PAST MASTERS 215

Bram Stoker
Sherwood Anderson
Jeffery Farnol
Edward Dyson
A. T. Quiller-Couch
Olaf Stapledon
Dylan Thomas
Jacques Futrelle
H. D. Umbstaetter

and more

PAST MASTERS 215

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

29 April 2025

Contents

_____

1: Night Among The Wolves

John Greenleaf Whittier

1807-1892

In: *Legends of New England*, Hanmer and Phelps, 1831

—"THE gaunt wolf,
Scenting the place of slaughter with his long
And most offensive howl, did ask for blood!"

THE wolf— the gaunt and ferocious wolf! How many tales of wild horror are associated with its name! Tales of the deserted battle-field— where the wolf and the vulture feast together— a horrible and obscene banquet, realizing the fearful description of the Seige of Corinth, when—

—"On the edge of a gulf
There sat a raven flapping a wolf,"

amidst the cold and stiffening corses of the fallen;— or of the wild Scandinavian forests, where the peasant sinks down, exhausted amidst the drifts of winter, and the wild wolf-howl sounds fearfully in his deafening ear, and lean forms and evil eyes gather closer and closer around him, as if impatient for the death of the doomed victim.

The early settlers of New-England were, not unfrequently, greatly incommoded by the numbers and ferocity of the wolves which prowled around their rude settlements. The hunter easily overpowered them, and with one discharge of his musket, scattered them from about his dwelling. They fled, even from the timid child, in the broad glare of day— but in the thick and solitary night, far away from the dwellings of men, they were terrible, from their fiendish and ferocious appetite for blood.

I have heard a fearful story of the wolf, from the lips of some of the old settlers of Vermont. Perhaps it may be best told in the language of one of the witnesses of the scene.

" 'TWAS A NIGHT of January, in the year 17—. We had been to a fine quilting frolic, about two miles from our little settlement of four or five log-houses. 'Twas rather late— about 12 o'clock, I should guess— when the party broke up. There was no moon— and a dull, grey shadow or haze hung all around the horizon, while overhead a few pale and sickly looking stars gave us their dull light as if they shone through a dingy curtain. There were six of us in company— Harry Mason and myself and four as pretty girls as ever grew up this side of the Green Mountains. There were my two sisters and Harry's sister

and his sweetheart, the daughter of our next door neighbor. She was a right down handsome girl— that Caroline Allen. I never saw her equal, 'though I am no stranger to pretty faces. She was so pleasant and kind of heart— so gentle and sweet-spoken, and so intelligent besides, that everybody loved her. She had an eye as blue as the hill-violet, and her lips were like a red rose-leaf in June. No wonder that Harry Mason loved her— boy though he was— for we had neither of us seen our seventeenth summer.

"Our path lay through a thick forest of oak, with here and there a tall pine raising its dark, full shadow against the sky, with an outline rendered indistinct by the thick darkness. The snow was deep— deeper a great deal than it ever falls of late years— but the surface was frozen strongly enough to bear our weight, and we hurried on over the white pathway with rapid steps. We had not proceeded far, before a low, long howl came to our ears. We all knew it in a moment: and I could feel a shudder thrilling the arms that were folded close to my own, as a sudden cry burst from the lips of all of us—"The wolves—the wolves!"

"Did you ever see a wild wolf— not one of your caged, broken down show-animals, which are exhibited for sixpence a sight— children half price— but a fierce, half-starved ranger of the wintry forest— howling and hurrying over the barren snow, and actually mad with hunger? There is no one of God's creatures which has such a frightful, fiendish look, as this animal. It has the form as well as the spirit of a demon.

"Another, and another howl— and then we could hear distinctly the quick patter of feet behind us. We all turned right about, and looked in the direction of the sound.

"The devils are after us," said Mason, pointing to a line of dark, gliding bodies. And so in fact they were— a whole troop of them— howling like so many Indians in a Powwaw. We had no weapons of any kind; and we knew enough of the nature of the vile creatures who followed us to feel that it would be useless for us to contend without them. There was not a moment to lose— the savage beasts were close upon us. To attempt flight would have been a hopeless affair. There was but one chance of escape, and we instantly seized upon it.

"To the tree— let us climb this tree!" I cried, springing forward towards a low-boughed and gnarled oak, which I saw at a glance might be easily climbed into.

"Harry Mason sprang lightly into the tree, and aided in placing the terrified girls in a place of comparative security among the thick boughs. I was the last on the ground, and the whole troop were yelling at my heels before I reached the rest of the company.

There was one moment of hard breathing and wild exclamation among us, and then a feeling of calm thankfulness for our escape. The night was cold— and we soon began to shiver and shake, like so many sailors on the top-mast of an Iceland whaler. But there were no murmurs— no complaining among us— for we could distinctly see the gaunt, attenuated bodies of the wolves beneath us, and every now and then we could see great, glowing eyes, staring up into the tree where we were seated. And then their yells— they were loud and long and devilish!

"I know not how long we had remained in this situation, for we had no means of ascertaining the time— when I heard a limb of the tree cracking, as if breaking down beneath the weight of some of us; and a moment after a shriek went through my ears like the piercing of a knife. A light form went plunging down through the naked branches, and fell with a dull and heavy sound upon the stiff snow.

"Oh God! I am gone!"

"It was the voice of Caroline Allen. The poor girl never spoke again! There was a horrible dizziness and confusion in my brain, and I spoke not— and I stirred not— for the whole was at that time like an ugly, unreal dream. I only remember that there were cries and shudderings around me— perhaps I joined with them— and that there were smothered groans and dreadful howls underneath. It was all over in a moment. Poor Caroline! She was literally eaten alive. The wolves had a frightful feast, and they became raving mad with the taste of blood.

"When I came fully to myself— when the horrible dream went off— and it lasted but a moment— I struggled to shake off the arms of my sisters, which were clinging around me, and could I have cleared myself I should have jumped down among the raging animals. But when a second thought came over me, I knew that any attempt at rescue would be useless. As for poor Mason, he was wild with horror. He had tried to follow Caroline when she fell— but he could not shake off the grasp of his terrified sister. His youth, and weak constitution and frame, were unable to withstand the dreadful trial; and he stood close by my side, with his hands firmly clenched and his teeth set closely, gazing down upon the dark, wrangling creatures below, with the fixed stare of a maniac. It was indeed a terrible scene. Around us was the thick, cold night— and below, the ravenous wild beasts were lapping their bloody jaws, and howling for another victim.

"The morning broke at last; and our frightful enemies fled at the first advance of day-light, like so many cowardly murderers. We waited until the sun had risen before we ventured to crawl down from our resting-place. We were chilled through— every limb was numb with cold and terror— and poor

Mason was delirious, and raved wildly about the dreadful things he had witnessed. There were bloody stains all around the tree; and two or three long locks of dark hair were trampled into the snow.

"We had gone but a little distance when we were met by our friends from the settlement, who had become alarmed at our absence. They were shocked at our wild and frightful appearance; and my brothers have oftentimes told me that at first view we all seemed like so many crazed and brain-stricken creatures. They assisted us to reach our homes; but Harry Mason never recovered fully from the dreadful trial. He neglected his business, his studies and his friends, and would sit alone for hours together, ever and anon muttering to himself about that horrible night. He fell to drinking soon after, and died, a miserable drunkard, before age had whitened a hair of his head.

"For my own part I confess I have never entirely overcome the terrors of the melancholy circumstance which I have endeavored to describe. The thought of it has haunted me like my own shadow. And even now, the whole scene comes at times freshly before me in my dreams, and I start up with something of the same feeling of terror, as when, more than half a century ago, I passed A NIGHT AMONG THE WOLVES."

2: Gold In His Teeth

Ernest O'Ferrall

1881-1925

The Lone Hand Oct 1913

THREE men of the Domain sat in attitudes of dejection in the shade of a giant Moreton Bay fig tree and stared at two figures standing somewhat apart on the rise overlooking busy Woolloomooloo Bay. One was a spruce and brawny policeman, the other a particularly abject member of their own order.

" 'E thinks 'es safe so long as 'e keeps near Murphy," whined the largest and fattest of the three under the fig tree.

The man with the chewed straw hat groaned and rolled into a sort of natural couch formed by two roots. "So 'e is— unless yer can think o' some way ter scare 'im orf."

"Or ter get Murphy ter scare 'im!" sneered the third man, an unpleasant-looking person with a drooped eyelid.

" 'Ow can yer manage that?" whined the fat man, who foresaw difficulties in everything.

" 'Ow erbout tellin' Murphy somethin' 'orrible erbout 'im?" suggested Straw Hat.

"Well," sighed the fat man, "I carn't think o' nothin' 'orrible enuf " He stretched himself but and put his hat over his face as if to signify that the problem was quite beyond him. But he presently lifted his old boxer to add a postscript. "Any'ow 'oo's goin' ter tell Murphy ? I ain't!" He replaced the hat as if it were a pot lid and settled down to simmer.

The other two, somewhat depressed by the fat man's early resignation from the board, stared moodily across the stretch of sunlit grass and tried to think of something to say. The dosser on the ridge hovered miserably like a tattered vulture in the vicinity of the still, rock-like policeman.

Then the voice of the acidulated member with the drooped eyelids cut the accumulated silence like a knife.

"'Ow would it be ter tell Murphy 'e was follerin' 'im round'? Praps 'e ain't noticed 'im?"

The straw hat man started up from his root bed.

"I bet 'e ain't!" he cried. "Murphy never saw anythin' in 'is life!"

"But 'oo's goin' ter tell 'im?" whined the fat man, fearful that the hot duty would devolve on him.

"I'll do it, Fatty," growled the man of ideas. "Don't you get in a sweat! You lie where you are an' keep yourself cool!"

Fatty grunted defiantly. "That's jus' what I was going ter do!"

Without saying further words, the self-elected envoy dragged himself to his feet and set off, the other two watching him furtively from the grateful shade. They saw him pass by the seeker of protection and plod straight up to the park policeman, whom he hailed and addressed respectfully from a distance of about three paces. Murphy seemed to grant him a disdainful audience, and to dismiss promptly with a few sharp words. As the envoy marched away, he looked after him in a terribly searching manner. Then suddenly he seemed to wrench his attention off the unpleasant object and focus it on some playing children.

The envoy returned sweating and in a state of nervous irritation.

"Blarst 'im!" he ejaculated, and sat down in the shade again.

"Did yer tell 'im?" enquired Fatty, who, like most inactive people, was never anxious for the latest news from the front.

"Yes, I tole 'im! If 'e don't 'unt Toey it won't be my fault!"

The man with the straw hat tactfully refrained from asking questions until he should have cooled down. But he ventured a suggestion.

"When yer rested, Mick, we'll get a move on. I bet 'e's only waitin' fer us ter go ter 'unt Toey. Them Johns never likes ter let yer see they're hactin' on yer information."

The fat man stirred like one troubled by evil dreams. "I was jus' gettin' comfortable 'ere!" he complained. "This 'ere's th' bes' side of th' park ter-day, what with th' breeze an' all."

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"Come on," said the messenger presently. He struggled to the perpendicular and waited till the other two had risen. The three drifted away in silence.

As soon as the stone gateway of the Botanical Gardens had reluctantly swallowed them, Constable Murphy allowed his eyes to wander to the wavering Toey. He advanced two steps threateningly and waved one blue serge arm. "Get out o' this, yon! If I see you bangin' round here any more!"

But the horrified Toey was already scuttling away at top speed beyond the range of spoken threats.

Constable Murphy clasped his hands behind him and resumed his pleasant beat.

The Domain is not wide enough for a man to keep out of the way of two sets of enemies'. So, after a day and a night's dodging, Toey humbly made application to be received again into the society of his fellows. This was exactly what they had aimed at; but like good diplomatists they made the concession grudgingly.

"What made yer go an' foller 'im roun' like er dorg?" piteously asked Fatty, when the unfortunate breach had been healed.

The returned prodigal immediately became gloomy. "You know!" he replied meaningly.

The man with the straw hat showed signs of anger. "Well, wot if we did? he yelped. "If any of us blokes 'ad a gold crown on a tooth, and we 'adn't 'ad a drink fer days, d'ye think th' bloke wot 'ad it would kick up a row erbout pullin' th' blanky thing out?" His speech ended in a sort of staccato scream. Toey wilted where he sat and looked round hopelessly for support. There was none forthcoming. Fatty plucked a grass stalk and looked away. The man with the drooped eyelid abstractedly gnawed one end of his rat-tail moustache.

"A decent cobber," continued the straw hat moralist severely, "a decent cobber wouldn't keep a bit o' blanky gold in 'is mouth w'en other cobbers was starvin roun' 'im!" He emphasised his words by spitting on the path immediately under a notice which implored the public not to do so.

The man with the crown looked thoroughly miserable. "Look 'ere! If this 'ere thing come orf, I'd near go barmy with toothache!"

"No yer wouldn't," declared the straw hatter. "That there blanky tooth's dead long ergo!"

"It 'ud ache, I tell yer!"

"Well let's 'ave a try eny'ow!" He advanced eagerly on the patient and looked disgusted when he shrank back with one hand over his closed mouth.

"You are frightened! I ain't goin' ter hurt yer!"

Fatty became suddenly interested and sat up. "Be er man now, Toey! Let 'im try!"

The man with the drooped eyelid sneered. "Let 'im 'ave 'er try, carn't ver!"

"I ain't goin' ter get toothache fer nobody!"

"Aw, a drop er beer 'ull soon stop toothache!"

"Wot's toothache any'ow! It don't kill yer!"

"You won't get no toothache at all! Come on now, Toey! Be er sport!"

"Yes, be er sport! Let 'im pull th' flamin' thing out an' get rid of it! Wot th' 'll's th' good of it in there ?"

"I tell yer I WON'T!" The badgered Toey backed away from the wolfish three. But the light was almost gone and the roots of the Moreton Bay are brutal things to walk among. As he retreated, one of the ridges caught his heel, and he pitched fairly on his shoulders.

They were on him in a minute, and might have triumphed only for his strong boots, teeth and lungs. With Fatty doubled up with a kick in the vest, Mick shaking and nursing a bitten finger, and someone running towards them

in answer to the lusty yells, they reckoned it was good enough to get. They hurried indignantly from the scene and were promptly lost in the shadows.

Constable Murphy, somewhat breathless after his sprint, was mad when he discovered the identity of the howler for help. "Oh, it's you, is it?..Well, what's up with you?"

Toey stood up looking fearfully ashamed of himself. "Er— some of th' blokes was jus' tryin' ter get somethink orf me."

The professional suspicions of Murphy were aroused at once. "What was it?"

"Me crown," faltered the dosser.

"Your what?"

"Me crown, sir— th' bit o' gold on me tooth."

The little group of night prowlers and passers-by, attracted by the yelling, laughed unfeelingly.

"What do they want your crown for? To buy beer with, I suppose?"

"Yessir— at least I think so, sir."

"Do you want to do anything about it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Well don't get kicking up a row again or I'll lock you all up. I'm getting sick of loafers, especially you."

He retired majestically. Toey trembled violently and, having no home to disperse to, went rapidly elsewhere. The fugitive three collapsed on the grass when they reached the other end of the Domain.

"It's no use tryin ter git it orf 'im be force," groaned Fatty. He put both hands tenderly on his kicked vest. " 'Ope this kick ain't th' start of internal troubles. I don' wanter go inter 'orspittle!"

Mick of the dropped eyelid critically inspected his nipped forefinger by the light of the arc lamp. "If that there finger's poisoned, dy'e know what I'll deter that cow?" (He proceeded to give full details of the tragedy).

The man with the straw hat listened impatiently till Mick had finished, then unfolded his plan. The central idea was that Fatty was to hand over the half-crown he had found that afternoon to Mick, and that Mick was to go forth alone, chum up with the golden galleon and make him as drunk as posible. The tooth burglary could then be accomplished with ease in some dark corner of the park.

Fatty, who was lying flat as usual, sat up when the straw hatter had quite done.

"Ain't nobody but me investin' nothin'?" he whined. "Serpose I'm the only share'older, what sorter cut do I git out of it ?"

"You'll get a blanky good cut, don't you fear!"

"So I orter! Why can't yous blokes put nothin' in?"

"Aw, tork sense! We ain't been pickin' up 'arf-crowns!"

"Wot are these tooth-crowns worth eny'ow ? Th' blanky thing might be brass fer all you know!"

Mick cut in impatiently. "You don't know nothin', Fatty! All these 'ere things wot they puts in teeth is pure gold— five or six quid's worth of it! They melts down sovrins ter fill up teeth with. Ain't that good enuf for yer?"

"There yer are!" barked the man with the straw hat. "You heard wot 'e said! Now give's yer 'arf-crown an' shut up!"

The coin changed hands without further fuss.

"I'll git arfter 'im ter-morrer," muttered Mick determinedly, as he stowed the coin away. The fat man lying prone on the grass, sighed tremulously and clasped his hands over his stomach. A nervous night wind went shuddering through the trees and shadows.

Next morning at ten o'clock, Mick set out on his quest and the man in the straw hat started to shepherd Fatty the capitalist through what proved to be a day of doubt and agony. The stout investor was so worried that he could not sleep even in the choice positions picked out for him by his absurdly solicitous guardian. In his worst moments, he drew fearful word pictures of Mick in town having a lone, illegal drunk with the embezzled half-crown. The day and the patience of the straw hatter wore away together, and he was transported with joy when, about three in the afternoon, Mick was observed coming back alone. When he arrived, he was found to be in a towering rage. Handing two shillings to the agonised Fatty, he cursed a little to relieve his feelings and explained.

"I bin walkin' th' whole blanky day! Muster walked near twenty mile before I come across th' cow in a pub down George Street. And what d'ye think ? 'E was full up ter th' neck an wouldn't reckernise me! 'E 'ad three sailors with 'im. I don't know 'oo was buyin' th' beer but there they was. Well I done me best, but I couldn't get 'im away. Th' blanky sailors threatened to punch me on th' nose if I didn't clear out. So I cleared."

The other two sat appalled at the news. Then the straw hatter cried,

"Where did 'e get th' money?"

"Muster went through someone," muttered Fatty brokenly. He jingled his two shillings change during the thoughtful interval that followed.

"I 'ad two drinks," announced the envoy sternly. "Two drinks I 'ad, an' I d— n well earned 'em!"

"That's orright, Mick," whispered the brooding financier.

The shadow of the great grief still hung over them when night came again to hide their misery, and the eternal candles of the stars twinkled on the blue mantelpiece of Heaven.

Later on, three sorrowful figures issued from the silent place of trees and wandered disconsolately towards Woolloomooloo. The regular thump- thump-thump of a Salvation Army drum became faintly audible as they turned into busy William Street. They found the noise, the torches and the usual crowd in one of the side lanes and drifted along to see what was doing.

The captain, an energetic, red-faced man with a heavy moustache, was jumping about inside the ring, clapping his hands explosively and leading a few shy lassies and dejected male members in the concluding verse of a home-made hymn. When he had shoved them through it, he whipped off his cap, half-wheeled, and waved it cheerily at the street: "Well, dear friends, I'm shoor I'm glad an' thankful ter see so many of you 'ere ter night listenin' to th' words o' joy that—"

Something fell into the ring— something in the shape of a man that held its face in both hands and moaned, "I sold me crown! I sold me (hic) golden crown f'r drink, an' now I'm suff'rin'— pains of Hell!"

The crowd murmured excitedly; three men in the background shouted with rage and tried vainly to break their way through the press; but the captain with a joyful cry threw one arm round the shoulder of the kneeling convert in the helpful, loving attitude so often seen in religious prints.

"Hallyloolyer!" he roared. "Our brother 'as found repentance! Cheer 'im onward with a verse !" Clapping his hands vigorously, he danced beside the man with raging toothache and led his lay figures in an absurdly appropriate verse;

" 'E'as lorst'is goldin crown—own!
'E 'as lorst 'is goldin crown!
But with 'elp an care
'E will get in w'ere
'E will FIND 'IS GOLDIN CROWN!"

And when the words of cheer had been wailed and howled, and the delighted leader was about to erupt in a thanksgiving speech, a cold, cutting voice from the back called out, " 'E'll find '*is* goldin crown in th' pawnshop, an' that's jus' where the cow put it."

———————————

3: The Great Grey Rain

Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

The Lone Hand, 2 Oct 1911

ALL things come to him who waits! It is good philosophy, thought Jack Denver; but there are particular instances in which it doesn't apply.

He had waited for Mary Byrne for a long time. He knew now that she was the one woman in the world for whom he had been moulded in the form of man. He knew that when he first set eyes on her. He knew that her eyes had a meaning for him—a secret meaning, a whole meaning not intended for anyone else in the world, and not to be understood by anyone else.

He knocked the ashes from his pipe, filled and lit it. Then, seating himself on a log in front of his house, he looked out on the west, yet golden with the glow of the sunken sun, and on the scraggy river-gums that border the course of the Namoi.

He had stuck to shearing because he liked the life. Kithless and kinless, the Bush had been a father and a mother to him, a hearth and home. He was a man's man— could tell a story, sing a song, drink, smoke, ride and, if there was no other way out, put up his hands with the best of them. There were times certainly when his back ached and the day's work became a drag and a torture; but so long as others toiled beside him, these things did not matter so very much. What did matter were the end-of-the-season farewells, when the men with whom he had sung, yarned, ate, toiled, said good-bye to him at homestead gate, or station boundary, or road-side public house, and made their way homewards to the wife and kids. At such times a bigger loneliness than sits by day or night on hill or plain would clutch at his heart desperately. For each of these men who left him a woman was waiting— waiting by the sliprails, perhaps, with a baby in her arms, waiting with the sunset glow on her face and the love-glow in her eyes. Well, after all, he would think to himself, mateship is a very fine thing indeed, but mateship is not everything.

The glow had died in the west, and a star or two had begun to show. Then a sudden lightning flash in the north-west made him look in that direction. There a great cloud had pushed its dome above the horizon.

''Rain," he said; "well, the country'll be glad of it."

Why had he not married years ago?

He was as well able to keep a wife as most men. He had a thousand acres of land up here on the Namoi— good wheat-land, well grassed and almost clear of timber.

No, he had remained single, not because he could not support a wife, but because he had never met a woman whom he wished to support. Denver

shifted his position and laughed mirthlessly. For, of late, his mental attitude had changed considerably; and much good the change had done him. It would have been a thousand times better with him if things had remained as they were, and if he had never met Mary Byrne.

DENVER'S house stood on a ridge— one of the few ridges thereabouts; and, as he turned to look at it, it seemed very lonely, dark and uninviting. Inside the house there would be no company at all, while outside there was company of a kind —the stars, the murmur of the gutter which men mis-called a river, and the lightning play in the north-west. How vivid that lightning play had become, and how the cloud screen, over which it rushed and forked and darted, had brightened and broadened and deepened! It seemed to Denver that the father of all storms was approaching. It meant wool and beef, water and wheat to the dry land; but if it had meant annihilation instead, Denver, brooding under a disappointment, would have cared little.

There was a time when he had interested himself in the thousand and one things that make up the world's doings. Now a girl's eyes, a girl's lips, the things she had said, the things that, under possible circumstances, she would probably say— these obsessed his mind day and night. He recalled how he had first met her, on the night of the ball at Brigalow, and how, without word of apology, he had quitted his partner to be introduced to her. He had long known "Lissadel," where her father lived, but as the girl had been to school in the city, and afterwards with friends in the city, this was the first occasion on which he had met her face to face. A mutual friend introduced them; but Denver paid little attention to his friend's words; he was so startled, held, bewildered by the brilliancy of her eyes.

She uttered some mere conventional nothing; but her voice rang on his ears with something of magic in it that made him thrill.

He did not know how it came about— the sudden brave accession of courage that made him ask for a dance with her, a courage that a second after failed him as he stood, cold inside, waiting for her reply. He sensed concession, acquiescence in the slight inclination of her form towards him— in her look, in her smile. But the answer to his request did not come from her.

Spaulding, the new imported manager of the great land company which had laid hands on half the country thereabouts, answered in her stead, and answered in the manner of one who had a right to speak for her.

"Miss Byrne leaves for home after the next dance," he said carelessly. ''The next dance she has with me."

''What Mr. Spaulding says is true," said the girl. ''But... some other time. "

Denver watched her through the dance. He saw that she was happy with her partner, that she smiled, blushed, laughed softly at his words; and it pained him hugely. Once, however, as she passed the spot where he was standing she looked up at Denver with a laugh in her eyes; and the laugh stayed there while she looked at him.

It was Spaulding, however, who fastened the cloak on her, and Spaulding who handed her into her buggy, and Spaulding who bade her good-bye, his hand lingering in hers a protracted moment— a moment that cost Denver a sleepless night.

From Jinny, the barmaid at the Teamsters' Arms, he learnt some things the following morning. Jinny told him that it was common talk around the district—that even the gum trees made it a matter of morning gossip—that Spaulding and Mary Byrne were secretly engaged. It would be a good match for Mary too, Jinny commented, a rich match, and she was angling for it with all her skill.

"He gets fifteen hundred a year,'' concluded Jinny, "a catch for any girl, ain't he?"

A week after it came to Denver's ears that Joe Byrne, Mary's father, had a horse to sell. Denver, thereupon discovered that he could do with another horse, and rode over to "Lissadel" to have a look at what Byrne had to offer. Byrne took him down to the horse-paddock, showed him the horse and named his price. Denver— to have the business over and to be back at the house— 'bought the animal, and Byrne, to celebrate the event, took him home to dinner.

At the table he met Mary. She was dressed quietly in brown, and in place of the brilliancy to which the ball-room had quickened her eyes there were subdued lights in them. Her quiet, soft-handed, warm-hearted welcome put him at immediate ease; so that he talked in a way that pleased her. He liked to make her smile, because against the red of her mouth her teeth were very white. He thought of pearl and coral.

Hitherto it had been her charm of person—her eyes, her hair, her grace and shapeliness which appealed to him ; but, as he watched the care and gentleness with which she met her father's wishes, the affection and interest with which she regarded him, he felt that she was something more. Afterwards, armed w'ith some plausible excuse, he visited "Lissadel" frequently.

At times he met Spaulding there. Even if he had not known him as a rival, the man's cold, studied air of superiority would have stirred him to hostility. As things were, Denver took ho pains to hide his dislike. On the other hand,

Spaulding regarded Denver as an incidental— as a something which had just happened, and would presently disappear and be no more.

One evening when Spaulding and his father were absent, he found her on the verandah of her house alone. She welcomed him with a warmth that went straight to his heart, and placed a chair for him. It was moonlight: a shepherd's companion was singing in the trees by the river, and the river itself sang- She was dressed in refreshing white; and she looked so shapely and inviting that the natural man got loose in Denver and he poured a hot, passionate torrent of love-words in her ears. When he had finished she withdrew her hand from his— not hastily, but with a certain calm resolve.

She told him that what he asked was impossible ; that her father had set his heart on her marrying elsewhere. That it would hurt him deeply to disappoint him. That he had always been good and gentle to her, and had given up many things for her sake.

Denver was silent for a long time— chilled to the marrow.

All this had happened a week before; and here he was turning it over and over in his mind, as he had turned it over and over day and night since the

evening on which it occurred. A thick, warm drop of rain fell on his head. Half the sky was covered with storm-clouds. Already thunder sounded.

IT CAME IN on the north-west coast of the Continent— at Broome and thereabouts. Fierce cyclonic winds preceded it. It drenched the unpeopled coasts and marched inland. It was born in the Indian Ocean, and so charged with up-caught water that it deserved to be called the Great Monsoon. It marched in martial order, with thunder and lightning in its ranks, and circling winds in its van. It turned rivers into seas, and creeks into rivers. It filled billabong, lake, and gilgai. Under its lavish downpour the Fitzroy became a banker, burst its banks, and roared. Day by day wood-duck, black duck, and teal followed in its trail. They were as many as the leaves blown down in a forest gale.

Farmers and pastoralists called it a benediction. Later, when it drowned their sheep and cattle, they termed it an affliction. They were just human. Human nature wants things made to a certain size— so big, and no bigger. But this was something elemental, with an elemental disregard for man, his likes and dislikes; and it went on its measureless way without consulting either him or them.

Crossing the McClintock Ranges, it filled the rivers of the Northern Territory with tumbling waters. Every depression, every creek, every lake-bed from there on to the McDonnell Ranges got its full share and a mighty trifle over. It stayed not for hill or hollow, inland range or State border. It was generous

without limit and all-embracing; and its great grey rains, marching into Queensland, set the creeks and rivers talking- as they had not talked for many years. The Paroo, the Warrego, the Culgoa, with scarce a lick of moisture in them, became far-spread sheets of moving water, bearing with them on their journey to the Darling and the sea sheep and trees and cattle, rabbits and writhing snakes. Finally the storm burst on the north-west watershed; and the telegraph began to tick out messages of imminent import to the towns along the Namoi. It had rained for more than four and twenty hours, and was still raining. Leaden cliffs of cloud moved slowly across the sky, letting down a broad, grey screen, an endless curtain of rain. To Denver, standing at his door, it seemed as if the heavens were emptying themselves in one final downpour.

The oily murmur of the river had given place to another sound, a low, sullen, minatory sound —a sound with meaning in it. From a mere trickle the water between its banks had volumed into a racing flood. Presently the sound of horse-hoofs at a gallop broke on his ears; and he looked up as the local trooper rounded his house from the Brigalow track, and reined in at his door. Horse and rider were splashed yellow with mud. With his free hand the trooper dragged the wet from his eyes and shook it from him.

"There's h—l at play up the river," he said. "Cattle, sheep, towns drowned. Brigalow has got a wire that the flood'll be there before sun-down. If there's anything you want to save, get it away to the back country, quick; and if you can, make for Brigalow yourself—you'll be wanted there—"

The sudden, stupendous news stunned Denver; but the bush had schooled him to emergency, and he was quick to get his wits again.

"Where are you going now?" he said.

"To Daly's— he's got two kids; and the river'll be bound to get him if he isn't warned. Then I'll make for Brown's—"

Denver was thinking quickly, thinking at a gallop.

"Look here," he said. "You go on to Brown's. I'll pass the word to Daly. It'll save you a round. Your horse is nearly outed as it is."

"Thanks, old man." The trooper turned his horse and moved off.

"Stay a moment," shouted Denver. "What about 'Lissadel'?"

"Joe Byrne's away in Sydney. No one there except the girl. Spaulding went out to bring her in when the wire came through, a couple of hours ago."

Then he rode on a few yards and reined in again, and turned his head, and said, with a laugh, "I wouldn't mind being him, would you?" he said. For a minute or two, as he galloped through the wet, he wondered why Denver had not laughed in response. Denver caught a horse and rode over to Daly's. As he splashed through pool and puddle he caught himself saying; "It was his right; it was his right; but, Lord, if it had only been me!"

He found Daly leaning against his doorpost meditatively smoking, and told him the news.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Daly. "I'll get the kids and the wife up to Jackson's— they'll be as safe there as on Ararat; and then I'll get along to Dane's— his missus is sick, and can't be shifted. Maybe he'll be wanting a trifle of help. Where are you off to yourself."

"To Brigalow. So long!"

"So long, and thank you, old man," said Daly.

It was late in the afternoon when Denver reached Brigalow. As he rode along the main street to the Teamsters' Arms, he noticed that the river was already spilling itself over its banks in a yellow wash of water, selvedged with dead rabbits and driftwood. People were carrying their household goods in cart and wheel-barrow to a high ground behind the town. In the big store, where anything might be bought, the manager and his assistants were shifting the stock to an upper floor. On several roofs he saw men at work, hauling up beds and bedding. On the verandah of the Teamsters' Arms stood a man with a field-glass scrutinising the river, the waters of which were now visible for a half-mile on either hand. As Denver drew up in front of him, this man said to another man, who stood near by, "No sign of it yet."

He was watching for the flood-wall. Denver dismounted, and called a passing boy, who was carrying a baby's bonnet, which he had salvaged from the river. "Here, lad," he said, "take my horse to the high ground back of the town and leave the saddle on him. And here's a shilling."

He watched the boy scramble into the saddle and ride away, and then, nodding to the men on the verandah, passed into the bar, where a half-score of men were standing around, smoking and drinking, and discussing the affair of the moment. He answered their greetings with a word, and made his way to Jinny, standing behind the bar.

Over his drink, he said to her, "Is Spaulding back?"

"No," she answered; "and yet he should be."

"He should," said Denver, aloud; and to himself he said, "Yet why should he? With her any haven would be a heaven."

Just then the man with the field glasses put his head in at the door.

"It's coming, lads!" he cried.

Denver was amongst the first to reach the verandah. Up river he saw a wave of water, a yellow, turgid wave that stretched from bank to bank, and beyond the banks a rushing, spreading wave that sprayed and swirled at every encountered obstacle.

"It's going to hit the town fair in the middle," a man called out.

There was no panic, no terror amongst the onlookers.

"It's been at work up the river," said the man with the field glasses; "and it's got hold of a horse. He's not dead yet; making a big battle of it, poor brute! And there's something else. It's a house. Jehoshaphat! It's the roof of a house!"

