tell him he is, too, and he'll be it."

"Must I do all that?" she said rapidly. "Not otherwise?"

I knew I was frowning at her, and she was watching my frown.

"Probably not," I said roughly. "He'll never make up his mind about it himself."

"How did you know?" she asked, as if it had been a mystery.

"I didn't. It only seems to me like that."

"Seems to you like that," she re-echoed, in that sad, clean monotone of finality, always like metal. I appreciate it in her, that she does not murmur or whisper. But I wished she left me alone, in that beastly theatre.

She was wearing emeralds, on her snow-white skin, and leaning forward gazing fixedly down into the auditorium, as a crystal-gazer into a crystal. Heaven knows if she saw all those little facets of faces and plastrons. As for me, I knew that, like a sansculotte, I should never be king till breeches were off.

"I had terrible work to make him marry me," she said, in her swift, clear, low tones.

"Why?"

"He was frightfully in love with me. *He is!* But he thinks he's unlucky...."

"Unlucky, how? In cards or in love?" I mocked.

"In both," she said briefly, with sudden cold resentment at my flippancy. There was over her eyes a glaze of fear. "It's in their family."

"What did you say to him?" I asked, rather laboured feeling the dead weight.

"I promised to have luck for two," she said. "And war was declared a fortnight later."

"Ah, well!" I said. "That's the world's luck, not yours."

"Quite!" she said.

There was a pause.

"Is his family supposed to be unlucky?" I asked.

"The Worths? Terribly! They really are!"

It was interval, and the box door had opened. Carlotta always had her eye, a good half of it at least, on the external happenings. She rose, like a reigning beauty— which she wasn't, and never became— to speak to Lady Perth, and out of spite, did not introduce me.

Carlotta and Lord Lathkill came, perhaps a year later, to visit us when we were in a cottage in Derbyshire, and he was home on leave. She was going to have a child, and was slow, and seemed depressed. He was vague, charming, talking about the country and the history of the lead-mines. But the two of them seemed vague, as if they never got anywhere.

The last time I saw them was when the war was over, and I was leaving England. They were alone at dinner, save for me. He was still haggard, with a wound in the throat. But he said he would soon be well. His slow, beautiful voice was a bit husky now. And his velvety eyes were hardened, haggard, but there was weariness, emptiness in the hardness.

I was poorer than ever, and felt a little weary myself. Carlotta was struggling with his silent emptiness. Since the war, the melancholy fixity of his eyes was more noticeable, the fear at the centre was almost monomania. She was wilting and losing her beauty.

There were twins in the house. After dinner, we went straight up to look at them, to the night nursery. They were two boys, with their father's fine dark hair, both of them.

He had put out his cigar, and leaned over the cots, gazing in silence. The nurse, dark-faced and faithful, drew back. Carlotta glanced at her children; but more helplessly, she gazed at him.

"Bonny children! Bonny boys, aren't they, nurse?" I said softly.

"Yes, sir!" she said quickly. "They are!"

"Ever think I'd have twins, roistering twins?" said Carlotta, looking at me.

"I never did," said I.

"Ask Luke whether it's bad luck or bad management," she said, with that schoolgirl's snirt of laughter, looking up apprehensively at her husband.

"Oh, I!" he said, turning suddenly and speaking loud, in his wounded voice. "I call it amazing good luck, myself! Don't know what other people think about it." Yet he had the fine, wincing fear in his body, of an injured dog.

After that, for years I did not see her again. I heard she had a baby girl. Then a catastrophe happened: both the twins were killed in a motor-car accident in America, motoring with their aunt.

I learned the news late, and did not write to Carlotta. What could I say?

A few months later, crowning disaster, the baby girl died of some sudden illness. The Lathkill ill-luck seemed to be working surely.

Poor Carlotta! I had no further news of her, only I heard that she and Lord Lathkill were both living in seclusion, with his mother, at the place in Derbyshire.

When circumstances brought me to England, I debated within myself, whether I should write or not to Carlotta. At last I sent a note to the London address.

I had a reply from the country: "So glad you are within reach again! When will you come and see us?"

I was not very keen on going to Riddings. After all, it was Lord Lathkill's place, and Lady Lathkill, his mother, was old and of the old school. And I always something of a sansculotte, who will only be king when breeches are off.

"Come to town," I wrote, "and let us have lunch together."

She came. She looked older, and pain had drawn horizontal lines across her face.

"You're not a bit different," she said to me.

"And you're only a little bit," I said.

"Am I!" she replied, in a deadened, melancholic voice. "Perhaps! I suppose while we live we've got to live. What do you think?"

"Yes, I think it. To be the living dead, that's awful."

"Quite!" she said, with terrible finality.

"How is Lord Lathkill?" I asked.

"Oh," she said. "It's finished him, as far as living is concerned. But he's very willing for *me* to live."

"And you, are you willing?" I said.

She looked up into my eyes, strangely.

"I'm not sure," she said. "I need help. What do you think about it?"

"Oh, God, live if you can!"

"Even take help?" she said, with her strange involved simplicity.

"Ah, certainly."

"Would you recommend it?"

"Why, yes! You are a young thing—" I began.

"Won't you come down to Riddings?" she said quickly.

"And Lord Lathkill— and his mother?" I asked.

"They want you."

"Do you want me to come?"

"I want you to, yes! Will you?"

"Why, yes, if you want me."

"When, then?"

"When you wish."

"Do you mean it?"

"Why, of course."

"You're not afraid of the Lathkill ill-luck?"

"*I!*" I exclaimed in amazement; such amazement, that she gave her schoolgirl snirt of laughter.

"Very well, then," she said. "Monday? Does that suit you?"

We made arrangements, and I saw her off at the station.

I knew Riddings, Lord Lathkill's place, from the outside. It was an old Derbyshire stone house, at the end of the village of Middleton: a house with three sharp gables, set back not very far from the high road, but with a gloomy moor for a park behind.

Monday was a dark day over the Derbyshire hills. The green hills were dark, dark green, the stone fences seemed almost black. Even the little railway station, deep in the green, cleft hollow, was of stone, and dark and cold, and seemed in the underworld.

Lord Lathkill was at the station. He was wearing spectacles, and his brown eyes stared strangely. His black hair fell lank over his forehead.

"I'm so awfully glad you've come," he said. "It is cheering Carlotta up immensely."

Me, as a man myself, he hardly seemed to notice. I was something which had arrived, and was expected. Otherwise he had an odd, unnatural briskness of manner.

"I hope I shan't disturb your mother, Lady Lathkill," I said as he tucked me up in the car.

"On the contrary," he sang, in his slow voice, "she is looking forward to your coming as much as we both are. Oh no, don't look on mother as too old-fashioned, she's not so at all. She's tremendously up to date in art and literature and that kind of thing. She has her leaning towards the uncanny— spiritualism, and that kind of thing— nowadays, but Carlotta and I think that if it gives her an interest, all well and good."

He tucked me up most carefully in the rugs, and the servant put a foot-warmer at my feet.

"Derbyshire, you know, is a cold county," continued Lord Lathkill, "especially among the hills."

"It's a very dark county," I said.

"Yes, I suppose it is, to one coming from the tropics. We, of course, don't notice it; we rather like it."

He seemed curiously smaller, shrunken, and his rather long cheeks were sallow. His manner, however, was much more cheerful, almost communicative. But he talked, as it were, to the faceless air, not really to me. I wasn't really there at all. He was talking to himself. And when once he looked at me, his brown eyes had a hollow look, like gaps with nothing in them except a haggard, hollow fear. He was gazing through the windows of nothingness, to see if I were really there.

It was dark when we got to Riddings. The house had no door in the front, and only two windows upstairs were lit. It did not seem very hospitable. We entered at the side, and a very silent manservant took my things.

We went upstairs in silence, in the dead-seeming house. Carlotta had heard us, and was at the top of the stairs. She was already dressed; her long white arms were bare; she had something glittering on a dull green dress.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come," she said, in a dulled voice, as she gave me her hand. She seemed as if she would begin to cry. But of course she wouldn't. The corridor, dark-panelled and with blue carpet on the floor, receded dimly, with a certain dreary gloom. A servant was diminishing in the distance, with my bags, silently. There was a curious, unpleasant sense of the fixity of the materials of the house, the obscene triumph of dead matter. Yet the place was warm, central-heated. Carlotta pulled herself together and said, dulled: "Would you care to speak to my mother-in-law before you go to your room? She would like it."

We entered a small drawing-room abruptly. I saw the water-colours on the walls and a white-haired lady in black bending round to look at the door as she rose cautiously.

"This is Mr. Morier, Mother-in-law," said Carlotta, in her dull, rather quick way, "on his way to his room."

The dowager Lady Lathkill came a few steps forward, leaning from heavy hips, and gave me her hand. Her crest of hair was snow white, and she had curious blue eyes, fixed, with a tiny dot of a pupil, peering from her pink, soft-skinned face of an old and well-preserved woman. She wore a lace fichu. The upper part of her body was moderately slim, leaning forward slightly from her heavy black-silk hips.

She murmured something to me, staring at me fixedly for a long time, but as a bird does, with shrewd, cold far-distant sight. As a hawk, perhaps, looks shrewdly far down, in his search. Then, muttering, she presented to me the other two people in the room: a tall, short-faced, swarthy young woman with the hint of a black moustache; and a plump man in a dinner-jacket, rather bald

and ruddy, with a little grey moustache, but yellow under the eyes. He was Colonel Hale.

They all seemed awkward, as if I had interrupted them at a séance. I didn't know what to say: they were utter strangers to me.

"Better come and choose your room, then," said Carlotta, and I bowed dumbly, following her out of the room. The old Lady Lathkill still stood planted on her heavy hips, looking half round after us with her ferret's blue eyes. She had hardly any eyebrows, but they were arched high up on her pink, soft forehead, under the crest of icily white hair. She had never emerged for a second from the remote place where she unyieldingly kept herself.

Carlotta, Lord Lathkill and I tramped in silence down the corridor and round a bend. We could none of us get a word out. As he suddenly rather violently flung open a door at the end of the wing, he said, turning round to me with a resentful, hang-dog air:

"We did you the honour of offering you our ghost room. It doesn't look much, but it's our equivalent for a royal apartment."

It was a good-sized room with faded, red-painted panelling showing remains of gilt, and the usual big, old mahogany furniture, and a big pinky-faded carpet with big, whitish, faded roses. A bright fire was burning in the stone fire-place.

"Why?" said I, looking at the stretches of the faded, once handsome carpet.

"Why what?" said Lord Lathkill. "Why did we offer you this room?"

"Yes! No! Why is it your equivalent for a royal apartment?"

"Oh, because our ghost is as rare as sovereignty in her visits, and twice as welcome. Her gifts are infinitely more worth having."

"What sort of gifts?"

"The family fortune. She invariably restores the family fortune. That's why we put you here, to tempt her."

"What temptation should *I* be?— especially to restoring your family fortunes. I didn't think they needed it, anyhow."

"Well!" he hesitated. "Not exactly in money: we can manage modestly that way; but in everything else but money—"

There was a pause. I was thinking of Carlotta's "luck for two". Poor Carlotta! She looked worn now. Especially her chin looked worn, showing the edge of the jaw. She had sat herself down in a chair by the fire, and put her feet on the stone fender, and was leaning forward, screening her face with her hand, still careful of her complexion. I could see her broad, white shoulders, showing the shoulder-blades, as she leaned forward, beneath her dress. But it was as if some bitterness had soaked all the life out of her, and she was only weary, or inert, drained of her feelings. It grieved me, and the thought passed through my mind that a man should take her in his arms and cherish her body, and start her flame again. If she would let him, which was doubtful.

Her courage was fallen, in her body; only her spirit fought on. She would have to restore the body of her life, and only a living body could do it.

"What *about* your ghost?" I said to him. "Is she really ghastly?"

"Not at all!" he said. "She's supposed to be lovely. But I have no experience, and I don't know anybody who has. We hoped you'd come, though, and tempt her. Mother had a message about you, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Oh yes! When you were still in Africa. The medium said: 'There is a man in Africa. I can only see M, a double M. He is thinking of your family. It would be good if he entered your family.' Mother was awfully puzzled, but Carlotta said 'Mark Morier' at once."

"That's not why I asked you down," said Carlotta quickly, looking round, shading her eyes with her hand as she looked at me.

I laughed, saying nothing.

"But, of course," continued Lord Lathkill, "you *needn't* have this room. We have another one ready as well. Would you like to see it?"

"How does your ghost manifest herself?" I said, parrying.

"Well, I hardly know. She seems to be a very grateful *presence* , and that's about all I do know. She was apparently quite *persona grata* to everyone she visited. *Gratissima* , apparently!"

"*Benissimo* !" said I.

A servant appeared in the doorway, murmuring something I could not hear. Everybody in the house, except Carlotta and Lord Lathkill, seemed to murmur under their breath.

"What's she say?" I asked.

"If you will stay in this room? I told her you might like a room on the front. And if you'll take a bath?" said Carlotta.

"Yes!" said I. And Carlotta repeated to the maidservant.

"And for heaven's sake speak to me loudly," said I to that elderly correct female in her starched collar, in the doorway.

"Very good, sir!" she piped up. "And shall I make the bath hot or medium?"

"Hot!" said I, like a cannon-shot.

"Very good, sir!" she piped up again, and her elderly eyes twinkled as she turned and disappeared.

Carlotta laughed, and I sighed.

We were six at table. The pink Colonel with the yellow creases under his blue eyes sat opposite me, like an old boy with a liver. Next him sat Lady Lathkill, watching from her distance. Her pink, soft old face, naked-seeming, with its pin-point blue eyes, was a real modern witch-face.

Next me, on my left, was the dark young woman, whose slim, swarthy arms had an indiscernible down on them. She had a blackish neck, and her

expressionless yellow-brown eyes said nothing, under level black brows. She was inaccessible. I made some remarks, without result. Then I said:

"I didn't hear your name when Lady Lathkill introduced me to you."

Her yellow-brown eyes stared into mine for some moments before she said:

"Mrs Hale!" Then she glanced across the table. "Colonel Hale is my husband."

My face must have signalled my surprise. She stared into my eyes very curiously, with a significance I could not grasp, a long, hard stare. I looked at the bald, pink head of the Colonel bent over his soup, and I returned to my own soup.

"Did you have a good time in London?" said Carlotta.

"No," said I. "It was dismal."

"Not a good word to say for it?"

"Not one."

"No nice people?"

"Not my sort of nice."

"What's your sort of nice?" she asked, with a little laugh.

The other people were stone. It was like talking into a chasm.

"Ah! If I knew myself, I'd look for them! But not sentimental, with a lot of soppy emotions on top, and nasty ones underneath."

"Who are you thinking of?" Carlotta looked up at me as the man brought the fish. She had a crushed sort of roguishness. The other diners were images.

"I? Nobody. Just everybody. No, I think I was thinking of the Obelisk Memorial Service."

"Did you go to it?"

"No, but I fell into it."

"Wasn't it moving?"

"Rhubarb, senna, that kind of moving!"

She gave a little laugh, looking up into my face, from the fish.

"What was wrong with it?"

I noticed that the Colonel and Lady Lathkill each had a little dish of rice, no fish, and that they were served second— oh, humility!— and that neither took the white wine. No, they had no wine-glasses. The remoteness gathered about them, like the snows on Everest. The dowager peered across at me occasionally, like a white ermine of the snow, and she had that cold air about her, of being good, and containing a secret of goodness: remotely, ponderously, fixedly knowing better. And I, with my chatter, was one of those fabulous fleas that are said to hop upon glaciers.

"Wrong with it? *It* was wrong, all wrong. In the rain, a soppy crowd, with soppy bare heads, soppy emotions, soppy chrysanthemums and prickly laurustinus! A steam of wet mob-emotions! Ah, no, it shouldn't be allowed."

Carlotta's face had fallen. She again could feel death in her bowels, the kind of death the war signifies.

"Wouldn't you have us honour the dead?" came Lady Lathkill's secretive voice across at me, as if a white ermine had barked.

"Honour the dead!" My mind opened in amazement. "Do you think they'd be honoured?"

I put the question in all sincerity.

"They would understand the *intention* was to honour them," came her reply.

I felt ashamed.

"If I were dead, would I be honoured if a great, steamy wet crowd came after me with soppy chrysanthemums and prickly laurustinus? Ugh! I'd run to the nethermost ends of Hades. Lord, how I'd run from them!"

The manservant gave us roast mutton, and Lady Lathkill and the Colonel chestnuts in sauce. Then he poured the burgundy. It was good wine. The pseudo-conversation was interrupted.

Lady Lathkill ate in silence, like an ermine in the snow, feeding on his prey. Sometimes she looked round the table, her blue eyes peering fixedly, completely uncommunicative. She was very watchful to see that we were all properly attended to; "The currant jelly for Mr. Morier," she would murmur, as if it were her table. Lord Lathkill, next her, ate in complete absence. Sometimes she murmured to him, and he murmured back, but I never could hear what they said. The Colonel swallowed the chestnuts in dejection, as if all were weary duty to him now. I put it down to his liver.

It was an awful dinner-party. I never could hear a word anybody said, except Carlotta. They all let their words die in their throats, as if the larynx were the coffin of sound.

Carlotta tried to keep her end up, the cheerful hostess sort of thing. But Lady Lathkill somehow, in silence and apparent humility, had stolen the authority that goes with hostess, and she clung on to it grimly, like a white ermine sucking a rabbit. Carlotta kept glancing miserably at me, to see what I thought. I didn't think anything. I just felt frozen within the tomb. And I drank the good, good warm burgundy.

"Mr. Morier's glass!" murmured Lady Lathkill, and her blue eyes with their black pin-points rested on mine a moment.

"Awfully nice to drink good burgundy!" said I pleasantly.

She bowed her head slightly, and murmured something inaudible.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Very glad you like it!" she repeated, with distaste at having to say it again, out loud.

"Yes, I do. It's good."

Mrs. Hale, who had sat tall and erect and alert, like a black she-fox, never making a sound, looked round at me to see what sort of specimen I was. She was just a bit intrigued.

"Yes, thanks," came a musical murmur from Lord Lathkill. "I think I *will* take some more."

The man, who had hesitated, filled his glass.

"I'm awfully sorry I can't drink wine," said Carlotta absently. "It has the wrong effect on me."

"I should say it has the wrong effect on everybody," said the Colonel, with an uneasy attempt to be there. "But some people like the effect, and some don't."

I looked at him in wonder. Why was he chipping in? He looked as if he'd liked the effect well enough, in his day.

"Oh no!" retorted Carlotta coldly. "The effect on different people is quite different."

She closed with finality, and a further frost fell on the table.

"Quite so," began the Colonel, trying, since he'd gone off the deep end, to keep afloat.

But Carlotta turned abruptly to me.

"Why is it, do you think, that the effect is so different on different people?"

"And on different occasions," said I, grinning through my burgundy. "Do you know what they say? They say that alcohol, if it has an effect on your psyche, takes you back to old states of consciousness, and old reactions. But some people it doesn't stimulate at all, there is only a nervous reaction of repulsion."

"There's certainly a nervous reaction of repulsion in me," said Carlotta.

"As there is in all higher natures," murmured Lady Lathkill.

"Dogs hate whisky," said I.

"That's quite right," said the Colonel. "Scared of it!"

"I've often thought," said I, "about those old states of consciousness. It's supposed to be an awful retrogression, reverting back to them. Myself, my desire to go onwards takes me back a little."

"Where to?" said Carlotta.

"Oh, I don't know! To where you feel it a bit warm, and like smashing the glasses, don't you know?

"J'avons bien bu et nous boirons!
Cassons les verres nous les payerons!
Compagnons! Voyez vous bien!
Voyez vous bien!
Voyez! voyez! voyez vous bien
Que les d'moiselles sont belles
Où nous allons!"

I had the effrontery to sing this verse of an old soldier's song while Lady Lathkill was finishing her celery and nut salad. I sang it quite nicely, in a natty, well-balanced little voice, smiling all over my face meanwhile. The servant, as he went round for Lady Lathkill's plate, furtively fetched a look at me. *Look!* thought I. *You chicken that's come untrussed!*

The partridges had gone, we had swallowed the *flan* , and were at dessert. They had accepted my song in complete silence. Even Carlotta! My *flan* had gone down in one gulp, like an oyster.

"You're quite right!" said Lord Lathkill, amid the squashing of walnuts. "I mean the state of mind of a Viking, shall we say, or of a Catiline conspirator, might be frightfully good for us, if we could recapture it."

"A Viking!" said I, stupefied. And Carlotta gave a wild snirt of laughter.

"Why not a Viking?" he asked in all innocence.

"A Viking!" I repeated, and swallowed my port. Then I looked round at my black-browed neighbour.

"Why do you never say anything?" I asked.

"What should I say?" she replied, frightened at the thought.

I was finished. I gazed into my port as if expecting the ultimate revelation.

Lady Lathkill rustled her finger-tips in the finger-bowl, and laid down her napkin decisively. The Colonel, old buck, rose at once to draw back her chair. *Place aux hommes!* I bowed to my neighbour, Mrs. Hale, a most disconcerting bow, and she made a circuit to get by me.

"You won't be awfully long?" said Carlotta, looking at me with her slow, hazel-green eyes, between mischief and wistfulness and utter depression.

Lady Lathkill steered heavily past me as if I didn't exist, perching rather forward, with her crest of white hair, from her big hips. She seemed abstracted, concentrated on something, as she went.

I closed the door, and turned to the men.

"Dans la première auberge
J'eus b'en bu!"

sang I in a little voice.

"Quite right," said Lord Lathkill. "You're quite right."

And we sent the port round.

"This house," I said, "needs a sort of spring-cleaning."

"You're quite right," said Lord Lathkill.

"There's a bit of a dead smell!" said I. "We need Bacchus, and Eros, to sweeten it up, to freshen it."

"You think Bacchus and Eros?" said Lord Lathkill, with complete seriousness; as if one might have telephoned for them.

"In the best sense," said I. As if we were going to get them from Fortnum and Mason's, at least.

"What exactly is the best sense?" asked Lord Lathkill.

"Ah! The flame of life! There's a dead smell here."

The Colonel fingered his glass with thick, inert fingers uneasily.

"Do you think so?" he said, looking up at me heavily.

"Don't you?"

He gazed at me with blank, glazed blue eyes, that had deathly yellow stains underneath. Something was wrong with him, some sort of breakdown. He should have been a fat, healthy, jolly old boy. Not very old either: probably not quite sixty. But with this collapse on him, he seemed, somehow, to smell.

"You know," he said, staring at me with a sort of gruesome challenge, then looking down at his wine, "there's more things than we're aware of happening to us!" He looked up at me again, shutting his full lips under his little grey moustache, and gazing with a glazed defiance.

"Quite!" said I.

He continued to gaze at me with glazed, gruesome defiance.

"Ha!" He made a sudden movement, and seemed to break up, collapse and become brokenly natural. "There, you've said it. I married my wife when I was a kid of twenty."

"Mrs. Hale?" I exclaimed.

"Not this one"— he jerked his head towards the door—"my first wife." There was a pause; he looked at me with shamed eyes, then turned his wine-glass round and his head dropped. Staring at his twisting glass, he continued: "I married her when I was twenty, and she was twenty-eight. You might say, she married me. Well, there it was! We had three children— I've got three married daughters— and we got on all right. I suppose she mothered me, in a way. And I never thought a thing. I was content enough, wasn't tied to her apron-strings, and she never asked questions. She was always fond of me, and I took it for granted. I took it for granted. Even when she died— I was away in Salonika— I took it for granted, if you understand me. It was part of the rest of things— war— life— death. I knew I should feel lonely when I got back. Well, then I got buried— shell dropped, and the dug-out caved in—and that queered me. They sent me home. And the minute I saw the Lizard light— it was evening when we got up out of the Bay— I realised that Lucy had been waiting for me. I could feel her there, at my side, more plainly than I feel you now. And do you know, at that moment I woke up to her, and she made an awful impression on me. She seemed, if you get me, tremendously powerful, important; everything else dwindled away. There was the Lizard light blinking a long way off, and that meant home. And all the rest was my wife, Lucy: as if her skirts filled all the darkness. In a way, I was frightened; but that was because I couldn't quite get

myself into line. I felt: *Good God! I never knew her!* And she was this tremendous thing! I felt like a child, and as weak as a kitten. And, believe me or not, from that day to this she's never left me. I know quite well she can hear what I'm saying. But she'll let me tell you. I knew that at dinner-time."

"But what made you marry again?" I said.

"She made me!" He went a trifle yellow on his cheek-bones. "I could feel her telling me: *'Marry! Marry!'* Lady Lathkill had messages from her too; she was her great friend in life. I didn't think of marrying. But Lady Lathkill had the same message, that I must marry. Then a medium described the girl in detail: my present wife. I knew her at once, friend of my daughters. After that the messages became more insistent, waking me three and four times in the night. Lady Lathkill urged me to propose, and I did it, and was accepted. My present wife was just twenty-eight, the age Lucy had been—"

"How long ago did you marry the present Mrs. Hale?"

"A little over a year ago. Well, I thought I had done what was required of me. But directly after the wedding, such a state of terror came over me—perfectly unreasonable— I became almost unconscious. My present wife asked me if I was ill, and I said I was. We got to Paris. I felt I was dying. But I said I was going out to see a doctor, and I found myself kneeling in a church. Then I found peace— and Lucy. She had her arms round me, and I was like a child at peace. I must have knelt there for a couple of hours in Lucy's arms. I *never* felt like that when she was alive: why, I couldn't stand that sort of thing! It's all come on after— after— And now, I daren't offend Lucy's spirit. If I do, I suffer tortures till I've made peace again, till she folds me in her arms. Then I can live. But she won't let me go near the present Mrs. Hale. I—I—I daren't go near her."

He looked up at me with fear, and shame, and shameful secrecy, and a sort of gloating showing in his unmanned blue eyes. He had been talking as if in his sleep.

"Why did your dead wife urge you to marry again?" I said.

"I don't know," he replied. "I don't know. She was older than I was, and all the cleverness was on her side. She was a very clever woman, and I was never much in the intellectual line myself. I just took it for granted she liked me. She never showed jealousy, but I think now, perhaps she was jealous all the time, and kept it under. I don't know. I think she never felt quite straight about having married me. It seems like that. As if she had something on her mind. Do you know, while she was alive, I never gave it a thought. And now I'm aware of nothing else but her. It's as if her spirit wanted to live in my body, or at any rate— I don't know—"

His blue eyes were glazed, almost fishy, with fear and gloating shame. He had a short nose, and full, self-indulgent lips, and a once-comedy chin. Eternally a careless boy of thirteen. But now, care had got him in decay.

"And what does your present wife say?" I asked.

He poured himself some more wine.

"Why," he replied, "except for her, I shouldn't mind so much. She says nothing. Lady Lathkill has explained everything to her, and she agrees that— that—a spirit from the other side is more important than mere pleasure— you know what I mean. Lady Lathkill says that this is a preparation for my next incarnation, when I am going to serve Woman, and help Her to take Her place."

He looked up again, trying to be proud in his shame.

"Well, what a damned curious story!" exclaimed Lord Lathkill. "Mother's idea for herself— she had it in a message too— is that she is coming on earth the next time to save the animals from the cruelty of man. That's why she hates meat at table, or anything that has to be killed."

"And does Lady Lathkill encourage you in this business with your dead wife?" said I.

"Yes. She helps me. When I get as you might say at cross-purposes with Lucy— with Lucy's spirit, that is— Lady Lathkill helps to put it right between us. Then I'm all right, when I know I'm loved."

He looked at me stealthily, cunningly.

"Then you're all wrong," said I, "surely."

"And do you mean to say," put in Lord Lathkill, "that you don't live with the present Mrs. Hale at all? Do you mean to say you never *have* lived with her?"

"I've got a higher claim on me," said the unhappy Colonel.

"My God!" said Lord Lathkill.

I looked in amazement: the sort of chap who picks up a woman and has a good time with her for a week, then goes home as nice as pie, and now look at him! It was obvious that he had a terror of his black-browed new wife, as well as of Lucy's spirit. A devil and a deep blue sea with a vengenace!

"A damned curious story!" mused Lord Lathkill. "I'm not so sure I like it. Something's wrong somewhere. We shall have to go upstairs."

"Wrong!" said I. "Why, Colonel, don't you turn round and quarrel with the spirit of your first wife, fatally and finally, and get rid of her?"

The Colonel looked at me, still diminished and afraid, but perking up a bit, as we rose from table.

"How would you go about it?" he said.

"I'd just face her, wherever she seemed to be, and say: *'Lucy, go to blazes!'*"

Lord Lathkill burst into a loud laugh, then was suddenly silent as the door noiselessly opened, and the dowager's white hair and pointed, uncanny eyes peered in, then entered.

"I think I left my papers in here, Luke," she murmured.

"Yes, mother. There they are. We're just coming up."

"Take your time."

He held the door, and ducking forward, she went out again, clutching some papers. The Colonel had blenched yellow on his cheek-bones.

We went upstairs to the small drawing-room.

"You were a long time," said Carlotta, looking in all our faces. "Hope the coffee's not cold. We'll have fresh if it is."

She poured out, and Mrs. Hale carried the cups. The dark young woman thrust out her straight, dusky arm, offering me sugar, and gazing at me with her unchanging, yellow-brown eyes. I looked back at her, and being clairvoyant in this house, was conscious of the curves of her erect body, the sparse black hairs there would be on her strong-skinned dusky thighs. She was a woman of thirty, and she had had a great dread lest she should never marry. Now she was as if mesmerised.

"What do you do usually in the evenings?" I said.

She turned to me as if startled, as she nearly always did when addressed.

"We do nothing," she replied. "Talk; and sometimes Lady Lathkill reads."

"What does she read?"

"About spiritualism."

"Sounds pretty dull."

She looked at me again, but she did not answer. It was difficult to get anything out of her. She put up no fight, only remained in the same swarthy, passive, negative resistance. For a moment I wondered that no men made love to her: it was obvious they didn't. But then, modern young men are accustomed to being attracted, flattered, impressed: they expect an effort to please. And Mrs. Hale made none: didn't know how. Which for me was her mystery. She was passive, static, locked up in a resistant passivity that had fire beneath it.

Lord Lathkill came and sat by us. The Colonel's confession had had an effect on him.

"I'm afraid," he said to Mrs. Hale, "you have a thin time here."

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, there is so little to amuse you. Do you like to dance?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, then," he said, "let us go downstairs and dance to the Victrola. There are four of us. You'll come, of course?" he said to me.

Then he turned to his mother.

"Mother, we shall go down to the morning-room and dance. Will you come? Will you, Colonel?"

The dowager gazed at her son.

"I will come and look on," she said.

"And I will play the pianola, if you like," volunteered the Colonel. We went down and pushed aside the chintz chairs and the rugs. Lady Lathkill sat in a

chair, the Colonel worked away at the pianola. I danced with Carlotta, Lord Lathkill with Mrs. Hale.

A quiet soothing came over me, dancing with Carlotta. She was very still and remote, and she hardly looked at me. Yet the touch of her was wonderful, like a flower that yields itself to the morning. Her warm, silken shoulder was soft and grateful under my hand, as if it knew me with that second knowledge which is part of one's childhood, and which so rarely blossoms again in manhood and womanhood. It was as if we had known each other perfectly, as children, and now, as man and woman met in the full, further sympathy. Perhaps, in modern people, only after long suffering and defeat, can the naked intuition break free between woman and man.

She, I knew, let the strain and the tension of all her life depart from her then, leaving her nakedly still, within my arm. And I only wanted to be with her, to have her in my touch.

Yet after the second dance she looked at me, and suggested that she should dance with her husband. So I found myself with the strong, passive shoulder of Mrs. Hale under my hand, and her inert hand in mine, as I looked down at her dusky, dirty-looking neck— she wisely avoided powder. The duskiness of her mesmerised body made me see the faint dark sheen of her thighs, with intermittent black hairs. It was as if they shone through the silk of her mauve dress, like the limbs of a half-wild animal that is locked up in its own helpless dumb winter, a prisoner.

She knew, with the heavy intuition of her sort, that I glimpsed her crude among the bushes, and felt her attraction. But she kept looking away over my shoulder, with her yellow eyes, towards Lord Lathkill.

Myself or him, it was a question of which got there first. But she preferred him. Only for some things she would rather it were me.

Luke had changed curiously. His body seemed to have come alive, in the dark cloth of his evening suit; his eyes had a devil-may-care light in them, his long cheeks a touch of scarlet, and his black hair fell loose over his forehead. He had again some of that Guardsman's sense of well-being and claim to the best in life, which I had noticed the first time I saw him. But now it was a little more florid, defiant, with a touch of madness.

He looked down at Carlotta with uncanny kindness and affection. Yet he was glad to hand her over to me. He, too, was afraid of her: as if with her his bad luck had worked. Whereas, in a throb of crude brutality, he felt it would not work with the dark young woman. So, he handed Carlotta over to me with relief, as if, with me, she would be safe from the doom of his bad luck. And he, with the other woman, would be safe from it too. For the other woman was outside the circle.

I was glad to have Carlotta again: to have that inexpressible delicate and complete quiet of the two of us, resting my heart in a balance now at last physical as well as spiritual. Till now, it had always been a fragmentary thing. Now, for this hour at least, it was whole, a soft, complete, physical flow, and a unison deeper even than childhood.

As she danced she shivered slightly, and I seemed to smell frost in the air. The Colonel, too, was not keeping the rhythm.

"Has it turned colder?" I said.

"I wonder," she answered, looking up at me with a slow beseeching. Why, and for what was she beseeching me? I pressed my hand a little closer, and her small breasts seemed to speak to me. The Colonel recovered the rhythm again.

But at the end of the dance she shivered again, and it seemed to me I too was chilled.

"Has it suddenly turned colder?" I said, going to the radiator. It was quite hot.

"It seems to me it has," said Lord Lathkill in a queer voice.

The Colonel was sitting abjectly on the music-stool, as if broken.

"Shall we have another? Shall we try a tango?" said Lord Lathkill. "As much of it as we can manage?"

"I— I—" the Colonel began, turning round on the seat, his face yellow. "I'm not sure—"

Carlotta shivered. The frost seemed to touch my vitals. Mrs. Hale stood stiff, like a pillar of brown rock-salt, staring at her husband.

"We had better leave off," murmured Lady Lathkill, rising.

Then she did an extraordinary thing. She lifted her face, staring to the other side, and said suddenly, in a clear, cruel sort of voice:

"Are you here, Lucy?"

She was speaking across to the spirits. Deep inside me leaped a jump of laughter. I wanted to howl with laughter. Then instantly I went inert again. The chill gloom seemed to deepen suddenly in the room, everybody was overcome. On the piano-seat the Colonel sat yellow and huddled, with a terrible hang-dog look of guilt on his face. There was a silence, in which the cold seemed to creak. Then came again the peculiar bell-like ringing of Lady Lathkill's voice:

"Are you here? What do you wish us to do?"

A dead and ghastly silence, in which we all remained transfixed. Then from somewhere came two slow thuds, and a sound of drapery moving. The Colonel, with mad fear in his eyes, looked round at the uncurtained windows, and crouched on his seat.

"We must leave this room," said Lady Lathkill.

"I'll tell you what, mother," said Lord Lathkill curiously; "you and the Colonel go up, and we'll just turn on the Victrola."

That was almost uncanny of him. For myself, the cold effluence of these people had paralysed me. Now I began to rally. I felt that Lord Lathkill was sane, it was these other people who were mad.

Again from somewhere indefinite came two slow thuds.

"We must leave this room," repeated Lady Lathkill in monotony.

"All right, mother. You go. I'll just turn on the Victrola."

And Lord Lathkill strode across the room. In another moment the monstrous barking howl of the opening of a jazz tune, an event far more extraordinary than thuds, poured from the unmoving bit of furniture called a Victrola.

Lady Lathkill silently departed. The Colonel got to his feet.

"I wouldn't go if I were you, Colonel," said I. "Why not dance? I'll look on this time."

I felt as if I were resisting a rushing, cold, dark current.

Lord Lathkill was already dancing with Mrs. Hale, skating delicately along, with a certain smile of obstinacy, secrecy, and excitement kindled on his face. Carlotta went up quietly to the Colonel, and put her hand on his broad shoulder. He let himself be moved into the dance, but he had no heart in it.

There came a heavy crash, out of the distance. The Colonel stopped as if shot: in another moment he would go down on his knees. And his face was terrible. It was obvious he really felt another presence, other than ours, blotting us out. The room seemed dree and cold. It was heavy work, bearing up.

The Colonel's lips were moving, but no sound came forth. Then, absolutely oblivious of us, he went out of the room.

The Victrola had run down. Lord Lathkill went to wind it up again, saying:

"I suppose mother knocked over a piece of furniture."

But we were all of us depressed, in abject depression.

"Isn't it awful!" Carlotta said to me, looking up beseechingly.

"Abominable!" said I.

"What do you think there is in it?"

"God knows. The only thing is to stop it, as one does hysteria. It's on a par with hysteria."

"Quite," she said.

Lord Lathkill was dancing, and smiling very curiously down into his partner's face. The Victrola was at its loudest.

Carlotta and I looked at one another, with hardly the heart to start again. The house felt hollow and gruesome. One wanted to get out, to get away from the cold, uncanny blight which filled the air.

"Oh, I say, keep the ball rolling," called Lord Lathkill.

"Come," I said to Carlotta.

Even then she hung back a little. If she had not suffered, and lost so much, she would have gone upstairs at once to struggle in the silent wrestling of wills

with her mother-in-law. Even now, *that* particular fight drew her, almost the strongest. But I took her hand.

"Come," I said. "Let us dance it down. We'll roll the ball the opposite way."

She danced with me, but she was absent, unwilling. The empty gloom of the house, the sense of cold, and of deadening opposition, pressed us down. I was looking back over my life, and thinking how the cold weight of an unliving spirit was slowly crushing all warmth and vitality out of everything. Even Carlotta herself had gone numb again, cold and resistant even to me. The thing seemed to happen wholesale in her.

"One has to choose to live," I said, dancing on. But I was powerless. With a woman, when her spirit goes inert in opposition, a man can do nothing. I felt my life-flow sinking in my body.

"This house is awfully depressing," I said to her, as we mechanically danced. "Why don't you *do* something? Why don't you get out of this tangle? Why don't you break it?"

"How?" she said.

I looked down at her, wondering why she was suddenly hostile.

"You needn't fight," I said. "You needn't fight it. Don't get tangled up in it. Just side-step, on to another ground."

She made a pause of impatience before she replied:

"I don't see where I am to side-step to, precisely."

"You do," said I. "A little while ago, you were warm and unfolded and good. Now you are shut up and prickly, in the cold. You needn't be. Why not stay warm?"

"It's nothing I do," she said coldly.

"It is. Stay warm to me. I am here. Why clutch in a tug-of-war with Lady Lathkill?"

"Do I clutch in a tug-of-war with my mother-in-law?"

"You know you do."

She looked up at me, with a faint little shadow of guilt and beseeching, but with a *moue* of cold obstinacy dominant.

"Let's have done," said I.

And in cold silence we sat side by side on the lounge.

The other two danced on. They at any rate were in unison. One could see from the swing of their limbs. Mrs. Hale's yellow-brown eyes looked at me every time she came round.

"Why does she look at me?" I said.

"I can't imagine," said Carlotta, with a cold grimace.

"I'd better go upstairs and see what's happening," she said, suddenly rising and disappearing in a breath.

Why should she go? Why should she rush off to the battle of wills with her mother-in-law? In such a battle, while one has any life to lose, one can only lose it. There is nothing positively to be done, but to withdraw out of the hateful tension.

The music ran down. Lord Lathkill stopped the Victrola.

"Carlotta gone?" he said.

"Apparently."

"Why didn't you stop her?"

"Wild horses wouldn't stop her."

He lifted his hand with a mocking gesture of helplessness.

"The lady loves her will," he said. "Would you like to dance?"

I looked at Mrs. Hale.

"No," I said. "I won't butt in. I'll play the pianola. The Victrola's a brute."

I hardly noticed the passage of time. Whether the others danced or not, I played, and was unconscious of almost everything. In the midst of one rattling piece, Lord Lathkill touched my arm.

"Listen to Carlotta. She says closing time," he said, in his old musical voice, but with the sardonic ring of war in it now.

Carlotta stood with her arms dangling, looking like a penitent schoolgirl.

"The Colonel has gone to bed. He hasn't been able to manage a reconciliation with Lucy," she said. "My mother-in-law thinks we ought to let him try to sleep."

Carlotta's slow eyes rested on mine, questioning, penitent— or so I imagined— and somewhat sphinx-like.

"Why, of course," said Lord Lathkill. "I wish him all the sleep in the world."

Mrs. Hale said never a word.

"Is mother retiring too?" asked Luke.

"I think so."

"Ah! then supposing we up and look at the supper-tray."

We found Lady Lathkill mixing herself some nightcap brew over a spirit-lamp: something milky and excessively harmless. She stood at the sideboard stirring her potations, and hardly noticed us. When she had finished she sat down with her steaming cup.

"Colonel Hale all right, mother?" said Luke, looking across at her.

The dowager, under her uplift of white hair, stared back at her son. There was an eye-battle for some moments, during which he maintained his arch, debonair ease, just a bit crazy.

"No," said Lady Lathkill, "he is in great trouble."

"Ah!" replied her son. "Awful pity we can't do anything for him. But if flesh and blood can't help him, I'm afraid I'm a dud. Suppose he didn't mind our

dancing? Frightfully good for *us*! We've been forgetting that we're flesh and blood, mother."

He took another whisky and soda, and gave me one. And in a paralysing silence Lady Lathkill sipped her hot brew, Luke and I sipped our whiskies, the young woman ate a little sandwich. We all preserved an extraordinary aplomb, and an obstinate silence.

It was Lady Lathkill who broke it. She seemed to be sinking downwards, crouching into herself like a skulking animal.

"I suppose," she said, "we shall all go to bed?"

"You go mother. We'll come along in a moment."

She went, and for some time we four sat silent. The room seemed to become pleasanter, the air was more grateful.

"Look here," said Lord Lathkill at last. "What do you think of this ghost business?"

"I?" said I. "I don't like the atmosphere it produces. There may be ghosts, and spirits, and all that. The dead must be somewhere; there's no such place as nowhere. But they don't affect me particularly. Do they you?"

"Well," he said, "no, not directly. Indirectly I suppose it does."

"I think it makes a horribly depressing atmosphere, spiritualism," said I. "I want to kick."

"Exactly! And ought one?" he asked in his terribly sane-seeming way.

This made me laugh. I knew what he was up to.

"I don't know what you mean by *ought* ," said I. "If I really want to kick, if I know I can't stand a thing, I kick. Who's going to authorise me, if my own genuine feeling doesn't?"

"Quite," he said, staring at me like an owl, with a fixed, meditative stare.

"Do you know," he said, "I suddenly thought at dinner-time, what corpses we all were, sitting eating our dinners. I thought it when I saw you look at those little Jerusalem artichoke things in a white sauce. Suddenly it struck me, you were alive and twinkling, and we were all bodily dead. Bodily dead, if you understand. Quite alive in other directions, but bodily dead. And whether we ate vegetarian or meat made no difference. We were bodily dead."

"Ah, with a slap in the face," said I, "we come to life! You or I or anybody."

"I *do* understand poor Lucy," said Luke. "Don't you? She forgot to be flesh and blood while she was alive, and now she can't forgive herself, nor the Colonel. That must be pretty rough, you know, not to realise it till you're dead, and you haven't, so to speak, anything left to go on. I mean, it's awfully important to be flesh and blood."

He looked so solemnly at us, we three broke simultaneously into an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, but I *do* mean it," he said. "I've only realised how very extraordinary it is to be a man of flesh and blood, alive. It seems so ordinary, in comparison, to be dead, and merely spirit. That seems so commonplace. But fancy having a living face, and arms, and thighs. Oh, my God, I'm glad I've realised in time!"

He caught Mrs. Hale's hand, and pressed her dusky arm against his body.

"Oh, but if one had died without realising it!" he cried. "Think how ghastly for Jesus, when He was risen and wasn't touchable! How very awful, to have to say *Noli me tangere!* Ah, touch me, touch me *alive* !"

He pressed Mrs. Hale's hand convulsively against his breast. The tears had already slowly gathered in Carlotta's eyes and were dropping on to her hands in her lap.

"Don't cry, Carlotta," he said. "Really, don't. We haven't killed one another. We're too decent, after all. We've almost become two spirits side by side. We've almost become two ghosts to one another, wrestling. Oh, but I want you to get back your body, even if I can't give it to you. I want my flesh and blood, Carlotta, and I want you to have yours. We've suffered so much the other way. And the children, it is as well they are dead. They were born of our will and our disembodiment. Oh, I feel like the Bible. Clothe me with flesh again, and wrap my bones with sinew, and let the fountain of blood cover me. My spirit is like a naked nerve on the air."

Carlotta had ceased to weep. She sat with her head dropped, as if asleep. The rise and fall of her small, slack breasts was still heavy, but they were lifting on a heaving sea of rest. It was as if a slow, restful dawn were rising in her body, while she slept. So slack, so broken she sat, it occurred to me that in this crucifixion business the crucified does not put himself alone on the cross. The woman is nailed even more inexorably up, and crucified in the body even more cruelly.

It is a monstrous thought. But the deed is even more monstrous. Oh, Jesus, didn't you know that you couldn't be crucified alone?— that the two thieves crucified along with you were the two women, your wife and mother! You called them two thieves. But what would they call you, who had their women's bodies on the cross? The abominable trinity on Calvary!

I felt an infinite tenderness for my dear Carlotta. She could not yet be touched. But my soul streamed to her like warm blood. So she sat slack and drooped, as if broken. But she was not broken. It was only the great release.

Luke sat with the hand of the dark young woman pressed against his breast. His face was warm and fresh, but he too breathed heavily, and stared unseeing. Mrs. Hale sat at his side erect and mute. But she loved him, with erect, black-faced, remote power.

"Morier!" said Luke to me. "If you can help Carlotta, you will, won't you? I can't do any more for her now. We are in mortal fear of each other."

"As much as she'll let me," said I, looking at her drooping figure, that was built on such a strong frame.

The fire rustled on the hearth as we sat in complete silence. How long it lasted I cannot say. Yet we were none of us startled when the door opened.

It was the Colonel, in a handsome brocade dressing-gown, looking worried.

Luke still held the dark young woman's hand clasped against his thigh. Mrs. Hale did not move.

"I thought you fellows might help me," said the Colonel, in a worried voice, as he closed the door.

"What is wrong, Colonel?" said Luke.

The Colonel looked at him, looked at the clasped hands of Luke and the dark young woman, looked at me, looked at Carlotta, without changing his expression of anxiety, fear, and misery. He didn't care about us.

"I can't sleep," he said. "It's gone wrong again. My head feels as if there was a cold vacuum in it, and my heart beats, and something screws up inside me. I know it's Lucy. She hates me again. I can't stand it."

He looked at us with eyes half-glazed, obsessed. His face seemed as if the flesh were breaking under the skin, decomposing.

"Perhaps, poor thing," said Luke, whose madness seemed really sane this night, "perhaps you hate *her* ."

Luke's strange concentration instantly made us feel a tension, as of hate, in the Colonel's body.

"I?" The Colonel looked up sharply, like a culprit. "I! I wouldn't say that, if I were you."

"Perhaps that's what's the matter," said Luke, with mad, beautiful calm. "Why can't you feel kindly towards her, poor thing! She must have been done out of a lot while she lived."

It was as if he had one foot in life and one in death, and knew both sides. To us it was like madness.

"I— I!" stammered the Colonel; and his face was a study. Expression after expression moved across it: of fear, repudiation, dismay, anger, repulsion, bewilderment, guilt. "I was good to her."

"Ah, yes," said Luke. "Perhaps *you* were good to her. But was your body good to poor Lucy's body, poor dead thing!"

He seemed to be better acquainted with the ghost than with us.

The Colonel gazed blankly at Luke, and his eyes went up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down.

"My body!" he said blankly.

And he looked down amazedly at his little round stomach, under the silk gown, and his stout knee, in its blue-and-white pyjama.

"My body!" he repeated blankly.

"Yes," said Luke. "Don't you see, you may have been awfully good to her. But her poor woman's body, were you ever good to that?"

"She had everything she wanted. She had three of my children," said the Colonel dazedly.

"Ah yes, that may easily be. But your body of a man, was it ever good to her body of a woman? That's the point. If you understand the marriage service: with my body I thee worship. That's the point. No getting away from it."

The queerest of all accusing angels did Lord Lathkill make, as he sat there with the hand of the other man's wife clasped against his thigh. His face was fresh and naïve, and the dark eyes were bright with a clairvoyant candour, that was like madness, and perhaps was supreme sanity.

The Colonel was thinking back, and over his face a slow understanding was coming.

"It may be," he said. "It may be. Perhaps, that way, I despised her. It may be, it may be."

"I know," said Luke. "As if she weren't worth noticing, what you did to her. Haven't I done it myself? And don't I know now, it's a horrible thing to do, to oneself as much as to her? Her poor ghost, that ached, and never had a real body! It's not so easy to worship with the body. Ah, if the Church taught us *that* sacrament: *with my body I thee worship!* that would easily make up for any honouring and obeying the woman might do. But that's why she haunts you. You ignored and disliked her body, and she was only a living ghost. Now she wails in the afterworld, like a still-wincing nerve."

The Colonel hung his head, slowly pondering. Pondering with all his body. His young wife watched the sunken, bald head in a kind of stupor. His day seemed so far from her day. Carlotta had lifted her face; she was beautiful again, with the tender before-dawn freshness of a new understanding.

She was watching Luke, and it was obvious he was another man to her. The man she knew, the Luke who was her husband was gone, and this other strange, uncanny creature had taken his place. She was filled with wonder. Could one so change, as to become another creature entirely? Ah, if it were so! If she herself could cease to be! If that woman who was married to Luke, married to him in an intimacy of misfortune that was like a horror, could only cease to be, and let a new, delicately-wild Carlotta take her place!

"It may be," said the Colonel, lifting his head. "It may be." There seemed to come a relief over his soul, as he realised. "I didn't worship her with my body. I think maybe I worshipped other women that way; but maybe I never did. But I thought I was good to her. And I thought she didn't want it."

"It's no good thinking. We all want it," asserted Luke. "And before we die, we know it. I say, before we die. It may be after. But everybody wants it, let them say and do what they will. Don't you agree, Morier?"

I was startled when he spoke to me. I had been thinking of Carlotta: how she was looking like a girl again, as she used to look at the Thwaite, when she painted cactuses-in-a-pot. Only now, a certain rigidity of the will had left her, so that she looked even younger than when I first knew her, having now a virginal, flower-like *stillness* which she had not had then. I had always believed that people could be born again: if they would only let themselves.

"I'm sure they do," I said to Luke.

But I was thinking, if people were born again, the old circumstances would not fit the new body.

"What about yourself, Luke?" said Carlotta abruptly.

"I!" he exclaimed, and the scarlet showed in his cheek. "I! I'm not fit to be spoken about. I've been moaning like the ghost of disembodiment myself, ever since I became a man."

The Colonel said never a word. He hardly listened. He was pondering, pondering. In this way, he, too, was a brave man.

"I have an idea what you mean," he said. "There's no denying it, I didn't like her body. And now, I suppose it's too late."

He looked up bleakly: in a way, willing to be condemned, since he knew vaguely that something was wrong. Anything better than the blind torture.

"Oh, I don't know," said Luke. "Why don't you, even now, love her a little with your real heart? Poor disembodied thing! Why don't you take her to your warm heart, even now, and comfort her inside there? Why don't you be kind to her poor ghost, bodily?"

The Colonel did not answer. He was gazing fixedly at Luke. Then he turned, and dropped his head, alone in a deep silence. Then, deliberately, but not lifting his head, he pulled open his dressing-gown at the breast, unbuttoned the top of his pyjama jacket, and sat perfectly still, his breast showing white and very pure, so much younger and purer than his averted face. He breathed with difficulty, his white breast rising irregularly. But in the deep isolation where he was, slowly a gentleness of compassion came over him, moulding his elderly features with strange freshness, and softening his blue eye with a look it had never had before. Something of the tremulous gentleness of a young bridegroom had come upon him, in spite of his baldness, his silvery little moustache, the weary marks of his face.

The passionate, compassionate soul stirred in him and was pure, his youth flowered over his face and eyes.

We sat very still, moved also in the spirit of compassion. There seemed a presence in the air, almost a smell of blossom, as if time had opened and gave off the perfume of spring. The Colonel gazed in silence into space, his smooth white chest, with the few dark hairs, open and rising and sinking with life.

Meanwhile his dark-faced young wife watched as if from afar. The youngness that was on him was not for her.

I knew that Lady Lathkill would come. I could feel her far off in her room, stirring and sending forth her rays. Swiftly I steeled myself to be in readiness. When the door opened I rose and walked across the room.

She entered with characteristic noiselessness, peering in round the door, with her crest of white hair, before she ventured bodily in. The Colonel looked at her swiftly, and swiftly covered his breast, holding his hand at his bosom, clutching the silk of his robe.

"I was afraid," she murmured, "that Colonel Hale might be in trouble."

"No," said I. "We are all sitting very peacefully. There is no trouble."

Lord Lathkill also rose.

"No trouble at all, I assure you, mother!" he said.

Lady Lathkill glanced at us both, then turned heavily to the Colonel.

"She is unhappy to-night?" she asked.

The Colonel winced.

"No," he said hurriedly. "No, I don't think so." He looked up at her with shy, wincing eyes.

"Tell me what I can do," she said in a very low tone, bending towards him.

"Our ghost is walking to-night, mother," said Lord Lathkill. "Haven't you felt the air of spring, and smelt the plum-blossom? Don't you feel us all young? Our ghost is walking, to bring Lucy home. The Colonel's breast is quite extraordinary, white as plum-blossom, mother, younger-looking than mine, and he's already taken Lucy into his bosom, in his breast, where he breathes like the wind among trees. The Colonel's breast is white and extraordinarily beautiful, mother. I don't wonder poor Lucy yearned for it, to go home into it at last. It's like going into an orchard of plum-blossom for a ghost."

His mother looked round at him, then back at the Colonel, who was still clutching his hand over his chest, as if protecting something.

"You see, I didn't understand where I'd been wrong," he said, looking up at her imploringly. "I never realised that it was my body which had not been good to her."

Lady Lathkill curved sideways to watch him. But her power was gone. His face had come smooth with the tender glow of compassionate life, that flowers again. She could not get at him.

"It's no good, mother. You know our ghost is walking. She's supposed to be absolutely like a crocus, if you know what I mean: harbinger of spring in the earth. So it says in my great-grandfather's diary: for she rises with silence like a crocus at the feet, and violets in the hollows of the heart come out. For she is of the feet and the hands, the thighs and breast, the face and the all-concealing belly, and her name is silent, but her odour is of spring, and her contact is the

all-in-all." He was quoting from his great-grandfather's diary, which only the sons of the family read. And as he quoted he rose curiously on his toes, and spread his fingers, bringing his hands together till the finger-tips touched. His father had done that before him, when he was deeply moved.

Lady Lathkill sat down heavily in the chair next the Colonel.