The men grouped about him anxious-eyed, intent on his every word. Into this group Jinny put her pale face.

"Look here, boys," she cried out, "if the flood hits Jimmy Campion's house it's bound to go. Jimmy's down with a broken leg, you know And what d'ye think?"

They did not stop to answer. Denver was in the lead. He took the railing at a vault.

"Bring a stretcher, some of you," he called out, as he ran.

Denver and the men with the stretchers ran themselves out of breath. They burst into Jimmy's room, Denver ahead. Jimmy was sitting up in bed. Their appearance astonished him.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he ejaculated.

"Quick, Jimmy, into this stretcher," said Denver.

They lifted him in with the gentleness of women. Outside they heard a medley of confused noises. Tins rattled and rumbled along the street, a cock crew, a steam-whistle shrilled. Around and through all they heard the noise of waters in a hurry— greedy, devastating waters.

"Step high here," said Denver, as he left the house, "or you'll get your feet wet."

The others laughed. The water was already a foot high around the house and running like a tide. Jimmy lifted his head and looked at it.

"I'm dead for the other thing," he said. "I'll never be drowned."

When Denver and his friends reached the Teamsters' Arms Jinny was at the door to meet them. There was a look of alarm in her eyes, and she called Denver aside.

"Spaulding is back— alone," she said.

Denver staggered, his face paling. "The girl?" he whispered,

"He couldn't get to her. Sudden Creek was in flood. He said it was too risky to cross."

The men on the verandah were talking excitedly, pointing to some object in the river. Jinny moved away to join them; and Denver, stunned by the appalling news she had brought, allowed her to go without further word.

He did not hear the talk going on nigh him. Jinny's news had shocked him into isolation. What could he do now? What was to be done? He could do nothing. Hours ago the flood must have reached "Lissadel" and done its work.

He felt a tug on his arm, and he looked down into Jinny's excited face.

"Look! Out there!" she said, pointing to the river. Mechanically his eyes followed her hand. He saw the figure of a woman stretched to the full of its length on a log.

"Dead, probably," he said.

"No; they thought so at first; but then she raised her head. The man with the glasses saw her face distinctly. It's dreadful; and nothing can be done!"

Denver roused himself. He called out to the man with the glasses.

"Is the woman alive?"

"Yes," said the man, quietly; "but the log is rolling dangerously, and the first obstacle it strikes will turn it over. "

"Who is she? You saw her face?"

"Miss Byrne!"

"What's that you say?"

Incredulity, amazement, hope, chimed out of Denver's voice as he shouted the question.

"It's so. It's her, and no one else," the man replied, in slow astonishment.

They called out to Denver when they saw what he would be at. They damned him for a reckless fool. They shouted out "Idiot! Madman!" after him. They told each other that he would be drowned— rolled over and over, and under and under, before he ever reached the girl.

They might just as well have been making a noise in Mars for all Denver heeded them. Earlier in the afternoon he had removed his boots; and now, as he ran, high-stepping through the waist-deep water like a trotting-horse, he cast away his vest and shirt. His eyes were fixed on the prostrate figure of the girl; and before he knew it, he was over the river-bank and well into the river current.

He had set his heart on reaching the girl. What he was to do after he did not know— did not pause to consider. The log came down mid-stream; and he swam to intercept it. Sometimes it moved end-on, sometimes broadside. Sometimes it whirled round and round for the space of a second or two without any seeming forward motion.

Twice he saw it roll dangerously. On the second occasion he recognised that he himself had been the cause of the disturbance- The girl had seen him; and the sight of his face had so startled her as to interfere with the set of the log in the water.

He knew that he was a strong man. He knew, also, that the current more than matched him in power. It pained him, therefore, when he was compelled to put up a fight against such things as the current had pillaged from the land. When he was almost within arm-reach of the girl a dead sheep came along and

troubled him. He pushed the carcase off, but when he looked for the log again it was yards away.

Whirled round by some trick of the water, the drifting carcase shot across his path again. A fierce anger, a hate of it, surged through him. He had come out to fight the current, to match his manhood against its might. It was preposterous that he should be called upon to use up his energy in fighting a dead sheep. It was against ring-rules. He pushed the carcase from him, and when he encountered it again punched it.

The current sported with him as with a cork— as with a toy— whirled him about as it pleased, tossed him to and fro, filled his mouth with water, and took the breath out of his lungs. Twice when he had his hand almost on the log it fooled him, sending the log astray at an angle. He felt limp, utterly exhausted in every muscle, when at last he laid hands on it. There was water in his ears and a strange drumming, like that of a far-off band. Then he heard the girl's voice, sounding, it seemed to him, from another world. "Dear Jack!" she said.

The words brought him new life. He rose from the water till his chest and shoulders were well above it. He shook the wet from his face and smiled.

The log had drifted to the shoreward side of the current. It was end-on to the river bank. With a final gathering together of his muscles he sent it into shallow water and followed it. Men, splashing waist deep through the water, laid hold of it and lifted the girl. Then they turned to him, caught him up, and hoisted him to their shoulders.

Spaulding was not amongst them.

NOR, a month later, was he present at the wedding.

_____

4: Captain Sharkey

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

Pearson's Magazine, Jan 1897

(as "The Governor of St Kitt's")

1. How the Governor of Saint Kitt's Came Home.

WHEN THE great wars of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen, and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation, they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness, and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer, and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship Morning Star, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt's was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which

glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the twenty-gun pirate barque, Happy Delivery, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity. From the Bahamas to the Main his coal-black barque, with the ambiguous name, had been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship, and her full and valuable lading, that he struck out to the west as far as Bird's Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, "as provisions for the voyage," but the seaman had at once committed it to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame until, at the last moment, the Morning Star had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought of him lay heavily upon the seaman's mind as he watched the agent's boat shooting out from the Custom-house quay.

"I'll lay you a wager, Morgan," said he to the first mate, "that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips."

"Well, captain, I'll have you a silver dollar, and chance it," said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder. "Welcome, Captain Scarrow!" he cried. "Have you heard about Sharkey?"

The captain grinned at the mate.

"What devilry has he been up to now?" he asked.

"Devilry! You've not heard, then? Why, we've got him safe under lock and key at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning."

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to Heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

"Sharkey to be hanged!" he cried. "You don't know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?"

"Stand back!" cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. "I'll pay that dollar, Captain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?"

"Why, as to that, he became more than his own comrades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little Governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. 'He's my meat,' said he, 'and I claim the cooking of it.' If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you'll see the joint swinging."

"I wish I could," said the captain, wistfully, "but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide."

"That you can't do," said the agent with decision. "The Governor is going back with you."

"The Governor!"

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains."

"Well, well!" cried the captain in some perplexity, "I'm a plain seaman, and I don't know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don't remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it's in King George's service, and he asks a cast in the Morning Star as far as London, I'll do what I can for him. There's my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it's lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week; but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste."

"You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow," said the agent. "Sir Charles is in weak health just now, only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely

he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life into him. He has a great spirit in him, though, and you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech."

"He may say what he likes, and do what he likes, so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship," said the captain. "He is Governor of St. Kitt's, but I am Governor of the Morning Star, and, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George."

"He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves."

"The early morning tide, then."

"Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night; and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt's without seeing Sharkey do the rogue's hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey."

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the Governor's baggage began to arrive—great iron-bound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or the sword within. And then there came a note, with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard that the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle's coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless

manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

"There is a keg of Trinidad."

"You play a hand at picquet?"

"Passably well, sir."

"Then anchor up, and to sea!"

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limpid the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter rail.

"You are on Government service now, captain," said he. "They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?"

"Every inch, Sir Charles."

"Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage."

"I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency's society," said the captain. "But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted."

"Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out."

"I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague."

"Yes; I have had a pyrexy, which has reduced me much."

"We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon."

"Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!" He raised his ring-covered band in the air. From far astern there came the low, deep thunder of cannon.

"It is from the island!" cried the captain in astonishment. "Can it be a signal for us to put back?"

The Governor laughed. "You have heard that Sharkey, the pirate, is to be hanged this morning. I ordered the batteries to salute when the rascal was kicking his last, so that I might know of it out at sea. There's an end of Sharkey!"

"There's an end of Sharkey!" cried the captain; and the crew took up the cry as they gathered in little knots upon the deck and stared back at the low, purple line of the vanishing land.

It was a cheering omen for their start across the Western Ocean, and the invalid Governor found himself a popular man on board, for it was generally understood that but for his insistence upon an immediate trial and sentence, the villain might have played upon some more venal judge and so escaped. At dinner that day Sir Charles gave many anecdotes of the deceased pirate; and so affable was he, and so skilful in adapting his conversation to men of lower degree, that captain, mate, and Governor smoked their long pipes, and drank their claret as three good comrades should.

"And what figure did Sharkey cut in the dock?" asked the captain.

"He is a man of some presence," said the Governor.

"I had always understood that he was an ugly, sneering devil," remarked the mate.

"Well, I dare say he could look ugly upon occasions," said the Governor.

"I have heard a New Bedford whaleman say that he could not forget his eyes," said Captain Scarrow. "They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?"

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the adjutant-general said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury was so foolish as to be visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head."

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink to a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on the top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off—the one to his watch, and the other to his bunk. But when, after his four hours' spell, the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor, in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown, still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the Morning Star was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were halfway across the Atlantic, he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point

to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet be would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sails and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman—he who had been cast away in the boat—should lead him about, and, above all, that he should sit beside him when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed forefinger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulders. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of a mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. "Give me a knife and a bucket!" he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt's, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long, dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would

pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the King's ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw his cards down, and swept all the money into the pocket of his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

"The game's mine!" said he.

"Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!" cried Captain Scarrow; "you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers."

"Sink you for a liar!" said the Governor. "I tell you I have played out the hand, and that you are a loser." He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

"Good God!" cried the mate. "It's Sharkey!"

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh. "Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen," said he, "and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the Happy Delivery. We made it hot, and so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs—you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs— we hold you at the end of our pistols!"

"You may shoot, or you may not!" cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. "If it's my last breath, Sharkey, I tell you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!"

"There's a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he's going to make a very pretty death of it!" cried Sharkey. "There's no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you'll need it soon. Is the dinghy astern, Ned?"

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"And the other boats scuttled?"

"I bored them all in three places."

"Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow. You look as if you hadn't quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

"I believe you're the devil himself!" cried the captain. "Where is the Governor of St. Kitt's?"

"When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends— for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port— that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master

who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah, and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I have ruffled it as a governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them."

"Help! help! Watch ahoy!" yelled the mate; but the butt of the pirate's pistol crashed down on his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm round his waist.

"No use, Master Scarrow," said Sharkey. "Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life."

"I'll see you—" cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

"Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?"

"No; not if you twist it off."

"Put an inch of your knife into him."

"You may put six inches, and then I won't."

"Sink me, but I like his spirit!" cried Sharkey. "Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You've saved your skin, Scarrow, and it's a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow, since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned."

"To the stove, captain?"

"Tut, tut! there's a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I'll let you know which of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table."

"Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!" said the quartermaster. "You surely do not mean to let him go?"

"If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?"

"Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!" said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spread-eagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed underneath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt's.

"Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you," said the pirate. "If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he

has a barque he'll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own— so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the Morning Star."

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their footsteps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dinghy hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

"Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage, Wilson!" he screamed. "Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dinghy. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo'sun, and tumble into the boats, all hands."

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

"The boats are scuttled!" they cried. "They are leaking like a sieve."

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net. Close to them was the little dinghy, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

"They are dead men!" cried the captain. "A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger." But it was too late. At that very moment the dinghy shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence. The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

2: The Dealings Of Captain Sharkey With Stephen Craddock

CAREENING was a very necessary operation for the old pirate. On his superior speed he depended both for overhauling the trader and escaping the man-of-war. But it was impossible to retain his sailing qualities unless he periodically— once a year, at the least— cleared his vessel's bottom from the long, trailing plants and crusting barnacles which gather so rapidly in the tropical seas. For this purpose he lightened his vessel, thrust her into some narrow inlet where she would be left high and dry at low water, fastened

blocks and tackles to her masts to pull her over on to her bilge, and then scraped her thoroughly from rudder-post to cut-water.

During the weeks which were thus occupied the ship was, of course, defenceless; but, on the other hand, she was unapproachable by anything heavier than an empty hull, and the place for careening was chosen with an eye to secrecy, so that there was no great danger. So secure did the captains feel, that it was not uncommon for them, at such times, to leave their ships under a sufficient guard, and to start off in the long-boat, either upon a sporting expedition or, more frequently, upon a visit to some outlying town, where they burned the heads of the women by their swaggering gallantry, or broached pipes of wine in the market square, with a threat to pistol all who would not drink with them.

Sometimes they would even appear in cities of the size of Charleston, and walk the streets with their clattering side-arms— an open scandal to the whole law-abiding colony. Such visits were not always paid with impunity. It was one of them, for example, which provoked Lieutenant Maynard to hack off Blackbeard's head, and to spear it upon the end of his bowsprit. But, as a rule, the pirate ruffled and bullied and drabbed without let or hindrance, until it was time for him to go back to his ship once more.

There was one pirate, however, who never crossed even the skirts of civilisation, and that was the sinister Sharkey, of the barque Happy Delivery. It may have been from his morose and solitary temper, or, as is more probable, that he knew that his name upon the coast was such that outraged humanity would, against all odds, have thrown themselves upon him, but never once did he show his face in a settlement.

When his ship was laid up he would leave her under the charge of Ned Galloway— her New England quartermaster— and would take long voyages in his boat, sometimes, it was said, for the purpose of burying his share of the plunder, and sometimes to shoot the wild oxen of Hispaniola, which, when dressed and barbecued, provided provisions for his next voyage. In the latter case the barque would come round to some pre-arranged spot to pick him up, and take on board what he had shot.

There had always been a hope in the islands that Sharkey might be taken on one of these occasions; and at last there came news to Kingston which seemed to justify an attempt upon him. It was brought by an elderly logwood-cutter who had fallen into the pirate's hands, and in some freak of drunken benevolence had been allowed to get away with nothing worse than a slit nose and a drubbing. His account was recent and definite. The Happy Delivery was careening at Torbec on the south-west of Hispaniola. Sharkey, with four men, was buccaneering on the outlying island of La Vache. The blood of a hundred

murdered crews was calling out for vengeance, and now at last it seemed as if it might not call in vain.

Sir Edward Compton, the high-nosed, red-faced Governor, sitting in solemn conclave with the commandant and the head of the council, was sorely puzzled in his mind as to how he should use this chance. There was no man-of-war nearer than Jamestown, and she was a clumsy old fly-boat, which could neither overhaul the pirate on the seas, nor reach her in a shallow inlet. There were forts and artillerymen both at Kingston and Port Royal, but no soldiers available for an expedition.

A private venture might be fitted out— and there were many who had a blood-feud with Sharkey— but what could a private venture do? The pirates were numerous and desperate. As to taking Sharkey and his four companions, that, of course, would be easy if they could get at them; but how were they to get at them on a large well-wooded island like La Vache, full of wild hills and impenetrable jungles? A reward was offered to whoever could find a solution, and that brought a man to the front who had a singular plan, and was himself prepared to carry it out.

Stephen Craddock had been that most formidable person, the Puritan gone wrong. Sprung from a decent Salem family, his ill-doing seemed to be a recoil from the austerity of their religion, and he brought to vice all the physical strength and energy with which the virtues of his ancestors had endowed him. He was ingenious, fearless, and exceedingly tenacious of purpose, so that when he was still young, his name became notorious upon the American coast. He was the same Craddock who was tried for his life in Virginia for the slaying of the Seminole Chief, and, though he escaped, it was well known that he had corrupted the witnesses and bribed the judge.

Afterwards, as a slaver, and even, as it was hinted, as a pirate, he had left an evil name behind him in the Bight of Benin. Finally he had returned to Jamaica with a considerable fortune, and had settled down to a life of sombre dissipation. This was the man, gaunt, austere, and dangerous, who now waited upon the Governor with a plan for the extirpation of Sharkey. Sir Edward received him with little enthusiasm, for in spite of some rumours of conversion and reformation, he had always regarded him as an infected sheep who might taint the whole of his little flock. Craddock saw the Governor's mistrust under his thin veil of formal and restrained courtesy.

"You've no call to fear me, sir," said he; "I'm a changed man from what you've known. I've seen the light again of late, after losing sight of it for many a black year. It was through the ministration of the Rev. John Simons, of our own people. Sir, if your spirit should be in need of quickening, you would find a very sweet savour in his discourse."

The Governor cocked his episcopalian nose at him.

"You came here to speak of Sharkey, Master Craddock," said he.

"The man Sharkey is a vessel of wrath," said Craddock. "His wicked horn has been exalted over long, and it is borne in upon me that if I can cut him off and utterly destroy him, it will be a goodly deed, and one which may atone for many backslidings in the past. A plan has been given to me whereby I may encompass his destruction."

The Governor was keenly interested, for there was a grim and practical air about the man's freckled face which showed that he was in earnest. After all, he was a seaman and a fighter, and, if it were true that he was eager to atone for his past, no better man could be chosen for the business.

"This will be a dangerous task, Master Craddock," said he.

"If I meet my death at it, it may be that it will cleanse the memory of an ill-spent life. I have much to atone for."

The Governor did not see his way to contradict him.

"What was your plan?" he asked.

"You have heard that Sharkey's barque, the Happy Delivery, came from this very port of Kingston?"

"It belonged to Mr. Codrington, and it was taken by Sharkey, who scuttled his own sloop and moved into her because she was faster," said Sir Edward.

"Yes; but it may be that you have lever heard that Mr. Codrington has a sister ship, the White Rose, which lies even now in the harbour, and which is so like the pirate, that, if it were not for a white paint line, none could tell them apart."

"Ah! and what of that?" asked the Governor keenly, with the air of one who is just on the edge of an idea.

"By the help of it this man shall be delivered into our hands."

"And how?"

"I will paint out the streak upon the White Rose, and make it in all things like the Happy Delivery . Then I will set sail for the Island of La Vache, where this man is slaying the wild oxen. When he sees me he will surely mistake me for his own vessel which he is awaiting, and he will come on board to his own undoing."

It was a simple plan, and yet it seemed to the Governor that it might be effective. Without hesitation he gave Craddock permission to carry it out, and to take any steps he liked in order to further the object which he had in view. Sir Edward was not very sanguine, for many attempts had been made upon Sharkey, and their results had shown that he was as cunning as he was ruthless. But this gaunt Puritan with the evil record was cunning aid ruthless also. The contest of wits between two such men as Sharkey and Craddock

appealed to the Governor's acute sense of sport, and though he was inwardly convinced that the chances were against him, he backed his man with the same loyalty which he would have shown to his horse or his cock.

Haste was, above all things, necessary, for upon any day the careening might be finished, and the pirates out at sea once more. But there was not very much to do, and there were many willing hands to do it, so the second day saw the White Rose beating out for the open sea. There were many seamen in the port who knew the lines and rig of the pirate barque, and not one of them could see the slightest difference in this counterfeit. Her white side line had been painted out, her masts and yards were smoked, to give them the dingy appearance of the weather-beaten rover, and a large diamond-shaped patch was let into her foretopsail. Her crew were volunteers, many of them being men who had sailed with Stephen Craddock before—the mate, Joshua Hird, an old slaver, had been his accomplice in many voyages, and came now at the bidding of his chief.

The avenging barque sped across the Caribbean Sea, and, at the sight of that patched topsail, the little craft which they met flew left and right like frightened trout in a pool. On the fourth evening Point Abacou bore five miles to the north and east of them. On the fifth they were at anchor in the Bay of Tortoises at the Island of La Vache, where Sharkey and his four men had been hunting. It was a well-wooded place, with the palms and underwood growing down to the thin crescent of silver sand which skirted the shore. They had hoisted the black flag and the red pennant, but no answer came from the shore. Craddock strained his eyes, hoping every instant to see a boat shoot out to them with Sharkey seated in the sheets. But the night passed away, and a day and yet another night, without any sign of the men whom they were endeavouring to trap. It looked as if they were already gone.

On the second morning Craddock went ashore in search of some proof whether Sharkey and his men were still upon the island. What he found reassured him greatly. Close to the shore was a boucan of green wood, such as was used for preserving the meat, and a great store of barbecued strips of ox-flesh was hung upon lines all round it. The pirate ship had not taken off her provisions, and therefore the hunters were still upon the island.

Why had they not shown themselves? Was it that they had detected that this was not their own ship? Or was it that they were hunting in the interior of the island, and were not on the look-out for a ship yet? Craddock was still hesitating between the two alternatives, when a Carib Indian came down with information. The pirates were in the island, he said, and their camp was a day's march from the Sea. They had stolen his wife, and the marks of their stripes

were still pink upon his brown back. Their enemies were his friends, and he would lead them to where they lay.

Craddock could not have asked for anything better; so early next morning, with a small party armed to the teeth, he set off, under the guidance of the Carib. All day they struggled through brushwood and clambered over rocks, pushing their way further and further into the desolate heart of the island. Here and there they found traces of the hunters, the bones of a slain ox, or the marks of feet in a morass, and once, towards evening, it seemed to some of them that they heard the distant rattle of guns.

That night they spent under the trees, and pushed on again with the earliest light. About noon they came to the huts of bark, which, the Carib told them, were the camp of the hunters, but they were silent and deserted. No doubt their occupants were away at the hunt and would return in the evening, so Craddock and his men lay in ambush in the brushwood around them. But no one came, and another night was spent in the forest. Nothing more could be done, and it seemed to Craddock that after the two days' absence it was time that he returned to his ship once more.

The return journey was less difficult, as they had already blazed a path for themselves. Before evening they found themselves once more at the Bay of Palms, and saw their ship riding at anchor where they had left her. Their boat and oars had been hauled up among the bushes, so they launched it and pulled out to the barque.

"No luck, then!" cried Joshua Hird, the mate, looking down with a pale face from the poop.

"His camp was empty, but he may come down to us yet," said Craddock, with his hand on the ladder.

Somebody upon deck began to laugh. "I think," said the mate, "that these men had better stay in the boat."

"Why so?"

"If you will come aboard, sir, you will understand it." He spoke in a curious, hesitating fashion.

The blood flushed to Craddock's gaunt face. "How is this, Master Hird?" he cried, springing up the side. "What mean you by giving orders to my boat's crew?"

But as he passed over the bulwarks, with one foot upon the deck and one knee upon the rail, a tow-bearded man, whom he had never before observed aboard his vessel, grabbed suddenly at his pistol. Craddock clutched at the fellow's wrist, but at the same instant his mate snatched the cutlass from his side.

"What roguery is this?" shouted Craddock, looking furiously around him. But the crew stood in knots about the deck, laughing and whispering amongst themselves without showing any desire to go to his assistance. Even in that hurried glance Craddock noticed that they were dressed in the most singular manner, with long riding-coats, full-skirted velvet gowns and coloured ribands at their knees, more like men of fashion than seamen.

As he looked at their grotesque figures he struck his brow with his clenched fist to be sure that he was awake. The deck seemed to be much dirtier than when he had left it, and there were strange, sun-blackened faces turned upon him from every side. Not one of them did he know save only Joshua Hird. Had the ship been captured in his absence? Were these Sharkey's men who were around him? At the thought he broke furiously away and tried to climb over to his boat, but a dozen hands were on him in an instant, and he was pushed aft through the open door of his own cabin.

And it was all different to the cabin which he had left. The floor was different, the ceiling was different, the furniture was different. His had been plain and austere. This was sumptuous and yet dirty, hung with rare velvet curtains splashed with wine-stains, and panelled with costly woods which were pocked with pistol-marks.

On the table was a great chart of the Caribbean Sea, and beside it, with compasses in his hand, sat a clean-shaven, pale-faced man with a fur cap and a claret-coloured coat of damask. Craddock turned white under his freckles as he looked upon the long, thin high-nostrilled nose and the red-rimmed eyes which were turned upon him with the fixed, humorous gaze of the master player who has left his opponent without a move. "Sharkey!" cried Craddock.

Sharkey's thin lips opened, and he broke into his high, sniggering laugh.

"You fool!" he cried, and, leaning over, he stabbed Craddock's shoulder again and again with his compasses. "You poor, dull-witted fool, would you match yourself against me?"

It was not the pain of the wounds, but it was the contempt in Sharkey's voice which turned Craddock into a savage madman. He flew at the pirate, roaring with rage, striking, kicking, writhing, foaming. It took six men to drag him down on to the floor amidst the splintered remains of the table—and not one of the six who did not bear the prisoner's mark upon him. But Sharkey still surveyed him with the same contemptuous eye. From outside there came the crash of breaking wood and the clamour of startled voices.

"What is that?" asked Sharkey.

"They have stove the boat with cold shot, and the men are in the water."

"Let them stay there," said the pirate. "Now, Craddock, you know where you are. You are aboard my ship, the Happy Delivery, and you lie at my mercy.

I knew you for a stout seaman, you rogue, before you took to this long-shore canting. Your hands then were no cleaner than my own. Will you sign articles, as your mate has done, and join us, or shall I heave you over to follow your ship's company?"

"Where is my ship?" asked Craddock.

"Scuttled in the bay."

"And the hands?"

"In the bay, too."

"Then I'm for the bay, also."

"Hock him and heave him over," said Sharkey.

Many rough hands had dragged Craddock out upon deck, and Galloway, the quartermaster, had already drawn his hanger to cripple him, when Sharkey came hurrying from his cabin with an eager face. "We can do better with the hound!" he cried. "Sink me if it is not a rare plan. Throw him into the sail-room with the irons on, and do you come here, quarter-master, that I may tell you what I have in my mind."

So Craddock, bruised and wounded in soul and body, was thrown into the dark sail-room, so fettered that he could not stir hand or foot, but his Northern blood was running strong in his veins, and his grim spirit aspired only to make such an ending as might go some way towards atoning for the evil of his life. All night he lay in the curve of the bilge listening to the rush of the water and the straining of the timbers which told him that the ship was at sea and driving fast. In the early morning someone came crawling to him in the darkness over the heap of sails.

"Here's rum and biscuits," said the voice of his late mate. "It's at the risk of my life, Master Craddock, that I bring them to you."

"It was you who trapped me and caught me as in a snare!" cried Craddock. "How shall you answer for what you have done?"

"What I did I did with the point of a knife betwixt my blade-bones."

"God forgive you for a coward, Joshua Hird. How came you into their hands?"

"Why, Master Craddock, the pirate ship came back from its careening upon the very day that you left us. They laid us aboard, and, short-handed as we were, with the best of the men ashore with you, we could offer but a poor defence. Some were cut down, and they were the happiest. The others were killed afterwards. As to me, I saved my life by signing on with them."

"And they scuttled my ship?"

"They scuttled her, and then Sharkey and his men, who had been watching us from the brushwood, came off to the ship. His mainyard had been cracked

and fished last voyage, so he had suspicions of us, seeing that ours was whole. Then he thought of laying the same trap for you which you had set for him."

Craddock groaned. "How came I not to see that fished mainyard?" he muttered. "But whither are we bound?"

"We are running north and west."

"North and west! Then we are heading back towards Jamaica."

"With an eight-knot wind."

"Have you heard what they mean to do with me?"

"I have not heard. If you would but sign the articles—"

"Enough, Joshua Hird! I have risked my soul too often."

"As you wish. I have done what I could. Farewell!"

All that night and the next day the Happy Delivery ran before the easterly trades, and Stephen Craddock lay in the dark of the sail-room working patiently at his wrist-irons. One he had slipped off at the cost of a row of broken and bleeding knuckles, but, do what he would, he could not free the other, and his ankles were securely fastened. From hour to hour he heard the swish of the water, and knew that the barque must be driving with all set in front of the trade wind. In that case they must be nearly back again to Jamaica by now. What plan could Sharkey have in his head, and what use did he hope to make of him? Craddock set his teeth, and vowed that if he had once been a villain from choice he would, at least, never be one by compulsion.

On the second morning Craddock became aware that sail had been reduced in the vessel, and that she was tacking slowly, with a light breeze on her beam. The varying slope of the sail room and the sounds from the deck told his practised senses exactly what she was doing. The short reaches showed him that she was manoeuvring near shore, and making for some definite point. If so, she must have reached Jamaica. But what could she be doing there?

And then suddenly there was a burst of hearty cheering from the deck, and then the crash of a gun above his head, and then the answering booming of guns from far over the water. Craddock sat up and strained his ears. Was the ship in action? Only the one gun had been fired, and though many had answered, there were none of the crashings which told of a shot coming home. Then, if it was not an action, it must be a salute. But who would salute Sharkey, the pirate? It could only be another pirate ship which would do so. So Craddock lay back again with a groan, and continued to work at the manacle which still held his right wrist. But suddenly there came the shuffling of steps outside, and he had hardly time to wrap the loose links round his free hand, when the door was unbolted and two pirates came in.

"Got your hammer, carpenter?" asked one, whom Craddock recognised as the big quartermaster.

"Knock off his leg shackles, then. Better leave the bracelets—he's safer with them on."

With hammer and chisel the carpenter loosened the irons.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Craddock.

"Come on deck and you'll see."

The sailor seized him by the arm and dragged him roughly to the foot of the companion. Above him was a square of blue sky cut across by the mizzen gaff, with the colours flying at the peak. But it was the sight of those colours which struck the breath from Stephen Craddock's lips. For there were two of them, and the British ensign was flying above the Jolly Rodger— the honest flag above that of the rogue.

For an instant Craddock stopped in amazement, but a brutal push from the pirates behind drove him up the companion ladder. As he stepped out upon deck, his eyes turned up to the main, and there again were the British colours flying above the red pennant, and all the shrouds and rigging were garlanded with streamers.

Had the ship been taken, then? But that was impossible, for there were the pirates clustering in swarms along the port bulwarks, and waving their hats joyously in the air. Most prominent of all was the renegade mate, standing on the foc'sle head, and gesticulating wildly. Craddock looked over the side to see what they were cheering at, and then in a flash he saw how critical was the moment.

On the port bow, and about a mile off, lay the white houses and forts of Port Royal, with flags breaking out everywhere over their roofs. Right ahead was the opening of the palisades leading to the town of Kingston. Not more than a quarter of a mile off was a small sloop working out against the very slight wind. The British ensign was at her peak, and her rigging was all decorated. On her deck could be seen a dense crowd of people cheering and waving their hats, and the gleam of scarlet told that there were officers of the garrison among them.

In an instant, with the quick perception of a man of action, Craddock saw through it all. Sharkey, with that diabolical cunning and audacity which were among his main characteristics, was simulating the part which Craddock would himself have played had he come back victorious. It was in his honour that the salutes were firing and the flags flying. It was to welcome him that this ship with the Governor, the commandant, and the chiefs of the island were approaching. In another ten minutes they would all be under the guns of the

Happy Delivery, and Sharkey would have won the greatest stake that ever a pirate played for yet.

"Bring him forward," cried the pirate captain, as Craddock appeared between the carpenter and the quartermaster. "Keep the ports closed, but clear away the port guns, and stand by for a broadside. Another two cable lengths and we have them."

"They are edging away," said the boatswain. "I think they smell us."

"That's soon set right," said Sharkey, turning his filmy eyes upon Craddock. "Stand there, you— right there, where they can recognise you, with your hand on the guy, and wave your hat to them. Quick, or your brains will be over your coat. Put an inch of your knife into him, Ned. Now, will you wave your hat? Try him again, then. Hey, shoot him! Stop him!"

But it was too late. Relying upon the manacles, the quartermaster had taken his hands for a moment off Craddock's arm. In that instant he had flung off the carpenter, and, amid a spatter of pistol bullets, had sprung the bulwarks and was swimming for his life. He had been hit and hit again, but it takes many pistols to kill a resolute and powerful man who has his mind set upon doing something before he dies. He was a strong swimmer, and, in spite of the red trail which he left in the water behind him, he was rapidly increasing his distance from the pirate. "Give me a musket!" cried Sharkey, with a savage oath.

He was a famous shot, and his iron nerves never failed him in an emergency. The dark head appearing on the crest of a roller, and then swooping down on the other side, was already half-way to the sloop. Sharkey dwelt long upon his aim before he fired. With the crack of the gun the swimmer reared himself up in the water, waved his hands in a gesture of warning, and roared out in a voice which rang over the bay. Then, as the sloop swung round her head-sails, and the pirate fired an impotent broadside, Stephen Craddock, smiling grimly in his death agony, sank slowly down to that golden couch which glimmered far beneath him.

3: How Copley Banks Slew Captain Sharkey

THE BUCCANEERS were something higher than a mere band of marauders. They were a floating republic, with laws, usages, and discipline of their own. In their endless and remorseless quarrel with the Spaniards they had some semblance of right upon their side. Their bloody harryings of the cities of the Main were not more barbarous than the inroads of Spain upon the Netherlands— or upon the Caribs in these same American lands.