"How do you feel?" she asked him, in a secretive mutter.

He looked round at her, with the large blue eyes of candour.

"I never knew what was wrong," he said, a little nervously. "She only wanted to be looked after a bit, not to be a homeless, houseless ghost. It's all right! She's all right here." He pressed his clutched hand on his breast. "It's all right; it's all right. She'll be all right now."

He rose, a little fantastic in his brocade gown, but once more manly, candid, and sober.

"With your permission," he said, "I will retire."— He made a little bow.— "I am glad you helped me. I didn't know— didn't know."

But the change in him, and his secret wondering were so strong in him, he went out of the room scarcely being aware of us.

Lord Lathkill threw up his arms, and stretched quivering.

"Oh, pardon, pardon," he said, seeming, as he stretched, quivering, to grow bigger and almost splendid, sending out rays of fire to the dark young woman. "Oh, mother, thank you for my limbs, and my body! Oh, mother, thank you for my knees and my shoulders at this moment! Oh, mother, thank you that my body is straight and alive! Oh, mother, torrents of spring, torrents of spring, whoever said that?"

"Don't you forget yourself, my boy?" said his mother.

"Oh no, dear no! Oh, mother dear, a man has to be in love in his thighs, the way you ride a horse. Why don't we stay in love that way all our lives? Why do we turn into corpses with consciousness? Oh, mother of my body, thank you for my body, you strange woman with white hair! I don't know much about you, but my body came from you, so thank you, my dear. I shall think of you to-night!"

"Hadn't we better go?" she said, beginning to tremble.

"Why, yes," he said, turning and looking strangely at the dark woman. "Yes, let us go; let us go!"

Carlotta gazed at him, then, with strange, heavy, searching look, at me. I smiled to her, and she looked away. The dark young woman looked over her shoulder as she went out. Lady Lathkill hurried past her son, with head ducked. But still he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she stopped dead.

"Good night, mother; mother of my face and my thighs. Thank you for the night to come, dear mother of my body."

She glanced up at him rapidly, nervously, then hurried away. He stared after her, then switched off the light.

"Funny old mother!" he said. "I never realised before that she was the mother of my shoulders and my hips, as well as my brain. Mother of my thighs!"

He switched off some of the lights as we went, accompanying me to my room.

"You know," he said, "I can understand that the Colonel is happy, now the forlorn ghost of Lucy is comforted in his heart. After all, he married her! And she must be content at last: he has a beautiful chest, don't you think? Together they will sleep well. And then he will begin to live the life of the living again. How friendly the house feels tonight! But, after all, it is my old home. And the smell of plum-blossom— don't you notice it? It is our ghost, in silence like a crocus. There, your fire has died down! But it's a nice room! I hope our ghost will come to you. I think she will. Don't speak to her. It makes her go away. She, too, is a ghost of silence. We talk far too much. But now I am going to be silent too, and a ghost of silence. Good night!"

He closed the door softly and was gone. And softly, in silence, I took off my things. I was thinking of Carlotta, and a little sadly, perhaps, because of the power of circumstance over us. This night I could have worshipped her with my body, and she, perhaps, was stripped in the body to be worshipped. But it was not for me, at this hour, to fight against circumstances.

I had fought too much, even against the most imposing circumstances, to use any more violence for love. Desire is a sacred thing, and should not be violated.

"Hush!" I said to myself. "I will sleep, and the ghost of my silence can go forth, in the subtle body of desire, to meet that which is coming to meet it. Let my ghost go forth, and let me not interfere. There are many intangible meetings, and unknown fulfilments of desire."

So I went softly to sleep, as I wished to, without interfering with the warm, crocus-like ghost of my body.

And I must have gone far, far down the intricate galleries of sleep, to the very heart of the world. For I know I passed on beyond the strata of images and words, beyond the iron veins of memory, and even the jewels of rest, to sink in the final dark like a fish, dumb, soundless, and imageless, yet alive and swimming.

And at the very core of the deep night the ghost came to me, at the heart of the ocean of oblivion, which is also the heart of life. Beyond hearing, or even knowledge of contact, I met her and knew her. How I know it I don't know. Yet I know it with eyeless, wingless knowledge.

For man in the body is formed through countless ages, and at the centre is the speck, or spark upon which all his formation has taken place. It is even not himself, deep beyond his many depths. Deep from him calls to deep. And according as deep answers deep, man glistens and surpasses himself.

Beyond all the pearly mufflings of consciousness, of age upon age of consciousness, deep calls yet to deep, and sometimes is answered. It is calling and answering, new-awakened God calling within the deep of man, and new God calling answer from the other deep. And sometimes the other deep is a woman, as it was with me, when my ghost came.

Women were not unknown to me. But never before had woman come, in the depths of night, to answer my deep with her deep. As the ghost came, came as a ghost of silence, still in the depth of sleep.

I know she came. I know she came even as a woman, to my man. But the knowledge is darkly naked as the event. I only know, it was so. In the deep of sleep a call was called from the deeps of me, and answered in the deeps, by a woman among women. Breasts or thighs or face. I remember not a touch, no, nor a movement of my own. It is all complete in the profundity of darkness. Yet I know it was so.

I awoke towards dawn, from far, far away. I was vaguely conscious of drawing nearer and nearer, as the sun must have been drawing towards the horizon, from the complete beyond. Till at last the faint pallor of mental consciousness coloured my waking.

And then I was aware of a pervading scent, as of plum-blossom, and a sense of extraordinary silkiness— though where, and in what contact, I could not say. It was as the first blemish of dawn.

And even with so slight a conscious registering, *it* seemed to disappear. Like a whale that has sounded to the bottomless seas. That knowledge of *it* , which was the mating of the ghost and me, disappeared from me, in its rich weight of certainty, as the scent of the plum-blossom moved down the lanes of my consciousness, and my limbs stirred in a silkiness for which I have no comparison.

As I became aware, I also became uncertain. I wanted to be certain of *it* , to have definite evidence. And as I sought for evidence, *it* disappeared, my perfect knowledge was gone. I no longer knew in full.

Now as the daylight slowly amassed, in the windows from which I had put back the shutters, I sought in myself for evidence, and in the room.

But I shall never know. I shall never know if it was a ghost, some sweet spirit from the innermost of the ever-deepening cosmos; or a woman, a very woman, as the silkiness of my limbs seems to attest; or a dream, a hallucination! I shall never know. Because I went away from Riddings in the morning on account of the sudden illness of Lady Lathkill.

"You will come again," Luke said to me. "And in any case, you will never really go away from us."

"Good-bye," she said to me. "At last it was perfect!"

She seemed so beautiful, when I left her, as if it were the ghost again, and I was far down the deeps of consciousness.

The following autumn, when I was overseas once more, I had a letter from Lord Lathkill. He wrote very rarely.

"Carlotta has a son," he said, "and I an heir. He has yellow hair, like a little crocus, and one of the young plum trees in the orchard has come out of all season into blossom. To me he is flesh and blood of our ghost itself. Even mother doesn't look over the wall, to the other side, any more. It's all this side for her now.

"So our family refuses to die out, by the grace of our ghost. We are calling him Gabriel.

"Dorothy Hale also is a mother, three days before Carlotta. She has a black lamb of a daughter, called Gabrielle. By the bleat of the little thing, I know its father. Our own is a blue-eyed one, with the dangerous repose of a pugilist. I have no fears of our family misfortune for him, ghost-begotten and ready-fisted.

"The Colonel is very well, quiet, and self-possessed. He is farming in Wiltshire, raising pigs. It is a passion with him, the *crème de la crème* of swine. I admit, he has golden sows as elegant as a young Diane de Poictiers, and young hogs like Perseus in the first red-gold flush of youth. He looks me in the eye, and I look him back, and we understand. He is quiet, and proud now, and very hale and hearty, raising swine *ad maiorem gloriam Dei.* A good sport!

"I am in love with this house and its inmates, including the plum-blossom-scented one, she who visited you, in all the peace. I cannot understand why you wander in uneasy and distant parts of the earth. For me, when I am at home, I am there. I have peace upon my bones, and if the world is going to come to a violent and untimely end, as prophets aver, I feel the house of Lathkill will survive, built upon our ghost. So come back, and you'll find we shall not have gone away...."

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2: The Discovery of America

Bill Nye

Edgar Wilson Nye, 1850-1896
In: *Comic History of the United States*, 1894

American humourist, author many humorous sketches and several books, and said to be the author of the remark: "Wagner's music is better than it sounds."

IT WAS A beautiful evening at the close of a warm, luscious day in old Spain. It was such an evening as one would select for trysting purposes. The honeysuckle gave out the sweet announcement of its arrival on the summer breeze, and the bulbul sang in the dark vistas of olive-trees,-sang of his love and his hope, and of the victory he anticipated in the morrow's bulbul-fight, and the plaudits of the royal couple who would be there. The pink west paled away to the touch of twilight, and the soft zenith was sown with stars coming like celestial fire-flies on the breast of a mighty meadow.

Across the dusk, with bowed head, came a woman. Her air was one of proud humility. It was the air of royalty in the presence of an overruling power. It was Isabella. She was on her way to confession. She carried a large, beautifully-bound volume containing a memorandum of her sins for the day. Ever and anon she would refer to it, but the twilight had come on so fast that she could not read it.

Reaching the confessional, she kneeled, and, by the aid of her notes, she told off to the good Father and receptacle of the queen's trifling sins, Fernando de Talavera, how wicked she had been. When it was over and the queen had risen to go, Fernando came forth, and with a solemn obeisance said,"May it please your Majesty, I have to-day received a letter from my good friend the prior of the Franciscan convent of St. Mary's of Rabida in Andalusia. With your Majesty's permission, I will read it to you." "

Proceed," exclaimed Isabella, gravely, taking a piece of crochet-work from her apron and seating herself comfortably near the dim light.

"It is dated the sixth month and tenth day of the month, and reads as follows:

Dear Brother:

This letter will be conveyed unto your hands by the bearer hereof. His name is Christopher Columbus, a native of Genoa, who has been living on me for two years. But he is a good man, devout and honest. He is willing to work, but I have nothing to do in his line. Times, as you know, are dull, and in his own profession nothing seems to be doing.

He is by profession a discoverer. He has been successful in the work where he has had opportunities, and there has been no complaint so far on the part of those who have

employed him. Everything he has ever discovered has remained that way, so he is willing to let his work show for itself.

Should you be able to bring this to the notice of her Majesty, who is tender of heart, I would be most glad; and should her most gracious Majesty have any discovering to be done, or should she contemplate a change or desire to substitute another in the place of the present discoverer, she will do well to consider the qualifications of my friend.

Very sincerely and fraternally thine,
Etc., etc.

The queen inquired still further regarding Columbus, and, taking the letter, asked Talavera to send him to the royal sitting-room at ten o'clock the following day.

When Columbus arose the next morning he found a note from the royal confessor, and, without waiting for breakfast, for he had almost overcome the habit of eating, he reversed his cuffs, and, taking a fresh handkerchief from his valise and putting it in his pocket so that the corners would coyly stick out a little, he was soon on his way to the palace. He carried also a small globe wrapped up in a newspaper.

The interview was encouraging until the matter of money necessary for the trip was touched upon. His Majesty was called in, and spoke sadly of the public surplus. He said that there were one hundred dollars still due on his own salary, and the palace had not been painted for eight years. He had taken orders on the store till he was tired of it. "Our meat bill," said he, taking off his crown and mashing a hornet on the wall, "is sixty days overdue. We owe the hired girl for three weeks; and how are we going to get funds enough to do any discovering, when you remember that we have got to pay for an extra session this fall for the purpose of making money plenty?"

But Isabella came and sat by him in her winning way, and with the moistened corner of her handkerchief removed a spot of maple syrup from the ermine trimming of his reigning gown. She patted his hand, and, with her gentle voice, cheered him and told him that if he would economize and go without cigars or wine, in less than two hundred years he would have saved enough to fit Columbus out.

A few weeks later he had saved one hundred and fifty dollars in this way. The queen then went at twilight and pawned a large breastpin, and, although her chest was very sensitive to cold, she went without it all the following winter, in order that Columbus might discover America before immigration set in here.

Too much cannot be said of the heroism of Queen Isabella and the courage of her convictions. A man would have said, under such circumstances, that there would be no sense in discovering a place that was not popular. Why discover a place when it is so far out of the way? Why discover a country with no

improvements? Why discover a country that is so far from the railroad? Why discover, at great expense, an entirely new country?

But Isabella did not stop to listen to these croaks. In the language of the Honorable Jeremiah M. Rusk, "She seen her duty and she done it." That was Isabella's style.

Columbus now began to select steamer-chairs and rugs. He had already secured the *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*, and on the 3d of August, 1492, he sailed from Palos. Isabella brought him a large bunch of beautiful flowers as he was about to sail, and Ferdinand gave him a nice yachting-cap and a spicy French novel to read on the road.

He was given a commission as viceroy or governor of all the lands he might discover, with hunting and shooting privileges on same.

He stopped several weeks at the Canary Islands, where he and his one hundred and twenty men rested and got fresh water. He then set out sailing due west over an unknown sea to blaze the way for liberty.

Soon, however, his men began to murmur. They began also to pick on Columbus and occupy his steamer-chair when he wanted to use it himself. They got to making chalk-marks on the deck and compelling him to pay a shilling before he could cross them. Some claimed that they were lost and that they had been sailing around for over a week in a circle, one man stating that he recognized a spot in the sea that they had passed eight times already.

Finally they mutinied, and started to throw the great navigator overboard, but he told them that if they would wait until the next morning he would tell them a highly amusing story that he heard just before he left Palos.

Thus his life was saved, for early in the morning the cry of "Land ho!" was heard, and America was discovered.

A saloon was at once started, and the first step thus taken towards the foundation of a republic. From that one little timid saloon, with its family entrance, has sprung the magnificent and majestic machine which, lubricated with spoils and driven by wind, gives to every American to-day the right to live under a Government selected for him by men who make that their business.

Columbus discovered America several times after the 12th of October, 1492, and finally, while prowling about looking for more islands, discovered South America near the mouth of the Orinoco.

He was succeeded as governor by Francisco de Bobadilla, who sent him back finally in chains. Thus we see that the great are not always happy. There is no doubt that millions of people every year avoid many discomforts by remaining in obscurity.

THE LIFE of Columbus has been written by hundreds of men, both in this country and abroad, but the foregoing facts are distilled from this great

biographical mass by skilful hands, and, like the succeeding pages, will stand for centuries unshaken by the bombardment of the critic, while succeeding years shall try them with frost and thaw, and the tide of time dash high against their massive front, only to recede, quelled and defeated.

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3: The Seven Vagabonds

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

The Token and Atlantic Souvenir, 1833

RAMBLING ON FOOT in the spring of my life and the summer of the year, I came one afternoon to a point which gave me the choice of three directions. Straight before me the main road extended its dusty length to Boston; on the left a branch went toward the sea, and would have lengthened my journey a trifle of twenty or thirty miles, while by the right-hand path I might have gone over hills and lakes to Canada, visiting in my way the celebrated town of Stamford. On a level spot of grass at the foot of the guide-post appeared an object which, though locomotive on a different principle, reminded me of Gulliver's portable mansion among the Brobdignags. It was a huge covered wagon— or, more properly, a small house on wheels— with a door on one side and a window shaded by green blinds on the other. Two horses munching provender out of the baskets which muzzled them were fastened near the vehicle. A delectable sound of music proceeded from the interior, and I immediately conjectured that this was some itinerant show halting at the confluence of the roads to intercept such idle travellers as myself. A shower had long been climbing up the western sky, and now hung so blackly over my onward path that it was a point of wisdom to seek shelter here.

"Halloo! Who stands guard here? Is the doorkeeper asleep?" cried I, approaching a ladder of two or three steps which was let down from the wagon.

The music ceased at my summons, and there appeared at the door, not the sort of figure that I had mentally assigned to the wandering showman, but a most respectable old personage whom I was sorry to have addressed in so free a style. He wore a snuff-colored coat and small-clothes, with white top-boots, and exhibited the mild dignity of aspect and manner which may often be noticed in aged schoolmasters, and sometimes in deacons, selectmen or other potentates of that kind. A small piece of silver was my passport within his premises, where I found only one other person, hereafter to be described.

"This is a dull day for business," said the old gentleman as he ushered me in; "but I merely tarry here to refresh the cattle, being bound for the camp-meeting at Stamford."

Perhaps the movable scene of this narrative is still peregrinating New England, and may enable the reader to test the accuracy of my description. The spectacle— for I will not use the unworthy term of "puppet-show"— consisted of a multitude of little people assembled on a miniature stage. Among them were artisans of every kind in the attitudes of their toil, and a group of fair ladies and gay gentlemen standing ready for the dance; a company of foot-soldiers

formed a line across the stage, looking stern, grim and terrible enough to make it a pleasant consideration that they were but three inches high; and conspicuous above the whole was seen a Merry Andrew in the pointed cap and motley coat of his profession. All the inhabitants of this mimic world were motionless, like the figures in a picture, or like that people who one moment were alive in the midst of their business and delights and the next were transformed to statues, preserving an eternal semblance of labor that was ended and pleasure that could be felt no more. Anon, however, the old gentleman turned the handle of a barrel-organ, the first note of which produced a most enlivening effect upon the figures and awoke them all to their proper occupations and amusements. By the selfsame impulse the tailor plied his needle, the blacksmith's hammer descended upon the anvil and the dancers whirled away on feathery tiptoes; the company of soldiers broke into platoons, retreated from the stage, and were succeeded by a troop of horse, who came prancing onward with such a sound of trumpets and trampling of hoofs as might have startled Don Quixote himself; while an old toper of inveterate ill-habits uplifted his black bottle and took off a hearty swig. Meantime, the Merry Andrew began to caper and turn somersets, shaking his sides, nodding his head and winking his eyes in as lifelike a manner as if he were ridiculing the nonsense of all human affairs and making fun of the whole multitude beneath him. At length the old magician (for I compared the showman to Prospero entertaining his guests with a masque of shadows) paused that I might give utterance to my wonder.

"What an admirable piece of work is this!" exclaimed I, lifting up my hands in astonishment.

Indeed, I liked the spectacle and was tickled with the old man's gravity as he presided at it, for I had none of that foolish wisdom which reproves every occupation that is not useful in this world of vanities. If there be a faculty which I possess more perfectly than most men, it is that of throwing myself mentally into situations foreign to my own and detecting with a cheerful eye the desirable circumstances of each. I could have envied the life of this gray-headed showman, spent as it had been in a course of safe and pleasurable adventure in driving his huge vehicle sometimes through the sands of Cape Cod and sometimes over the rough forest-roads of the north and east, and halting now on the green before a village meeting-house and now in a paved square of the metropolis. How often must his heart have been gladdened by the delight of children as they viewed these animated figures, or his pride indulged by haranguing learnedly to grown men on the mechanical powers which produced such wonderful effects, or his gallantry brought into play— for this is an attribute which such grave men do not lack— by the visits of pretty maidens!

And then with how fresh a feeling must he return at intervals to his own peculiar home! "I would I were assured of as happy a life as his," thought I.

Though the showman's wagon might have accommodated fifteen or twenty spectators, it now contained only himself and me and a third person, at whom I threw a glance on entering. He was a neat and trim young man of two or three and twenty; his drab hat and green frock-coat with velvet collar were smart, though no longer new, while a pair of green spectacles that seemed needless to his brisk little eyes gave him something of a scholar-like and literary air. After allowing me a sufficient time to inspect the puppets, he advanced with a bow and drew my attention to some books in a corner of the wagon. These he forthwith began to extol with an amazing volubility of well-sounding words and an ingenuity of praise that won him my heart as being myself one of the most merciful of critics. Indeed, his stock required some considerable powers of commendation in the salesman. There were several ancient friends of mine— the novels of those happy days when my affections wavered between the *Scottish Chiefs* and *Thomas Thumb*— besides a few of later date whose merits had not been acknowledged by the public. I was glad to find that dear little venerable volume the *New England Primer*, looking as antique as ever, though in its thousandth new edition; a bundle of superannuated gilt picture-books made such a child of me that, partly for the glittering covers and partly for the fairy-tales within, I bought the whole, and an assortment of ballads and popular theatrical songs drew largely on my purse. To balance these expenditures, I meddled neither with sermons nor science nor morality, though volumes of each were there, nor with a *Life of Franklin* in the coarsest of paper, but so showily bound that it was emblematical of the doctor himself in the court-dress which he refused to wear at Paris, nor with Webster's spelling-book, nor some of Byron's minor poems, nor half a dozen little Testaments at twenty-five cents each. Thus far the collection might have been swept from some great bookstore or picked up at an evening auction-room, but there was one small blue-covered pamphlet which the pedler handed me with so peculiar an air that I purchased it immediately at his own price; and then for the first time the thought struck me that I had spoken face to face with the veritable author of a printed book.

The literary-man now evinced a great kindness for me, and I ventured to inquire which way he was travelling.

"Oh," said he, "I keep company with this old gentlemen here, and we are moving now toward the camp-meeting at Stamford."

He then explained to me that for the present season he had rented a corner of the wagon as a book-store, which, as he wittily observed, was a true circulating library, since there were few parts of the country where it had not gone its rounds. I approved of the plan exceedingly, and began to sum up within my mind the many uncommon felicities in the life of a book-pedler, especially

when his character resembled that of the individual before me. At a high rate was to be reckoned the daily and hourly enjoyment of such interviews as the present, in which he seized upon the admiration of a passing stranger and made him aware that a man of literary taste, and even of literary achievement, was travelling the country in a showman's wagon. A more valuable yet not infrequent triumph might be won in his conversations with some elderly clergyman long vegetating in a rocky, woody, watery back-settlement of New England, who as he recruited his library from the pedler's stock of sermons would exhort him to seek a college education and become the first scholar in his class. Sweeter and prouder yet would be his sensations when, talking poetry while he sold spelling-books, he should charm the mind, and haply touch the heart, of a fair country schoolmistress, herself an unhonored poetess, a wearer of blue stockings which none but himself took pains to look at. But the scene of his completest glory would be when the wagon had halted for the night and his stock of books was transferred to some crowded bar-room. Then would he recommend to the multifarious company, whether traveller from the city, or teamster from the hills, or neighboring squire, or the landlord himself, or his loutish hostler, works suited to each particular taste and capacity, proving, all the while, by acute criticism and profound remark, that the lore in his books was even exceeded by that in his brain. Thus happily would he traverse the land, sometimes a herald before the march of Mind, sometimes walking arm in arm with awful Literature, and reaping everywhere a harvest of real and sensible popularity which the secluded bookworms by whose toil he lived could never hope for.

"If ever I meddle with literature," thought I, fixing myself in adamantine resolution, "it shall be as a travelling bookseller."

Though it was still mid-afternoon, the air had now grown dark about us, and a few drops of rain came down upon the roof of our vehicle, pattering like the feet of birds that had flown thither to rest. A sound of pleasant voices made us listen, and there soon appeared halfway up the ladder the pretty person of a young damsel whose rosy face was so cheerful that even amid the gloomy light it seemed as if the sunbeams were peeping under her bonnet. We next saw the dark and handsome features of a young man who, with easier gallantry than might have been expected in the heart of Yankee-land, was assisting her into the wagon. It became immediately evident to us, when the two strangers stood within the door, that they were of a profession kindred to those of my companions, and I was delighted with the more than hospitable— the even paternal— kindness of the old showman's manner as he welcomed them, while the man of literature hastened to lead the merry-eyed girl to a seat on the long bench.

"You are housed but just in time, my young friends," said the master of the wagon; "the sky would have been down upon you within five minutes."

The young man's reply marked him as a foreigner— not by any variation from the idiom and accent of good English, but because he spoke with more caution and accuracy than if perfectly familiar with the language.

"We knew that a shower was hanging over us," said he, "and consulted whether it were best to enter the house on the top of yonder hill, but, seeing your wagon in the road— "

"We agreed to come hither," interrupted the girl, with a smile, "because we should be more at home in a wandering house like this."

I, meanwhile, with many a wild and undetermined fantasy was narrowly inspecting these two doves that had flown into our ark. The young man, tall, agile and athletic, wore a mass of black shining curls clustering round a dark and vivacious countenance which, if it had not greater expression, was at least more active and attracted readier notice, than the quiet faces of our countrymen. At his first appearance he had been laden with a neat mahogany box of about two feet square, but very light in proportion to its size, which he had immediately unstrapped from his shoulders and deposited on the floor of the wagon.

The girl had nearly as fair a complexion as our own beauties, and a brighter one than most of them; the lightness of her figure, which seemed calculated to traverse the whole world without weariness, suited well with the glowing cheerfulness of her face, and her gay attire, combining the rainbow hues of crimson, green and a deep orange, was as proper to her lightsome aspect as if she had been born in it. This gay stranger was appropriately burdened with that mirth-inspiring instrument the fiddle, which her companion took from her hands, and shortly began the process of tuning. Neither of us the previous company of the wagon needed to inquire their trade, for this could be no mystery to frequenters of brigade-musters, ordinations, cattle-shows, commencements, and other festal meetings in our sober land; and there is a dear friend of mine who will smile when this page recalls to his memory a chivalrous deed performed by us in rescuing the show-box of such a couple from a mob of great double-fisted countrymen.

"Come," said I to the damsel of gay attire; "shall we visit all the wonders of the world together?"

She understood the metaphor at once, though, indeed, it would not much have troubled me if she had assented to the literal meaning of my words. The mahogany box was placed in a proper position, and I peeped in through its small round magnifying-window while the girl sat by my side and gave short descriptive sketches as one after another the pictures were unfolded to my view. We visited together— at least, our imaginations did— full many a famous city in the streets of which I had long yearned to tread. Once, I remember, we

were in the harbor of Barcelona, gazing townward; next, she bore me through the air to Sicily and bade me look up at blazing Ætna; then we took wing to Venice and sat in a gondola beneath the arch of the Rialto, and anon she set me down among the thronged spectators at the coronation of Napoleon. But there was one scene— its locality she could not tell— which charmed my attention longer than all those gorgeous palaces and churches, because the fancy haunted me that I myself the preceding summer had beheld just such a humble meeting-house, in just such a pine-surrounded nook, among our own green mountains. All these pictures were tolerably executed, though far inferior to the girl's touches of description; nor was it easy to comprehend how in so few sentences, and these, as I supposed, in a language foreign to her, she contrived to present an airy copy of each varied scene.

When we had travelled through the vast extent of the mahogany box, I looked into my guide's face.

"'Where are you going, my pretty maid?'" inquired I, in the words of an old song.

"Ah!" said the gay damsel; "you might as well ask where the summer wind is going. We are wanderers here and there and everywhere. Wherever there is mirth our merry hearts are drawn to it. To-day, indeed, the people have told us of a great frolic and festival in these parts; so perhaps we may be needed at what you call the camp-meeting at Stamford."

Then, in my happy youth, and while her pleasant voice yet sounded in my ears, I sighed; for none but myself, I thought, should have been her companion in a life which seemed to realize my own wild fancies cherished all through visionary boyhood to that hour. To these two strangers the world was in its Golden Age— not that, indeed, it was less dark and sad than ever, but because its weariness and sorrow had no community with their ethereal nature. Wherever they might appear in their pilgrimage of bliss, Youth would echo back their gladness, care-stricken Maturity would rest a moment from its toil, and Age, tottering among the graves, would smile in withered joy for their sakes. The lonely cot, the narrow and gloomy street, the sombre shade, would catch a passing gleam like that now shining on ourselves as these bright spirits wandered by. Blessed pair, whose happy home was throughout all the earth! I looked at my shoulders, and thought them broad enough to sustain those pictured towns and mountains; mine, too, was an elastic foot as tireless as the wing of the bird of Paradise; mine was then an untroubled heart that would have gone singing on its delightful way.

"Oh, maiden," said I aloud, "why did you not come hither alone?"

While the merry girl and myself were busy with the show-box the unceasing rain had driven another wayfarer into the wagon. He seemed pretty nearly of the old showman's age, but much smaller, leaner and more withered than he,

and less respectably clad in a patched suit of gray; withal, he had a thin, shrewd countenance and a pair of diminutive gray eyes, which peeped rather too keenly out of their puckered sockets. This old fellow had been joking with the showman in a manner which intimated previous acquaintance, but, perceiving that the damsel and I had terminated our affairs, he drew forth a folded document and presented it to me. As I had anticipated, it proved to be a circular, written in a very fair and legible hand and signed by several distinguished gentlemen whom I had never heard of, stating that the bearer had encountered every variety of misfortune and recommending him to the notice of all charitable people. Previous disbursements had left me no more than a five-dollar bill, out of which, however, I offered to make the beggar a donation provided he would give me change for it. The object of my beneficence looked keenly in my face, and discerned that I had none of that abominable spirit, characteristic though it be, of a full-blooded Yankee, which takes pleasure in detecting every little harmless piece of knavery.

"Why, perhaps," said the ragged old mendicant, "if the bank is in good standing, I can't say but I may have enough about me to change your bill."

"It is a bill of the Suffolk Bank," said I, "and better than the specie."

As the beggar had nothing to object, he now produced a small buff leather bag tied up carefully with a shoe-string. When this was opened, there appeared a very comfortable treasure of silver coins of all sorts and sizes, and I even fancied that I saw gleaming among them the golden plumage of that rare bird in our currency the American eagle. In this precious heap was my bank-note deposited, the rate of exchange being considerably against me.

His wants being thus relieved, the destitute man pulled out of his pocket an old pack of greasy cards which had probably contributed to fill the buff leather bag in more ways than one.

"Come!" said he; "I spy a rare fortune in your face, and for twenty-five cents more I'll tell you what it is."

I never refuse to take a glimpse into futurity; so, after shuffling the cards and when the fair damsel had cut them, I dealt a portion to the prophetic beggar. Like others of his profession, before predicting the shadowy events that were moving on to meet me he gave proof of his preternatural science by describing scenes through which I had already passed.

Here let me have credit for a sober fact. When the old man had read a page in his book of fate, he bent his keen gray eyes on mine and proceeded to relate in all its minute particulars what was then the most singular event of my life. It was one which I had no purpose to disclose till the general unfolding of all secrets, nor would it be a much stranger instance of inscrutable knowledge or fortunate conjecture if the beggar were to meet me in the street today and repeat word for word the page which I have here written.

The fortune-teller, after predicting a destiny which time seems loth to make good, put up his cards, secreted his treasure-bag and began to converse with the other occupants of the wagon.

"Well, old friend," said the showman, "you have not yet told us which way your face is turned this afternoon."

"I am taking a trip northward this warm weather," replied the conjurer, "across the Connecticut first, and then up through Vermont, and maybe into Canada before the fall. But I must stop and see the breaking up of the camp-meeting at Stamford."

I began to think that all the vagrants in New England were converging to the camp-meeting and had made this wagon, their rendezvous by the way.

The showman now proposed that when the shower was over they should pursue the road to Stamford together, it being sometimes the policy of these people to form a sort of league and confederacy.

"And the young lady too," observed the gallant bibliopolist, bowing to her profoundly, "and this foreign gentleman, as I understand, are on a jaunt of pleasure to the same spot. It would add incalculably to my own enjoyment, and I presume to that of my colleague and his friend, if they could be prevailed upon to join our party."

This arrangement met with approbation on all hands, nor were any of those concerned more sensible of its advantages than myself, who had no title to be included in it.

Having already satisfied myself as to the several modes in which the four others attained felicity, I next set my mind at work to discover what enjoyments were peculiar to the old "straggler," as the people of the country would have termed the wandering mendicant and prophet. As he pretended to familiarity with the devil, so I fancied that he was fitted to pursue and take delight in his way of life by possessing some of the mental and moral characteristics— the lighter and more comic ones— of the devil in popular stories. Among them might be reckoned a love of deception for its own sake, a shrewd eye and keen relish for human weakness and ridiculous infirmity, and the talent of petty fraud. Thus to this old man there would be pleasure even in the consciousness— so insupportable to some minds— that his whole life was a cheat upon the world, and that, so far as he was concerned with the public, his little cunning had the upper hand of its united wisdom. Every day would furnish him with a succession of minute and pungent triumphs— as when, for instance, his importunity wrung a pittance out of the heart of a miser, or when my silly good-nature transferred a part of my slender purse to his plump leather bag, or when some ostentatious gentleman should throw a coin to the ragged beggar who was richer than himself, or when— though he would not always be so decidedly diabolical— his pretended wants should make him a sharer in the scanty living

of real indigence. And then what an inexhaustible field of enjoyment, both as enabling him to discern so much folly and achieve such quantities of minor mischief, was opened to his sneering spirit by his pretensions to prophetic knowledge.

All this was a sort of happiness which I could conceive of, though I had little sympathy with it. Perhaps, had I been then inclined to admit it, I might have found that the roving life was more proper to him than to either of his companions; for Satan, to whom I had compared the poor man, has delighted, ever since the time of Job, in "wandering up and down upon the earth," and, indeed, a crafty disposition which operates not in deep-laid plans, but in disconnected tricks, could not have an adequate scope, unless naturally impelled to a continual change of scene and society.

My reflections were here interrupted.

"Another visitor!" exclaimed the old showman.

The door of the wagon had been closed against the tempest, which was roaring and blustering with prodigious fury and commotion and beating violently against our shelter, as if it claimed all those homeless people for its lawful prey, while we, caring little for the displeasure of the elements, sat comfortably talking. There was now an attempt to open the door, succeeded by a voice uttering some strange, unintelligible gibberish which my companions mistook for Greek and I suspected to be thieves' Latin. However, the showman stepped forward and gave admittance to a figure which made me imagine either that our wagon had rolled back two hundred years into past ages or that the forest and its old inhabitants had sprung up around us by enchantment. It was a red Indian armed with his bow and arrow. His dress was a sort of cap adorned with a single feather of some wild bird, and a frock of blue cotton girded tight about him; on his breast, like orders of knighthood, hung a crescent and a circle and other ornaments of silver, while a small crucifix betokened that our father the pope had interposed between the Indian and the Great Spirit whom he had worshipped in his simplicity. This son of the wilderness and pilgrim of the storm took his place silently in the midst of us. When the first surprise was over, I rightly conjectured him to be one of the Penobscot tribe, parties of which I had often seen in their summer excursions down our Eastern rivers. There they paddle their birch canoes among the coasting-schooners, and build their wigwam beside some roaring mill-dam, and drive a little trade in basket-work where their fathers hunted deer. Our new visitor was probably wandering through the country toward Boston, subsisting on the careless charity of the people while he turned his archery to profitable account by shooting at cents which were to be the prize of his successful aim.

The Indian had not long been seated ere our merry damsel sought to draw him into conversation. She, indeed, seemed all made up of sunshine in the

month of May, for there was nothing so dark and dismal that her pleasant mind could not cast a glow over it; and the wild man, like a fir tree in his native forest, soon began to brighten into a sort of sombre cheerfulness. At length she inquired whether his journey had any particular end or purpose.

"I go shoot at the camp-meeting at Stamford," replied the Indian.

"And here are five more," said the girl, "all aiming at the camp-meeting too. You shall be one of us, for we travel with light hearts; and, as for me, I sing merry songs and tell merry tales and am full of merry thoughts, and I dance merrily along the road, so that there is never any sadness among them that keep me company. But oh, you would find it very dull indeed to go all the way to Stamford alone."

My ideas of the aboriginal character led me to fear that the Indian would prefer his own solitary musings to the gay society thus offered him; on the contrary, the girl's proposal met with immediate acceptance and seemed to animate him with a misty expectation of enjoyment.

I now gave myself up to a course of thought which, whether it flowed naturally from this combination of events or was drawn forth by a wayward fancy, caused my mind to thrill as if I were listening to deep music. I saw mankind in this weary old age of the world either enduring a sluggish existence amid the smoke and dust of cities, or, if they breathed a purer air, still lying down at night with no hope but to wear out to-morrow, and all the to-morrows which make up life, among the same dull scenes and in the same wretched toil that had darkened the sunshine of today. But there were some full of the primeval instinct who preserved the freshness of youth to their latest years by the continual excitement of new objects, new pursuits and new associates, and cared little, though their birthplace might have been here in New England, if the grave should close over them in Central Asia. Fate was summoning a parliament of these free spirits; unconscious of the impulse which directed them to a common centre, they had come hither from far and near, and last of all appeared the representatives of those mighty vagrants who had chased the deer during thousands of years, and were chasing it now in the spirit-land. Wandering down through the waste of ages, the woods had vanished around his path; his arm had lost somewhat of its strength, his foot of its fleetness, his mien of its wild regality, his heart and mind of their savage virtue and uncultured force, but here, untamable to the routine of artificial life, roving now along the dusty road as of old over the forest-leaves,— here was the Indian still.

"Well," said the old showman, in the midst of my meditations, "here is an honest company of us— one, two, three, four, five, six— all going to the camp-meeting at Stamford. Now, hoping no offence, I should like to know where this young gentleman may be going?"

I started. How came I among these wanderers? The free mind that preferred its own folly to another's wisdom, the open spirit that found companions everywhere— above all, the restless impulse that had so often made me wretched in the midst of enjoyments,— these were my claims to be of their society.

"My friends," cried I, stepping into the centre of the wagon, "I am going with you to the camp-meeting at Stamford."

"But in what capacity?" asked the old showman, after a moment's silence. "All of us here can get our bread in some creditable way. Every honest man should have his livelihood. You, sir, as I take it, are a mere strolling gentleman."

I proceeded to inform the company that when Nature gave me a propensity to their way of life she had not left me altogether destitute of qualifications for it, though I could not deny that my talent was less respectable, and might be less profitable, than the meanest of theirs. My design, in short, was to imitate the story-tellers of whom Oriental travellers have told us, and become an itinerant novelist, reciting my own extemporaneous fictions to such audiences as I could collect.

"Either this," said I, "is my vocation, or I have been born in vain."

The fortune-teller, with a sly wink to the company, proposed to take me as an apprentice to one or other of his professions, either of which undoubtedly would have given full scope to whatever inventive talent I might possess. The bibliopolist spoke a few words in opposition to my plan— influenced partly, I suspect, by the jealousy of authorship, and partly by an apprehension that the *vivâ-voce* practice would become general among novelists, to the infinite detriment of the book trade.

Dreading a rejection, I solicited the interest of the merry damsel.

" 'Mirth,' " cried I, most aptly appropriating the words of L'Allegro, " 'to thee I sue! Mirth, admit me of thy crew!' "

"Let us indulge the poor youth," said Mirth, with a kindness which made me love her dearly, though I was no such coxcomb as to misinterpret her motives. "I have espied much promise in him. True, a shadow sometimes flits across his brow, but the sunshine is sure to follow in a moment. He is never guilty of a sad thought but a merry one is twin-born with it. We will take him with us, and you shall see that he will set us all a-laughing before we reach the camp-meeting at Stamford." Her voice silenced the scruples of the rest and gained me admittance into the league; according to the terms of which, without a community of goods or profits, we were to lend each other all the aid and avert all the harm that might be in our power.

This affair settled, a marvellous jollity entered into the whole tribe of us, manifesting itself characteristically in each individual. The old showman, sitting down to his barrel-organ, stirred up the souls of the pigmy people with one of

the quickest tunes in the music-book; tailors, blacksmiths, gentlemen and ladies all seemed to share in the spirit of the occasion, and the Merry Andrew played his part more facetiously than ever, nodding and winking particularly at me. The young foreigner flourished his fiddle-bow with a master's hand, and gave an inspiring echo to the showman's melody. The bookish man and the merry damsel started up simultaneously to dance, the former enacting the double shuffle in a style which everybody must have witnessed ere election week was blotted out of time, while the girl, setting her arms akimbo with both hands at her slim waist, displayed such light rapidity of foot and harmony of varying attitude and motion that I could not conceive how she ever was to stop, imagining at the moment that Nature had made her, as the old showman had made his puppets, for no earthly purpose but to dance jigs. The Indian bellowed forth a succession of most hideous outcries, somewhat affrighting us till we interpreted them as the war-song with which, in imitation of his ancestors, he was prefacing the assault on Stamford. The conjurer, meanwhile, sat demurely in a corner extracting a sly enjoyment from the whole scene, and, like the facetious Merry Andrew, directing his queer glance particularly at me. As for myself, with great exhilaration of fancy, I began to arrange and color the incidents of a tale wherewith I proposed to amuse an audience that very evening; for I saw that my associates were a little ashamed of me, and that no time was to be lost in obtaining a public acknowledgment of my abilities.

"Come, fellow-laborers," at last said the old showman, whom we had elected president; "the shower is over, and we must be doing our duty by these poor souls at Stamford."

"We'll come among them in procession, with music and dancing," cried the merry damsel.

Accordingly— for it must be understood that our pilgrimage was to be performed on foot— we sallied joyously out of the wagon, each of us, even the old gentleman in his white top-boots, giving a great skip as we came down the ladder. Above our heads there was such a glory of sunshine and splendor of clouds, and such brightness of verdure below, that, as I modestly remarked at the time, Nature seemed to have washed her face and put on the best of her jewelry and a fresh green gown in honor of our confederation. Casting our eyes northward, we beheld a horseman approaching leisurely and splashing through the little puddle on the Stamford road. Onward he came, sticking up in his saddle with rigid perpendicularity, a tall, thin figure in rusty black, whom the showman and the conjurer shortly recognized to be what his aspect sufficiently indicated— a travelling preacher of great fame among the Methodists. What puzzled us was the fact that his face appeared turned from, instead of to, the camp-meeting at Stamford. However, as this new votary of the wandering life drew near the little green space where the guide-post and our wagon were

situated, my six fellow-vagabonds and myself rushed forward and surrounded him, crying out with united voices, "What news? What news from the camp-meeting at Stamford?"

The missionary looked down in surprise at as singular a knot of people as could have been selected from all his heterogeneous auditors. Indeed, considering that we might all be classified under the general head of Vagabond, there was great diversity of character among the grave old showman, the sly, prophetic beggar, the fiddling foreigner and his merry damsel, the smart bibliopolist, the sombre Indian and myself, the itinerant novelist, a slender youth of eighteen. I even fancied that a smile was endeavoring to disturb the iron gravity of the preacher's mouth.

"Good people," answered he, "the camp-meeting is broke up."

So saying, the Methodist minister switched his steed and rode westward. Our union being thus nullified by the removal of its object, we were sundered at once to the four winds of heaven. The fortune-teller, giving a nod to all and a peculiar wink to me, departed on his Northern tour, chuckling within himself as he took the Stamford road. The old showman and his literary coadjutor were already tackling their horses to the wagon with a design to peregrinate south-west along the sea-coast. The foreigner and the merry damsel took their laughing leave and pursued the eastern road, which I had that day trodden; as they passed away the young man played a lively strain and the girl's happy spirit broke into a dance, and, thus dissolving, as it were, into sunbeams and gay music, that pleasant pair departed from my view. Finally, with a pensive shadow thrown across my mind, yet emulous of the light philosophy of my late companions, I joined myself to the Penobscot Indian and set forth toward the distant city.

4: The Tenth Earl

Sapper

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

In: *Ask For Ronald Standish*, 1936

Ronald Standish was the classic 1930s amateur detective in Sapper's stable of heroes, who included adventurers Bulldog Drummond and Jim Maitland

LADY RANELAGH was an extremely lovely woman. Almost one might say girl, for she was only twenty-five. And as it so happened that I had seen a good deal of Kitty Barberton, as she then was, before her marriage to the Earl, it was with real pleasure that I ran into her at the Savoy one morning just before lunch.

"How goes it?" I cried. "It must be a year at least since we last met. And now that I look at you, Kitty, you seem a bit fine drawn. Anything the matter?"

"Order a cocktail. Bob," she said. "My party won't be here for ten minutes yet."

We sat down and I beckoned to a waiter.

"I believe it's Providence that I butted into you," she went on. "Is that nice friend of yours, Ronald Standish, still in London?"

"He was last night," I said. "Why?"

She hesitated for a moment, and I noticed her hand was trembling a little.

"Does he still go in for detective work?"

"If a case interests him, and he's asked to take it up, he does," I told her.

She waited while the man put the drinks on the table: then she leant forward.

"Bob," she said in a low voice, "I'm terribly uneasy. Things are going on down at the Towers that I don't understand."

"What sort of things?" I asked.

"There's no time to tell you now," she answered. "I see that awful cow of a Melshot woman arriving already. Are you lunching here?"

"In the grill-room," I said.

"Do you think it would be possible for us to go round and see Mr. Standish this afternoon?"

"Perfectly. He's lunching at his club, I know. I'll get through to him on the telephone."

"Send a note in to me by a waiter to say if it's all right," she said. "Any time after three will do me. And it's rather urgent, Bob."

"I'm sure I can fix it, my dear," I told her. "I'll ring him up now."

I got on to Ronald at once and fixed three-thirty: then having sent her a message to that effect I ordered another cocktail and sat down to wait for the man I was lunching with. What, I wondered, could be the trouble at the Towers?

Henry, tenth Earl of Ranelagh, had been married to Kitty Barberton for eighteen months. About twelve years older than her it had seemed and, so far as I know, had proved an ideal marriage in every way. He was a charming man, good looking, cultivated and a fine sportsman. In addition to all that, unlike many less fortunate members of the aristocracy, he had no worries over finance and was able to keep up the Towers in the semi-regal magnificence of his ancestors. It was a huge house, and only an extremely wealthy man could possibly have maintained it. The gardens were famed all over England: the avenue of copper beeches was historic. In fact the house was historic. Charles the First had made it his headquarters for a considerable time during the Civil War: all down the centuries royalty had honoured it with periodical visits. In short it was one of England's show places, and the last spot where one would anticipate trouble of any sort. The present Earl had succeeded to the title three years before he married Kitty. He had two younger brothers one of whom was in the Navy, the other out in Canada. His sister Muriel, who was older than him, was strangely enough unmarried. She had all the family good looks, and the reason, one gathered, of her still being single was a war-time tragedy. Before his marriage she had lived with the Earl: now she occupied the dower house some two miles away.

Such, then, was the *ménage* into which Kitty Barberton had married, and all the way through lunch my mind kept reverting to what she had said. "What could it be that was making her uneasy? What could be going on that she did not understand? But since every possibility that occurred to me was more absurd than the one before, I gave it up and possessed my soul in patience till we arrived at Ronald's rooms at half past three.

"Would you like me to leave you two alone?" I said when they had shaken hands.

"Not a bit, Bob," she cried. "I don't in the least mind you knowing all about it. Not that there's really very much to know, and I think that because of that, because it is so indeterminate that it's got on my nerves. You've met my husband, Mr. Standish, haven't you?"

"I have," said Ronald. "I can't say that I know him at all well: Bob knows him much better than I do. But we've shot together once or twice."

"It's about him that I'm worried," she began, "However, I'd better go right away back to when the thing first started. And it's only comparatively recently that little episodes which occurred at the beginning have fitted into their proper place: at the time I thought nothing of them.

"About a fortnight after we came back from our honeymoon I was in the library one morning looking for a book. And it so happened that I was standing in an alcove out of sight of the door, which suddenly opened and Henry came in with someone else.

" 'Come in here. Doctor,' I heard him say, and then the door shut.

" 'It's out of the question, Henry,' said the other man, and I recognised the voice of Doctor Frobisher. He is the local doctor, who has attended the family for years and who is regarded as an old friend rather than as a doctor.

" 'But, my God ! how much longer is it going on?' cried my husband, and then I stepped out into the room.

"They both swung round, and for a moment or two Henry looked annoyed.

" 'Hallo I dear,' he said, 'where have you sprung from?'

" 'I was looking for a book,' I answered, wondering whether I should say anything about the remark I had just heard.

" 'I hope you had a pleasant time in France, Lady Ranelagh,' said Doctor Frobisher, at the same time opening the door for me.

"I made some perfunctory reply, and left them. And since it so happened that Henry had to go up to London that afternoon for a few days, I had no opportunity of asking him about it at once. Then when he came back I put it off, until finally it was too late, and the whole episode faded from my memory."

"That would be about fifteen months ago, Lady Ranelagh," said Ronald.

"That's right," she answered. "Well, as time passed by, it began to strike me that Doctor Frobisher came to the house rather more frequently than one would expect. He was continually coming either to dinner or lunch, and on two or three occasions I saw his car in the drive in the middle of the morning. So one day I mentioned it casually to Henry, who turned it off with a laugh.

" 'My dear girl,' he said, 'the old chap loves my port. And seeing that he brought the whole lot of us into the world he can have as much of it as he wants, bless his heart.'

"But it seemed to me, Mr. Standish, that he looked at me a little queerly, and I wondered if his answer was quite the truth. Certainly there was no one ill in the house, and so there was no reason for a professional visit: at the same time I had an intuitive feeling that there was something that was being kept back from me. And though I can truthfully say that I'm not a particularly curious person, it piqued me a little. With the result that I kept my eyes open more than I should have done normally. But I found out nothing until one day about a fortnight ago.

"Happening to look through the window I saw the doctor's car outside. Now it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and the old man had dined with us the night before. And it struck me that, port or no port, this was a little excessive. So I went out into the hall just in time to see Henry and him disappearing into the library. And as they closed the door I heard my sister-in-law's voice.

" 'Well, Doctor Frobisher, what do you think?'

"For a moment or two I hesitated: then I'm ashamed to say that I deliberately tiptoed across the hall and listened outside the door. But they were

talking in low voices, and I could hear nothing until I suddenly caught one sentence of my husband's. She must know nothing; under no circumstances must she ever find out.'

"And at that moment I looked round to find Weston, the butler, watching me from the door that leads to the servant's quarters. There was nothing to be done about it, and I don't think I've ever felt more embarrassed. To be caught red-handed eavesdropping by a servant is not funny, especially when that servant was Weston who has been with the family since the dawn of history. So I did the only possible thing: I opened the door and went in.

"The conversation ceased abruptly.

" 'Hallo ! Kitty dear.' said Muriel. 'I was just coming to see you. I'm stopping to lunch if I may.'

" 'Delighted,' I replied. 'Am I interrupting a family pow-wow?'

" 'Of course not, darling,' cried Henry. 'This old rascal has come for a hair of the dog that bit him last night.'

" 'Playing the deuce with my gout, too,' laughed Doctor Frobisher.

'But if your husband insists on keeping such an infernally good cellar. Lady Ranelagh, what on earth is a poor country practitioner to do?'

"I laughed too, and left them. But now, of course, all my suspicions were confirmed. "Who could the 'she' be who must never find out except myself ? Something was being kept back from me, and I determined to tackle Henry direct. The opportunity came that very night.

" 'Just before I came into the library this morning, Henry,' I said, 'I overheard a remark you made. You said, "She must know nothing: under no circumstances must she ever find out." You were alluding to me?'

" 'My dear Kitty,' he answered, 'that shows how dangerous it is to listen to a conversation and only hear one remark.'

" 'I wasn't listening,' I said, putting down the indignation pedal.

" 'Weren't you?' he answered quietly, and in a flash I knew that Weston had told him. 'Anyway the "she" I referred to was not you. but somebody quite different. If you must know, Charles'— that's his youngest brother— 'has been making a fool of himself over a woman, and we're trying to get him out of it.' "

She paused and lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

"Mr. Standish, that was a lie. I knew it, and Henry knew that I knew it. I didn't say anything, of course, but it hurt— hurt considerably. As his wife surely I had as much right to be taken into his confidence as Muriel or Doctor Frobisher. And Weston, too. How dared he go to Henry and tell him he'd seen me listening outside the door unless he was in it, too. It would be as much as any butler's place is worth to say such a thing under normal circumstances.

"As I said, that was about a fortnight ago, and since then Henry has been most odd. I can tell he's worried to death about something, and he seems to get

worse and worse every day. And then two mornings ago it came to a head. I don't think you know the house, Mr. Standish, but Bob does. It is an enormous barrack of a place: there are old box-rooms and lumber- rooms that even I haven't been in to. And it so happened that on the day in question I was walking along a passage in the east wing which I'd never been along before. As a matter of fact parts of that wing are never used; they are supposed to be damp or something.

"Suddenly walking towards me I saw Henry, and as he came up I made some commonplace remark about the passage wanting dusting. Then I looked at his face and gasped. It was quite white, and his voice when he spoke was shaking—shaking with rage.

" ' What are you doing here?' he said.

" 'I really don't know,' I answered. 'Is there any reason why I shouldn't be here?'

"As you can imagine, I was a bit fed up; there didn't seem to me to be anything peculiar in the mistress of a house going round it. And I suppose the same idea occurred to Henry, for he pulled himself together and gave a sort of sickly smile.

" 'Sorry, darling,' he said. 'No reason at all, of course. I'm a bit nervy to-day; didn't sleep very well last night.'

" 'What is this mystery, Henry?' I burst out. 'There's no good pretending there isn't one, because it sticks out a yard. Muriel knows about it, and Doctor Frobisher and Weston. Why can't I be told?'

"He took me by the arm, and led me back to the main part of the house.

" 'You're imagining things, my dear,' he said. 'There's no mystery at all. I was a little surprised at finding you in this unused part of the house— that's ail.'

" 'Then what were you doing there?' I demanded.

" 'Just having a look round,' he answered. 'There's a bit of dry rot starting, and I don't want it to go too far.'

" 'The dry rot is what you're talking,' I said angrily. 'Do you imagine I'm a fool, Henry, or a baby ? Once and for all, will you tell me what this mystery is?'

" 'Once and for all I tell you there is no mystery,' was his reply. 'You're imagining the whole thing.'

"And that's how it stands at the moment, Mr. Standish, and it is upsetting me terribly. I'm frightfully fond of him, but this beastly barrier between us is ruining everything. And I wondered if you could help me. "

Ronald raised his eyebrows.

"It's rather a tough proposition. Lady Ranelagh," he said. "To help you I should have to come to the Towers, and if I did so it would be the most unwarrantable impertinence on my part if I started prying into your husband's

private affairs. Besides, what possible excuse have I got for going there at all? To be quite frank I haven't the pleasure of knowing either of you at all well..."

"I've thought of that, Mr. Standish," she interrupted. "And that's where Bob comes in, for he knows Henry very well and me too. This morning two guns failed us. What about you and Bob coming in their place?"

"I can assure you,'' said Ronald with a smile, "that an invitation to shoot your coverts would not be thrown in the paper basket. But what will your husband say? He's almost certain to have already invited two other guns to fill the vacancies."

"He hasn't. He asked me to get hold of Tony Ditchling at lunch to-day, but I didn't. Anyway he's a foul shot. I'm going to tell him that I asked Bob, and that he suggested you."

She rose.

"So that's settled. I'll write you a line confirming the invitation to-night. And it is sweet of you to have listened so patiently."

"A remarkable woman. Bob," said Ronald, as he came back from seeing her off, "and three days' shooting is not to be sneezed at. But if the dear thing expects me to go nosing round the house I fear she's going to be disappointed. It would be an unpardonable thing to do."

"I wonder what the deuce it can be," I remarked.

"He's always been a healthy bloke, hasn't he?"said Ronald.

"So far as I know, perfectly."

"Because it did occur to me to start with that he might have some illness which had to be kept from her. That would account for the doctor's consumption of port, and the old family butler being in it."

"But hardly for the agitation in the passage," I remarked.

"No; not for that. Well, let's hope at any rate that we hit 'em in the beak."

I HAD NOT seen Henry Ranelagh since his marriage, and I confess that I was shocked at his appearance. He looked a sick man, so much so that I began to wonder whether Ronald's idea had not been right, and that he was suffering from some disease himself. At times he was his old self, but it always seemed to me that it was forced.

As usual the shooting was wonderful, but only on one day did our host come out with us, which was a most significant thing in itself for he was a magnificent shot. And somewhat naturally his mood communicated itself to the party, so that it was with a feeling of relief that one realised it was drawing to a close. It was on the last night but one of our visit that Ronald came into my room for a final cigarette. There was thunder about; the atmosphere was sultry and oppressive. Heavy clouds drifted sluggishly across the sky, and through them the

moon made a fitful appearance. He was in his dressing-gown, and drawing up two chairs we sat down by the open window.

"I had a long talk with Lady Ranelagh after dinner," he said. "She's worried to death, poor soul, and I'm only sorry I can't help her. I had to tell her that I was afraid I'd earned a shoot under false pretences."

"His nerves are certainly all to hell," I remarked. "I've been wondering if you weren't right and that he's ill."

He shook his head, and looked at me curiously.

"Did you hear anything last night. Bob? Round about three o'clock."

"No; I didn't. I was tired, and never batted an eyelid till I was called. What was it?"

"I can't say. But I had one of those nights when one can't get to sleep. The house was deathly still; nothing was stirring outside, when suddenly from a long way off there came a harsh call— rather like the call of a bittern. But there are no bitterns in this neighbourhood. It was not repeated, and I was just beginning to doze off when I heard a strange sort of slithering noise going past my door. It was so peculiar that I got up and looked out. And in the faint light— the moon was just setting— I saw what looked like a shadow move. It was there one moment and gone the next. And in the distance a board creaked. For a moment or two I hesitated; should I follow? And then I heard steps — ordinary human footsteps So I closed my door, save for a tiny crack, and waited. Two men came past, walking along the passage, and going in the direction in which the shadow had vanished. One was Ranelagh; the other was the butler Weston."

"Good Lord!" I cried.

"Did you say anything to Kitty about it?"

"No; I thought it better not. There's no good frightening her with vague stories."

"What do you make of it, Ronald?"

"Just this. That were it possible in my position as a guest to do such an outrageous thing, I would very much like to have an hour alone in the wing where Lady Ranelagh unexpectedly met her husband that day."

He pitched his cigarette out of the window and got up. "But since it isn't possible... My God! Listen. The same noise."

From outside there came an eerie, wailing cry, harsh and discordant. It rose and fell, then ceased abruptly.

"Switch out your light. Bob," said Ronald quietly.

I did so, and side by side we stood at the window peering out into the darkness. And at that moment a vivid flash of lightning split the sky. It was like the instantaneous exposure of a camera. For in that fraction of a second the picture was printed on our brains. In the middle of the garden two men were

bending over something dark that lay on the ground between them; one was Henry Ranelagh, the other was Weston the butler.

Came the crash of thunder, and we waited tensely for the next flash. At last we got it, more vivid even than the one before. The garden was empty; of Henry and his butler and the thing that had lain between them there was no sign.

"What was it?" I muttered.

"I don't know. Bob," said Ronald gravely. "But whatever it was it's none of our business. I'm going to bed."

And so did I— but not to sleep. Try as I would it eluded me. I could not keep my mind off what we had seen. Was it imagination? Had there been something out there, or was it a trick of the light? But if that was the case what had taken Henry and his butler to the garden at that time of night? And still puzzling, at last I dropped off.

It was broad daylight when I woke, to find Ronald fully dressed standing by my bed.

"I've been taking a spot of exercise, Bob," he said. "And where do you think my foot-steps led me?"

"To the garden?" I hazarded.

"You've said it. I wanted to see if the ground would tell us anything."

"Has it?"

"Yes. There were three distinct sets of footprints on one bed. One was the Earl's; one was Weston's."

"And the third?"

"Were the footprints of a child," he answered.

"A child!" I echoed. "Is that then the mystery?"

"You know as much as I do, Bob. There is certainly no question of there being any child in the party."

"But that awful noise?" I said, staring at him.

"Just so. That noise." He shook his head gravely. "I'm afraid we're treading on rather dangerous ground, old boy."

"So you think that somewhere concealed in this house there is a child, and that that is the secret which is being kept from Kitty?"

"I can't see what else there is to make of it."

"But why on earth hasn't it been seen before ? It is obviously free to walk about."

"Ask me another," he said.

"Can it have only just arrived?"

"Possibly. It may be that the conversation Lady Ranelagh interrupted a fortnight ago was when they were making the original plans to bring it here. Be that as it may, I can't help thinking that it is most unfair on her to keep her in ignorance. If she does run into it the shock be infinitely greater."

"Where can they have hidden it, I wonder?"

"My dear Bob, in an old house of this vast size there is almost certain to be a secret room. That's why I said I'd like an hour in that wing alone."

"What are you going to do about it?" I said.

"Nothing," he answered promptly. "As I said to you last night. Bob, it is no business of ours. To interfere in such a matter would be unpardonable."

"I suppose it would. And yet I wish we could put Kitty wise. She's worried to death."

"If you get a chance find out from her if she heard that noise last night," said Ronald as he left the room.

As it happened I did get a chance, just before we were starting out.

"Of course I heard it. Bob," she said. "And I tell you I can't go on like this, Henry was out of his room practically the whole of last night. It's getting on my nerves. Doesn't Mr. Standish see that something is wrong?"

"Naturally he sees it," I said guardedly. "But he's in a very difficult position, Kitty."

"But has he said nothing to you?"

"He's a very uncommunicative bloke," I temporised, but she shook her head.

"I'm sure he knows something," she said. "Or at any rate suspects."

"Isn't Henry coming out to-day?" I asked.

"No; he isn't. And don't try and change the conversation, Bob. Listen to me. If Henry is out of his room again to-night I'm going to follow him. Will you and Mr. Standish come with me?"

"My dear," I said, "it's really devilish awkward, you know. Henry is our host, and to spy on him is a gross abuse of his hospitality."

"And I'm your hostess," she answered. "Bob, this can't go on. I must know the truth. If you won't come with me I shall go alone."

"I'll talk to Ronald about it, Kitty," I promised. "But you do see, don't you, what a very embarrassing position we are in?"

Strangely enough, when I mentioned it to him during the course of the morning he viewed it rather differently.

"I think that if we go with her. Bob— at her request, so to speak— it puts the matter on another footing. It's totally different to our prying round on our own."

"Then I'll tell her that we'll both be in my room," I said.

And so for the second time did we settle down to a vigil by the open window. We sat in the darkness, and gradually the house grew silent. And then just as my head was beginning to nod there came a gentle knock on the door. Kitty was standing outside.

"Henry's dressed," she whispered. "He's gone out into the park."

"Come along," said Ronald briefly. "Though we may have a job to follow him."

We crept down the stairs, and through a side door.

"Have you the slightest idea where he's gone?" asked Ronald, and even as he spoke a light shone out suddenly through the trees. It was two or three hundred yards away, and Kitty gave a little gasp.

"It's the mausoleum," she said. "They're all buried there — the Ranelaghs."

"Is that so." Ronald's voice was grave,

"Let's go there, but don't make a noise."

Our feet made no sound on the springy turf, but for the last thirty yards we had to cross a gravelled drive that led to the door. And it was when we were half-way across it that Kitty stumbled, and only just saved herself from falling. But the noise was plainly audible in the still night, and the light inside the mausoleum was instantly extinguished. A few seconds later the door opened and Henry Ranelagh's voice came out of the darkness.

"Who's there?" he said.

"It's me, Henry," answered his wife quietly.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" he cried. "Go back to bed at once."

He flashed on his torch, and discovered the three of us.

"So, gentlemen," and his voice was icy, "this is the way you behave when you are guests in a house."

"They came with me at my express wish, Henry," said his wife. "They didn't want to— either of them."

"I don't think you quite realise, Lord Ranelagh," said Ronald gravely,

"how worried your wife has been. And now that things have come to this pass, if you take my earnest advice you'll cease making a mystery of things and take her into your confidence. Neither Bob nor I wish to hear; at the same time..."

He stepped forward and whispered something to the Earl, who gave a violent start.

"How do you know that?" he cried.

"Am I right?" said Ronald.

"Up to a point. But you don't know all."

"Wouldn't it be better if we did? Or at any rate tell Lady Ranelagh. There will be permanent mistrust between you till you do."

For a long minute he stood motionless; then abruptly he turned round and entered the mausoleum.

"Come inside," he said curtly. "Shut the door, please; I'll turn on the light."

He did so, and a strange sight met our eyes.

On a raised dais in the centre of the room was a small coffin; beside it stood Doctor Frobisher and the butler Weston. And inside it lay the body of a boy.

"Perhaps it is better so, Henry," said the doctor gravely.

"I am sure we can trust these two gentlemen not to speak."

"Most certainly," answered Ronald equally gravely. "At the same time it is obvious, I think, that some explanation is necessary. Who is this boy?"

"My brother," said the Earl, and his wife gave a little gasp.

"But, Henry," she cried, holding out her hands to him, "why couldn't I have been told that? Poor little chap!"

"Listen, my dear, and you'll understand. John was one of the most lovely children it would be possible to imagine. He was the apple of my father's eye; my mother worshipped the ground he walked on. One day, when birds'-nesting in a tree, a branch broke, and he fell to the ground. As diabolical luck would have it, he fell in such a way that he became paralysed. Not only that, but he lost the power of speech.

"My parents were heartbroken. Specialist after specialist was brought in, but none of them could do any good. And at last it was left to my old friend here"— he laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder— "to break it to my father that the case was hopeless. There was nothing that could be done. He might partially recover the use of his limbs, but he would be a terrible cripple for life.

"And so my father took a decision, a decision only rendered possible by the help of this other old friend Weston. John died, and was buried in the tomb of his forefathers. That was what the world thought. That was what I thought till I came of age. In reality he was smuggled away into a secret suite of rooms in the wing where I met you that day, Kitty. There, tended by Weston, he has remained ever since, and only we three and my sister knew that the story told to the world was a lie. He has never grown since his fall; you see him now as he was then.

"And then, one day shortly after we came back from our honeymoon, Weston came to me with the most disquieting news. So long as he was completely paralysed it was easy to keep the secret. But Weston told me he had seen signs of returning animation. We watched and we waited; the weeks passed by, and the months. And at last we knew the worst: I use that word advisedly. The incredible was happening; John was partially recovering the use not only of his limbs, but also of his vocal cords. You must have heard that terrible noise two or three times lately. And from that moment our vigil has been ceaseless. But not always successful. The night before last he escaped; last night, too, in that thunderstorm he managed in some amazing way to get into the garden. And that, I suppose, proved too much for him, for this morning he died."

For a long space there was silence, and then Kitty went to him.

"But, Henry dear," she said, and there were tears in her voice, "I still can't see the reason for it all. Why couldn't the poor little chap have been put into a nursing home?"

His answer was a strange one: he flashed the torch on to the end of the coffin—

John, Viscount Laverton
1895—1905

"You see," he said quietly, "he was my father's eldest son."

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5: Out of Egypt

Charles B. Stilson

1880-1932

All-Story Weekly, 18 Jan 1919

"NIGHT after night he's at it, way up there, all alone by hissel'. What it is he finds to do, fair boggles me."

To himself and under his breath, Hank Binnie thus soliloquized as he stepped from the elevator to the fifth floor of the Millchester Museum of Arts and Antiquities, whereof he was the night watchman. Hank's speculation was called forth by the light which shone through the marbled glass of the transom over the door to the curator's office at the far end of the corridor. The "he" to whom Hank referred was Standise, the curator.

"Old Kiley was never like yon," Binnie continued querulously, " Come half past four, and he was content to close shop and go home to his rest like a decent body. But this one— I believe ve gets no sleep whatever."

A glance at his watch told Hank that the hour was eleven-eighteen. He jingled his keys reflectively. " Guess I'll be rousting him out," he muttered. "He'd oughta thank me for it."

Except for the flare from an incandescent in the elevator and the faint radiance shed through the transom-glass, the long corridor was unlighted. Binnie, a careful soul, was not wont to waste any of the museum's "juice," so he shuffled along in the dark toward the curator's door.

"Cripes a-mercy! What's that?"

An agonized, wordless shriek, the cry wrung from the throat of a man in the grip of supreme horror, burst from the curator's office and thrilled the corridor. Before it had ceased to echo came another cry entirely unlike the first— a short, grating screech, almost animal in its ferocity. There was the sound of a heavy fall, then silence,

"My Gawd!" whispered Binnie out of a throat which was too dry for aught but whispers. At that first dreadful wail, the watchman had let fall his keys. He now fell against the side of the corridor, his hands spread against the wall at each side of him, his nails sinking into the calcimined plaster, his knees sagging. Every separate hair on his gray old head felt like a wire. For perhaps the space of a minute he clung there, his ears attuned to terror, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on that closed door.

Nothing further happened.

Though his legs yearned mightily for the shelter of the elevator ad its swift plunge to the safety of the street level, his head told Binnie that he should go to that door and make inquiry. Inch by inch along the wall, for he was not a

reckless man, Binnie went, coercing his unwilling hobnails to each step. He stood at the door. Still nothing came out of the silence of the room.

Thrusting a thumb in his mouth to quiet his clacking teeth, the watchman laid a hand on the doorknob. Gently, very gently, he turned it. But the door was locked.

Not at all sorry for that, Hank went down on his knees and applied an eye to he keyhole. He could see nothing. The hand that had turned the key had left it sticking in the wards.

Some credit is due to old Hank Binnie's Scotch persistence for what he did next. Scared stiff though he was, and with his white chin-whiskers bristling straight out in front, he lifted up his quavering voice and called:

"Mr. Standise!"

No answer came, and the watchman cried out again:

"Mr. Standise! What's wrang wi' ye, mon? Speak up i' God's name!"

There was no reply.

Emboldened by the noise of his own voice, Binnie struck sharply on the doorpanels with his fists. He even kicked them. Neither knuckles nor toes elicited any response. His efforts echoed in the corridor. The soft light filtered through the marbled glass. The door was inscrutable.

Laying an ear to the keyhole, the watchman listened intently. At first he heard nothing but the ticking of the clock on the office wall. But what was that? Something surely moved within the room! Not a footfall, but a soft slithering, whispering sound, as of draperies trailed across the wooden floor. A board creaked. Something fell with a clink like metal. Silence again. What was with Standise in that room?

More frightened, if that were possible, than he had been by the shrieks, old Binnie drew back from the door. He dared not turn from it. Carefully, never for an instant relaxing his gaze on the panels, he felt his way backward along the wall until he reached the angle opposite the entrance to the elevator. A small table stood in the corner. On it was an extension telephone. The watchman pressed the switch-button in the wall and flooded the corridor with light. That was much better. For the first time, he thought of the revolver which he carried in a coat pocket, and he took it out and placed it on the table.

"Gi' me the poleece," he said hoarsely to the sleepy "central" who answered his twiddling of the telephone hook.

Connections established with the drawling voice of the night lieutenant at headquarters, Binnie felt vastly relieved.

"You'll be coming as fast as you can?" he queried anxiously as he ended his report of his predicament. "And you'll climb the fire-ladder to the fifth floor, and smash a window," he added. "There's a some thing unco' horrid in yon room. I'll be watching the door until you come."

When Binnie's message came over the wire to headquarters, Detective Captain Scott Makris was just leaving the building. To him the lieutenant made report.

"The Museum— fifth floor— fire escape," repeated Makris. "I'll go. Sounds out of the ordinary. Come on, Ernesti," to the sergeant whom he had been talking with. "And you, Doran, and Schaad," as he picked up with his eyes the two plainclothes men lounging at the windows. "My car's outside."

Ten minutes later, Hank Binnie, crouched in the doorway of his elevator, one hand on its cable and the other clutching the butt of his revolver, heard the crash of breaking glass at the end of one of the transverse corridors, followed by the steady tread of square-toed shoes. And he heaved a great sigh of relief as he stepped out to meet them.

There had been no further sound or sign from the curator's office.

On a table placed against the door Ernesti stood and tried the transom. When it failed to yield to his efforts, he smashed the glass with the point of his elbow, and his curly black head followed his pistol arm through the aperture.

"Man on the floor here, and much blood," he reported. "Nothing else in sight; but there's another room beyond."

Makris turned to the watchman.

"What's in the farther room?" he asked.

"Naught but speeciments— and— and—" Binnie shivered— "whatever was wi' him the nicht. *It* canna be gone, unless it ha' droppit five stories."

"Careful, Ernesti! Keep an eye peeled," warned Makris.

The sergeant had reached the joint in the transom-bar, and under his hand the frame swung inward. Ernesti wriggled through the opening and swung lightly to his feet. The lock clicked, and the door immediately swung open.

Revolvers drawn, Makris and the plain-clothes men pushed into the room. The watchman followed.

It was a small office, a scant fourteen by fourteen feet, plainly furnished and not overcrowded— the workshop of a methodical and competent man, by its look. Artistic it was too, befitting the precinct of the steward of an institution that was of more than local fame. But none of the antiques and objects of virtu which adorned the walls, interesting as some of them were, held more than the passing attention of the five men who had entered the room. Yor them the center of the picture was a heavy, flat-topped mahogany desk which stood a little way out from the wall opposite the door.

At the left of the desk as they faced it, a man lay on the floor, his feet toward the doorway, his head almost touching the wainscot under the northernmost of the two windows between which the desk stood. It was Standise, the curator.

He lay with his face upturned to the ceiling, his limbs distorted as though he had been flung there by violence. His left arm was doubled under his body; his right extended back and above his head, the knuckles of the hand resting on the edge of the wainscot. One of his legs was crossed over the other like a grotesque figure 4. He was a short, stocky man of some forty years, with thick, blue-black hair, worn rather longish. His face was smoothly shaven. His cheeks were flabby; and, due to the position in which he had fallen, the folds of his neck and jowls were forced down over his collar, and his mouth was shut. His eyes, too, were closed. He was in his shirt-sleeves. A coat, overcoat, and hat hung on a clothes-tree, which occupied a corner of the room.

As Ernesti had said, there was much blood. Standise's face and his exposed hand were smeared with it. It had stained his white shirt-sleeves, and there was a splotch of red on the flooring at his side. A spurt of crimson had sprinkled a litter of papers on the desk-top.

For a tense instant the five men' paused within the threshold, seeing these things. Then Ernesti stepped forward and bent over the still figure. At wrist and temples the sergeant felt with quick, light fingers.

"He's done for," he said.

"God ha' mercy!" quavered Hank Binnie. Tears ran down his cheeks as he stared at the fallen man. The old watchman, despite his grumblings, had liked the curator.

By common instinct, the eyes of the four man-hunters were turned to the doorway, the aperture of which yawned darkly in the white of the northern wall. It would be for other hands to care for the silent tenant of the office where they stood. Their business now lay in that farther room.

There was no door in that doorway. It was a narrow entrance; and they eyed it narrowly, not knowing what might lurk in the darkness beyond it.

At a word from Makris, Schaad planted himself at the threshold to the corridor. The other three went forward.

The way was not wide enough for two men abreast. It fell to Doran to enter it first, and he did so, instinctively hunching his right shoulder and swinging it ahead, and drawing in his neck, turtlewise. Level with his breast, his gun pointed, steady as a finger. The rays of his electric torch cut the blackness before him. One step inside the doorway he paused, his broad back blocking his companions.

"Well; what's there?" asked Makris, prodding Doran in the back to make way.

"Nothin'," replied Doran as he swung his search-light in an arc. "Nothin' but a guy who's been dead for about two thousan' years." Disappointment, disgust, and somewhat of relief were in the plain-clothes man's tones. He turned on a light.

"That's him," he said, pointing with his revolver toward the east window, "a damned Ee-gyptian dummy, an' that's all. Look at his nibs."

Under the window and resting on a couple of low wooden horses, was a great mummy-case, carved and gilded, and patterned in dull reds and greens. The case was open, and within it, stark and stiff in its many swathings of dust-brown cloth, its long-time occupant lay, waiting that fulness of years wherein the gods had promised the return of a soul from Amenti. The cover of the case, on which skilled hands in the long ago had fashioned and painted the image of him who was to rest under it, had been removed from the casket and swung around. Its carven feet touched the floor, and its head leaned against the side of the case. It smiled with painted lips and eyes at the discomfited detectives.

Doran had said it. That was all! Besides themselves there was no living thing within the chamber.

In the dimensions the room differed little from the outer office. It had only one window. A few racks of books about the walls, a small portable laboratory and brazier, a deal table, a bag of golf-sticks in a corner, the mummy-case, and the débris of the crate and fiber packing in which it had been shipped— those were all that the room contained.

Nevertheless, the men searched methodically and minutely. They moved the book-cases. They sounded the walls and the flooring and rapped along the baseboards. They opened the doors of the portable laboratory. They found nothing that might have concealed a cat, much less an assassin. Even the bandaged figure in the mummy-case was not sacred to Makris's searching hands. Whoever he had been, the Egyptian had departed a giant's body. Makris, who had visited many museums, judged that he had never seen so large a mummy. But when he placed his hands under the broad shoulders and lifted, the swathed bulk came up easily; for it was light, as mummies are.

"Ugh!" said Doran, watching that proceeding, "I wouldn't touch him for a two-spot. Goin' to give him the third degree, cap?"

"It's a cinch he didn't do it— not with his hands tied like that," he added, with a touch of Irish imagination.

Makris shook his head thoughtfully. He let the mummy sink stiffly back to its resting-place.

The three returned to the outer office. Old Binnie had not followed them. He stood near the desk. As they reentered he stared at them, wide-eyed.

"What hae ye foun'?" he queried in a rasping whisper.

"Nothing," Makris replied. "Ernesti, call the coroner and the morgue."

While the sergeant was gone to the telephone, the detective captain examined the windows in the two rooms. All of them were closed. The stout catches on all were fastened tightly. He opened the one at the left of the desk and looked down the front of the building. The walk far below and the lawns

were bright in September moonlight. There was nothing to be learned there. Only a winged thing could have passed down that height unharmed—and the windows had been fastened.

"What next?" Ernesti asked as he returned from his errand. Makris was of few words when he was busy. Just now his thoughts were racing. He did not answer. What next, indeed?

"Looks to me as if this Standise did it himself," observed Doran. " But what with?" He bent over the body of the curator. " There's no knife here."

"Na, na; twas no suiceed!" protested Binnie with conviction. "Didna I tell ye," he pursued becoming more and more Scotch as his excitement mounted, "didna I tell ye I heard twa in here the nicht. I heard Mr. Standise ca' oot as though hell's-fire that touched him— an' then I heard it. That screel was no his voice. His was varra disconcertin'; but the ither— ma fleesh fair creepit to the soun' o' it."

"What do you think that it was?" asked Makris.

"It might ha' been a wild beastie; but seein' ye hae foun' no trace o' it, it must ha' been Auld Bogie hissel'— or one o' his sendin'."

At that, Schaad and Doran laughed outright, and Makris smiled. But Ernesti, who was sprung from warmer blood, rolled his eyes and felt ice at his back. He was ready to snap the bracelets on anything that lived, was the sergeant, or to die in the attempt; but the Old Scratch— that was different.

Makris continued on his round of the office. He was approaching the doorway to the inner room again when an exclamation escaped him. He stooped and picked something from the floor under a small pedestal-table that stood at the right of the doorway. The others gathered around him as he took it to the desk.

It was a dagger of antique pattern, double-edged, and with a twisted crossguard and'hilt of silver. The blade was some six inches long. Both steel and silver were smeared with blood.

"That's the knife!" exclaimed Doran, "He must of threw it." The plain-clothes man was sticking to his theory of suicide.

"Mon, I'm tellin' ye he didna throw it whatever," broke in the night watchman. " 'Tis what I heard clink on the floor when I stood wi' ma ear to the keyhole after Mr. Standise lay stretchit where ye foun' him, an' I heard it glidin' ower the boards like a serpent. 'Tis the same dirkie Mr. Standise aye kept on his desk to open letters wi'— an' the hand that struck him doon let it fa'."

Doran, stubborn in his own conclusions, shrugged his shoulders. Handling the dagger delicately by its point and hiltguards, Makris held it under the desk-lamp and examined it for finger-prints. He found none, and presently he laid the weapon on the desk and went back to the spot where he had found it. Where the dagger had lain, under the pedestal-table, he found two or three minute red

stains on the floor, flicked there from the blade when it fell. From the floor his searching glance traveled up the frame of the table and beyond.

He whipped out his flash-light and magnifying lens.

A squat and heavy vase of green stone stood on the table. It was an Egyptian funeral urn, from the sarcophagus, mayhap, of some long-forgotten Pharaoh. On the swell of it, where it flared downward from its neck, the quick eyes of the detective had discerned three small oval stains on the luster of the polished stone. Under the glass and the light, they were resolved into the'prints of three finger-tips, done in the fluid which had been shed so profusely elsewhere in the room.

Lines and whorls of the prints were well defined, emphatically so, as though one in passing had pressed his fingers heavily on the vase for support. Here was a clue.

Returning to the body of Standise, Makris produced from his pockets a couple of squares of paper glazed over with celluloid, and a pencil of dark grease-paint. With those he took the prints of the index middle, and ring fingers of each of Standise's hands.

With Ernesti to hold the light, the detective captain compared the prints he had made with those on the green stone urn, studying each in turn under his lens.

"You're wrong, Doran," he said. "This was murder. Another was in this room with Standise to-night, and left the proof of it here on this vase for any eye to see. But how did he get out again?— if he is out."

Once more the atmosphere in the room became tense. Again the two offices were ransacked. The second search was as fruitless as the first had been. In the midst of it a bell rang loudly in the lower corridor of the building.

"That will be Coroner Arnold or the morgue men," said Makris, and he sent Schaad down the elevator with Binnie, who was too frightened to go alone. The visitor proved to be Thompson, the morgue attendant.

"When Coroner Arnold heard you was here," he said to Makris, "he said he wouldn't need to come up. He'll view the remains at the morgue. Give me a lift with it, will you?" he asked of Doran. They picked up the limp form of Standise and carried it away.

When Doran returned to the fifth floor with the watchman, the city clocks were chiming midnight. Makris's men looked to him for further instructions. So far as they were concerned the case had fetched up against a blank wall. But the detective captain was far from discouragement. With the trail still warm and the better part of the night ahead of him, he was determined to persist in the untanglement of a puzzle which was entirely dissimilar to any he had ever set his mind to, and which offered a challenge to his professional mettle that he had no intention of refusing.

Sadly racked by the course of events old Binnie was on the verge of collapse, seeing which, Makris directed Schaad to take him home and not to come back. Doran he dismissed also.

"You and I will have a try at it," he said to Ernesti. The sergeant was nothing loath. At sight of those bloody fingerprints, the fear of the supernatural had passed from him. The devils and ghosts of Ernesti's imagination did not leave fingerprints.

After the others were gone, the sergeant closed the door to the corridor, drew a chair near to it and sat down. Makris seated himself at Standise's desk. He took up again the silver-handled poniard. Under the crimson stains on its slender blade, in quaint old lettering which the wear of time had half effaced, he read the inscription, "*Il Scorpione*"

" 'The Scorpion,' eh?" mused Makris. "So you are Italian, Scorpion. How many folk have you stung in your time, I wonder— and by the look of you, you might have been forged in Cesare Borgia's day. So they made a common, every-day papercutter of you, Scorpion? But to-night you turned to your ancient trade. A strange tale you could tell, if you had a tongue, I'll warrant— and a part of it I'd like most mightily to hear."

But *il Scorpione* was mute, and the detective laid it by.

Many other objects were on the curator's desk. A tiger, exquisitely wrought in bronze, supported one end of a row of leather-bound reference books, and at the other was a miniature in marble of the Laocoon group. By odd chance a jet of blood had so spurted against the side of the tortured priest that it gave a grim semblance of reality to the agony of the serpent's fangs. A long sheet of paper nearly fifled with close-written lines, two bulky brown rolls of Egyptian papyrus, and an open fountain pen were evidence of Standise's latest occupation. Besides these, the desk contained a litter of manuscripts and pamphlets. An envelope with a foreign stamp attracted the attention of Makris. It was postmarked Alexandria.

Makris took out the letter. It was from the firm of Raston & Hummel, dealers in Egyptian antiques at Alexandria, and it read:

Dear Mr. Standise:

We are shipping to your address a mummy recently taken from a newly discovered tomb beyond Karnak. It is to be sent on approval to the Chicago Museum. Before it goes on to its destination, however, we should like you to confirm our estimate of its value, which lies, we believe, not so much in the mummy and case—both remarkably fine—as in the manuscripts contained in the case.

The mummy is that of Neb-Sis, a nobleman of the fifth dynasty. The manuscripts seem to us to be a new and interesting specimen of the Book of the Dead. We call your special attention to the interpolations in Chapters I and XVII.

We shall be very greatly obliged if you will examine these manuscripts, and communicate to us your opinion, The mummy will reach you on the afternoon of the 6th ult. May we further trespass on your generosity to the extent of asking you to examine the manuscripts at once? Our agent will call upon you on the 7th, and will see to the reshipment of the case.

Y'rs resp., et cetera.

"Well, old Neb-Sis came through on schedule time," thought Makris. "And a jolly mess he landed in. I'm afraid that Messrs. Raston & Hummel are doomed to disappointment in the matter of that opinion—unless that is what Standise has written here."

But the curator's labors appeared to have been directed to a translation of the papyrus manuscripts, and he had not completed the task when *il Scorpione* struck.

Thousands of years ago were written the lines which Standise had translated. Makris's eyes wandered down the page, and he read:

O ye who give bread and beer to beneficent souls in the house of Osiris, do ye give bread and beer at the two periods to the soul of Neb-Sis, who is with you.

"Meant to be well provided for," thought the detective. Another line struck his eye:

I shall not be given up; my adversary shall fall before me; he hath been given up to me, and shall not be delivered from me.

"By George! old fellow, if your hands weren't tied, as Doran said, I might almost be brought to believe that you did do it, Neb-Sis," Makris muttered. "But this isn't getting any closer to what I'm after."

Over the edge of the paper sheet he glanced at Ernesti and saw that the sergeant was nodding in his chair. The room was very quiet.

For some time Makris had noticed a peculiar odor, a faint, and not altogether pleasant, perfume. He had smelled it when he first entered the office. It had been apparent when he disturbed the rigid figure of old Neb-Sis in the farther room. It was particularly noticeable in the vicinity of the curator's desk— a persistent, almost sickening aroma. Now, as he laid down Standise's writing and took up for a moment one of the papyrus rolls, it was doubly strong. He sniffed at the ancient record, and immediately was aware of the source of the odor. The papyrus reeked with it.

Curious symbols these: strange, crooked hieroglyphs, little figures of men and beasts and birds, tiny ships and chariots, traced with a reed point, no doubt, by some drudge of a priest, and dedicated to the salvation of the soul of the mighty nobleman, Neb-Sis. But how they smelled! Makris pushed the papyrus

from him with sudden disgust. He rested his hands on the desktop and began to ponder his problem, seeking for a starting-place. Ernesti had ceased to nod and was sound asleep on his chair, his chin sunk in his coat-collar,

Some moments elapsed. Makris started to arise from the desk. That is, his brain sent out such an impulse to his limbs. But to his utter consternation, his body failed to obey. His hands remained quietly on the desk. His legs did not move. Ordinarily, such a realization would have sent at least a tremor through him, a nervous start. And in his brain he did start; but his frame remained as motionless and unresponsive as the wood on which he leaned. He was paralyzed!

He tried again. From the center of his being, with all the strength of his will, he sent out along the thousand little telegraph lines of his body, a call for action. No quickening of the muscles answered the call, insistent though it was. He was like a man locked in a room at the top of a lofty building, who finds that his telephone wires have been cut and he is shut off from communication with the rest of his world. He was helpless.

Panic succeeded surprise, and he strove desperately in his prisoned brain. He tried to cry out, to call to Ernesti, who was sleeping there, not ten feet from him. But his throat was dead too, and not the slightest whisper issued from it. Even his eyelids had ceased to function, and his eyes were dry and painful from Jack of lubrication.

Was he dreaming? Had he, too, fallen asleep? No; that could not be. His surroundings were too clearly defined. On the desk before him lay Standise's manuscript, and he could read the words that were written there. Thank God he could still see! To his other infirmity the addition of darkness would have been too terrible. What faculties were left him that he could command? He took stock quickly. He could see, and he could move his eyeballs a very little, though the friction of the dry lids made that painful. He could hear. The steady ticking of the clock, the rumble. of a distant owl car, and the heavy breathing of Ernesti; he could hear all those. He was breathing regularly, but slightly. Ah, yes! and he could still smell. The odor of that accursed Egyptian papyrus beat up to his nostrils in waves.

For one of the few times in his life, Scott Makris was afraid, with a cold, deadly, all-pervading fear that reached and laid hold of him in the inmost recess of his being. What if he should never regain control of himself? In his mind arose the picture of Standise being carried away to the morgue.

God! had this thing happened to Standise, too? Was the curator overwhelmed by the poisonous perfume of this unholy relic of forgotten ages, and struck down while he was helpless? Struck by what? The suggestion chilled Makris's brain. Cool and sane as the detective was by nature, at that moment

the apparition of the mummy of Neb-Sis, stiff in its grave-clothes, standing beside his chair, would not have surprised him very much.

He reviewed the events of the night. Yes; that was how it had happened. Standise had been overcome by the fumes of whatever drug it was with which the papyrus was saturated. And then some presence which had lurked in the room— which might still be in waiting in its secret hiding-place— had crept upon him.. Would it come forth again? If it should, it might play a merry game with the men who had set out to track it down. For one of them was powerless and the other was asleep. The irony of it! He, Makris— almost an international figure because of the crimes he had ferreted out— to go down like this! Well, let it come quickly.

Thr-r-r-r-r! *Flap*! A noise behind him, almost at his elbow, caused another great start in Makris's brain. Had it come? He held his breath and waited the blow.

He felt big, cold drops of perspiration trickling down his temples and his ribs. He rolled his eyes around in a mad attempt to see what it was that menaced him; but their range was too limited. Crossed assagais on the farther wall, the clock, a Sioux war-bonnet of gaily dyed feathers, the wall itself, the blue-coated sergeant asleep in his chair— Makris could see nothing more.

Flap, again! Ah! it was nothing but a bat that had flown in through the window which the detective had left open. It skittered aimlessly about the walls and the ceiling and then flew out into the night.

In the corridor the telephone-bell rang, long and intermittently; but there was no one to answer it.

Minutes passed. Makris watched them drag by on the clock-face across from him. The phone bell was silent again. Would Ernesti never awake?

An automobile chugged in the street below, and halted. The elevator hummed up the shaft. Voices and footsteps sounded in the hall. The door was opened and Kerwood Arnold, the coroner, shouldered in. Behind him came the coroner's physician, Dr. Van Wark, and a third man, at sight of whom the awakened Ernesti sprang back against the wall with a cry of amazement.

It was Standise, the curator! Shaky and scared-looking, with eyes goggling and hair awry, and his cheeks the color of paste; but Standise, alive, and apparently unhurt!

"What ails you chaps up here, that I couldn't get you on the phone?" began Arnold. "Havin' a party, or—" He caught sight of Makris's face and stopped.

The other three men followed Arnold's glance. At sight of the detective captain, Ernesti cried out again. Standise, breathing audibly, fell into the chair which the sergeant had vacated. Makris sat like a man of wax. His face was as white and, except for his eyes, as expressionless as the plastered wall. But his

eyes moved, and from them he sent forth an agony of appeal that turned the blood cold in the veins of the men who saw it.

First to recover himself, the physician sprang across the room. He shook Makris by the shoulder. The detective would have toppled from the chair if Van Wark had not held him up. The doctor called Arnold to help him, and between them they lifted the inert form from the chair, Van Wark sniffed.

"That same damnable odor that I smelled when Standise began to breathe down there on the morgue table," he muttered. "Fetch cold water," he said to Ernesti. "Quick! That's what seemed to help the other chap most."

Arnold and the physician walked, or rather dragged, Makris up and down the room. Presently he began to take faltering steps on his own account. Ernesti filled his cap with ice-water from a cooler in the corridor, and they threw it in Makris's face.

He shuddered, gasped, and in his throat they heard the inarticulate rattle of returning speech. He was a strong man, and he had not been subjected to the poisonous fumes for so long a period as had Standise. After a few moments he shook off the supporting hands, and took a staggering turn or two up and down the room, chafing his temples hard with his palms.

Suddenly he snapped himself erect, crossed the office, and thrust his dripping face on a level with Standise's staring eyes.

"Now," said Makris, his voice strained and unnatural, "we'll have the bottom of this. What hell's mess took place here tonight? What happened?"

Anger had succeeded fear in the detective. His dark eyes bored into the curator's blue ones like gimlets.

Standise returned the gaze listlessly. He sank lower in the chair. He seemed to be only three-quarters conscious.

"I don't know," he said weakly.

"Where was he hurt?" asked Makris, turning to the doctor,

"Not a scratch on him," Van Wark replied.

"What!" Makris and Ernesti ejaculated in double.

"What has he told you?" the detective asked.

"Nothing at all," Arnold put in. "He began to kick on the table at the morgue. We tried to get you on the phone to tell you; but we couldn't raise you. So we brought him along. He's been mum as a mouse."

"He doesn't know how we found him?" Makris queried.

"Guess not."

"Just as well," the detective said. He laid a hand on Standise's arm.

" You must remember something of what happened," he said more gently. "Tell us what you can."

"I— I— it was—a dream." Standise's voice was vague.

"Yes. But what was the dream? What were you doing?" Makris jogged the curator's arm. Blood had been shed in that office; not Standise's, it seemed. Whose, it was the detective's business to find out.

"I was working at the desk— translating. It was a most unusual manuscript. Then all at once I seemed to be paralyzed. I could not move hand or foot. I could not even wink my eyes—" He hesitated.

"Yes," said Makris with sympathy. "But that was not a dream. That happened to me, too, and I ought to know that it was no dream."

Standise nodded.

"I know," he said, "That was not a dream— but— the other."

"What other?"

"Oh, I know you'll think it's a child's nightmare I'm telling," went on the curator. He seemed to rouse himself. "I thought that as I sat powerless to move I heard a noise—there—in the inner room."

"What kind of a noise?"

"A creaking at first, and then the swish of garments, flowing garments, across the floor. Then from the corner of my eye I saw it." He halted again.

"What did you see?"

The curator's hands twitched. He smiled resignedly.

"I saw a tall figure clad in long, white robes, and—" The smile faded. An expression of terror came into the curator's eyes. "Please do not ask me to go on," he pleaded.

"But we must know," urged Makris. "What happened next?"

"*It*, the figure, bent down over me. It clutched my arm with its fingers."

"Did you see its face?" Makris interrupted. He was watching the curator keenly. The man was trying to withhold something. The detective was determined that he should not.

"No— only the eyes," Standise answered.

"And they were the eyes of some one whom you knew— some one whom you feared." Makris spoke quickly.

"No!" Standise started.

"Think," said Makris. "We must have the truth, Mr. Standise— and you are not telling it. Who was it? Man or woman— and who?"

"It was a dream, I tell you— but," desperately, "those were the eyes of Suleyman El Dalk." His voice trembled painfully.

"And he is—"

"It was years ago— in Egypt. I met him there. He was a strange man— a strong man— a terrible will. He believed himself to be the last representative of an ancient strain— a descendant of Harmachis, the last of the Egyptian Pharaohs. I was to help him with his researches. Even then I had acquired great knowledge of the Egypt that is dead.

"He had a daughter. We loved. We fled from him— were married. He swore to revenge himself—to follow us to the ends of the earth. I changed my name. We wandered. She died many years ago. His last message— I remember it '— shuddering— "was, 'When you look again upon the face of Suleyman, prepare for death!' I have always feared him.

"That is all." He sank wearily in the chair.

"But in the dream," persisted the detective captain, "what happened when this figure clutched your arm?"

Standise made a hopeless gesture.

"It seemed— in the dream— that that touch on my arm sent a thrill of horror through every nerve, and that my muscles for an instant were once more mine to command. I sprang to my feet. On the desk lay an old Italian dagger that I used for a papercutter. I seized it with a shriek and struck out blindly. An answering shriek rang in my ears— is ringing there still."

"And then?"

"That is all, sir, on my word of honor. I knew no more until I awoke to find men working over me, and the cold water in my face."

Makris stepped to the desk and returned.

"So you struck— in the dream— with this?"

He laid *il Scorpione* in Standise's hand.

The curator took the poniard, turned it in his fingers, saw the red stains on hilt and blade. He cast it from him with a hoarse cry and sprang up from his chair.

"God!" he whispered.

From one to another the men looked. Ernesti's olive skin turned as sickly - white as the curator's. None spoke. Then—

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap-a-tap!

It was the keen ear of Makris that heard it— something falling, softly, slowly, like water dropping upon wood. It was in the farther room.

The detective captain sprang through the doorway, and the others followed; Standise last of all and swaying as he walked.

It was under the mummy-case of Neb-Sis. There was a little pool of it on the floor. It was red. More of it was falling, drop by drop.

While the other men stared, fascinated, Makris seized the swathed form of the mummy and hurled it from its case. It fell on the floor with a dry, crunching sound, as of dead twigs breaking.

In the bottom of the case, where the mummy had lain, was a long, wide panel of thin wood. That, too, the detective tore out and let fall.

In the crypt below the false bottom lay a tall, thin man, clothed in the loose, white robes of the East. His face was covered. Makris removed the covering. The face revealed was that of an old man, the skin like wrinkled leather, the hair and

beard as white as fleece, There was a smile on the face. The man was dead. Blood from a gash in his neck had stained his white garments. It had crept along the bottom of the casket until it had soaked through the thin wood.

Standise thrust his head over the shoulder of Makris and gazed down at the face of the dead man.

"Suleyman!"

The word burst from the curator in a shriek. He staggered back, clutching at his breast, and fell. Van Wark bent over him.

"He's gone this time," said the doctor, after a brief examination. "He had a weak heart."

With the morrow came the "agent" mentioned in the letter from Raston & Hummel. He came unwarned by the newspapers; for the night's doings at the Millchester Museum had not yet been given to the press. He found what he came to seek, did the agent, but not as he had expected to find it. He presented at the museum a card which bore the name and legend, "Achmet Zuelim, Dealer in Curios." He was ushered into the presence of Detective Captain Scott Makris.

Quite the mode as to dress was this Achmet, expansive of shirt-front, profuse of glossy-black hair and curling mustaches, voluble of speech and effusive in manner, But his.suavity and veneer all melted from him like wax when the detective led him into the inner office of the curator, and he stood before the body of Suleyman El Dalk, which, for lack of a better bier, still reposed in the mummy-case of Neb-Sis. All that he had acquired of the West and its ways fell away from Achmet when he looked down at the dead man, and he became what he was, a son of the East and the desert.

"Allah! Allah!" he cried, and with a burst of tears and wailing went down on his knees by the casket.

Under questioning by Makris, Achmet told how they— Suleyman, whose servant he was, and himself— had brought the mummy-case from Egypt to Millchester and prepared it. Another servant of the old man had mailed the letter— which was, of course, a forgery— in Alexandria on a given day. On the date named in the letter for the arrival of the mummy, Suleyman, who kad saturated the papyrus with a drug known to him, and sealed it so that he would not himself fall a victim to its powers, had entered the case. Achmet then had packed it and summoned an expressman to their lodgings, whence the case had been delivered to the museum.

Of the purpose of his master, the servant professed ignorance. Achmet had done as he had been bidden, and he had come again, as had been arranged, to take the case away.

Makris told the Easterner of the transactions of the night, and asked him why Suleyman should have borne such an undying and relentless hatred for Standise.

"It was because of the daughter of the great one who is gone," answered Achmet, pointing at the casket. "I cannot talk of that. But—" and his face grew stern— "thees man, thees Standise, as he he call him— he was verree great scoundrel."

As Achmet had done no crime, and there was no occasion to detain him, he was allowed to go, and to take with him the body of his beloved master, to be buried under the sweep of the desert sands.

It is written in the Book of the Dead: "My adversary shall fall before me." And Standise had not told all the truth.

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6: Shag of the North

Sumner Locke

Helena Sumner Locke, 1881-1917
Weekly Times (Melbourne) 9 Jan 1909

"SHAG," so-called because of the appearance of his strong, untidy-looking head, was foreman of the Wentwith Mills... Once he had come, from the North, at least he had said so when questioned by James Wentwith, when he had signed on as apprentice years ago.

"Shag of the North" they had styled him! That was all, and he had confined in his own limit of business the why and wherefore of his former , life, answering to all in his brusque way, "I come from the North— the North."

Now it was that Shag, being called upon to present himself in the office attached to the main factory, stood stake-like before his chief, and did not betray any unusual warmth of feeling on his strongly-cast face. He might have, been a chief of a race that stood trial for the sins of his people, and was ready to face it— as it was now there was not so much a facing of anything as a desire to end the situation. That to him seemed unnecessary.

James Wentwith was whirling his pen in circles between his fingers, and Shag moved not a muscle, nor did he remove his eyes from their rivetted position on his chief's face.

Assuredly there was discomfort somewhere in the mind of the proprietor.

"You've been a fair time with us, Shag."

Shag agreed by an affirmative nod, which was as courtly as it was right.

"You— you — may be with us for— for the rest of your life, eh. Shag?"

Shag slowly inclined his monster head.

"For the rest of my life— possibly," he repeated, complacently.

James Wentwith leaned forward, suddenly dropping the pen and eyeing Shag with a quickness that meant "Now for! it."

"You ought to— marry— Shag..." He stopped short as Shag, with a lion-like movement, shot up his head.

"I mean— you might easily pick out a capable girl from amongst the neighboring families here and settle down within; a reasonable distance of the factory. I— I should like it done, Shag. A man is far more settled to his life and— and his work— when he's got his family round about him."

Decidedly Wentwith was getting uneasy under the heavy stare that his foreman was serving him with.

"I— see!" Shag's voice was slow and not without some measurements. "You wish me to— marry — to marry. You are afraid I may clear out one. of these days—" He waited, and James Wentwith again circled the pen.

"No— not exactly," said Wentwith. "There are many possibilities in my establishment for you yet, Shag. I— I— would like you to marry. I'm getting on. now, and— and there is no one to personally keep an eye on the business in quite the same way that you or I might when I have gone."

Shag's head lowered a bit. "That's right!" he said, "but you haven't no right to— to think a man ain't no call to look after his own future any more than I has place to call myself boss here. It's one man for himself, nowadays, eh?"

James Wentwith leaned back in his chair. Shag had taken him up more truly than he had expected. However, as it was so, he went on boldly.

"Just so— every man for himself. Now, you are fairly well off here— Shag— and— I say— there are possibilities— do you understand? For the reason of your own good future— with my help— I wish that— that you would marry."

The foreman, standing there, just calmly nodded again.

"Just so," he said presently, and there was more silence between the two. Then the proprietor got up slowly, and Shag understood the interview was at an end.

"We're fairly decided," began the foreman, "that— things is to be— altered a bit— " James Wentwith stared— waiting. "That is— I'm to— settle down, pick out a crib nigh on to the smoke of the factors' chimneys— as it were— somewhere— where I am handy— somewhere, where I can be part of the business, as it were." Then his eye shot a different, gleam.

"You may change your mind, sir when I tell you— my choice "

Wentwith, suddenly animated at fresh ideas, came forward to Shag.

"Your choice— why, Shag, it's sure to right. There are a fair lot of bright-faced lassies in these parts— born and bred to die in the vicinity of the Wentwiths Mills. Choose— choose— we'll make a merry day of it— eh, Shag?"

Shag's eyes still shot gleams.

"Perhaps— if she'd have me. I think I'm straight enough, and man enough— but I've got no call on her, an' maybe she's got ideas of her own."

"Maybe, Shag— maybe— we shall see. Come, now," Wentwith laid a ready hand on the arm of his foreman.

"I'm thinking," said Shag, "that you'd better understand right away, first go off— that— that I'm marrying no one but— one little person in this world— I don't want marriage at all without her "

"Without her— that is—" Wentwith smiled much approval into the face of his foreman.

"That is— the prettiest, daintiest little she that has ever stepped this office; sir— Miss Celia Wentwith— your daughter, sir."

Slowly Shag retreated, as if that was a finish, to his side of the discussion, but James Wentwith trod backwards with a shooting nerve and fire in his face.

"Shag— how dare—"

Shag, turned at the door. The look of a man of strong resolution was on his face. "I dare— why? I— love her!"

Wentwith stood round by his desk again, facing the lion before him with half fight in his eyes, half admiration for such daring.

"You can't love her— a man in your position in life— a man with a— a— nothing sort of past. Who are you, man, that you are bold enough to love— the heiress of the Wentwith fortunes? Who are you that you dare think you could but touch her hand?"

A blush came spreading over the face of the foreman.

"Who am I, sir? I'm but a man— a man made, by God— same as you, sir— same as you. I can't set out in fine linen and rich clothes, maybe, sir, as you can do— an' if it weren't for me, sir— me and them as is with me— neither could you, sir. That's the difference, sir, and as for her, Miss Celia, well— there ain't never anything unwholesome or low in strong, honest love, sir. No, not even if it comes from the worker— 'stead of the— gainer— eh, sir?"

Wentwith sat down stupidly.

"Miss Celia may think so, Shag!"

"May I— ask her— her opinion, sir?"

"Her opinion? Of your love? You would be sorry, Shag! She is inclined to set herself at a vantage; she has a soft little heart underneath— but she would laugh at you."

To fix the matter more in his mind and in that of his foreman, he laughed. Assuredly he knew his own spoilt, ruby-lipped daughter— assuredly she would scorn such love, though honestly meant!

Shag held the door.

"I can but ask her, an' she can but laugh," he said, passing out and quietly shutting the door behind him.

James Wentwith, proprietor, was not laughing now. He sat staring into the space that had held the man before him.

"If she did," he inwardly asserted, "if she did— it would be a great thing— for the business— a good thing, but not for her. No!" He jumped up. upsetting his chair; "it is not to be— a man from the North— no more— the foreman and the daughter of the Proprietor, who never soiled his hands in the dust and smoke of his own factory! The heiress of the Wentwith' mills— No! it would not do— she won't— either."

Thereby James Wentwith, Proprietor, became calm again; and Shag, man of the North, and foreman of the Wentwith Mills, went back to his work in a new mind, and a happy one!

When the five bell clanged out, and a rush of heavy boots and voices told of work slapped down, Shag paused, in the passage-way, dusty, and still in his work clothes. He stepped towards the office, as some one came quickly out. it was

Miss Celia, daughter of James Wentwith. Small and dainty she was, without a doubt, but her flowing skirts made a swishing sound that almost awed the big man where, he stood.

"Where is my father?" she demanded, in a tone that might have meant, "It is your duty to know and answer me."

Shag softly answered her.

"He has gone an hour ago."

"Oh, dear!" Miss Wentworth bit her lip, rather speaking to the walls in general than to the foreman. "Can I— not— do— anything?"

Shag felt a something rising in his chest— it was a wonderful new feeling to the big man. Miss Wentwith stared. Her eyes were soft and dark. Shag knew it now— he had often wondered.

"Is it at all natural that you would do, when I want my father?" she said, dropping her silk-sounding skirts.

Shag laughed slowly. "Maybe; how should I know?"

"Indeed! how should you. Will you move, I should like to go."

Shag stood aside, very straight, and very majestic in his lion-mane! "Why not? I am not in your way, Miss Wentwith."

She curved her silken self past him, and he turned to watch her for just a moment, then he called her. "Miss Celia." The heiress of the Wentwith mills stood; amazed at the end of the passage. There was fully forty feet between them.

"I'd like to ask you something, Miss Celia."

"Indeed! Why don't you, then?"

Shag was now once more the man of iron— he felt, in his right, he was standing on the same plane as she was!

"Do you believe that God made us all— alike, Miss Celia?"

Miss Wentwith shrugged her well-laced shoulders. "Really! I suppose He did—"

"And isn't one man's loving, same as another, when it's good an'— an'— beautiful and strong feeling?"

Miss Wentwith laughed— a short, insipid little ripple, that sounded like a return to an impudence on his part.

"One man's loving!" she laughed again. "How should I know?"

"Well, I reckon you might know if you wished to— there's lots to love you, I should say, and right to one must he right to another."

Miss Wentwith's head was suspiciously high.

"Who has right to love me?" she said, defiantly, looking at him sideways, and aware that a tragedy queen could look no better. Shag's voice got down a bit.

"All who rightly do— has a right to love you, Miss Celia. I s'pose I'm only Shag the Foreman, but in loving I'm topmost as the others— as— as dines with you most times— eh?"

Miss Wentwith snorted like a thoroughbred.

"Topmost— in impudence!" she said, loudly, not going through the passage door. " I wonder you don't call on me la your— your — 'very bests,' and solicit a claim for my hand in marriage, when I'm 'At home' in my own house — Mr-Shag?"

"I shall— do so— possibly " answered Shag with his Lion-head held high; and Miss Wentwith, heiress to the Wentwith fortune, sailed out of the passage with a cold, echoing laugh that fired Shag to a feeling of intense desire to stand victorious over this silk-skirted little person who could make such strong men as he feel even as small as her tiny personage.

ON THE SUNDAY following that episode Miss Celia Wentwith, looking from her lace-curtained window, saw Shag come quickly up the drive that wound its way up to the front entrance of the Wentwith mansion. She laughed heartily behind the window.

"He's fine full of cheek," she said to her important little self. "And I suppose those are his 'very bests' he's got on. Looks like as if I was really being courted! Certainly I shall receive him, and pay him in full for such impudence as this."

When the big man was shown into the room Miss Celia stood centre, with a world of frothing frill about her, and her little tilted nose just slightly higher by way of start...

Shag stood just inside the door, his hands behind him.

"Are you at home, Miss Celia?"

She laughed slightly, and the titled nose went a trifle higher. "Yes. I'm receiving charity calls— is it wages that want raising? Shall I speak to my father?"

Shag did not betray a point of the hot blood that seemed to shoot into his head. He spoke calmly. "Perhaps— but at another time! I'm at present putting all I know on the claim that an honest man has, when he feels that what's in him for another is right and good. You have laughed at me, Miss Wentwith, for coming to you when you— you— sort of dared me to. Well, I'm here now— an' you're not wondering I should say."

Miss Wentwith curved herself to the window again.

"No!" She turned in the swathing of draperies round her feet. "No! I'm not wondering. Your impertinence is only your ignorance Mr Shag— is that your name?"

She laughed again in his face. Shag came centre, and facing a length of mirror there, watched her therein.

"My name's Bennington, rightly— but that's nothing. You look right well in that mirror."

Miss Wentwith moved so that her reflection left the glass— her back was to him, so he missed the flush that ran into her waving hair.

"I should say," Shag went on, "that you were mightily spoilt, too."

Miss Wentwith still turned her back on him, and presently he walked over and stood looking over her head.

"Strange! We're both lookin' at the same things out of the same window," he said, laughingly. Suddenly she turned, and the distance between them might have been about forty inches.