The chief of the Buccaneers, were he English or French, a Morgan or a Granmont, was still a responsible person, whose country might countenance him, or even praise him, so long as he refrained from any deed which might shock the leathery seventeenth-century conscience too outrageously. Some of them were touched with religion, and it is still remembered how Sawkins threw the dice overboard upon the Sabbath, and Daniel pistolled a man before the altar for irreverence.

But there came a day when the fleets of the Buccaneers no longer mustered at the Tortugas, and the solitary and outlawed pirate took their place. Yet even with him the tradition of restraint and of discipline still lingered; and among the early pirates, the Avorys, the Englands, and the Robertses, there remained some respect for human sentiment. They were more dangerous to the merchant than to the seaman. But they in turn were replaced by more savage and desperate men, who frankly recognised that they would get no quarter in their war with the human race, and who swore that they would give as little as they got. Of their histories we know little that is trustworthy. They wrote no memoirs and left no trace, save an occasional blackened and blood-stained derelict adrift upon the face of the Atlantic. Their deeds could only be surmised from the long roll of ships who never made their port.

Searching the records of history, it is only here and there in an old-world trial that the veil that shrouds them seems for an instant to be lifted, and we catch a glimpse of some amazing and grotesque brutality behind. Such was the breed of Ned Low, of Gow the Scotchman, and of the infamous Sharkey, whose coal-black barque, the Happy Delivery, was known from the Newfoundland Banks to the mouths of the Orinoco as the dark forerunner of misery and of death.

There were many men, both among the islands and on the Main, who had a blood feud with Sharkey, but not one who had suffered more bitterly than Copley Banks, of Kingston. Banks had been one of the leading sugar merchants of the West Indies. He was a man of position, a member of the Council, the husband of a Percival, and the cousin of the Governor of Virginia. His two sons had been sent to London to be educated, and their mother had gone over to bring them back. On their return voyage the ship, the Duchess of Cornwall, fell into the hands of Sharkey, and the whole family met with an infamous death.

Copley Banks said little when he heard the news, but he sank into a morose and enduring melancholy. He neglected his business, avoided his friends, and spent much of his time in the low taverns of the fishermen and seamen. There, amidst riot and devilry, he sat silently puffing at his pipe, with a set face and a smouldering eye. It was generally supposed that his misfortunes had shaken

his wits, and his old friends looked at him askance, for the company which he kept was enough to bar him from honest men.

From time to time there came rumours of Sharkey over the sea. Sometimes it was from some schooner which had seen a great flame upon the horizon, and approaching to offer help to the burning ship, had fled away at the sight of the sleek, black barque, lurking like a wolf near a mangled sheep. Sometimes it was a frightened trader, which had come tearing in with her canvas curved like a lady's bodice, because she had seen a patched foretopsail rising slowly above the violet water-line. Sometimes it was from a coaster, which had found a waterless Bahama cay littered with sun-dried bodies. Once there came a man who had been mate of a Guineaman, and who had escaped from the pirate's hands. He could not speak—for reasons which Sharkey could best supply—but he could write, and he did write, to the very great interest of Copley Banks. For hours they sat together over the map, and the dumb man pointed here and there to outlying reefs and tortuous inlets, while his companion sat smoking in silence, with his unvarying face and his fiery eyes.

One morning, some two years after his misfortunes, Mr. Copley Banks strode into his own office with his old air of energy and alertness. The manager stared at him in surprise, for it was months since he had shown any interest in business.

"Good morning, Mr. Banks!" said he.

"Good morning, Freeman. I see that Ruffling Harry is in the Bay."

"Yes, sir; she clears for the Windward Islands on Wednesday."

"I have other plans for her, Freeman. I have determined upon a slaving venture to Whydah."

"But her cargo is ready, sir."

"Then it must come out again, Freeman. My mind is made up, and the Ruffling Harry must go slaving to Whydah."

All argument and persuasion were vain, so the manager had dolefully to clear the ship once more. And then Copley Banks began to make preparations for his African voyage. It appeared that he relied upon force rather than barter for the filling of his hold, for he carried none of those showy trinkets which savages love, but the brig was fitted with eight nine-pounder guns, and racks full of muskets and cutlasses. The after-sailroom next the cabin was transformed into a powder magazine, and she carried as many round shot as a well-found privateer. Water and provisions were shipped for a long voyage.

But the preparation of his ship's company was most surprising. It made Freeman, the manager, realise that there was truth in the rumour that his master had taken leave of his senses. For, under one pretext or another, he began to dismiss the old and tried hands, who had served the firm for years,

and in their place he embarked the scum of the port—men whose reputations were so vile that the lowest crimp would have been ashamed to furnish them. There was Birthmark Sweetlocks, who was known to have been present at the killing of the logwood-cutters, so that his hideous scarlet disfigurement was put down by the fanciful as being a red afterglow from that great crime. He was first mate, and under him was Israel Martin, a little sun-wilted fellow who had served with Howell Davies at the taking of Cape Coast Castle.

The crew were chosen from amongst those whom Banks had met and known in their own infamous haunts, and his own table-steward was a haggard-faced man, who gobbled at you when he tried to talk. His beard had been shaved, and it was impossible to recognise him as the same man whom Sharkey had placed under the knife, and who had escaped to tell his experiences to Copley Banks. These doings were not unnoticed, nor yet uncommented upon in the town of Kingston. The Commandant of the troops—Major Harvey of the Artillery—made serious representations to the Governor.

"She is not a trader, but a small warship," said he.

"I think it would be as well to arrest Copley Banks and to seize the vessel."

"What do you suspect?" asked the Governor, who was a slow-witted man, broken down with fevers and port wine.

"I suspect," said the soldier, "that it is Stede Bonnet over again."

Now, Stede Bonnet was a planter of high reputation and religious character who, from some sudden and overpowering freshet of wildness in his blood, had given up everything in order to start off pirating in the Caribbean Sea. The example was a recent one, and it had caused the utmost consternation in the islands. Governors had before now been accused of being in league with pirates, and of receiving commissions upon their plunder, so that any want of vigilance was open to a sinister construction.

"Well, Major Harvey," said he, "I am vastly sorry to do anything which may offend my friend Copley Banks, for many a time have my knees been under his mahogany, but in face of what you say there is no choice for me but to order you to board the vessel and to satisfy yourself as to her character and destination."

So at one in the morning Major Harvey, with a launchful of his soldiers, paid a surprise visit to the Ruffling Harry, with the result that they picked up nothing more solid than a hempen cable floating at the moorings. It had been slipped by the brig, whose owner had scented danger. She had already passed the Palisades, and was beating out against the north-east trades on a course for the Windward Passage.

When upon the next morning the brig had left Morant Point a mere haze upon the Southern horizon, the men were called aft, and Copley Banks

revealed his plans to them. He had chosen them, he said, as brisk boys and lads of spirit, who would rather run some risk upon the sea than starve for a living upon the shore. King's ships were few and weak, and they could master any trader who might come their way. Others had done well at the business, and with a handy, well-found vessel, there was no reason why they should not turn their tarry jackets into velvet coats. If they were prepared to sail under the black flag, he was ready to command them; but if any wished to withdraw, they might have the gig and row back to Jamaica.

Four men out of six-and-forty asked for their discharge, went over the ship's side into the boat, and rowed away amidst the jeers and howlings of the crew. The rest assembled aft, and drew up the articles of their association. A square of black tarpaulin had the white skull painted upon it, and was hoisted amidst cheering at the main.

Officers were elected, and the limits of their authority fixed. Copley Banks was chosen captain, but, as there are no mates upon a pirate craft, Birthmark Sweetlocks became quartermaster, and Israel Martin the boatswain. There was no difficulty in knowing what was the custom of the brotherhood, for half the men at least had served upon pirates before. Food should be the same for all, and no man should interfere with another man's drink! The captain should have a cabin, but all hands should be welcome to enter it when they chose.

All should share and share alike, save only the captain, quartermaster, boatswain, carpenter, and master-gunner, who had from a quarter to a whole share extra. He who saw a prize first should have the best weapon taken out of her. He who boarded her first should have the richest suit of clothes aboard of her. Every man might treat his own prisoner, be it man or woman, after his own fashion. If a man flinched from his gun, the quartermaster should pistol him. These were some of the rules which the crew of the Ruffling Harry subscribed by putting forty-two crosses at the foot of the paper upon which they had been drawn.

So a new rover was afloat upon the seas, and her name before a year was over became as well known as that of the Happy Delivery. From the Bahamas to the Leewards, and from the Leewards to the Windwards, Copley Banks became the rival of Sharkey and the terror of traders. For a long time the barque and the brig never met, which was the more singular as the Ruffling Harry was for ever looking in at Sharkey's resorts; but at last one day, when she was passing down the inlet of Coxon's Hole, at the east end of Cuba, with the intention of careening, there was the Happy Delivery, with her blocks and tackle-falls already rigged for the same purpose. Copley Banks fired a shotted salute and hoisted the green trumpeter ensign, as the custom was among gentlemen of the sea. Then he dropped his boat and went aboard.

Captain Sharkey was not a man of a genial mood, nor had he any kindly sympathy for those who were of the same trade as himself. Copley Banks found him seated astride upon one of the after guns, with his New England quartermaster, Ned Galloway, and a crowd of roaring ruffians standing about him. Yet none of them roared with quite such assurance when Sharkey's pale face and filmy blue eyes were tuned upon him. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with his cambric frills breaking through his open red satin long-flapped vest. The scorching sun seemed to have no power upon his fleshless frame, for he wore a low fur cap, as though it had been winter. A many-coloured band of silk passed across his body and supported a short, murderous sword, while his broad, brass-buckled belt was stuffed with pistols.

"Sink you for a poacher!" he cried, as Copley Banks passed over the bulwarks. "I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! What mean you by fishing in my waters?"

Copley Banks looked at him, and his eyes were like those of a traveller who sees his home at last. "I am glad that we are of one mind," said he, "for I am myself of opinion that the seas are not large enough for the two of us. But if you will take your sword and pistols and come upon a sand-bank with me, then the world will be rid of a damned villain, whichever way it goes."

"Now, this is talking!" said Sharkey, jumping off the gun and holding out his hand. "I have not met many who could look John Sharkey in the eyes and speak with a full breath. May the devil seize me if I do not choose you as a consort! But if you play me false, then I will come aboard of you and gut you upon your own poop."

"And I pledge you the same!" said Copley Banks, and so the two pirates became sworn comrades to each other.

That summer they went north as far as the Newfoundland Banks, and harried the New York traders and the whale ships from New England. It was Copley Banks who captured the Liverpool ship, House of Hanover, but it was Sharkey who fastened her master to the windlass and pelted him to death with empty claret-bottles.

Together they engaged the King's ship Royal Fortune, which had been sent in search of them, and beat her off after a night action of five hours, the drunken, raving crews fighting naked in the light of the battle-lanterns, with a bucket of rum and a pannikin laid by the tackles of every gun. They ran to Topsail Inlet in North Carolina to refit, and then in the spring they were at the Grand Caicos, ready for a long cruise down the West Indies.

By this time Sharkey and Copley Banks had become very excellent friends, for Sharkey loved a whole-hearted villain, and he loved a man of metal, and it seemed to him that the two met in the captain of the Ruffling Harry. It was

long before he gave his confidence to him, for cold suspicion lay deep in his character. Never once would he trust himself outside his own ship and away from his own men. But Copley Banks came often on board the Happy Delivery, and joined Sharkey in many of his morose debauches, so that at last any lingering misgivings of the latter were set at rest. He knew nothing of the evil that he had done to his new boon companion, for of his many victims how could he remember the woman and the two boys whom he had slain with such levity so long ago! When, therefore, he received a challenge to himself and to his quartermaster for a carouse upon the last evening of their stay at the Caicos Bank he saw no reason to refuse.

A well-found passenger ship had been rifled the week before, so their fare was of the best, and after supper five of them drank deeply together. There were the two captains, Birthmark Sweetlocks, Ned Galloway, and Israel Martin, the old buccaneers-man. To wait upon them was the dumb steward, whose head Sharkey split with a glass, because he had been too slow in the filling of it. The quarter-master has slipped Sharkey's pistols away from him, for it was an old joke with him to fire them cross-handed under the table and see who was the luckiest man. It was a pleasantry which had cost his boatswain his leg, so now, when the table was cleared, they would coax Sharkey's weapons away from him on the excuse of the heat, and lay them out of his reach.

The captain's cabin of the Ruffling Harry was in a deck-house upon the poop, and a stern-chaser gun was mounted at the back of it. Round shot were racked round the wall, and three great hogsheads of powder made a stand for dishes and for bottles. In this grim room the five pirates sang and roared and drank, while the silent steward still filled up their glasses, and passed the box and the candle round for their tobacco-pipes. Hour after hour the talk became fouler, the voices hoarser, the curses and shoutings more incoherent, until three of the five had closed their blood-shot eyes, and dropped their swimming heads upon the table.

Copley Banks and Sharkey were left face to face, the one because he had drunk the least, the other because no amount of liquor would ever shake his iron nerve or warm his sluggish blood. Behind him stood the watchful steward, for ever filling up his waning glass. From without came the low lapping of the tide, and from over the water a sailor's chanty from the barque. In the windless tropical night the words came clearly to their ears:—

A trader sailed from Stepney Town,
Wake her up! Shake her up!
Try her with the mainsail!
A trader sailed from Stepney Town
With a keg full of gold and a velvet gown.

Ho, the bully Rover Jack,
Waiting with his yard aback
Out upon the Lowland Sea.

The two boon companions sat listening in silence. Then Copley Banks glanced at the steward, and the man took a coil of rope from the shot-rack behind him.

"Captain Sharkey," said Copley Banks, "do you remember the Duchess of Cornwall, hailing from London, which you took and sank three years ago off the Statira Shoal?"

"Curse me if I can bear their names in mind," said Sharkey. "We did as many as ten ships a week about that time."

"There were a mother and two sons among the passengers. Maybe that will bring it back to your mind."

Captain Sharkey leant back in thought, with his huge thin beak of a nose jutting upwards. Then he burst suddenly into a high treble, neighing laugh. He remembered it, he said, and he added details to prove it. "But burn me if it had not slipped from my mind!" he cried. "How came you to think of it?"

"It was of interest to me," said Copley Banks, "for the woman was my wife, and the lads were my only sons."

Sharkey stared across at his companion, and saw that the smouldering fire which lurked always in his eyes had burned up into a lurid flame. He read their menace, and he clapped his hands to his empty belt. Then he turned to seize a weapon, but the bight of a rope was cast round him, and in an instant his arms were bound to his side. He fought like a wild cat, and screamed for help. "Ned!" he yelled. "Ned! Wake up! Here's damned villainy! Help, Ned!—help!"

But the three men were far too deeply sunk in their swinish sleep for any voice to wake them. Round and round went the rope, until Sharkey was swathed like a mummy from ankle to neck. They propped him stiff and helpless against a powder barrel, and they gagged him with a handkerchief, but his filmy, red-rimmed eyes still looked curses at them. The dumb man chattered in his exultation, and Sharkey winced for the first time when he saw the empty mouth before him. He understood that vengeance, slow and patient, had dogged him long, and clutched him at last.

The two captors had their plans all arranged, and they were somewhat elaborate. First of all they stove the heads of two of the great powder barrels, and they heaped the contents out upon the table and floor. They piled it round and under the three drunken men, until each sprawled in a heap of it. Then they carried Sharkey to the gun and they triced him sitting over the port-hole, with his body about a foot from the muzzle. Wriggle as he would he could not

move an inch either to the right or left, and the dumb man trussed him up with a sailor's cunning, so that there was no chance that he should work free.

"Now, you bloody devil," said Copley Banks, softly, "you must listen to what I have to say to you, for they are the last words that you will hear. You are my man now, and I have bought you at a price, for I have given all that a man can give here below, and I have given my soul as well.

"To reach you I have had to sink to your level. For two years I strove against it, hoping that some other way might come, but I learnt that there was no other. I've robbed and I have murdered— worse still, I have laughed and lived with you— and all for the one end. And now my time has come, and you will die as I would have you die, seeing the shadow creeping upon you and the devil waiting for you in the shadow."

Sharkey could hear the hoarse voices of his rovers singing their chanty over the water.

Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stick a-bending!
Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
His gold's on the capstan, his blood's on his gown,
All for bully Rover Jack,
Reaching on the weather tack
Right across the Lowland Sea.

The words came clear to his ear, and just outside he could hear two men pacing backwards and forwards upon the deck. And yet he was helpless, staring down the mouth of the nine-pounder, unable to move an inch or to utter so much as a groan. Again there came the burst of voices from the deck of the barque.

So it's up and it's over to Stornoway Bay,
Pack it on! Crack it on! Try her with stunsails!
It's off on a bowline to Stornoway Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay,
Waiting for their bully Jack,
Watching for him sailing back,
Right across the Lowland Sea.

To the dying pirate the jovial words and rollicking tune made his own fate seem the harsher, but there was no softening in those venomous blue eyes. Copley Banks had brushed away the priming of the gun, and had sprinkled fresh powder over the touch-hole. Then he had taken up the candle and cut it to the length of about an inch. This he placed upon the loose powder at the

breach of the gun. Then he scattered powder thickly over the floor beneath, so that when the candle fell at the recoil it must explode the huge pile in which the three drunkards were wallowing.

"You've made others look death in the face, Sharkey," said he; "now it has come to be your own turn. You and these swine here shall go together!" He lit the candle-end as he spoke, and blew out the other lights upon the table. Then he passed out with the dumb man, and locked the cabin door upon the outer side. But before he closed it he took an exultant look backwards, and received one last curse from those unconquerable eyes. In the single dim circle of light that ivory-white face, with the gleam of moisture upon the high, bald forehead, was the last that was ever seen of Sharkey.

There was a skiff alongside, and in it Copley Banks and the dumb steward made their way to the beach, and looked back upon the brig riding in the moon-light just outside the shadow of the palm trees. They waited and waited watching that dim light which shone through the stem port. And then at last there came the dull thud of a gun, and an instant later the shattering crash of an explosion. The long, sleek, black barque, the sweep of white sand, and the fringe of nodding feathery palm trees sprang into dazzling light and back into darkness again. Voices screamed and called upon the bay.

Then Copley Banks, his heart singing within him, touched his companion upon the shoulder, and they plunged together into the lonely jungle of the Caicos.

5: Nissen's Secret

Anonymous

The Bulletin 8 Dec 1900

JOHN WESTBROOK, master-mariner, sailed one fine morning out of Port Jackson on a six months' trading cruise among the South Sea Islands, and he never returned. His wife, having perfunctorily waited the six months, with two months' grace added, and being too indifferent to make any inquiries, conveniently gazetted him dead, and married Job Dixon, master-mariner, of the schooner *Neptune*. In due course he sailed out of Port Jackson on an extended cruise, and he never returned. And the man who holds the key to the mystery is precisely the one most oblivious of there being any key to hold.

THE TRADING settlement lay bathed in brilliant sunlight. Against the clear sky the palms were defined to their smallest twigs. A big-boned, pale-faced man sat on a pile of lumber by the landing-place, and listlessly eyed a schooner that was coming slowly up the lagoon. On the ground behind lolled a little, shock-headed man with big, vacant eyes and a significant droop of his nether lip.

Two idlers strolled down from the station and stood at a little distance.

"Who're they?" queried one.

"What!" The other looked surprised. "Don't know Captain Westbrook and his man Friday— watch-dog, body-guard, and all things in that line? But, then, this is your first visit to the Gilbert Islands."

"Well? tell me!"

"The story? Oh, there isn't much of it. Westbrook used to trade between these islands and Sydney, but on his last visit with his ship he took a cargo for 'Frisco. Coming back, he ran into a breeze, and his old hulk strained so badly that her crew had only time to take to the boats, without food or water—or with very little— before she went down. They moped about— I don't know how many days—going off by degrees till only the captain and his familiar were left. The little man— Nissen— was loony when the *Tortoise* picked 'em up, and he's a bit loony now. The thing turned his brain. When they found them, he was nursing the unconscious captain, damping his head with a wet cloth, and crooning to him one of those things the women sing to youngsters. Now, he seems to think he has a mission to watch over the "old man"— I believe he thinks he's a dog, though he doesn't bark. He's always at his heels."

"Ah! queer yarn," the first man said, and pointed to the schooner, which had now got an anchor down. "What craft's that?"

"That! Oh! that's the *Neptune*. Been tramping about the islands a good while, this trip. She was here a little time back. Left just before the Tortoise brought those castaways here."

A boat put off from the schooner, and landed her skipper. Captain Westbrook looked after him, nodded his head like a man who has a thought, and strolled off up to the saloon. Nissen, the watch-dog, followed at heel.

"SO SHE killed me at short notice, and married you— eh?"

Captain Westbrook, grim-visaged and portentous, faced the *Neptune*'s skipper across a table in the saloon. Witless Nissen, excluded from the room, stumped the verandah, disconsolate. Captain Job Dixon, one hand drumming the table nervously, the other thrust into his jacket-pocket, was silent for awhile.

"But—how did you know?" he blurted at last.

The other laughed.

"Inquired," he said. "I wanted news from home. You were busy with the agent, so I boarded one of your crew whom I happened to know. He told me my wife had given me up as dead, and married again. Married you— he said. True, isn't it?"

The Neptune's skipper nodded.

"I took a run to 'Frisco," Westbrook said. "But I wrote to her, telling her of it. And she thought I was dead ! Waited —let me see! about eight months. Long time!"

"See!" said Dixon, impatiently. "This is all rot. The woman's right enough. I swear she never got your letter— if you wrote one," he added, not so softly but that Westbrook heard.

"Don't call me a liar," he snarled. "I did write. But— what are you going to do about it? Both can't have the woman."

"No!" Captain Job eyed the ceiling thoughtfully. "*Only one of us must go back*."

Westbrook laughed, leaned forward, and tapped the other man on the wrist with his forefinger. His voice, husky with the intensity of his significance, hardly rose above a whisper.

"You've said it— only one of us must go back!"

Dixon sat bolt upright, white-faced and palpably shaking, as the other's meaning leapt into his understanding.

"What!" he gasped. "You mean... I didn't mean that! No! no!"— and he forced a laugh. "You always were a joker, Westbrook, and you're at it again."

"I mean," came the steady answer, "only one of us must go back!"

"But— good heavens, man! you're mad! I tell you it can't be— it's horrible, horrible!"

"Bah! you carry a pistol, I'll be bound, and know how to use it, too. How often have you used it?"

"Never!" said Dixon, earnestly. "Never, I swear— on a man. Why— it's murder!"

"Murder!— rubbish! we'll fight fair. Both can't have her."

"Well— well," Dixon said, helplessly, "can't we arrange?... You don't want her..." His voice died, and he rose to his feet.

"You won't have her, anyway." Westbrook jumped up in a rage. "Fight, you hound, or I'll strangle you. Only one of us..."

At the threat, clinched by a swift forward movement, coolness came to Dixon. He jerked his right hand from his pocket, and the storming Westbrook calmed in an instant before a menacing revolver muzzle.

For ten seconds a life trembled on Dixon's trigger finger. Then he pocketed the weapon and strode for the door.

"We'll take a walk— you and I," he said through his teeth, "and" parrot-like "only one of us shall come back! "

NISSEN, still doing sentry-go on the verandah, saw them leave, and, with an almost sane idea that something was wrong, sneaked after them.

The two men skirted the beach till a bluff of rocks screened them from all but very inquisitive eyes.

Nissen scaled the bluff and dropped unseen behind a rock commanding a view of the little, half-moon-shaped battle-ground, and the broad Sea outside. When he lifted his head cautiously above the rock he saw the men facing each other, pistols in hand and lips shut hard. He gasped in dismay, and his revolver, instantly grinning over the rock, made the third in the drama! He determined the one to go back should not be Captain Dixon! Two shots rang as one, echoing a score of times in the little amphitheatre, and two billetless bullets flattened on the rocks. Westbrook's hand went up.

"*Stop*!" he shouted— "this won't do! These cursed revolvers sound like cannon. We'll have a whole pack of gaping dogs from the station down upon us in a minute."

"Well?" said Dixon, tensely, over his revolver suspecting a trick.

"Why knives, of course," said Westbrook, dropping his pistol. "What else did we bring 'em for?"

Dixon recoiled a pace, shivered, and began to protest. But the other only laughed and reached to his belt. On the motion, Dixon drew, and sprang to meet him, shouting defiance. From the security of his entrenchment Nissen

eyed the combat with dull comprehension of its tragic features, but with a certain relish, nevertheless. The consciousness that he held in his hand power to decide the issue at will set him chuckling gleefully.

Suddenly he saw the contending men stagger and fall, Westbrook beneath. He screamed once like a wounded horse, and simultaneously his revolver went up, hurriedly drew a line on Dixon, and barked.

For just one hour Dixon thought he had killed Captain Westbrook. Panting with rage and exertion, blood roaring in his ears, he had not noticed the pistol explosion. What he knew was that the squirming form beneath him suddenly relaxed and lay still. Knife in hand, he jumped to his feet, looked, then turned, and ran like the murderer he thought he was.

For minutes afterwards, Nissen watched the sea with intense eyes and quivering underlip. Then he scrambled down the slope— mechanically, like a man who does one thing and thinks of another. There was no shake in his hands as he lifted the man his well-meant but luckless shot had slain. He bore him to a projecting ledge, and dropped him into deep water. Then he returned and— as far as possible— destroyed all traces of the tragedy. All this with a stolid, preoccupied air, as if his dwarfed wits had met a problem. And they had. He felt he had something else to do—but what was it?

Nissen could not think.

IT WAS AN HOUR LATER that Captain Dixon emerged, with whisky-steadied nerves, from the saloon. The criminal does sometimes re-visit the scene of the crime— but it was no "mysterious attraction" that took Captain Dixon there. He went, on an afterthought, through the gathering dusk, to recover his forgotten revolver, which might have told a tale— and to throw something to the sharks. Nissen, still hunting the phantom-answer to his question, saw him, and the answer materialised. He crouched behind a rock, and waited.

Dixon, half-drunk and swayed by one idea, saw nothing, not even the sought revolver— which, seeing that Nissen clutched it, is not surprising. With the aimlessness of a bewildered man he staggered out on the projecting ledge, and the movement called Nissen to action. He had something to do! He stepped stealthily after. Suddenly his hand went up, and the *Neptune*'s skipper went out in a spurt of red flame and a splash in the sea.

———————————

6: Grundy's Ghost

Joseph Spence Evison

1841-1903

The Bulletin 8 Dec 1900

Little can be found about the author, except that he died in NSW in 1903. He wrote several stories for The Bulletin

HERE IS NOT the story of the ghost of Private "Grundy" M'Carthy, H.M's 22nd. Hussars— but of the ghost that afflicted him. The lessee of that malignant spook was Private "Tokey" Williams, borne, when in the flesh, or the muster-roll of the same corps. The 22nd were of the "Dumpy Pice," the small, savage, soldier-wasps of the "Honorable" East India Company's service. When a Briton in moleskins violently filches shillings, Society scourges him with many stripes. When a syndicate of shop keepers robs and murders with both hands, territories and lacs of gold mohurs being the loot, it is "Honorable." Great was the *raj* of "John Kompani"!

After the Indian Mutiny, Victoria took over, with other of the Company's property, the Company's white troops, though these had no covenant with her. Any refusing Imperial livery were branded "rebels" and driven aboard floating cattle-pens for England, many being done to death at sea in foetid 'tween-decks by putrid rations, bilge-water, and fever. Thus ever British Bumbledom guerdons the rank-and-file whose blood cements the Empire's glory.

GRUNDY AND TOKEY were not Company's soldiers. They enlisted together, years before either Mutiny or "Tiger Act," in H.M. 40th Light Dragoons, long antecedent to the advent as Secretary of State for War of the doctrinaire who invented "limited engagement" and the "territorial" aberration— in the days when the British Army stocked veterans; when to the soldier his regiment was home, his comrades brothers, his colonel God— a grim deity to be followed, nathless, to nethermost hell.

From the first day of their service, Grundy— Irish, raw, and red, and Tokey— Welsh medical-student of education, sagged from virtue— were sworn comrades. Tradition associated them in malign enterprise before enlisting. They went to India together; together rode, blood to their stirrup-irons, the Mutiny, and, the 40th ordered home, volunteered to the Dumpies and for further Indian service, and were later both invalided and joined the depot troop, Canterbury, where Tokey's ghost became objectionable. Prior transactions in India however, belong first to this record.

AFTER the amalgamation, the 22nd, quartered at Allahabad, lost its regimental treasure-chest containing 3,000 rupees— then worth all £300. The chest was inside a padlocked tumbril, the tumbril outside the main-guard. The chest, safe at sundown, had vanished when the paymaster unlocked the tumbril next morning. The entire guard were "whipped on the shelf." Yet the mystery held, enough the adjutant, young and melodramatic, for weeks crawled cantonments at night, like the serpent after the fall, on his belly, a loaded revolver in his sword-belt. Bandicoots and jackals he encountered, and nearly sampled the venom of variegated snakes and scorpions, but found never thief nor rupee. The Provost-Sergeant's men were as unsuccessful, though they long shadowed every Dumpy on orderly-room black-list. Tokey and Grundy, both on the Provost's staff, much distinguished themselves by zeal and ingenious theories. Therefore, when, months after, they put in for five weeks' leave of absence "to visit Benares and adjacent parts," the grateful adjutant backed, and the colonel signed, their furloughs.

"Listen, Grundy, you crimson, Irish, bog-trotting Papist, you; this will be a general field-day of a spree, a screeching, scorching tear that you'll remember when back at your native bog picking the spuds out of the ashes with your toe-nails. But we don't blew all that three thousand now. I'll buy gold with fifteen hundred of it; you plant the rest till we get another furlough next year."

So Grundy nested Rs. 1500 in a new place, while Tokey, going among the city *babus*, bought gold— *mohurs* and sovereigns— here and there a few. Then they took furlough. Legends of that lurid jamboree long lingered in Bengal. Benares they visited, but mostly "adjacent parts," where were no inquisitive white troops; "going large" in many *lal bazars*; heard of in *dák* bungalows with female companions of divers races. On foot they journeyed never, "Grabbies"or "toe-soldiers" might "mud-crush," but not "gentlemen-hussars" with red gold belted around their waists.

They were borne, rajah-wise, in palanquins, or tore through the night in *tongas*, and always the spur-clad boots of men and the necks of bottles protruded from their chariots, and the scent of *arak* perfumed an unfragrant land. Evading infantry pickets and the "frogs'-march," they duly reported at the guard-room of the 22nd, and, reinvigorated, returned to duty, every *pie* of Rs. 1,500 royally "blewed."

THE TORRID months came and dragged. The comrades relieved monotony by circumspect minor debaucheries, leaving intact their nest-egg. Tokey provided funds— how, not even Grundy quite knew. Queer robberies in city and cantonments happened those days. The city jewellers jabbered of a strange native, swarthy yet *Feringhi*-faced, who bought old gold coins and

ornaments, and carried a white umbrella, which he hooked on foot of the sloping board whereon the dealer, sitting at head thereof, scattered his wares for inspection. Treasure and the stranger vanished simultaneously. The *bazar* pundits concluded the stranger was a white *budmash* who palmed valuables into his accursed sun-shade. Then, did not Sergeant "Kicker" Kavanagh, who disciplined his Dumpies, when they were phenomenally crapulous and pugnacious, with his boots, lose the bag of rupees he had acquired by lavish blending of water with Commissariat rum, while canteen sergeant.

Tokey carried the rupees over to Kavanagh's bungalow for him, and the latter, throwing them into his box, affixed thereto a Chubb's padlock. "Let the blashted tumbril thieves pick that lock, if they can; an', by the howly, if I catch them tryin', I'll brain 'em wid me collar-chain, so I will!"

Kicker was a big, strong man, of vicious temper; nevertheless, there were no rupees in the box when, next morning, the trumpets brayed the reveille. There was an inch-thick grease-track from cot to door, and a box, with the bottom cut out and a greasy rope fast to the handle, in the verandah. The adjutant was hideously disconcerted. But Tokey showed that only a naked nigger could possibly have crawled in and lubricated floor and box unheard, or have had the patience to drag the latter, inch by inch, to the door without awakening the sergeant. Life thereafter was made unpleasant to strange natives visiting cantonments— even for those money-changers who came to report they had been despoiled by a sahib, habited as a *babu*, and with a white umbrella. Provosts and promiscuous barrack-room dogs hunted these before they could attain the ear of higher authority.

A YEAR PASSED. Tokey and Grundy sat in the provost-cell wherein they bivouacked when on provost duty. Time ripened for another gorgeous furlough.

"Go fetch those fifteen hundred rupees, Grundy, and shove them in your box, till I can get gold for them, and we'll put in for another furlough."

Grundy departed, returning speedily exuding perturbation.

"Howly saints! ut's gone, every *anna* av ut! "

Tokey, blanching under his tan, yet, from glittering, uncanny eyes, shot the Irishman a searching glance; then gnawed his wiry moustache: "Let's go look!"

They followed the inside of the prickly-pear hedge, walling the twelve cells, to a hut, where were tools for digging graves. Tokey lit a lantern hanging there; first swiftly touching the wick and top of the lamp. Both were dead-cold. As the light streamed out the men heard the hiss an angry cobra and saw the evil thing erect, swaying with expanded hood in the very hole, at toot of the wall facing the door, in which the treasure had been hidden.

Grundy slid outside. Tokey, his own snakelike eyes fastened on the cobra, reached swiftly for a bamboo, and, as the reptile struck, met it with

a number two sword-cut and broke its back.

"Come here, you quaking Connemara coward!" he fiercely whispered. "Didn't you see that thing when you were here just now?"

"Divil the see I saw! The hole was dug up an the roopays gone; wasn't that enough for wan while?"

"You lit the lantern?"

The Irishman boggled a moment. "An' how else wud I've seen the hole?"

"To hell with the hole ! When did you last see the money?"

"When, is ut? Sure, last night; didn't I lift ut and put ut back and tramp the ground shmooth, so I did!"

"Fist the light! "

Tokey went gingerly to the hole, his bamboo ready to strike. In it were young cobras, writhing and wicked. He killed them. Then he *knew* his comrade had lied and had himself taken the money. But the Welshman made no sign.

WEEKS AFTER, Tokey, calling Grundy at midnight to relieve him on *bazar* duty, said; "Have you seen these nights one of our chaps prowling about cantonments, as if searching for something?"

Grundy's face twitched, and he shook. "Nivir won; why?"

"Some fellow's sniffing around; but he's too smart for me and gets away."

Grundy, gripping his stick, went out. Tokey, grinning, lay on his *charpoy*, and, seemingly, fell asleep. Soon a shadow crept athwart the floor— Grundy watching the sleeper. Satisfied, he strode to the chapel-compound, paced, counting his steps, the long cactus hedge, halted, hesitated, stooped, lifted a stone, examined a bulky parcel beneath, replaced the stone, raked leaves above it, and departed— chuckling.

He might not have chuckled had he known he was shadowed by one carrying a keen knife in his cummerbund; he might have been less merry had he seen his tracker prone on his belly, a few yards away on the other side of the hedge; murder might have been, had he returned while the shadower took up and removed the treasure. Grundy strolled leisurely back to the cells. There Tokey snored harder than before, and Grundy chuckled once more at the humor of the situation.

NEXT DAY a European soldier deposited Rs. 1500 in the local bank.

"Prize-money?" said the accountant, with the genial smile and languid curiosity of one who receives.

"Sweat-money! My savings after seventeen years of this God forsaken country."

SO, WHEN they were old— for 24 years of guard-bed and variegated alcohol age the cavalryman before five-and-forty— these two came to Canterbury depot, to dodge-in their small remaining service. Recruits grinned at their middle-aged attachment and grim old-soldier ways. But unostentatiously; as the comrades argued with collar-chains or horse-logs. They guarded one another's barrack-room interests with aggressive vigilance; were inseparable, and nightly—brilliantly burnished, chrome-yellowed, and pipe-clayed— clanked and swaggered out of barracks, as horsemen go arrayed for love; Tokey, a lean, weather-beaten and grizzled war-wolf; Grundy, a pink-complexioned, red-headed, and well-oiled dandy. Neither affected female society. Both had realised alike the falsity of woman, and the eternal verity of malt and hops. Yet they met their fate, and their fate was— a woman.

AVOIDING the grog-shops of a garrison town, they sought, in country lanes, slow, old-fashioned inns, in the low-pitched rooms of which scents of lavender and musk mingled with coarser odours of casks, and clustering roses, red and white, rapped gently at the diamond window-panes. There they refreshed, far from the guffaws of raucous recruits and the giggling of girls enticed from rural homes and the monotony of chastity by the irresistible lures of jingling spurs, of shining steel and scarlet.

Such a *serai* they happened-on one moonlit summer night. Roses bloomed over the low porchway and climbed the creaking sign— a Headless Horseman; great hollyhocks and giant sunflowers waved languorous in the garden; the air was heavy with perfume of jasmine and stocks.

Under the porch a girl, her head uncovered, stood a-tip-toe trying to reach the shining glow-worms in a flower-box hung high. Tokey passed in. Irish gallantry forbade Grundy leave woman in distress.

"Let me help ye, miss," and waiting no leave— as is the right way with women— he lightly swung her up by the waist, then let her gently down and saluted.

She laughed, the glow-worms shining in her pink palm; then came without the porch, so that the moonlight glanced upon face and form of such a woman as, since the world was, has had power to bind the wills of men— a light, lithe, almost fragile, but full-throated girl, with dark, melancholy-gay eyes of shifting color, and coils of brown hair shot with sunbeams. Her dress was a spotless print; sweet flowers and a snatch of soft lace at her shapely breast— rustic she,

yet all fragrant and delicious; her speech and manner free alike from gawkiness of rural Kent and mincings of the modem board-school miss.

A white-haired dame, soft of voice, showed them to a parlor and brought them drink. Tokey, unbuttoning his stable-jacket, took a long pull at the ale, and, leaning big back luxuriously, and said, "Lady-killing, eh; you dashed old fool?"

"By th' powers! Tokey, but did ye see th' two eyes av her?"

"I've looked in the eyes of many women, white and yellow, and never got good from the looking yet The eyes of a woman! My God, what might I not have been now, but for the eyes of a woman ! "

Nevertheless, when, later, the girl came, laughing, with a rose for Grundy's jacket, Tokey looked into her eyes and— his doom!

She sat carelessly on the arm of a big old chair showing her pretty feet and ankles, and made them tell her of the army, of the Mutiny— their own story. Tokey was spokesman, and, under the spell of the girl's glances, the manner and language of an earlier day came back to him. Grundy said little, devouring the woman with his eyes.

Then she told them of herself. She had been in London, "in business with a friend," but, falling delicate, had come back to be nursed by her mother, who kept the "Headless Horseman" Her name was May. And, when they were going she made them promise to come again, well knowing they would come.

NIGHTLY they made love to her, each his own way. Then fell a time when Grundy, horse-kicked, went to hospital. Tokey faithfully tended his comrade, smuggling in to him rum, tobacco, and other delicacies. After, he rewarded himself at the shrine of love. His wooing of May was fierce— the courting of a fighting Celt.

One night, the girl absent, the mother said:

"An' what d'ye come after my girl for, Mr Williams— to get her love and leave her, like all ye soldier-gentlemen does? May's an innocent child. What d'ye want with her?"

"To marry her, mother."

She laughed quietly. "No offence; but how would the likes of ye keep a wife? May puts her arms in a wash-tub to keep no man "

He pulled out a bank-book. It showed more than £200 to his credit.

"I've that; and when I'm discharged, my pension for service and wounds— not much, yet some I've prize-money— all £200— coming."

This intelligent old woman, not indisposed to house her "innocent girl," was impressed. Maybe she made enquiries. Anyway, when next he called, May was in melting mood.

"I'll marry you," she said, "whenever you like. That poor Mr. M'Carthy, now; has he no money banked?"

Tokey laughed sardonically. "Devil *apie*! he may have prize-money— some day."

THE EVENING of the day Grundy was discharged from hospital he (Tokey being on "fatigue") swaggered, alone and radiant, to the inn.

"Mays out," said her mother; "it's no use you coming here. She's going to marry respectable, to Mr. Williams, who saved £200 in India. May's not for you, Mr. M'Carthy!"

He stood awhile, his mouth open; then, comprehending, purpled with passion and held, shaking, to a chair. Two hundred pounds!— he knew where *that* came from; saw, as in a dream, white, ant-scoured Allahabad, a long cactus hedge, an empty hole, and felt the agony a rogue feels at encountering a superior rascal. He said little, incoherently cursed his comrade and the girl, and staggered into the night.

The old lady laughed softly.

Before "last post " he stalked into the barrack-room.

"Come and drink, you pink-snouted bog-trotter!" sang out Tokey, his normal irascibility mellowed by beer, and pointing to a pot on the table.

The other answered nothing. He went straight to his shelf, took thence an uncut loaf (his and Tokey's ration of bread for following day) and halved it with exactness. One moiety he threw on the mantel shelf, the other he left on the table.

"Th' curse av Judas an' ye, ye Welsh bastard, an' an the Gov'mint as sarves out no ball-ammunition to this dam depot, so's I might shoot ye dead to wonst!"

There was dead silence in the wondering room. The act of "cutting the loaf," solemn as a sacrament, meant final severance of comradeship. The room, loving neither man, was yet honestly affected. The British soldier of that day knew nothing so sacred as comradeship. Loudly and malignantly laughed Tokey.

HENCEFORWARD neither spoke to the other. Tokey nightly went courting. The recruits in the room were ready enough to annoy the former comrades, in detail, but when the boldest once abused Tokey in the latter's absence, Grundy promptly stretched him across his cot with a broken nose.

"Lie still, ye pariah, till ye knows how to spake respectful of your shupariors! "

Some weeks after the breach the two received their prize-money. Three days later Tokey married "without leave." His wedding-present to his bride was £400. She banked it the same day; was taken "suddenly ill," and borne home by her mother. Thus was Tokey's honeymoon deferred, and he repaired to his solitary martial cot. The wedding had been kept quite quiet; if Grundy knew, he gave no sign. Time went, but the bride continued, her mother said, "dangerously ill."

In six weeks Tokey was only permitted to see the girl twice for a few minutes.

He began to age strangely, to pine and sicken. He mooned drearily about barracks, or lay speechless on his cot. Daily he grew more gaunt; some unsightly cutaneous disorder attacked him; the room humorist opined he was "a bloomin' old ruin crumblin' to bits." But Grundy gathered liveliness. He went out every evening that Tokey remained in barracks. It was whispered he had been seen much with "a square girl— her mother keeps a country pub." Grundy always returned mentally elevated but painfully sober. He, on these occasions, had a trick of looking at Tokey— they still slept in adjacent cots — and of guffawing in a manner which exasperated the wild-eyed veteran to the verge of madness. But neither spoke. The room waited an explosion.

FOR MANY DAYS Tokey had not quitted barracks— even to enquire after his wife. What he had seen, heard, or suspected was never known. But all saw he was dying as he walked. One night Grundy, just before "watch-setting," swaggered noisily into the room. Undressing, he banged his boots, spurs, and whip down, whistled, sang unmelodiously, and stridently laughed whenever he glanced in Tokey's direction. The latter lay still on his cot, only his eyes, alive and alight, showing above his blankets. Grundy, hanging up his jacket, so managed that the buttoned sleeve flipped Tokey in the face.

Then the latter started up, pouring out a stream of black curses which made even the hardened room shudder. He wound up: "Listen, you sneaking hound, that tried to rob your own comrade, and hadn't the savee to know how. I followed you that night down the prickly-pear hedge, and I've been sorry ever since I didn't stick you, for the Irish pig you are. But I've got the money, and, ha! ha! I've got the girl!"

The other listened, half-hypnotised, not by the words, but by the concentrated venom and malignity of the other, and by his terrible eyes. But, when Tokey ceased, Grundy burst into a wild laugh.

"Hev ye that same? Hev ye? Ye lie; the gal has the money and— howl and ramp, ye murderin' devil!— I've got the gal; when I like, when I like."

Then, half mad with liquor and revenge, he tore Tokey's pouch-belt from its peg and dashed it in the owner's face. The sharp brass tip deeply gashed the old soldier's forehead. Only a few drops of black blood oozed from the wound.

"Take that, ye black-hearted Welsh divil; I'd give ye more, but ye'll be dead in a week!"

Tokey lay still. His face was grey and set.

When he spoke, he spoke quietly, without heat: "Yes, I'll be dead in a week. And take notice, you men; witness for me; when I'm dead, if there's a God in Heaven, or a devil in Hell, I'll return that foul blow, and I'll come and sit on that thing's chest till it dies of fright!" He turned his face to the wall ; the doleful trumpet wailed— "Lights out."

They carried Tokey to hospital next morning. That night Grundy took the news to the "Headless Horseman," and was received by May (well and blooming— she had never been ill) and her placid mother with effusion. He left the former some £200 richer; they were to be married immediately Tokey's death left the innocent child free.

Six nights later the orderly-sergeant came into the room at roll-call.

"Which of you's next for fatigue?" He looked at his duty-roster. " Lewis, you go to hospital to sit up with Private Williams!"

"Tokey bad, sergeant?" asked the room-corporal.

"Doctor says he can't live a week; smart old soldier in his day, Tokey. Answer to your names, you chaps."

Grundy came in before "last post"— sober and apparently depressed. The room said nothing to him, but grinned cavernously.

"LIGHTS OUT!" sounded. The stillness of night fell, broken only by kick of unquiet horse, the passionate whinny of mare in the stable below, or the melancholy monotone of the hoarse sentry— "Number three—and all's well!"

The room never could explain why, about 2 a.m., every man woke, coldly sweating; each fancying he alone was awake and each ashamed to call-out. When the corporal, quaking, tried to strike a match, there arose an awful and piercing shriek, with the rattle and jingle as of belts and arms throv.n down. A cold air stole through the close and stable-scented room, and with the gleam of the corporal's candle arose a babble of exclamation.

"What the devil was that?"

The corporal leapt from his cot. " Stop him! Stop him!" he yelled to the man lying next the room door.

But a figure in hospital dress, a figure seen by all the room and by the sentry on No. 3 post (no recruit can be trusted to stay his two hours on that post in Canterbury barracks, even to this day, though this true story has long

been forgotten) vanished, though there was neither opening nor closing of the room door.

Grundy lay white and still, Tokey's pouch-belt across his breast; on his brow a broad gash trickling blood. It was Grundy who had shrieked. Now he lay insensible, his open eyes staring into space. They dashed water over him and he seemed to revive, but spoke never a word. In his eyes was the terror of death and hell.

An hour after, just when the room had recovered sufficiently to pretend to laugh, the door was suddenly opened. The men, their nerves fretted like worn fiddle-strings, almost yelled. It was only Lewis, however, returning from hospital-fatigue.

"Hello, you chaps, what's up? Poor old

"Tokey's dead, died an hour ago. Died hard, my oath! He jumped up in his cot, howled, laughed, made as if to snatch something from a peg, threw his hand out, shrieked, 'Here I am, Grundy!' and fell back, grinning, but dead as a 'orse-log. Orderly and me finished Tokey's medical comforts; and— I'm not for morning stables, corporal; mind that! "

WHEN the principal military medical officer saw Grundy's dead body next morning, he was puzzled.

"Heart, I suppose; though I should say he died of nightmare." He lifted a heavy eyelid with his strong white fingers. "Whew! Look at the horror in that eye!"

———————

7: Two Old-Timers

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

Esquire, March 1941

One of the series of short stories of Pat Hobby, hack screenwriter, in pre-war Hollywood.

PHIL MACEDON, once the Star of Stars, and Pat Hobby, script writer, had collided out on Sunset near the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was five in the morning and there was liquor in the air as they argued and Sergeant Gaspar took them around to the station house. Pat Hobby, a man of forty-nine, showed fight, apparently because Phil Macedon failed to acknowledge that they were old acquaintances.

He accidentally bumped Sergeant Gaspar who was so provoked that he put him in a little barred room while they waited for the Captain to arrive.

Chronologically Phil Macedon belonged between Eugene O'Brien and Robert Taylor. He was still a handsome man in his early fifties and he had saved enough from his great days for a hacienda in the San Fernando Valley; there he rested as full of honours, as rolicksome and with the same purposes in life as Man o' War.

With Pat Hobby life had dealt otherwise. After twenty-one years in the industry, script and publicity, the accident found him driving a 1933 car which had lately become the property of the North Hollywood Finance and Loan Co. And once, back in 1928, he had reached a point of getting bids for a private swimming pool.

He glowered from his confinement, still resenting Macedon's failure to acknowledge that they had ever met before.

'I suppose you don't remember Coleman,' he said sarcastically. 'Or Connie Talmadge or Bill Corker or Allan Dwan.'

Macedon lit a cigarette with the sort of timing in which the silent screen has never been surpassed, and offered one to Sergeant Gaspar.

'Couldn't I come in tomorrow?' he asked. 'I have a horse to exercise—'

'I'm sorry, Mr Macedon,' said the cop— sincerely for the actor was an old favourite of his. 'The Captain is due here any minute. After that we won't be holding you.'

'It's just a formality,' said Pat, from his cell.

'Yeah, it's just a—' Sergeant Gaspar glared at Pat. 'It may not be any formality for you. Did you ever hear of the sobriety test?'

Macedon flicked his cigarette out the door and lit another.

'Suppose I come back in a couple of hours,' he suggested.

'No,' regretted Sergeant Gaspar. 'And since I have to detain you, Mr Macedon, I want to take the opportunity to tell you what you meant to me once. It was that picture you made, The Final Push, it meant a lot to every man who was in the war.'

'Oh, yes,' said Macedon, smiling.

'I used to try to tell my wife about the war— how it was, with the shells and the machine guns— I was in there seven months with the 26th New England— but she never understood. She'd point her finger at me and say "Boom! you're dead," and so I'd laugh and stop trying to make her understand.'

'Hey, can I get out of here?' demanded Pat.

'You shut up!' said Gaspar fiercely. 'You probably wasn't in the war.'

'I was in the Motion Picture Home Guard,' said Pat. 'I had bad eyes.'

'Listen to him,' said Gaspar disgustedly. 'That's what all them slackers say. Well, the war was something. And after my wife saw that picture of yours I never had to explain to her. She knew. She always spoke different about it after that— never just pointed her finger at me and said "Boom!" I'll never forget the part where you was in that shell hole. That was so real it made my hands sweat.'

'Thanks,' said Macedon graciously. He lit another cigarette, 'You see, I was in the war myself and I knew how it was. I knew how it felt.'

'Yes sir,' said Gaspar appreciatively. 'Well; I'm glad of the opportunity to tell you what you did for me. You— you explained the war to my wife.'

'What are you talking about?' demanded Pat Hobby suddenly. 'That war picture Bill Corker did in 1925?'

'There he goes again,' said Gaspar. 'Sure— *The Birth of a Nation*. Now you pipe down till the Captain comes.'

'Phil Macedon knew me then all right,' said Pat resentfully, 'I even watched him work on it one day.'

'I just don't happen to remember you, old man,' said Macedon politely, 'I can't help that.'

'You remember the day Bill Corker shot that shell hole sequence don't you? Your first day on the picture?'

There was a moment's silence.

'When will the Captain be here?' Macedon asked.

'Any minute now,' Mr Macedon.'

'Well, I remember,' said Pat, '—because I was there when he had that shell hole dug. He was out there on the back lot at nine o'clock in the morning with a gang of hunkies to dig the hole and four cameras. He called you up from a

field telephone and told you to go to the costumer and get into a soldier suit. Now you remember?'

'I don't load my mind with details, old man.'

'You called up that they didn't have one to fit you and Corker told you to shut up and get into one anyhow. When you got out to the back lot you were sore as hell because your suit didn't fit.'

Macedon smiled charmingly.

'You have a most remarkable memory. Are you sure you have the right picture— and the right actor?' he asked.

'Am I!' said Pat grimly. 'I can see you right now. Only you didn't have much time to complain about the uniform because that wasn't Corker's plan. He always thought you were the toughest ham in Hollywood to get anything natural out of— and he had a scheme. He was going to get the heart of the picture shot by noon— before you even knew you were acting. He turned you around and shoved you down into that shell hole on your fanny, and yelled "Camera".'

'That's a lie,' said Phil Macedon. 'I got down.'

'Then why did you start yelling?' demanded Pat. 'I can still hear you: "Hey, what's the idea! Is this some —— gag? You get me out of here or I'll walk out on you!"

'—and all the time you were trying to claw your way up the side of that pit, so damn mad you couldn't see. You'd almost get up and then you'd slide back and lie there with your face working— till finally you began to bawl and all this time Bill had four cameras on you. After about twenty minutes you gave up and just lay there, heaving. Bill took a hundred feet of that and then he had a couple of prop men pull you out.'

The police Captain had arrived in the squad car. He stood in the doorway against the first grey of dawn.

'What you got here, Sergeant? A drunk?'

Sergeant Gaspar walked over to the cell, unlocked it and beckoned Pat to come out. Pat blinked a moment— then his eyes fell on Phil Macedon and he shook his finger at him.

'So you see I do know you,' he said. 'Bill Corker cut that piece of film and titled it so you were supposed to be a doughboy whose pal had just been killed. You wanted to climb out and get at the Germans in revenge, but the shells bursting all around and the concussions kept knocking you back in.'

'What's it about?' demanded the Captain.

'I want to prove I know this guy,' said Pat. 'Bill said the best moment in the picture was when Phil was yelling "I've already broken my first finger nail!" Bill titled it "Ten Huns will go to hell to shine your shoes!"'

'You've got here "collision with alcohol",' said the Captain looking at the blotter. 'Let's take these guys down to the hospital and give them the test.'

'Look here now,' said the actor, with his flashing smile, 'my name's Phil Macedon.'

The Captain was a political appointee and very young. He remembered the name and the face but he was not especially impressed because Hollywood was full of has-beens.

They all got into the squad car at the door.

After the test Macedon was held at the station house until friends could arrange bail. Pat Hobby was discharged but his car would not run, so Sergeant Gaspar offered to drive him home.

'Where do you live?' he asked as they started off.

'I don't live anywhere tonight,' said Pat. 'That's why I was driving around. When a friend of mine wakes up I'll touch him for a couple of bucks and go to a hotel.'

'Well now,' said Sergeant Gaspar, 'I got a couple of bucks that ain't working.'

The great mansions of Beverly Hills slid by and Pat waved his hand at them in salute.

'In the good old days,' he said, 'I used to be able to drop into some of those houses day or night. And Sunday mornings—'

'Is that all true you said in the station,' Gaspar asked, '—about how they put him in the hole?'

'Sure, it is,' said Pat. 'That guy needn't have been so upstage. He's just an old-timer like me.'

———————

8: The Bentways Family Skeleton.

Edward Dyson (as by Silas Snell)

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne), 11 June 1914

One of the series of comic tales of Miss Trigg, Domestic

THE BENTWAYS were superior people. They lived in a large, square, formidable house that had something of the aspect of a social fortress. The house was set in extensive grounds. It was entirely surrounded by close-set fir-trees, tneir dark austerity adding greatly to the aloofness of the house— and lending it their name, "The Firs."

The Bentways stood as much apart from their suburb as their house did. People saw them always from a distance. Residents in the locality beheld the big Bentways motor passing sedately through the stern iron gates of "The Firs," and caught glimpses of austere Miss Bentways, or very correct Mr. Arthur Bentways, or even grey, reticent Mrs. William Bentways, their mother, sitting in its dim recesses; but were admitted to no more intimate connection with the Bentways and "The Firs."

Minnie was only one of many servants at "The Firs," but within a couple of days she had lost all the sense of semi-veneration with which the suburban people regarded its occupants.

"My word, they've got 'eaps all right," said Miss Twiggy for the enlightenment of her bosom friend 'Arriet, "but they ain't such a much after all. They stows away there, an' puts on dog, so that local simpletons think they're it and a bit. But, lor' blesh yer 'eart, 'Arriet, I fell to their little family secret right away."

"Go orn," said 'Arriet, her eyes distending. " 'Ave they got a fambly secret?"

"O' course they 'ave. Was you ever in service at a place wot 'adn't a fambly secret iv one sort or another? There's a skellington in every cupboard. That's my experience. Sometimes it's a little, no-account sort o' skellington— other times it's a great, big, grinnin' monster. The Bentways' skellington is a sort of medium skellington— but they're worried by it a lot. It's a hactive skellington, an' won't keep in its cupboard."

"Krismiss ! I wouldn't stay where there was skellingtons," said 'Arriet nervously. " 'Ave yer seen it ?"

"Seen it ? I see it all over the place. It's the ole man. It's ole Willyim Bentways his self."

" 'Ow cud he be a skellington, an' 'im not dead?"

"Garn, 'Arriet, wot's the matter with you is you ain't got any brains. Fambly skellingtons ain't always dead uns. The Bentways fambly skellington ain't dead.

If he was he wouldn't be a skellington. You bet, I furridged him out in no time. Harf the fun of bein' a servant is furridging out fam'bly skellingtons. I was onto Mr. Bentways, senior, right from the jump. He's the lad what's got all the stuff. He made the pile, contracting an' buyin' property, an' he's a heavy sort iv bandy-legged roughie, with no dog to him at all. He ain't got no more style than a born bottle-o, an' slouches about the place in the misrable clothes he wore when he was a navvy over thirty years ago, he does."

"G-a-a-rt,! an' him that rich."

"Yes. They say he's worth more'n 'arf-a-million, an' yeh wouldn't think he 'ad a penny fer bootlaces. He don't wash himself till som'eone makes iira, an' loves' t' go potterin' about the place with a spade an' a barrer, doin' odd jobs an' bits iv gardenin', cuttin' wood, diggin' oles, an' puttin' up sheds an' thin's. The cook, what's bin there years, tells me he kicked up thunder once when his son engaged a 'andy man t' do the work iv the garden an' the yard. Ole Willyum chased the bloke off the place with a axe 'andle. He'd 'a' brained 'im if he'd got 'in

"So yeh see, 'Arriet, that's the Bent ways family skellington. They're ashamed iv the ole man, an' they can't alter 'im, coz he won't be altered, bein' that pig-headed. He likes work, an' he 'ates spendin', and he 'ates clothes an' good 'ats, an' looks like a street sweeper what's blown in."

Minnie heard and saw a good deal more of the elder Mr. Bentways in the course of the next fortnight. She gathered that when Mr. Arthur Bentways and Miss Eugeme Bentways were younger they were very ambitious to he just "it" in a social sense, and went in for entertaining. But when old - man Bentways had charged into the drawing-room among their swagger guests on three different occasions in shirt sleeves, old brown moleskin pants, and unlaced blucher boots, dirty from a job in the garden, and had wanted to know what in thunder that pack of gaudy imbeciles was doing in his house, wearing holes in his carpets, and devasting his larder, the younger people had given it up as a bad job, and were now waitng for Providence to dispose of papa before seeking to shine in society.

But Providence was tardy in disposing of papa. Papa was a tough nut. He remained hale and hard and headstrong. Young Mr. Arthur was rich, and kept the house going, but the old man had to be conciliated— otherwise heaven knows how he might have left his half million.

"S'welp me ! I've found out a new one about ole Willyum," Minnie told 'Arriet one evening. "He goes out an' takes jobs. Yes. if he ain't watched he'll do a guy through the back gate in his scrouger togs, an' get along somewhere where work's goin' on, an' bail up the boss tor a job."

"No!" gasped 'Arriet incredulously. "An' 'im with banks chock full iv money."

"Yes, he done it. He done it more than once. The cook tell me she 'erself saw him one day mixin' mortar on a buildin' job. Another time he went missin' fer a fortnight, an' Mr. Arthur put the privit D's on him, an' they found him doin' pick an' shovel work in the sewers fer eight bob a day, an' livin' in a little room he'd hired on his own."

"Well, ain't he a trick? What'll he do next?"

"Heaving only knows. But he loves it. See he's been used t' 'ard work, an' he likes it. More'n that, he likes 'ard cash Straight, my privit opinion is he's just a hair's breadth off his 'ead, though he don't look it, 'part from his wantin' t' work, which ain't natural. My ole man never wanted to work. Neither did yours."

Mrs. William Bentways, of "The Firs," was a mild, simple old woman, the type of lady that a working man's wife makes when she finds herself withdrawn from all the interests that made life endurable, and surrounded with all the comforts she could not enjoy. The probability is that if she could have had her own way she would have preferrod to be living with Bill in a simple cottage, doing her own housework, attending to Bill and a few hens all day, and sewing patches and darning socks in the evenings. But being now tne wife of a rich man, and the mother of a lady and a gentleman, she had to sit about in perpetual Sunday clothes, with folded hands, and let time pass as heavily as it might.

One day, when Minnie had been at "The Firs" about eight weeks, Mrs. Bentways sent for her.

"I rather like the ole girl," Minnie explained to 'Arriet. "She's a kindly, dccent sort, an' havin' worked 'erself, knows how to respect them what works. When I went in to 'er she was lookin' sort o' ruffled an' upset. She she: 'You're a nice girl, Minnie, an' I think you'll do somethin' for me— something partickler. I want you to go to that vacant land in Wills-street near the tram corner, have a good look what is going on, and come back and tell me. Mind you miss nothin', and be a good girl, and please don't tell anyone else where I am sendin' you, or what you see.'

"Well, o' course I went. There was a rough fence round the land, which was owned by Mr. Arthur Bentways. He'd let a contrack fer a row iv 'ouses, an' the men was 'ard at it. I takes a look round, 'arf suspectin' what the missus was after, an', sure inough, there was his jills diggin' away 'ike ole 'Arry in one iv the trenches."

"Wot, Mr. Bentways?"

"Who else ? He'd took a job from his own son's contractor, what didn't know 'im from a crow, an' there he was pastin' in', doin' ez much 'ard yacker as any two others, his ole whiskers waggin', an' his ole bald 'ead sweatin' like a waterin'-can. Work! 'Strutk! he jiss seemed t' revel in it.

"Course I went back an' tole the missus, an' she burst into tears. 'I guessed it ! I guessed it!" sez she. 'Oh, what will Mr. Arthur say ?'

"She gimme two bob t' sit quiet an' say nothin'; but a few hours later Mr. Arthur came in the back way, bustlin' his dad before him, an' the ole man was all over yeller clay an' wet with sweat— and he was givin' Arthur nothin'. Mad! Lor', he was ropable.

" 'Somethin' if a man can't please hisself,' yells he. 'By I will please myself. Do you think I'm goin' t' be an infernal slave t' my blessed fambly. By heavens! I'll show you! I'll show you!'

"Then Mr. Arthur bustled him into his room, an' in course all the girls knew what 'ad 'appened."

Mr. William Bentways behaved himself fairly well for a few days. Then one afternoon he went quietly out by the back gate, wearing a coat, a very unusual article, of apparel with him, and instantly disappeared.

It was as if he had stepped into oblivion the moment he closed the little gate after him.

Minnie was called upon to go in one direction, seeking Bentways, senior. Three other servants were sent in' other directions. All were instructed to keep up the search till six o'clock, and to carry on the hunt about any place where work was going forward.

The search was all in vain, and William did not return home that night. Next day the search was renewed. Minnie was sent out by Mrs. Bentways, with special directions from the old woman.

"Look for him wherever there is any kind of digging being done, my dear," said Mrs. Bentways. "My husband is fond of digging. It is a weakness of his. If you find him I'll make you a very nice present."

"I'm on a good wicket these days," Minnie Trigg confided to 'Arriet. "I ain't no more slavey. I'm Miss Trigg, privit detectiff. I got nothink t' do but jist prowl round, lookin' fer clues. I ain't found none up to now, but the perfession suits me all right. I'm all over the place on me own, searchin' fer Mr. Willyum Bentways, what disappeared from his 'ome on 12th inst. Short, stout, bloo eyes, whiskers, legs bowed a bit, about sixty-five years iv age. So, 'Arriet, if yeh spot a ole stray answerm' that description y'll be rewarded on givin' infirmation what'll lead to his recovery, dead or alive."

Minnie was retained as a private detective in pursuit of the missing Mr. Bentways for over a week. Meanwhile, Mr. Arthur had put two agencies on the

job, the police had been privately instructed to keep an eye for his lost parent, and the search was extending all over the country.

When a fortnight passed consternation seized the Bentways family. There was no knowing What their "hard-headed father might dp. But the grim possibility of his fixing up a new will during this period of absence and estrangement was ever tefore their eyes.

The story got into the papers. The mystery of the missing Mr. Bentways became a matter of extraordinary public interest. William had never been photographed, consequently pictures of him were not available; but all the papers in three States published minute descriptions of him and the possibilities of the case were discussed by shrewd gentlemen everywhere.

At this stage Mr. Arthur Bentways offered a reward of £100 to any person supplying information that would lead to discovery of the whereabouts ol William Bentways, of "The Firs," Newberry-street, Kew.

"They've called me off, 'Arriet,'' said Minnie Trigg dolefully. "I ain't a success ez a privit detectiff, so I've bin requested t' resoom me ordinary dooties ez a ' domestic. It's a great shame, coz I was doin' pertickler well, havin' me travellin' expenses paid, also gettin' a hallowance fer dinners an' wear an' tear, But that 'undred quid's worth 'avin', so I'm keepin' me eyes open."

The search for the lost father was resulting in a great deal of inconvenience to others beside the Bentways family. Old men answering somewhat to the printed description of the missing William were being brought to "The Firs" hourly.

"Some of 'em comes willin' enough," said Minnie, "it bein' understood they stands in for 'arf the 'undred if accepted. But most of 'em comes reluctant, an' puts up fights on the drive, on the garding path or on the doormats. We 'ad ez many ez five fights yesterday afternoon 'tween ole blokes an' chaps what was bringin' em in t' be claimed. Some of 'em is dragged on foot, some is brought in cabs, an' one ole geezer was brung along in a taxi. The party what brought him was furious when Mrs. Bentways wouldn't accept him as her long-lost, lovin' husband, and said he was bein 'posed on an' deceived. He insisted on leavin' him— he said he would sue fer the 'undred pounds reward. Mr. Arthur 'ad to kick him off the premises."