"How can you dare—" began Miss Celia, trying the dignity of her five foot two inches against his laughing demeanor, and his six foot four stature.

"I don't know," said Shag, "but I s'pose I'm rightly using my eyes, same as you, Miss Celia!"

He looked down on her then, where she stood, just a small framed thing, in extravagant coverings. She was staring at the carpet, and he felt his chance was then, and that if must be quick.

"Seems to me," he said, quietly "that we're two most opposite people. You don't care about me, an' I must be mighty fond of you to stand here, lookin' ah' darin' as I'm doing, when you might have me turned out any minute!"

"Miss Celia. You don't dare me to ' go on caring about you," he said presently.

She shot up a glance at him that he saw was still fire.

"I don't dare you anything, in case you might do it," she said, sweeping past him.

"And do I dare more than a man has right, when he's got Heaven on his side, Miss Celia? Seems to me I've only told you that I— I think a mighty lot of you. I've not asked you to marry me. Have I?"

She flounced round.

"You won't do that!" she said defiantly.

"No, I'm not daring that, since you can't understand what it's like— my bein' fond of you— good bye."

She balanced her elbow on the mirrored mantel, and looked at him quietly.

"Next time — you call, Mr Shag, maybe I shall not be at home!"

"Maybe," said Shag. "I won't come along unless you send for me, an' then"— he came a bit closer and looked right into her face— "maybe I'll come an' understand what you mean when you sends me your card sayin' you're 'At Home.' "

Miss Wentwith did not answer. She stood looking at herself in the glass and saw the reflected door shut, and then open again, as her best girl friend dashed into the room.

"Celia!" she gasped! "Who is he?"

Miss Wentwith looked surprised. "Who?"

"Who? You sly girl! Is he a new hiring? Of course, he is. and you're keeping him all to yourself."

Celia laughed long and prettily. "My dear! he's— oh, anyone!"

"Anyone? He's somebody, I bet — he's just splendid. He's so big, and oh — what a head; I'm dying for an introduction."

"Are you?" Celia laughed again and turned the subject diplomatically.

NEARLY a month after this Shag, foreman of Wentwith mills, received a card in the girlish handwriting of Miss Celia Wentwith.

"I shall be at home to you when you like."

That was all, but Shag read it a dozen limes, then slipped it into the jacket of his working clothes, and was silent that day.

Later on he had a wash and, just as he was, presented himself after dinner in the drawing-room of the Wentwith mansion. Miss Celia stood between the colored lights of many silk-shaded lamps. He stood stock still, and held out the card.

"There's a big meaning in this little card, Miss Celia. Am I— am I darin' more'n I ought?"

"What is that?" Her voice was clear of all effort. It was purely herself that spoke.

"It just means this," said Shag, not moving; "it just means that I'm here with you, same as you, same as any as comes here; it just means that I'm right first to-night an' can say what I dare, eh?"

Miss Wentwith steadily watched the colored light near her.

"Seems to me that I sorter could dare most anything to-night!" His heart was beating in his immense frame like one of the factory engines, it seemed to him.

"What would you dare?" Celia was-smiling now. "You say I dare do all I say I will."

"Well, I dare ask you to come and live with me. I dare ask you marry me— eh?"

The littleness of Miss Wentwith sent a thrill of possession into the big man that he never knew before. Now he was fighting for it.

"I dare ask you to marry me," he repeated, "and that means I'll do it."

"You'll dare ask me?" Miss Wentwith's face was turned to him now.

"No! I'll dare do it, without the asking!" said Shag, striding to her. "You sent that little card, an' you meant it— sure!"

"Oh, yes; I meant it," smiled Miss Celia, standing up to him as a child who smiles into the face of a kindly giant. "I meant it. Will you dare marry me?"

Shag laughed, holding her by both arms and looking down from' his towering position over her.

"I'm thinking— seems as if I'm all impudent in these workin' clothes; but I'm impudent enough to take you right away and marry you, 'cause you're mighty fond of me, I reckon, to look at me like this."

"But you're so big and— and strong, and oh— everything!" chirped little Miss Celia, in his heavy, manly clasp.

JAMES WENTWITH mused alone in the office of the mills. "Good for the business— yes— good! Someone to take it on— after I'm gone! Good for my Celia. Well, maybe, but then the heiress of Wentwith mills — hum— the foreman — don't sound right somehow. Marry the foreman — No! She shall not marry the foreman. I'll — I'll make him— by Heaven! that's it. I'll make him manager."

And thus it was, that Celia, of the Wentwith fortune, married the manager, formerly foreman of the Wentwith mills, and "Shag, man of the North."

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7: The Guy From Memphis

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Pall Mall Magazine, May 1928

One of Edgar Wallace's many series characters was Chief Inspector Oliver Rater, known to one and all as 'Orator'.

THERE was a society of men and women who devoted their time and their little money to the reformation of the habitual criminal, and every Thursday night all the habitual criminals in London who were not wanted by the police at that particular moment, or who were not engaged in the exercise of their habitual criminality, would assemble in Duvern Hall and be addressed by eminent persons, some of whom were quite great novelists. At the committee meetings of this reformation society the organisers would congratulate one another upon the extraordinary progress they were making, and would detail such cases as:

H— X— . A man with 17 convictions, now doing honest work with Messrs. B. & C., and quite satisfied with drawing 35s.a week....

When it came out in evidence, as it were, that X— was supplementing his 35s. a week with a little private larceny at the expense of the firm which employed him, his name was ruled out of the book of grace and he was most conveniently forgotten. For this society, like many others, had not realised that, of every pound spent in the reformation of the habitual criminal, 19s. 10½d. was wasted— if the other 1½d. were devoted to the stamp on a letter telling the gentleman to go to hell his own way.

Sometimes retired inspectors of police came down and addressed their late lawful prey with honeyed words and brotherly love, and the silent and watchful audience would afterwards discuss with one another the appearance of their old foe.

"...See that diamond stick in his tie? I wonder who he pinched that from— the thievin' so-and-so!"

Only one or two members of the active force had been induced to take an interest in the movement, and Inspector Oliver Rater, with great reluctance, consented to "say a few words." The night he came to make his address the hall was crowded. He had so many personal acquaintances, so many people who resented his interference in their business, that it could not be otherwise.

His address was brief.

"Some of you fellows make me sick," he began unpromisingly. "When you say you're trying to get an honest living, you mean that between jobs you go round ear-biting the mugs! Two of you tried to catch me last week, when you

found I was coming to speak in this hall— thank you for the compliment! The majority of you are only really comfortable when you're in stir— you feel at home with the screw. One of you fellows— I'm not naming names— came out of prison last week, and the first thing he did was to go round and scrounge a couple of kites! I have since found that you have a can in tow. I'm warning you! I'm not praying over you. Not a tear have I shed. I've only helped one man to get a job, and what did he do? He pinched a new suit of clothes from his boss and bust a house in Finsbury. He is happier on the Moor. There isn't one of you who doesn't say he's being hounded down by the police, and none of you that doesn't look upon a policeman as a house agent. This is the longest speech I've ever made in my life. I shall certainly see most of you again at the Assizes, and if I don't, it will be because I shan't be there."

It was not a successful address. The committee were horrified. Most of them didn't know that 'stir' was prison, that 'ear-biting' was borrowing, that a 'screw' was a warder, or a 'kite' a cheque, a 'can' a fool, and they invariably said 'burglary' where the Orator and his friends preferred 'bust.'

They were so horrified that they wrote to the Chief Commissioner; and the Chief Commissioner replied that he had their letter of the 21st and that the matter was receiving his attention.

"I should like to have been there when the Orator spoke," he said, as he dropped the letter of complaint in the wastepaper basket. "He has probably used up all his speech for the next two years and we shan't get a word out of him."

But there was one appreciative hearer. The society had a straw-haired typist whose name was Lydia Grayne. She was very pretty and fair and competent, and had declined seven separate invitations to have a little dinner with members of the committee. There were seven men on the committee.

She came shyly to the Orator as he was leaving the building.

"Would you be awfully offended if I asked for your autograph, Mr. Rater?"

The Orator looked at her with a twinkle in his grey eyes, took the book without a word and scribbled his name.

She was from Canada, she told him; had only been in the country three months. Later he heard that she had left her dismal job; but he did not know what the new one was until some time had elapsed.

Scotland Yard at this time had a sort of guest: Captain Martin J. Snell, of Philadelphia. Ordinarily, Chief Inspector Rater did not like talkative men, but for some reason which was inexplicable he tolerated the garrulity of the American— and not only tolerated it but encouraged the man. This was during the period when the Orator was suffering from insomnia. Captain Snell was in Europe watching the operation of the criminal law; he had allocated a month of time to Scotland Yard and had been shown everything from the Black Museum

to the Lost Property Office. At night he used to stroll west with Mr. Rater, or spend a less energetic evening in the Orator's sitting-room, telling tales of strange adventure.

"There was a guy down in Memphis named Lew Oberack. This bird was the slickest con man that ever talked money..."

Here the Orator's head would droop. That was why he liked Captain Snell: his voice was soporific. Yet, if he had listened to the clever American, certain strange happenings in the office of one Dimitri Horopolos would have been quite understandable.

Mr. Horopolos was a Greek and immensely wealthy. He controlled not only an extensive trading concern, but his firm were bankers and financial agents, and he had a finger in most of the big international flotations.

A singularly good-looking creature, with his girl's complexion, big dark eyes and black silky moustache, he was as singularly vain. He was vain of his prowess as an athlete, his riding, his beautiful house in Elman Square, and the fascinations he exercised over susceptible womanhood.

There was once an oblique complaint addressed to Scotland Yard, and Rater himself had interviewed the smiling millionaire.

"My dear fellow," drawled Dimitri, "how absurd! The girl threw herself at my head. I did my best to bring her to her senses, and when I found I could do nothing with her, I discharged her. A man in my position is subject to such charges."

"There is no charge," said the Orator briefly.

Later he interviewed the girl, but without success. The thought of publicity terrified her. Her successor left the service of Mr. Dimitri quite as hurriedly, and was as reticent about the reason. Mr. Dimitri Horopolos met the Orator by accident in Bond Street.

"Well, I've lost another of my secretaries." he smiled. "I really don't know what to do to please them."

The Orator was chewing at the end of a cigar. He eyed the gentleman unfavourably.

"Ever tried not doing things that displease them, Mr. Horopolos?" he asked.

Dimitri was tickled; he had a sense of humour. Moreover, he was rather pleased with himself that morning, for at last he had found a pearl amongst secretaries, a straw-haired girl with great blue eyes, who had accepted the job he offered with alacrity. She was a stranger in London, had no relations, no friends at all. She didn't like the idea of living in, but that was a difficulty which might be overcome. After all, as Dimitri said to a compatriot, you can't expect everything.

The Orator was well aware that the new secretary had arrived. He had an ocular demonstration, for Dimitri, with an audacity worthy of one of his classical forebears, sent the girl with a note to Scotland Yard.

My dear Mr. Rater, I have had so much trouble with my previous secretaries that I would like you to approve this one, and pass on the warning which I understand it is your practice to give to any pretty girl who comes into my employ.

The Orator looked up from the letter to the demure girl sitting on the other side of the desk.

"Well, Miss Grayne, they tell me you didn't like reforming criminals?"

She was delighted that he remembered her name.

"I've got such a nice place now, Mr. Rater," she said. "Mr. Horopolos is so very kind, and so handsome— I've never seen a better-looking man, have you?"

"Not since Madame Tussaud's was burnt down," said the Orator in his most offensive manner.

He hesitated, in face of this letter, to offer any advice whatever. In all probability Dimitri had told the girl that he was not popular at Scotland Yard, that he had lost certain secretaries. It was even probable... the charitable Mr. Rater shook his head and dismissed the idea.

"You'll find this Greek a very good fellow for pay," he said, "but a bit friendly. You can't help that— nobody can. If I were you, I'd have office hours and keep 'em."

She was very grateful.

"I don't know how the hours run in this country," she said. "What time ought one to leave work at night?"

"Just as soon as it's dark," said Mr. Rater.

That night he sat before his fire listening to Mr. Snell.

"Well, this guy Oberack— the bird I told you about— lived in Memphis..."

At this point the Orator's head drooped forward and he slept.

Dimitri found his new secretary a great improvement on any that he had ever possessed. She had a ready sense of humour, was prepared to laugh at stories which with the average secretary would not have raised a smile, and would certainly have caused acute misgivings in the mind of more commonplace young women. She was certainly remarkably able, and rattled through his correspondence at an extraordinary speed.

"My dear, you're both efficient and charming," he said, and patted her on the shoulder.

He always started by patting them on the shoulder.

She looked up at him with her big blue eyes and smiled.

"I think I shall be very happy here," she said. "My last place..."

She told him of her unfortunate experience in the office of a middle-aged tea man, and of the no less unpleasantness associated with her earlier work.

"Prisoners' reform, eh?" He was amused, was Mr. Dimitri, who had never been to prison and therefore could never be reformed in a proper and official manner. "What a bore it must have been for you, little girl!"

He usually had a big correspondence by the early morning post, and he stayed long enough to deal with this before he went to the City. Generally he returned about four o'clock in the afternoon and dealt with such letters as had arrived in the course of the day. He had a big house, which he had built for himself, and maintained a fairly large staff.

"One of these days I'll show you some of my nice diamonds," said Dimitri, who was prouder of these treasures than of any others he possessed.

She was thrilled.

"Do you keep them in the house?" she asked.

Dimitri smiled.

"I keep them under the house," he said, amused by her eagerness; "I'll tell you something which will interest you. Six attempts have been made to burgle me. Twice the burglars, who were one of the cleverest gangs from Paris, succeeded in getting into the house, but if there had been two hundred gangs instead of two they couldn't have got into my strongroom— it's the one burglar-proof vault in London."

Here he did no more than justice to his marvellous strong-room. It was constructed in the basement, a small room of steel and concrete, with a door two feet thick. He had in it a system of ventilation. It had served its purpose for his father during the war, for it was near to being a perfect bomb-proof shelter. It was under construction when the war started, and its ventilation, which was an afterthought, had been designed to make the place habitable during the hours when German aeroplanes were hovering over London.

"In fact, it is rather like a little room where one could sleep in comfort," he said. "You must see it one day."

He had no intention that she should see it one day, or even one evening, when he spoke; for this vault of his was most jealously guarded. A commissionaire was on duty day and night at the end of the passage leading to the underground room.

He was the most attentive of employers. She had not been working for him a week before he insisted upon accompanying her to the door when she left.

On this particular night he stood in the doorway, watched her trip down the steps and turn left. As he did so, he saw a man come out of the shadow of a lamp-post and talk to the girl. For a moment she stood, hesitant. He saw the man talking earnestly; then suddenly Lydia turned back and came quickly towards him.

"What's wrong?" asked Dimitri.

"I don't know. I think he's a police officer or something,'' she said, her voice tremulous. "He told me I ought to be very careful about staying late in your house."

Dimitri, in his fury, brushed her aside and went down to the man. He had a clear view of his face— thin, long, with a dark moustache and bristling black eyebrows.

"What the devil do you mean by speaking to that lady?" he demanded. "You're a police officer, are you? You can go back to Mr. Rater and tell him from me that if I am subjected to any more of this treatment I shall make a complaint to Scotland Yard."

He saw the man smile.

"Who told you I was a police officer?" he asked coolly. "And if I am, what objection is there to my warning a young girl about the perils of the street?"

It was on the tip of the Greek's tongue to be very rude indeed. Instead, he mastered his emotion.

"Come in and have a drink," he said, as genially as he could.

The man hesitated for a moment, and seemed a little reluctant. But his manner and tone immediately changed.

"I'm very sorry to give you any annoyance or any trouble, sir, and I'm not anxious to get in any myself. I have my duty to do...

"Come inside," said Dimitri.

Obediently the man followed him. On the top of the steps they passed the girl, whom Dimitri dismissed with a brief good night. He led the way into a sumptuously furnished study. The man sat awkwardly on the edge of a chair, balancing his hat on his knee.

"I'm not asking you to betray any of your office secrets," said Dimitri with a flashing smile as he poured whisky into a tumbler and sent soda fizzling after; but if your job is to watch me, I can save you a lot of trouble— I've no desire to be on bad terms with the police. On the other hand, I should prefer to be on good terms with them."

The man coughed apologetically, reached out for the whisky-and-soda and gulped it down.

"Duty—" he began.

"Never mind about duty," said Dimitri affably. "What you've got to do is to do your duty by yourself. Will you be here every day?"

The watcher nodded.

"Except Sundays," he said.

Dimitri laughed.

"On Sundays I promise to behave myself."

He took a note-case from his pocket, extracted a crinkling white oblong of paper and laid it on the table. The watchful man saw it was for ten pounds.

"I couldn't take that, sir, I couldn't really. I mean, I should get into very serious trouble."

"Trouble!" scoffed the Greek. "What nonsense! You think of nothing but trouble. I suppose that naturally runs in a police officer's mind."

He pressed the note upon Mr. Olcott, which, his guest told him, was his name, and after a considerable show of reluctance the note was pocketed.

He saw Olcott again the next night. The man touched his hat to him respectfully. On the third night Dimitri again invited him into the house.

"I'd like to know exactly what your orders are," he said, when he had his visitor sitting behind a large whisky-and-soda. Olcott coughed.

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, I should get into serious—"

"Trouble, I suppose!" snarled Dimitri, who was no longer amused. "Well, you're likely to get into trouble anyway, aren't you? What are your instructions?"

After a while it came out. Olcott's duty was to watch the house until the girl left, and to remain for an hour after to report if she returned.

"Suppose she does a little extra work, what happens then?"

"I report to Mr.— well, I don't want to mention names— if she doesn't come out by half-past ten."

The Greek's lips curled in a sneer. "That's about the stupidest thing I've heard," he said. "All right, Olcott— I'll tell you the night you can leave early!"

His friendship with the girl was progressing satisfactorily. She had tentatively accepted an invitation to supper at a fashionable restaurant. Only Dimitri knew that the venue would be changed at the last minute.

She certainly displayed some evidence of apprehension when he suggested, on the morning of the proposed meal, that she should come back to the house at ten.

"A little *tête-à-tête* supper would be rather jolly," he said. "We can have it in my suite."

She shook her head. This straw-haired girl had suddenly developed a weakness for the proprieties, it appeared, for she suggested that she should bring a friend with her.

"That's a perfectly stupid idea," he smiled. "Think it over."

She thought it over all day; and during that period the plans were adjusted to meet her objections. It was to be a dinner at seven; then a supper at nine; then a dinner at half-past eight, with an assurance that he would see her home. He agreed to every modification, for the beauty of the girl was like none that he had ever known.

INSPECTOR RATER was at the Yard, and his American friend had installed himself in the chair on the opposite side of the desk, had clouded the atmosphere with cigar smoke, and had set the Orator's head nodding.

"...Well, this guy in Memphis... smartest con man ever..."

When the Orator woke up he was alone, with no other proof of his visitor's presence than the odour of his cigar. It was a messenger who had awakened him, and the Orator looked at the unfinished report which the arrival of Snell had interrupted, and groaned inwardly, for this document had to be before the Chief Constable at eleven o'clock in the morning.

He was half asleep and only dimly heard the messenger's voice.

"What, boy?" he asked.

"He came about four or five minutes ago, sir. He said this had to go to you personally."

The Orator took the crumpled piece of paper from the messenger's hand, unfolded it, and smoothed it out. It was a thin sheet, evidently torn from a diary, and the message, in a shaky hand, was written in pencil.

For God's sake help me. The Greek has locked me in underground room. I came to dinner... (here a few words were indecipherable)... *Please help me. — Lydia Grayne*.

The Orator was wide awake now. He glanced at the clock: the hands pointed to ten. Lydia Grayne and the Greek! No further explanation was needed; as to how the message was sent to him, by what agency, he did not even trouble to guess. He touched a bell, and then, finding the messenger still in the room, sent him in haste to gather a squad. Five minutes later a police tender was flying westward. It pulled up with a jerk before the house of Mr. Dimitri Horopolos, and the Orator was the first to jump to the pavement.

He rang the bell twice before an answer came, and to his surprise it was Dimitri who eventually opened the door to him. He was wearing a dressing-gown; on his face was a scowl, which might have been caused by the sudden appearance of Inspector Rater.

"What do you want?" he demanded wrathfully.

"I want Lydia Grayne," said the Orator.

"Well, she's not here," stormed the man. "Your damned spy could have told you that!"

"You can admit me voluntarily or I'll get a search warrant in half an hour," said the Orator briefly.

The man threw open the door and stalked before them up the stairs. He paused at the head and snarled back: "Shut the door, one of you!" There were no servants to be seen, a circumstance which struck the Orator as curious. He learned afterwards that the servants of this strange establishment lived in a

separate quarter of the house, which could be entirely shut off at its owner's pleasure.

It was not to his study but to a little room on the first floor that Dimitri conducted them. The Orator saw a table laid for two, and on the sideboard a variety of cold viands.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me what you mean by this, inspector?" said Dimitri loudly.

The Orator handed the little sheet of paper to his unwilling host. Dimitri read and frowned.

"It's a damned lie!" he said when he finished. "She's not here. She was coming, but she didn't turn up."

"Have you an underground room?"

The Greek hesitated.

"Yes, I have. I keep most of my valuables there. You don't suppose I'd shut her away in a safe, do you? The whole thing is ridiculous. I tell you she was coming, but—"

"I should like to see that underground room," insisted the Orator.

"But I tell you, she hasn't even come tonight. I was expecting her; can't you tell from the table nobody's been here?"

"The table is not evidence," said the Orator. "I want to see your underground room."

The man turned purple and white and seemed as if he would explode in his fury. Instead, he went into another room, and after a time returned with two small keys on a key-chain.

"As you're so darned curious, I'll show you the place," he said.

He went down a narrow flight of stairs, the detective at his heels, along a narrow corridor, and stopping before a steel door, inserted first one key and then the other. The great door swung backward. He put in his hand and turned a switch, and the Orator found himself in a small, dungeon-like chamber, illuminated by a bulkhead light in the roof. On small glass shelves were deposited hundreds of leather cases.

But that did not interest him. He saw a chair, a table and a camp-bed. The girl was not there.

"Is there any other room?"

"Of course there isn't any other room," snapped Dimitri. "I tell you she didn't come."

The Orator looked round and for a moment felt foolish. Had he been hoaxed? There was no place for a mouse to hide in that room. When he got upstairs to the ground floor level, Dimitri's reserve melted. For five minutes he stormed in three languages at this disturber of his peace. His voice grew shrill

with fury; the diamond rings on his hands made scintillating sweeps of light as he gesticulated.

"That's very fine," said the Orator; "but I only want to tell you that I'm entitled to make this search, and I'm not sure even now that she isn't on the premises."

"Search the house!" roared Dimitri.

It was an invitation which the Orator did not hesitate to accept.

But nothing was found. He went back to his car a puzzled man, and the door slammed on his heels.

Dimitri went back to his sitting-room, livid with rage; paced up and down; was on the point of telephoning through to the servants' section to order his hidden menials to clear away the supper, when he heard a rat-tat at the door. Perhaps it was Lydia. His heart jumped at the thought. He raced along the passage and threw open the door. A man was standing there: he recognised him.

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded.

"Let me in quick," said Olcott in a low voice. "I've just left Rater and he's furious with me. Did he search your strong-room?"

"Of course he searched my strong-room!" snapped Dimitri.

He closed the door, and the two men went back to the small room where the table was laid. Mr. Olcott closed the door of this behind him.

"Well, what do you want? You've been a lot of use to me! Have you seen the girl and headed her off?"

Olcott shook his head impatiently.

"What I want to know is, Mr. Horopolos, did he take the keys of your strong-room away with him?"

"Of course he didn't," said Dimitri.

"Are you sure?" The man was very earnest.

The Greek put his hand in the pocket of his dressing-gown and took out the ring with the two little keys.

"Here they are."

"Hand them to me— and don't move, or I'll blow the top of your head off!" said Mr. Olcott, and the Browning in his hand was very steady, in striking contrast to Dimitri, who nearly swooned with horror.

He was placid enough; allowed himself to be tied up and gagged, before the leisurely Mr. Olcott with the keys went down to examine the strongroom.

WHEN THE ORATOR returned to the Yard he found the talkative Mr. Snell sitting in an armchair. The Orator was not in a mood for reminiscences. Snell was a wily man in the ways of criminals, and to him he told the story.

"Gee!" said Snell, drawing a deep breath. "That sounds like that guy at Memphis... the finest con man that ever lived. He used to work with his wife— the prettiest thing you ever saw— straw-headed, blue-eyed. She'd find a guy to fall for her, and she always picked a bad man. Then this guy from Memphis used to turn up, pretend he was a detective and clear out all that was worth clearing. I'd like to bet that that guy—"

Before he had finished, the Orator was racing back to the police car. It was just driving away when he leapt on to the footboard, and the two detectives who were in sight joined him.

By the time he got to Dimitri, broke in the door and untied him, "that guy from Memphis" was driving with his straw-haired wife somewhere east of Marble Arch.

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8: The Checkmating of Mr. Brown

Richard Dehan

Clotilde Graves, 1863-1932

A Soldier's Home, and other stories, 1919.

THE people who occupy the flat immediately beneath ours are great diners-out; and as their dog is of a sociable disposition and entertains an objection to the society of the charwoman, he commonly burrows under the doormat and howls until the return of his proprietors. But the howls now heard by myself and my wife were distinctly human, and proceeded from our culinary department at the passage end. Something must have happened to Loosha! We sprang from the dinner-table, and made one bound to the kitchen door. With instinctive delicacy we listened a moment before bursting in. The outcries never ceased, though at times they sounded strangely muffled. Had a burglar dropped in for a late afternoon visit? Was he garrotting the too faithful creature who had refused to reveal the whereabouts of the plate-basket? I grasped the soup-ladle— which I had unconsciously retained— with nervous determination. We rushed in quietly. There was no burglar. Only Loosha behind the scullery-door, with her head wrapped up in the jack-towel, was giving vent to bursts of emotion which might well have aroused the envy of the poodle downstairs. With compassion, slightly tempered with severity, we questioned the girl. She took some time to coax out of the chrysalis or pupa condition; but finally emerged from the folds of the jack-towel and explained. Mother — who should have known better, having but a brief twelvemonth since interred her Second— was now receiving the addresses of a potential Third, himself a widowei with nine encumbrances. In justice to the aspirant w(may mention that he was fairly well to do, being a retired joiner by the name of Mr. Brown. In Loosha's bitteresl moments she deprived him of the prefix, calling him simply, and for short, "That there Brown."

The fell news had only been brought by Loosha's little step-sister Emmeline, though Loosha had had a premonitory warning in the way of creeps down her bad whenever she had encountered the designing Mr. Brown for some time past. It had been a-doming in her mind she said, by degrees as there was something up; and this very afternoon he had upped and spoke, most barefaced on the identical doorstep. Says he, "Mrs. Hemmans, I will not deceive you, that it was just through you dropping in in a friendly way to 'elp at the laying out of Her as is gone (and Her only buried eleven months) that me attention was, in a manner of speaking, drawed to you and in a homely way, putting the thing plainly for you, thinking over quiet, by yourself, I will say, you have three and me similarly nine; and both unincumbered, why no make one extra large table out of your medium and me full-sized?" Which table, Loosha parenthetically observed, would ultimately prove her death-bed.

We tried to soothe the aggrieved handmaid by every means in our power. Being within three days of Christmas Day, and having purposed to entertain the representative members of our respective families— between whom all the year round great enmity exists— at a social dinner, the prospect before us was overshadowed by Loosha's grief. If matters came to a crisis she would, as like as not, take to her bed and remain there for two days. At the end of her period of sackcloth and ashes she would, we knew by previous experience, reappear as fresh as paint and quite reconciled to the dispositions of Fate. But, in the meanwhile, what would become of us? I tried to argue. I reminded Loosha that her mother was still young, active and industrious; and that one could not, while deploring the act of Mr. Brown, revile him for his choice of a successor to the departed; that that successor might be called, even now, a pretty woman, and that men would be men, no matter how foolish it was. I would have continued in this strain, but that Loosha became hysterical.

"She ain't young," she screamed. "With me twenty-three, how could she? And she ain't pretty, or if she is, she ought to be ashamed of herself! And both my father and Emmeline and Elfred's father would say so if they was here! And if she does it— which at her time of life is a disgrace— I shall drown myself over the Albit Bridge, in the Serpentine!" The Serpentine is not far from our Brompton door, and Loosha is a very determined girl. I was conscious of a momentary dismay. But I remembered just in time that the Serpentine had been announced as frozen over in the evening papers. I mentioned this.

"Then I'll marry the Railway Guard," sobbed Loosha. Then she went into hysterics and drummed the floor with her heels and the back of a Windsor chair with her head, in quite an alarming manner; and I was ordered out of the kitchen that she might be unfastened and the inevitable remedies applied. It took a whole gill of Tarragon vinegar and the best part of the tail feathers of our Christmas turkey to bring her to anything like composure.

That was three days before Christmas. We have got over the dinner and the meeting of the clans without any casualties other than those we were bound to expect. And Loosha is pretematurally bright, sharp, tight, and brisk. As she goes about her work she sings. "Come buy my Coloured Errin" is a favourite vocal exercise with her. But it has been superseded by "Take Back the Art." And from the piquantly expressive meaning Lossha infuses into the opening lines it is plain that she applies them to Mr. Brown, whose addresses have been discouraged, and whose matrimonial plans have been circumvented, thanks to the prompt action taken by Loosha in the matter. It may be mentioned that our handmaid's baptismal appellation was originally derived from a popular Opera, called "Loosha of Lam Her More," witnessed by mother at an important crisis. Mother is quite a cultured person, having chared for several authors, one of whom was a poetical genius attached to a well-known firm of soap-makers. The way that

man would carry on when the rhymes wouldn't come, and the extent to which he used to wipe his pens in his hair, must, we are given to understand, have been seen to be believed.

Loosha's mother, like many small, meek-looking people, possesses a considerable amount of determination. If she really entertained a weakness for Mr. Brown, that weakness was not to be put down with the strong arm. Loosha realised that, she tells us, as she stood on the kitchen-floor and met those black beady eyes, so like her own True, she opened no parallels, but dashed upon her subject in a way peculiarly distinctive. Emmeline and Elfred, seated on two chairs against the wall, paused in theii consumption of hread-and-treacle on hearing themselves alluded to as poor lambs, and joined their lamentations to sister Loosha's. The Serpentine and the Railway Guard came to the fore, with certain other ultimate possibilities of an equally harrowing nature. The tumult raged high, though Mrs. Hemmans preserved a calm, even stony, demeanour. And in the middle of it all That There Brown knocked at tha door.

No quick-change artist ever effected a more wondrous transformation than did Loosha in that minute. Mrs. Hemmans had glided away to put her cap straight and smooth her sleek parting. In the interval between her disappearance and her return, Loosha and Mr. Brown had become quite friendly. Brown's manner was quite fatherly, and his features shone with smiles and gin-and-water. He had been screwing up his courage with that fortifying beverage. Loosha, as she sent the astonished Emmeline out for a quartern of the best and provided the visitor with a reliable chair, made up her mind that the doom of That There Brown, matrimonially speaking, was sealed. Mother, without knowing why, felt uncomfortable when the widowed joiner proposed taking the entire family (it was Loosha's day out) to the World's Fair and Loosha warmly responded to the overture. They took Emmeline and Elfred and the Islington 'bus, and That There Brown and Loosha occupied a garden-chair seat together outside, mother and the children being stowed in the interior of the vehicle. Brown was fatherly when they started: Portland Road fotrnd him affectionate. By the time they were launched amidst the giddy delights of the Fair he was beginning to think— Deluded wretch! What matters it what he thought? It was deliberately done of Loosha, the betraying of That There Brown. He wandered with the mother and daughter, each on an arm, through a fairyland of mingled fog and gaslight They visited the birds, the beasts, and reptiles; and Loosha appealed to him for information as to their names, species, and general habitat, and greeted every remark of his with admiring "Lors!" She never seemed to notice when he mixed up the Bactrian camel with the water buffalo. She went upon the circular switchback with him— Mother being too timid to venture— and became nervous in the middle of the airy journey, clinging to the arm of the ravished widower with feminine squeaks of terror.

How enthralled she was by his performance on the try-your-strength machine, though the marker on the dial indicated nothing much in the way of a record! The more fascinating Loosha became, the warmer and more perspiring became That There Brown. He nudged her frequently. All the sensation of his corporeal frame seemed to have taken its abode in the elbow to which she hung. The widow was a dead weight on the other. He and Loosha got lost for a moment in the Channel Tunnel.

Was it, then, that the miserable man uttered the words which sealed his fate? It may have been. All we know for certain is that those words once uttered, Loosha's manner became distant and offhand. There were moments when she was even vinegarish. That There Brown put it down to maiden coyness, and renewed the siege with redoubled rashness. It was when the Flying Demons were about to take their marvellous leap through space, and the popular attention was uniformly diverted to the ceiling, that Mrs. Hemmans— who was not without a consciousness as that for a suitor trembling on the brink of acceptance, Mr. Brown's conduct was, to say the least of it, inadequate— felt a tug at her shawl. It came from the infant Emmeline, whose watchful eye, unchildlike in its keen appreciation of the situation, had detected the joiner's arm in the act of enclosing the figure of Loosha under the shadow of her bead-fringed mantle. After that the widow was taken faintish, and had to be revived with peppermint drops ere the company returned to Bromptoa Mr. Brown was not invited in to tea, though he lingered long upon the doorstep. And when he had gone Loosha uncorked the vials of her contempt, and told her parent that she had been nursing a addick in her £osom; but thank Providence, it was unmasked at last!

Next morning a procession of four started for the cemetery. Emmeline and Elfred walked in front, hand in hand and bearing votive garlands. In the presence of the headstone on which the virtues of her Second were recorded, Mrs. Hemmans renewed her vows of faithful widowhood. On the way back the party encountered That There Brown.

"Mother just 'ung her 'ed," said Loosha afterwards, "and walked by him without taking no more notice than if he was dirt. But he spreads 'isself out over the path, and sezee, 'Don't you reckonise your friends, Mrs. Hem-mans, mum, at this time o' day, after all as has been said between us?' And then I pushes in, an' he looks up and met my eye. I give 'im a cold stare, and you might see 'im shrink, as if 'e knowed what was cornin'. 'Begging your pardon,' I says, 'but did you mean me or my mother?' 'Your mother,' says That There Brown, 'as I think and 'ope will make a good wife to me and mother to my nine children.' 'Which you was of a different opinion yesterday,' I sharps back on 'im, 'when you ast me to marry you at the World's Fair. Per'aps you'd like to 'ave us both, as the Salt Lake Morgans ain't too particular in that way, and you may belong to the English

branch of the dinomagation.' 'You've been and raised a nornick's nesk about my yeers, you cat!' says That There Brown, with a scowl. 'Maria,' and he looked imploring like at mother, 'the 'uman 'art is impulshuous, special when led away by gin-and-water. Overlook the accidence and you won't have no reason to complain.' 'I could never 'ave no reliance on you, Mr. Brown,' says mother, with her eyes cast down, and speakin' as if she'd got pins in 'er mouth, 'after what has took place.' 'So make your mind up to it,' I says, 'as neither me nor my mother ain't going to be no wife to you nor your nine children neither.' And he took and hooked it, did That There Brown."

9: The Story of Yung Chang

Ernest Bramah

Ernest Bramah Smith, 1868-1942
Chapman's Magazine October 1896
In: *The Wallet of Kai Lung*, 1900

Ernest Bramah wrote numerous tales of Kai Lung, a story teller in ancient China. They were collected in *The Wallet of Kai Lung* (1900), *Kai Lung's Golden Hours* (1922), *Kai Lung Unrolls His Mat* (1928), *The Moon of Much Gladness* (1932; published in the US as *The Return of Kai Lung*), *Kai Lung Beneath the Mulberry Tree* (1940), *Kai Lung: Six* (1974) and *Kai Lung Raises His Voice* (2010).

NARRATED by Kai Lung, in the open space of the tea-shop of The Celestial Principles, at Wu-whei.

"HO, ILLUSTRIOUS PASSERS-BY!" said Kai Lung, the story-teller, as he spread out his embroidered mat under the mulberry-tree. "It is indeed unlikely that you would condescend to stop and listen to the foolish words of such an insignificant and altogether deformed person as myself. Nevertheless, if you will but retard your elegant footsteps for a few moments, this exceedingly unprepossessing individual will endeavour to entertain you with the recital of the adventures of the noble Yung Chang, as recorded by the celebrated Pe-ku-hi."

Thus adjured, the more leisurely-minded drew near to hear the history of Yung Chang. There was Sing You the fruit-seller, and Li Ton-ti the wood-carver; Hi Seng left his clients to cry in vain for water; and Wang Yu, the idle pipe-maker, closed his shop of "The Fountain of Beauty," and hung on the shutter the gilt dragon to keep away customers in his absence. These, together with a few more shopkeepers and a dozen or so loafers, constituted a respectable audience by the time Kai Lung was ready.

"It would be more seemly if this ill-conditioned person who is now addressing such a distinguished assembly were to reward his fine and noble-looking hearers for their trouble," apologized the story-teller. "But, as the Book of Verses says, 'The meaner the slave, the greater the lord'; and it is, therefore, not unlikely that this majestic concourse will reward the despicable efforts of their servant by handfuls of coins till the air appears as though filled with swarms of locusts in the season of much heat. In particular, there is among this august crowd of Mandarins one Wang Yu, who has departed on three previous occasions without bestowing the reward of a single cash. If the feeble and covetous-minded Wang Yu will place within this very ordinary bowl the price of one of his exceedingly ill-made pipes, this unworthy person will proceed."

"Vast chasms can be filled, but the heart of man never," quoted the pipe-maker in retort. "Oh, most incapable of story-tellers, have you not on two

separate occasions slept beneath my utterly inadequate roof without payment?"

But he, nevertheless, deposited three cash in the bowl, and drew nearer among the front row of the listeners.

"It was during the reign of the enlightened Emperor Tsing Nung," began Kai Lung, without further introduction, "that there lived at a village near Honan a wealthy and avaricious maker of idols, named Ti Hung. So skilful had he become in the making of clay idols that his fame had spread for many li round, and idol-sellers from all the neighbouring villages, and even from the towns, came to him for their stock. No other idol-maker between Honan and Nanking employed so many clay- gatherers or so many modellers; yet, with all his riches, his avarice increased till at length he employed men whom he called 'agents' and 'travellers,' who went from house to house selling his idols and extolling his virtues in verses composed by the most illustrious poets of the day. He did this in order that he might turn into his own pocket the full price of the idols, grudging those who would otherwise have sold them the few cash which they would make. Owing to this he had many enemies, and his army of travellers made him still more; for they were more rapacious than the scorpion, and more obstinate than the ox. Indeed, there is still the proverb, 'With honey it is possible to soften the heart of the he-goat; but a blow from an iron cleaver is taken as a mark of welcome by an agent of Ti Hung.' So that people barred the doors at their approach, and even hung out signs of death and mourning.

"Now, among all his travellers there was none more successful, more abandoned, and more valuable to Ti Hung than Li Ting. So depraved was Li Ting that he was never known to visit the tombs of his ancestors; indeed, it was said that he had been heard to mock their venerable memories, and that he had jestingly offered to sell them to anyone who should chance to be without ancestors of his own. This objectionable person would call at the houses of the most illustrious Mandarins, and would command the slaves to carry to their masters his tablets, on which were inscribed his name and his virtues. Reaching their presence, he would salute them with the greeting of an equal, 'How is your stomach?' and then proceed to exhibit samples of his wares, greatly overrating their value. 'Behold!' he would exclaim, 'is not this elegantly-moulded idol worthy of the place of honour in this sumptuous mansion which my presence defiles to such an extent that twelve basins of rose-water will not remove the stain? Are not its eyes more delicate than the most select of almonds? and is not its stomach rounder than the cupolas upon the high temple at Peking? Yet, in spite of its perfections, it is not worthy of the acceptance of so distinguished a Mandarin, and therefore I will accept in return the quarter-tael, which, indeed, is less than my illustrious master gives for the clay alone.'

"In this manner Li Ting disposed of many idols at high rates, and thereby endeared himself so much to the avaricious heart of Ti Hung that he promised him his beautiful daughter Ning in marriage.

"Ning was indeed very lovely. Her eyelashes were like the finest willow twigs that grow in the marshes by the Yang-tse-Kiang; her cheeks were fairer than poppies; and when she bathed in the Hoang Ho, her body seemed transparent. Her brow was finer than the most polished jade; while she seemed to walk, like a winged bird, without weight, her hair floating in a cloud. Indeed, she was the most beautiful creature that has ever existed."

"Now may you grow thin and shrivel up like a fallen lemon; but it is false!" cried Wang Yu, starting up suddenly and unexpectedly. "At Chee Chou, at the shop of 'The Heaven-sent Sugar-cane,' there lives a beautiful and virtuous girl who is more than all that. Her eyes are like the inside circles on the peacock's feathers; her teeth are finer than the scales on the Sacred Dragon; her—"

"If it is the wish of this illustriously-endowed gathering that this exceedingly illiterate paper tiger should occupy their august moments with a description of the deformities of the very ordinary young person at Chee Chou," said Kai Lung imperturbably, "then the remainder of the history of the noble-minded Yung Chang can remain until an evil fate has overtaken Wang Yu, as it assuredly will shortly."

"A fair wind raises no storm," said Wang Yu sulkily; and Kai Lung continued:

"Such loveliness could not escape the evil eye of Li Ting, and accordingly, as he grew in favour with Ti Hung, he obtained his consent to the drawing up of the marriage contracts. More than this, he had already sent to Ning two bracelets of the finest gold, tied together with a scarlet thread, as a betrothal present. But, as the proverb says, 'The good bee will not touch the faded flower,' and Ning, although compelled by the second of the Five Great Principles to respect her father, was unable to regard the marriage with anything but abhorrence. Perhaps this was not altogether the fault of Li Ting, for on the evening of the day on which she had received his present, she walked in the rice fields, and sitting down at the foot of a funereal cypress, whose highest branches pierced the Middle Air, she cried aloud:

" 'I cannot control my bitterness. Of what use is it that I should be called the "White Pigeon among Golden Lilies," if my beauty is but for the hog-like eyes of the exceedingly objectionable Li Ting? Ah, Yung Chang, my unfortunate lover! what evil spirit pursues you that you cannot pass your examination for the second degree? My noble-minded but ambitious boy, why were you not content with an agricultural or even a manufacturing career and happiness? By aspiring to a literary degree, you have placed a barrier wider than the Whang Hai between us.'

" 'As the earth seems small to the soaring swallow, so shall insuperable obstacles be overcome by the heart worn smooth with a fixed purpose,' said a voice beside her, and Yung Chang stepped from behind the cypress tree, where he had been waiting for Ning. 'O one more symmetrical than the chrysanthemum,' he continued, 'I shall yet, with the aid of my ancestors, pass the second degree, and even obtain a position of high trust in the public office at Peking.'

" 'And in the meantime,' pouted Ning, 'I shall have partaken of the wedding-cake of the utterly unpresentable Li Ting.' And she exhibited the bracelets which she had that day received.

" 'Alas!' said Yung Chang, 'there are times when one is tempted to doubt even the most efficacious and violent means. I had hoped that by this time Li Ting would have come to a sudden and most unseemly end; for I have drawn up and affixed in the most conspicuous places notifications of his character, similar to the one here.'

"Ning turned, and beheld fastened to the trunk of the cypress an exceedingly elegantly written and composed notice, which Yung read to her as follows:

" 'BEWARE OF INCURRING DEATH FROM STARVATION

" 'Let the distinguished inhabitants of this district observe the exceedingly ungraceful walk and bearing of the low person who calls himself Li Ting. Truthfully, it is that of a dog in the act of being dragged to the river because his sores and diseases render him objectionable in the house of his master. So will this hunchbacked person be dragged to the place of execution, and be bowstrung, to the great relief of all who respect the five senses; A Respectful Physiognomy, Passionless Reflexion, Soft Speech, Acute Hearing, Piercing Sight.

" 'He hopes to attain to the Red Button and the Peacock's Feather; but the right hand of the Deity itches, and Li Ting will assuredly be removed suddenly.'

" 'Li Ting must certainly be in league with the evil forces if he can withstand so powerful a weapon,' said Ning admiringly, when her lover had finished reading. 'Even now he is starting on a journey, nor will he return till the first day of the month when the sparrows go to the sea and are changed into oysters. Perhaps the fate will overtake him while he is away. If not—'

" 'If not,' said Yung, taking up her words as she paused, 'then I have yet another hope. A moment ago you were regretting my choice of a literary career. Learn, then, the value of knowledge. By its aid (assisted, indeed, by the spirits of my ancestors) I have discovered a new and strange thing, for which I can find no word. By using this new system of reckoning, your illustrious but exceedingly narrow-minded and miserly father would be able to make five taels where he

now makes one. Would he not, in consideration for this, consent to receive me as a son-in-law, and dismiss the inelegant and unworthy Li Ting?'

" 'In the unlikely event of your being able to convince my illustrious parent of what you say, it would assuredly be so,' replied Ning. 'But in what way could you do so? My sublime and charitable father already employs all the means in his power to reap the full reward of his sacred industry. His "solid house-hold gods" are in reality mere shells of clay; higher-priced images are correspondingly constructed, and his clay gatherers and modellers are all paid on a "profit-sharing system." Nay, further, it is beyond likelihood that he should wish for more purchasers, for so great is his fame that those who come to buy have sometimes to wait for days in consequence of those before them; for my exceedingly methodical sire entrusts none with the receiving of money, and the exchanges are therefore made slowly. Frequently an unnaturally devout person will require as many as a hundred idols, and so the greater part of the day will be passed.'

" 'In what way?' inquired Yung tremulously.

" 'Why, in order that the countings may not get mixed, of course; it is necessary that when he has paid for one idol he should carry it to a place aside, and then return and pay for the second, carrying it to the first, and in such a manner to the end. In this way the sun sinks behind the mountains.'

" 'But,' said Yung, his voice thick with his great discovery, 'if he could pay for the entire quantity at once, then it would take but a hundredth part of the time, and so more idols could be sold.'

" 'How could this be done?' inquired Ning wonderingly. 'Surely it is impossible to conjecture the value of so many idols.'

" 'To the unlearned it would indeed be impossible,' replied Yung proudly, 'but by the aid of my literary researches I have been enabled to discover a process by which such results would be not a matter of conjecture, but of certainty. These figures I have committed to tablets, which I am prepared to give to your mercenary and slow-witted father in return for your incomparable hand, a share of the profits, and the dismissal of the uninventive and morally threadbare Li Ting.'

" 'When the earth-worm boasts of his elegant wings, the eagle can afford to be silent,' said a harsh voice behind them; and turning hastily they beheld Li Ting, who had come upon them unawares. 'Oh, most insignificant of table-spoilers,' he continued, 'it is very evident that much over-study has softened your usually well-educated brains. Were it not that you are obviously mentally afflicted, I should unhesitatingly persuade my beautiful and refined sword to introduce you to the spirits of your ignoble ancestors. As it is, I will merely cut off your nose and your left ear, so that people may not say that the Dragon of the Earth sleeps and wickedness goes unpunished.'

"Both had already drawn their swords, and very soon the blows were so hard and swift that, in the dusk of the evening, it seemed as though the air were filled with innumerable and many-coloured fireworks. Each was a practised swordsman, and there was no advantage gained on either side, when Ning, who had fled on the appearance of Li Ting, reappeared, urging on her father, whose usually leisurely footsteps were quickened by the dread that the duel must surely result in certain loss to himself, either of a valuable servant, or of the discovery which Ning had briefly explained to him, and of which he at once saw the value.

" 'Oh, most distinguished and expert persons,' he exclaimed breathlessly, as soon as he was within hearing distance, 'do not trouble to give so marvellous an exhibition for the benefit of this unworthy individual, who is the only observer of your illustrious dexterity! Indeed, your honourable condescension so fills this illiterate person with shame that his hearing is thereby preternaturally sharpened, and he can plainly distinguish many voices from beyond the Hoang Ho, crying for the Heaven-sent representative of the degraded Ti Hung to bring them more idols. Bend, therefore, your refined footsteps in the direction of Poo Chow, O Li Ting, and leave me to make myself objectionable to this exceptional young man with my intolerable commonplaces.'

" 'The shadow falls in such a direction as the sun wills,' said Li Ting, as he replaced his sword and departed.

" 'Yung Chang,' said the merchant, 'I am informed that you have made a discovery that would be of great value to me, as it undoubtedly would if it is all that you say. Let us discuss the matter without ceremony. Can you prove to me that your system possesses the merit you claim for it? If so, then the matter of arrangement will be easy.'

" 'I am convinced of the absolute certainty and accuracy of the discovery,' replied Yung Chang. 'It is not as though it were an ordinary matter of human intelligence, for this was discovered to me as I was worshipping at the tomb of my ancestors. The method is regulated by a system of squares, triangles, and cubes. But as the practical proof might be long, and as I hesitate to keep your adorable daughter out in the damp night air, may I not call at your inimitable dwelling in the morning, when we can go into the matter thoroughly?'

"I will not weary this intelligent gathering, each member of which doubtless knows all the books on mathematics off by heart, with a recital of the means by which Yung Chang proved to Ti Hung the accuracy of his tables and the value of his discovery of the multiplication table, which till then had been undreamt of," continued the story-teller. "It is sufficient to know that he did so, and that Ti Hung agreed to his terms, only stipulating that Li Ting should not be made aware of his dismissal until he had returned and given in his accounts. The share of the profits that Yung was to receive was cut down very low by Ti Hung, but the

young man did not mind that, as he would live with his father-in-law for the future.

"With the introduction of this new system, the business increased like a river at flood-time. All rivals were left far behind, and Ti Hung put out this sign:

"NO WAITING HERE!

"Good-morning! Have you worshipped one of Ti Hung's refined ninety-nine cash idols?

"Let the purchasers of ill-constructed idols at other establishments, where they have grown old and venerable while waiting for the all-thumb proprietors to count up to ten, come to the shop of Ti Hung and regain their lost youth. Our ninety-nine cash idols are worth a tael a set. We do not, however, claim that they will do everything. The ninety-nine cash idols of Ti Hung will not, for example, purify linen, but even the most contented and frozen-brained person cannot be happy until he possesses one. What is happiness? The exceedingly well-educated Philosopher defines it as the accomplishment of all our desires. Everyone desires one of the Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash idols, therefore get one; but be sure that it is Ti Hung's.

"Have you a bad idol? If so, dismiss it, and get one of Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash specimens.

"Why does your idol look old sooner than your neighbour's? Because yours is not one of Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash marvels.

"They bring all delights to the old and the young, The elegant idols supplied by Ti Hung.

"N.B.—The 'Great Sacrifice' idol, forty-five cash; delivered, carriage free, in quantities of not less than twelve, at any temple, on the evening before the sacrifice.

"It was about this time that Li Ting returned. His journey had been more than usually successful, and he was well satisfied in consequence. It was not until he had made out his accounts and handed in his money that Ti Hung informed him of his agreement with Yung Chang.

" 'Oh, most treacherous and excessively unpopular Ti Hung,' exclaimed Li Ting, in a terrible voice, 'this is the return you make for all my entrancing efforts in your services, then? It is in this way that you reward my exceedingly unconscientious recommendations of your very inferior and unendurable clay idols, with their goggle eyes and concave stomachs! Before I go, however, I request to be inspired to make the following remark—that I confidently predict your ruin. And now this low and undignified person will finally shake the elegant

dust of your distinguished house from his thoroughly inadequate feet, and proceed to offer his incapable services to the rival establishment over the way.'

" 'The machinations of such an evilly-disposed person as Li Ting will certainly be exceedingly subtle,' said Ti Hung to his son-in-law when the traveller had departed. 'I must counteract his omens. Herewith I wish to prophecy that henceforth I shall enjoy an unbroken run of good fortune. I have spoken, and assuredly I shall not eat my words.'

"As the time went on, it seemed as though Ti Hung had indeed spoken truly. The ease and celerity with which he transacted his business brought him customers and dealers from more remote regions than ever, for they could spend days on the journey and still save time. The army of clay-gatherers and modellers grew larger and larger, and the work- sheds stretched almost down to the river's edge. Only one thing troubled Ti Hung, and that was the uncongenial disposition of his son- in-law, for Yung took no further interest in the industry to which his discovery had given so great an impetus, but resolutely set to work again to pass his examination for the second degree.

" 'It is an exceedingly distinguished and honourable thing to have failed thirty-five times, and still to be undiscouraged,' admitted Ti Hung; 'but I cannot cleanse my throat from bitterness when I consider that my noble and lucrative business must pass into the hands of strangers, perhaps even into the possession of the unendurable Li Ting.'

"But it had been appointed that this degrading thing should not happen, however, and it was indeed fortunate that Yung did not abandon his literary pursuits; for after some time it became very apparent to Ti Hung that there was something radically wrong with his business. It was not that his custom was falling off in any way; indeed, it had lately increased in a manner that was phenomenal, and when the merchant came to look into the matter, he found to his astonishment that the least order he had received in the past week had been for a hundred idols. All the sales had been large, and yet Ti Hung found himself most unaccountably deficient in taels. He was puzzled and alarmed, and for the next few days he looked into the business closely. Then it was that the reason was revealed, both for the falling off in the receipts and for the increase in the orders. The calculations of the unfortunate Yung Chang were correct up to a hundred, but at that number he had made a gigantic error—which, however, he was never able to detect and rectify—with the result that all transactions above that point worked out at a considerable loss to the seller. It was in vain that the panic-stricken Ti Hung goaded his miserable son-in-law to correct the mistake; it was equally in vain that he tried to stem the current of his enormous commercial popularity. He had competed for public favour, and he had won it, and every day his business increased till ruin grasped him by the pigtail. Then

came an order from one firm at Peking for five millions of the ninety-nine cash idols, and at that Ti Hung put up his shutters, and sat down in the dust.

" 'Behold!' he exclaimed, 'in the course of a lifetime there are many very disagreeable evils that may overtake a person. He may offend the Sacred Dragon, and be in consequence reduced to a fine dry powder; or he may incur the displeasure of the benevolent and pure-minded Emperor, and be condemned to death by roasting; he may also be troubled by demons or by the disturbed spirits of his ancestors, or be struck by thunderbolts. Indeed, there are numerous annoyances, but they become as Heaven-sent blessings in comparison to a self- opinionated and more than ordinarily weak-minded son-in-law. Of what avail is it that I have habitually sold one idol for the value of a hundred? The very objectionable man in possession sits in my delectable summer-house, and the unavoidable legal documents settle around me like a flock of pigeons. It is indeed necessary that I should declare myself to be in voluntary liquidation, and make an assignment of my book debts for the benefit of my creditors. Having accomplished this, I will proceed to the well-constructed tomb of my illustrious ancestors, and having kow-towed at their incomparable shrines, I will put an end to my distinguished troubles with this exceedingly well-polished sword.'

" 'The wise man can adapt himself to circumstances as water takes the shape of the vase that contains it,' said the well-known voice of Li Ting. 'Let not the lion and the tiger fight at the bidding of the jackal. By combining our forces all may be well with you yet. Assist me to dispose of the entirely superfluous Yung Chang and to marry the elegant and symmetrical Ning, and in return I will allot to you a portion of my not inconsiderable income.'

" 'However high the tree, the leaves fall to the ground, and your hour has come at last, O detestable Li Ting!' said Yung, who had heard the speakers and crept upon them unperceived. 'As for my distinguished and immaculate father-in-law, doubtless the heat has affected his indefatigable brains, or he would not have listened to your contemptible suggestion. For yourself, draw!'

"Both swords flashed, but before a blow could be struck the spirits of his ancestors hurled Li Ting lifeless to the ground, to avenge the memories that their unworthy descendant had so often reviled.

" 'So perish all the enemies of Yung Chang,' said the victor. 'And now, my venerated but exceedingly short-sighted father-in-law, learn how narrowly you have escaped making yourself exceedingly objectionable to yourself. I have just received intelligence from Peking that I have passed the second degree, and have in consequence been appointed to a remunerative position under the Government. This will enable us to live in comfort, if not in affluence, and the rest of your engaging days can be peacefully spent in flying kites.'"

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10: The Second Generation

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Westminster Gazette, 6 July 1912

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SOMETIMES, in a moment of sharp experience, comes that vivid flash of insight that makes a platitude suddenly seem a revelation: its full content is abruptly realised. "Ten years *is* a long time, yes," he thought, as he walked up the drive to the great Kensington house where she still lived.

Ten years— long enough, at any rate, for her to have married and for her husband to have died. More than that he had not heard, in the outlandish places where life had cast him in the interval. He wondered whether there had been any children. All manner of thoughts and questions, confused a little, passed across his mind. He was well-to-do now, though probably his entire capital did not amount to her income for a single year. He glanced at the huge, forbidding mansion. Yet that pride was false which had made of poverty an insuperable obstacle. He saw it now. He had learned values in his long exile.

But he was still ridiculously timid. This confusion of thought, of mental images rather, was due to a kind of fear, since worship ever is akin to awe. He was as nervous as a boy going up for a *viva voce*; and with the excitement was also that unconquerable sinking— that horrid shrinking sensation that excessive shyness brings. Why in the world had he come? Why had he telegraphed the very day after his arrival in England? Why had he not sent a tentative, tactful letter, feeling his way a little?

Very slowly he walked up the drive, feeling that if a reasonable chance of escape presented itself he would almost take it. But all the windows stared so hard at him that retreat was really impossible now; and though no faces were visible behind the curtains, all had seen him. Possibly she herself— his heart beat absurdly at the extravagant suggestion. Yet it was odd; he felt so certain of being seen, and that someone watched him. He reached the wide stone steps that were clean as marble, and shrank from the mark his boots must make upon their spotlessness. In desperation, then, before he could change his mind, he touched the bell. But he did not hear it ring— mercifully; that irrevocable sound must have paralysed him altogether. If no one came to answer, he might still leave a card in the letterbox and slip away. Oh, how utterly he despised himself for such a thought! A man of thirty with such a chicken heart was not fit to protect a child, much less a woman. And he recalled with a little stab of pain that the man she married had been noted for his courage, his determined action, his inflexible firmness in various public situations, head and shoulders above lesser men. What presumption on his own part ever to dream…! He

remembered, too, with no apparent reason in particular, that this man had a grown-up son already, by a former marriage.

And still no one came to open that huge, contemptuous door with its so menacing, so hostile air. His back was to it, as he carelessly twirled his umbrella, but he "felt" its sneering expression behind him while it looked him up and down. It seemed to push him away. The entire mansion focused its message through that stern portal: Little timid men are not welcomed here.

How well he remembered the house! How often in years gone by had he not stood and waited just like this, trembling with delight and anticipation, yet terrified lest the bell should be answered and the great door actually swung wide! Then, as now, he would have run, had he dared. He was still afraid; his worship was so deep. But in all these years of exile in wild places, farming, mining, working for the position he had at last attained, her face and the memory of her gracious presence had been his comfort and support, his only consolation, though never his actual joy. There was so little foundation for it all, yet her smile, and the words she had spoken to him from time to time in friendly conversation, had clung, inspired, kept him going. For he knew them all by heart. And, more than once, in foolish optimistic moods, he had imagined, greatly daring, that she possibly had meant more….

He touched the bell a second time— with the point of his umbrella. He meant to go in, carelessly as it were, saying as lightly as might be, "Oh, I'm back in England again— if you haven't *quite* forgotten my existence— I could not forego the pleasure of saying how do you do, and hearing that you are well…," and the rest; then presently bow himself easily out— into the old loneliness again. But he would at least have seen her; he would have heard her voice, and looked into her gentle, amber eyes; he would have touched her hand. She might even ask him to come in another day and see her! He had rehearsed it all a hundred times, as certain feeble temperaments do rehearse such scenes. And he came rather well out of that rehearsal, though always with an aching heart, the old great yearnings unfulfilled. All the way across the Atlantic he had thought about it, though with lessening confidence as the time drew near. The very night of his arrival in London, he wrote; then, tearing up the letter (after sleeping over it), he had telegraphed next morning, asking if she would be in. He signed his surname— such a very common name, alas but surely she would know— and her reply, "Please call 4.30," struck him as oddly worded— rather…. Yet here he was.

There was a rattle of the big door knob, that aggressive, hostile knob that thrust out at him insolently like a fist of bronze. He started, angry with himself for doing so. But the door did not open. He became suddenly conscious of the wilds he had lived in for so long; his clothes were hardly fashionable; his voice probably had a twang in it, and he used tricks of speech that must betray the

rough life so recently left. What would she think of him— now? He looked much older, too. And how brusque it was to have telegraphed like that! He felt awkward, gauche, tongue-tied, hot and cold by turns. The sentences, so carefully rehearsed, fled beyond recovery.

Good heavens— the door was open! It had been open for some minutes. It moved on big hinges noiselessly. He acted automatically— just like an automaton; he heard himself asking if her ladyship was at home, though his voice was nearly inaudible. The next moment he was standing in the great, dim hall, so poignantly familiar, and the remembered perfume almost made him sway. He did not hear the door close, but he knew. He was caught. The butler betrayed an instant's surprise— or was it overwrought imagination again?— when he gave his name. It seemed to him, though only later did he grasp the significance of that curious intuition— that the man had expected another caller instead. The man took his card respectfully, and disappeared. These flunkeys, of course, were so marvellously trained. He was too long accustomed to straight question and straight answer; but here, in the Old Country, privacy was jealously guarded with such careful ritual.

And, almost immediately, the butler returned with his expressionless face again, and showed him into the large drawing-room on the ground floor that he knew so well. Tea was on the table— tea for one. He felt puzzled. "If you will have tea first, sir, her ladyship will see you afterwards," was what he heard. And though his breath came thickly, he asked the question that forced itself up and out. Before he knew what he was saying, he asked it: "Is she ill?" Oh no, her ladyship was "quite well, thank you, sir. If you will have tea first, sir, her ladyship will see you afterwards." The horrid formula was repeated, word for word. He sank into an armchair and mechanically poured out his own tea. What he felt he did not exactly know. It seemed so unusual, so utterly unexpected, so unnecessary, too. Was it a special attention, or was it merely casual? That it could mean anything else did not occur to him. How was she busy, occupied— not here to give him tea? He could not understand it. It seemed such a farce, having tea alone like this; it was like waiting for an audience; it was like a doctor's or a dentist's room. He felt bewildered, ill at ease, cheap…. But after ten years in primitive lands… perhaps London usages had changed in some extraordinary manner. He recalled his first amazement at the omnibuses, taxicabs, and electric tubes. All were new. London was otherwise than when he left it. Piccadilly and the Marble Arch themselves had altered. And, with his reflection, a shade more confidence stole in. She knew that he was there; and presently she would come in and speak with him, explaining everything by the mere fact of her delicious presence. He was ready for the ordeal; he would see her— and drop out again. It was worth all manner of pain, even of mortification. He was in her house, drinking her tea, sitting in a chair she even perhaps used

herself. Only— he would never dare to say a word, or make a sign that might betray his changeless secret. He still felt the boyish worshipper, worshipping in dumbness from a distance, one of a group of many others like himself. Their dreams had faded, his had continued, that was the difference. Memories tore and raced and poured upon him. How sweet and gentle she had always been to him! He used to wonder sometimes…. Once, he remembered, he had rehearsed a declaration— but, while rehearsing, the big man had come in and captured her, though he had only read the definite news long after by chance in the Arizona paper….

He gulped his tea down. His heart alternately leaped and stood still. A sort of numbness held him most of that dreadful interval, and no clear thought came at all. Every ten seconds his head turned towards the door that rattled, seemed to move, yet never opened. But any moment now it *must* open, and he would be in her very presence, breathing the same air with her. He would see her, charge himself with her beauty once more to the brim, and then go out again into the wilderness— the wilderness of life— without her— and not for a mere ten years, but for always. She was so utterly beyond his reach. He felt like a backwoodsman. He was a backwoodsman.

For one thing only was he duly prepared— though he thought about it little enough: she would, of course, have changed. The photograph he owned, cut from an illustrated paper, was not true now. It might even be a little shock perhaps. He must remember that. Ten years cannot pass over a woman without—

Before he knew it, then, the door was open, and she was advancing quietly towards him across the thick carpet that deadened sound. With both hands outstretched she came, and with the sweetest welcoming smile upon her parted lips he had seen in any human face. Her eyes were soft with joy. His whole heart leaped within him; for the instant he saw her it all flashed clear as sunlight— that she knew and understood. His being melted in the utter bliss of it; shyness vanished. She had always known, had always understood. Speech came easily to him in a flood, had he needed it. But he did not need it. It was all so adorably easy, simple, natural, and true. He just took her hands— those welcoming, outstretched hands in both his own, and led her to the nearest sofa. He was not even surprised at himself. Inevitable, out of depths of truth, this meeting came about. And he uttered a little, foolish commonplace, because he feared the huge revulsion that his sudden glory brought, and loved to taste it slowly:

"So you live here still?"

"Here, and here," she answered softly, touching his heart, and then her own. "I am attached to this house, too, because *you* used to come and see me here, and because it was here I waited so long for you, and still wait. I shall never leave it— unless you change. You see, we live together here."

He said nothing. He leaned forward to take and hold her. The abrupt knowledge of it all somehow did not seem abrupt— as though he had known it always; and the complete disclosure did not seem disclosure either— rather as though she told him something he had inexplicably left unrealised, yet not forgotten. He felt absolutely master of himself, yet, in a curious sense, outside of himself at the same time. His arms were already open— when she gently held her hands up to prevent. He heard a faint sound outside the door.

"But you are free," he cried, his great passion breaking out and flooding him, yet most oddly well controlled, "and I—"

She interrupted him in the softest, quietest whisper he had ever heard: "You are not free, as I am free— not yet."

The sound outside came suddenly closer. It was a step. There was a faint click on the handle of the door. In a flash, then, came the dreadful shock that overwhelmed him— the abrupt realisation of the truth that was somehow horrible: that Time, all these years, had left no mark upon her, and that *she had not changed*. Her face was young as when he saw her last.

With it there came cold and darkness into the great room that turned it instantly otherwise. He shivered with cold, but an alien, unaccountable cold. Some great shadow dropped upon the entire earth. And though but a second could have passed before the handle actually turned, and the other person entered, it seemed to him like several minutes. He heard her saying this amazing thing that was question, answer, and forgiveness all in one. This, at least, he divined before the ghastly interruption came:

"But, George— if you had only spoken—!"

With ice in his blood, he heard the butler saying that her ladyship would be "pleased" to see him now if he had finished his tea and would he be "so good as to bring the papers and documents upstairs with him." He had just sufficient control of certain muscles to stand upright and murmur that he would come. He rose from a sofa that held no one but himself. But, all at once, he staggered. He really did not know exactly then what happened, or how he managed to stammer out the medley of excuses and semi-explanations that battered their way through his brain and issued somehow in definite words from his lips. Somehow or other he accomplished it. The sudden attack, the faintness, the collapse!… He vaguely remembered afterwards— with amazement, too— the suavity of the butler, as he suggested telephoning for a doctor, and that he just managed to forbid it, refusing the offered glass of brandy as well, and that he contrived to stumble into the taxicab and give his hotel address, with a final explanation that he would call another day and "bring the papers." It was quite clear that his telegram had been attributed to someone else— someone "with papers"— perhaps a solicitor or architect. His name was such an ordinary one.

There were so many Smiths. It was also clear that she he had come to see, and *had* seen, no longer lived here— in the flesh….

And, just as he left the hall, he had the vision— mere fleeting glimpse it was— of a tall, slim, girlish figure on the stairs asking if anything was wrong, and realised vaguely through his atrocious pain that she was, of course, the wife of the son who had inherited….

———————

11: Mrs. Edward Ellerker's Diamonds

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 6 June 1912

HIS NAME was Thaddeus Tittmarch, or Tittmouse, or something equally un-Irish, but he was known professionally as Titt. The reason the prefix will be plain enough before we have done with him. As for Thaddeus, the victim complained: "I dunno why me parents dun it. 'Twas a dirty trick t' play on a bit uv a kid widout stick or stone t' purtect himself at all. 'T has bin a great dthrawback troo life. If 'twasn't fer the Thaddeus a man might iv bin wan o' thim Prime Ministers, or a pole hexplorer, or maybe aven a sargint iv police, God will in'. But did ve iver hear iv a Thaddeus doin' anythin' fer himself? Ye didn't, an' ut's all be raysin iv the name tacked to him."

Tell-tale Titt when we knew him was attached to the studio of a successful black-and-white artist as model, philosopher, and handyman. What he had been before he may be left to explain.

Titt was something over fifty, a fine, useful figure of a man in a studio, garrulous, drunken, a most delightful liar, a better cook, a fine bachelor's housekeeper, nine-and-ninety kinds of a blackguard, scrupulous in nothing but cleanliness, but a faddist in that.

"While I trow you this attichude," said Tell-Tale Till, " 'twill be the comfort t' revale to you a bit iv a curious doin' what happened t' me wan night whin I was a braver man than I am, and a smarter.

"Thim times Thadd. was niver short fer long. What he hadn't he took, which same is the way iv 'business all the worrld over, on'y that Thadd. took his wantin's straightforward an' manly, wid a mask to his face an' a bit iv stick to his fisht, whoile thim business sharps do ut undtherhand an' mane, trickm' yeh wid a slimile an' a whimper. Divil fly away wid them!

"Well, it so happdned I was mighty short all iv a suddint, me bit iv savin's all havin' gone in foolishness wid the darlinest, black-eyed, gowlden-haired gur-rl whativer mixed up her complexion conthrairy an' perverse— the fiend snatch her! But that ain't me prisint story

"Hill, but this July— is Caesar attichude is thryin' t' the shpinal marrer! Wad ye aise me back wid a shlight bind t' the aist, Mister Norton?

"Bein' so short that I cudn't reach a pint iv bitter beer, which is ridiclus fer a man iv me inches, I gets t' work considerin' the exits an' the enthrances iv a nice, upstandin' house iv red brick wid ladders adjacent be teason of the painthers bein' on the job slappin' a beautiful new elephant's breath tied to it.

"I had some acquaintance wid said house an' lands, a for-rmer gyrl iv me, own havin' ministhered to the wants iv the fam'ly in the incapacity iv maid-in-waitin', 'r something equally illegant in a white hat the size iv a thripny.

"In this way it come to me ears that the misthress have as nice a little wad iv diamines fer chest wear as iver stirred invy in the hear-rt iv a woman, 'r fired a man, sufferin' wid a bad attack iv impecuniosity, t' deeds of darin' an' schames iv great enginuity an' skill.

"I am also well-informed iv the location iv the fam'ly jool's, an' the nature an' 'abits iv the matt married into said fam'ly, himsilf bein' a sport, an' ez bright a boy ez'ever put his head inside a hat, Ellerker be name.

"This Misther Edward Ellerker was a good-lookin' bla'guard, wid a sunny shmile, an' always a high light on aich cheek, an' a silkie bell-topper to him. His wife wasn't so young as she uster was, not anythin' too lovely t' live, bein' given t' dissipation in warts wid goatees to 'em, which same is unseemly an' precocious in woman. Maybe the sex is comin' by whiskers in joo time, 'cordin' t' thim perfessors an' learned men, but meanwhile the lady wid hair on her chin, chin, chin is presumptchus an' rude. Annyhow, thim's the sentiments iv Thadd.

"Prim information received I gather that Edward Ellerker did what manny a fine lad done before, him, married fer beans, an' nivir received delivery iv the goods. 'Tis wan thing t' marry fer money, an' another horse altogether t' get what yeh married fer. Mrs. Ellerker was the financhill partner, ah' the party in char-rge iv the bulk sum, likewise the petty cash, an' she was the one t' sit on the money box wid a firrm hand. When Eddie wants a few pence t' back a hot; favrit et six t' four on Annie hits him wid a cold scowl, an' reminds him in a harrd, gratin' voice that the Oof is hers, t' have an' t' hold, tellin' him iitl the pleasin' langwidge peculiar to the married, that if he wants money t' dissipate he better get out after it with a pick.

"This naturally hurts ftddie, an' there's a nice, amyibble, fam'ly dust-up, with talk from the *Home Illocutionist* an' *Polite Phrases Per the Domestic Hearth*, which me gurrl hears be reason of her ear gettin' fast t' the keyhole an' refusin' t' come unglued.

" 'Tis well t' know the kind iv fam'ly yer goin' t' call on. A man don't want t' go mixin' 'himself up wid anny old sort, an' when I entered the house of Misther and Missus Edward Ellerker inofficial somethin' afther two one windy mornin', I was well acquaint wid the geography iv the house an' the characters, ways and temperamints iv the occupants.

"I didn't waste time on formalities at all, 'twas never me way. Me business was with a certain black bureau in the boodwar iv Mrs. Edward, an' I got to it widout preamhulations 'r beggin' yer pardon.

" 'Twould have been an aisy enough job on'y 'twas necessary t' make it a quiet wan, fer there beyond a bunch iv curtins was Mrs. Edward sleepin' the

sleep iv the just, wid th' wind blowin' troo her whiskers. A little too much racket in smashin' the bureau, an' yer uncle would have t' dale wid a hefty woman of oncertain timper an' great physical disproportions, not t' mention thim whiskers anny more.

"I was gettin' along nicely when me jemmy slipped, an' bashed in the bingie iv a quare old pot god frim the Far East, what was squattin' near handy, overlooldn' the job. The Asiatic made a divil iv a welter over his breakin', an' u.p t' heaven an' a'jacent places goes the wild squeal of Mrs. Edward Ellerker, first cousin t' Belial, an' connect in a direct line wid Reelzebub an' the Hairv Witch of Donegal on her mother's side.

"Natural, yer friend Thadd is on his feet in two secs, lookin' fer loopholes, himself not bein' one givin' t' hittin' a woman widout doo provocation, however whiskery. I darts to a door. Up from that direction goes another howl of terror an' dishmay.

"Thadd. doubles, an' gets in touch wid the street by a larrge windy. Nivir, be heavins, fer there below, lookin' up curious in the light av a street lamp, an' sniffin' the air like an anxious buffalo, is Misther Policeman.

"Manewhile, Mrs. Eddie is buckin' on her bed in a kind iv hysteric fit, complicated wid whiskers, an' bellerin' wid cow-like ferocity. What's Thadd. t' do? He butts fer another door. It's locked. He begins t' have the feelin's iv a- cat in a fit, an' in another minute he'll be runnin' dilly up the walls an' tryin' t' walk horizantal.

"Then sudden an' silent that locked door opens, an' poor Thadd. is confronted wid Mr. Edward Ellerker. Eddie is wearin' his pink silk pyjamas, an' an expression iv natural surprise. —

" 'Hello!' sez he, soft an' low.

" 'Hello-o !' sez I, swingin' me jemmy.

"But he ducks it, an' puts a Japanese come-ither on me fist that makes me taste poignant anguish.

" 'Not that, yeh darned fool,' sez he. 'Here.' He springs to the bureau. Two twists an' a wrench an' he has half the side out of it. He grabs a bunch of jools out of a pretty box, all diamints, an' shoves 'em on me.

"Cud yeh drame iv a situation fuller iv surprise an' consternation tinctured wild doubt ? Yeh cudn't. I'm shtandin' like somethin' foolish iv the hen-tribe, stuffed wid wonder, holdin' me left fist full iv diamints, an' Edward's standin' forenist me.

" 'Wake up, blighter!' he snorts. Get a shift down the flieht. First,' he sez, 'land me one.' He holds his dim out to me like an infant beggin' kisses.

"It was too much. 'D'yeh mean it?' sez I.

" 'I want it, an' I want it harrd,' sez he.

" 'Are yeh mad or loonatick ?' sez I.

" 'Tain't yer business. Hit and get,' he answers.

"Then I hit Edward jist where his lady's whiskers was thickest, an' down he wint all in pretty pink heap iv huddle on the flure.

"If yi'll bilave me, Thadd waited fer no more; he dived troo the dure, he shot the shute down thim stairs, took the back way out, waltzed over a dividin' fence, ducked an' manoeuvred, an' got home later, wid diamints in his pocket worth 'twixt an' between two thousand quid.

"Me lavin' was accelerated be the conduct ot that curyit po-liceman who, Havin' his latent suspicion aroused be the hoarse cries iv Mrs. Edward, was batterin' like thunder at the Ellerker front dure, imaginin' afther the manner iv po-licemen what's thoroughly trained t' their juties, that the burglar or burglars raysonably suposed t' be risponsible fer the racket inside would come down prisintly, polite an' kind, an unlock the primises fer him.

"I saw all about it in the avenin' paper, how Mrs. Ellerker's house had been bruck into, an' her beautiful bureau all smashed to flinders, an' her lovely diamints, valued et two thousand, pounds, stolen away. There was further remarks concernin' Misther Edward Ellerker's heroic dalin's wid the gang, how bravely he had grappled wid the miscreants till rendered insensible wid a crooel blow on the jaw. The newspaper, t' settle all doubts declared that the burglars got clear awav wid the shpoil.

"Fer hours an' hours I'd bin sittin' down hard, thinkin' iv Mr. Edward. What did he mean be it? The more I thought the less I knew. There was the diamints all right. The paper called 'em shpoil, but niver a wan was shpoiled.

"What was Eddie's game? It bate me clane through, but there was somethin' in the nature iv a hauntin' suspicion that me notole knew more of your Thadd than was good 'n' comfortable, 'n' would prisintly chip in wid an affable claim for 50 percent iv the loot.

"I waited days in a shtate iv great dubiosity, but no Edward came, so agin me doubts begun to assail me. I got narvis. 'Twasn't natural fer a man t' be givin' away diamints with both hands. Then like a whipe wid a shtick it come to me. This was Eddie's revenge, this was how he med it up to Annie fer the unwifely treatment she doled out to the head iv the house.

"Afther that Thadd was aisy in his mind. The po-lice was chasin' a total stranger away in Sydney, 'n' niver the ghost iv a suspicion breathed the way I went.

"When the time was ripe I takes a stone 'r' two, 'n' makes inquiries in the right direction, wid the result that I presently had of urgent 'n' imperative business wid Edward Ellerker, Esq at his office in town.

"See me marchin' in on Edward where he sat comfortably eatin' the fat end of a black ceegar, 'n' lookin' over the sportin' column of his fav'rit daily, easy, airy, 'n' well disposed to all men.

" ' 'Ello !' sez he.

" 'Hell-o again,' I sez, ' 'n' I see veh know e.'

" 'I do, Mike,' sez he, ' 'n' that was a fine, fat punch you dealt me.'

" 'Twould have been a finer 'n' a fatter, me man, if I'd knowed then what I know now.'

" 'Tis live and learn, Pat,' sez he.

" 'True for yeh, Edward, 'n' so I've come to larn what you'll be givin' me not to send them diamints back to Mrs. Ellerker.'

"I won't give you a cent, Tim," he sez, sweetly. 'But don't let that cause any ill-feelin' between us.'

"I thought you'd think it Worthy twintv at least not t' have them diamints sent back.'

" 'Your calculations are all out a mile, Pat.'

" 'Say fifteen, p'raps.'

" 'This is my busy day. See here, suppose you send the stuff back, will she believe the stolen stones wete returned? Not on your life, Michael. I'm on velvet. Make any sort of noise at all, my bdy, and you're potted for ten. That's a cert.'

"He was right. 'What the devil's a man to do wid 'em?' sez I.

"He seemed a bit sorry for me. 'The gold mounting is good,' sez he; 'boil it down, make what you can out of it. Here, I'm flush this mornin'; hook this fiver, and pass out of me life!'

"Thadd hooked the five 'n' passed. The facts was these: the noble Edward, lovin' husband iv Annie aforesaid, had at some time disposed of his wife's beautiful diamints on his little alone, then he'd bin persecuted wid twinges iv remorse 'n' qualms iv conscience, fearin' the wife iv his boosom would tumble t' how he'd rung the changes on her.

"That's why he was pleased t' meet me when illegally on his premises. That's why he was so joyous 'n' jublent in shovin' the family jools into my arms 'n showin' me the quick way out. The stuff I got was all paste."

12: A Bit of a Banshee

Tod Robbins

Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949
"*Forum*", Dec 1924
In: *Who Wants a Green Bottle?*
and Other Uneasy Tales, 1926

SHAEMAS O'SHEA was walking along Mulberry Lane. He carried a hat— but not on his head. It was tucked away beneath his arm; and his crop of crisp black curls bobbed this way and that in the mad March breeze. The sullen sun painted his shadow on the sidewalk behind him. Long and thin and black it was, with a droop of the head to the left which bespoke either deep thought or strong drink.

"Well, here I am," young Shaemas was thinking, "clear out of Ireland and all, on a crooked street with the sun being murdered in front of me by the bloody look of the sky, and with never an adventure to lay hand to."

Now it wasn't more than a stride further down Mulberry Lane he'd got, before an adventure pops out of a lopsided house and grabs him by the bony elbow. And like all adventures that happen to young poets, this one was a girl— only prettier than most, plump as a partridge, with eyes as ornamental as they were useful, which says more for them than ever Shaemas O'Shea said afterwards in spite of the beautiful words the man had on the tip of his gen for a penny apiece.

"You're a poet?" she cried, holding fast to him like she was afraid he might bolt.

"I am," he answers without mincing the matter. "And pleased to serve you," says he with a low bow, "any hour of the day or night."

"Then come along inside," she says. "Mother's waiting."

"Waitin for whom?" he asks, puzzled.

"Why, for you first; and for death afterwards," she replies, dragging him up the stoop by the arm. "Would you be cooling your heels down here when there's a dying woman beckoning to you?"

Well, as Shaemas O'Shea has since told me, his head was in such a whirl from the dark beauty of the lass and the strange tongue of her, that she could have led him straight into the red hot belly of Hell and never a whimper out of him. Was she not an adventure— and a damned pretty one at that— and was he not a poet, as mad as most, with a soft spot in his heart and his head for the likes of her?

So Shaemas O'Shea didn't hold back at all— just followed her lead, up the crumbling stoop of the lopsided house and into a hall as black as a cellar. Pretty soon they came to a door with a flicker of candlelight stealing out through the crack of it.

"Mother," she calls, "I've found my young man."

"Bring him in," says a voice as mournful as the wind wailing through a keyhole. "Bring him in, dearie. There's not much light left in my eyes nor breath in my lungs."

So the girl leads Shaemas O'Shea in by the hand. And there are lighted candles standing on the mantlepiece which show him a little brown mummy of a woman lying in the middle of a big four-poster bed. There are more hairs on her chin than on the top of her head; her eyes are like dying coals in the fireplace; and there are so many deep wrinkles in the wizened face of her that when she opens her mouth to speak it gives him a start, he having guessed that it lay lower.

At the first glance Shaemas sees only her; but now a big, round-bellied priest rises up from the floor where he's been telling his beads, and makes the sign of the cross like he's in dead earnest about it. Trembling all over he is, like a holy man made out of jelly; and he has such a grip on his crucifix that the knuckle-bones in his hands stand out as white as water-washed pebbles.

"Come over to the bed, young man," the old woman croaks, beckoning to Shaemas O'Shea with a skinny forefinger. "You're in time for the wedding."

"And who'll be getting married?" he asks, innocent like, stepping up to her.

"Listen to the gay young spalpeen!" the old woman cried with a twitch of a smile thrown at the priest. "And him a poet, with an imagination and all! Sure, my dear young man, who would be getting married but just you and my daughter, Bridget?"

"But I wasn't thinking of getting married, Mam," says Shaemas O'Shea, knocked all of a heap like.

"Sure, and you wouldn't," she agrees, smooth as syrup. "And what man would be getting married who had given a thought to it first? Father Flynn, are you ready to make them man and wife?"

"I am, Widow Malone," says the priest, hoarse as a crow.

"But I'm not ready," Shaemas O'Shea cried out. "Why, I've never been properly introduced to your daughter."

"Marriage will take care of that," she replies. "Sure, 'tis the only way for a girl and boy to be knowing each other! Introduced, is it? Faith, you'd think that this lad was the Prince of Wales— bad cess to him!— and not a hobble-de-hoy, hayrick poet with more words than praties in his belly!"

"But how did you know I was a poet?" Shaemas O'Shea asks to gain time. '

"Never you trouble your poor head over that, my lad," she says, real motherly. "You're a poet, right enough— both by the look and the smell of you— and all you're needing is a bit of a wife to steady you. Didn't I see you coming two blocks away; and, me being at death's door with a great sickness, didn't I say to Bridget here: 'There's a husband for you, walking down Mulberry

Lane; so just you go out and catch the lad, dearie, and be bringing him in to me.'"

"But my head's spinning around," says poor Shaemas O'Shea. "How could you be telling that I was coming down Mulberry Lane— you a dying woman, tied to your bed by mortal sickness?"

"That's no great matter," she says, rather proud. "If you must know, 'tis just a touch of second-sight I inherited from my grandmother who was burned for a witch in the old country."

"If it's the gospel truth you're speaking," says Shaemas O'Shea, shaking his head, "Why, then this same second-sight should have told you that there's nothing at all in my pockets but holes. A poet makes a poor husband, if reports of the breed are

true; and a poor poet is like a millstone 'round a pretty girl's neck, and her fallen into the ocean."

"Maybe you're right," replies Widow Malone. "But I've just set my heart on seeing Bridget married and settled down before I'm laid at rest. And there are only two kinds of men would be appreciating my daughter's peculiar gift— an undertaker and a poet. As for myself, being o d and sensible-minded, I favored an undertaker; but Bridget would have none of him."

"I can see your point, Mam," says Shaemas O'Shea, still hopeful. "There's your funeral to be thought of— the expense of having to do the thing proper outside the family circle. I think it unreasonable and undutiful of Bridget not to be minding—"

But at this point in his fine speech, just as he's thinking of winding it up with a flourish and taking his departure, there comes a sudden interruption which chokes off the high sounding words in his throat. Bridget, who's been holding tight to his arm all this time as silent as sin, lets out a screech with a twitter in the middle of it, like an owl makes in the still of the night— a weird yowl it was, lonely and drear as the devil's laughter coming up from some deep pit in the earth— a cry fit to make the gooseflesh ripple up a rave man's back and a bald man thankful that he lost the hair on the top of his head.

Widow Malone sits up as quick as the blade of a jackknife, while Father Flynn begins mumbling a bit of a prayer. And as for Shaemas O'Shea— why, he gives Bridget's mouth, which is like the letter O, a curious glance and lets on to himself that he'll not be going yet awhile.

"I thought that would interest you," says Widow Malone. "There isn't every girl, my dear young man, born with a gift like Bridget's. Father Flynn be quick with the marriage. Death's got a grip on my throat!"

"Hold on!" cries Shaemas O'Shea. A poet he was, but not the man to lose his head entirely just because a girl had a yowl not common to most. "Hold on!" he says. "I'm not marrying till I learn the truth of this matter. I'll acknowledge that

your daughter has just emitted a yell which stirs my imagination. It made me see an evil moon, like a fiery white face with the skull showing through; a bare, wind-twisted tree with a row of vultures perching on it mournful; a battlefield where dead soldiers are searching for parts of themselves that they lost in the big fight; a funeral where the late-departed is driving the hearse; a suicide; a murder; a—"

"Who cares what you saw?" Widow Malone breaks in with scant ceremony. "Keep your poetry to yourself. I'm only a poor practical, dying woman with a grown daughter to marry off."

"No offense meant, Mam," says Shaemas O'Shea, very humble. "I'm only wanting to know whether this howl of your daughter's was come by naturally?"

"Sure, and it was," the old woman replies. "Her own grandmother was that way till they stones her to death back of the churchyard."

"And what way was that way?" asks Shaemas O'Shea.

"Why a bit of a banshee, to be sure!" Widow Malone cries, nearly out of breath and quite out of patience. "Don't tell mt that you, who call yourself a poet, never heard tell of a banshee!"

"I have that, Mam," Shaemas O'Shea replies, speaking up for himself. "They're spirits in the old country that whimper and whine outside a house where they'll be hanging crape in the morning."

"True for you," she says. "That's a banshee. Now sometime: in my gifted family there's a baby born, like Bridget here, with the yowl of a banshee inside her. Sure, it's a strange and wonderful gift!"

"Aye, that it is," puts in Father Flynn. "And it's a rare gift to have a banshee bride."

"That's true enough, holy father," says Shaemas O'Shea "But is Bridget reliable?"

"As true as the clock strikes," Widow Malone says proudly.

And at that Shaemas O'Shea makes up his mind. He had wanted adventure—well, here it was to be had for the plucking. A man could go further and fare worse.

"Sure," he says to himself, "Bridget is as pretty a banshee as a lad could find in a night's walk. And that cute little howl of he stirs the imagination in me. It's a powerful poet I'd be with h at my elbow!"

So when Father Flynn steps up to the pair of them Shaemas O'Shea never so much as blinks an eyelash. Patient as Job he is till it's all over, and him turned into a husband now, the head of a house with no house to go to, and maybe the father sometime of baby banshees— patient he is till the knot is tied, then he turns to Widow Malone.

But she isn't there any more— just the broken shell of her, dead and flat on her back as a flounder. Smaller she looks, and more withered; and the second-

sight has flickered out of her rolled-up eyes. The practical dying woman is a practical dead woman now— with no fun to her at all, like you see sometimes when the going is easy, but just a sour determination writ on her wrinkled old face to be made tidy as soon as may be tucked away in her coffin.

"No wonder she favored an undertaker over a poet," says Shaemas O'Shea to himself with a shudder. "To think that such a practical, far-seeing woman should have given birth to a banshee!"

ii

NOW THERE ARE plenty of tales told round the peat fires in old Ireland about Shaemas O'Shea and his banshee bride, Bridget— black stories for the most art, giving little credit to the pair of them. They do say in the County of Cork, where this grand poet was born, that Shaemas, in spite of his fine scorn of things worldly, was not above hiring out his gifted woman at so much a night to the undertakers. They tell how these undertakers would be leading her from one darkened house to another in the big city till she'd stop short in her tracks, throw back her head, and let out a yowl. And then they say as how these penny-pinching blackguards would be putting down the numbers of the houses where Bridget had stopped so that they could be sending 'round their cards bright and early in the morning.

However that may be, Shaemas O'Shea made money, one way or another— enough for their passage back to the old country— and it was here I met him one summer afternoon, with his good wife beside him, sitting pensive like on the top of a hayrick.

"Home again, Shaemas?" says I.

"Home again, Pat," he answers, rather sour, "if you might call this mound of moldy hay a home."

"Poets have fared worse," I says, remembering his calling.

"Sure, and poets have fared better," he replies with a scoff. "Why, I've been paid as high as a penny a word for my writing in New York City!"

"Your wife?" I inquires.

"Sure, my wife," he lets on mighty proud. "Perhaps you've heard tell that she's a bit of a banshee?"

"I have that," I replies, doffing my hat to the slim, silent, owl-eyed woman beside him. "It's all over Ireland."

"Is that so?" he says, very pleased. "News travels fast in the old country."

"Have you heard tell about your Uncle, Shaemas?" says I. "Not the poor one who through drink is living in Widow Rorke's pigs; but the rich one who owns the grand house on the brow of the hill."

"Not a word, Pat. What's come to him?"

"Nothing— 'less it is death. The man's a sick man, and he's been asking for you."

"I've heard that tale before," Shaemas replies with a doubtful shake of the head. "But each time I've gone to his deathbed only to find that he wasn't so sick that he couldn't get better."

"There's your banshee bride," I reminds him. "Sure, couldn't she be sniffing out the truth of the matter?"

And at that, Shaemas O'Shea grins all over his face. "A true word you've spoken, Patrick McNulty!" he says from the top of his hayrick. "And to think that it should be *me* who was forgittin' what Bridget could do when the mood's on her! Tonight, the moon rises, we'll be taking ourselves up to the meadow of my dear uncle's house. Maybe he's bought himself a fierce dog, Pat?"

"The devil a one," I tell him, "that a proper banshee can scare the bark out of by just a good yowl or two. I'm wishing you luck, Shaemas; for your uncle's a cruel, hard landlord, and I've been owing him a bit of money these three months past."

"We'll be canceling that bit of a debt," he says, "and all goes well with our venture. Keep your ears open, come midnight, man, and it may be you'll be hearing a bit of a screech. Good-by to you, Patrick McNulty."

Well, it so happened that I didn't give the matter much more thought. That night I slept so sound that I snored the pig awake. But I was up betimes in the morning and over to the big house to see how Peter O'Shea was faring.

Poorly he looked, with his nightcap set all awry on his head and the face of the man as yellow as ripe corn in the bin. But for all that he wasn't forgetting the trifle of money I was owing him— him with his treasure chest fairly bursting with gold, enough for a lifetime, and the man's days were fewer in front of him than the toes on his feet!

"Have you a dog that howls at the moon, Pat?" he asks as I'm about to take my departure.

"The devil a one," says I.

"There was such a beast outside my window last night. He kept me awake till morning."

"And that will be a bad omen, Mr. O'Shea," says I.

"The devil a bit," says he. "It's a good omen, and I'll be proving it. My nephew came back to me from foreign parts this day."

"Not Shaemas?" says I, acting surprised like.

"Him and none other," says he. "And he's married a pretty young wife and settled down. 'I'm through with poetry, Uncle Peter,' he tells me. 'I've come home to help you work your land'. And there he is now, down by the brook, plowing up the rich black soil."

"Shaemas O'Shea plowing in this broiling sun?" says I.

"Him and none other," says old man O'Shea very proud. "Just you step down that way, Pat, and you'll be seeing him or yourself."

Well, I did as he told me; and pretty soon I came on Shaemas working like a red hot devil out of hell. Seeing me, he stopped for a moment and wiped the honest sweat out of his eyes.

"I see you've turned farmer, Shaemas," I says.

"Yes, bad cess to that withered limb of an uncle of mine!" he replies with a scowl. "'Tis the only way I can make my peace with him. Six days more, and the place will be mine; then I'm through with this dirty business."

"Six days from now you'll be master here?" I ask.

"Six days and no more," says he. "Bridget yowled six times last night— a yowl for each day left him, as her custom is, and, come Saturday next, Uncle Peter will have breathed his last. It's a comforting thing to think on."

"I'd better be off home," I tell him. "You'll be wanting to get back to work."

"Not wanting," says he; "but that old fox has his face at the window, and it's best that I appear industrious. Good-day to you, Patrick McNulty."

Well, I bid him good-day and leave Shaemas O'Shea to his toil. And a sweating time he has over it— he being a poet born and no hand with a plow— while all the time his uncle's looks out out at him through a bedroom window. And yellow it is as the pumpkins the lads cut eye-holes in for the candlelight to flicker through on an All Souls' Eve; and there's a mad tuft of beard on the chin of it, wiggling this way and that, like a handful of corn-silk caught up by the breeze.

So that's the last I ever see of Shaemas O'Shea's uncle in the live flesh like he was born.

iii

THEY'LL STILL BE TELLING in the old country of what a grand man Shaemas O'Shea was making of himself after his good wife, Bridget— her who was maybe a bit of a banshee— yowled Peter O'Shea into his grave. And they'll be telling you of the fine clothes he was wearing, and the good drink that brightened the nose of the man, and the rich food that swelled out his belly— but not a whisper you'll hear as to how he came to be writing that powerful poem that made him famous around the world and back again.

Sure, there's none knows the truth of that business but just myself, and maybe a pig or two, and the little red cock that roosts each night on the foot of my bed, and the calf— but perhaps he was sleeping— and the two sheep I bought from Anna Mulvane, and the bit of a little brown hen that cackled and laid an egg the midst of it. Fowls and dumb beasts, you'll be saying; but are they not the best listeners to a man when black trouble is astride the back of him?

It all came about some six years after Peter O'Shea was laid to rest in the churchyard. A black night it was, with never a star aquiver— a night fit for witches and banshees and the like of that to be having a fling with us mortals— a night when a Christian is safer beside his own fireside, with the crucifix handy to hit the devil over the head and the dirty thief come in by the door.

Well, it was me that was sleeping peaceful that night. Peaceful and warm I was, dreaming a bit of a dream with no harm to it, when all of a sudden I was yanked out of my sleep as though by the hair of the head.

A banshee yowl had come down the wind to me, clear and true as a bugle-call. And the mournfulest yowl it was— a yowl like a corpse would make should his widow sit on his grave with her lover; a yowl fit to quicken the dead and freeze the living.

"That will be over by the big house," I tell myself. "Bridget is prowling a bit on the grounds. It's Shaemas O'Shea who should be putting a muzzle and chain on her. 'Tis not right that a hard-working man like me should be despoiled of his sleep by a banshee, and she a married woman. It's me that will be putting in a complaint at the big house come morning."

But there I was wrong, for who should come striding down the hill but Shaemas O'Shea before the dawn was gray in the sky. And a sick man he looked, for all the fat of him.

"You're up early, Mr. O'Shea," says I, very polite. "Will you be taking a seat?"

"I will that," says he, "for I'm needing it. And don't be calling me Mr. O'Shea," he says, "but Shaemas— poor Shaemas O'Shea who married a bit of a banshee."

"Poor?" says I. "Sure, you're having a joke on me."

"The devil a joke, Pat," he says, very serious. "Poor I said and poor I'm meaning. A man's wealth lies in the days of his life— for the doing of God's work and the like of that— and it's Shaemas O'Shea who will be cold as the fish in the sea come the Sabbath! It's a dying man I am, Pat— me who was a grand poet in New York City!"

"A dying man?" says I. "Sure, you're having a bit of a joke, Mr. O'Shea. Young you are yet— young and fast as a round-rumped bullock. 'Tis my own self is nearer the graveyard."

"Not so it is," he says, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "Just give ear to what I'll be telling you."

"I'm all ears," says I, "and eyes for the crying. Tell us your tale, Mr. O'Shea."

"Tonight's a black night," says he, "a black and sorrowful night for Shaemas O'Shea. Sleeping I was and dreaming a bit of a dream of all the good I was doing the countryside, when what should I hear but a bit of a screech.

"'That will be Bridget,' I tell myself, 'singing her song of death outside of old Squire Clancy's door— him whom I housed for the night after his hunter went

lame on him. I'd best be getting my hand over her mouth for this is no way to be entertaining a guest at the dead of the night.'

"Well, Pat," says he, "I was half right and half wrong, as the saying is. It was Bridget, sure enough; but the devil a bit she was serenading Squire Clancy. She was nearer home. Nearer did I say? By the saints above and the devils below, there she sat at the foot of my bed— she, in her nightgown and slippers, with a dreamy look in her big black eyes— there she sat, with her head thrown back, howling her own good man into his grave!"

"Maybe there's some mistake, Mr. O'Shea."

"The devil a mistake!" says he. "Six yowls she let out of the ungrateful throat of her— the throat down which my partridges have gone, and my pastry, and my wine— six yowls and no more, a yowl for each day in which the breath of life is left me. A cruel business, Pat!"

"Cruel and hard, Mr. O'Shea," says I very polite, but not forgetting the bit of silver I'd been owing him for more than a month. "Cruel and hard, sir, but the ways of the Almighty are passing strange."

"This is more like the work of the devil," says he. "It'll be a black day for Ireland when they'll be putting Shaemas O'Shea under the sod. It was me who was a grand poet in New York City," he says. "Did you know that they paid me a penny a word for my writings, Pat?"

"I did that," I replied. "Sure, it must have been the fine words you had in you! But where have they all flown to since you got back to the old country?"

"I've wasted them," says he, "on the viper I took to my bosom. And for all the fineness of them, and the worth of them and the grand sound they made when flung on the air, it's her that's closed her ears to them more times than once! An extravagant woman when it came to wasting her husband's words, Pat!"

"True for you, sir," says I. "It's you that's been too kind to her."

"I have that," says he. "And who should be more grateful than a banshee when a man is willing to be lending her his good name?"

"And her to be keeping it after he has no further use for it," says I. "'Tis she that should be grateful, Mr. O'Shea."

At that Shaemas O'Shea rises up in a hurry and lets on that it's time he was taking to his bed. "It's only decent," says he, "that a dying man should stay on the flat of his back and not be lending false hope to others by walking about brave in the sunlight."

"And how are you faring, Mr. O'Shea?" says I.

"As well as could be expected with death 'round the corner," gays he. "Draw up your chair, Pat, for there's a poem I want to be reading you."

But just as I'm doing what he asks me, and just as he's turning over his papers and clearing his throat, who should come in by the door but her who was

Bridget Malone. As pale as a moonbeam she is; and she stands there staring at the two of us with the great round eyes of an owl. Then she lets a little low cry out of her, like a starving cat makes when a bird swoops over its head, and down she sinks at the foot of the bed all of a heap like. And silent she is from that time forward— more silent than is healthy in a woman whose husband is readin his poetry.

"You heard her, Pat?" says Shaemas O'Shea with a bitter smile. "And that's the viper I've treasured in my bosom!"

"A sad end to be yowled into the grave by the missus," says I.

"Sad is no name for it," says he. "But as the tongue of her is quiet for the time, we'll just be getting on with the poem."

Now you've all heard tell of "The Lament of Shaemas O'Shea," for it's a poem that has been 'round the world like a traveling salesman. But there are deaf people and blind people and people with no more book learning in their heads than have Widow Rorke's pigs, and to them I'll be having a word to say on the matter.

"The Lament of Shaemas O'Shea" is a sorrowful poem with six parts to it— one part for each day after Bridget howled first in the dead of the night. Starting out in a rage and a blind wonder and a questioning of Providence who has blundered so badly as to bundle such a gifted man into his grave, we find this grand poem winding along more tranquilly and sorrowfully and philosophically to the sea of death.

And now Shaemas is wondering why the sweet little flowers are creeping up from the earth when soon there will be no proper nose in all Ireland to sniff the fragrance out of the hearts of them. And won't the moon be wearing a widow's veil for Shaemas O'Shea— for him who sang about the white loveliness of her in New York City for a penny a word? Sure, she would be doing just that. Then what would the lovers do, and the mad people and the tides she beckoned up on the beach? And the sun? Wouldn't he be thinking it was a cruel injustice to his good friend Shaemas O'Shea and not be lending his warmth and his light to the world any more? And the stars? Who had treated them so kind in poetry as just Shaemas O'Shea? Were they the ones to forget? And there were the birds, and the wind, and the grass underfoot, and the tall trees that wagged their green tongues in the gloaming, and the great blue sea beyond— sure, what would be the use of them all once Shaemas O'Shea was laid in his grave?

Sure, it's a grand poem, whether you look at it from in front or behind. And Shaemas O'Shea was the man to do it justice that night.

"Well, what are you thinking of it, Pat?" said he when he was done.

"A great and grand poem, Mr. O'Shea!" I tell him, wiping the tears out of my eyes. "It's a genius you are, and a credit to Ireland!"

"That's true enough," says he, without mincing the matter. "Now just be taking a look at the clock yonder."

"It's midnight," says I.

"To the minute?" he says, sitting bolt upright in bed and looking surprised.

"To the minute, Mr. O'Shea," says I, "and a fraction beyond."

"Then it's me should be a dead man!" cried Shaemas O'Shea. "'Twas at midnight that Bridget first started to yowl!"

"And are you not feeling sick?" says I.

"The devil a bit!" he replies, hopping out of bed as brisk as a cat. "What can be the meaning of it? Bridget!" says he, giving his wife a shake by the shoulder. "Bridget," he yells, "it's past midnight, and I'm still on the two feet of me!"

But she makes him no answer— just lies there regardless of the man and his hand on her shoulder. And now the truth sweeps over Shaemas O'Shea like an ocean wave and drops him to his knees.

"She's dead," he says in a low voice. "Bridget is dead."

"And it will not be as bad as that," says I.

"She's dead," he says, like he hadn't heard me at all. "And to think that it was me who called her this and called her that— thinking that she was yowling Shaemas O'Shea into his grave while all the time it was only her own death she was giving tongue to under the moon! Sure, Bridget, my darling, it's a sad and desolate man you're leaving behind."

"But a fine poet, Mr. O'Shea," I says to console him.

"Aye, thanks to Bridget here," says he, looking up through his tears. " 'Twas her and the gift of her that went into the making of 'The Lament of Shaemas O'Shea.' And oh, Pat," he says in a voice all broken with sobs, " 'twas a grand adventure to be married to a bit of a banshee!"

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13: Tchotl

Stella Benson

Mrs. John O. Anderson, 1892-1933

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NIELSEN, when he first caught sight of the white topee gliding along the lower limit of his range of vision, thought, here was a fellow-foreigner coming to see him. This would have been very surprising, for, as far as he knew, the Chinese city of Lao-pao was exclusively filled with Chinese; he was himself the only exception. He knew this to his cost, for whenever he moved he was followed about by incredulous crowds, as though time were turned round, and he were a kind of dinosaurus of to-morrow, surviving into yesterday. As soon as the visitor reached the steps, however, Nielsen saw that the cleanness of the topee had deceived him; this was simply the kind of visitor that one might expect in Lao-pao— a young Chinese of the business class. Nielsen, who came from Minnesota, was a person of callow friendliness, and he immediately rolled his fat legs from the long chair on which he lay, to greet the guest, a light of alacrity shining in his large hungry protruding eyes.

The face of the newcomer belied the complacency of the perfect topee; it was a melancholy face; its bones seemed to be set at melancholy angles, although— since the face was Chinese— there were no wrinkles to plough furrows of superficial disillusionment.

"You must think me very unconventional," said the visitor humbly, "but I hope when I acquaint the circumstances, you will excuse me for paying call on you without introduction. My name is Chin Yu-ting; my profession is a bank clerk." He looked at Nielsen as though he expected to be thrown down the steps at once. But Nielsen was unaffectedly delighted to see any one anywhere, in any circumstances. Nielsen always had a great deal to say, and usually no one to say it to. Repressive years of solitude mellowed this bottled-up fermented wine of words within him, and the result, when the cork was finally drawn, was a generous outpouring of nectar, to which any one was welcome, simply for the asking. No slip was allowed to intervene betwixt this cup and any proffered lip; sometimes he even splashed a few drops of brimming superfluous idealism on to his patient Chinese servants, or into letters on Moral or Social Problems which he wrote to the Shanghai papers. He did not much repine if his generosity was only acknowledged by half-wits, scoffers and buffoons. An arid desert, he knew, absorbs a few priceless drops of water without apparent advantage; yet fundamentally, ideals were good for every one— were never really wasted. Nielsen believed that he was a person who Thought in Wide Terms and was Interested in Nation-wide Problems. The pressure of his widening horizon, he felt, had burst the limits of the moral panorama seen from Jenkinsville,

Minnesota, where he was born and raised. Even the city of Minneapolis, he often thought, would seem provincial to him now that he had seen Manila and Shanghai, and had learned to take for granted such quaint facts as that every one round him spoke Chinese and rode in rickshaws instead of Fords. Nielsen now prided himself on being no Middle Western hick; he despised men who had no Ideals— who talked of nothing but money, drink, women and food. He himself was of course no expert on any of these matters.

"I am very happy indeed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Chin," said Nielsen. "I don't know why you should apologize for calling, I'm sure. I'm an American, you know, and Americans despise forms and ceremonies." For the inorganic principles injected by his Jenkinsville education were still embedded in encysted cells in Nielsen's mind, just as the bullets from old wars remain lodged in the body. Schooling in Jenkinsville was not a matter of teaching-to-think— it was simply teaching. There were about twenty-six persons in Jenkinsville— all those of his classmates, in fact, who enjoyed the full use of their wits— who had exactly the same mind as Nielsen to this day— even though the school-mistress who had modelled their common mind had been mercifully lost to them all for fifteen years. Democratic education is an incurable affliction; it informs once and for all.

"I will now tell you," said Chin Yu-ting, "why I have taken this liberty. Oh, Mr. Nielsen, there has been very great joy in my heart to hear that you— an English-speaking gentleman— has come to live at Lao-pao. For three years I live in this place with a lonely heart. I am from Peking, a student of Y— Mission College; I cannot freely talk the Cantonese language which is here the custom. All the time I long earnestly that some one shall come to Lao-pao speaking either the language of England or of Peking freely, with whom I can discuss the modern developments in comparative theologies— my favourite study. French priests come to Lao-pao— I am speaking no French. German mining engineers also come— but I am not understanding any German. An Italian explorer going to Tibet— a Russian ex-nobleman fleeing from Bolsheviks— I am not able to speak with them one word. My heart is always alone, as though my lips have been dumb— my ears deaf. Then I hear that an American is coming here to open an agency of the Standard Oils, and so my heart is very happy, for though I do not know America and cannot discuss American matters—"

Here, Nielsen saw at once, was a thirsty soul for some of his Ideals. "Why, Mr. Chin," he said, "you've got us Americans quite wrong. You don't have to discuss American matters with Americans. I don't know how it is with folks snared in the cloying traditions of the Old World, but Americans are always Citizens of the World. Americans think Internationally, in terms of Uplift— Humanity— Idealism.... Wherever you see an American, you may be sure he's got Ideals somewhere back of those horn-rimmed goggles of his. I can tell you

right now, if you and me are going to get together it won't be to discuss trivial little home-town gossip about material facts— it'll be to compare notes about the Great Things of Life. Americans feel the urge to get to Soul-grips with the Universe. Comparative Theology, I'll admit, is not much in my line— theology, and all other ologies and osophies, I leave to your half-baked narrow-minded professors who can't see outside their own classrooms. I've worked out a religion and a philosophy of my own, Mr. Chin, a very simple one, and its slogan is Be Your Best Self and Help the Next Guy to be His. Humanity's my theology— it's Soul that counts, and the Purpose behind the Soul. Man is the master of— do you know those beautiful lines by one of our American poets?—"

"Yes," said Mr. Chin, hastily but without irony. "I know them, of course. They are written by the late William Ernest Henley, a noted English author, I believe."

"I am the Master of my Fate," chanted Nielsen, who was not to be baulked of his quotation— and Chin Yu-ting joined in the chorus— "I am the Captain of My Soul." They both looked very masterful and captain-like for a minute.