Mr. Arthur's great concern grew, and he had bills printed, and stuck up all about the place, reading :

REWARD.

One Hundred Pounds

Will be paid for information leading to the recovery of William Bentways, missing from his home "The Firs," Kew.

Their followed a description of the lost man, and a reassurance concerning the £100 reward.

But six weeks had gone, and Mr. William Bentways remained unheard of, There was now talk of the advisability of dragging the Yarra. Several experts had come to the conclusion that William was somewhere under water, attached to a snag.

IT WAS in the middle of the seventh week that Minnie burst in on 'Arriet Brown in the latter's room at the house 'Arriet was just then favouring with her services.

"I've got it!" she squealed. "I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!"

"Got wot?" gasped 'Arriet. " Yer fair barmy. Got wot— the measles?"

"I've got the 'undred pouuds."

"I don't believe yeh. 'Tain't possible."

"Oh, ain't it ? Well, I've tound him. I've got the ole man Bentways, an' he's at home now safe and sound— all of him barrin' his whiskers. He'd shaved his whiskers off, but I knew him." Minnie was actually dancing mad in her excitement and the exuberance inspired by thought of the £100.

"But 'ow ?" wailed 'Arriet. In heaving's name get sane 'n' sit, 'n' tell a body 'ow, 'n' where, 'n' when."

" 'Twas t'-day, this very afternoon. I'm out. In Kew, mind yeh— in very Kew, not a mile frim his own 'ouse— 'n' I'm' keepin' me eyes open, when I sees a bloke in a sort iv calicker suit, stickin' bills on a hiron fence. I'm curious, I gets nearer the view. He's a clean-shaven old John; but he ain't shaved his heyebrows, or I wouldn't a knowed him, but I did know him.

" 'Willym Bentways!' I yells.

"He looks at me keen. 'Oh, go to ——,' he says, 'n' goes on pastin' up the bill.

"But I ain't t' be put off. I dogs him and fixes him all right. In less'n' a hour Mr. Arthur bowls him 'ome in the motor in his calicker suit, 'n' with his paste-tin and his roll of bills.

" 'N' whatcher think? Here's the hextraordinary part. The bill what old Willyum Bentways was stickin' up— what was it? 'Course you'd never guess in the creation iv cats. It was the bill offerin' a 'undred pounds for his own recovery. He'd took a job with a bill-sticker, he havin' been a bill-sticker once when he was young in England, 'n' is postin' the very bill advertisin' for his very self when I nabs him. Which," said Minnie, "proves another thing conclusive— the rich Mr. Willyum Bentways, of 'The Firs' carn't read."

———————————

9: Reversion

Robert W. Chambers

1865-1933

McCall's, Dec 1924

*Author of many short stories, not all of which have been reprinted in collections, or even been reprinted at all. Best known for his supernatural fiction, exemplified by the collection "*The King In Yellow*". This romantic short story appears to have been reprinted once only, in* Woman's Journal*, Nov 1928.*

HE was pretty well stuffed with the best to be had in the world— a man still in his prime, familiar with society at home and abroad, highly educated, a good sportsman, with excellent taste and healthy interest in literature, art and science.

His house in town, his country house, his clubs, horses, automobiles, his contributions to charities, public institutions, all were expensive.

And suddenly he sickened of the whole business.

It happened one June morning when his Japanese valet awakened him as usual and set a glass of hot water and another of orange juice beside his bed. Coffee would follow half an hour later. After that he had another perfect day before him to make such combinations of pleasure and study as he chose.

And the very thought of it sickened him.

As he swallowed his hot water and orange juice he became more vividly conscious of this overwhelming distaste for everything.

To get away from men and women— from his house, his friends, his habits— from perfectly appointed clothes, culinary creations, Long Island lawns, dances, books— to see nothing more of these for a while suddenly became essential.

Suddenly he knew what he wanted. Out of sunny vanished years arose the aroma of castile soap-suds, huckaback towels and tin basins.

In that instant his mind evoked all the magic of a vanished world when life was simple and skies cloudless— when from their modest home in Brooklyn, after school was ended for the summer, his parents had taken him for the annual vacation to some rough, healthy spot full of clear, cold streams and maples and evergreens—full of snake fences and rutty roads, rickety beds and poor food.

Did any such spot still exist? Were such country hotels to be found anywhere any longer? Was there any rural region free of macadam and concrete and automobiles and jazz?

Could he find any country hotel or boarding-house where they offered vegetable hash, boiled cider pie, and four kinds of dessert, not including prunes?

Did there still exist an inn where Sunday services were held in the parlour and ice cream and chicken followed at noonday dinner?— an hostlery which was called Mountain Grove, or Maple Hill; or by some one of the old, obvious, blessed names—

All that morning he wrote letters politely repudiating business and social obligations.

This accomplished, he said to his Jap: "Do you know what a "b'iled rag" is?... No? Well, I'll inform you. It's a white shirt. Be good enough to pack one! And those gray flannel shirts. And two suits of knickers. Yes; I'll need all these because I may be away for years."

The Jap smiled at Smith's humour and deftly packed two suit-cases.

So impatient was Smith to be on his way that he could scarcely endure the hour necessary in which to arrange for running his establishments while absent.

"I want to get away. I want to get away," he kept thinking like a man obsessed.

IT was a lovely June evening with rose colour in the west, when he was dumped out of the last train onto an abandoned station platform. The only vehicle awaiting was a double buckboard crusted with mud, in which slouched an aged native chewing tobacco.

Smith approached carrying his two suit-cases.

"Will you drive me to Willow River?" he inquired.

"Aw' right. Jump in."

The ancient native got out, threw a lean mail sack aboard, produced some rope, tied Smith's two suit-cases securely.

"I guess it'll be about three dollars," he said, ridding himself of his quid and gnawing off a new one.

Smith paid in advance; the aged one climbed in, gathered the reins, and set in motion two muddy, placid horses.

"My name's Leander Bell. Who be you?"

"My name is William Smith."

"City man?"

"Yes."

After a pause and a squirt of tobacco: "I drive f'r the Willow Hill House. What's your business?"

"I am a psychologist," said Smith, gravely.

After a pause: "I ain't acquainted with that business," said Mr. Bell. "You make a lotta money?"

"Yes, a lot."

Smith inquired whether there were any boarders at the Willow Hill House and Mr. Bell enumerated them:

"Mr. and Mrs. Dill— he's in the shoe business down to the city— I guess. you know him? No? Well, he's a real pleasant man, And there's Mr. and Mrs. Kunkle— Gus Kunkle— he's in the grocery business— allus takes his vacation to the Willow Hill House. Then there's Reverend Gumble and his family, and the Griggses, and Miss Wand, and the Linton family . They all come up every summer."

"What do they do?"

"Waal, I guess they play all them games like croquet. 'N' they take walks 'n' look at views."

"How many inhabitants in Willow River?"

"Waal, I dunno... 'Tain't so big, 'n' it's kinda scattered. We got a store an' post office."

"Then there are no movies?"

"No, sir. But they's good fishin' into Willow River."

Smith thanked God in silence and bestowed a cigar upon Mr. Bell.

FOR a week Smith did nothing. Willow Hill House and its proprietor, Mrs. Sarah Hoynes, far exceeded his most riotous dreams. He did a little fishing in Willow River, not much. He sat on the top rail of fences and observed woodchucks and birds. He strolled in the woods. There was no village. There was a covered bridge spanning Willow River— a small, swift creek haunted by trout and suckers. Near the bridge stood the store and post office. And, within a radius of five miles, some three dozen houses, many ramshackle and unpainted, with but a patch of garden scratched on a stony the pliant hillside, and the sort of cows and chickens familiar to readers of the comic section.

He came upon the school-house one day. It stood at the cross-roads and was painted the classic red. From an unpainted pole in front of it flew the national flag, very faded and ragged. School was still in session although vacation was almost at hand.

Smith had been dangling a fly along Willow River and had taken nearly a creel full of fair-sized trout—great, fat, silvery fellows with no mottling, no blue spots, and only the red specks which glimmered like points of fire along the median line. It was about noontime, and he was ready for lunch when he left the stream, ascended the bank through a growth of maple and alder, and came out at the school-house.

The next moment from the open door poured forth a dozen or more bare-legged children, shrilling their joy at deliverance, scuffling, chasing one another, and all clutching lunch baskets.

Smith looked up over the eager heads of the children. Their schoolmistress, carrying her lunch basket, was coming across the grass. She caught Smith's glance, blushed slightly. She was not more than twenty. She wore a slip-over of pale pink linen, white tennis shoes and stockings. Her hair was brown, burned and gilded a little by the sun. Her face, too, was tanned and slightly freckled, with wide gray eyes and vivid lips, rather full.

Smith politely showed her the largest trout.

"What good luck you have had," she said, frankly interested. "I didn't know there were such fish in Willow River."

A red-headed boy instantly informed her that he had seen "a nawful monstrous trout" under the bridge.

"Yes, Cyrus," she said, "you usually do see larger than others." At which the boy, not at all abashed, threw several handsprings and raced away with another boy's lunch basket. At which the entire pack set up a shout and followed over the fence into the pasture where were a spring and some rocks, apparently their traditional dining-room.

Smith looked at his fishy hands, looked around for some place to wash them. The schoolmistress said, politely, that there were soap, towels, and basin in the rear of the school-room, and that he was quite welcome to use them.

When he came out of the school-house he saw the schoolmistress under a maple tree. She had spread a napkin on the grass and was arranging upon it the contents of her lunch basket.

"Would you mind if I ate my lunch here on the grass?" he asked.

"No, I'd like it,' she replied, but her face flushed.

He fished out his lunch, squatted down cross-legged, and opened the paper parcel.

"I'm stopping at the Willow Hill House," he explained. "My name is Smith and J come from New York."

"This is Willow River School House," she said.

After a slight pause: "And did you mention the teacher's name?" he asked.

She blushed, looked up, then laughed: "It's Adele West."

He said: "Suppose I cook a trout or two?"

"You may if you choose," she said. "but I don't see how you are going to."

"Aha!" he rejoined gaily, "I'll show you... And it will be very good."

She laughed a little and watched him draw out of the rear pocket of his canvas fishing coat a flat aluminum case from which he produced a fry-pan, a stew-pan, a plate, a teapot, a cup, a canister of tea. and a knife and fork.

Four stones made his range. He whittled a few shavings, started his fire and then with open jack-knife in one hand and his creel of fish in the other, he went down to the river bank to clean his trout.

When he came back she was seated with her hands clasped around one knee looking at the fire. This he mended, poked. and fed adroitly. In a few minutes he had two plump fish frizzling over the coals.

They ate with the appetite of youth. They ate shamelessly everything in her basket and in his parcel, too.

Then he lighted his pipe and leaned back against the trunk of the great maple.

His aluminum hardware was merrily boiling in the stew-pan. He washed and dried it on his handkerchief, packed up his kit, burned all the debris, put out the embers by spilling water on them.

"You are a neat housekeeper," she ventured.

"Aren't you?"

"Oh, yes. You should see my house."

"Will you let me?"

"I was only joking. It's just a two-room cabin. It wouldn't interest you—"

"You don't live there alone, do you?"

"Yes,"

"Are there near neighbors?"

"Not very near. I'm not afraid. Tramps don't come into these parts. It's too far from the railroad." She looked down at her nickel wrist-watch.

"Oh, dear," she said, "I must call the children—"

"Shall we do this tomorrow ?"

"Maybe you won't catch any trout—"

"I promise."

She laughed; looked away from him: "Good bye," she said, releasing her hand.

On his way back to the river he heard her ringing the school bell.

BY the end of the week Smith became known to the urchins of Willow School House as "Teacher's fella."

Also that psychic telegraphy which broadcasts news over wide and sparsely settled areas had acquainted the countryside that "Teacher" had a "city beau."

For a week or more Smith remained unenlightened. He was having a quaint time in a quaint world which, he had supposed, Modernism had abolished.

"I'm glad it's the end of the term," she said to Smith one late afternoon when he stopped at the school-house. A salmon-tinted evening sky; and she wore a salmon-tinted cotton slip—and there had been a shower and every road-rut ran brimming gold.

In the exquisite freshness of the world she seemed like some virile, dewy thing newborn of rain and sky and leagues of hill and plain—something invigorated, stem-slender, and very young.

Two sandpipers preceded them down the river, flitting ahead as they approached. Out of sweet-fern and drenched wild grasses rabbits already were venturing into the wet road, and the girl in sudden impulse of wild spirits chased them, as light of foot as they. And stood laughing and flushed and uncertain as he came up.

As they strolled on she pulled off her big straw hat and swung it by one ribbon as she walked with superbly youthful carriage in her thin, clinging cotton slip.

When they came to her cottage she passed through the picket gate and held it open for him. She unlocked her door, ran into one of the two rooms to light an oil lamp, calling to him to be seated.

Kitchen, dining-room, sitting-room in one— that is where he found himself. The other was her bed-room.

Cotton curtains and potted flowers made gay an otherwise dingy place of cheap furniture, parental portraits in crayon, a noisy clock, a very noisy canary bird, and, for the rest, a range, a cupboard, a pine table covered with a red-checked cloth and several shelves for china and kitchen ware.

"Are you going to take supper with me?" she asked frankly.

"If I may."

No trace of hesitation, of awkwardness, of embarrassment remained. She moved about confidently, as though there were no question of his belonging where he sat.

"Do you need help?" he inquired.

She did not, having pinned on an apron, lighted the fire, whisked skillets and saucepans about, started things simmering, and— as though she had as many arms as a Brahman goddess— setting the table for two.

Fried potatoes, fried trout, tea and pie is what they ate. She went away to wash the dishes; came back and seated herself on the rickety sofa beside him with the flushed finality of one prepared to play according to Hoyle. But what the rural game was to be he didn't understand—

She was so sun-tanned and fresh and warm against his shoulder.

After a moment she leaned forward and turned the oil lamp very low.

The new moon's tracery in the southwest caught his eve over his right shoulder.

The girl looked up at the new moon. Then slowly turned and gave him her lips of a child.

After a while; "How many beaux have you had?" he asked.

"I haven't had any."

"Adele!"

"Really."

"Am I your first ?"

"I don't know. Are *you* a— a beau?"

"Well, I behave like one, don't I?"

"You seem to... When are you going away from Willow Hill?"

"I haven't any plans."

She was silent. Her slim fingers, tanned creamy white, wandered absently over his sleeve and shoulder, brushed his cheek very, very lightly; touched his hair:

"Is it gray or only very blond— just here—" she rested one finger above his ear.

"Probably gray," he replied.

"Oh. It looks so blond." Their eyes met in the dimness, and after a little while their lips joined.

Later: "What do you propose to do with your life?" he asked.

"Why, teach," she replied, surprised.

"Oh. And some day you'll fall in love and marry?"

"I don't know."

Sitting limply, her head reversed on his shoulder, her wide eyes on the ceiling, presently she laughed to herself,

"Why?" he asked.

One of her hands dropped into his and took hold:

"I don't know why I laughed. Life is nice."

"Is it?"

"You think so, too, don't your... Oh, it *is* so nice.... When I stop to think of everything God has done for me I— I don't know how to thank Him. Did you ever feel that way?"

He hardly knew what to answer— was suddenly conscious of unfamiliar embarrassment which surprised and confused him, and even perversely amused him... And yet it had been a simple question... What was it, again? Oh, yes;— did he know how adequately to thank God for all the things He had done for him?... But it was many years since that sort of gratitude had even occurred to him, or any expression of it entered his untroubled mind.

He said nothing. His glance roamed around the shabby room— one of the gifts of the Almighty for which this girl had found no words to express her gratitude... .

"My dear... When will you come again?"

"Tomorrow," said that fool in the prime of life.

WHAT preoccupied Smith was his own profound reaction to his environment. The time of year, the place, the situation had taken a hold on him that began to fill him with unquiet surprise.

He couldn't seem to get enough of it.

Every sunny or rainy morning he awoke with the same happy excitement at the prospect of another day— to idle through.

But the principal thrill to which he awoke every morning was so spontaneous, so primitive, that there was no doubt or perplexity concerning it.

For his first waking thought was of Adele West, teacher at Willow River School-house.

That he had no inclination to return to his former life and accustomed haunts and habits did not surprise Smith as much as his ever freshening pleasure in this girl.

He knew it would be ridiculous to marry her or to suppose that distaste for the life he was born to could be permanent.

Yet the very thought of all that he had fled from was singularly repellent.

"Well," he thought, reasoning with himself, "I can't live all my life in patched knickers and greased shoes. Sometime or other I'll have to move on.

"Ah!" he thought, "is this *love*?..."

Several times he tried to tell himself that he'd be ready to return to his proper environment by October. And shuddered at the idea.

Several times he thought of winter, and the South Seas, or of Naxos and the blue Aegean, or of other distant sapphire seas; and every time his accompanying thought was of Adele's reaction to such sunlit and enchanted bournes.

Another thing, from the beginning, had appealed to him— to his sense of humour, and, lately, to something more sympathetic;— and that was this girl's ignorance of his worldly prosperity.

He was thinking about that, now, as he left the long, alder-bordered reach behind her cottage, climbed the river bank, upward through a little maple wood, and caught sight of her at her back door, looking for him.

She was all ready for him in a fresh, pink slip-over; sweet, fragrant with youth. She put both arms around his neck and they exchanged that rather serious kiss which had become, now, their first greeting.

He spoke, now, in a low voice: "What do you suppose I do for a living?"

"Are you a travelling man?" she inquired after a little reflection.

"I've travelled... Do you suppose I make a good salary?"

"I haven't thought about it."

"Oughtn't a girl to have a beau who can afford to give her things?"

"I don't need anything."

"But I've never given you anything. Not even a box of candy."

"You don't need to," she said, pressing her cheek against his shoulder.

"Of course," he said, "even if we wanted to marry each other we couldn't afford it."

Never had he supposed any human creature to remain so still. Even her breathing seemed to have ceased. He looked down at her partly hidden face and saw that her eyes were closed.

"So it couldn't be done, even if we wanted to— could it?" he added.

"Don't you earn a little?" she asked, opening her eyes.

"I'm— out of work," he said.

After a silence: "You wouldn't want to live on my salary, would you?" she ventured.

"Are you in love with me?" he demanded.

"Yes," she said.

Fortune had offered Smith everything in the world except love. Now she even offered that. And Smith, who never had refused himself anything offered by Fortune, took the little schoolmistress into his arms and kissed her flower-red mouth.

"We'll marry," he said, "and live on whatever we can scrape together." And he kissed her again; and the girl responded in a passion of gratitude and love.

"And now," thought that impulsive and sentimental jackass, "we'll see what happens to a born fool!"

But he was happier than ever he had been in all his life, and he looked at the child-like creature in his arms and thought of Naxos and the South Seas.

_____

10: Female Woman!

Don Marquis

1878-1937

Short Stories USA, March 1912

Truth (Perth, W. Australia) 6 April 1912

IT WAS when I was meandering around the country with Dr. Hartley L. Kirby, selling patent medicine, that I first observed personal that much talked-of truth that no woman is ever too old, or too fat or foolish or freckled, to be feminine in her feelings. And the most feminine woman I ever seen was the fattest.

The Doctor and me was rolling along through Indiana in the autumn and we run onto a town that was having a country fair. On the grounds the Doctor bumped up against an old pal of his who wanted him to be ballyhoo man for his show. Which was the first I ever heard them called that, but I got better acquainted with them since. They are the fellers that stand out in front and get you all excited about the Siamese twins or the bearded lady or the sword swallower or whatever is inside the tent, as represented upon the canvas. The Doctor says he will do it for a week for the fun of the thing.

This feller's name is Watty Sanders, and his wife is the fat lady in his own show and very good natured when not intoxicated nor mad at Watty. She was billed on the curtains outside for six hundred pounds, and Watty says she really does not weigh nigh onto five hundred. But being the husband of a fat lady isn't any bed of rosy ease at that, Watty tell us. It is like every other trade— it has its own particlar responsibilities and troubles. She is a turrible expense to Watty on account of eating so much. The tales that feller told of how hard he has to hustle showing her off in order to support her appetite would have drawed tears from a pawnbroker's sign, as Doctor Kirby says. Watty found it cheaper for his whole show to board and sleep in one of his tents and we done likewise.

"Danny," says Dr. Kirby to me, "you can get a job with Watty, too, if you want one."

Watty had a wild man canvas, but no wild man, so he made me a proposition and I took him up. I was getting to be quite an actor. It was only a couple of months before that I had joined Dr. Kirby, running away from the little village in Illinois where I had been brung up in ignorance and orphanhood, and I was naturally proud that I had learned to be an actor so quick while yet so young. The Doctor sold Siwash Injun Sagraw, which is a remedy for all diseases, giving a free show in the wagon between sales, and I was rigged up to represent a Siwash Injun. So the wild man's job was right in line with my talents.

I was from Borneo, where they're all supposed to be captured. Just as Doctor Kirby would get to his talk about how the wild man had been caught after great struggle and expense, with four men killed and another crippled, there would be an awful rumpus on the inside of the tent, with wild howlings and the sound of revolvers shot off and a woman screaming. Then I would come busting out all blacked up from htsad to heel with no more clothes on than the law pervided for, yipping loud and shaking a big spear and rolling my eyes, and Watty would come rushing after me firing his revolver. I would make for the Doctor and draw my spear back to jab it clean through him, and Watty would grab my arm. And the Doctor would whirl round and they would wrastle me to the ground and I would be handcuffed and dragged back to the tent, still bawling and struggling to break loose.

On the inside my part of the show was to be wild in a cage. I would be chained to the floor and every now and then I would get wilder and rattle ray chains and shake the bars and make jumps at the crowd and carry on, and make believe I was too mad to eat the pieces of raw meat Watty throwed into the cage.

Watty had a snake-charmer woman working for him, and another feller that was her husband and eat glass. The show opened up with me. Then the fat lady come on. Whilst everybody was admiring her size, and looking at the number of pounds on them big cheat scales Watty weighed her on, the charmer would be changing to her snake clothes.

Which she only had one snake, and had been in the business so long, and was so kind of worn out and tired with being charmed so much, it always seemed a pity to me the way she would take and twist him round. I guess there never was a snake was worked harder for the little bit he got to eat, nor got any sicker of a woman's society than poor old Reginald did.

After Reginald had been charmed a while, it would be the glass eater's turn. Which he really eat it, and the doctor says that kind always die before they are fifty. I never knowed his right name, but what he went by was The Human Ostrich. Watty's wife was awful jealous of Mrs. Ostrich, for she got the idea she was carrying on with Watty.

One night I heard, an argument from the fenced-off part of the tent Watty and his wife slept in. She was setting on Watty's chest and he was gasping for mercy.

"You know it ain't true," says Watty, kind of smothered-like.

"It is," says she, "you own up it is." And she give him a bounce.

"No, darling," he gets out of him, "you know I never could bear them thin, scrawny kind of women."

And he begins to call her pet names of all kinds and beg her please, if she won't get off entirely to set somewhere else a minute, fur his chest he can feel giving way, and his ribs caving in. He called her his plump little woman three or four times and she must of softened up some, for she moved and his voice come stronger, but not less meek and lowly.

And he follers it up: "Dolly, darling," he says, "I bet I know something my little woman don't know."

"What is it?" the fat lady asks him.

"You don't know what a weak stomach your hubby has got," Watty says, awful coaxing like, "or you wouldn't bear down quite so hard onto it— please, Dolly."

She begins to blubber and say he is aking fun of her big size, and if he is mean to her any more or ever looks at another woman she will take anti-fat and fade away to nothing and ruin is show, and it is awful hard to be made a joke of all her life, and not have a steady home nor anything like other women do.

"You know I worship every pound of you, little woman," says Watty, still coaxing. "Why can't you trust me? You know, Dolly, Darling, I wouldn't take your weight in gold for you."

And he tells her there never was but once in all his life he has so much as turned his head to look at another woman, and that was by way of a plutonic admiration, and no flirting innded, he says. And even that was before he had met his own little woman. And that other woman, he says was plump too, for he wouldn't never look at any but a plump woman.

"What did she weigh?" asts Watty's wife, he tells her a measly little three hundred pounds.

"But she wasn't refined like my little woman," says Watty, "and when I seen that I passed her up."

And inch by inch Watty coaxed her clean off of him.

But the next day she heard Watty and Mrs. Ostrich giggling about some thing and got so mad the tried t.i eaten Mrs. Ostrich when she wasn't looking and kneel on her. Then Mrs. Ostrich got her own indignation all worked up and sics Reginald onto Watty's wife. Watty's wife is awful scared of Reginald because she don't understand what a shop-worn, peaceable kind of an old snake he is. He don't really have ambition enough to bite anyone, let alone a lady built so round everywhere he couldn't of got a grip on her. And as far as wrapping himself round her and squashing her to death is concerned, Reginald never seen the day he could reach that distance.

Reginald's feelings are plumb friendly towards Dolly when he is turned loose, but she don't know that, and she has some hysterics and faints when he comes wagging towards her like the tail of a glad dog.

Things keeps getting from bad to worse, and you can see the wind up of that show unless something happens. I wouldn't have put it a bit past Mrs. Ostrich and Watty to elope with each other and leave their fambiies. Like as not she would leave poor old Reginald with that cold-blooded Ostrich feller to sell to strangers that don't know his disposition. Or mebby he would be turned loose, in the open country to shift for himself among wild snakes that never had any human education or experience. And what chance would a friendly snake like Reginald have in a gang like that? Some women has simply got no conscience at all about their husbands and famblies, and I sized up that there Mrs. Ostrich for one of that kind. Dolly cries a good deal and tells me how bad she is feeling about it.

One morning her and me and the Human Ostrich talks over the situation.

"See here," I says, "what you two wants to do is to make them both jealous."

"It won't do, Danny," says she. "I think so much of Watty that I couldn't even pretend to flirt with another man."

The Human Ostrich shook his head slow and wooden, and says he has tried it on previous occasions and it never worked any.

"You ain't much of a man," says Dolly to him, "Or you wouldn't stand for such goings-on."

But the Ostrich don't get mad at that remark as far as can see Though I may have been misjudging him. For you never can tell by his face what thoughts he has. or whether he has any at all. What little expression he has on his face never changes. He eats glass as unconcerned as if it was food, and he eats food as unconcerned as if it was glass. Some of his remarks has got so much human intelligence to 'em at times that you think that maybe after all he ain't an idiot. At times I would say to myself that feller had a lot of sense and is stringing me. And other times you are sure that any sense he showed was accidental.

Dr. Kirby used to look at him long and earnest, but he would always shake his head in the end, and give up trying to understand him. If a country store ever sneaked up behind him and stood still, Dr. Kirby says, he would have gone on in a contented kind of way filling the position of village blacksmith till he was moved; but still he would be a hitch-rack that would keep you guessing.

"If you was a man," savs Dolly, "instead of a hickory-faced what-is-it you'd get mad and beat Watty up."

But the Ostrich ain 't got any more mad in him than Reginald has, Mrs. Ostrich has cowed 'em both.

"Sometimes," says Dolly, blubbering, "I think I will kill myself."

He gets real interested at that, but he ain't at all shocked. He eyes her quite a while then he says:

"Shoot yourself, Mrs. Sanders—"

"No, no, no," says Dollv, shuddering all over. "Not that! I never could a-bear to think of guns and pistols— even a fire cracker going-off makes me nervous. I never could abide the sound of fire-works!"

The Ostrich, he is thinking very hard and serious, and he says, after so long a wait Dolly and me has thought the subject is dropped:

"How else would you go about it, Mrs. Sanders? Not meaning any disrespect Mrs. Sanders, it don't look to me like it could be done any other way.''

"Heavens," says Dolly, "ain't the man got got any sympathetic feeling at all? Why couldn't I do it any other way?" she says, spunking up.

"Well," says he, staring at her hard, without any change at all on his face. "you couldnt hang yourself, Mrs Sanders. Not meaning to wound nobody's feelings, Mrs. Sanders, the fact is you ain't got the neck for it. There is no place for a rope to catch onto."

"Hump," says she, glaring at him. And she glared for two minutes sulky, without saying anything.

I thinks the subject has really been dropped this time, but he says pretty soon, quite unexpected:

"And if you was to fry to drown yourself, Mrs. Sanders, you would float!"

"I could hold my head under water," she yells out, like he is taking away from her something that belongs to her. "And I will, too!"

"No, Mrs. Sanders," says he, very solemn, "it ain't in human nature to hold it under long."

"Fiddlesticks! Enough!'' says she.

"And if you was to trv to use" a knife," say he, "where would you find one Ion enough to reach all the ay to a vital part?"

"Merciful Heavens," says she, mad, "don't you tell me I can't kill myself if I want to! I could fling myself in front of a runaway horse or an automobile, couldn't I?"

He thinks it over careful, and then he says, sort of disappointed and grudging: "You could, Mrs. Sanders, you could, if you had got the nerve, you could."

"I'll show you," she says, blubbering, "whether I've got the nerve or not!"

She tells me that because she is so fat no one will take her serious like a human being, and that she wishes she was like other women and had a family. That woman wanted a baby, too, and I bet she would have been good to it, for

she was good to animals. She had been big from a young girl, and never got any sympathy when sick, or anything, and even whilst she played with dolls as a kid she knowed she looked ridiculous, and was laughed at. And by jings!— they was the funniest thing come to light before we left that crowd. That poor, derned, old, fat fool had a doll yet, all hid away, and when she was alone she used to take it out and cuddle it.

I didn't think Dolly really wanted to kill herself. But still the idea of it was working in her mind, too. She says to me:

"Danny, I ain't anything but a comic valentine, and I know it— even if I did kill myself someone would laugh. You see if they wouldn't."

How far she meant to go, I never could judge. Maybe she never had it quite figured out herself. But about three o'clock that afternoon, when one of our performances is over, and another one is getting ready to begin, we missed her. While we were all looking round and asking each other questions, and wondering, a red-faced Rube with a big nickel-plated star pinned onto his blue coat comes into the tent, mad and sweating, and says to Watty:

"Does that fat woman belong to you?"

"I have one," says Wattry, cautious.

"Come and get her," he says excited. "She's under arrest— You're under arrest, too. Y'ou're all under arrest," he goes on, getting more and more excited. "I'm chief of police of this town, and I arrest you all for conspiracy."

"Wait a minute," says Watty, "don't go so fast! What's she done?"

"Done," says he, "done! You come along with me!"

We all iollered him over to the race track. And before we got there we could see something unusual was going on.

The track, under the finish wire, betwixt the judges' stand and the grandstand, was one shouting, laughing, hollering mass of people all collected round something in the centre of it. People was standing on fences all around, and the Judges was leaning out of the stand trying to make themselves heard.

"She's broken up the races." says the city marshal. "She's laying on the middle of the track right in front of the judges' stand. And she won't budge. And we can't budge her. Is any of you named Watty? She keeps calling out to Watty that she's going to kill herself."

It seems Dolly, just as the horses was starting for the third race, had walked through a section of the paddock fence, very calm and determined, and flopped down onto the track. Everyone thought she had fainted. Some of the jockeys pulls up in time, some swerves aside, and one has to hurdle her. And her laying there with her eyes shut! A doctor comes and feels of her pulse and says there's nothing the matter with her. He jabs her in the arm with a hypodermic, and she opens her eyes and sets us and hollers: "Start your races!

Start 'em—I'll show 'em whether I've got the nerve to kill myself or not! Start up your horses!"

As we drawed near the crowd it opened out, in one spot, and one of these here big sprinkling carts come dashing out of it. They had backed that up against Dolly and turned it loose. The driver licked his horses into a trot and wept down the road past us.

"Hi there, chief," the driver yells, to the city marshal, as he goes by, "she's had one whole tank full and it never fazed her!"

And he went off at a gallop for a fresh one, people scattering from in front of him as he went. And just at that minute there was a yell went up from the crowd and one of these here volunteer fire companies come racing up the track with a hand pump engine. They was cheering as they run, like they was going to a fire, and the crowd waved its hats and cheered, too. They whirled around very business-like, and backed the engine over towards the judges' stand and reeled out a coil of hose. They plunked their suction pipe into a barrel standing there and started to pump, and then that broke up in a row. For there wasn't any place to get water from nearer than an eighth of a mile away where the sprinkling cart had gone, and they wasted fifteen gallons of pink lemonade, squirting it excited-like Into tbe air in all directions, before the fellow who was selling it woke up and ruined that fire engine with a hatchet.

We pushed through the crowd with the people yelling "Get a derrick!" "Start a bonfire!" and things like that. And there she lay, wet as a duck from the sprinkling cart, but still determined to die.

"Start 'em up," she was crying out "Start up your horses! Here I lay to be tromped to death! I'll show Watty Sanders, I will!"