"Strictly speaking," said Chin Yu-ting, "such beliefs, though very noble, are not to be labelled Theologies. I am myself interested in—"

"Ah, but Americans don't deal in labels," said the infatuated Nielsen. "Americans think for themselves, regardless of the labels the effete so-called thinkers of the Old World have tied on to—"

"How interesting it is, discussing the matters of the mind in this animated manner," said Mr. Chin, with a self-conscious laugh. "I feel refreshed already, like a camel that has trodden a long distance across a desert before meeting with an oasis. For indeed, Mr. Nielsen, to see interesting men— perhaps men who could improve my acquaintanceship with the comparative theologies— passing through Lao-pao, and yet, having no mutual language, being not able to exchange any word— has often reminded me of the beautiful words of another English poet— namely, S. T. Coleridge— 'Water, water, everywhere— and not a spot to drink.' I have often thought—"

"There you touch on one of my pet Ideals," shouted Nielsen. "I believe I can help you there. I believe our meeting is going to have Results— is going to strike a spark, as human meetings ought to do. We have met with a Purpose, Mr. Chin, I sensed it from the start. Now listen— didn't you ever hear about Universal Languages? Universal Language is a study of mine, as it ought to be the study of every thinking man who cares about Human Brotherhood. Now listen—"

"I learned English," said Mr. Chin, "due to being told that it was itself the univ—"

"You've heard of Tchotl, I guess," said Nielsen.

The torrent of Chin Yu-ting's protest evaporated suddenly, leaving one distilled monosyllable. "No," he said weakly.

"I wonder you never heard of Tchotl," said Nielsen, slightly checked in his turn. "I was going to say— I may be a very undistinguished sort of guy in many ways, Mr. Chin, but I have this distinction— and I'm proud of it— that I was raised in that great little city, Jenkinsville, in Minnesota— where Tchotl originated— that I was in on the start of that Superlatively World-Wide Movement, and that its famous founders— Trent C. Howells and Oscar T. Lambie— are personal friends of mine. Furthermore—"

"I have warned you in the beginning that I am ignorant of American matters, Mr. Nielsen," said Mr. Chin. "Most certainly I am unfortunate in having no knowledge of—"

"Tchotl is emphatically not an American matter. The very essence of Tchotl is its flaming universality. Tchotl is the Real World Language. Its name, you will notice, is an ingenious combination of the initials of its inventors, Trent Carlos Howells and Oscar Tetworth Lambie— and it is my firm belief that the day will come when the names of those two men will be written in letters of gold side by side with the names of Moses, Thomas à Becket, Emerson, Confucius, George Washington, Homer, Mary Baker Eddy, Shakespeare and other World Regenerators. Tchotl is a—"

"But do many persons really—"

"Tchotl is a superlative brotherhood of World Thinkers; it has an agent— or exponent— or apostle— (call it what you will)— in every country in the world. Would you believe it, Mr. Chin, when I last heard from old Tet (that's O. T. Lambie), he told me that Tchotl has even secured a footing in the quaint little European state of Montenegro, as a result of a most fruitful tour of Europe by a young Jenkinsville matron called Mrs. Zinnia Putney Wicketts, whose eloquence is inspiring an animated interest in Tchotl wherever she goes—"

"But could a Tchotl-speaker, for instance, in Lao-pao be sure of—"

"The reason why Tchotl has such an instant universal appeal is because the underlying idea is so superlatively simple; a child can grasp it as easily as can the hoary-headed professor. There are no words longer than one syllable in Tchotl, and no consonant or vowel sounds are used that are not common to all world languages. Furthermore— and here is the genuine stunning originality of Tchotl, Mr. Chin— not only the lips are used in speaking, but also the fingers. For instance— Ta, one of the key syllables, meaning anything alive…. Ta, if I hold up one finger, means man— two fingers, a non-human mammal— three, a bird of some kind— and so forth. Now if—"

"But if you also erected the thumb?" asked Chin Yu-ting, his eyes almost leaning out of his head.

"Ah, well, there you come to the lesser saurians, as far as I can recall without the textbook," said Mr. Nielsen in slight confusion. "I don't pretend to be word-perfect in the language, though of course I'm studying it in my spare time. I have

a spare textbook in my bureau upstairs and I'd be tickled pink, Mr. Chin, to enrol you as a member and pupil. I could give you your first few lessons, and then sell you the primer— it only costs five dollars gold and the proceeds all go to the disseminating of the superlative Gospel of World Understanding— and you'd have the satisfaction of being the dean of Tchotl-speakers in Lao-pao— this sleepy little burg's first member of the vastest World Movement of our day."

"It is indeed an extremely impressing thought," said Chin Yu-ting, "to soar over all the barriers of language at one jumping. To be so conveniently in touch with the universe— this would be well worth five dollars gold— (thirteen dollars twenty cents of Lao-pao money). How long time do you think will be needful to make a perfect Tchotl-speaker of me— able (for instance) to discuss (for instance) comparative theologies with a Tchotl professor from (for instance) Montenegro?"

"Three months' intensive study should be ample. I remember old Tet telling me that his best student— a Christian Science practitioner in Jenkinsville— mastered the elements in three lessons, and by the end of the second week could chatter Tchotl like a native— I mean like a World Citizen— but of course that is exceptional. My dear friend, I'm proud to see you so enthused— I'm proud to think I have the honour to be your teacher of Tchotl— as a friend, mind you, Mr. Chin— purely as a friend,— there's to be no question of a teacher's fee, of course, between friends like you and I. Five dollars gold for the textbook— that's all Tchotl's going to cost you— and cheap it is at the price— a small price for the right of entry into a Universal Brotherhood— an insurance, as Trent Howells always says, against the soul-wastage involved in petty nationalism and—"

Chin Yu-ting could hardly contain his enthusiasm. "Let me see this book at earliest convenience, Mr. Nielsen. Let me now repeat my first lesson."

"I'll bring the book right down," said Nielsen.

As he passed through the hall on his way upstairs, he noticed that the mail had come, and, forgetting for a moment his ardent pupil, he hung over the tempting-looking heap of letters and papers— the exile's bread of life. He opened one of the home newspapers— the *Jenkinsville Morning Examiner*— and skimmed the headlines with a hungry eye as he walked slowly upstairs.

"Howells Bonnet Houses New Bee," murmured a chatty minor headline, in the "Home-folks at Home" column. "Trent C. Howells and his co-dreamer Oscar Tetworth Lambie admitted to-day that their World Language has proved a flop. Trent, interviewed this morning, faced the death of his World-dream with a laugh like the good sport he is. 'No doubt about it,' he confessed frankly. 'Our roll of members shrank alarmingly— especially after Mrs. Zinnia P. Wicketts, our former silver-tongued booster, lost interest in it and took up with the study of Byzantine architecture instead. Three thousand nine hundred and twelve

language professors, social reformers, and elocution wizards failed to reply to our questionnaire that we mailed all over the world six months ago in order to boost Tchotl— and only nine textbooks have been sold— not counting eight hundred and sixty that we distributed free— a daring ad. which provoked no response whatever. Tet— (Oscar T. Lambie) and myself still claim we were on to a whale of a notion in inventing Tchotl— but the world's not educated up to a Big Thing like that is, and the dead weight of effete Europe has been thrown into the scales against us— we have proof of that. It's all part of the conspiracy of a sinister aristocratic tradition against free enlightened democracy. No good flogging a dead horse, however, and Tet and I know when we're whipped. We've just got to quit. But we should worry; we've got a new scheme that just can't fail to usher in a new economic era. I don't want to talk a whole lot about it right now, but I'll ask you this much— did you ever think why it is that we hand out huge sums all round for foodstuffs— importing fish here— exporting wheat there— canning asparagus here— wearing out our fists pulling milk out of cows there— while all the time right here under our shoe-soles all of us has got—' But right there Trent caught my eager optic and stopped short. 'No, sir,' he laughed. 'You aren't going to pry the secret out of me till the time comes. The world will know all about it soon enough when the details are perfected. It's a swell scheme, though, you can take it from me and, economically speaking, it's the biggest thing ever. Tet and me are working night and day to give it a running start. Tchotl, after all, was words— this new scheme is deeds....' "

Nielsen only ceased reading long enough to allow him to take the Tchotl textbook from a drawer in his desk; the impetus of his errand carried him so far, before he paused to consider the effect of what he had read upon his triumphant act of salesmanship. Still considering the newspaper he walked slowly downstairs. He stood for a moment at the door of the sitting-room. For a second his dim imagination showed, as though on a badly lighted stage, an impossible scene, the cue for which was, "See here, Mr. Chin, I want you to read this newspaper par. I take back all I said...." Take back? To recall spoken ideals from the flattered air— to roll up and put dustily away rosy festoons of words— to turn tamely and retrace his steps to the beginning of that resilient path of words— above all, to unsell something successfully sold— every instinct revolted against such inconceivable tasks. Words were Nielsen's mark upon the air— nothing must erase the fine bright signature of his words from the air. Words were seeds sown in the soft tilled minds of listeners— was it not treachery to the soil to uproot the springing crops— treachery to the soil— betrayal of the sower— aye, and blasphemy against the Lord of the Manor Himself? Was not the whole duty of man to Put Things Across? Nielsen lifted up his face to the Salesman's God and knew that his duty was loyalty to the Successful Deal. He entered the room. Mr. Chin, his appetite for immediate

universal brotherhood whetted by the delay, came to meet him, with a hand outstretched for the book.

"By opening this book," said Chin Yu-ting solemnly, "I think I open simultaneously a doorway into the world society. Behind this metaphorical door I think many thousands of world brothers stand ready to cry— in the Tchotl tongue— Welcome, brother Chin. Formerly I have been made deaf and dumb by the disease of national language, but now for ever through the future years I shall be freed from this affliction, and to every newcomer at Lao-pao I can stretch out the hand of freedom and exclaim in Tchotl— Welcome, brother— open to me your thoughts and I shall open mine..."

Nielsen hesitated only long enough to drop the newspaper into the waste-paper basket. "I'll tell the world you're right, brother," he said.

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14: The Waterwitch

Fred M.White

1859-1935

The Windsor Magazine, Sep 1910

Fred Merrick White was a prodigiously prolific English author of novels and short stories; Project Gutenberg Australia *has practically all of it, including no less than 20 volumes of previously unpublished short stories gathered from newspapers and magazines. This is one of them.*

HATCH sat on the bank watching the yellow waste of water swirling by, wishing to Heaven that he was well out of it. He was down to his last tin of cigarettes, the soda-water had petered out long ago, and there was no quinine. The hideous silence of the swamp was getting on his nerves. From a spot of sand in mid-stream a crocodile winked a grim yellow eye at him— the crocodile belonged to the fortunate order of those who can afford to wait.

Two handfuls of dry tuberous chips represented six months of grim hard work. There are purple patches in the life of an orchid hunter, and there are other patches. Bernard Hatch was up against one of the others. It was all very well for his partner, comfortably ensconced in Covent Garden, to write in optimistic vein. Doubtless the Waterwitch existed, seeing that the traditions of the Gold Coast were pretty deiinite, but Hatch had not found it yet.

The main thing he had done up to now was to come in contact with Van Voarst. That oily Belgian rascal had greeted him with large enthusiasm, but forewarned was forearmed. There never had been a more successful orchid hunter in the coast than the Belgian, and certainly never one with a less savoury reputation. The man was a braggart and a bully; nevertheless, he had a pluck of his own. For the most part he hunted alone, and this from compulsion as much as choice. Wanless, of Mason's, of St. Albans, had gone out with him, and Wanless had never come back. Mansfield the same, and others. And Van Voarst's theatrical explanation had not been deemed satisfactory.

The only satisfactory feature of the whole case was that Van Voarst was sticking to Hatch like a leech. Evidently Hatch was getting "warm," and Van Voarst knew it. The man who laid predatory hands on the Waterwitch could retire permanently from the business. His tubers would fetch ten thousand pounds each in the open market, and no question asked.

Now, Harry the Buck had seen the Waterwitch. Harry the Buck was black and faithful, otherwise Hatch had not slept soundly at night with the great rotund carcase of the Belgian snoring so near. The Waterwitch was more or less of a sacred flower, the emblem of a great chief back of beyond the Indu Mountains. When one of the chiefs died peacefully— or otherwise— a flower from the Waterwitch was laid on his grave. It was death for anyone but a high priest of

Mumbo Jumbo to touch it. There were dark sacrifices too horrible to mention. And Harry the Buck had seen all this. He told of it with grotesque gestures and volcanic squints. In the ordinary way, and in his ordinary vernacular, he was not taking any. But he happened to want a gun and a supply of cartridges. These he valued a little higher than his own life. Therefore he was on his way to the Indu Mountains, and it was at this part that Van Voarst had joined the expedition.

Nothing short of personal violence would have choked him off. That he guessed exactly what was in the wind Hatch perfectly well knew. The search was getting hot, too, and a couple of days in the canoe would bring the seekers to their destination. It was here that the accident happened to the quinine and soda-water, and Van Voarst apologised for his clumsiness. He took the matter so lightly that Hatch was forced to the conclusion that the big rascal had a private supply of quinine of his own. He could only make the best of it, and look the spectre of fever gloomily in the face. If he got down now, with no quinine at hand, he would never get up again.

Heavens, how hot it was! Harry the Buck, busy getting the canoe loaded, shimmered in a violet haze. His black skin glistened in the sunshine. He beckoned presently with the intimation that all was ready. Hatch called to Van Voarst huskily. From the high bank of the stream the Belgian responded.

"Just for one moment," he said, "then I come. Here is a plant that me puzzles— one of a family that my knowledge eludes, get into the canoe, and I drop down on you from the branches. It is only the matter of a little delay."

Hatch crawled down as far as the canoe and dropped wearily into it. There was a crackling of branches, and a fragment of rock some two hundredweight or so splashed into the water, missing the canoe by inches. Two pin-points of flame sparkled in Hatch's eyes. Harry the Buck grunted. Apparently the Belgian had been afraid to trust his aim, or possibly he was short of revolver ammunition. It was just the sort of cowardly thing he would do. Hatch jumped from the boat and scrambled up to the spot where Van Voarst was still busy digging. Another stone lay quivering on the balance.

"You shark!" Hatch shouted. "You murderous dog! Take that!"

Half unconscious of what he was holding in his hand, Hatch brought the butt of his revolver down with a crash in the region of Van Voarst's left ear. The Belgian grunted placidly, and lay on his back contemplating the hard sky with the whites of his eyes. He never moved again. From the stern of the canoe Harry the Buck softly applauded. In his eyes it was an exceedingly neat and workmanlike piece of business. He knew nothing of the horrible nausea at the pit of Hatch's stomach. Even when you take a life in self-defence for the first time the feeling is there.

"Get out of that," Hatch commanded. "Come and bury the swine; I can't do it."

Harry the Buck responded cheerfully. He came back in half an hour, lying glibly that the thing was done. As an economist in words with a limited vocabulary, he omitted the fact that he had pitched the fat body into a heap of mimosa and left it there. He took his seat and the paddle, and pushed the canoe steadily up-stream till the dusk shut down and the night closed in. They were under the shadow of the mountains now, and the atmosphere was sensibly cooler. Hatch shuddered slightly. With a grin Harry the Buck drew a square tin box from his tattered linen coat.

"By the gods, quinine!" Hatch cried. "Where did you get it from, Harry?"

"Belgian elephant," Harry grunted. "In um's belt. So this watch, and this revolver— gold. Took um all off Belgian elephant when buried um."

Hatch nodded. He was feeling in no critical mood just now. So Van Voarst, as he guessed, had had his own supply of quinine all the time. Well, he could not trouble anybody in future. And as to what was going to happen in the early future— why--

Hatch slept— for how long he could not say. His slumber was disturbed by strange dreams of Van Voarst. He had the Belgian by the throat, and he was yelling for mercy. In the distance somewhere a band was making hideous music. The blare of brass and skin became more pronounced, until it dominated everything and brought Hatch sleepily to his feet.

"What, in the name of all that is hideous, is the matter?" he asked.

Harry the Buck made a hissing noise with his teeth. The canoe lay half hidden in a tangle of mimosa scrub by the flat bank of the river. On the slanting plain beyond, a yelling mob of blacks had assembled. They were marching in the rude formation of a column, headed by what, in happier circumstances, might have been a brass band. The serene beauty of the night was stricken by the hideous din. In the centre of the procession was a huge catafalque affair surrounded by a body of men clad in white cotton garments.

"What's it all about?" Hatch asked.

"Big buryin'," Harry explained. "Dead chief. Bury 'em at night— chief. Dem priests. And dere's Waterwitch flowers on top of the body. Sure."

Hatch caught his breath sharply. Luck seemed to be coming his way at last. Some of the stragglers were so near that he could have touched them with the canoe paddle. With a certain vague alarm, Hatch noted that they were all armed. Presently the hideous din ceased and the column became more compact. From the slope of the silent hills there came another sound, full-throated and ripe of menace. A long scattered line of torches flared out; the yellow flame swept down the slope like a torrent of falling stars.

"What's this all about?" Hatoh asked.

"'Nodder tribe," Harry grunted. "Going to be what ye call barney. Old enemies. Hillman, he claim right to make chief in place of un dead. Others say

no bally fear. They come take dead chief— hold um ransom till they come to der senses. Seen it done befo'."

Hatch was getting a grip on the situation. There was something rudely strategic in the way in which the column was forming in a solid phalanx around the sarcophagus containing the body of the dead chief. They faced outwards with defiant cries, brandishing their spears over tbeir heads. Down came the other yelling mob, with their torches aflame, till they were within striking distance. Then with one accord, or so it seemed, the flaming sinking torches were hurled into the phalanx, where they roared and spluttered with spitting cracks that added to the hideous din.

"Now, that's not a bad idea," Hatch said admiringly. "Quite a smart dodge."

"Himshi Don, the great chief, great warrior," Harry explained. "Cunning as the serpent. Um planned out this thing. And he will what you call wipe the floor. Bet you a dollar."

"No bet," Hatch smiled. "By Jove, they are at it in earnest."

They were. Taking advantage of the momentary confusion, the attackers sprang forward with the force and fury of a mountain torrent. The defenders swayed and bent before the shock, they reeled backwards, screaming as they went. Then, with a grim silence that was in marked contrast to the roar of battle, another force arose in the rear from the big tangle of scrub, and fell with incredible force and fury on the rear of the funeral party.

In a wonderfully short space of time the defenders faded away like a dream. The din of battle died out, the big crowd departed in the direction of the hills, and as the moon rose slowly over a snow peak. Hatch could see a struggling squad of figures removing the dead. As a matter of fact, the slaughter had not been great— the onslaught had been too impetuous and headlong for that— and in a short time the plain was cleared. Almost immediately afterwards a great bank of flame and smoke burst out from the shadow at the base of the hills, followed by a wail of voices so plaintive and melancholy that Hatch could feel it to the roots of his hair.

"What new devil's work is this?" he asked.

"Burn um village," Harry explained. "Burn um huts. Always de way. No matter. Dey go away to-morrow and build some more in some odder place. Watto!"

Harry turned over on his side and composed himself for sleep. So far as he was concerned, the whole thing was at an end. Doubtless he had witnessed many a scene like this before; no doubt he had been employed as an actor therein himself. It was one of the common objects of the country, so to speak. But Hatch lay awake there, looking up at the silent stars. How far was the Waterwitch off now? he wondered. Harry had declared that some of its mysterious flowers had lain on the breast of the dead chief. And Hatch was

wondering what the flower was like, if he did find it. There were all sorts of stories told about this wonderful water orchid, and all kinds of fancy prices had been offered for it. An orchid that bloomed or had its growth in water was a thing calculated to send collectors mad. But how was it grown and how was it to be acquired? Harry the Buck professed to know, but Harry was fast asleep and snoring peacefully. Perhaps the daylight would tell.

Breakfast was ready when Hatch awoke. For once in a way be was ready for the meal. Perhaps the snow breeze from the hills was responsible for the unusual appetite. So far as could be seen, there was no sign of the contending hosts of the night before, nothing but some thin spirals of blue smoke in the distance. It was towards this distance that Hatch's thoughts were wandering. Somewhere amongst the ruins yonder must be the remains of the dead chief's palace, and if Harry the Buck was right, the Waterwitch must be there, too, unless the fire had destroyed it. If this was the case, then it would be his luck all over.

"I'm going to have a squint round that place," he said. "I suppose it's safe?"

Harry the Buck entertained no doubt whatever on that score. The tribe had been beaten, their huts had been burnt, and they would fly further for safety. In Harry's opinion there was not a living soul within miles of the place. If Hatch doubted his word, he could go and see.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," Hatch grinned. "I'll come along. And if I find what I hope to find, the gun is yours, and as many cartridges as you like, when we get to Toparo. I'll leave an order for you to be supplied with a store of cartridges every year of your life. Get a move on you."

They set out across the plain in the direction of the smouldering village. The land was low and flat, and intersected here and there by pools and drains formed by the melted snow on the mountains on its way to the yellow splurge of the river. Harry stopped before one of these and pointed.

"Whatum say?" he demanded. "Here's um Waterwitch. Same as I saw befo'."

With a heart beating fast, Hatch bent over the shallow little pool. A flower broken off short at the head of the stem had fallen there and balanced on the puddle by its own weight. With all his wide experience in the beauty of the orchid, Hatch had never seen anything like this before. The bloom was some five inches in diameter, in the shape of four separate Maltese crosses. And each was a different colour— deep red, a lovely blue, saffron, and rose-pink, with a wide undercup of white shot with rose. The green foliage was veined with gold, exquisite feathery foliage wandering over the bloom and half hiding it from the eye. Hatch fairly gasped as he held it in his hand.

"Good Heavens!"he muttered. "Oh, good Heavens! And to think that I should be the first white man to bump up against this amazing flower! No

description could picture its marvellous beauty. But the tuber? What is it like, and where shall I find it? All this is distinctly encouraging, but it doesn't help me much. Just my luck to find everything yonder done to a cinder, and not one of those tubers left."

Hatch pushed on fervently. It was quite late in the afternoon before the ruins were sufficiently cool to allow a proper search being made. In the chief's "palace" was an old chest, oak and brass bound, containing such odds and ends and cheap adornments as savages love— glass beads, some old cigarette tins, and a packet of post-card photographs. Hatch tossed it away gravely.

"Now, where in the name of fortune did all this come from?" he asked. "How did this chest get here? And what is all this tangle of fibre, with tiny clay marbles attached? Here are some things that look like orchids, but I shouldn't mind betting that they are nothing of the kind. Shove 'em all in the bag, Harry, and let's be off. We'll have another day here to-morrow."

Harry placed the tangle of fibre, with the little clay balls attached like beads irregularly threaded on a string, in a box lately containing cigarettes. This he tossed, a little later on, into the canoe. Hatch took one of his precious cigarettes after supper, and then turned in for the night. In a moment he was fast asleep.

The moon was sliding down behind the mangoes as he woke with a sound like the bursting of a shell in his ears. Harry was kneeling in the canoe with a smoking revolver in his hand. It was the same weapon that he had looted from Van Voarst. In the distance a bulky figure was running towards the watery slope. A groan came from the obese runner; something dropped from his hand and tinkled on the stones. Hatch took in the whole situation at a glance.

"That was that infernal Belgian," he said. "I thought you had buried him for me?"

"Same thing," said Harry. "Bury him or flung him in the bushes, all the same. Give the kites a chance to get a good meal. Not kill, only stun him by blow on head. See canoe move and his hand after stores. Little tin can with the marbles in it. I hit him on the hand and he drop it. Not trouble us any more. Bet you a dollar. Righto."

"Well, righto or not, don't you go to sleep again," Hatch commanded. "Keep your eye skinned till daylight. If it's worth while, we can find the tin box to-morrow."

"Find it to-night," Harry volunteered.

"No, you'll not find it to-night," Hatch retorted. "You'll just stay here and keep a bright look-out for that infernal Belgian. He'll murder us both to a dead certainty if he gets a chance. Don't risk your life for the residuary legateeship of a tin cigarette box."

Hatch turned over on his side and went to sleep again. All these things were merely incidents in the life of an orchid hunter, but, all the same, he was not going to spare the Belgian the next time they met.

He woke presently to find breakfast ready. There had been no further signs of Van Voarst, but doubtless he was somewhere amongst the ruins. Fortunately, he had lost his revolver, so that he was comparatively harmless in the daylight. Hatch was feeling on pretty good terms with himself as he set out for the blackened village. Harry lingered behind on the edge of one of the little pools.

"Oh, come on!"Hatch said impatiently. "Never mind that beastly little box."

"Found the box," Harry said calmly. "Lid off. All um strings and marbles in de water. Look!"

A great cry burst from Hatch's lips as he looked down at his feet. Van Voarst had dropped the little tin box in his flight, and the lid had fallen off. The little string of marbles had dropped into the pool, where they floated with the marbles here and there covering the whole pool. But where each of the marbles had been was a magnificent flower, making the most magnificent display of floral colouring that Hatch had ever seen. The secret was out now— the secret of the Waterwitch and how to grow them. Each of those tubers could be detached, and each grew into a family of lovely blooms. Directly they touched the water they began to expand into glowing loveliness; directly they were removed they would shrivel up to a dirty fibrous root. It was a Rose of Sharon glorified, the very best thing in the way of an orchid.

Hatch removed the whole tangled mass tenderly and placed it in the tin again after the lapse of an hour or so. By this time it was rapidly drying, the bloom had gone, and nothing remained to show what a few drops of liquid could do for it. Hatch drew a deep breath as he turned his face towards the south. The danger and trials of his life were over.

"Let's go back," he said. "Let's spend the night on the river, so that by Friday we can touch something in the way of civilisation again. Leave him to his fate."

He pointed to the blackened ruins of the village. A little black dot was moving from place to place as the Belgian sought patiently for what he would never find.

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15: When August the Second Was April the First

Irvin S Cobb

1876-1944

The Saturday Evening Post, 1 Nov 1919

HOW ETHAN A. PRATT, formerly of South New Medford, in the State of Vermont, came to be resident manager and storekeeper for the British Great Eastern Company, Ltd., on Good Friday Island, in the South Seas, is not our present concern. Besides, the way of it makes too long a tale for telling here. It is sufficient to say he was.

Never having visited that wide, long, deep and mainly liquid backside of the planet known broadly as the South Seas but always intending to do so, I must largely depend for my local color upon what Ethan Pratt wrote back home to South New Medford; on that, plus what returned travelers to those parts have from time to time told me. So if in this small chronicle those paragraphs which purport to be of a descriptive nature appear incomplete to readers personally acquainted with the spots dealt with or with spots like them the fault, in some degree at least, must rest upon the fact that I have had my main dependence in the preserved letters of one who was by no means a sprightly correspondent, but on the contrary was by way of being somewhat prosy, not to say commonplace, on his literary side.

From the evidence extant one gathers that for the four years of his life he spent on Good Friday Island Ethan Pratt lived in the rear room of a two-room house of frame standing on a beach with a little village about it, a jungle behind it, a river half-mooning it and a lagoon before it. In the rear room he bedded and baited himself. The more spacious front room into which his housekeeping quarters opened was a store of sorts where he retailed print goods staple, tinned foods assorted and gimcracks various to his customers, these mostly being natives. The building was crowned with a tin roof and on top of the roof there perched a round water tank, like a high hat on a head much too large for it. The use of this tank was to catch and store up rain water, which ran into it from the sloping top of a larger and taller structure standing partly alongside and partly back of the lesser structure. The larger building— a shed it properly was; a sprawling wide-eaved barracks of a shed— was for the storing of copra, the chief article for export produced on Good Friday Island.

Copra, as all know— or as all should know, since it has come to be one of the most essential vegetable products of the world, a thing needful in the manufacture of nearly every commercial output in which fatty essences are required— is the dried meat of the nut of the coconut palm. So rich is it in oils that soap makers— to cite one of the industries employing it— scarce could do without it; but like many of this earth's most profitable and desirable yieldings it

has its unpretty aspects. For one thing it stinks most abominably while it is being cured, and after it has been cured it continues to stink, with a lessened intensity. For another thing, the all-pervading reek of the stuff gets into food that is being prepared anywhere in its bulked vicinity.

Out in front of the establishment over which Ethan Pratt presided, where the sandy beach met the waters, was a rickety little wharf like a hyphen to link the grit with the salt. Down to the outer tip of the wharf ran a narrow-gauge track of rusted iron rails, and over the track on occasion plied little straddlebug handcars. Because the water offshore was shoal ships could not come in very close but must lie well out in the lagoon and their unloadings and their reloadings were carried on by means of whale-boats ferrying back and forth between ship side and dock side with the push cars to facilitate the freight movement at the land end of the connection. This was a laborious and a vexatious proceeding, necessitating the handling and rehandling of every bit of incoming or outbound cargo several times. But then, steamers did not come very often to Good Friday Island; one came every two months about.

The expanse upon which Ethan Pratt looked when he turned his eyes outward was of an incredible whiteness. You would have thought it to be the whitest, most blinding thing in the world until you considered the road that skirted it and some of the buildings that bordered it. For the road was built of crushed coral, so dazzlingly white that to look fixedly at it for thirty seconds in bright weather was to make the eyeballs ache; and the buildings referred to were built of blocks of white coral like exaggerated cubes of refined sugar. These buildings were the chapels and churches— Methodist, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, English Wesleyan and American Mormon. When the sun shone clear the water on beyond became a shimmering blazing shield of white-hot metal; and an hour of uninterrupted gazing upon it would have turned an argus into a blinkard. But other times— early morning or evening or when stormy weather impended— the lagoon became all a wonderful deep clear blue, the color of molten stained glass. One peering then into its depths saw, far down below, marvelous sea gardens all fronded and ferny and waving; and through the foliage of this fairy-land went darting schools and shoals of fish queerly shaped and as brilliantly colored as tropical birds.

At the top of the beach, girdling it on its land side, and stencilling themselves against the sky line, ran a fringing of coconut palms. The trunks were naked almost to the tops, where the foliage revealed itself in flaring clumps of green. Viewed separately a tree was suggestive of a great bird standing on one leg with its head hidden under its wing, its rump up-reared and its splayed tail feathers saluting the skies. Viewed together they made a spectacle for which nothing in the temperate zones, animal or vegetable, offers a measurable comparison. When the wind blew softly the trees whispered among themselves. When the

wind blew hard and furiously, as often it did, or when the trade breeze swelled to hurricane speed, the coconuts in their long bearded husks would be wrenched free and would come hurtling through the air like fletched cannon balls. When one of them struck a tin roof there resulted a terrific crashing sound fit to wake the dead and to stun the living.

Living there Pratt's diet was mainly tinned salmon, which tasted faintly of tin and strongly of copra; and along with the salmon, crackers, which in this climate were almost always flabby with dampness and often were afflicted with greenish mold. Salmon and crackers had come to be his most dependable stand-bys in the matter of provender. True, the natives brought him gifts of food dishes; dishes cooked without salt and pleasing to the Polynesian palate. Coming out upon his balcony of a morning he would find swinging from a cross-beam a basket made of the green palm leaves and containing a chicken or a fish prepared according to the primitive native recipe, or perhaps a mess of wild greens baked on hot stones; or maybe baked green bananas or taro or yams or hard crusty halves of baked breadfruit.

To the white man yams and taro taste mighty good at first, but eventually he sickens of them. Pratt sickened sooner than some white men had; and almost from the first the mere sight and savor of a soft-fleshed baked fish had made his gorge rise in revolt. So he fell back upon staples of his own land and ate salmon and crackers.

This island where he lived was an island of smells and insects. Consider first the matter of the prevalent smells: When the copra was curing and the village green was studded with thousands of little cusps, each being brown without and milk-white within, and each destined to remain there until the heat had dried the nut meats to the proper brownish tone, there rose and spread upon the air a stench so thick and so heavy as to be almost visible; a rancid, hot, rottenish stench. Then, when the wind blew off the seas it frequently brought with it the taint of rotted fish. Sniffing this smell Ethan Pratt would pray for a land breeze; but since he hated perfumed smells almost as intensely as he hated putrescent ones, a land breeze was no treat to his nose either, for it came freighted with the sickish odor of the frangipani and of a plant the islanders call mosooi, overpowering in their combined sweetness.

In his letters he complained much of these smells and likewise much of the heat, but more than of either he complained of the insects. It would appear that the mosquitoes worked on him in shifts. By day there came day mosquitoes, creatures of the sunlight and matching it in a way, seeing that they were big gray-striped fellows with keen and strident voices. By night there were small vicious mosquitoes, in color an appropriate black and in habit more bloodthirsty than Uhlans. After dark the flame of his kerosene lamp was to them as the traditional light in the traditional casement is to returning wanderers. It brought

them in millions, and with them tiny persistent gnats and many small coffin-shaped beetles and hosts of pulpy, unwholesome-looking moths of many sizes and as many colors. Screens and double screens at the window openings did not avail to keep these visitors out. Somehow they found a way in. The mosquitoes and the gnats preyed upon him; the beetles and the moths were lured by the flame to a violent end. To save the wick from being clogged by their burnt bodies he hooded the top of the lamp with netting. This caused the lamp chimney to smoke and foul itself with soot. To save his shins from attack he wrapped his legs in newspaper buskins. For his hands and his face and his neck and his ears he could devise no protection.

To be encountered just outside the door were huge flying cockroaches that clung in his hair or buffeted him in the face as they blundered along on purposeless flights. Still other insects, unseen but none the less busy, added to the burden of his jeremiad. Borers riddled the pages of his books; and the white ant, as greedy for wood pulp as a paper baron, was constantly sapping and mining the underpinnings of his house.

Touching on the climate his tone was most rebellious. By all accounts the weather was rarely what one born in Vermont would regard as seasonable weather. According to him its outstanding characteristics were heat, moistness and stickiness. If he took a nap in the afternoon he rose from it as from a Turkish bath. His hair was plastered to his head all day with dampness; his forehead and his face ran sweat; his wrists were as though they had been parboiled and freshly withdrawn from the water. Perspiration glued his garments to his frame. His shoes behind the door turned a leprous white from mildew and rotted to pieces while yet they were new.

The forest, into which he sometimes ventured, was a place of dampness, deepness and smells; a place of great trees, fat fungoids, sprawling creepers, preposterous looking parasites, orchids, lianas; a place of things that crawled and climbed and twined and clung. It was filled with weird sounds— the booming of wild pigeons; a nagging, tapping sound as though woodchoppers were at work far off in its depths; and a constant insane chattering sound, as though mad children, hidden all about him, were laughing at him. Dusk brought from their coverts the flying foxes, to utter curious notes as they sailed through the gloaming, and occasionally sharp squeaks as of mortal agony or intense gratification— he couldn't make up his mind which. After nightfall if he flung a burning cigar stump out upon the sand he could see it moving off in the darkness apparently under its own motive power. But the truth was that a land crab, with an unsolvable mania for playing the rôle of torchbearer, would be scuttling away with the stub in one of its claws.

The forest sheltered no dangerous beasts and no venomous reptiles but in it were stinging nettles the touch of which was like fire to a sensitive white skin.

Also, the waters of the lagoon were free from man-eaters, but wading close to shore one was almost sure to bark one's shanks on the poisoned coral, making sores that refused to heal. Against the river, which flowed down out of the interior to the sea, Pratt likewise bore a grudge, because it was in the river that a brown woman washed his clothes on the stones, returning them with the buttons pounded off; but for every missing button there was sure to be a bright yellow, semi-indelible stain, where the laundress had spread the garments to dry upon a wild berry bush.

Every two months the steamer came. Then the white population of the station doubled and trebled itself. Traders and storekeepers came by canoe from outlying islands or from remote stations on the farther side of his own island, for Good Friday Island had but one port of entry and this was it. Beachcombers who had been adopted into villages in the interior sauntered in over jungle trails. Many of them were deserters from whalers or from naval vessels; nearly all were handsome chaps in an animal sort of way.

For this common sharing of a common comeliness among them there was a reason. In a land where physical perfection literally is worshipped, good-looking men, brawny and broad, are surest of winning an asylum and wives and tribal equality. To Pratt it seems to have been a source of wonderment that almost without exception they were blue-eyed and light-haired; he could understand of course why their skins, once fair and white, had changed to the color of well-tanned calfskin. The sun beating upon their naked bodies had done that.

There also would be present a party of overseers and managers from a big German plantation on an adjacent island. The traders and the Germans would appear in white ducks with white shoes smartly pipe-clayed, and white straw hats. The beachcombers would be in clean pajama suits with bright-colored neckties. Ordinarily these latter went about bare-headed, bare-legged and bare-bodied except for the lava-lava made of fiber from the paper mulberry tree and worn like a kilt about the hips; but now, in white men's garments, they sought to prove that they still were white men and civilized white men too. If the steamer were late, as very often happened, some of the visitors would take advantage of the wait to make themselves roaring drunk on gin.

SO MUCH BRIEFLY, for the stage setting of Ethan Pratt's environment; now for the personality of the man: Of all the breeds and the mixed breeds that have gravitated out of white lands into these sea islands of darker-skinned peoples, there surely was never a more incongruous, more alien figure than this man presented. For you should know that in all things he was most typical of what is most typical in a certain cross-section of New England life— not the coastwise New England of a seafaring, far-ranging, adventurous race, but the New England of long-settled remote interior districts. He came of a farming stock and a

storekeeping stock, bred out of the loins of forbears made hard by the task of chiselling a livelihood off of flinty hillsides, made narrow by the pent-up communal system of isolated life, made honest and truthful by the influences behind them and the examples before them of generations of straight-walking, strait-laced, God-dreading folk.

That form of moral dyspepsia known as the Puritanical conscience was his by right of inheritance. In his nature there was no flexibility, no instinct for harmonious adaptability to any surroundings excepting those among which he had been born and in which he intended to end his days. Temperamentally he was of a fast color. The leopard cannot change the spots and neither could he change his; nor did he will so to do. In short he was what he was, just as God and prenatal reactions had fashioned him, and so he would remain to the end of the chapter.

For all the four years he had spent out there the lure of the South Seas— about which so much has been written that it must be a verity and not a popular myth— had never laid hold upon him. Its gorgeous physical beauty, its languor, its voluptuous color and abandon, its prodigally glorious dawns and its velvety nights— held for him no value to be reckoned as an offset against climatic discomforts; it left him untouched. In it he never saw the wonderland that Stevenson made so vivid to stay-at-homes, nor felt for one instant the thrill that inspired Jack London to fine rhapsodising. In it he saw and he felt only the sense of an everlasting struggle against foreign elements and hostile forces.

Among the missionaries he had acquaintances but no friends. He despised the swaggering beachcombers who had flung off the decencies of civilization along with the habiliments of civilization and who found a marrowy sweetness in the husks of the prodigal. Even more he despised the hectoring Germans with their flaming red and yellow beards, their thick-lensed spectacles, their gross manners when among their own kind and their brutishness in all their dealings with the natives— a brutishness so universal among them that no Polynesian would work at any price for a German, and every German had to depend for his plantation labor upon imported black boys from the Solomons and from New Guinea, who having once been trapped or, to use the trade word, indented, were thereafter held in an enforced servitude and paid with the bond-man's wage of bitter bread and bloody stripes.

He had never been able to get under the skin of a native; indeed he had never tried. In all the things that go to make up an understanding of a fellow mortal's real nature they still were to him as completely strangers as they had been on the day he landed in this place. Set down in the midst of a teeming fecundity he nevertheless remained as truly a castaway as though he had floated ashore on a bit of wreckage. He could have been no more and no less a

maroon had the island which received him been a desert island instead of a populous one.

When a chief paid him a formal visit, bringing a gift of taro root and sitting for hours upon his veranda, the grave courtesy of the ceremony, in which a white man differently constituted might have taken joy, merely bored him unutterably. As for the native women, they had as little of sex appeal for him as he had for them— which was saying a good deal now, because he was short and of a meager shape, and the scorn of the Polynesian girl for a little man is measureless. The girls of Good Friday Island called him by a name which sounded like "Pooh-pooh."

Among an English-speaking people it would have been a hard-enough lot to be pooh-poohed through life by every personable female one met. Here the coupled syllables carried an added sting of contemptuousness. In the language of the country they meant runty, mean-figured, undersized. A graceful girl, her naked limbs glistening with coconut oil, a necklet of flowers about her throat and a hibiscus bloom pasted to her cheek like a beauty spot, meeting him in the road would give him a derisive smile over her shoulder and with the unconscious cruelty of primitive folk would softly puff out "Pooh-pooh" through her pursed lips as she passed him by. And it hurt. Certain of the white residents called him Pooh-pooh too, which hurt more deeply.

How he hated the whole thing— the dampness which mildewed his shoes and rusted out his nettings; the day heat which kept him bathed in clamminess; the pestiferous insects; the forest with its voices like sobbings and hammerings and demoniac chatterings; the food he had to eat; the company he had to keep; the chiefs who bored him; the girls who derided him; the beachcombers who nauseated him; the white sands, the blue waters, the smells, the sounds, the routine of existence with one day precisely like another— the whole thing of it. We may picture him as a humid duck-legged little man, most terribly homesick, most tremendously lonely, most distressingly alien. We may go further and picture him as a sort of combination of Job with his afflictions, Robinson Crusoe with no man Friday to cheer him in his solitude, and Peter the Hermit with no dream of a crusade to uplift him. In these four years his hair had turned almost white, yet he was still under forty.

To all about him, white people and brown people alike, the coming of the steamer was an event of supremest importance. For the islanders it meant a short season of excitement, most agreeable to their natures. For the whites it meant a fleeting but none the less delectable contact with the world outside, with lands beyond, upon which all of them, for this reason or that, had turned their backs, and to which some of them dared never return.

In his case the world did not mean the world at large but merely the small circumscribed world of South New Medford, which was his world. To him South

New Medford comprehended and summed up all that was really worth while. He welcomed the steamer not because it brought news of wars and rumors of wars nor tales of great events on this continent or in that archipelago, but because it brought to him a sheaf of letters, all addressed in the same prim handwriting and bearing the same postmark; and a sheaf of copies of the South New Medford Daily Republican. The letters he read at once greedily, but with the newspapers he had a different way. He shucked them out of their wrappers, arranged them in proper chronological order with those bearing the later dates at the bottom and those bearing the older dates upon the top of the heap, then stacked them on a shelf in his living room. And each morning he read a paper.

In the beginning of his sojourn on Good Friday Island he had made a grievous mistake. Following the arrival of the first steamer after he took over his duties as resident manager for the British Great Eastern he had indulged himself in a perfect orgy of reading. He had read all his Daily Republicans in two days' time, gorging himself on home news, on mention of familiar names and on visions of familiar scenes. Then had ensued sixty-odd days of emptiness until the steamer brought another batch of papers to him.

From that time on he read one paper a day and one only. Reading it he lived the life of the town and became one of its citizens; a sharer at long distance in its joys, its sorrows and its small thrills. But never now did he read more than one paper in a single day; the lesson of those two months had sunk in. No temptation, howsoever strong— the desire to know how the divorce trial of the H. K. Peabodys turned out, the itch of yearning to learn whether the body of the man found drowned in Exeter Pond was identified— proved potent enough to pull him away from his rule. That the news he read was anywhere from ten weeks to four months old when it reached him did not matter; in fact he very soon forgot that such was the case. For two precious hours a day he was translated back to the day and date that the rumpled sheet in his hands carried on its first page. Afterward he reverted quite naturally and without conscious jar to the proper time of the year as advertised by the calendar.

His routine would be like this: He would rise early, before the heat of the day was upon Good Friday Island to make it steam and sweat and give off smells. He would shave himself and bathe and put on clean loose garments, all white except where the stains of the wild, yellow berries had blotched them. His breakfast he prepared himself, afterward washing the dishes. Then he would light his pipe or his cigar and take from the shelf the uppermost copy of the pile of *Daily Republicans* there. With the love for tidiness and kemptness that was a part of him he would smooth out its creases, then sit down on his veranda to read it. Immediately he became detached from all his surroundings. By his concentration he was isolated from and insulated against all external influences. He was not in Good Friday Island then; he was in South New Medford.

Each morning he read his paper through from the top line of the first column of the first page to the bottom line of the last column of the fourth, or last, page. He read it all— news matter, local items, clippings, advertisements, want notices, church notices, lodge notices, patent insides of boiler plate, fashion department, household hints, farm hints, reprint, Births, Weddings and Deaths; syndicate stuff, rural correspondence— no line of its contents did he skip. With his eyes shut he could put his finger upon those advertisements which ran without change and occupied set places on this page or that; such, for instance, as the two-column display of J. Wesley Paxon, Livery Barn, Horses Kept and Baited, Vehicles at all hours, Funeral Attendance a Specialty; and the two-inch notice of the American Pantorium and Pressing Club, Membership $1.00 per Month, Garments Called For and Delivered, Phone No. 41, M. Pincus, Prop. He was like a miser with a loaf; no crumb, however tiny, got away from him. To him there was more of absorbing interest in the appearance of the seventeen-year locust in Chittenden County than in a Balkan outbreak; less of interest in the failing state of health of the Czar than in the prospects for the hay crop in the Otter Creek valley.

When he had read on through to the last ink-smudged line he would reread the accounts of those matters which particularly attracted him on their first reading. Then reluctantly and still in his state of absorption, he would put the paper aside and going inside to a small desk would write his daily chapter in a bulky letter, the whole to be posted on the next steamer day. It was characteristic of the man that in his letter writing he customarily dealt in comment upon the minor affairs of South New Medford as they had passed in review before him in the printed columns, rather than in observations regarding witnessed occurrences in Good Friday Island. This writing stunt done, his day was done. The rest was dullness. Unutterable, grinding dullness— the monotony of dealing out wares to customers, of keeping his accounts, of posting his records to date, of performing his domestic chores.

From this dullness, though, there was sometimes an escape. To relieve the monotony of his cheerless grind of duties and obligations there came to him visions. And these visions, we may be very sure, mainly were induced by what he had that day read and that day written. By virtue of a special conjury residing in these waking dreams of his, the little man peering nearsightedly at the shimmering white beach saw instead of a beach the first heavy fall of snow upon the withers of the Green Mountains; saw not unchanging stretches of sand but a blanket of purest fleece, frilled and flounced and scrolled after the drift wind had billowed it up in low places but otherwise smooth and fair except where it had been rutted by sleigh runners and packed by the snow-boltered hoofs of bay Dobbins and sorrel Dollies, the get of Morgan stock.

In the insane forest voices he heard the contented cacklings of fat hens scratching for provender beneath the gnarled limbs of ancient apple trees whose trunks all were so neatly whitewashed up to the lowermost boughs. Looking upon the settlement where he lived, set as it was like a white-and-green jewel in a ring of lush barbaric beauty, his fancy showed him the vista of a spinsterish-looking Main Street lined by dooryards having fences of pointed painted pickets, and behind the pickets, peonies and hollyhocks encroaching upon prim flagged walks which led back to the white-panelled doors of small houses buried almost to their eaves in lilac bushes and golden glow.

The magic of it made all things to match in with the image: Thus, for example, the tall palms with their feather-duster tops, bending seaward, turned into broad elms standing in regular double rank, like Yankee militiamen on a muster day. And night times, when through his windows there came floating in the soft vowelsome voices of native fishermen paddling their canoes upon the lagoon and singing as they paddled, he felt himself translated many thousands of miles away to Wednesday evening prayer meeting in a squat, brick church with a wooden belfry rearing above its steep slated roof.

But in this last conjuring-up of a beloved scene there lay at the back of the trick more of reminiscence than imagination, since the airs the fishermen chanted were based, nearly all, upon Christian songs that the earlier missionaries had brought hither; the words might be Polynesian but the cadence that carried the words was likely to be the cadence of some pioneer hymnster.

And ever and always the vision had a certain delectable climax; a definite consummation most devoutly wished for. For its final upshot would be that Ethan Pratt would behold himself growing old in the peaceful safe harbor of South New Medford, anchored fast by his heartstrings to a small white cottage, all furbished and plenished within, all flowers and shrubs roundabout, with a kitchen garden at its back, and on beyond an orchard of whitewashed trees where buff cochins clucked beneath the ripening fruit, and on beyond this in turn a hay meadow stretching away toward rising foothills.

He saw himself working in the flowers and tilling the vegetable garden. He watched himself quitting this haven to walk a sedate way to worship of a Sunday morning. With his mind's eye he followed his own course in a buggy along a country road in the fall of the year when the maples had turned and the goldenrod spread its carpet of tawny glory across the fields. And invariably his companion in these simple homely comfortable employments was a little woman who wore gold-rimmed glasses and starchy print frocks.

Into the picture no third figure ever obtruded. With her alone he conceived of himself as walking side by side through all the remaining days of his life. For this mousy methodical little man had his great romance. Unsuspected and undetected, inside the commonplace cover of his body it burned with a clear

and a steady flame. It had burned there, never flickering, never wavering, through all the days of his faring into far and foreign parts. Since childhood the two of them had been engaged. It was she who wrote him the letters that came, a fat sheaf of them, by every steamer; it was to her that he wrote in reply. It was for the sake of her and in the intention of making a home for her that through four years he had endured this imprisonment or this martyrdom or this whatever you may be pleased to call it, away off here on the opposite side of the world from her. She was saving and he was saving, both for a common purpose. Back there at home it cost her little to live, and out here it cost him less. In fact, it cost him almost nothing. Ninety per cent of his pay went into his share of the pool.

Within another year the requisite sum which this pair of canny prudent souls had set as their modest goal would be reached; and then he could bid an everlasting farewell to these hated islands and go sailing home— home to South New Medford and to Miss Hetty Stowe. And then she would surrender the place she had held for so long as the teacher of District School Number Four, to become Mrs. Ethan Allen Pratt, a wife honored, a helpmate well-beloved.

So to him the coming of the steamer meant more than an orgy of drunken beachcombers and a bustle of life and activity upon the beach; it meant more than a thin-strained taste of contact with a distant world of white men and white men's ways; meant more, even, than letters and papers. To him it was a renewal of the nearing prospect of an eternal departure out of these lands. By the steamer's movements he marked off into spaced intervals the remaining period of his exile, he thought of the passage of time not in terms of days or weeks but in terms of two-month stretches. Six visits more of the ship, or possibly seven, and this drear life would come to an end and another life, the one of his hopes and plans, would begin.

For its next time of coming the boat was due on or about August the first. She failed to come on the first, but on the second, early in the morning, she came nosing into the lagoon. In a canoe with a brown man to paddle him Pratt put off for her. He was alongside by the time her anchor chains had rattled out, and the skipper with his own hands passed down to him a mail bag. He brought it ashore and from it took out his packet of letters and his sheaf of *Daily Republicans*. These he carried to his quarters.

First he read the letters, finding them many fewer in number than was usual. By his private system of chronological accounting there should have been one letter for every day from the eighteenth of March well on into May. But here were but a scant dozen instead of the expected fifty-odd. On the other hand there seemed to be a fairly complete file of the papers, except that about ten or twelve of the earlier-dated numbers were missing. By some freakishness in the handling of the post at this port or that a batch of the older papers and a larger

batch of the newer letters had failed of ultimate delivery to the steamer; so he figured it. This thing had happened before, causing a vexatious break in his routine. Plainly it had happened again. Well, away out here off the beat of travel such upsettings must be endured.

He arranged the papers upon their proper shelf and in their proper order; then, as was his wont, he turned to the letters and read them one by one. To another they might have seemed stiff and precise in their language; almost formal, faintly breathing as they did the restrained affections of a woman no longer young and coming of a breed of women who almost from the cradle are by precept and example taught how to cloak the deeper and the more constant emotions beneath the ice skim of a ladylike reserve. But they satisfied their reader; they were as they always had been and as they always would be. His only complaint, mentally registered, was that the last one should bear the date of March twenty-ninth.

Having read them all he filed them away in a safe place, then brought the topmost copy of his just-received file of newspapers out upon the veranda and sat himself down to read it.

The first column always contained local news. He read of the wand drill given by the graduating class of the South New Medford Girls' High School; of a demonstration of Wheat-Sweet Breakfast Food in the show window of Cody's drug store; of a fire from unknown causes in Lawyer Horace Bartlett's offices upstairs over G. A. R. Hall, damage eighty dollars; of the death of Aunt Priscilla Lyon, aged ninety-two; of a bouncing, ten-pound boy born to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Purdy, mother and child doing well— all names familiar to him. He came to the department devoted to weddings. There was but one notice beneath the single-line head; it made a single paragraph.

He read it and as he read the words of it burned into his brain like a fiery acid. He read it, and it ran like this:

"We are informed that a surprise marriage took place this morning at Rutland. In that city Miss Hetty Stowe, of near this place, was united in the holy bonds of wedlock to Mr. Gabriel Eno, of Vergennes. We did not get the name of the officiating minister. The bride is an estimable lady who for years past has taught District School Number Four in the county. We have not the pleasure of the happy bridegroom's acquaintance but assume he is in every way worthy of the lady he has won for a wife. Ye Editor extends congratulations to the happy pair and will print further details when secured."

He read it through again, to the last blurred word. And as he reread a roaring and a crashing filled his ears. It was the castle of his hopes crashing down in ruins. So this, then was why the sequence of letters had been so abruptly broken off. She had lacked the courage to tell him of her faithlessness; she had

chosen the course of silence, leaving him to learn of the treachery through other sources. It was cruelty piled upon cruelty compounded.

For such a sorry ending he had cut four years out of his life. For this reward of all his constancy he had endured what had been wellnigh unendurable—loneliness, homesickness, isolation, discomfort. For this he had kept his body clean and his soul clean where all about him was sloth and slackness. He thought backward upon that which he had undergone; he thought forward upon the dreary purposeless prospect that stretched unendingly before him. Never now could he bring himself to go back to the spot of his shattered dreams. And to him that was the one place in all the world worth going back to.

He put his face down upon his crossed arms, and presently there began to escape from him strangled sobs sounding most grotesquely like some strange mimicry of the name the native girls had for him— "Pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh," over and over again repeated. Beyond his doorstep the life of the station hummed and throbbed, quickened into joyous activity by the coming of the steamer. He was not conscious of it. That roaring still was in his ears.

Now between his racking sobs he began to pray aloud a broken prayer. He did not pray for divine forgiveness of the thing he meant to do. By the narrow tenets of his faith his soul, through the deliberate act of his hands, would go forth from the body, doomed to everlasting torment. It did not appear feasible to him that God might understand. The God he believed in was a stern God of punishments, sitting in strict judgment upon mortal transgressions. So he prayed not for mercy but for strength to carry him through that which faced him.

In a cupboard in the inner room was a single-barreled, muzzle-loading fowling piece made at Liege, in Belgium, many years before. His predecessor in the station had left it behind him and Pratt had succeeded to possession of it. He knew how to load and fire and clean it. Occasionally he had used it in shooting at wood pigeons. He went inside and took it from its place and charged it with black powder from an old-fashioned metal powder flask and with heavy shot from a worn shot pouch. For wadding he tore apart the front page of the uppermost copy of the file of *Daily Republicans* lying upon the shelf where he had placed them less than half an hour before.

He rammed the charge home, with wadding between powder and shot, with more wadding on top of the shot. He withdrew the ramrod and cast it aside; he brought the hammer back to full cock and fixed a cap upon the nipple. He stood the gun upright upon the floor and leaned forward, the muzzle against his upper chest, the stock braced against the edge of a crack in the planking. With the great toe of his bare right foot he pressed the trigger.

TWO NATIVES, passing, heard the booming report and ran in to see what had caused it. They quickly ran out again and brought white men. After the body

had been moved from where it had fallen but before the scanty personal belongings of the dead man had been sealed up and before the store had been put under lock and key, the white men made search about the place for any farewell message, or lacking that, any physical evidence that might furnish a possible explanation for the cause of the suicide. They found neither message nor clue. In searching about one of them came upon a tattered scrap of newspaper. Its burnt edges and its general singed condition proved that it had been used for wadding. The force of the discharge had blown it out, almost intact, to flutter off into a corner.

Moved by a curiosity natural under the circumstances the finder deciphered the smudged and blackened reading that he found upon the two surfaces of the fragment. On one side appeared part of an advertisement of a merchant tailor; on the other side he made out this, which he read with a casual interest only:

The Editor regrets exceedingly that in yesterday's issue he was victimized and imposed upon to the extent of printing an erroneous and entirely incorrect item, for which mistake we now hasten to make prompt correction and due amends. Some person unknown, taking advantage of the fact that yesterday was April the first, or All Fools' Day, telephoned to our sanctum the information that Miss Hetty Stowe, the well-known teacher, of near here, had been married yesterday morning at Rutland to a Mr. Gabriel Eno, of Vergennes. Accepting the report in good faith, this paper printed it in good faith, as an item of news. We now learn that the entire story was untrue, being, not to mince words, a lie manufactured out of the whole cloth. We learn that Miss Stowe knows the gentleman whose name was given as bridegroom but very slightly, having met him but once, as we are now reliably informed. In fact, nothing could be farther from her thoughts than marriage with the gentleman in question, he being considerably her junior in years. The cruelty of the hoax thus perpetrated is increased by the fact that for the past several days Miss Stowe has been confined to the bed of illness, suffering from a sudden and violent attack of fever, which illness has naturally been enhanced by the embarrassing position in which she has been placed through the act of an anonymous practical joker. Such jokes are entirely out of place and cannot be too strongly reprehended. In correcting this falsehood the Daily Republican *wishes to state that the perpetrator of the same is deserving of severe—"*

Here the fragment was torn across.

To the tale there is no moral unless it be an indirect moral to be derived from contemplation of a strange contradiction in our modern life, to wit: That practical burglary is by law sternly discouraged and practical joking is not.

———————

16: The Montezuma Emerald

R. Ottolengui

1831-1937

The Idler Feb 1895

In: *Final Proof*, 1898

A Barnes and Mitchel investigation

"IS THE Inspector in?"

Mr. Barnes immediately recognized the voice, and turned to greet the speaker. The man was Mr. Leroy Mitchel's English valet. Contrary to all precedent and tradition, he did not speak in cockney dialect, not even stumbling over the proper distribution of the letter "h" throughout his vocabulary. That he was English, however, was apparent to the ear, because of a certain rather attractive accent, peculiar to his native island, and to the eye because of a deferential politeness of manner, too seldom observed in American servants. He also always called Mr. Barnes "Inspector," oblivious of the fact that he was not a member of the regular police, and mindful only of the English application of the word to detectives.

"Step right in, Williams," said Mr. Barnes. "What is the trouble?"

"I don't rightly know, Inspector," said Williams. "Won't you let me speak to you alone? It's about the master."

"Certainly. Come into my private room." He led the way and Williams followed, remaining standing, although Mr. Barnes waved his hand towards a chair as he seated himself in his usual place at his desk. "Now then," continued the detective, "what's wrong? Nothing serious I hope?"

"I hope not, sir, indeed. But the master's disappeared."

"Disappeared, has he." Mr. Barnes smiled slightly. "Now Williams, what do you mean by that? You did not see him vanish, eh?"

"No, sir, of course not. If you'll excuse my presumption, Inspector, I don't think this is a joke, sir, and you're laughing."

"All right, Williams," answered Mr. Barnes, assuming a more serious tone. "I will give your tale my sober consideration. Proceed."

"Well, I hardly know where to begin, Inspector. But I'll just give you the facts, without any unnecessary opinions of my own."

Williams rather prided himself upon his ability to tell what he called "a straight story." He placed his hat on a chair, and, standing behind it, with one foot resting on a rung, checked off the points of his narrative, as he made them, by tapping the palm of one hand with the index finger of the other.

"To begin then," said he. "Mrs. Mitchel and Miss Rose sailed for England, Wednesday morning of last week. That same night, quite unexpected, the

master says to me, says he, 'Williams, I think you have a young woman you're sweet on down at Newport?' 'Well, sir,' says I, 'I do know a person as answers that description,' though I must say to you, Inspector, that how he ever came to know it beats me. But that's aside, and digression is not my habit. 'Well, Williams,' the master went on, 'I shan't need you for the rest of this week, and if you'd like to take a trip to the seashore, I shan't mind standing the expense, and letting you go.' Of course, I thanked him very much, and I went, promising to be back on Monday morning as directed. And I kept my word, Inspector; though it was a hard wrench to leave the young person last Sunday in time to catch the boat; the moon being bright and everything most propitious for a stroll, it being her Sunday off, and all that. But, as I said, I kept my word, and was up to the house Monday morning only a little after seven, the boat having got in at six. I was a little surprised to find that the master was not at home, but then it struck me as how he must have gone out of town over Sunday, and I looked for him to be in for dinner. But he did not come to dinner, nor at all that night. Still, I did not worry about it. It was the master's privilege to stay away as long as he liked. Only I could not help thinking I might just as well have had that stroll in the moonlight, Sunday night. But when all Tuesday and Tuesday night went by, and no word from the master, I must confess that I got uneasy; and now here's Wednesday noon, and no news; so I just took the liberty to come down and ask your opinion in the matter, seeing as how you are a particular friend of the family, and an Inspector to boot."

"Really, Williams," said Mr. Barnes, "all I see in your story is that Mr. Mitchel, contemplating a little trip off somewhere with friends, let you go away. He expected to be back by Monday, but, enjoying himself, has remained longer."

"I hope that's all, sir, and I've tried to think so. But this morning I made a few investigations of my own, and I'm bound to say what I found don't fit that theory."

"Ah, you have some more facts. What are they?"

"One of them is this cablegram that I found only this morning under a book on the table in the library." He handed a blue paper to Mr. Barnes, who took it and read the following, on a cable blank:

"Emerald. Danger. Await letter."

For the first time during the interview Mr. Barnes's face assumed a really serious expression. He studied the despatch silently for a full minute, and then, without raising his eyes, said:

"What else?"

"Well, Inspector, I don't know that this has anything to do with the affair, but the master had a curious sort of jacket, made of steel links, so tight and so closely put together, that I've often wondered what it was for. Once I made so bold as to ask him, and he said, said he, 'Williams, if I had an enemy, it would be

a good idea to wear that, because it would stop a bullet or a knife.' Then he laughed, and went on: 'Of course, I shan't need it for myself. I bought it when I was abroad once, merely as a curiosity.' Now, Inspector, that jacket's disappeared also."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I've looked from dining-room to garret for it. The master's derringer is missing, too. It's a mighty small affair. Could be held in the hand without being noticed, but it carries a nasty-looking ball."

"Very well, Williams, there may be something in your story. I'll look into the matter at once. Meanwhile, go home, and stay there so that I may find you if I want you."

"Yes, sir; I thank you for taking it up. It takes a load off my mind to know you're in charge, Inspector. If there's harm come to the master, I'm sure you'll track the party down. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Williams."

After the departure of Williams, the detective sat still for several minutes, lost in thought. He was weighing two ideas. He seemed still to hear the words which Mr. Mitchel had uttered after his success in unravelling the mystery of Mr. Goldie's lost identity. "Next time I will assign myself the chief *rôle*," or words to that effect, Mr. Mitchel had said. Was this disappearance a new riddle for Mr. Barnes to solve? If so, of course he would undertake it, as a sort of challenge which his professional pride could not reject. On the other hand, the cable despatch and the missing coat of mail might portend ominously. The detective felt that Mr. Mitchel was somewhat in the position of the fabled boy who cried "Wolf!" so often that, when at last the wolf really appeared, no assistance was sent to him. Only Mr. Barnes decided that he must chase the "wolf," whether it be real or imaginary. He wished, though, that he knew which.

Ten minutes later he decided upon a course of action, and proceeded to a telegraph office, where he found that, as he had supposed, the despatch had come from the Paris firm of jewellers from which Mr. Mitchel had frequently bought gems. He sent a lengthy message to them, asking for an immediate reply.

While waiting for the answer, the detective was not inactive. He went direct to Mr. Mitchel's house, and once more questioned the valet, from whom he obtained an accurate description of the clothes which his master must have worn, only one suit being absent. This fact alone, seemed significantly against the theory of a visit to friends out of town. Next, Mr. Barnes interviewed the neighbors, none of whom remembered to have seen Mr. Mitchel during the week. At the sixth house below, however, he learned something definite. Here he found Mr. Mordaunt, a personal acquaintance, and member of one of Mr. Mitchel's clubs. This gentleman stated that he had dined at the club with Mr.

Mitchel on the previous Thursday, and had accompanied him home, in the neighborhood of eleven o'clock, parting with him at the door of his own residence. Since then he had neither seen nor heard from him. This proved that Mr. Mitchel was at home one day after Williams went to Newport.

Leaving the house, Mr. Barnes called at the nearest telegraph office and asked whether a messenger summons had reached them during the week, from Mr. Mitchel's house. The record slips showed that the last call had been received at 12.30 A.M., on Friday. A cab had been demanded, and was sent, reaching the house at one o'clock. At the stables, Mr. Barnes questioned the cab-driver, and learned that Mr. Mitchel had alighted at Madison Square.

"But he got right into another cab," added the driver. "It was just a chance I seen him, 'cause he made as if he was goin' into the Fifth Avenoo; but luck was agin' him, for I'd scarcely gone two blocks back, when I had to get down to fix my harness, and while I was doin' that, who should I see but my fare go by in another cab."

"You did not happen to know the driver of that vehicle?" suggested Mr. Barnes.

"That's just what I did happen to know. He's always by the Square, along the curb by the Park. His name's Jerry. You'll find him easy enough, and he'll tell you where he took that fly bird."

Mr. Barnes went down town again, and did find Jerry, who remembered driving a man at the stated time, as far as the Imperial Hotel; but beyond that the detective learned nothing, for at the hotel no one knew Mr. Mitchel, and none recollected his arrival early Friday morning.

From the fact that Mr. Mitchel had changed cabs, and doubled on his track, Mr. Barnes concluded that he was after all merely hiding away for the pleasure of baffling him, and he felt much relieved to divest the case of its alarming aspect. However, he was not long permitted to hold this opinion. At the telegraph office he found a cable despatch awaiting him, which read as follows:

"Montezuma Emerald forwarded Mitchel tenth. Previous owner murdered London eleventh. Mexican suspected. Warned Mitchel."

This assuredly looked very serious. Casting aside all thought of a practical joke, Mr. Barnes now threw himself heart and soul into the task of finding Mitchel, dead or alive. From the telegraph office he hastened to the Custom-House, where he learned that an emerald, the invoiced value of which was no less than twenty thousand dollars, had been delivered to Mr. Mitchel in person, upon payment of the custom duties, at noon of the previous Thursday. Mr. Barnes, with this knowledge, thought he knew why Mr. Mitchel had been careful to have a friend accompany him to his home on that night. But why had he gone out again? Perhaps he felt safer at a hotel than at home, and, having reached the Imperial, taking two cabs to mystify the villain who might be

tracking him, he might have registered under an alias. What a fool he had been not to examine the registry, as he could certainly recognize Mr. Mitchel's handwriting, though the name signed would of course be a false one.

Back, therefore, he hastened to the Imperial, where, however, his search for familiar chirography was fruitless. Then an idea occurred to him. Mr. Mitchel was so shrewd that it would not be unlikely that, meditating a disappearance to baffle the men on his track, he had registered at the hotel several days prior to his permanently stopping there. Turning the page over, Mr. Barnes still failed to find what he sought, but a curious name caught his eye.

"Miguel Palma— City of Mexico."

Could this be the London murderer? Was this the suspected Mexican? If so, here was a bold and therefore dangerous criminal who openly put up at one of the most prominent hostelries. Mr. Barnes was turning this over in his mind, when a diminutive newsboy rushed into the corridor, shouting:

"Extra *Sun*! Extra *Sun*! All about the horrible murder. Extra!"

Mr. Barnes purchased a paper and was stupefied at the headlines:

ROBERT LEROY MITCHEL DROWNED!
His Body Found Floating in the East River.
A DAGGER IN HIS BACK.
Indicates Murder.

Mr. Barnes rushed out of the hotel, and, quickly finding a cab, instructed the man to drive rapidly to the Morgue. On the way, he read the details of the crime as recounted in the newspaper. From this he gathered that the body had been discovered early in the morning by two boatmen, who towed it to shore and handed it over to the police. An examination at the Morgue had established the identity by letters found on the corpse and the initials marked on the clothing. Mr. Barnes was sad at heart, and inwardly fretted because his friend had not asked his aid when in danger.

Jumping from the cab almost before it had fully stopped in front of the Morgue, he stumbled and nearly fell over a decrepit-looking beggar, upon whose breast was a printed card soliciting alms for the blind. Mr. Barnes dropped a coin, a silver quarter, into his outstretched palm, and hurried into the building. As he did so he was jostled by a tall man who was coming out, and who seemed to have lost his temper, as he muttered an imprecation under his breath in Spanish. As the detective's keen ear noted the foreign tongue an idea occurred to him which made him turn and follow the stranger. When he reached the street again he received a double surprise. The stranger had already signalled the cab which Mr. Barnes had just left, and was entering it, so that he had only a moment in which to observe him. Then the door was slammed, and

the driver whipped up his horses and drove rapidly away. At the same moment the blind beggar jumped up, and ran in the direction taken by the cab. Mr. Barnes watched them till both cab and beggar disappeared around the next corner, and then he went into the building again, deeply thinking over the episode.

He found the Morgue-keeper, and was taken to the corpse. He recognized the clothing at once, both from the description given by Williams, and because he now remembered to have seen Mr. Mitchel so dressed. It was evident that the body had been in the water for several days, and the marks of violence plainly pointed to murder. Still sticking in the back was a curious dagger of foreign make, the handle projecting between the shoulders. The blow must have been a powerful stroke, for the blade was so tightly wedged in the bones of the spine that it resisted ordinary efforts to withdraw it. Moreover, the condition of the head showed that a crime had been committed, for the skull and face had been beaten into a pulpy mass with some heavy instrument. Mr. Barnes turned away from the sickening sight to examine the letters found upon the corpse. One of these bore the Paris postmark, and he was allowed to read it. It was from the jewellers, and was the letter alluded to in the warning cable. Its contents were:

Dear Sir:—

As we have previously advised you the Montezuma Emerald was shipped to you on the tenth instant. On the following day the man from whom we had bought it was found dead in Dover Street, London, killed by a dagger-thrust between the shoulders. The meagre accounts telegraphed to the papers here, state that there is no clue to the assassin. We were struck by the name, and remembered that the deceased had urged us to buy the emerald, because, as he declared, he feared that a man had followed him from Mexico, intending to murder him to get possession of it. Within an hour of reading the newspaper story, a gentlemanly looking man, giving the name of Miguel Palma, entered our store, and asked if we had purchased the Montezuma Emerald. We replied negatively, and he smiled and left. We notified the police, but they have not yet been able to find this man. We deemed it our duty to warn you, and did so by cable."

The signature was that of the firm from which Mr. Barnes had received the cable in the morning. The plot seemed plain enough now. After the fruitless murder of the man in London, the Mexican had traced the emerald to Mr. Mitchel, and had followed it across the water. Had he succeeded in obtaining it? Among the things found on the corpse was an empty jewel-case, bearing the name of the Paris firm. It seemed from this that the gem had been stolen. But, if so, this man, Miguel Palma, must be made to explain his knowledge of the affair.

Once more visiting the Imperial, Mr. Barnes made inquiry, and was told that Mr. Palma had left the hotel on the night of the previous Thursday, which was

just a few hours before Mr. Mitchel had undoubtedly reached there alive. Could it be that the man at the Morgue had been he? If so, why was he visiting that place to view the body of his victim? This was a problem over which Mr. Barnes puzzled, as he was driven up to the residence of Mr. Mitchel. Here he found Williams, and imparted to that faithful servant the news of his master's death, and then inquired for the address of the family abroad, that he might notify them by cable, before they could read the bald statement in a newspaper.

"As they only sailed a week ago to-day," said Williams, "they're hardly more than due in London. I'll go up to the master's desk and get the address of his London bankers."

As Williams turned to leave the room, he started back amazed at the sound of a bell.

"That's the master's bell, Inspector! Some one is in his room! Come with me!"

The two men bounded up-stairs, two steps at a time, and Williams threw open the door of Mr. Mitchel's boudoir, and then fell back against Mr. Barnes, crying:

"The master himself!"

Mr. Barnes looked over the man's shoulder, and could scarcely believe his eyes when he observed Mr. Mitchel, alive and well, brushing his hair before a mirror.

"I've rung for you twice, Williams," said Mr. Mitchel, and then, seeing Mr. Barnes, he added, "Ah, Mr. Barnes. You are very welcome. Come in. Why, what is the matter, man? You are as white as though you had seen a ghost."

"Thank God, you are safe!" fervently ejaculated the detective, going forward and grasping Mr. Mitchel's hand. "Here, read this, and you will understand." He drew out the afternoon paper and handed it to him.

"Oh, that," said Mr. Mitchel, carelessly. "I've read that. Merely a sensational lie, worked off upon a guileless public. Not a word of truth in it, I assure you."

"Of course not, since you are alive; but there is a mystery about this which is yet to be explained."

"What! A mystery, and the great Mr. Barnes has not solved it? I am surprised. I am, indeed. But then, you know, I told you after Goldie made a fizzle of our little joke that if I should choose to play the principal part you would not catch me. You see I have beaten you this time. Confess. You thought that was my corpse which you gazed upon at the Morgue?"

"Well," said Mr. Barnes, reluctantly, "the identification certainly seemed complete, in spite of the condition of the face, which made recognition impossible."

"Yes; I flatter myself the whole affair was artistic."

"Do you mean that this whole thing is nothing but a joke? That you went so far as to invent cables and letters from Paris just for the trifling amusement of making a fool of me?"

Mr. Barnes was evidently slightly angry, and Mr. Mitchel, noting this fact, hastened to mollify him.

"No, no; it is not quite so bad as that," he said. "I must tell you the whole story, for there is yet important work to do, and you must help me. No, Williams, you need not go out. Your anxiety over my absence entitles you to a knowledge of the truth. A short time ago I heard that a very rare gem was in the market, no less a stone than the original emerald which Cortez stole from the crown of Montezuma. The emerald was offered in Paris, and I was notified at once by the dealer, and authorized the purchase by cable. A few days later I received a despatch warning me that there was danger. I understood at once, for similar danger had lurked about other large stones which are now in my collection. The warning meant that I should not attempt to get the emerald from the Custom-House until further advices reached me, which would indicate the exact nature of the danger. Later, I received the letter which was found on the body now at the Morgue, and which I suppose you have read?"

Mr. Barnes nodded assent.

"I readily located the man Palma at the Imperial, and from his openly using his name I knew that I had a dangerous adversary. Criminals who disdain aliases have brains, and use them. I kept away from the Custom-House until I had satisfied myself that I was being dogged by a veritable cutthroat, who, of course, was the tool hired by Palma to rob, perhaps to kill me. Thus acquainted with my adversaries, I was ready for the enterprise."

"Why did you not solicit my assistance?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Partly because I wanted all the glory, and partly because I saw a chance to make you admit that I am still the champion detective-baffler. I sent my wife and daughter to Europe that I might have time for my scheme. On the day after their departure I boldly went to the Custom-House and obtained the emerald. Of course I was dogged by the hireling, but I had arranged a plan which gave him no advantage over me. I had constructed a pair of goggles which looked like simple smoked glasses, but in one of these I had a little mirror so arranged that I could easily watch the man behind me, should he approach too near. However, I was sure that he would not attack me in a crowded thoroughfare, and I kept in crowds until time for dinner, when, by appointment, I met my neighbor Mordaunt, and remained in his company until I reached my own doorway late at night. Here he left me, and I stood on the stoop until he disappeared into his own house. Then I turned, and apparently had much trouble to place my latch-key in the lock. This offered the assassin the chance he had hoped for, and, gliding stealthily forward, he made a vicious stab at me. But, in the first place, I

had put on a chain-armor vest, and, in the second, expecting the attack to occur just as it did, I turned swiftly and with one blow with a club I knocked the weapon from the fellow's hand, and with another I struck him over the head so that he fell senseless at my feet."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Barnes. "You have a cool nerve."

"I don't know. I think I was very much excited at the crucial moment, but with my chain armor, a stout loaded club in one hand and a derringer in the other, I never was in any real danger. I took the man down to the wine-cellar and locked him in one of the vaults. Then I called a cab, and went down to the Imperial, in search of Palma; but I was too late. He had vanished."

"So I discovered," interjected Mr. Barnes.

"I could get nothing out of the fellow in the cellar. Either he cannot or he will not speak English. So I have merely kept him a prisoner, visiting him at midnight only, to avoid Williams, and giving him rations for another day. Meanwhile, I disguised myself and looked for Palma. I could not find him. I had another card, however, and the time came at last to play it. I deduced from Palma's leaving the hotel on the very day when I took the emerald from the Custom-House, that it was prearranged that his hireling should stick to me until he obtained the gem, and then meet him at some rendezvous, previously appointed. Hearing nothing during the past few days, he has perhaps thought that I had left the city, and that his man was still upon my track. Meanwhile I was perfecting my grand *coup*. With the aid of a physician, who is a confidential friend, I obtained a corpse from one of the hospitals, a man about my size, whose face we battered beyond description. We dressed him in my clothing, and fixed the dagger which I had taken from my would-be assassin so tightly in the backbone that it would not drop out. Then one night we took our dummy to the river and securely anchored it in the water. Last night I simply cut it loose and let it drift down the river."

"You knew of course that it would be taken to the Morgue," said Mr. Barnes.

"Precisely. Then I dressed myself as a blind beggar, posted myself in front of the Morgue, and waited."

"You were the beggar?" ejaculated the detective.

"Yes. I have your quarter, and shall prize it as a souvenir. Indeed, I made nearly four dollars during the day. Begging seems to be lucrative. After the newspapers got on the street with the account of my death, I looked for developments. Palma came in due time, and went in. I presume that he saw the dagger, which was placed there for his special benefit, as well as the empty jewel-case, and at once concluded that his man had stolen the gem and meant to keep it for himself. Under these circumstances he would naturally be angry, and therefore less cautious and more easily shadowed. Before he came out, you turned up and stupidly brought a cab, which allowed my man to get a start of

me. However, I am a good runner, and as he only rode as far as Third Avenue, and then took the elevated railroad, I easily followed him to his lair. Now I will explain to you what I wish you to do, if I may count on you?"

"Assuredly."

"You must go into the street, and when I release the man in the cellar, you must track him. I will go to the other place, and we will see what happens when the men meet. We will both be there to see the fun."

An hour later, Mr. Barnes was skilfully dogging a sneaking Mexican, who walked rapidly through one of the lowest streets on the East Side, until finally he dodged into a blind alley, and before the detective could make sure which of the many doors had allowed him ingress he had disappeared. A moment later a low whistle attracted his attention, and across in a doorway he saw a figure which beckoned to him. He went over and found Mr. Mitchel.

"Palma is here. I have seen him. You see I was right. This is the place of appointment, and the cutthroat has come here straight. Hush! What was that?"

There was a shriek, followed by another, and then silence.

"Let us go up," said Mr. Barnes. "Do you know which door?"

"Yes; follow me."

Mr. Mitchel started across, but, just as they reached the door, footsteps were heard rapidly descending the stairs. Both men stood aside and waited. A minute later a cloaked figure bounded out, only to be gripped instantly by those in hiding. It was Palma, and he fought like a demon, but the long, powerful arms of Mr. Barnes encircled him, and, with a hug that would have made a bear envious, the scoundrel was soon subdued. Mr. Barnes then manacled him, while Mr. Mitchel ascended the stairs to see about the other man. He lay sprawling on the floor, face downward, stabbed in the heart.

17: Ex Oblivione

H. P. Lovecraft

(as by Ward Phillips)

1890-1937

The United Amateur, March 1921

"I don't know— it has its points at times."

WHEN THE LAST DAYS were upon me, and the ugly trifles of existence began to drive me to madness like the small drops of water that torturers let fall ceaselessly upon one spot of their victim's body, I loved the irradiate refuge of sleep. In my dreams I found a little of the beauty I had vainly sought in life, and wandered through old gardens and enchanted woods.

Once when the wind was soft and scented I heard the South calling, and sailed endlessly and languorously under strange stars.

Once when the gentle rain fell I glided in a barge down a sunless stream under the earth till I reached another world of purple twilight, iridescent arbors, and undying roses.

And once I walked through a golden valley that led to shadowy groves and ruins, and ended in a mighty wall green with antique vines, and pierced by a little gate of bronze.

Many times I walked through that valley, and longer and longer would I pause in the spectral half-light where the giant trees squirmed and twisted grotesquely, and the gray ground stretched damply from trunk to trunk, sometimes disclosing the mold-stained stones of buried temples. And always the goal of my fancies was the mighty vine-grown wall with the little gate of bronze therein.

After a while, as the days of waking became less and less bearable from their grayness and sameness, I would often drift in opiate peace through the valley and the shadowy groves, and wonder how I might seize them for my eternal dwelling-place, so that I need no more crawl back to a dull world stripped of interest and new colors. And as I looked upon the little gate in the mighty wall, I felt that beyond it lay a dream-country from which, once it was entered, there would be no return.

So each night in sleep I strove to find the hidden latch of the gate in the ivied antique wall, though it was exceedingly well hidden. And I would tell myself that the realm beyond the wall was not more lasting merely, but more lovely and radiant as well.

Then one night in the dream-city of Zakarion I found a yellowed papyrus filled with the thoughts of dream-sages who dwelt of old in that city, and who were too wise ever to be born in the waking world. Therein were written many

things concerning the world of dream, and among them was a lore of a golden valley and a sacred grove with temples, and a high wall pierced by a little bronze gate. When I saw this lore, I knew that it touched on the scenes I had haunted, and I therefore read long in the yellowed papyrus.

Some of the dream-sages wrote gorgeously of the wonders beyond the irrepassable gate, but others told of horror and disappointment. I knew not which to believe, yet longed more and more to cross forever into the unknown land; for doubt and secrecy are the lure of lures, and no new horror can be more terrible than the daily torture of the commonplace. So when I learned of the drug which would unlock the gate and drive me through, I resolved to take it when next I awaked.

Last night I swallowed the drug and floated dreamily into the golden valley and the shadowy groves; and when I came this time to the antique wall, I saw that the small gate of bronze was ajar. From beyond came a glow that weirdly lit the giant twisted trees and the tops of the buried temples, and I drifted on songfully, expectant of the glories of the land from whence I should never return.

But as the gate swung wider and the sorcery of the drug and dream pushed me through, I knew that all sights and glories were at an end; for in that new realm was neither land nor sea, but only the white void of unpeopled and illimitable space. So, happier than I had ever dared hope to be, I dissolved again into that native infinity of crystal oblivion from which the daemon Life had called me for one brief and desolate hour.

———————

18: The City of Dreadful Night

O. Henry

1862-1910

The (New York) Sunday World, 13 Aug 1905

"DURING THE recent warmed-over spell," said my friend Carney, driver of express wagon No. 8,606, "a good many opportunities was had of observing human nature through peekaboo waists.

"The Park Commissioner and the Commissioner of Polis and the Forestry Commission gets together and agrees to let the people sleep in the parks until the Weather Bureau gets the thermometer down again to a living basis. So they draws up open-air resolutions and has them O.K.'d by the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Comstock and the Village Improvement Mosquito Exterminating Society of South Orange, N. J.

"When the proclamation was made opening up to the people by special grant the public parks that belong to 'em, there was a general exodus into Central Park by the communities existing along its borders. In ten minutes after sundown you'd have thought that there was an undress rehearsal of a potato famine in Ireland and a Kishineff massacre. They come by families, gangs, clambake societies, clans, clubs and tribes from all sides to enjoy a cool sleep on the grass. Them that didn't have oil stoves brought along plenty of blankets, so as not to be upset with the cold and discomforts of sleeping outdoors. By building fires of the shade trees and huddling together in the bridle paths, and burrowing under the grass where the ground was soft enough, the likes of 5,000 head of people successfully battled against the night air in Central Park alone.

"Ye know I live in the elegant furnished apartment house called the Beersheba Flats, over against the elevated portion of the New York Central Railroad.

"When the order come to the flats that all hands must turn out and sleep in the park, according to the instructions of the consulting committee of the City Club and the Murphy Draying, Returfing and Sodding Company, there was a look of a couple of fires and an eviction all over the place.

"The tenants began to pack up feather beds, rubber boots, strings of garlic, hot-water bags, portable canoes and scuttles of coal to take along for the sake of comfort. The sidewalk looked like a Russian camp in Oyama's line of march. There was wailing and lamenting up and down stairs from Danny Geoghegan's flat on the top floor to the apartments of Missis Goldsteinupski on the first.

" 'For why,' says Danny, coming down and raging in his blue yarn socks to the janitor, 'should I be turned out of me comfortable apartments to lay in the dirty grass like a rabbit? 'Tis like Jerome to stir up trouble wid small matters like this instead of—'

"'Whist!' says Officer Reagan on the sidewalk, rapping with his club. ''Tis not Jerome. 'Tis by order of the Polis Commissioner. Turn out every one of yez and hike yerselves to the park.'

"Now, 'twas a peaceful and happy home that all of us had in them same Beersheba Flats. The O'Dowds and the Steinowitzes and the Callahans and the Cohens and the Spizzinellis and the McManuses and the Spiegelmayers and the Joneses—all nations of us, we lived like one big family together. And when the hot nights come along we kept a line of children reaching from the front door to Kelly's on the corner passing along the cans of beer from one to another without the trouble of running after it. And with no more clothing on than is provided for in the statutes, sitting in all the windies, with a cool growler in every one, and your feet out in the air, and the Rosenstein girls singing on the fire-escape of the sixth floor, and Patsy Rourke's flute going in the eighth, and the ladies calling each other synonyms out the windies, and now and then a breeze sailing in over Mister Depew's Central—I tell you the Beersheba Flats was a summer resort that made the Catskills look like a hole in the ground. With his person full of beer and his feet out the windy and his old woman frying pork chops over a charcoal furnace and the childher dancing in cotton slips on the sidewalk around the organ-grinder and the rent paid for a week—what does a man want better on a hot night than that? And then comes this ruling of the polis driving people out o' their comfortable homes to sleep in parks—'twas for all the world like a ukase of them Russians—'twill be heard from again at next election time.

"Well, then, Officer Reagan drives the whole lot of us to the park and turns us in by the nearest gate. 'Tis dark under the trees, and all the children sets up to howling that they want to go home.

" 'Ye'll pass the night in this stretch of woods and scenery,' says Officer Reagan. ''Twill be fine and imprisonment for insoolting the Park Commissioner and the Chief of the Weather Bureau if ye refuse. I'm in charge of thirty acres between here and the Agyptian Monument, and I advise ye to give no trouble. 'Tis sleeping on the grass yez all have been condemned to by the authorities. Yez'll be permitted to leave in the morning, but ye must retoorn be night. Me orders was silent on the subject of bail, but I'll find out if 'tis required and there'll be bondsmen at the gate.'

"There being no lights except along the automobile drives, us 179 tenants of the Beersheba Flats prepared to spend the night as best we could in the raging forest. Them that brought blankets and kindling wood was best off. They got fires started and wrapped the blankets round their heads and laid down, cursing, in the grass. There was nothing to see, nothing to drink, nothing to do. In the dark we had no way of telling friend or foe except by feeling the noses of 'em. I brought along me last winter overcoat, me tooth-brush, some quinine pills and the red quilt off the bed in me flat. Three times during the night somebody

rolled on me quilt and stuck his knees against the Adam's apple of me. And three times I judged his character by running me hand over his face, and three times I rose up and kicked the intruder down the hill to the gravelly walk below. And then some one with a flavour of Kelly's whiskey snuggled up to me, and I found his nose turned up the right way, and I says: 'Is that you, then, Patsey?' and he says, 'It is, Carney. How long do you think it'll last?'

" 'I'm no weather-prophet,' says I, 'but if they bring out a strong anti-Tammany ticket next fall it ought to get us home in time to sleep on a bed once or twice before they line us up at the polls.'

" 'A-playing of my flute into the airshaft, says Patsey Rourke, 'and a-perspiring in me own windy to the joyful noise of the passing trains and the smell of liver and onions and a-reading of the latest murder in the smoke of the cooking is well enough for me,' says he. 'What is this herding us in grass for, not to mention the crawling things with legs that walk up the trousers of us, and the Jersey snipes that peck at us, masquerading under the name and denomination of mosquitoes. What is it all for Carney, and the rint going on just the same over at the flats?'

" ' 'Tis the great annual Municipal Free Night Outing Lawn Party,' says I, 'given by the polis, Hetty Green and the Drug Trust. During the heated season they hold a week of it in the principal parks. 'Tis a scheme to reach that portion of the people that's not worth taking up to North Beach for a fish fry.'

" 'I can't sleep on the ground,' says Patsey, 'wid any benefit. I have the hay fever and the rheumatism, and me ear is full of ants.'

"Well, the night goes on, and the ex-tenants of the Flats groans and stumbles around in the dark, trying to find rest and recreation in the forest. The children is screaming with the coldness, and the janitor makes hot tea for 'em and keeps the fires going with the signboards that point to the Tavern and the Casino. The tenants try to lay down on the grass by families in the dark, but you're lucky if you can sleep next to a man from the same floor or believing in the same religion. Now and then a Murpby, accidental, rolls over on the grass of a Rosenstein, or a Cohen tries to crawl under the O'Grady bush, and then there's a feeling of noses and somebody is rolled down the hill to the driveway and stays there. There is some hair-pulling among the women folks, and everybody spanks the nearest howling kid to him by the sense of feeling only, regardless of its parentage and ownership. 'Tis hard to keep up the social distinctions in the dark that flourish by daylight in the Beersheba Flats. Mrs. Rafferty, that despises the asphalt that a Dago treads on, wakes up in the morning with her feet in the bosom of Antonio Spizzinelli. And Mike O'Dowd, that always threw peddlers downstairs as fast as he came upon 'em, has to unwind old Isaacstein's whiskers from around his neck, and wake up the whole gang at daylight. But here and there some few got acquainted and overlooked the discomforts of the elements.

There was five engagements to be married announced at the flats the next morning.

"About midnight I gets up and wrings the dew out of my hair, and goes to the side of the driveway and sits down. At one side of the park I could see the lights in the streets and houses; and I was thinking how happy them folks was who could chase the duck and smoke their pipes at their windows, and keep cool and pleasant like nature intended for 'em to.

"Just then an automobile stops by me, and a fine-looking, well-dressed man steps out.

" 'Me man,' says he, 'can you tell me why all these people are lying around on the grass in the park? I thought it was against the rules.'

" ' 'Twas an ordinance,' says I, 'just passed by the Polis Department and ratified by the Turf Cutters' Association, providing that all persons not carrying a license number on their rear axles shall keep in the public parks until further notice. Fortunately, the orders comes this year during a spell of fine weather, and the mortality, except on the borders of the lake and along the automobile drives, will not be any greater than usual.'

" 'Who are these people on the side of the hill?' asks the man.

" 'Sure,' says I, 'none others than the tenants of the Beersheba Flats—a fine home for any man, especially on hot nights. May daylight come soon!'

" 'They come here be night,' says he, 'and breathe in the pure air and the fragrance of the flowers and trees. They do that,' says he, 'coming every night from the burning heat of dwellings of brick and stone.'

" 'And wood,' says I. 'And marble and plaster and iron.'

" 'The matter will be attended to at once,' says the man, putting up his book.

" 'Are ye the Park Commissioner?' I asks.

" 'I own the Beersheba Flats,' says he. 'God bless the grass and the trees that give extra benefits to a man's tenants. The rents shall be raised fifteen per cent. to-morrow. Good-night,' says he."

19: The-Water Hole

Maxwell Struthers Burt

1882-1954

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SOME men are like the twang of a bow-string. Hardy was like that— short, lithe, sunburned, vivid. Into the lives of Jarrick, Hill, and myself, old classmates of his, he came and went in the fashion of one of those queer winds that on a sultry day in summer blow unexpectedly up a city street out of nowhere. His comings excited us; his goings left us refreshed and a little vaguely discontented. So many people are gray. Hardy gave one a shock of color, as do the deserts and the mountains he inhabited. It was not particularly what he said— he didn't talk much— it was his appearance, his direct, a trifle fierce, gestures, the sense of mysterious lands that pervaded him. One never knew when he was coming to New York and one never knew how long he was going to stay; he just appeared, was very busy with mining companies for a while, sat about clubs in the late afternoon, and then, one day, he was gone.

Sometimes he came twice in a year; oftener, not for two or three years at a stretch. When he did come we gave him a dinner— that is, Jarrick, Hill, and myself. And it was rather an occasion. We would procure a table in the gayest restaurant we could find, near, but not too near, the music— Hill it was who first suggested this as a dramatic bit of incongruity between Hardy and the frequenters of Broadway— and the most exotic food obtainable, for a good part of his time Hardy, we knew, lived upon camp fare. Then we would try to make him tell about his experiences. Usually he wouldn't. Impersonally, he was entertaining about South Africa, about the Caucasus, about Alaska, Mexico, anywhere you care to think; but concretely he might have been an illustrated lecture for all he mentioned himself. He was passionately fond of abstract argument.

"Y' see," he would explain, "I don't get half as much of this sort of thing as I want. Of course, one does run across remarkable people now, I met a cow-puncher once who knew Keats by heart— but as a rule I deal only with material things, mines and prospects and assays and that sort of thing."

Poor chap! I wonder if he thought that we, with our brokering and our writing and our lawyering, dealt much with ideas! I remember one night when we sat up until three discussing. the philosophy of prohibition over three bottles of port. I wonder how many other men have done the same thing! But five years ago— no, it was six— Hardy really told us a real story about himself. Necessarily the occasion is memorable in our recollections. We had dined at Lamb's, and the place.was practically empty, for it was long after the theatre hour— only a drowsy waiter here and there, and away over in one corner a young couple who,

I suppose, imagined them selves in love. Fancy being in love at Lamb's! We had been discussing, of all things in the world, bravery and con science and cowardice and original sin, and.that sort of business, and there was no question about it that Hardy was en joying himself hugely. He was leaning upon the table, a coffee-cup between his relaxed brown hands, listening with an eagerness highly complimentary to the banal remarks we had to make upon the subject.

"This is talk!" he ejaculated once with a laugh. Hill, against the combined attack of Jarrick and myself, was maintaining the argument.

"There is no such thing as instinctive bravery," he affirmed, for the fifth time at least, "amongst intelligent men. Every one of us is naturally a coward. Of course we are. The more imag ination we've got the more we can realize how pleasant life is, after all, and how rotten the adjuncts of sudden death. It's reason that does the trick— reason and tradition. Do you know of any one who is brave when he is alone— except, that is, when it is a case of self-preservation? No! Of course not. Did you ever hear of any one choosing to go along a dangerous road or to ford a dangerous river unless he had to— that is, any one of our class, any man of education or imagination? It's the greater fear of being thought afraid that makes us brave. Take a lawyer in a shipwreck— take myself! Don't you suppose he's frightened? Naturally he is, horribly frightened. It's his reason, his mind, that after a while gets the better of his poor pipe-stem legs and makes them keep pace with the sea legs about them."

"It's condition," said Jarrick doggedly— "condition entirely. All has to do with your liver and digestion. I know; I fox hunt, and when I was younger— yes, leave my waist alone!— I rode jumping races. When you're fit there isn't a horse alive that bothers you, or a fence, for that mat ter, or a bit of water."

"Ever try standing on a ship's deck, in the dark, knowing you're going to drown in about twenty minutes?" asked Hill.

Hardy leaned forward to strike a match for his cigarette. "I don't agree with you," he said.

"Well, but—" began Hill.

"Neither of you."

"Oh, of course, you're outside the argument. You lead an adventurous life. You keep in condition for danger. It isn't fair."

"No." Hardy lit his cigarette and in haled a puff thoughtfully. "You don't understand. All you have to say does have some bearing upon things, but, when you get down to brass tacks, it's instinct— at the last gasp, it's instinct. You can't get away from it. Look at the difference between a thoroughbred and a cold-blooded horse! There you are! That's true. It's the fashion now to discount instinct, I know; well— but you can't get away from it. I've thought about the thing— a lot. Men are brave against their better reason, against their

conscience. It's a mixed-up thing. It's confusing and— and sort of damnable," he, concluded lamely.

"Sort of damnable!" ejaculated Hill wonderingly.

"Yes, damnable."

I experienced inspiration. "You've got a concrete instance back of that," I ventured. Hardy removed his gaze from the ceil ing. "Er—" he stammered. "Why, yes — yes. That's true."

"You'd better tell it," suggested Hill; "otherwise your argument is not very conclusive."

Hardy fumbled with the spoon of his empty coffee-cup. It was a curious ges ture on the part of a man whose franknesses were as clean-cut as his silences.

"Well— " he began. "I don't know. Perhaps. I did know a man, though, who saved another man's life when he didn't want to, when there was every excuse for him not to, when he had it all reasoned out that it was wrong, the very wrongest possible thing to do; and he saved him because he couldn't help it, saved him at the risk of his own life, too."

"He did!" murmured Hill incredu lously.

"Go on!" I urged. I was aware that we were on the edge of a revelation. Hardy looked down at the spoon in his hand, then up and into my eyes. "It's such a queer place to tell it— " he smiled deprecatingly— "here, in this restaurant. It ought to be about a camp fire, or something like that. Here it seems out of place, like the smell of bacon or sweating mules. Do you know Los Piños? Well, you wouldn't. It was just a few shacks and a Mexican gambling house when I saw it. Maybe it isn't there any more, at all. You know those places! People build them and then go away, and in a year there isn't a thing, just desert again and shifting sand and maybe the httle original old ranch by the one spring."

He swept the table-cloth with this hand, as if sweeping some thing into oblivion, and his eyes sought again the spoon.

"It's queer, that business. Men and women go out to lonely places and build houses, and for a while everything goes on in miniature, just as it does here— daily bread and hating and laughing— and then something happens, the gold gives out or the fields won't pay, and in no time nature is back again. It's a big fight. You lose track of it in crowded places."

He raised his head and settled his arms comfortably on the table.

"I wasn't there for any particular purpose. I was on a holiday. I'd been on a big job up in Colorado and was rather done up, and, as there were some prospects in New Mexico I wanted to see, I hit south, drifting through Santa Fe and Silver City, until I found myself way down on the southern edge of Arizona. It was still hot down there— hot as blazes— it was about the first of September— and the rattlesnakes and the scorpions were still as active as

crickets. I knew a chap that had a cattle outfit near the Mexican border, so I dropped in on him one day and stayed two weeks. You see, he was lonely. Had a passion for theatres and hadn't seen a play for five years. My second hand gossip was rather a godsend. But finally I got tired of talking about Mary Mannering, and decided to start north again. He bade me good-by on a little hill near his place. 'See here!' he said suddenly, looking toward the west. 'If you go a trifle out of your way you'll strike Los Piños, and I wish you would. It's a little bit of a dump of the United Copper Company's, no good, I'm thinking, but the fellow in charge is a friend of mine. He's got his wife there. They're nice people— or used to be. I haven't seen them for ten years. They say he drinks a little— well, we all do. Maybe you could write me how she— I mean, how he is getting on?' And he turned red. I saw how the land lay, and as a favor to him I said I would.

It was eighty miles away, and I drifted in there one night on top of a tired cow horse just at sundown. You know how purple— violet, really— those desert evenings are. There was violet stretching away as far as I could see, from the faint violet at my stirrups to the deep, almost black violet of the horizon. Way off to the north I could make out the shadow of some big hills that had been ahead of me all day. The town, what there was of it, lay in a little gully. Along its single street there were a few lights shining like small yellow flowers. I asked my way of a Mexican, and he showed me up to where the Whitneys— that name will do as well as any— lived, in a decent enough sort of bungalow, it would seem, above the gully. He left me there, and I went forward and rapped at the door. Light shone from between the cracks of a near-by shutter, and I could hear voices inside— a man's voice mostly, hoarse and high-pitched. Then a Chinaman opened the door for me and I had a look inside, into a big living-room beyond. It was civilized all right enough, pleasantly so to a man stepping out of two days of desert and Mexican adobes. At a glance I saw the rugs on the polished floor, and the Navajo blankets about, and a big table in the centre with a shaded lamp and magazines in rows; but the man in riding-clothes standing before the empty fireplace wasn't civilized at all, at least not at that mo ment. I couldn't see the woman, only the top of her head above the back of a big chair, but as I came in I heard her say, 'Hush!— Jim!— please!' and I noticed that what I could see of her hair was of that fine true gold you so seldom find. The man stopped in the middle of a sentence and swayed on his feet, then he looked over at me and came toward me with a sort of bulldog, inquiring look. He was a big, red-faced, blond chap, about forty, I should say, who might once have been handsome. He wasn't now, and it didn't add to his beauty that he was quite obviously fairly drunk. 'Well?' he said, and blocked my way.

" 'I'm a friend of Henry Martin's,' I answered. 'I've got a letter for you.' I was beginning to get pretty angry.

" 'Henry Martin?' He laughed un steadily. 'You'd better give it to my wife over there. She's his friend. I hardly know him.' I don't know when I'd seen a man I disliked as much at first sight.

"There was a rustle from the other side of the room, and Mrs. Whitney came toward us. I avoided her unattractive husband and took her hand, and I understood at once whatever civilizing influences there were about the bungalow we were in. Did you ever do that— ever step out of nowhere, in a wild sort of country, and meet suddenly a man or a woman who might have come straight from a pleasant, well-bred room filled with books and flowers and quiet, nice people? It's a sensation that never loses its freshness. Mrs. Whitney was like that. I wouldn't have called her beautiful; she was better; you knew she was good and clean-cut and a thoroughbred the minute you saw her. She was lovely, too; don't misunderstand me, but you had more important things to think about when you were talking to her. Just at the moment I was wondering how any one who so evidently had been crying could all at once greet a stranger with so cordial a smile. But she was all that— all nerve; I don't think I ever met a woman quite like her— so fine, you understand."

Hardy paused. "Have any of you chaps got a cigarette?" he asked; and I noticed that his hand, usually the steadiest hand imaginable, trembled ever so slightly.

"Well," he began again, "there you are! I had tumbled into about as rotten a little, pitiful a little tragedy as you can imagine, there in a God-forsaken desert of Arizona, with not a soul about but a Chinaman, a couple of Scotch stationary engineers, an Irish foreman, two or three young mining men, and a score of Mexi cans. Of course, my first impulse was to get out the next morning, to cut it— it was none of my business— although I determined to drop a line to Henry Martin; but I didn't go. I had a talk with Mrs. Whitney that night, after her attractive husband had taken himself off to bed, and somehow I couldn't leave just then. You know how it is, you drop into a place where nothing in the world seems likely to happen, and all of a sudden you realize that something is going to happen, and for the life of you you can't go away. That situation up on top of the hill couldn't last forever, could it? So I stayed on. I hunted out the big Irish foreman and shared his cabin. The Whitneys asked me to visit them, but I didn't exactly feel like doing so. The Irishman was a fine specimen of his race, ten years out from Dublin, and everywhere else since that time; generous, irascible, given to great fits of gayety and equally unexpected fits of gloom. He would sit in the evenings, a short pipe in his mouth, and stare up at the Whitney bungalow on the hill above.

' "That Jim Whitney's a divvle,' he confided to me once. 'Wan o' these days I'll hit him over th' head with a pick and be hung for murther. Now, what in hell

d'ye suppose a nice girl like that sticks by him for? If it weren't for her I'd 'a' reported him long ago. The scut!' And I remember that he spat gloomily.

"But I got to know the answer to that question sooner than I had expected. You see, I went up to the Whitneys' often, in the afternoon, or for dinner, or in the evening, and I talked to Mrs. Whitney a great deal; although sometimes I just sat and smoked and listened to her play the piano. She played beautifully. It was a treat to a man who hadn't heard music for two years. There was a little thing of Grieg's— a spring song, or something of the sort— and you've no idea how quaint and sad and appealing it was, and incongruous, with all its freshness and murmuring about waterfalls and pine-trees, there, in those hot, breathless Arizona nights. Mrs. Whitney didn't talk much; she wasn't what you'd call a particularly communicative woman, but bit by bit I pieced to gether something continuous. It seems that she had run away with Whitney ten years before— Oh, yes! Henry Martin! That had been a schoolgirl affair. Nothing serious, you understand. But the Whitney matter had been different. She was greatly in love with him. And the family had disapproved. Some rich, stuffy Boston people, I gathered. But she had made up her mind and taken matters in her own hands. That was her way— a clean-cut sort of person— like a gold-and-white arrow; and now she was going to stick by her choice no matter what happened; owed it to Whitney. There was the quirk in her brain; we all have a quirk somewhere, and that was hers. She felt that she had ruined his career; he had been a brilliant young engineer, but her family had kicked up the devil of a row, and, as they were powerful enough, and nasty enough, had more or less hounded him out of the East. Of course, personally, I never thought he showed any of the essentials of brilliancy, but that's neither here nor there; she did, and she was satisfied that she owed him all she had. I suppose, too, there was some trace of a Puritan conscience back of it, some inherent feeling about divorce; and there was pride as well, a desire not to let that disgusting family of hers know into what ways her idol had fallen. Anyway, she was adamant— oh, yes, I made no bones about it, I up and asked her one night why she didn't get rid of the hound. So there she was, that white-and-gold woman, with her love of music, and her love of books, and her love of fine things, and her gentleness, and that sort of fiery, suppressed Northern blood, shut up on top of an Arizona dump with a beast that got drunk every night and twice a day on Sunday. It was worse even than that. One night— we were sitting out on the veranda— her scarf slipped, and I saw a scar on her arm, near her shoulder."

Hardy stopped abruptly and began to roll a little pellet of bread between his thumb and his forefinger; then his tense expres sion faded and he sat back in his chair.

"Let me have another cigarette," he said to Jarrick. "No. Wait a minute! I'll order some." He called a waiter and gave his instruc tions.

"You see," he continued, "when you run across as few nice women as I do that sort of thing is more than ordinarily disturbing. And then I suppose it was the setting, and her loneliness, and every thing. Anyway, I stayed on. I got to be a little bit ashamed of myself. I was afraid that Mrs. Whitney would think me prompted by mere curiosity or a desire to meddle, so after a while I gave out that I was prospecting that part of Arizona, and in the mornings I would take a horse and ride out into the desert. I loved it, too; it was so big and spacious and silent and hot. One day I met Whitney on the edge of town. He was sober, as he always was when he had to be; he was a masterful brute, in his way. He stopped me and asked if I had found anything, and when I laughed he didn't laugh back. 'There's gold here,' he said. 'Lots of gold. Did you ever hear the story of the Ten Strike Mine? Well, it's over there.' He swept with his arm the line of distant hills to the north. 'The crazy Dutchman that found it staggered into Almuda, ten miles down the valley, just before he died; and his pockets were bulging with samples— pure gold, almost. Yes, by thunder! And that's the last they ever heard of it. Lots of men have tried— lots of men. Some day I'll go myself, surer than shooting.' And he let his hands drop to his sides and stared silently toward the north, a queer, dreamy anger in his eyes. I've seen lots of mining men, lots of prospectors, in my time, and it didn't take me long to size up that look of his. 'Aha, my friend!' I said to myself. 'So you've got another vice, have you! It isn't only rum that's got a hold on you!' And I turned my horse into the town.

"But our conversation seemed to have stirred to the surface something in Whitney's brain that had been at work there a long time, for after that he would never let me alone about his Ten Strike Mine and the mountains that hid it. 'Over there!' he would say, and point to the north. From the porch of his bungalow the sleeping hills were plainly visible above the shimmering desert. He would chew on the end of a cigar and consider. 'It isn't very far, you know. Two days— maybe three. All we need's water. No water there— at least, none found. All those fellows who've prospected are fools. I'm an expert; so are you. I tell you. Hardy, let's do it! A couple of little old pack-mules! Eh? How about it? Next week? I can get off. God, I'd like money!' And he would subside into a sullen silence. At first I laughed at him; but I can tell you that sort of thing gets on your nerves sooner or later and either makes you bolt it or else go. At the end of two weeks I actually found myself considering the fool thing seriously. Of course, I didn't want to discover a lost gold-mine, that is, unless I just happened to stumble over it; I wanted to keep away from such things; they're bad; they get into a man's blood like drugs; but I've always had a hankering for a new country, and those hills, shining in the heat, were compelling— very compelling. Besides, I reflected, a trip like that might help to straighten Whitney up a little. I hadn't much hope, to be sure, but drowning men clutch at straws. It's curious

what sophistry you use to convince yourself, isn't it? And then— something happened that for two weeks occupied all my mind."

Hardy paused, considered for a mo ment the glowing end of his cigarette, and finally looked up gravely; there was a slight hesitation, almost an embarrass ment, in his manner.

"I don't exactly know how to put it," he began. " I don't want you chaps to imagine anything wrong; it was all very nebulous and in definite, you understand— Mrs. Whitney was a wonderful woman. I wouldn't men tion the matter at all if it wasn't neces sary for the point of my story; in fact, it is the point of my story. But there was a man there— one of the young engineers— and quite suddenly I discovered that he was in love with Mrs. Whitney, and I think— I never could be quite sure, but I think she was in love with him. It must have been one of those sudden things, a storm out of a clear sky, deluging two people before they were aware. I imagine it was brought to the surface by the chap's illness. He had been out riding on the desert and had got off to look at something, and a rattlesnake had struck him— a big, dust-dirty thing— on the wrist, and, very faint, he had galloped back to the Whitney s'. And what do you suppose she had done— Mrs. Whitney, that is? Flung herself down on him and sucked the wound! Yes, without a moment's hesi tation, her gold hair all about his hand and her white dress in the dirt. Of course, it was a foolish thing to do, and not in the least the right way to treat a wound, but she had risked her life to do it; a slight cut on her lip— you understand; a tiny, ragged place. Afterward, she had cut the wound crosswise, so, and had put on a ligature, and then had got the man into the house some way and nursed him until he was quite himself again. I dare say he had been in love with her a long while with out knowing it, but that clinched matters. Those things come overpoweringly and take a man, down in places like that— semi-tropical and lonely and lawless, with long, empty days and moonlit nights. Perhaps he told Mrs. Whitney; he never got very far, I am sure. She was a wonderful woman— but she loved him, I think. You can tell those things, you know; a gesture, an unavoidable look, a silence.