A group of prominent citizens was keeping the crowd back. And one old feller, with a black alpaca coat and a silk hat, that was nearly as excited as Dolly was herself, was hopping around and waving a handkerchief at the crowd whilst he kept piping out over and over: "Give her air! Stand back and give the lady air! Air is what she wants!"

The mayor of the town and the head man of the fair association was trying to roll her. And they would stop and give it up for hopeless, and then try again. Then the mayor would shout and order different men in the crowd to come and help roll, in the name of the law. But the crowd would only whoop and yell again, and no one would help. And then them prominent citizens would beg and plead with her. But Dolly would only say: "Start your horses! Here I be! Tromp me with your horses! You can tell Watty Sanders to come and see me tramped!"

"This man," says the city marshal, pushing Watty up towards the mayor, "is her husband."

The mayor is purty mad by this time. He feels like his dignity is getting wilted, for one stream of that pink lemonade had curved over the crowd and ruffled his boiled shirt, and every time he leaned over to plead with Dolly one big feller in the crowd would say very solemn: "Don't you marry him, lady! Don't you let him fool you. He's got one wife now!"

So the mayor whirls around on Watty and take it out on him.

"I'll give you ten minutes," he says, yanking out his watch, ''to get her away from here. Just ten minutes. Or else the whole gang of you go to the lock up!"

There wasn't really any legal charge he could have us locked up on. But in them country towns, legal or not, the prominent citizens can always make it hot for a travelling showman one way or another. And they do it, too.

So Watty was considerably worried.

"Dolly, dear," says he, kneeling down by her very tender and coaxing, "ain't you feeling well? What seems to be the matter with my little woman?"

"I ain't to be coaxed," shouts Dolly, hysterical. "Bring on your horsps! I'm going to he tromped to death."

"Come, come, little woman," says Watty, "tell hubby what the trouble is."

"It's you that's drove me to it," she bawls. "You don't love me any more!"

Watty was awful embarrassed, but he seen it had to be done, so he fetched a sigh and coaxed her. And she enjoyed being coaxed that way, and kept him at it. But every time he talks around to the place where he begs her to move along she begins to cry out for the horses and he has to start all over again. You never seen a woman who was any more the boss of a situation, or liked it any better, than Dolly.

But the mayor's ten minutes was going fast and finally Watty gets desperate.

"Dolly," he says, "If you don't come along home at once I'll send for Reginald!"

But she don't care.

"Bring him!" she shouts. "Bring him along! I don't care if he does bite me. I want to die. Bring on your poison snake!"

"Go get him," says Watty to the Human Ostrich, who was standing by with a face like a knot on a fence post, "go, get the snake!"

"Stop!" cries the Mayor. "A snake? Don't you dare jeopardise the lives of these peaceful citizens by turning loose a snake in this crowd!"

And the Ostrich, he stops.

"Dolly," says Watty, giving up the snake idea, "isn't there any way I can prove to you how much I love you?"

Dolly sets up and snuffles and gasps and acts like she is getting ready for the worst tantrum yet. But all of a sudden a light begins to break onto her face.

She has a thought that tickles her. And she drops hysterics and she says, very coy and girlish: "If would you really loved me you—"

But a light has hit Watty at the same time, and he interrupts her by saying: "Little woman, I have decided to get along without any more snake charming or glass eating in my show from now on."

He turns to the Human Ostrich and says: "You go and tell your wife that you and she are at liberty. You're fired. Come on Dolly."

And Dolly grinned, and got up.

But the Human Ostrich, even then, never changed the expression of his face any. But he did open his mouth just far enough to say two words.

"Female Woman!" he says. "Female woman!"

———————

11: The Long, Long Lane

B. M. Bower

1871-1940

The Smart Set Oct 1906

Truth (Perth, WA) 13 Jan 1907

LONESOME got up and stretched his arms above his head, which means that he was obliged to curl his fingers to keep from scraping the ridge-pole of the line-camp shack. On his browned face brooded the gloom of settled ennui and distaste for the life he was living. It was that gloom which had brought him the name "Lonesome" among his fellows.

"If the fellow that first permeated defenceless civilisation with that remark about 'It's a long lane that has no turning,' " he remarked disgustedly, "had ever toiled on a Montana cow-ranch, he'd have changed the wording some."

Chan Morgan, looked up briefly from his game of solitaire. He held a red ace in his hand, and there were two places to build to, so that his tone was what one might call indifferent.

"What about it ?" He laid the ace on the deuce of clubs and then meditated on the wisdom of the play. He was not thinking much about Lonesome just then.

"He'd have put it like this, if he didn't say worse. 'It's a DAM long lane that has no turning.' If hunting a stake in this man's country ain't the damnedest long lane ever I strayed into, I don't want to tackle a longer. I've spent six years drinking alkali till I ooze sal soda, and perambulating over the range looking for my fortune and never finding it to home when I call. I tell yuh right here and now, Chan, I'm sick of it. I want to get back where there's cornfields, and houses close enough so yuh don't have to pack a lunch and blankets getting from one to the next, and girls! And I say again, and say it louder: It's a dam—"

"Yuh needn't," cut in Chan, placing the jack of hearts on the ten-spot in the top row. "Leastways, not any louder. You are plenty audible, right now."

"If ever I do get more than enough to keep me in bridle-bits and smoking material," Lonesome went on, after a minute of silence save for the faint, swishing click of the cards, "I tell yuh right now, it's me for little Illinois. I'm plumb sick of just grass and hill with nothing but cow-brutes and buzzard-head horses for society, with maybe a dance now and then to make yuh realise how thundering lonesome yuh are, and what a lot you're missing. I'd ruther hoe corn for my board and clothes."

"Well, who is holding yuh?" snorted Chan, putting the queen of diamonds on the jack, and adding the king from the reserve pile. He shuffled off three, turned up the ace and added it to the king, drew a long breath of satisfaction and believed he had the game beaten.

Lonesome's complaining was annoying like the hum of a disgruntled mosquito when one wants to sleep.

"Blamed, rotten poverty is a-holding me: that's what. There's a girl back there, that— but I can't go back without a stake. Only for that, I wouldn't have stayed a minute, Chan. But what's a man going to do? I've used my rights, and got my homestead proved upon, and a desert claim that ain't by no means blossoming like a rose. What good are they? I couldn't give 'em away. I might better a' been riding with a long rope and a bunch uh irons tied to my saddle. I'd 'a' had some cattle by this time, and I'd about as soon be a rustler as live the way I've been doing."'

"Aw, you dry up! You talk bug-house, Lonesome. There's neither sense, nor poetry in them remarks. lf you'd quit bawling about the country and settle down to liking it, yuh wouldn't have any kick coming. I wouldn't live anywhere else— not if I was paid for it. A man that can ride over the range and cuss it like you do— just plain cussing when you're hungry, or the sand gets in your eyes, or you're standing night-guard in the rain, or something, is different— but cussing the country systematic and malignant the way you do, there's something sure to be wrong with that man. It ain't, the country that's to blame, Lonesome: it's you."

Chan shuffled off three cards, saw that the deuce of hearts was where he couldn't get at it without cheating, grunted disgust and swept the deck together for another try.

"Why don't yuh marry and settle down?" he demanded pettishly, the while he shuffled.

"Marry who? It it's Myrt Westman you're thinking of, I don't want her bad enough to settled down in this country."

"Uh course, I don't suppose, it's a question uh whether she wants YOU," fleered Chan, his eyes fixed up on his fingers.

"I ain't asked her, if that's what you mean," Lonesome retorted. "And what's more, I ain't dead sure that I will. She's mighty nice, but I know where there is nicer."

"Yuh do? Well, if I was you, I'd drift. I wouldn't set back here and growl about the only part of God's earth that's fit for a white man to live in. I'd pull out and go back to a little two-by-four country that's more my size. I'd head back where the girls are all yellow-haired and sprouting wings. I'd stake myself to a hoe and one uh them corn-fed angels and live happy ever after. I wouldn't stay in a country that gave me sharp pangs uh distress, that Montana appears to give you, Lonesome. Better throw another chunk on the fire, hadn't yuh?"

Chan, having got another lay-out that promised much, dismissed the subject wholly from his mind.

Lonesome went to the door and stood looking out for a moment at the bleak, moon-washed bluff hunched up against the clouds, so close that the huge boulders seemed toppling for a slide down upon the cabin. He eyed it resentfully, over its ridge was where the sun first peered belatedly into the coulee in the morning. Beyond the ridge— miles and more mile's away— stretched the sunny corn-fields, the meadows and homesteads of his beloved Illinois. On the ridge gray wolf howled plaintively the hunting call. Across on the farther hillside a coyote yapped back impertinently. And straight ahead, the little, round corral lay empty, and beside it, in the low, sod-roofed stable, he could hear a horse sneeze the hay dust from his nostrils. And in his heart he, hated it all with a hatred that rose up in futile rage against the circumstances that held him there, and clamored against his tight shut teeth for the speech he knew was childish and weak.

"Say! Are yuh trying to warm the whole coulee, Lonesome?" mildly questioned Chan over his shoulder, with a card poised between his fingers.

"Lord, how I do hate this dam country!" Lonesome muttered, and shut the door viciously. "That cussed hill has stood right there every winter since I've worked for the Block Seven, and never moves a muscle— which is to say, a rock. And the same dam wolf howling on top."

"Come to think of it," Chan spoke cheerfully, "it IS a crying shame that same hill don't have to be planted fresh every spring, and hoed and watered, same as them corn-fields you're batty about. But if I recollect, it had stood just like that ever since I was a kid. Queer how blame permanent Mama Nature does things."

Lonesome pitched his shoulders ill-naturedly and threw more wood on the heap of coals in the fire-place, rolled a cigarette in the purely mechanical fashion that comes with long practice, and brooded before the fire. A breeze came whispering down the coulee and shook tentatively the one little square window of the shack. The flames heard, nodded greeting and danced on their toes, craning up the wide chimney to speak to the breeze above. The wolf, up on the ridge, gave a long, wavering note, and from afar came the answer weirdly.

Lonesome leaned with elbows on his knees, listened to the wind gusts and to the wolf, watched the flames preening and craning wishfully toward the call, and pinched his brows closer together. He hated it. He had hated it every day of the six long years, and the hatred was growing within him. He wondered how long it would be, this long lane of fortune seeking in the range land! He wondered why men like Chan— good fellows too, they were— could live on and on in the wild reaches of the plain and barren hills, with never a thought for that smiling land which lay far beyond the ridge, where howled the wolf?

They, too, knew the East. They knew; but they did not care. They were content to spend their days in the saddle and their nights under a canvas roof, or perhaps with nothing between them and the stars: or, in winter, to live apart from their fellows in a little, sod roofed cabin like this, with days in the saddle keeping watch over the drifting cattle that they strayed not too far off the home range. They were content, and he— he grudged each day that passed and found the ridge between him and home. Days while he rode— and he rode with the best of them— his thoughts turned wistfully to that other life. He had not cared for it, particularly, when he was living it. He had not appreciated the comfort of soft lying at night, or of mingling much with his fellows.

He had come West, and the West had been too big for him and too lonely. And he wondered if, in another six years, he would get used to having the sky-line pushed back 80 miles, or a hundred: to riding up on a ridge and finding that his outlook was limited only by his range of vision: that the horizon was curved, as one sees it on the ocean? Or to look away and away, and see low-lying, faintly blue mountains outlined against the deeper blue of the sky; to feel the wind always a-sweeping across the land, laying flat the grasses where it passed: to having always cattle and horses and other riders like himself making up his life and filling his days: and to sit at night and listen to the howling of the gray wolf and the yapping of the coyote, and to the faint shuffling of cards as Chan played solitaire.

He bent, picked up a long stick with blackened point and thrust it roughly in among the leading flames, and they stopped dancing long enough to spit angry sparks at him for his interference.

"Time to roll in, I guess," Chan said, yawning and clasping his smooth, white hands behind his brown head. "I beat it, anyway. But on the tray, too, which is. generally my unlucky card."

Lonesome drew a long breath and came back to the hateful present: covered the fire methodically, wound his watch and went over to his rough board bunk with its gray wool blankets and the calico-covered pillow, stopped to listen to a particularly wailing note of the wolf, and drew off his boots, dropping them to the floor with a thump.

"Yes, sir, it's a dam long lane— Montana," he said meditatively.

THE LONG LANE had turned: that is, Lonesome discovered that his homestead and his desert claim up Swift Current way were worth many dollars as oil land, even though they still refused to blossom like the rose one reads about. He sold them, one day just before the horse round-up started that spring, and suddenly realised that he had the stake, magnified beyond his

dreams, for which he had been waiting so long: that his fortune had unexpectedly come knocking at his door, and had found him at home.

When he was convinced that it was real money, and that he was not dreaming, he immediately sold other things: his saddle, bridle, chaps and spurs, for instance, and his bed. Rags, a shaggy-maned pony that he owned, he gave to Chan.

He liked Chan. He even begged Chan to go back with him to God's own country and be a white man. Chan wouldn't. He said that Montana looked good to *him*, and he guessed he'd stay a while, and Lonesome looked at him wonderingly.

How any man could stay in Montana when he had the chance to leave he could not understand. However, he rode over and told Myrtie Westman good-bye, and then made straight for the nearest place where he could buy a ticket to Illinois.

To Chan he remarked that it was like getting pardoned out of the pen, as near as he could tell for never having been pardoned out. Anyway, he thanked the Lord that cow-punching was only a bad taste in his mouth, and he'd try and forget the last six years. Then he stepped eagerly on the platform of his train and waved his hat.

In a month he wrote a letter to Chan. The letter, copied verbatim, read:

DEAR CHAN,

I'm in God's country, and you can gamble I'm sure enjoying every breath. Talk about an Eden! I'm rolling' in flowers. You ought to smell the lyocks once. And eating? Say, I've had custard pie and chicken every day since I got here, and real cream to drink: *drink*, mind you. The canned variety don't go here, you bet. And girls? Say, Chan, you just ought to see the girls. It would be worth the trip back here, all right, all right. My old girl is still here, and no loop on her, but the trouble is, they's a bunch of peaches growed up since I left. I been close herding the bunch, but there's so many nice ones I just don't know where to ride in and begin cutting out. I've been to 14 dances and eight parties, and go to church regular and hold up one corner of the hymn-book for a girl. And every Sunday it's a different girl. It's great, all right. Cow-boys is scarce back here, and if you come back you can be the White-haired Boy, sure. It's as good as being a soldier-boy home from the war, all right. I'm sure the real thing. Think uh setting in the best chair with a bunch of pretty girls hovering around, listening to you tell it scarey. Chan, they's nothing to beat it. You better come on back where I am. Mother looks just as she did when I left, and you ought to set your teeth into one of her custard pies. She's sure a swell cook. Father's got the rhumatizm and goes with a cane. You better come back. Chan.

Your friend

EDGAR C. CORBIN.

Chan did not go anywhere, except on the round-up. And for a long time he heard no more from Lonesome, who was now being called Edgar, or plain "Ed." Then a letter went West: a shorter letter than was the first.

Lonesome, it seemed, was still having the time of his life: but how was Rags coming on? Did he still show his teeth when the cinch was tightened? And how was Myrtie Westman? And what had become of all the boys? Was Shorty still cooking for the Block Seven? And why didn't Chan write oftener and more of it!

In that letter Lonesome forgot to suggest that Chan should come back to God's country.

Back in his native town, Edgar C. Corbin rolled himself a cigarette and leaned against the barn door, and looked away over the ripening corn-fields. They were his own, and he eyed them gloomily, wondering why he did not feel the gloat of possession that he had expected to feel.

With his thousands, he'd invested heavily in corn-fields and meadows, with houses, and barns snuggled among them. He had come near investing in a wife, as well. But the girl had been wearisome, though she was the prettiest in the neighborhood.

Lonesome— who was Lonesome no more— found her, after the first month of the engagement, a bit hard to talk to. For that matter, she seemed to have the same trouble with him. So they quarrelled and went their ways, and Lonesome told himself that there wasn't a girl in the bunch could hold a candle to Myrtie Westman, either for looks or brains. Myrtie could ride! He had tried to teach the engaged one the art, with results unsatisfactory to both. He had not attempted to teach another. Anyway, there wasn't much fun in riding when a fellow couldn't find a decent saddle in the country, and had to ride down lanes, or up lanes, or across into another lane, whenever he started anywhere.

Lonesome told himself that he had had about enough of the lane proposition, and so gave over riding. There were over things he had given over: going to church, for instance, and holding up olio corner of a hymn-book for a girl. And he was tired of chicken and custard pie. A fellow couldn't get hold of a decent beef-steak, it seemed like, for love or money: and a dish of dried apricots, stewed with lots of sugar, wouldn't go bad, for a change. Or even a mess of fat, black prunes, with the pits just about to fall out of them. And what was the matter, that mother couldn't seem to get the right twist on baking-powder bread? He'd tried to tell her, and even mixed up a batch, once. As for sourdough: well, she just didn't savvy, and that was all.

Still, it was God's country, and the only place for a white man: only it had changed a lot in the six years he had been away. At first he hadn't noticed it.

but there sure was a change. Things were different. They didn't used to be so narrow and contracted. Seemed like they'd gone back a notch, and he'd just have to get used to them all over.

He ground the cigarette stub into the black soil that he might not set fire to his barn, and let his eyes wander to the tree-fringed horizon, only half a mile away. It occurred to him that half a mile was a pretty decent-sized outlook, for God's country. He liked God's country— it wasn't that— but God's country was so blamed little! He felt, sometimes as if he daren't turn around quick, for fear of bumping into something.

He went slowly across the meadows to his pretty home, listlessly wondering if her pansy-bed had amounted to anything this summer. By her he mentally referred to Myrtie Westman, on the Upper Marias, in Montana.

Queer, how a fellow's thoughts will drift. That night he dreamed of the Block Seven line-camp, and of the gray wolf howling on the ridge above the shack, and Chan shuffling the cards with a little, swishing click, playing solitaire.

When he woke in the morning, and saw the ruffled, dotted Swiss curtains at his window, he somehow felt cheated. He gloomed around; the place all day, and barely escaped having to swallow a pint of bone-set tea because he wouldn't eat.

That night he dreamed again of riding in the face of a sweeping prairie wind that lay flat the grass where it passed: of working in the dust and the uproar and the tang of smoke in branding time. Of eating his breakfast, cross-legged in the grass, with his plate in his lap, while others laughed and talked around him. And talk was not of crops and drought and the price of butter: it was the wide, wide language of the range-land.

HE WOKE with a queer ache in his throat, and he would not meet his mother's anxious eyes when she asked if he were sick?

Chan, playing solitaire in the dusk of the first stormy day of late November, felt a gust of keen cold swoop in with the opening of the door. He looked up. stared blankly, and scattered the cards recklessly.

"Lonesome, by all that's holy! When did yuh drop down, man?"

Their hands met and clung in the grip of friendship.

"Hit the home ranch this morning, Chan, and come right on over! They said you'd just come over to hole up for the winter. Guess I'll help yuh hold it down."

Chan stooped and began picking up the scattered deck.

"What'n hell brought yuh back?" he asked curiously.

"Lots uh things." Lonesome went over and poked at the flames, and they spat sparks at him quite as spitefully as ever. "Myrtie Westman, for one thing. Corn-fed angels kinda get monotonous, Chan."

For ten long breaths Chan said nothing. He was shuffling the deck abstractedly.

Then: "Mrytie and me are going to be married in the spring," he said slowly. "I was going to write and tell yuh."

Lonesome leaned on the rough log mantel and stared down into the flames. Chan mechanically counted off 13 cards, laid them to one side, and dealt four, face up, on the table before him. He glanced sidelong at the tall figure before the fire, and at the impassive profile with the firelight throwing upon it a wavering, red glow.

The figure turned and walked to the door, threw it open and stood looking out, his nostrils distended to the sweep of the wind. Before him the ridge hunched up against the black sky-line, and a pale swimming moon washed the steep sides of it in uncertain light. On the top a gray wolf howled plaintively the hunting call. Across on the far side a coyote yapped back impertinently.

Lonesome laughed, deep in his throat, and turned back to the fire.

"You'll have a good wife, Chan, and maybe yuh deserve her more than I do. But anyway, yuh can't marry off these hills and coulees, and— and all that, and take 'em away from me, thank the Lord! I got a cinch there."

Chan looked up quickly, and came over to where he stood.

"I'm almighty glad to see yuh back, Lonesome," he said simply, with a hand pressed lightly on his shoulder. Lonesome raised his head and listened to the wolf, as one listens to the music one loves.

"Chan, it's a good place to be— Montana," he said, and rolled a cigarette contentedly.

_____

12: The Angel of the Mizzen-top

Edith Elmer Wood

1871-1945

Harper's Bazaar, 28 April 1900

Bundaberg Mail and Burnett Advertiser, 23 Aug 1901

THE NEW AMERICAN CONSUL and his wife had been at Kobe about six months— long enough to outgrow the presence of uncanny strangeness with which Japan oppressed them, but not to cast off the homesickness that lay heavy on their hearts. They had never before been out of America, hardly beyond the borders of their native State, and they were past the time of life that finds exhilaration in a radically new departure.

Mr. Burrage had been superintendent of the stamping-mills connected with a copper mine in the northern peninsula of Michigan. The mine run out, and the mills were shut down in consequence. Mr. Burrage having served the owners faithfully for many years, they were anxious to find him another position; and as his life and training so obviously fitted him to represent his country abroad in a diplomatic capacity, and incidentally as the chief owner of the mine was the brother of a Senator, he was appointed, within a month of the closing of the mills, United States Consul at Kobe.

The breaking up of the home of a lifetime, the journey across the Continent, and, worst of all, the long sea trip from San Francisco to Kobe were a serious ordeal to this quiet elderly couple, who found it exceedingly difficult to adjust themselves to many of the conditions of their new life.

The Government fared better than might have been anticipated. Mr. Burrage was a good business man, conscientious, hard-working, and clear-headed, and it would not be long before he had the details of his office-work well in hand. He was polite and accommodating to the American tourists who wanted passports to visit Kioto. He skilfully avoided being drawn into the personal breach between the French and German Consuls. Altogether he was in a fair way to become, by the time of his recall, a very excellent official.

But neither he nor his wife was happy. Under the circumstances it might be expected that Mr. Burrage would hold all the American features of the calendar in most reverent memory, it would be natural to picture him thinking of Decoration Day, not indeed with any sense of personal responsibility, but with an extra pang of homesickness as the processions marching through Michigan rose before his mind.

But in the easy-going Orient, where time is punctuated only by the arrival and departure of the mail-steamers, he actually forgot all about it, and was sitting in his office at the consulate on the morning of the 30th of May utterly unconscious of the date's significance— and he a Grand Army man, too!

Very soon after he had settled himself on the morning at his desk his Portuguese clerk, Mr. Agulhas, came in to the inner sanctum and announced, with certain discreet amusement, that Mrs. Kent, who kept a saloon on Division-street known as "The Mizzen-top," and much patronised by sailors, was in the outer office, and wanted to see him.

"Is she an American, too?" inquired Mr. Burrage, rather testily. He had been caused a good deal of annoyance by several shady fellow-countrymen, who had gotten into trouble with the Japanese police and expected him to get them out.

"Oh, no, sir," said the clerk. "She's English. She wouldn't tell me what she wanted."

"All right. Ask her in."

The Consul rose us she entered, and offered her a chair, with all the scrupulous courtesy that could have been claimed by the first lady in the land. Mrs. Kent was middle aged and stout. She dropped into the chair gratefully and began fanning herself.

"You'll be haskin' yourself, sir, what I'm 'ere for," she remarked in a comfortable, motherly way. "But I knowed you was new to the place, and I thought you might 'ave overlooked its bein' Decoration Day."

"Why, bless my soul! yes," exclaimed the Consul. " It never once entered my mind."

"I didn't never mention it to 'im as was Consul before, but, from what I've 'eard of you, sir, I thought you might be a man with enough 'eart to take it up, and I knowed it 'ud be a comfort to the poor boys to 'ave some sort of official notice took of 'em by their own people."

The Consul looked dazed. The drift of it all was anything but clear to him. Mrs. Kent noticed his perplexity; and explained.

"Decoration Day bein' an American hinstitution, and me bein' Hinglish, you'll be wondering what ever in this world I've got to do with it. It all begun like this, sir, twelve years back, when there was an American man-o'-war in port, and a young fellow from aboard bein' in at my place— You may 'ave noticed my place on Division-street?"

The Consul nodded. "E got into trouble with some Roosians. They're a terrible quarrelsome people when they've 'ad a drop too much. 'E was all alone, you see, and before 'e got through 'e was awful bad 'urt. I sent for 'is ship's surgeon, and 'e says, says 'e, 'Sweeny can't live but a few hours, and it 'ud be a cruel shame to move 'im. We'll take the best care of 'im we can right 'ere,' says 'e, 'and I'll see you're paid for your trouble.' 'Don't speak of that, sir,' says I. 'It's not money I'm wantin' for doin' what I can for the poor boy. 'E was dreadful young, 'E'd run away from 'ome to enlist. I'm thlnkin' 'e came o good

people— 'e was that partlc'lar. 'E asked me to write to 'is mother, and tell 'er about 'is dyln', but I weren't on no haccount to mention where 'e got 'urt nor 'ow. 'E didn't want to die, and it 'ud a wrunged your 'eart, sir, to 'ear 'im. 'Tweren't so much either, 'e minded, as dyin' so far from 'ome, to a 'eathen country. Says I: 'You won't be buried amongst the 'eathen. Sweeny, There's a tidy little cemetery on the 'ill where they puts the furriners.' 'But it'll be awful lonesome,' says 'e, just like a child, 'and there won't never be no Decoration Day.' 'And what may that be ?' says I, never 'avin' 'eard of it before. Then 'e told me about it. and I says, 'Sweeny, if that's all that's on your mind, make yourself easy,' says I. 'As long as I live you shall 'ave your flowers and your flag every 30th of May. And when I die, I'll try to get some one else to take charge o' the job.' You'd 'ardly believe, sir, 'ow that little thing seemed to please 'im.... And now you understand, sir 'ow I come to be lookin out for it for 'im, and the other boys." she ended simply. The Consul was profoundly touched

"I am grateful to you, my dear madam— very grateful to you for what you have been doing for my fellow-countrymen. I am very glad you have told me of it— very glad you have reminded me of my own duty in this matter. It is rather late to do much to-day, but I will do what I can, and next year it shall be properly attended to. Do I understand you to say there are other American sailors buried here?"

"About a dozen, sir, is all."

"And you have decorated their graves all these years that their fellow-Americans have been neglecting them? I am sincerely glad it has been done. Though of course," he added, smiling, "it makes one a good deal ashamed to have to be reminded of one's American duty by an English woman."

"And such a Hinglish woman?" she rejoined, with a good-natured laugh that completely disconcerted the Consul. He made some inarticulate protests, but she had expressed his thought so exactly that there was not much for him to say. As soon as Mrs. Kent left he called his riksha, and, holding in one hand a green-lined pongee umbrella, and in the other a palm-leaf fan, he told his coolies "Hayaku!" which is an exhortation to move rapidly, and started on his rounds to see all the Americans in town.

He told two officer's wives about Mrs. Kent's call, and they, of course, were full of interest, and anxious to aid him in his hurriedly-arranged plans for the decoration of the sailors' graves. But they could not go at 4 o'clock, because they were taking part in the tennis tournament at the club, which began every afternoon that week at 4. Two, then, it must be. They promised to be at the consulate promptly at that hour, with all the flowers they could get in the meantime. Mr. Burrage next visited the homes of the three American missionaries, then called on a well-to-do Boston widow with literary tastes,

who had settled at Kobe to write a book on Japanese feudalism. Next he dropped in on two young bachelors, who were employed, one in the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, and the other in the office of a steamship company.

Then he hesitated, wondering if the tale of American citizens was complete; hesitated again, remembered Mrs. Kent, and stopped before a shop kept by a rusty old "sloper," who pretended to be a Grand Army man, though the Consul had never believed him to be genuine. Still, he was an American, and had a right to take part, and Mr. Burrage was glad he had asked him when he saw how eagerly the old man entered into it.

He decided he might as well be thorough while he was about it, and stopped on his way home at a road-house kept by a big burly Norfolk negro, where the bicyclists of Kobe were wont to stop for refreshments. It was tiffin time, and he was warm and tired when he reached him own shady bungalow on the hill, where his wife began bemoaning the short notice he had given her. Why hadn't he sent her a chit from the consulate before he started out? He acknowledged with humility that he had not thought of it.

He had not fairly gotten used to chits yet, and seldom thought of them without prompting. She accepted his explanation, and set the two, bare-legged gardeners at work stripping all the flowers from the place, and made a frantic search through bureau drawers for a silk flag handkerchief some one had given her husband when they left home. A few minutes before 2 the members of the American colony, each in a riksha loaded down with flowers, began collecting at the consulate.

The young man at the bank had found he could not get off, but he sent his "boy" with a basket full of flowers to represent him. No one had been able to get American flags of the proper sort. The naval officers' wives each had a tiny paper flag left over from a Washington's Birthday dinner party. The negro carried in his lap the big bunting flag that he was in the habit of flying over his establishment. It was not quite clear what he intended to do with it now. Of course one or two people were late, and the others grew impatient, and were about starting without them, when the missing ones turned up, with the usual plausible account of the accidents that had detained them.

The rikshas swung into line, single file, and started off, but not without some discussion on the part of the coolies over the all-important matter of precedence. The Consul's men proudly took the head of the line, and no one thought of disputing their right, nor that of the Consul's wife to come second. But some of the others had their doubts when the coolies of the widow, in their mourning livery of black and white, took the third place. The rivalry between the coolies of the navy women and those of the missionaries was keener still, and might have ended in serious trouble had not the

missionaries— the only foreigners present who understood enough Japanese to know what was going on— commanded their retainers to fall back.

It was a long, warm ride to the edge of the settlement, and up the hill-side to the cemetery. The flowers had lost their first freshness long before they reached their destination. At last the Consul's riksha drew up suddenly before the gate, over which rose a slender arch draped with American flags.

"Why, you didn't tell us you'd been out here already!" some one said, turning to the Consul.

"I haven't been," he replied. "Mrs. Kent must have done it."

As soon as they entered the little cemetery they saw other evidences of her visit, American flags rising here and there above the ground, each grave so marked, being heaped with flowers laboriously woven into wreaths and crosses and anchors.

There was a mid-shipman who died of fever in 1870, a quarter-master who was drowned in 1883, and nine more— seamen, landsmen, apprentices, or coal-heavers— including young Sweeney, who lost his life at Mrs. Kent's.

There was one grave decorated with flowers and a flag that was not a sailor's. It occupied a secluded spot apart from the others. The head-stone said that it belonged to Margaret Mason, of San Francisco, who died at Kobe in the 22nd year of her age. What story lay behind the decoration of that grave no one asked. It seemed better not to. One of the naval officers' wives, as she passed by with her arms full of flowers, acting on an unanalysed impulse, laid a handful of her blossoms on the lonely mound.

When the flowers were all distributed, the little group of expatriated Americans drew together in the shadiest spot they could find. The men bared their heads, and one of the missionaries offered a prayer that left them all wet-eyed.

When they had finished a wave of enthusiasm for Mrs. Kent surged over them all. And when some one proposed that they should stop on the way home, and give her a vote of thanks in the name of the American colony at Kobo, it was agreed to by acclamation.

Her place, the Mizzen-top, stood hospitably open. No need for doors 8000 miles from home. A Eurasian, five or six years old, the latest of her adoption, sat on she door-step playing with a disreputable kitten. In the back part of the room a person of 38, whose bleached hair flowed loosely over her shoulders in an affectation of impossible girlishness, was banging a waltz out of a wheezy *melodeau*. Half-a-dozen German sailors sat about drinking beer; and one, who had probably had something stronger, had just seized the rotund Mrs. Kent about the waist and was spinning her around, laughing and not very unwilling,

in a mad Teutonic waltz. As the riksha coolies half-paused, the Consul turned around with an interrogative lift of the eyebrows towards his wife.

She turned to the ladies behind her. "What do you think?"

"We can't do it," they said. "It's no use."

The Consul waved his coolies to go on. And the little procession of grateful Americans passed by the Mizzen-top without stopping.

_____

13: The Bridals of Ysselmonde

A. T. Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

The Pall Mall Magazine July 1901

WHEN THE GRAND DUKE Ferdinand of Carinthia travelled in state to wed the Princess Sophia of Ysselmonde, he did so by land, and for two reasons; the first being that this was the shortest way, and the second that he possessed no ships. These, at any rate, were the reasons alleged by his Chancellor, to whom he left all arrangements. For himself, he took very little interest in the marriage beyond inquiring the age of his bride. 'Six years,' was the answer, and this seemed to him very young, for he had already passed his tenth birthday.

The Pope, however, had contrived and blessed the match; so Ferdinand raised no serious objection, but in due course came to Ysselmonde with his bodyguard of the famous Green Carinthian Archers, and two hundred halberdiers and twelve wagons— four to carry his wardrobe, and the remaining eight piled with wedding presents. On the way, while Ferdinand looked for birds' nests, the Chancellor sang the praises of the Princess Sophia, who (he declared) was more beautiful than the day.