"Anyway, I saw what had happened and I was sorry, and for a fortnight I hung around, loath to go, but hating myself all the while for not doing so. And every day Whitney would come at me with his insane scheme. 'Over there! It isn't very far. Two days— maybe three. How about it? Eh?' and then that tense sweep of the arm to the north. I don't know what it was, weariness, disgust, irri tation of the whole sorry plan of things, but finally, and to my own astonishment, I found myself consenting, and within two days Whitney had his crazy pack out fit ready, and on the morning of the third day we set out. Mrs. Whitney had said nothing when we unfolded our intentions to her, nor did she say anything when we departed, but stood on the porch of the bungalow, her hand up to her throat, and watched us out of sight. I wondered what she was

thinking about. The Voodoos— that was the name of the mountains we were heading for— had killed a good many men in their time."

Hardy took a long and thoughtful sip from the glass in front of him before he began again

"I've knocked about a good deal in my life," he said; " I've been lost— once in the jungle; I've starved; I've reached the point where I've imagined horrors, heard voices, you understand, and seen great, bearded men mouthing at me— a man's pretty far gone when that happens to him— but that trip across the desert was the worst I've ever taken, By day it was all right, just swaying in your saddle, half asleep a good part of the time, the smell of warm dust in your nose, the three pack-mules plodding along be hind; but the nights!— I tell you, I've sat about camp-fires up the Congo and watched big, oily black men eat their food, and I once saw a native village sacked, but I'd rather be tied for life to a West Coast nigger than to a man like Whitney. It isn't good for two people to be alone in a place like that and for one to hate the other as I hated him. God knows why I didn't kill him; I'd have to get up and leave the fire and go out into the night, and, mind you, I'd be shuddering like a man with the ague under that warm, soft air. And he never for a minute suspected it. His mind was scarred with drink as if a worm had bored its slow way in and out of it. I can see him now, cross-legged, beyond the flames, big, unshaven, heavy jowled, dirty, what he thought dripping from his mouth like the bacon drippings he was too lazy to wipe away. I won't tell you what he talked about; you know, the old thing; but not the way even the most wrong-minded of ordinary men talks; there was a sodden, triumphant deviltry in him that was appalling. He cursed the country for its lack of opportunity of a certain kind; he was like a hound held in leash, gloating over what he would do when he got back to the kennels of civilization again. And all the while, at the back of my mind, was a picture of that white-and-gold woman of his, way back toward the south, waiting his return be cause she owed him her life for the bril liant career she had ruined. It made you sometimes almost want to laugh— insanely. I used to lie awake at night and pray whatever there was to kill him, and do it quickly. I would have turned back, but I felt that every day I could keep him away from Los Pinos was a day gained for Mrs. Whitney. He was a dangerous maniac, too. The first day he behaved himself fairly well, but the second, after supper, when we had cleaned up, he began to fumble through the packs, and finally produced a bottle of brandy.

" 'Fine camping stuff!' he announced. 'Lots of results for very little weight. Have some?'

"'Are you going to drink that?' I asked.

" 'Oh, go to the devil!' he snapped. 'I've been out as much as you have.' I didn't argue with him further; I hoped if he drank enough the sun would get him. But the third night he upset the water kegs, two of them. He had been

carrying on some sort of weird celebration by himself, and finally staggered out into the desert, singing at the top of his lungs, and the first thing I knew he was down among the kegs, rolling over and over, and kicking right and left. The one that was open was gone; another he kicked the plug out of, but I managed to save about a quarter of its contents. The next morning I spoke to him about it. He blinked his red eyes and chuckled.

" 'Poor sort of stuff, anyway,' he said.

" 'Yes,' I agreed; 'but without it you would blow out like a candle in a dust storm.' After that we didn't speak to each other except when it was necessary.

"We were in the foot-hills of the Voodoos by now, and the next day we got into the mountains themselves— great, bare ragged peaks, black and red and dirty yellow, like the cooled-off slake of a furnace. Every now and then a dry gully came down from nowheres; and the only human thing one could see was occasionally, on the sides of one of these, a shivering, miserable, half-dead piñon— nothing but that, and the steel-blue sky overhead, and the desert behind us, shimmering like a lake of salt. It was hot— good Lord! The horn of your saddle burned your hand. That night we camped in a canyon, and the next day went still higher up, following the course of a rutted stream that probably ran water once in a year. Whitney wanted to turn east, and it was all a toss-up to me; the place looked unlikely enough, anyway, although you never can tell. I had settled into the monotony of the trip by now and didn't much care how long we stayed out. One day was like another— hot little swirls of dust, sweat of mules, and great black cliffs; and the nights came and went like the passing of a sponge over a fevered face. On the sixth day the tragedy happened. It was toward dusk, and one of the mules, the one that carried the water, fell over a cliff.

"He wasn't hurt; just lay on his back and smiled crossly; but the kegs and the bags were smashed to bits. I like mules, but I wanted to kill that one. It was quiet down there in the canyon— quiet and hot. I looked at Whitney and he looked at me, and I had the sudden, unpleasant realization that he was a coward, added to his other qualifiications. Yes, a coward! I saw it in his blurred eyes and the quivering of his bloated lips— stark dumb funk. That was bad. I'm afraid I lost my nerve, too; I make no excuses; fear is infectious. At all events, we tore down out of that place as if death was after us, the mules clattering and flapping in the rear. After a time I rode more slowly, but in the morning we were nearly down at the desert again; and there it lay before us, shimmering like a lake of salt— three days back to water.

"The next two days were rather a blur, as if a man were walking on a red-hot mirror that tipped up and down and tried to take his legs from under him. There was a water-hole a little to the east of the way we had come, and toward that I tried to head. One of the mules gave out, and staggered and groaned, and tried

to get up again. I remember hearing him squeal, once; it was horrible. He lay there, a little black speck on the desert. Whitney and I didn't speak to each other at all, but I thought of those two kegs of water he had upset. Have you ever been thirsty— mortally thirsty, until you feel your tongue black in your mouth? It's queer, what it does to you. Do you remember that little place— Zorn's— at college? We used to sit there sometimes on spring afternoons. It was cool and cavern-like, and through the open door one could see the breeze in the maple-trees. Well, I thought about that all the time; it grew to be an obsession, a mirage. I could smell the moss-like smell of bock beer; I even remembered conversations we had had. You fellows were as real to me as you are real to-night. It's strange, and then, when you come to, uncanny; you feel the sweat on you turn cold.

"We had ridden on in that way I don't know how long, snatching a couple of feverish hours of sleep in the night, Whit ney groaning and mumbling horribly, when suddenly my horse gave a little snicker— low, the way they do when you give them grain— and I felt his tired body straighten up ever so little. 'Maybe,' I thought, and I looked up. But I didn't much care; I just wanted to crawl into some cool place and forget all about it and die. It was late in the afternoon. My shadow was lengthening. Too late, really, for much mirage; but I no longer put great stock in green vegetation and matters of that kind; I had seen too much of it in the last two days fade away into nothing— nothing but blistering, damned sand. And so I wouldn't beheve.the cool reeds and the sparkling water until I had dipped down through a little swale and was actually fighting my horse back from the brink. I knew enough to do that, mind you, and to fight back the two mules so that they drank just a little at a time— a little at a time; and all the while I had to wait, with my tongue like sand in my mouth. Over the edge of my horse's neck I could see the water just below; it looked as cool as rain. I was always a little proud of that— that holding back; it made up, in a way, for the funk of two nights earlier. When the mules and my horse were through I dismounted and, lying flat, bathed my hands, and then, a tiny sip at a time, began to drink. That was hard. When I stood up the heat seemed to have gone, and the breeze was moist and sweet with the smell of evening. I think I sang a little and waved my hands above my head, and, at all events, I remember I lay on my back and rolled a cigarette; and quite suddenly and without the slightest, reason there were tears in my eyes. Then I began to wonder what had become of Whitney; I hadn't thought of him before. I got to my feet, and just as I did so I saw him come over the little rise of sand, swaying in his saddle, and trying, the fool, to make his horse run. He looked like a great scarecrow blown out from some Indian maize-field into the desert. His clothes were torn and his mask of a face was seamed and black from dust and sweat; he saw the water and let out one queer, hoarse screech and kicked at his horse with wabbling legs.

" 'Look out!' I cried, and stepped in his way. I had seen this sort of thing before and knew what to expect; but he rode me down as if I hadn't been there. His horse tried to avoid me, and the next moment the sack of grain on its back was on the sands, creeping like a great, monstrous four-legged thing toward the water. 'Stay where you are,' I said,' and I'll bring you some.' But he only crawled the faster. I grabbed his shoulder. 'You fool!' I said. 'You'll kill yourself!'

" 'Damn you!' he blubbered. 'Damn you!' And before I knew it, and with all the strength, I imagine, left in him, he was on his feet and I was looking down the barrel of his gun. It looked very round and big and black, too. Beyond it his eyes were regarding me; they were quite mad, there was no doubt about that, but, just the way a dying man achieves some of his old desire to will, there was definite purpose in them. 'You get out of my way,' he said, and began very slowly to circle me. You could hardly hear his words, his lips were so blistered and swollen.

"And now this is the point of what I am telling you." Hardy fumbled again for a match and relit his cigarette.

"There we were, we two, in that desert light, about ten feet from the water, he with his gun pointing directly at my heart— and his hand wasn't trembling as much as you would imagine, either— and he was circling me step by step, and I was standing still as could be; there was morality and common sense, the welfare of other people, the man's own good, really, and yet— well, I didn't do it.

"I suppose the whole affair took two minutes, maybe three, but in that time— and my brain was still blurred to other impressions— I saw the thing as clearly as I see it now, as clearly as I saw that great, swollen beast of a face. Here was the chance I had longed for, the hope I had lain awake at night and prayed for; between the man and death I alone stood; and I had every reason, every instinct of decency and common sense, to make me step aside. The man was a devil; he was killing the finest woman I had ever met; his presence poisoned the air he walked in; he was an active agent of evil, there was no doubt of that. I hated him as I had never hated anything else in my life, and at the moment I was sure that God wanted him to die. I knew then that to save him would be criminal; I think so still. And I saw other considerations as well; saw them as clearly as I see you sitting here. I saw the man who loved Mrs. Whitney, and I saw Mrs. Whitney herself, and in my keeping, I knew, was all her chance for happiness, the one hope that the future would make up to her for some of the horror of the past. It would have been an easy thing to do; the most ordinary caution was on my side. Whitney was far larger than I, and, even in his weakened condition— I was weak myself— stronger, and he had a gun that in a flash of light could blow me into eternity. And what would happen then? Why, when he got back to Los Piños they would hang him; they would be only too

glad of the chance; and his wife?— she would die; I knew it— just go out like a flame from the unbearableness of it all. And there wasn't one chance in a thousand that he wouldn't kill me if I made a single step toward him. I had only to let him go and in a few minutes he would be dead— as dead as his poor brute of a horse would be within the hour. I felt already the cool relief that would be mine when the black shadow of him was gone. I would ride into town and think no more of it than if I had watched a tarantula die. You see, I had it all reasoned out as clearly as could be; there was morality and common sense, the welfare of other people, the man's own good, really, and yet— well, I didn't do it."

"Didn't?" It was Jarrick who put the question a little breathlessly.

"No. I stepped toward him— so! One step, then another, very slowly, hardly a foot at a time, and all the while I watched the infernal circle of that gun, expecting it every minute to spit fire. I didn't want to go; I went against my will. I was scared, too, mortally scared; my legs were like lead— I had to think every time I lifted a foot— and in a queer, crazy way I seemed to feel two people, a man and a woman, holding me back, plucking at my sleeves. But I went. All the time I kept saying, very steady and quiet: 'Don't shoot, Whitney! D'you hear! Don't shoot or I'll kill you!' Wasn't it silly? Kill him! Why, he had me dead ten times before I got to him. But I suppose some trace of sanity was knocking at his drink-sodden brain, for he didn't shoot— just watched me, his red eyes blinking. So! One step at a time— nearer and nearer— I could feel the sweat on my forehead— and then I jumped. I had him by the legs, and we went down in a heap. He shot then; they always do! But I had him tied up with the rags of his own shirt in a trice. Then I brought him water in my hat and let him drink it, drop by drop. After a while he came to altogether. But he never thanked me; he wasn't that kind of a brute. I got him into town the morning of the second day and turned him over to his wife. So you see"— Hardy hesitated and looked at the circle of our faces with an odd, appealing look— "it is queer, isn't it? All mixed up. One doesn't know."

He sank back in his chair and began to s'cratch, absent-mindedly, at a holder with a match. The after-theatre crowd was beginning to come in; the sound of laughter and talk grew steadily higher; far off an orchestra wailed inarticulately. "What became of them?" I asked.

Hardy looked up as if startled.

"The Whitneys? Oh— she died— Martin wrote me. Down there, within a year. One would know it would happen. Like a flame, I suppose— suddenly."

"And the man— the fellow who was in love with her?"

Hardy stirred wearily. "I haven’t heard," he said. "I suppose he is still alive."

He leaned over to complete the striking of his match, and for an instant his arm touched a glass; it trembled and hung in the balance, and he shot out a sinewy hand to stop it, and as he did so the sleeve of his dinner jacket caught.

On the brown flesh of his forearm I saw a queer, ragged white cross— the scar a snake bite leaves when it is cicatrized. I meant to avoid his eyes, but somehow I caught them instead. They were veiled and hurt.

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20: The Dark Lady of The Hemlock Grange

Anonymous

Riverina Recorder (NSW), 14 June 1905

AT THE CLOSE of the last century, there stood upon the borders of Hounslow Heath, far apart from any other habitation, a lonely dwelling called the Hemlock Grange. Drear, weird, and grim, its aged walls covered with ivy that trailed upwards to the roof, a very dismal-looking tenement was the old Grange, its forlorn and mournful aspect increased as sombre winter took the place of the bright and glorious summer.

It was upon a dark frosty afternoon in January, 1799, a wild tempestuous wind roaring round the solitary demense, that a young man made his way with every apparent stealth to the gateway opening upon the large and spacious garden ground fronting the house. Stooping down, gliding swiftly along, taking advantage of every shadow, tree, or bush, the stranger, upon reaching the gate, stared anxiously around, muttering, as he did so, his thoughts aloud.

'I'll do it! Come what will! My Lady Pauline is safe away, and I'll force an entrance into the house and see Flora this night, though I risk Tyburn for the deed!'

With compressed lips and a fierce, angry frown on his handsome features, the speaker now, first giving another of his cautious glances round, then with utmost agility and activity, clambered over the high-spiked gateway, and hurrying on cowering among the trees and shrubbery, presently gained a flight of stone steps that led up to the old oak door, the principal entrance way to the Grange.

Not to this mode of ingress did the young man however proceed, but turning aside, he began coolly by means of the thick stems of the ivy to clamber up to a casement upon the ground floor distant some ten or twelve feet from the pathway below. Apparently well aware that there was no likelihood of his being disturbed or confronted by any resident of the old house, the daring intruder with a stiletto or dagger be drew from his pocket, succeeded after a little delay in forcing an entry through the window.

A startled exclamation of surprise and chagrin escaped his lips as stepping into the chamber (a large and handsomely-furnished apartment), he beheld stretched across the threshold of the door opening upon a corridor without, the bulky form of a female. A woman of some 50 years of age who, her face upon the floor, her arms and legs spread out, lay an inert mass, without motion or sign of life in her frame. There was a wild stare in the eyes of the stranger, who stood for many moments by the casement gazing at the body in stupefied amaze. Penetrating so boldly the interior of the Grange, he now stood hesitating and irresolute. The icy blast dashing and moaning at the open casement,

fluttered and raised aloft in the air a tawdry, gaudy-coloured silk scarf that was wound about the woman's neck, whilst also lifting some tresses of her course grey hair. That recumbent form, however, stirred not, moved not, but lay supine and immovable at the threshold of the door.

'Nurse Gamble! Strange she should in the absence of her vile mistress have stupefied herself with drink!' In a low bushed voice as though fearing to rouse the woman, these words fell from the lips of the visitor who had so unceremoniously made his way to the Grange.

With slow faltering footsteps he now crossed over to that prostrate form. With a nervous shudder he could not suppress he stooped down and turned the body on its side, a wild startled cry escaping him as he caught sight of the face of the wretched woman. Though dead, instead of the usual ghastly livid pallor of death, the features of the corpse wore a dark, blue purple tint.

'Humph! a fit of apoplexy! or— and yet the trusted faithful servitor of my Lady Pauline, could scarce have been foully dealt with. But my dread suspicions of the past few weeks shall be proven, or dismissed from my mind before long!'

Stepping over the body that in death appeared is though wishful to bar his progress, the young man now hurried out into a darksome corridor, and bounding up two flights of stairs, and thence down two or three passages, he presently gained a small landing or corridor with a door on either side; to one of these just ajar he made his way, and, unhesitatingly pushing it open, entered a small bed chamber. The abiding place of an invalid, as was plainly indicated by a bottle of medicine and a glass that rested on a little table drawn up beside a draperied bedstead on which reclined a young girl so still and pallid, with colourless lips and half-closed eyes, that she seemed as though life had flown already from her wasted frame.

With a suppressed groan, the young man, now rushing forward and lifting up one of the hands white as the coverlet on which it rested, exclaimed,

'Look up, Flora! dear Flora! 'Tis I, Everard. Speak to me, my own love! Your stepmother Pauline, drawn from the Grange by a ruse, I am here to snatch you from her.'

For a moment as he gazed upon the waxen, livid features, Everard Dudley (the invalid's fiancée) fancied, death had already snatched from him his promised bride; a scarce audibly whisper presently, however, reassuring him, as, opening her dull eyes, the poor girl in broken sentences of fearful import, exclaimed:

'Oh, it is awful, Holy Madonna, that such things should be. The Paulini— I overheard her— as I counterfeited sleep— she— she— bade the dreadful woman, Gamble— to— to— end all to-day! Oh, Everard! she— she— my stepmother, I heard her say—' The feeble voice now stopped, a sweat as of rain running off the brow and down the waxen features of the suffering girl, and in

an agony of terror the bereaved lover in choking, gasping accents exclaimed: 'What said she, dear Flora? God in Heaven, let me know, that I may punish this dark demon whose presence has always been the precursor of death! First, her husband, your wretched father, died, then your brother Rupert, and now, oh God! you, my beloved, are threatened.'

'But not lost! God has watched over me, dear Everard.'

The voice was stronger now as, clutching feebly at her lover's hand, the young girl exclaimed:

'She— 'She— she, my stepmother, gave Nurse Gamble a phial— and— and I heard her say "Give it her all. *Peste*, the game will then be won!" And then, oh Everard! I heard the clink of glass, and though in sleep. I know the contents of the phial were being poured into my medicine. A few minutes after I was rudely seized by that horrid nurse, who handed me the potion intended to ensure my death!'

'And how did you escape, dear Flora? What then took place? Nurse Gamble is—'

'Dead, Everard, I know!' cried the sick girl, her voice again low and hushed.

'Listen— upon receiving the tumbler from the vile and wicked woman, I gave a shriek and cried 'Look, see! Everard Dudley is at the door, bid him come in!' Deceived by my action, her cruel eyes blazing with fury, she rushed out of the room, and in an instant I emptied the glass she had handed to me into her bottle of strong waters she had a moment before placed upon the table.'

'And returning she drank some of its contents, Flora?'

'Yes, and, Holy Madonna! as she did so, Everard, with a brutal laugh she cried out: 'Now let that power you so often talk about save you from death if it can, you white-faced chit!'

'And leaving you, and descending to the lower part of the house, the wretched scoffer and infidel was called to her account— hoist with her own petard,' said Everard grimly. Then, as an ashen-grey look stole over the face of his beloved, a wild, sacred expression gathered in his eyes, a cry of anguish escaping his lips.

'Death is hovering over her yet, and medical aid now might save her. Heaven guide me how to act, for I know not what to do,' he exclaimed distractedly as, wringing his hands, he gazed at the young girl who lay before him. Bending low over the still and pallid figure, Everard placed his hand upon the bosom and his face close to the sufferer's lips, a sigh of relief escaping him as he felt a tremulous pulsation from the one, and a faint breathing from the little mouth.

'She lives, but at all risks medical aid must be procured, and yet dare I leave the house with the chance of that unnatural, fiendish woman returning during my absence?'

Having during his ejaculations of doubt and fear drawn near to the casement of the chamber, the distracted lover gave a wild start as he gazed on the scene without. A snow-storm had now set in, the feathery flakes being whirled past the window by the eddying gusts, that were borne from the open heath. Almost dark, yet Everard Dudley's keen eyes noted a figure hurrying along the grounds in the direction of the hall door.

'It is she! The Dark Lady, as they call her, of the Hemlock Grange. Providence has served me well, and an inscrutable fate has led that woman to return here before my departure to procure help for my loved Flora, her last victim.'

There was a lurid gleam of passion in the eyes of the speaker now, and giving a glance at the pallid face of the still breathing girl, he then hastened into the room, and softly dosing the door, made his way to the lower part of the house.

A loud noise in the hall below was followed by the sound of footsteps, and then a woman's voice in alarmed, angry tones, echoed grimly in the lone dwelling.

'She has found her late assistant in all her crimes,' muttered Everard, who now with a rush made his way to the chamber into which he had forced an ingress some time before.

Standing now beside the ghastly corpse there by the threshold of the door, was a tall, handsome woman of beautiful form and statuesque figure, singularly lovely; her eyes were marvellous. In their deep setting and with their long, thick upper and lower lashes, those seductive, luminous orbs seemed to be black, while in reality they were of the darkest grey, and blazing now with a greenish light like those of a beast of prey upon the spring.

In a shrill, harsh voice, quivering with rage, she exclaimed: *'Mon Dieu*! This is your work, Everard Dudley! *Pardieu*, you shall swing upon a gibbet on the heath for this.'

'Not I! but you, poisoner, will perish on the scaffold.'

'I! Pauline Clavering, hang? You are mad, beggar and housebreaker! How came you here?'

'Through yon casement, and upon setting foot in this apartment I discovered your vile assistant dead; fate decreed she should quaff the poisoned draught you had prepared for your step-daughter Flora Clavering! You! You she-devil, who put to death your husband, and the poor boy his son Rupert, this day purposed to remove your last bar to wealth! Do you remember your instructions to that dead creature at your feet— "Give it her all, *Peste*, the game will then be won!" The game to you is lost, oh Dark Lady of the Hemlock Grange, and torture and Tyburn await you.'

There was a piercing scream of fury, now followed by the scuffling of feet, and sharp report of a pistol, then save for the howling wintry tempest without, all was silence in the chamber of death.

There was a wild look of horror upon the features of Everard Dudley as he stared upon the floor there by the still open casement. Reclining at length, a bullet hole in her temple, lay the fell poisoner, the Dark Lady of the Hemlock Grange. In the scuffle, attempting to destroy the man who had discovered her heinous and horrible crimes, she had herself perished. The bullet, her arm pushed aside by her adversary, had buried itself in her own brain.

Not for long did the astounded and horrified young man remain in that chamber of death, but dashing away was soon after speeding through the snowstorm for medical assistance for the last of the poisoner's victims, Flora Clavering, who with youth and vitality lay fighting against the effects of the insidious poison coursing through all her veins.

All was thick darkness, without and within the lonely Hemlock Grange, when a surgeon (an old friend of the late owner of the house), along with his two daughters, reached the building. Procuring lights, Everard Dudley, pale, exhausted, and in an agony of alarm, conducted Doctor Ainsworth and his daughters to the room in which lay all be loved on earth. There was a grave look upon the face of the worthy surgeon as leaning over the bed be glanced at the corpse-like figure that, so ghastly and still, lay before him. For some minutes be stood watching that still breathing form, his daughters with clasped hands awaiting the result of his investigations.

'It will be a hard battle,' the old man said. But it was a conflict in the end won by science.

For many weeks Flora Clavering lay hovering 'twixt life and death; but the poison driven out of her system she at length recovered, and, fully restored to health, twelve months afterwards gave her hand to the lover whose timely presence at the old house had saved her from the machinations of the poisoner, her infamous stepmother.

It was soon after the marriage that the Hemlock Grange was pulled down, though for many years the tragic death of the Dark Lady, its last mistress, was talked of for miles round.

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21: Flirted Herself To Death

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 20 Feb 1937

WHEN they found Amy Borden, she was dead. The room was filled with gas. It was all very, very funny...

In my own peculiar way, I'm going to try to show you how funny— how howlingly humorous — was the death Amy Borden. She was a petite creature. this Amy. Very fond of life. She liked to laugh, and play, and dance. She had jet black hair, and it was so arranged that it framed the ivory of her face. Her eyes were large, and her mouth was fresh. She had been married to Jerry for five years, and she was intensely in love with him. Amy had few faults. True, she was a bit vain. She liked to be flattered, even as you and I. And she was something of a flirt. She'd give the boys those big eyes— and then seem quite surprised when the boys went for her. You know the type, don't you? Oh, yes, Amy was flirtatious, all right. But give her credit for one thing. She never went beyond the flirting stage.

The whole trouble, I guess, rested in Jerry's disposition. Somewhere near the top of his dome was a little, green-eyed man with a two-edged fork. And every time that Amy so much as smiled at another man this little, green-eyed man would jab at Jerry with the fork. Then the fight would be on:— "Say, Amy, what's this all about?"

"What's all what about?"

"You know what I mean. You seemed pretty friendly with George tonight."

She'd shrug. "Oh, George is all right."

"Like him?"

"Not especially."

"Now, listen, Amy, and get this straight. I'm not going to have you fooling around with my friends. People are talking, and I can't stand it. I'm telling you right now that if I catch you flirting again there's going to be trouble. Plenty of trouble."

Usually that was enough to bring on the tears. Later, at home, the fight would be renewed with greater vigor. And so it went, day after day and month after month. There must be many thousands of couples just like Amy and Jerry— and if this story teaches them any lesson, it's worth the space it gets. Which is more than can be said for a great many of my stories.

These two, you see, were very much in love. Nuts about each other, really. Yet Amy was forever walking out on Jerry, because of his insane jealousy. And Jerry was forever imagining a great deal more than he actually saw. It was

during the latter part of their fifth year together that the split became definite. Amy walked out— and she didn't come back.

Jerry was so peeved, so hurt, that he didn't ask her to return. So it was different this time. Usually, after three or four days of separation, they'd fall into a clinch, and swear that it would never happen again. Usually, the sweetness of the reconciliation was almost worth the bitterness of the argument. But not this time.

Weeks went by. Long weeks, during which Amy found a job, and worked to keep herself in a little furnished room. She often cried during the night, and she cursed herself for being a fool. Jerry, she told herself, was unquestionably in the right. Even though it meant nothing, she should never have flirted when Jerry loved her so devotedly.

And Jerry, meanwhile, was learning how to send the wash out on Mondays so that it would be back on Thursdays— maybe. And he was learning how to fry steak and potatoes so that one wouldn't be done too long before the other. He blamed himself for everything. If he wasn't so insanely jealous, he told himself, he'd still be living happily with Amy. What right had he to keep Amy in chains, just because he placed a ring on her finger?

Well, both kept it up as long as they could. Then Jerry, verging on daffiness, made the first move. He phoned Amy, and, when he heard her voice, he burst into tears. He begged her to come back. He said he couldn't stand it any longer, and he swore he'd never be jealous again. Never! Then it was Amy's turn to weep. It was all her fault, she insisted. She had been terribly silly, and she would never flirt again. Never! They agreed to meet in a fashionable restaurant that night. And when they hung up, they were two of the happiest people in this whole wide world.

Now, this part of the story is tough to write. Frankly, I don't like it— and yet, without it, the story of Amy and Jerry is nothing at all. So listen: When Jerry walked into the restaurant, he saw Amy sitting alone at a wall table. Standing beside her was a fat man who was arguing and gesticulating. Jerry stepped into the picture. He pushed the fat man aside, and demanded to know what the trouble was. Amy tried to say something, but the fat man beat her to it.

"I am the manager here," he cried, excitedly. "This— this woman, here— she has been annoying a customer. An old customer, and a good one.

"We don't allow women like this in here. We have a reputation. If she is looking for men she must go elsewhere. If she doesn't leave at once, I will call the police."

Jerry helped his wife with her coat. Amy was trying to talk, but Jerry wasn't listening. He asked to pay her check, but the manager refused the money. He merely wanted the woman out of his place. When they reached the sidewalk,

Jerry looked coldly at Amy. He raised a fist and smacked her so suddenly that she turned completely around. Then he left.

The following morning, in a downtown business organisation, the office wag was filing his nails. Two stenographers and an office boy gaped at him in admiration as he spoke.

"Well," he was saying, "you know me. All dames go for me like this." He snapped his fingers. "But here I am, sitting next to this pretty number— at the next table, mind you— and she won't give me a tumble." He grinned. "But did I fix her? Wow! You know what I did? I just walked up to the manager, and said: 'Look here, Pepino. I've been eating here for eight years, but now I'm through. That dame at the wall table has been on the make for me ever since I sat down. Is that the kind of customers you're getting now? I ought to report this to the police!"

"And did he get scared? Wow! When I left, he was telling that dame plenty. I sure got even with that haughty dame!" The office force howled with laughter. What a wag this man was!

When they found Amy Harden, she was dead. The room was filled with gas. It was all very, very funny.

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22: The Bullion-Room

Headon Hill

Francis Edward Grainger (1854-1927)
In: *The Solutions of Radford Shone*, 1907

Another burlesque of Sherlock Holmes

STANDING NEAR the gangway of the great steamship, I was glad that for once in a way I was able to take a human rather than a professional interest in the departing passengers and their farewell to friends who had come to see them off. I was going out in the *Petunia* to bring home a certain notorious note-forger, known among his associates of the higher criminal circles as 'Flash Taylor.'

Mr. Taylor had been laid by the heels by our colleagues of the New York police, and was being held for extradition. The bell clanged out its final warning for non-voyagers to leave the ship, and there was a swish of skirts and a scurry of feet past my post of vantage. I had to draw back closer against the rails to avoid being swept away by the stream. In doing, so I was jammed against a young man in the smart uniform of the Flower Line, who was taking leave of a pretty girl, quietly dressed in a well-fitting suit of dark serge.

So absorbed were they in each other that for half a minute I became an involuntary listener to their last adieus.

'You must cheer up, Phil,' the girl was saying. 'There is no sense in meeting trouble half-way, and I have no doubt that this wonderful Mr. Radford Shone will safe-guard your treasures. At any rate, he will greatly lighten your responsibility.'

'That is exactly what he won't do,' the young man answered gloomily. 'If anything goes wrong, the company will hold me to blame, while if nothing is taken, or if the thief is caught in the act, Shone will get all the kudos. And it means so 'much' to us, darling! No promotion, no wedding bells for you and me.'

The bell clanged louder, reinforced now by the shriek of the siren, and with a long look in each other's eyes the lovers clasped hands and tore themselves apart. The girl hurried down the gangway, to be lost in the crowds on the quay, and the young officer, having watched her out of sight, turned, and met my gaze. I recognised him at once and held out my hand.

'Why, Mr. Lancaster!' I exclaimed, 'so we are to be shipmates again?'

For I had already made two voyages in other boats of the same line in which he had been serving. He drew back for a moment, as though startled by my presence; then he seized my hand and wrung it warmly.

'How are you, Inspector Royds?' he said. 'You're another on the job, I suppose. The *Petunia* simply reeks of detective talent this trip. We are carrying

the eminent Radford Shone and his friend Mr. Samuel Martin, and now you turn up as the representative of Scotland Yard. My bullion-room ought to be as safe as the Bank of England!'

'Why, yes,' I laughed, 'if Radford Shone is going to mind it. For myself, I am going to enjoy freedom from all official cares on the outward trip.' And I explained my mission— how I had been detailed to fetch 'Flash Taylor' to England to stand his trial at the Old Bailey.

Phil Lancaster, who had always struck me as a bright specimen of the gay-hearted sailor lad, glanced furtively round him. I noticed that his usually frank, healthy face was singularly careworn and haggard. The steamer had warped away from the quay, and her mighty propellers were churning her round in a gigantic curve for her run down the Mersey to the open sea.

'Come to my cabin and smoke; I am not due on the bridge for an hour,' said Lancaster abruptly. 'Ah, there goes the beauty!'

The passengers, the distraction of departure over, were mostly seeking their private accommodation for the bestowal of their travelling necessaries, and Lancaster's concluding soliloquy appeared to refer to a wizened, stooping, elderly man in clerical attire, who was entering one of the upper deck staterooms, followed by a florid, stout young man in very loud checks. I thought that I caught a gleam from the old cleric's prominent eyes directed at my companion, who, without further explanation, led me into a tiny cubicle in the range of deck-houses amidships. He drew forward a camp-stool for me, and perched himself on the edge of his bunk.

'Did you see that old chap dressed like a parson, with the fat bounder in tweeds?' he asked. 'Well, that is Radford Shone, masquerading as the Rev. Joshua Greer, tutor to the Honourable George Dalrymple, otherwise his pal, Mr. Samuel Martin. I don't like the man, Royds— for no better reason than that he is a standing reflection on my efficiency.'

And he went on to tell me that Shone had been engaged by the directors of the Flower Steamship Company to solve the mystery of several robberies that had recently been effected on the *Petunia*. As one of the 'greyhounds of the Atlantic,' and also a mail boat, the vessel was fitted with a bullion-room that had till quite recently been considered impregnable. Nevertheless, during the past year this strong hold had been twice entered by thieves, who had abstracted valuable uncut gems consigned to leading jewellers in New York. To have removed and landed the heavy gold ingots which sometimes formed part of the cargo was, of course, beyond their ingenuity.

The robberies were the more unaccountable as the bullion-room was guarded by a heavy iron door, which was furnished with an up-to-date combination letter-lock. As second officer, Lancaster had charge of the room and kept the key, though the captain of the ship also had a key and shared, with

him the secret of the particular lettering decided on for each voyage, the precaution being intended to provide against the loss of the combination in the event of one or other of them meeting with a fatal accident.

In spite of these safeguards the bullion room had thrice been denuded of its most portable valuables, and as on the present occasion the Petunia was carrying a price less consignment of diamonds for Tiffany of New York, Radford Shone's services had been enlisted with the double purpose of protecting the gems and, if any attempt were made on them, of detecting the thief.

'It is pretty rough on me, Mr. Royds, because I'm engaged to the sweetest girl in the world, and we are only waiting till I get my first officer's certificate to be married. I should have had it before now if it hadn't been for this set-back,' Lancaster concluded.

'Then you ought to hail Mr. Radford Shone as a friend,' I said. 'He has a great reputation, and ought to see you through.'

The young officer flicked a speck of dust from the gold lace on his sleeve and frowned.

'Radford Shone is a vain beast!' he replied fiercely. 'The sort of creature who sticks at foregone conclusions, and if he sticks to his present one he'll be worse than useless.'

'He has formed a theory?' I hazarded.

'He behaves as if he has. But see here, Mr. Royds, I've told you all this in confidence, and I can tell you no more. I don't really know what is in Shone's mind. Captain Smithers and I— and now you— are the only people in the ship aware of his presence on board, and I beg that you will not give me away for having blabbed to you. We have had some pleasant times together, crossing the ditch, so as you were in the same line of business I thought I would like to post you in what was going on. Nothing like having a friend at court, you know.'

A little later, as I leaned over the stern rail and watched the receding river-flats, I found myself wondering at that last cryptic utterance. Why should this frank faced sailor want a 'friend at court' in the shape of a Scotland Yard inspector? Why was the boy worrying so strangely, over the employment of Shone, when the object of that famous investigator was the same as his own— the keeping of felonious hands from the treasures entrusted to his charge? I am a detective by profession, remember, and though I tried to put it away, the thought flashed across me that his hostility to Shone could not have been more pronounced had he had designs on the contents of the bullion-room himself. If so, his apparently open confidence in me would have been a very subtle piece of strategy indeed.

Lancaster was on duty that evening, and did not appear at dinner in the saloon. But I need hardly say that I paid particular heed to my fellow passengers, without, however, recognising among them any criminal of note who might

have shipped with nefarious intentions. If such an one was on board he must be a new man who had not yet passed through our hands, for I knew that there were but four old convicts then at large capable of taking up such big business.

Failing in that direction I naturally turned my attention to Mr. Radford Shone, with whom I had never yet been brought into professional association. This was not surprising, from the fact that his principal exploits had been performed in cases of 'hushing-up' order, where police interference was the last thing wanted. So far as I was concerned, his reputation, great as it was, was somewhat shadowy, and I hailed with satisfaction the chance of studying his methods.

There was nothing the matter with his make-up, anyhow, or with his manner. He had been given a seat at the captain's table, between a handsome and vivacious young lady and a tall, aquiline-featured gentleman who wore in his button-hole the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. His friend, Martin, playing the part of his pupil, sat on the other side of the girl, and they seemed to have quickly shaken down into a congenial party. Shone, with the deferential air of the clerical tutor, turned frequently to his distinguished-looking neighbour, while Mr. Samuel Martin engaged the handsome brunette in airy trifling. Indeed, unless the stout youth was an excellent actor— and he did not look it— he had really fallen a victim to her fascinations.

At the close of the meal, before repairing to the smoking-room, I allowed my curiosity to get the better of me so far as to beckon a steward. 'Who is that gentleman who has just risen and is offering his arm to the lady?' I asked.

'That, sir? That is a French nobleman, sir— the Duc de Vionville; and the young-lady is his daughter, the Vicomtesse de Mericourt,' replied the man. And, lowering his voice, he added— 'They're sailed with us before, sir, and I am surprised that they should choose this boat again.'

'How's that?' said I.

'Last voyage they made with us there was a robbery aboard— out of the bullion room. Goodness knows how it was broke into, but among the things taken was a pearl necklace belonging to the Vicomtesse, which she had got the captain to place there for safety. Rough luck, sir, wasn't it?'

'Very,' I rejoined, and I left the saloon pondering on what I had heard.

The question presented itself whether Radford Shone and his assistant were known as private detectives to the Duc and his daughter, or whether the wily Shone was cultivating an acquaintance which might be profitable in the event of his tracing the thieves and possibly recovering their property. On the whole I was inclined to the latter view, for I had had dealings with some of the old French nobility, and it is hardly one of their traits to hobnob on equal terms with private enquiry agents, however eminent.

The *Petunia* sped westward over an unusually kind Atlantic, and we reached the fifth day out without any untoward development. Young Lancaster, when not on the bridge, bridge, was often with me, and with the narrowing down of the hours which would end his suspense his spirits seemed to fall lower and lower. He talked gloomily to me of his Ethel, and of his fears that a cruel fate would come between them. The bullion-room had evidently got badly on his nerves, and he refused to be comforted by my suggestion that all must be well or Radford Shone would have made some sign.

This the celebrated expert, had not done. There had been no sensational indication of the thief or thieves; no alarums and excursions in the neighbourhood of the bullion-room, or, indeed, anything to show that Shone was exercising any vigilance whatever. He lounged for the most part on deck, avoiding the poker and bridge players in the smoking-room, and lying up to his assumed clerical character by doing the civil to elderly ladies, spending also some portion of his time in promenading with the Duc de Vionville.

The Honourable George Dalrymple, otherwise Mr. Samuel Martin, was equally assiduous in improving his acquaintance with the Duc's *piquante* daughter. The more I saw of the strangely assorted fellow passengers, the more convinced I became that Shone's real personality had not been divulged. No scions of the old regime would have been so affable to a mere specialist in criminology as was the Duc to Radford Shone. Certainly no such gay dalliance as prevailed between Mr. Samuel Martin and the Vicomtesse would have been permitted.

No; I perforce stuck to my original opinion that Shone was ingratiating himself with a view to reaping a greater reward when he should spring his great surprise upon us. If his researches should lead to the restoration of the stolen necklace, the Duc's, admiration would be enhanced by his having been innocently fooled himself. Nor could it be that there was a deeper undercurrent, born of some secret knowledge gained by Shone, that the Duc and his daughter were themselves guiltily concerned in the robberies?

I put this theory away as inadmissible, arguing that, no detective, private or official, would allow himself to loom so largely in the notice of his quarry. Besides, it was well established that these grandees had themselves been heavy losers by the raids on the bullion-room.

We were expected to make New York harbor on the afternoon of the sixth day, so dinner on the fifth evening bade fair to be a lively function. The great, domed, palm-decorated saloon was a blaze of electric light, illuminating brilliant toilettes fresh from Paris; speculation ran high on the probable winner of the lottery on the ship's daily runs; clean-shaven men with clear eyes and curt speech talked of the Wall-street prices received by Marconigram just before the gong sounded.

For all that, for me the place lacked its Hamlet, for Mr. Radford Shone was absent from table, and so was Mr. Samuel Martin. Glancing hastily round I also missed Phil. Lancaster from the place which, as second officer, he usually occupied at the head of the third table when not on duty on the bridge.

I knew that he had come off watch at six o'clock, and was free till four in the morning— in fact, I had been looking forward to a chat with him during the evening. I was beginning to wonder what his absence portended when there was a commotion at the door of the saloon and Shone's stout young friend rushed in, labouring under the wildest excitement. Ignoring the implied invitation of Helene de Mericourt, who had drawn her skirts together to make room for him at her side he pushed his way to the head of the table, and whispered in the ear of the captain, who rose hurriedly and accompanied him out of the saloon.

Guessing that the supreme moment had come, I too, slipped out and followed them, the chase leading me, as I had expected down to the main deck, along a corridor, up the closed door of the bullion-room. There, under an electric lamp, stood Radford Shone, his dexter finger pointing dramatically to the iron door.

'Got your key, captain?' he said.

'Yes, why?' stammered the blunt old sailor, who was shaking all over with apprehension. 'Because the thief is inside. I have suspected him from the first, but I trod his heels so closely that he put off his attempt to the last night,' replied Shone, who was evidently not going to lose one jot of his triumph. 'I shadowed him here just before dinner, and finding the door ajar, pulled it to and shut him in.

Captain Smithers fumbled with a steel chain at his neck, and produced a key from the inner regions of his underclothing. With this, having set the letter combination he unlocked the door and dragged it open. There, in the dim interior, with his back to a pile of bullion-cases, stood Phil Lancaster, scowling defiance.

'I knew the brute would have me,' he said, shooting at Shone a glance that would have slain. 'I didn't quite see how, except that he carries too many guns for me. What are you going to do with me, sir?'

'Clap you in irons, my lad, and take you back to England,' said the captain sadly, for Lancaster had been one of his favourite officers.

During the next few days the downfall of Phil Lancaster, though not effaced from my memory, was driven into the background of my thoughts by the official routine I had to undergo in New York for taking over my prisoner, 'Flash Taylor'. This was at last satisfactorily concluded in time for us to take berths in the *Petunia* on her return trip, and we boarded the steamer at the Flower-Line dock in North River ten minutes before she cast off.

I had purposely cut it fine, to give my gentleman no chance of making a dash for liberty. Not till we were out in mid-river, heading for Sandy Hook, was I able to relax my vigilance, after coming to a clear understanding with Mr. Taylor. As long as he behaved himself he was free to come and go on deck as he pleased till we touched at Queenstown, when I should have to ask him to retire to our cabin while the steamer was in communication with the shore. Thus my only risk of losing him would be if he jumped overboard during the voyage— a risk which, as a student of human nature, I was fully prepared to take.

Flash Taylor was the sort of rascal who, when out of prison, enjoyed life far too thoroughly to want to end it by suicide. These preliminaries amicably settled, we were on the best of terms with each other, and together we amused ourselves by taking stock of the other passengers. They were, of course, a different set from those on the, outward voyage, and I soon found that the chief interest centred in that, young and popular peer, Lord Ravensbury, who was taking home his American bride, nee Miss Vanderbilt-Waldorf, the daughter of the multi-millionaire. The young couple had engaged what was known as 'the honeymoon suite,' and their appearance or otherwise in the saloon for meals was being freely canvassed by the loungers in our vicinity on the promenade deck.

'I am in a position to inform you, ladies and gentlemen, that his lordship and the countess will certainly take their places at table. The obstacle that might have prevented it has been happily removed,' said a well-remembered voice.

'Oh, tell us! do tell us!?' came the chorus from everyone within earshot. Radford Shone, his clerical attire abandoned in favour of a suit of grey tweed, and with Mr. Samuel Martin at his elbow, stood forth and, nothing loth, took up his parable.

'It was a little matter of Lady Ravensbury's million-dollar tiara, her father's wedding present,' he announced sententiously. 'They were reluctant to let it out of their sight, and equally reluctant to deposit it in the bullion-room on account of certain robberies therefrom on previous voyages. But they have now consented to entrust this priceless treasure to the ship's stronghold, since the captain was able to assure them that it would be as safe there as in the vaults of the Old Lady of Threadneedle-street. I am a modest man; and cannot tell you why.'

'I can though.' Mr. Samuel Martin blurted put, blushing furiously. 'This is the celebrated Mr. Radford Shone, the greatest detective of the age. He caught the thief on the voyage out one of the ships officers, who is down below some-where, going home in irons.'

A buzz of admiration went up, in the midst of which Shone took Martin's arm roughly and walked him off, as though annoyed by his adulation. A soft chuckle at my side caused me to turn to 'Flash' Taylor.

My prisoner's dissipated face was convulsed with strange spasms.

'Mouth watering over that tiara?' I chaffed him.

'No, it wasn't that. I'm no cracksman, and it wouldn't be much of a game with you aboard, Mr. Royds,' Taylor replied affably— for he was a genial rogue who bore me no malice. 'I was just thinking what funny fools there are in the world. When I've done my little bit of time I'm blessed if I don't set up as an expert investigator. Set a thief to catch a thief, don't you know.'

There seemed to be a cryptic meaning in this utterance, which I was too wary to try to extract on the spur of the moment. The more so as the bombastically devised self-advertisement of Shone had sent my thoughts back to that other captive who was making, the voyage home under such infinitely harder conditions than my stoical professional friend. I could picture to myself the dull misery of the young sailor, eating his heart out in the bowels of the ship that was bearing him to justice. Yet, would it be justice if he was called off to expiate his unauthorised presence in the bullion-room? He had put forward no defence nor uttered a word of explanation, preserving a sullen silence in face of Shone's triumphant accusation and the captain's acceptance of the same. He had seemed to acquiesce in the situation, as though the fact of his being found in the bullion room was proof of guilty in tent; and in a way it was so, for it was a strict rule of the ship that except in the case of a fire or wreck neither he nor the captain should enter till the end of the voyage, and then only in the presence of the other.

Yet for all that; it was against the grain to believe Phil Lancaster a thief— one, too, who, if he was a thief at all, must have worked systematically.

As this passed through my mind, my gaze strayed after the author of Lancaster's undoing, and I observed that Shone and his henchman had reached the stern-most limits of the promenade deck, and that, having wheeled round, they would shortly pass us again. At the same moment a suppressed exclamation from Taylor caused me to shift my eyes to the other direction— to the head of the stairs leading up from the deck below.

To my astonishment, the Duc de Vionville and his charming daughter, whom I had naturally supposed to be in New York, had just mounted to the promenade deck and were strolling aft. In a few seconds they would meet Shone and his friend; and as it happened, the meeting took place exactly opposite to where Taylor and I were lounging against the rails. I watched it closely, eager to see how the French grandees would comport them selves under the altered conditions now prevailing between them and their former cronies.

The Duc and the Vicomtesse were deep in conversation, and did not appear to recognise Radford Shone till he stopped; then they greeted him with raised eyebrows, as though surprised at his effrontery in making overtures.

'This is indeed a pleasant and unexpected *rencontre*,' Shone simpered. 'I had thought that your Grace was making a longer stay than three days in America.'

'Oh, ah! It is our friend the detective,' said De Vionville with haughty condescension. 'Yes, we decided to return at once, to take advantage of any developments that may follow your clever piece of work on the outward voyage. If my daughter's necklace is recovered through your agency, Mr. Radford Shone, you will not find me remiss as a pay master, but you will understand that as there can no longer be any need for the intimacy which doubtless served its turn on the outward voyage, that intimacy must how cease.'

Shone bit his lip and passed on, Martin following with a helplessly unrequited glance of admiration at the Vicomtesse de Mericourt.

And then once more my attention was diverted to my prisoner by the *sotto voce*— 'Am I on my head or my heels?'

'Nonsense, man; there's no motion. We're not in the open sea yet,' I replied, affecting to misunderstand him. I had not forgotten his exclamation of two minutes ago on first seeing the Duc de Vionville, but it was not my cue to put leading questions to one of his type.

'Come down to the cabin, Mr. Royds,' he breathed earnestly in my ear. 'You have treated me like a gentleman, and I'll do the same by you.'

So we sought our two-berthed stateroom, and there 'Flash' Taylor unburdened to me his wicked but sportsmanlike soul to such a tune that I fairly gasped. When it was all over I knew that the conveyance of that manufacturer of bogus notes to England was by no means the most serious work before me on the *Petunia*'s homeward trip.

It was one of the penalties of my official position on that trip that, travelling now strictly on duty, I was no longer able to use the saloon for meals. I could not well expect decent folk to sit at table with a notorious forger, nor would the captain have permitted it, and I had therefore to mess in the seclusion of the state-room with my prisoner. I had not looked forward to the prospect with much pleasure, but after Taylor's confidence I prepared to take full advantage of my enforced ostracism.

On that first night, however, I contrived to take a peep into the saloon after the passengers had taken their places, and I saw that the Duc de Vionville and his daughter no longer sat with Radford Shone and Martin. The two latter had been relegated to the lower social depth of the doctor's table, and from Shone's lofty air and Martin's volubility I guessed that he was being lionised as the hero of the hour almost to the effacement of Lord Ravensbury and his bride, who occupied the post of honour right and left of the skipper.

Later in the evening I obtained an interview with Captain Smithers in the chartroom, and asked his permission to see Phil Lancaster. The request was

none too cordially received for a reason that made me like the old man better than I had ever done before.

'No,' he said angrily. 'There's a good deal too much detective business going on in this ship, what with that chap Shone getting himself gassed among the passengers over Lancaster's disgrace, and now you, Royds, wanting, I reckon, to trip the poor lad into some sort of confession. No, I will take him home for a fair trial, but I'll be hanged if he shall be badgered into talking if he doesn't want to!'

'I have no wish to entrap Mr. Lancaster,' I replied quietly. 'On the contrary, I do not believe that he was in the bullion-room with guilty intent. All I want is to get an assurance from him to that effect, to guard against making a fool of myself, before considerably startling you, captain.'

'What! —Lancaster innocent? Shone wrong! By the little cherub that sits up aloft, but you shall have your palaver anyhow! Come along, right here and now!'

And the captain clapped his gold-banded cap on to his grizzled head, and led ne down to the lower deck and unlocked a door.

The cabin was cramped, and but ill-lit by an oil-lamp, but there was sufficient there for rough-and-ready comfort if the occupant been free to come and go. But the chains at Phil's ankles— the 'irons' which are part even of a modern shipmaster's creed— rattled as we entered, telling of his close confinement.

At sight of me the young man's face cleared a little, and he rose from the bench on which he had been sitting dejectedly.

'This is kind of you, Royds,' he said, 'that is, if you're going to put me with the other professional criminal. 'I'm a bit lonely and shall be glad of company.'

I saw that he was overwrought, and I sharply bade him not to be a fool, but to tell me, as man to man, why he went to the bullion-room that night and gave Radford Shone his chance.

'Not a word more,' I added; 'only your reason. I think I can guess it, but I want to be sure.'

Lancaster shrugged his shoulders wearily.

'I'll tell you, Royds, that I'd have bitten off my tongue rather than tell Shone,' he replied. 'It was simply that my nerves couldn't stand the strain any longer. I had no faith in the fellow, be cause his manner on the first day of the voyage showed that he suspected me. He might, therefore, have overlooked the real thief, and I went to the bullion-room to satisfy myself that nothing had been tampered with. As God is my judge; that is the truth, though I do not suppose that it will avail me in court.'

'If I can lay my hand on the artist who ought to be in your place you will never have to go into court at all,' I answered him. 'Come, captain, let us get back to the chart-room and finish our chat.'

THE NEXT three days passed uneventfully, and then one morning the Vicomtess appeared on deck alone. Luncheon time came, and her father not having joined her, I ascertained from a steward that the Due de Vionville was ill. It was believed that he had developed a touch of influenza, which would keep him in his bunk for the rest of the voyage.

The news, when I imparted it to Taylor was received with a wink.

'I wonder if the great Radford Shone knows what is the matter with him?' he said drily. 'Am I in this with you, Mr. Royds?'

I nodded, and for the remainder of the day we stuck close to our stateroom, Taylor amusing himself with fastening and unfastening the handcuffs which I had brought for use upon him if he had proved refractory. The cabin was in the same corridor as De Vionville's, and between the two was a suite of bathrooms; I was smitten with quite a craze for promiscuous 'tubs' that afternoon, but nothing happened; nor was it to be expected that vigilance would be rewarded while the passengers were in and out of their cabins. It was not till dinner was in progress in the saloon and after our steward had brought us our tray and departed, that anything happened, and then it was only the faint click of a door-latch some way along the corridor, but it sufficed. Flash Taylor laid down his knife and fork and took up the handcuffs which I had entrusted to him.

'You fool!' I whispered. 'You'll never live up to your adage that way. Go on eating. Clatter your crockery, and don't be so keen.'

My prisoner looked his chagrin, but obeyed, and ten minutes later, when the distant door clicked again, I unleashed him with the possibly unkind remark—'There must be a crime before there can be a conviction, my son, as your own experience ought to have told you. If I am not mistaken the crime has now been accomplished, and you can have your revenge. Come along.'

The door of the Duc de Vionville's stateroom was our goal, and our united efforts broke it down in time to prevent its occupant from throwing Lady Ravensburys million-dollar tiara through the port-hole into the sea.

My prisoner snapped the handcuffs on to the 'French nobleman's' wrists, while I covered him with my pistol.

'There, Toff Larkin,' Taylor panted. 'That'll pay you for rounding on a pal three years ago!'

MR. RADFORD SHONE was not seen much during the last days of the trip ; but when he did appear his sublime egoism carried him through without any confession of defeat. His mouthpiece, Mr. Samuel Martin, laboured to explain that Shone would have caught the sham Duc had it not been for Lancaster's folly in attracting suspicion by his over-anxiety. The eminent expert had, I was told, some very bitter things to say about my alliance with a convict in order to gain my ends.

As a matter of fact, I never tried to conceal that my capture of 'Toff Larkin' was entirely due to his chance recognition by 'Flash' Taylor, whose faithless comrade he had been in a former enterprise.

Taylor was able to tell me that the 'Duc' was one of a gang who had begun to systematically work the mail steamers by assuming a rank that was above suspicion and having as a confederate a young and pretty woman. They had procured a key to fit the bullion-room by taking a wax impression of the captain's key, and after all that was plain sailing with the exception of getting the proper lettering of the combination lock. This they contrived by closely studying the custom of the ship, which was for the captain and the second officer to decide upon just before sailing. One or other of the confederates generally managed to be in the vicinity of the chart-room at the crucial moment and overhear the letters.

Larkin had abstained from robbing the bullion-room on the outward voyage this time because he had ascertained that better plunder was to be obtained on the homeward one, and because he knew that Shone's vigilance would be relaxed after his apparent success.

I considered that I was more than justified by the clearing of Phil Lancaster, who was on the bridge when we reached Liverpool, and as a free man, was able to wave a glad greeting to the girl waiting for him on the quay.

End