'But you have never seen her,' objected Ferdinand.

'No, Your Highness, and that is why I contented myself with a purely conventional phrase;' and the Chancellor, who practised *finesse* in his odd moments, began to talk of the sea, the sight of which awaited them at Ysselmonde.

'And what is the sea like?'

'Well, Your Highness, the sea is somewhat difficult to describe, for in fact there is nothing to compare with it.'

'You have seen it, I suppose?'

'Sire, I have done more; for once, while serving as Ambassador at Venice, I had the honour to be upset in it.'

With such converse they beguiled the road until they reached Ysselmonde, and found the sea completely hidden by flags and triumphal arches. And there, after three days' feasting, the little Grand Duke and the still smaller Princess were married in the Cathedral by the Cardinal Archbishop, and the Pope's legate handed them his master's blessing in a morocco-covered case; and as they drove back to the Palace the Dutchmen waved their hats and shouted 'Boo-mp!' but the Carinthian Archers cried '*Talassio*!' which not only sounded better, but proved (when they obligingly explained what it meant) that the ancestors of the Grand Duke of Carinthia had lived in Rome long before any Pope.

On reaching the Palace the bride and bridegroom were taken to a gilded drawing-room, and there left to talk together, while the guests filled up the time before the banquet by admiring the presents and calculating their cost. Ferdinand said, 'Well, *that*'s over'; and the Princess said, 'Yes,'— for this was their first opportunity of conversing alone.

'You're a great deal better than I expected,' said Ferdinand reassuringly. Indeed, in her straight dress sewn with seed-pearls and her coif of Dutch lace surmounted with a little crown of diamonds, the Princess looked quite beautiful; and he in his white satin suit, crossed with the blue ribbon of St. John Nepomuc, was the handsomest boy she had ever seen. 'Besides,' he added, 'my Chancellor says you are the hereditary High Admiral of the Ocean— it's in the marriage settlement; and that would make up for a lot. Where is it?'

'The Ocean?' She felt very shy still. 'I have never seen it, but I believe it's somewhere at the bottom of the garden.'

'Suppose we go and have a look at it?'

She was about to say that she must ask leave of her governess, but he looked so masterful and independent that she hadn't the courage. It gave her quite a thrill as he took her hand and led her out through the low window to the great stone terrace. They passed down the terrace steps into a garden ablaze with tulip beds in geometrical patterns; at the foot ran a yew hedge, and beyond it, in a side-walk, they came upon a scullion boy chasing a sulphur-yellow butterfly. The Grand Duke forgot his fine manners, and dropped his bride's hand to join in the chase; but the boy no sooner caught sight of him than he fled with a cry of dismay and popped into an arbour. There, a minute later, the bride and bridegroom found him stooping over a churn and stirring with might and main.

'What are you stirring, boy?' asked Ferdinand.

'Praised be the Virgin!' said the boy, 'I *believe* it's an ice-pudding for the banquet. But they shouldn't have put the ice-puddings in the same arbour as the fireworks; for, if Your Highness will allow me to say so, you can't expect old heads on young shoulders.'

'Are the fireworks in our honour too?'

'Why, of course,' the scullion answered. 'Everything is in your honour to-day.'

This simplified matters wonderfully. The children passed on through a gate in the garden wall and came upon a clearing beside a woodstack; and there stood a caravan with its shafts in the air. A woman sat on the tilt at the back, reading, and every now and then glancing towards two men engaged in deadly combat in the middle of the clearing who shouted as they thrust at one another with long swords.

The little Princess, who, except when driven in her state-coach to the Cathedral, had never before strayed outside the garden, turned very pale and caught at her husband's hand. But he stepped forward boldly.

'Now yield thee, caitiff, or thine hour has come!' shouted one of the fighters and flourished his blade.

'Sooner I'll die than tum te tum te tum!' the other answered quite as fiercely.

'Slave of thine become,' said the woman from the caravan.

'Thank you. Sooner I'll die than slave of thine become!' He laid about him with fresh vigour.

'Put down your swords,' commanded Ferdinand. 'And now tell me who you are.'

'We are Valentine and Orson,' they answered.

'Indeed?' Ferdinand had heard of them, and shook hands affably. 'Then I'm very glad to make your acquaintance.'

'And,' said they, 'we are rehearsing for the performance at the Palace to-night in Your Highnesses' honour.'

'Oh, so this is in our honour too?'

'To be sure,' said the woman; 'and I am to dress up as Hymen and speak the Epilogue in a saffron robe. It has some good lines; for instance—

' "Ye Loves and Genial Hours, conspire
To gratify this Royal Pair
With Sons impetuous as their Sire,
And Daughters as their Mother fair!" '

'Thank you,' said Ferdinand. 'But we are very busy to-day and must take one thing at a time. Can you tell us the way to the sea, please?'

The woman pointed along a path which led to a moss-covered gate and an orchard where the apple-blossom piled itself in pink clouds against the blue sky: as they followed the path they heard her laughing, and looked back to see her still staring after them and laughing merrily, while Valentine and Orson leaned on their swords and laughed too.

The orchard was the prettiest in the whole world. Blackbirds played hide-and-seek beneath the boughs, blue and white violets hid in the tall grass around the boles, and the spaces between were carpeted with daisies to the edge of a streamlet. Over the streamlet sang thrushes and goldfinches and bullfinches innumerable, and their voices shook down the blossom like a fall of pink snow, which threatened to cover even the daisies. The Grand Duke and the Princess believed that all this beauty was in their honour, no less than the chorus of the bells floating across the tree-tops from the city.

'This is the best of all,' said Ferdinand as they seated themselves by the stream. 'I had no idea marriage was such fun. And they haven't even forgotten the trout!' he cried, peering over the brink.

'Can you make daisy-chains?' asked the Princess timidly.

He could not; so she taught him, feeling secretly proud that there was something he could learn of her. When the chain was finished he flung it over her neck and kissed her. 'Though I don't like kissing, as a rule,' he explained.

'And this shall be my wedding present,' said she.

'Why, I brought you six wagon-loads!— beauties— all chosen by my Chancellor.'

'But he didn't make or choose this one,' said Sophia, 'and I like this one best.' They sat silent for a moment. 'Dear me,' she sighed, 'what a lot we have to learn of each other's ways!'

'Hallo!' Ferdinand was staring down the glade. 'What's that line at the end there, across the sky?'

Sophia turned. 'I think that's the sea— yes, there is a ship upon it.'

'But why have they hung a blue cloth in front of it?'

'I expect that's in our honour too.'

They took hands and trotted to the end of the orchard; and there, beyond the hedge, ran a canal, and beyond the canal a wide flat country stretched away to the sea,— a land dotted with windmills and cattle and red-and-white houses with weathercocks,— a land, too, criss-crossed with canals, whereon dozens of boats, and even some large ships, threaded their way like dancers in and out of the groups of cattle, or sailed past a house so closely as almost to poke a bowsprit through the front door. The weathercocks spun and glittered, the windmills waved their arms, the boats bowed and curtseyed to the children. Never was such a salutation. Even the blue cloth in the distance twinkled, and Ferdinand saw at a glance that it was embroidered with silver.

But the finest flash of all came from a barge moored in the canal just below them, where a middle-aged woman sat scouring a copper pan.

'Good day!' cried Ferdinand across the hedge. 'Why are you doing that?'

'Why, in honour of the wedding, to be sure! Must show one's best at such times, if only for one's own satisfaction.' Then, as he climbed into view and helped Sophia over the hedge, she recognized them, and, dropping her pan with a clatter, called on the saints to bless them and keep them always. The bridal pair clambered down to the towpath, and from the towpath to her cabin, where she fed them (for they were hungry by this time) with bread and honey from a marvellous cupboard painted all over with tulips: in short, they enjoyed themselves immensely.

'Only,' said Ferdinand, 'I wish they hadn't covered up the sea, for I wanted a good look at it.'

'The sea?' said the barge-woman, all of a shiver. Then she explained that her two sons had been drowned in it. 'Though, to be sure,' said she, 'they died for Your Majesty's honour, and, if God should give them back to me, would do so again.'

'For me?' exclaimed Sophia, opening her eyes very wide.

'Aye, to be sure, my dear. So it's no wonder— eh?— that I should love you.'

BY THE TIME they said good-bye to her and hurried back through the orchard, a dew was gathering on the grass and a young moon had poised herself above the apple-boughs. The birds here were silent; but high on the stone terrace, when they reached it, a solitary one began to sing. From the bright windows facing the terrace came the clatter of plates and glasses, with loud outbursts of laughter. But this bird had chosen his station beneath a dark window at the corner, and sang there unseen. It was the nightingale.

They could not understand what he sang. 'It is my window,' whispered Sophia, and began to weep in the darkness, without knowing why; for she was not miserable in the least, but, on the contrary, very, very happy. They listened, hand in hand, by a fountain on the terrace. Through the windows they could see the Papal Legate chatting at table with the King, Sophia's father, and the Chancellor hobnobbing with the Cardinal Archbishop. Only the Queen of Ysselmonde sat at the table with her wrists on the arms of her throne and her eyes looking out into the darkness, as though she caught some whisper of the bird's song. But the children knew that he sang for them, not for her; for he told of all the adventures of the day, and he told not as I am telling them, but so beautifully that the heart ached to hear. Yet his song was of two words only. 'Young— young— young! Love— love— love!'— the same words over and over.

A courtier came staggering out from the banqueting-hall, and the bird flew away. The children standing by the fountain watched him as he found the water and dipped his face in it, with a groan. He was exceedingly drunk; but as he lifted his head he caught sight of them in the moonlight and excused himself.

'In Your Highnesses' honour,' he assured them: 'been doing my best.'

'Poor man!' said Sophia. 'But how loyal!'

———————

14: A Modern Magician

Olaf Stapledon

1886-1950

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction July 1979

Published posthumously

THEY CONFRONTED EACH OTHER across a tea table in a cottage garden. Helen was leaning back coldly studying Jim's face. It was an oddly childish, almost foetal face, with its big brow, snub nose, and pouting lips. Childish, yes; but in the round dark eyes there was a gleam of madness. She had to admit that she was in a way drawn to this odd young man partly perhaps by his very childishness and his awkward innocent attempts at lovemaking; but partly by that sinister gleam.

Jim was leaning forward, talking hard. He had been talking for a long time, but she was no longer listening. She was deciding that though she was drawn to him she also disliked him. Why had she come out with him again? He was weedy and self-centered. Yet she had come.

Something he was saying recaptured her attention. He seemed to be annoyed that she had not been listening. He was all worked up about something. She heard him say, "I know you despise me, but you're making a big mistake. I tell you I have powers. I didn't intend to let you into my secret, yet; but, damn it, I will. I'm finding out a lot about the power of mind over matter. I can control matter at a distance, just by willing it. I'm going to be a sort of modern magician. I've even killed things by just willing it."

Helen, who was a medical student, prided herself on her shrewd materialism. She laughed contemptuously.

His face flushed with anger, and he said, "Oh very well! I'll have to show you."

On a bush a robin was singing. The young man's gaze left the girl's face and settled intently on the robin. "Watch that bird," he said. His voice was almost a whisper. Presently the bird stopped singing, and after looking miserable for a while, with its head hunched into its body, it dropped from the tree without opening its wings. It lay on the grass with its legs in the air, dead.

Jim let out a constricted squawk of triumph, staring at his victim. Then he turned his eyes on Helen. Mopping his pasty face with his handkerchief, he said, "That was a good turn. I've never tried it on a bird before, only on flies and beetles and a frog."

The girl stared at him silently, anxious not to seem startled. He set about telling her his secret. She was not bored any more.

He told her that a couple of years earlier he had begun to be interested in "all this paranormal stuff." He had been to séances and read about psychical research. He wouldn't have bothered if he hadn't suspected he had strange powers himself. He was never really interested in spooks and thought transference and so on. What fascinated him was the possibility that a mind might be able to affect matter directly. "Psychokinesis," they called this power; and they knew very little about it. But he didn't care a damn about the theoretical puzzles. All he wanted was power. He told Helen about the queer experiments that had been done in America with dice. You threw the dice time after time, and you willed them to settle with the two sixes uppermost. Generally they didn't; but when you had done a great many experiments you totted up the results and found that there had been more sixes than should have turned up by sheer chance. It certainly looked as though the mind really had some slight influence. This opened up terrific possibilities.

He began to do little experiments on his own, guided by the findings of the researchers, but also by some of his own ideas. The power was fantastically slight, so you had to test it out in situations where the tiniest influence would have detectable results, just tipping the scales.

He didn't have much success with the dice, because (as he explained) he never knew precisely what he had to do. The dice tumbled out too quickly for him. And so he only had the slight effect that the Americans had reported. So he had to think up new tricks that would give him a better opening. He had had a scientific training, so he decided to try to influence chemical reactions and simple physical processes. He did many experiments and learned a lot. He prevented a spot of water from rusting a knife. He stopped a crystal of salt from dissolving in water. He formed a minute crystal of ice in a drop of water and finally froze the whole drop by simply "willing away" all the heat, in fact by stopping all the molecular movement.

He told Helen of his first success at killing, a literally microscopic success. He brewed some very stagnant water and put a drop on a slide. Then through the microscope he watched the swarm of microorganisms milling about. Mostly they were like stumpy sausages, swimming with wavy tails. They were of many sizes. He thought of them as elephants, cows, sheep, rabbits. His idea was that he might be able to stop the chemical action in one of these little creatures and so kill it. He had read up a lot about their inner workings, and he knew what key process he could best tackle. Well, the damned things kept shifting about so fast he couldn't concentrate on anyone of them for long enough. He kept losing his victim in the crowd. However, at last one of the "rabbits" swam into a less populous part of the slide, and he fixed his attention on it long enough to do the trick. He willed the crucial chemical process to

stop, and it did stop. The creature stopped moving and stayed still indefinitely. It was almost certainly dead. His success, he said, made him "feel like God."

Later he learned to kill flies and beetles by freezing their brains. Then he tried a frog, but had no success. He didn't know enough physiology to find a minute key process to check. However, he read up a lot of stuff, and at last he succeeded. He simply stopped the nerve current in certain fibres in the spinal cord that controlled the heartbeat. It was this method also that he had used on the robin.

"That's just the beginning," he said. "Soon I shall have the world at my feet. And if you join up with me, it will be at your feet too."

Throughout this monologue the girl had listened intently, tom between revulsion and fascination. There was a kind of bad smell about it all, but one couldn't afford to be too squeamish in these days. Besides, there was probably nothing in morality, anyhow. All the same, Jim was playing with fire. Strange, though, how he seemed to have grown up while he was talking. Somehow he didn't look gawky and babyish anymore. His excitement, and her knowledge that his power was real, had made him look thrillingly sinister. But she decided to be cautious and aloof.

When at last Jim was silent, she staged a concealed yawn and said, "You're clever, aren't you! That was a good trick you did, though a horrid one. If you go much further, you'll end on the gallows."

He snorted and said, "It's not like you to be a coward."

The taunt stung her. Indignantly she answered, "Don't be ridiculous! Why should I join with you, as you call it, merely because you can kill a bird by some low trick or other?"

In Jim's life there had been certain events which he had not mentioned. They seemed to him irrelevant to the matter in hand, but they were not really so at all. He had always been a weakling. His father, a professional footballer, despised him and blamed the frail mother. The couple had lived a cat-and-dog life almost since their honeymoon. At school Jim had been thoroughly bullied; and in consequence he had conceived a deep hatred of the strong and at the same time an obsessive yearning to be strong himself. He was a bright lad and had secured a scholarship at a provincial university. As an undergraduate, he kept to himself, worked hard for a scientific degree, and aimed at a career of research in atomic physics. Already his dominant passion was physical power, so he chose its most spectacular field. But somehow his plans went awry. In spite of his reasonably good academic qualifications, he found himself stuck in a low-grade job in an industrial lab, a job which he had taken on as a stopgap till he could capture a post in one of the great institutions devoted to atomic physics. In this backwater, his naturally sour disposition became embittered.

He felt he was not getting a fair chance. Inferior men were outstripping him. Fate was against him. In fact he developed something like a persecution mania. But the truth was that he was a bad cooperator. He never developed the team spirit which is so necessary in the immensely complex work of fundamental physical research. Also, he had no genuine interest in physical theory and was impatient of the necessity of advanced theoretical study. What he wanted was power, power for himself as an individual. He recognized that modern research was a cooperative affair and that in it, though one might gain dazzling prestige, one would not gain any physical power as an individual. Psychokinesis, on the other hand, might perhaps give him his heart's desire. His interest rapidly shifted to the more promising field. Henceforth his work in the lab was a mere means of earning a livelihood.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION in the cottage garden he concentrated more eagerly than ever on his venture. He must gain even more spectacular powers to impress Helen. He had decided that for him, at any rate, the promising line was to develop his skill at interfering with small physical and chemical processes, in lifeless and in living things. He learned how to prevent a struck match from lighting. He tried to bypass the whole of atomic research by applying his power of psychokinesis to the release of energy pent up in the atom. But in this exciting venture he had no success at all, perhaps because in spite of his training, he had not sufficient theoretical knowledge of physics, nor access to the right kind of apparatus for setting up the experiment. On the biological side he succeeded in killing a small dog by the same process as he had applied to the robin. He was confident that with practice he would soon be able to kill a man.

He had one alarming experience. He decided to try to stop the sparking of his motorcycle engine. He started up the bike on its stand and set about "willing" the spark to fail. He concentrated his attention on the points of the sparking plug and the leaping spark and "willed" the space between the points to become impenetrable, an insulator. This experiment, of course, involved a far greater interference with physical processes than freezing a nerve fibre or even preventing a match from lighting. Sweat poured from him as he struggled with his task. At last the engine began to misfire. But something queer happened to himself. He had a moment of horrible vertigo and nausea and then he lost consciousness. When he recovered, the engine was once more running normally.

This mishap was a challenge. He had never been seriously interested in the mere theoretical side of his experiments for its own sake, but now he had perforce; to ask himself what exactly was happening when by an "act of will"

he interfered with a physical process. The obvious explanation was that in some way the physical energy that should have crossed the gap between the points had been directed into his own body; in fact that he had suffered the electric shock that he would have had if he had touched the points. It may be doubted whether the true explanation was as simple as this, for his symptoms were not those of electric shock. It might be nearer the truth to say that the inhibition of so much physical energy caused some sort of profound psychical disturbance in him; or else, to put the matter very crudely, that the physical energy was in some way converted into psychical energy in him. This theory is borne out by the fact that, when he recovered consciousness, he was in a state of great excitement and mental vigour, as though he had taken some stimulating drug.

Whatever the truth of the matter, he adopted the simpler theory and set about sidetracking the intruding energy so as to protect himself. After much anxious experimentation, he found that he could do so by concentrating his attention both on the sparking plug and on some other living organism, which then "drew off the electricity" and suffered accordingly. A sparrow sufficed. It died of the shock, while he himself remained conscious long enough to stop the engine. On another occasion he used his neighbour's dog as a "lightning conductor." The animal collapsed, but soon recovered consciousness and careened about the garden barking hilariously.

His next experiment was more exciting, and much, much more reprehensible. He went into the country and took up a position on a knoll, whence he could see a fairly long stretch of road. Presently a car came into sight. He concentrated his attention on the sparking plugs and "willed" the electrical energy to escape into the driver. The car slowed down, vacillated between the two sides of the road, and came to a standstill across the fairway. He could see the driver slumped over the steering wheel. There was no one else in the car. Greatly excited, Jim waited to see what would happen. Presently another car came in the opposite direction, hooted violently, and drew up with screeching brakes. The driver emerged, went to the derelict car, opened a door, and was confronted by the unconscious occupant. While the horrified newcomer was wondering what to do, the other recovered consciousness. There was an anxious conversation, and finally both cars went their separate ways.

JIM NOW FELT ready to impress his girlfriend. Since the killing of the robin, they had occasionally met, and in his awkward and adolescent way he had tried to make love to her. She had always discouraged him; but she was

obviously more interested in him since the robin incident. Though she sometimes affected to despise him, he felt that she was secretly drawn to him.

But one day he had an unpleasant surprise. He had boarded a bus to take him home from his work. He climbed the stairs and settled into a seat. Suddenly he noticed Helen sitting a few seats ahead with a curly-headed young man in a sportscoat. The couple were deep in conversation with their heads bent together. The girl's hair brushed his cheek. Presently she laughed, with a ring of happiness such as he had never before heard from her. She turned her face toward her companion. It was aglow with vitality and love. Or so it seemed to the jealous lover three seats behind.

Irrational fury swept over him. He was so ignorant of the ways of girls, and so indignant that "his girl" (for so he regarded her) should take notice of another man, that jealousy wholly possessed him, to the exclusion of all other considerations. He could think of nothing but destroying his rival. His gaze seized upon the nape of the hated neck before him. He passionately conjured up images of the hidden vertebrae and the enclosed bundle of nerve fibres. The nerve current must cease; must, must cease. Presently the curly head sank on Helen's shoulder, and then the whole body fell forward.

The murderer hurriedly rose from his seat and turned his back on the incipient commotion. He left the bus, as though ignorant of the disaster.

Continuing his journey on foot, he was still so excited that he had no thought but exultation over his triumph. But gradually his frenzy subsided, and he faced the fact that he was a murderer. Urgently he reminded himself that after all there was no point in feeling guilty, since morality was a mere superstition. But alas, he did feel guilty, horribly guilty; the more so since he had no fear of being caught.

As the days passed, Jim alternated between what he regarded as "irrational" guilt and intoxicating triumph. The world was indeed at his feet. But he must play his cards carefully. Unfortunately his guilt gave him no peace. He could not sleep properly; and when he did sleep, he had terrifying dreams. By day his experiments were hampered by the fantasy that he had sold his soul to the devil. This notion infuriated him with its very silliness. Yet he could not rid himself of it. He began drinking rather heavily. But he soon found that alcohol reduced his psychokinetic power, so he firmly broke himself of the habit.

Another possible form of relief from his obsessive guilt was sex. But somehow he could not bring himself to face Helen. He was irrationally afraid of her. Yet she must be quite ignorant that he had killed her lover.

At last he met her accidentally in the street. There was no possibility of avoiding her. She was rather wan, he thought, but she smiled at him and

actually suggested a talk over a cup of coffee. He was tom between fear and desire, but presently they were seated in a cafe. After some trivial remarks, she said.

"Please comfort me! I have had a terrible shock quite recently. I was on the top of a bus with my brother who has been in Africa for three years. While we were talking, he collapsed and died almost instantly. He seemed perfectly fit. They say it was some new virus in the spinal cord." She noticed that Jim's face had turned deadly pale. "What's the matter?" she cried. "Are you going to die on me too?"

He pulled himself together and assured her that sheer sympathy for her had made him feel faint. He loved her so much. How could he help being upset by her misfortune? To his relief Helen was completely taken in by this explanation. She gave him, for the first time, the glowing smile he had formerly seen her turn upon her brother.

Encouraged, he pressed home his advantage. He said, he did so want to comfort her. They must meet again soon. And if she was at all interested in his experiments, he would show her something really exciting some time. They arranged a trip in the country the following Sunday. He privately decided to repeat for her benefit his trick with a passing car.

Sunday was a bright summer day. Sitting together in an empty railway carriage, they talked a good deal about her brother. He was rather bored, but he expressed ardent sympathy. She said she never imagined he had such a warm heart. He took her arm. Their faces drew close together, and they looked into each other's eyes. She felt an overwhelming tenderness for this strange, rather grotesque though boyish face, wherein, she told herself, the innocence of childhood was blended with an adult consciousness of power. She felt the underlying grimness, and she welcomed it. Jim, for his part, was realizing that she was very desirable. The warm glow of health had returned to her face. (Or was it a glow of love?) The full, sweet lips, the kindly, observant grey eyes, filled him not only with physical desire but a swooning gentleness that was new to him. The recollection of his guilt and present deception tormented him. An expression of misery came over his face. He let go her arm and bowed forward with his head in his hands. Perplexed and compassionate, she put an arm round his shoulders, and kissed his hair. Suddenly he burst into tears and buried his head on her breast. She hugged him and crooned over him as though he were her child. She begged him to tell her what was the matter, but he could only blubber, "Oh, I'm horrible! I'm not good enough for you."

Later in the day, however, he had quite recovered his spirits, and they walked arm in arm through the woods. He told her of his recent successes, culminating with the car incident. She was impressed and amused, but also

morally shocked by the irresponsibility of risking a fatal accident merely to test his powers. At the same time she was obviously fascinated by the fanaticism that drove him to such lengths. He was flattered by her interest, and intoxicated by her tenderness and her physical proximity. For they were now resting on the little knoll where he in tended to do his trick with the car, and he was lying with his head in her lap, gazing up at her face, where all the love that his life had missed seemed to be gathered. He realized that he was playing the part of an infant rather than a lover. But she seemed to need him to do so, and he was happy in his role. But soon sexual desire began to reassert itself and with it masculine self-respect. He conceived an uncontrollable lust to demonstrate his godlike nature by some formidable display of his powers. He became the primitive savage who must kill an enemy in the presence of the beloved.

Looking up through Helen's fluttering hair, he saw a small object moving. For a moment he took it for a gnat, then realized that it was a distant airplane approaching.

"Watch that plane," he said; and she was startled by the abruptness of his voice. She looked up, and down again at him. His face was contorted with effort. His eyes glared, his nostrils dilated. She had an impulse to fling him from her, so brutal he looked. But fascination triumphed. "Keep your eyes on the plane," he commanded. She looked up, then down, then up again. She knew she ought to break the devilish spell. (There was something called morality, but a delusion, probably.) Fascination had triumphed.

Presently the advancing plane's four engines hesitated, and ceased one by one to fire. The plane glided for a while, but soon gave evidence of being out of control. It vacillated, staggered, and then was in a nose dive, spiralling. Helen screamed, but did nothing. The plane disappeared behind a distant wood. After a few seconds there was a muffled crash, and smoke began to rise from behind the wood, a leaning black plume.

Jim raised himself from Helen's lap, and turning, pressed her backward to the ground. "That's how I love you," he whispered fiercely. Then he furiously kissed her lips, her neck.

She made a violent effort to pull herself together and resist the impulse of self-abandonment to this lunatic. She struggled to free herself from his grip; and presently the two stood facing each other, panting. "You're mad," she cried. "Think what you have done! You have killed people just to show how clever you are. And then you make love to me." She covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

He was still in a state of crazy exaltation, and he laughed. Then he taunted her. "Call yourself a realist! You're squeamish. Well, now you know what I am

really like; and what I can do. And see! You're mine. I can kill you at any moment, wherever you are. I shall do whatever I like with you. And if you try to stop me, you'll go the way of the robin and— the man on the bus." Her hands dropped from her tear-stained face. She stared at him in mingled horror— and tenderness. She said quietly, "You're quite mad, you poor boy. And you seemed so gentle. Oh, my dear, what can I do about you?"

There was a long silence. Then suddenly Jim collapsed on the ground, blubbering like a child. She stood over him in perplexity.

While she was wondering what to do, and blaming herself for not breaking the spell before it was too late, he was in an agony of self-loathing. Then he started to use his technique upon himself, so that no more harm should be done. It was more difficult than he expected; for as soon as he began to lose consciousness he also lost his grip on the operation. But he made a desperate effort of will. When Helen, noticing his stillness, knelt down by him, he was dead.

_____

15: Piety's Monument

Frank Penn-Smith

1863–1935

In: *Hang!* 1925

THE OLD MAN gathered in his contemplation from elsewhere, and fixed his pink-edged eyes on mine. I coughed and then began: "Didn't old Piety work the kilns above here? What sort of lime did he burn?" And I offered the old fellow my flask.

He picked up a battered jam-tin and gazed thoughtfully into it. Then he poked his finger in. Lastly, he emptied all my whisky into it, and drank it swiftly and suspiciously.

"Eh?" he said. Then something began to work in the old man; his reserve seemed to crack and come to pieces; he burst-up slowly, as it were, and crumbled into speech. "What should you know about old Piety?" he asked, uneasily, in a sorrowful, whining tone. "Oh, he could burn lime," he went on, "leastways, he thought he could. But there was as much difference between his kilns and mine as between oysters and cheese. Well! Well! You knowed him?" he whispered, stroking the bricks in the chimney behind him, thoughtfully.

"No," I replied, "only heard of him."

"And heard wrong," said the old man simply. "Now I'll tell you the facks." Then he went off in a low, quavering whine: "Piety owned these here kilns, an' Piety burnt lime. Leastways, he said he did, but it was me as done it But when Piety put his finger in, the kiln was all stone. He worrited here, he worrited there, muddling and mulling every blessed kiln till he had me nigh crazed, and my fingers raw picking out stone. Jus' give me the contrack,' I'd say— 'the contrack to burn lime at so much a bushel.' 'No you don't,' says he. An' that's all I ever got out of him: 'No, you don't! Not in my day.' And then he went and killed the kangaroo."

"The kangaroo?" I asked. "What kangaroo?"

"Bill's kangaroo," he replied, querulously. "Bill had a pet kangaroo— Bill, the old man's grandson, as owns these here kilns now. They didn't get on, the old man and Bill, and lived in different huts. Bill was an orphan. Well, the kiln was about half-full and burning— old Piety, he was great at half-kilns— when the kangaroo hopped on to the kiln bank and ate old Piety's dinner, bread-and-butter and what not. Oho! He *was* wild when he found out. Then the beast came and rooted at him with its fore-paws, playing like. With that, he kicks it; but for', the beast thought he was playing with it, so it just turns back upon him, a-twiddling its paws. Then he goes for it real spiteful, and give it a tremendous kick that sends it flying, right into the burning kiln."

The old man paused here and stared into space, mumbling. Then he went on, monotonously: "Lad! You would have larfed to see that kangaroo jump. But, lor'! there's no jumping out of a kiln. D'ye see the p'int?— But Bill he didn't larf when he finds it all out. There was the last of the kangaroo smoking in the blue flame a-top of the kiln. 'Oh, you old devil!' he says to Piety; 'it would serve you right to go through the kiln yourself!' Then he cleared right away, and wouldn't speak to nobody. But it was the childer as did it."

"Did what?" I asked.

"Well, it was like this," he explained. "My fingers was red raw with the half-burnt stone, and I was a-tying them up with rags, and abusing of old Piety. 'Couldn't burn charcoal, let alone lime!' I says. And the childer they took it round to Piety hisself. Well! the kiln was emptied, and we was going to start another, when he comes toddling down. 'You old weather-beaten windbag, you!' he cries. 'It's you that knows what spoils the kilns!' he says; 'just you clear out. I'll put, the lime in myself this time.' 'And welcome,' says I, 'if you draw it yourself,' says I.

" 'None of your cheek!' he says, coming at me with the sieve, and so I clears away, larfing to myself at the mess he'd make of it, and waiting for his tantrum to blow over. Well, I camps here in the hut, day by day, and hears them bumbling away up the valley, putting in the kiln and lighting it. Then when it's time to draw it, I goes up to the kiln, but no Piety.

" 'He's not turned up,' says the quarryman.

" 'And not likely,' says I, 'with a ki'ful o' stone. I'd be ashamed to look a man in the face,' I says. So I sets to work and draws the kiln as usual. But no Piety. And what's more, he wasn't about his hut, nor nowheres. Then I begins to think and think, and I draws that kiln slow and steady. But at last I draws a sort of bit o' whitestick— lime like the rest. I has a good look at it, and then says to myself, says I—"

Here the maundering old man paused, looking into space, then pulling himself together went on:

"I says to myself: 'Here he comes, feet first. I thought as much! It was the shin-bone."

"Whose shin-bone?" I demanded.

"Why, old Piety's, of course," he replied.

"What?— he'd fallen into the kiln?" I asked, horrified.

The old man turned viciously upon me for damaging his story.

"There you go," he cried— "blurting the thing out! Why, of course he'd fell in the kiln— what else would he do? There were his tracks to the kiln edge, and a few bricks gone where he lost his footing. Well, I jus' leaves it there and put a bag over it. Then I goes down to Bill— a-digging in the orchard— and says to

him: 'About this here contrack. Will you 'gree to let me have the contrack after the old man's dead?'

"That's looking ahead with a vengeance,' he says, grinning.

" 'Never mind,' I says. 'Good understandings makes long frien's,' I says.

" 'Oh, just as you like,' he says, digging away. 'I'm not too pertickler!'

" 'That's a bargain?' I asks.

" 'That's a bargain,' he says, just to be rid o' me. Then I says to him: 'Come up to the kiln, I want yer to help me awhile.' So he comes. Then I takes the bag off the bones. 'Look at that!' I says. "'Well,' says he, 'and what about it?'

"I says, 'that's your respected gran'father; leastwise all that's left of him.' You could have knocked him down with a feather. When he come to see it all he took on dreadful.

" 'Good Gawd,' he says, and, ' 'Orrible! 'Orrible!'

"Then says I: 'Be a man! It might have been wuss. It might have been *me,*' I says— 'or yerself,' I says. It might have been *me*— and then who's to burn the lime?' But he took on all the same. He took that dreadful a view of it. Oho!" quavered the old fellow, wagging his head: "He took a gloomy view of it, a very gloomby view of it!"

" 'Now you go away!' I says to him, 'and I'll draw this lime and bag it.'

" 'Bag that lime!' says he, 'and my gran'father amongst it!'

" 'My wages is in it,' I says, firm, 'but I'll get what I can of him out,' and so I did, and put the bone or two on the shed roof, away from the childer. Put 'em there not thinking, for there came a shower of rain while I was away for the cart, and when I got back the bones had all slacked up.

"But look ye here," went on the old man confidentially, "I had my own little idee so as old Piety'd not be lost sight of altogether. I takes about harf the lime the bones made— real lime, mind you— and makes up a bit of mortar for this here chimbley— which I was building at the time. So you see these here bricks and that bit mortar? Well, I reckon that's old Piety's monument. But as for the rest, Bill he buried it in the orchard, and when the perlice came up there was nothing left but the buttons."

———————

16: The Burial of the Rats

Bram Stoker

1847-1912

In: *Dracula's Guest*, 1914

Weird Tales, Sep 1928

LEAVING PARIS by the Orleans road, cross the Enceinte, and, turning to the right, you find yourself in a somewhat wild and not at all savoury district. Right and left, before and behind, on every side rise great heaps of dust and waste accumulated by the process of time.

Paris has its night as well as its day life, and the sojourner who enters his hotel in the Rue de Rivoli or the Rue St. Honore late at night or leaves it early in the morning, can guess, in coming near Montrouge— if he has not done so already— the purpose of those great waggons that look like boilers on wheels which he finds halting everywhere as he passes.

Every city has its peculiar institutions created out of its own needs; and one of the most notable institutions of Paris is its rag-picking population. In the early morning— and Parisian life commences at an early hour— may be seen in most streets standing on the pathway opposite every court and alley and between every few houses, as still in some American cities, even in parts of New York, large wooden boxes into which the domestics or tenement-holders empty the accumulated dust of the past day. Round these boxes gather and pass on, when the work is done, to fresh fields of labour and pastures new, squalid hungry-looking men and women, the implements of whose craft consist of a coarse bag or basket slung over the shoulder and a little rake with which they turn over and probe and examine in the minutest manner the dustbins. They pick up and deposit in their baskets, by aid of their rakes, whatever they may find, with the same facility as a Chinaman uses his chopsticks.

Paris is a city of centralisation— and centralisation and classification are closely allied. In the early times, when centralisation is becoming a fact, its forerunner is classification. All things which are similar or analogous become grouped together, and from the grouping of groups rises one whole or central point. We see radiating many long arms with innumerable tentaculae, and in the centre rises a gigantic head with a comprehensive brain and keen eyes to look on every side and ears sensitive to hear— and a voracious mouth to swallow.

Other cities resemble all the birds and beasts and fishes whose appetites and digestions are normal. Paris alone is the analogical apotheosis of the octopus. Product of centralisation carried to an *ad absurdum*, it fairly

represents the devil fish; and in no respects is the resemblance more curious than in the similarity of the digestive apparatus.

Those intelligent tourists who, having surrendered their individuality into the hands of Messrs. Cook or Gaze, 'do' Paris in three days, are often puzzled to know how it is that the dinner which in London would cost about six shillings, can be had for three francs in a café in the Palais Royal. They need have no more wonder if they will but consider the classification which is a theoretic speciality of Parisian life, and adopt all round the fact from which the chiffonier has his genesis.

The Paris of 1850 was not like the Paris of to-day, and those who see the Paris of Napoleon and Baron Hausseman can hardly realise the existence of the state of things forty-five years ago.

Amongst other things, however, which have not changed are those districts where the waste is gathered. Dust is dust all the world over, in every age, and the family likeness of dust-heaps is perfect. The traveller, therefore, who visits the environs of Montrouge can go go back in fancy without difficulty to the year 1850.

In this year I was making a prolonged stay in Paris. I was very much in love with a young lady who, though she returned my passion, so far yielded to the wishes of her parents that she had promised not to see me or to correspond with me for a year. I, too, had been compelled to accede to these conditions under a vague hope of parental approval. During the term of probation I had promised to remain out of the country and not to write to my dear one until the expiration of the year.

Naturally the time went heavily with me. There was not one of my own family or circle who could tell me of Alice, and none of her own folk had, I am sorry to say, sufficient generosity to send me even an occasional word of comfort regarding her health and well-being. I spent six months wandering about Europe, but as I could find no satisfactory distraction in travel, I determined to come to Paris, where, at least, I would be within easy hail of London in case any good fortune should call me thither before the appointed time. That 'hope deferred maketh the heart sick' was never better exemplified than in my case, for in addition to the perpetual longing to see the face I loved there was always with me a harrowing anxiety lest some accident should prevent me showing Alice in due time that I had, throughout the long period of probation, been faithful to her trust and my own love. Thus, every adventure which I undertook had a fierce pleasure of its own, for it was fraught with possible consequences greater than it would have ordinarily borne.

Like all travellers I exhausted the places of most interest in the first month of my stay, and was driven in the second month to look for amusement

whithersoever I might. Having made sundry journeys to the better-known suburbs, I began to see that there was a *terra incognita*, in so far as the guide book was concerned, in the social wilderness lying between these attractive points. Accordingly I began to systematise my researches, and each day took up the thread of my exploration at the place where I had on the previous day dropped it.

In the process of time my wanderings led me near Montrouge, and I saw that hereabouts lay the Ultima Thule of social exploration— a country as little known as that round the source of the White Nile. And so I determined to investigate philosophically the chiffonier— his habitat, his life, and his means of life.

The job was an unsavoury one, difficult of accomplishment, and with little hope of adequate reward. However, despite reason, obstinacy prevailed, and I entered into my new investigation with a keener energy than I could have summoned to aid me in any investigation leading to any end, valuable or worthy.

One day, late in a fine afternoon, toward the end of September, I entered the holy of holies of the city of dust. The place was evidently the recognised abode of a number of chiffoniers, for some sort of arrangement was manifested in the formation of the dust heaps near the road. I passed amongst these heaps, which stood like orderly sentries, determined to penetrate further and trace dust to its ultimate location.

As I passed along I saw behind the dust heaps a few forms that flitted to and fro, evidently watching with interest the advent of any stranger to such a place. The district was like a small Switzerland, and as I went forward my tortuous course shut out the path behind me.

Presently I got into what seemed a small city or community of chiffoniers. There were a number of shanties or huts, such as may be met with in the remote parts of the Bog of Allan— rude places with wattled walls, plastered with mud and roofs of rude thatch made from stable refuse— such places as one would not like to enter for any consideration, and which even in water-colour could only look picturesque if judiciously treated. In the midst of these huts was one of the strangest adaptations— I cannot say habitations— I had ever seen. An immense old wardrobe, the colossal remnant of some boudoir of Charles VII, or Henry II, had been converted into a dwelling-house. The double doors lay open, so that the entire ménage was open to public view. In the open half of the wardrobe was a common sitting-room of some four feet by six, in which sat, smoking their pipes round a charcoal brazier, no fewer than six old soldiers of the First Republic, with their uniforms torn and worn threadbare. Evidently they were of the *mauvais sujet* class; their bleary eyes and limp jaws

told plainly of a common love of absinthe; and their eyes had that haggard, worn look of slumbering ferocity which follows hard in the wake of drink. The other side stood as of old, with its shelves intact, save that they were cut to half their depth, and in each shelf of which there were six, was a bed made with rags and straw. The half-dozen of worthies who inhabited this structure looked at me curiously as I passed; and when I looked back after going a little way I saw their heads together in a whispered conference. I did not like the look of this at all, for the place was very lonely, and the men looked very, very villainous. However, I did not see any cause for fear, and went on my way, penetrating further and further into the Sahara. The way was tortuous to a degree, and from going round in a series of semi-circles, as one goes in skating with the Dutch roll, I got rather confused with regard to the points of the compass.

When I had penetrated a little way I saw, as I turned the corner of a half-made heap, sitting on a heap of straw an old soldier with threadbare coat.

'Hallo!' said I to myself; 'the First Republic is well represented here in its soldiery.'

As I passed him the old man never even looked up at me, but gazed on the ground with stolid persistency. Again I remarked to myself: 'See what a life of rude warfare can do! This old man's curiosity is a thing of the past.'

When I had gone a few steps, however, I looked back suddenly, and saw that curiosity was not dead, for the veteran had raised his head and was regarding me with a very queer expression. He seemed to me to look very like one of the six worthies in the press. When he saw me looking he dropped his head; and without thinking further of him I went on my way, satisfied that there was a strange likeness between these old warriors.

Presently I met another old soldier in a similar manner. He, too, did not notice me whilst I was passing.

By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and I began to think of retracing my steps. Accordingly I turned to go back, but could see a number of tracks leading between different mounds and could not ascertain which of them I should take. In my perplexity I wanted to see someone of whom to ask the way, but could see no one. I determined to go on a few mounds further and so try to see someone— not a veteran.

I gained my object, for after going a couple of hundred yards I saw before me a single shanty such as I had seen before— with, however, the difference that this was not one for living in, but merely a roof with three walls open in front. From the evidences which the neighbourhood exhibited I took it to be a place for sorting. Within it was an old woman wrinkled and bent with age; I approached her to ask the way.

She rose as I came close and I asked her my way. She immediately commenced a conversation; and it occurred to me that here in the very centre of the Kingdom of Dust was the place to gather details of the history of Parisian rag-picking— particularly as I could do so from the lips of one who looked like the oldest inhabitant.

I began my inquiries, and the old woman gave me most interesting answers— she had been one of the ceteuces who sat daily before the guillotine and had taken an active part among the women who signalised themselves by their violence in the revolution. While we were talking she said suddenly: 'But m'sieur must be tired standing,' and dusted a rickety old stool for me to sit down. I hardly liked to do so for many reasons; but the poor old woman was so civil that I did not like to run the risk of hurting her by refusing, and moreover the conversation of one who had been at the taking of the Bastille was so interesting that I sat down and so our conversation went on.

While we were talking an old man— older and more bent and wrinkled even than the woman— appeared from behind the shanty. 'Here is Pierre,' said she. 'M'sieur can hear stories now if he wishes, for Pierre was in everything, from the Bastille to Waterloo.' The old man took another stool at my request and we plunged into a sea of revolutionary reminiscences. This old man, albeit clothed like a scarecrow, was like any one of the six veterans.

I was now sitting in the centre of the low hut with the woman on my left hand and the man on my right, each of them being somewhat in front of me. The place was full of all sorts of curious objects of lumber, and of many things that I wished far away. In one corner was a heap of rags which seemed to move from the number of vermin it contained, and in the other a heap of bones whose odour was something shocking. Every now and then, glancing at the heaps, I could see the gleaming eyes of some of the rats which infested the place. These loathsome objects were bad enough, but what looked even more dreadful was an old butcher's axe with an iron handle stained with clots of blood leaning up against the wall on the right hand side. Still, these things did not give me much concern. The talk of the two old people was so fascinating that I stayed on and on, till the evening came and the dust heaps threw dark shadows over the vales between them.

After a time I began to grow uneasy. I could not tell how or why, but somehow I did not feel satisfied. Uneasiness is an instinct and means warning. The psychic faculties are often the sentries of the intellect, and when they sound alarm the reason begins to act, although perhaps not consciously.

This was so with me. I began to bethink me where I was and by what surrounded, and to wonder how I should fare in case I should be attacked; and then the thought suddenly burst upon me, although without any overt cause,

that I was in danger. Prudence whispered: 'Be still and make no sign,' and so I was still and made no sign, for I knew that four cunning eyes were on me. 'Four eyes— if not more.' My God, what a horrible thought! The whole shanty might be surrounded on three sides with villains! I might be in the midst of a band of such desperadoes as only half a century of periodic revolution can produce.

With a sense of danger my intellect and observation quickened, and I grew more watchful than was my wont. I noticed that the old woman's eyes were constantly wandering towards my hands. I looked at them too, and saw the cause— my rings. On my left little finger I had a large signet and on the right a good diamond.

I thought that if there was any danger my first care was to avert suspicion. Accordingly I began to work the conversation round to rag-picking— to the drains— of the things found there; and so by easy stages to jewels. Then, seizing a favourable opportunity, I asked the old woman if she knew anything of such things. She answered that she did, a little. I held out my right hand, and, showing her the diamond, asked her what she thought of that. She answered that her eyes were bad, and stooped over my hand. I said as nonchalantly as I could: 'Pardon me! You will see better thus!' and taking it off handed it to her. An unholy light came into her withered old face, as she touched it. She stole one glance at me swift and keen as a flash of lightning.

She bent over the ring for a moment, her face quite concealed as though examining it. The old man looked straight out of the front of the shanty before him, at the same time fumbling in his pockets and producing a screw of tobacco in a paper and a pipe, which he proceeded to fill. I took advantage of the pause and the momentary rest from the searching eyes on my face to look carefully round the place, now dim and shadowy in the gloaming. There still lay all the heaps of varied reeking foulness; there the terrible blood-stained axe leaning against the wall in the right hand corner, and everywhere, despite the gloom, the baleful glitter of the eyes of the rats. I could see them even through some of the chinks of the boards at the back low down close to the ground. But stay! these latter eyes seemed more than usually large and bright and baleful!

For an instant my heart stood still, and I felt in that whirling condition of mind in which one feels a sort of spiritual drunkenness, and as though the body is only maintained erect in that there is no time for it to fall before recovery. Then, in another second, I was calm— coldly calm, with all my energies in full vigour, with a self-control which I felt to be perfect and with all my feeling and instincts alert.

Now I knew the full extent of my danger: I was watched and surrounded by desperate people! I could not even guess at how many of them were lying

there on the ground behind the shanty, waiting for the moment to strike. I knew that I was big and strong, and they knew it, too. They knew also, as I did, that I was an Englishman and would make a fight for it; and so we waited. I had, I felt, gained an advantage in the last few seconds, for I knew my danger and understood the situation. Now, I thought, is the test of my courage— the enduring test: the fighting test may come later!

The old woman raised her head and said to me in a satisfied kind of way:

'A very fine ring, indeed— a beautiful ring! Oh, me! I once had such rings, plenty of them, and bracelets and earrings! Oh! for in those fine days I led the town a dance! But they've forgotten me now! They've forgotten me! They? Why they never heard of me! Perhaps their grandfathers remember me, some of them!' and she laughed a harsh, croaking laugh. And then I am bound to say that she astonished me, for she handed me back the ring with a certain suggestion of old-fashioned grace which was not without its pathos.

The old man eyed her with a sort of sudden ferocity, half rising from his stool, and said to me suddenly and hoarsely:

'Let me see!'

I was about to hand the ring when the old woman said:

'No! no, do not give it to Pierre! Pierre is eccentric. He loses things; and such a pretty ring!'

'Cat!' said the old man, savagely. Suddenly the old woman said, rather more loudly than was necessary:

'Wait! I shall tell you something about a ring.' There was something in the sound of her voice that jarred upon me. Perhaps it was my hyper-sensitiveness, wrought up as I was to such a pitch of nervous excitement, but I seemed to think that she was not addressing me. As I stole a glance round the place I saw the eyes of the rats in the bone heaps, but missed the eyes along the back. But even as I looked I saw them again appear. The old woman's 'Wait!' had given me a respite from attack, and the men had sunk back to their reclining posture.

'I once lost a ring— a beautiful diamond hoop that had belonged to a queen, and which was given to me by a farmer of the taxes, who afterwards cut his throat because I sent him away. I thought it must have been stolen, and taxed my people; but I could get no trace. The police came and suggested that it had found its way to the drain. We descended— I in my fine clothes, for I would not trust them with my beautiful ring! I know more of the drains since then, and of rats, too! but I shall never forget the horror of that place— alive with blazing eyes, a wall of them just outside the light of our torches. Well, we got beneath my house. We searched the outlet of the drain, and there in the filth found my ring, and we came out.

'But we found something else also before we came! As we were coming toward the opening a lot of sewer rats— human ones this time— came towards us. They told the police that one of their number had gone into the drain, but had not returned. He had gone in only shortly before we had, and, if lost, could hardly be far off. They asked help to seek him, so we turned back. They tried to prevent me going, but I insisted. It was a new excitement, and had I not recovered my ring? Not far did we go till we came on something. There was but little water, and the bottom of the drain was raised with brick, rubbish, and much matter of the kind. He had made a fight for it, even when his torch had gone out. But they were too many for him! They had not been long about it! The bones were still warm; but they were picked clean. They had even eaten their own dead ones and there were bones of rats as well as of the man. They took it cool enough those other— the human ones— and joked of their comrade when they found him dead, though they would have helped him living. Bah! what matters it— life or death?'

'And had you no fear?' I asked her.

'Fear!' she said with a laugh. 'Me have fear? Ask Pierre! But I was younger then, and, as I came through that horrible drain with its wall of greedy eyes, always moving with the circle of the light from the torches, I did not feel easy. I kept on before the men, though! It is a way I have! I never let the men get it before me. All I want is a chance and a means! And they ate him up— took every trace away except the bones; and no one knew it, nor no sound of him was ever heard!' Here she broke into a chuckling fit of the ghastliest merriment which it was ever my lot to hear and see. A great poetess describes her heroine singing: 'Oh! to see or hear her singing! Scarce I know which is the divinest.'

And I can apply the same idea to the old crone— in all save the divinity, for I scarce could tell which was the most hellish— the harsh, malicious, satisfied, cruel laugh, or the leering grin, and the horrible square opening of the mouth like a tragic mask, and the yellow gleam of the few discoloured teeth in the shapeless gums. In that laugh and with that grin and the chuckling satisfaction I knew as well as if it had been spoken to me in words of thunder that my murder was settled, and the murderers only bided the proper time for its accomplishment. I could read between the lines of her gruesome story the commands to her accomplices. 'Wait,' she seemed to say, 'bide your time. I shall strike the first blow. Find the weapon for me, and I shall make the opportunity! He shall not escape! Keep him quiet, and then no one will be wiser. There will be no outcry, and the rats will do their work!'

It was growing darker and darker; the night was coming. I stole a glance round the shanty, still all the same! The bloody axe in the corner, the heaps of filth, and the eyes on the bone heaps and in the crannies of the floor.

Pierre had been still ostensibly filling his pipe; he now struck a light and began to puff away at it. The old woman said:

'Dear heart, how dark it is! Pierre, like a good lad, light the lamp!'

Pierre got up and with the lighted match in his hand touched the wick of a lamp which hung at one side of the entrance to the shanty, and which had a reflector that threw the light all over the place. It was evidently that which was used for their sorting at night.

'Not that, stupid! Not that! the lantern!' she called out to him.

He immediately blew it out, saying: 'All right, mother I'll find it,' and he hustled about the left corner of the room— the old woman saying through the darkness:

The lantern! the lantern! Oh! That is the light that is most useful to us poor folks. The lantern was the friend of the revolution! It is the friend of the chiffonier! It helps us when all else fails.'

Hardly had she said the word when there was a kind of creaking of the whole place, and something was steadily dragged over the roof.

Again I seemed to read between the lines of her words. I knew the lesson of the lantern.

'One of you get on the roof with a noose and strangle him as he passes out if we fail within.'

As I looked out of the opening I saw the loop of a rope outlined black against the lurid sky. I was now, indeed, beset!

Pierre was not long in finding the lantern. I kept my eyes fixed through the darkness on the old woman. Pierre struck his light, and by its flash I saw the old woman raise from the ground beside her where it had mysteriously appeared, and then hide in the folds of her gown, a long sharp knife or dagger. It seemed to be like a butcher's sharpening iron fined to a keen point.

The lantern was lit.

'Bring it here, Pierre,' she said. 'Place it in the doorway where we can see it. See how nice it is! It shuts out the darkness from us; it is just right!'

Just right for her and her purposes! It threw all its light on my face, leaving in gloom the faces of both Pierre and the woman, who sat outside of me on each side.

I felt that the time of action was approaching, but I knew now that the first signal and movement would come from the woman, and so watched her.

I was all unarmed, but I had made up my mind what to do. At the first movement I would seize the butcher's axe in the right-hand corner and fight my way out. At least, I would die hard. I stole a glance round to fix its exact locality so that I could not fail to seize it at the first effort, for then, if ever, time and accuracy would be precious.

Good God! It was gone! All the horror of the situation burst upon me; but the bitterest thought of all was that if the issue of the terrible position should be against me Alice would infallibly suffer. Either she would believe me false— and any lover, or any one who has ever been one, can imagine the bitterness of the thought— or else she would go on loving long after I had been lost to her and to the world, so that her life would be broken and embittered, shattered with disappointment and despair. The very magnitude of the pain braced me up and nerved me to bear the dread scrutiny of the plotters.

I think I did not betray myself. The old woman was watching me as a cat does a mouse; she had her right hand hidden in the folds of her gown, clutching, I knew, that long, cruel-looking dagger. Had she seen any disappointment in my face she would, I felt, have known that the moment had come, and would have sprung on me like a tigress, certain of taking me unprepared.

I looked out into the night, and there I saw new cause for danger. Before and around the hut were at a little distance some shadowy forms; they were quite still, but I knew that they were all alert and on guard. Small chance for me now in that direction.

Again I stole a glance round the place. In moments of great excitement and of great danger, which is excitement, the mind works very quickly, and the keenness of the faculties which depend on the mind grows in proportion. I now felt this. In an instant I took in the whole situation. I saw that the axe had been taken through a small hole made in one of the rotten boards. How rotten they must be to allow of such a thing being done without a particle of noise.

The hut was a regular murder-trap, and was guarded all around. A garroter lay on the roof ready to entangle me with his noose if I should escape the dagger of the old hag. In front the way was guarded by I know not how many watchers. And at the back was a row of desperate men— I had seen their eyes still through the crack in the boards of the floor, when last I looked— as they lay prone waiting for the signal to start erect. If it was to be ever, now for it!

As nonchalantly as I could I turned slightly on my stool so as to get my right leg well under me. Then with a sudden jump, turning my head, and guarding it with my hands, and with the fighting instinct of the knights of old, I breathed my lady's name, and hurled myself against the back wall of the hut.

Watchful as they were, the suddenness of my movement surprised both Pierre and the old woman. As I crashed through the rotten timbers I saw the old woman rise with a leap like a tiger and heard her low gasp of baffled rage. My feet lit on something that moved, and as I jumped away I knew that I had stepped on the back of one of the row of men lying on their faces outside the hut. I was torn with nails and splinters, but otherwise unhurt. Breathless I

rushed up the mound in front of me, hearing as I went the dull crash of the shanty as it collapsed into a mass.

It was a nightmare climb. The mound, though but low, was awfully steep, and with each step I took the mass of dust and cinders tore down with me and gave way under my feet. The dust rose and choked me; it was sickening, fœtid, awful; but my climb was, I felt, for life or death, and I struggled on. The seconds seemed hours; but the few moments I had in starting, combined with my youth and strength, gave me a great advantage, and, though several forms struggled after me in deadly silence which was more dreadful than any sound, I easily reached the top. Since then I have climbed the cone of Vesuvius, and as I struggled up that dreary steep amid the sulphurous fumes the memory of that awful night at Montrouge came back to me so vividly that I almost grew faint.

The mound was one of the tallest in the region of dust, and as I struggled to the top, panting for breath and with my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, I saw away to my left the dull red gleam of the sky, and nearer still the flashing of lights. Thank God! I knew where I was now and where lay the road to Paris!

For two or three seconds I paused and looked back. My pursuers were still well behind me, but struggling up resolutely, and in deadly silence. Beyond, the shanty was a wreck— a mass of timber and moving forms. I could see it well, for flames were already bursting out; the rags and straw had evidently caught fire from the lantern. Still silence there! Not a sound! These old wretches could die game, anyhow.

I had no time for more than a passing glance, for as I cast an eye round the mound preparatory to making my descent I saw several dark forms rushing round on either side to cut me off on my way. It was now a race for life. They were trying to head me on my way to Paris, and with the instinct of the moment I dashed down to the right-hand side. I was just in time, for, though I came as it seemed to me down the steep in a few steps, the wary old men who were watching me turned back, and one, as I rushed by into the opening between the two mounds in front, almost struck me a blow with that terrible butcher's axe. There could surely not be two such weapons about!

Then began a really horrible chase. I easily ran ahead of the old men, and even when some younger ones and a few women joined in the hunt I easily distanced them. But I did not know the way, and I could not even guide myself by the light in the sky, for I was running away from it. I had heard that, unless of conscious purpose, hunted men turn always to the left, and so I found it now; and so, I suppose, knew also my pursuers, who were more animals than men, and with cunning or instinct had found out such secrets for themselves: for on finishing a quick spurt, after which I intended to take a moment's

breathing space, I suddenly saw ahead of me two or three forms swiftly passing behind a mound to the right.

I was in the spider's web now indeed! But with the thought of this new danger came the resource of the hunted, and so I darted down the next turning to the right. I continued in this direction for some hundred yards, and then, making a turn to the left again, felt certain that I had, at any rate, avoided the danger of being surrounded.

But not of pursuit, for on came the rabble after me, steady, dogged, relentless, and still in grim silence.

In the greater darkness the mounds seemed now to be somewhat smaller than before, although— for the night was closing— they looked bigger in proportion. I was now well ahead of my pursuers, so I made a dart up the mound in front.

Oh joy of joys! I was close to the edge of this inferno of dustheaps. Away behind me the red light of Paris was in the sky, and towering up behind rose the heights of Montmarte— a dim light, with here and there brilliant points like stars.

Restored to vigour in a moment, I ran over the few remaining mounds of decreasing size, and found myself on the level land beyond. Even then, however, the prospect was not inviting. All before me was dark and dismal, and I had evidently come on one of those dank, low-lying waste places which are found here and there in the neighbourhood of great cities. Places of waste and desolation, where the space is required for the ultimate agglomeration of all that is noxious, and the ground is so poor as to create no desire of occupancy even in the lowest squatter. With eyes accustomed to the gloom of the evening, and away now from the shadows of those dreadful dustheaps, I could see much more easily than I could a little while ago. It might have been, of course, that the glare in the sky of the lights of Paris, though the city was some miles away, was reflected here. Howsoever it was, I saw well enough to take bearings for certainly some little distance around me.

In front was a bleak, flat waste that seemed almost dead level, with here and there the dark shimmering of stagnant pools. Seemingly far off on the right, amid a small cluster of scattered lights, rose a dark mass of Fort Montrouge, and away to the left in the dim distance, pointed with stray gleams from cottage windows, the lights in the sky showed the locality of Bicêtre. A moment's thought decided me to take to the right and try to reach Montrouge. There at least would be some sort of safety, and I might possibly long before come on some of the cross roads which I knew. Somewhere, not far off, must lie the strategic road made to connect the outlying chain of forts circling the city.

Then I looked back. Coming over the mounds, and outlined black against the glare of the Parisian horizon, I saw several moving figures, and still a way to the right several more deploying out between me and my destination. They evidently meant to cut me off in this direction, and so my choice became constricted; it lay now between going straight ahead or turning to the left. Stooping to the ground, so as to get the advantage of the horizon as a line of sight, I looked carefully in this direction, but could detect no sign of my enemies. I argued that as they had not guarded or were not trying to guard that point, there was evidently danger to me there already. So I made up my mind to go straight on before me.

It was not an inviting prospect, and as I went on the reality grew worse. The ground became soft and oozy, and now and again gave way beneath me in a sickening kind of way. I seemed somehow to be going down, for I saw round me places seemingly more elevated than where I was, and this in a place which from a little way back seemed dead level. I looked around, but could see none of my pursuers. This was strange, for all along these birds of the night had followed me through the darkness as well as though it was broad daylight. How I blamed myself for coming out in my light-coloured tourist suit of tweed. The silence, and my not being able to see my enemies, whilst I felt that they were watching me, grew appalling, and in the hope of some one not of this ghastly crew hearing me I raised my voice and shouted several times. There was not the slightest response; not even an echo rewarded my efforts. For a while I stood stock still and kept my eyes in one direction. On one of the rising places around me I saw something dark move along, then another, and another. This was to my left, and seemingly moving to head me off.

I thought that again I might with my skill as a runner elude my enemies at this game, and so with all my speed darted forward.

Splash!

My feet had given way in a mass of slimy rubbish, and I had fallen headlong into a reeking, stagnant pool. The water and the mud in which my arms sank up to the elbows was filthy and nauseous beyond description, and in the suddenness of my fall I had actually swallowed some of the filthy stuff, which nearly choked me, and made me gasp for breath. Never shall I forget the moments during which I stood trying to recover myself almost fainting from the fœtid odour of the filthy pool, whose white mist rose ghostlike around. Worst of all, with the acute despair of the hunted animal when he sees the pursuing pack closing on him, I saw before my eyes whilst I stood helpless the dark forms of my pursuers moving swiftly to surround me.

It is curious how our minds work on odd matters even when the energies of thought are seemingly concentrated on some terrible and pressing need. I

was in momentary peril of my life: my safety depended on my action, and my choice of alternatives coming now with almost every step I took, and yet I could not but think of the strange dogged persistency of these old men. Their silent resolution, their steadfast, grim, persistency even in such a cause commanded, as well as fear, even a measure of respect. What must they have been in the vigour of their youth. I could understand now that whirlwind rush on the bridge of Arcola, that scornful exclamation of the Old Guard at Waterloo! Unconscious cerebration has its own pleasures, even at such moments; but fortunately it does not in any way clash with the thought from which action springs.

I realised at a glance that so far I was defeated in my object, my enemies as yet had won. They had succeeded in surrounding me on three sides, and were bent on driving me off to the left-hand, where there was already some danger for me, for they had left no guard. I accepted the alternative— it was a case of Hobson's choice and run. I had to keep the lower ground, for my pursuers were on the higher places. However, though the ooze and broken ground impeded me my youth and training made me able to hold my ground, and by keeping a diagonal line I not only kept them from gaining on me but even began to distance them. This gave me new heart and strength, and by this time habitual training was beginning to tell and my second wind had come. Before me the ground rose slightly. I rushed up the slope and found before me a waste of watery slime, with a low dyke or bank looking black and grim beyond. I felt that if I could but reach that dyke in safety I could there, with solid ground under my feet and some kind of path to guide me, find with comparative ease a way out of my troubles. After a glance right and left and seeing no one near, I kept my eyes for a few minutes to their rightful work of aiding my feet whilst I crossed the swamp. It was rough, hard work, but there was little danger, merely toil; and a short time took me to the dyke. I rushed up the slope exulting; but here again I met a new shock. On either side of me rose a number of crouching figures. From right and left they rushed at me. Each body held a rope.

The cordon was nearly complete. I could pass on neither side, and the end was near.

There was only one chance, and I took it. I hurled myself across the dyke, and escaping out of the very clutches of my foes threw myself into the stream.

At any other time I should have thought that water foul and filthy, but now it was as welcome as the most crystal stream to the parched traveller. It was a highway of safety!

My pursuers rushed after me. Had only one of them held the rope it would have been all up with me, for he could have entangled me before I had time to

swim a stroke; but the many hands holding it embarrassed and delayed them, and when the rope struck the water I heard the splash well behind me. A few minutes' hard swimming took me across the stream. Refreshed with the immersion and encouraged by the escape, I climbed the dyke in comparative gaiety of spirits.

From the top I looked back. Through the darkness I saw my assailants scattering up and down along the dyke. The pursuit was evidently not ended, and again I had to choose my course. Beyond the dyke where I stood was a wild, swampy space very similar to that which I had crossed. I determined to shun such a place, and thought for a moment whether I would take up or down the dyke. I thought I heard a sound— the muffled sound of oars, so I listened, and then shouted.

No response; but the sound ceased. My enemies had evidently got a boat of some kind. As they were on the up side of me I took the down path and began to run. As I passed to the left of where I had entered the water I heard several splashes, soft and stealthy, like the sound a rat makes as he plunges into the stream, but vastly greater; and as I looked I saw the dark sheen of the water broken by the ripples of several advancing heads. Some of my enemies were swimming the stream also.

And now behind me, up the stream, the silence was broken by the quick rattle and creak of oars; my enemies were in hot pursuit. I put my best leg foremost and ran on. After a break of a couple of minutes I looked back, and by a gleam of light through the ragged clouds I saw several dark forms climbing the bank behind me. The wind had now begun to rise, and the water beside me was ruffled and beginning to break in tiny waves on the bank. I had to keep my eyes pretty well on the ground before me, lest I should stumble, for I knew that to stumble was death. After a few minutes I looked back behind me. On the dyke were only a few dark figures, but crossing the waste, swampy ground were many more. What new danger this portended I did not know— could only guess. Then as I ran it seemed to me that my track kept ever sloping away to the right. I looked up ahead and saw that the river was much wider than before, and that the dyke on which I stood fell quite away, and beyond it was another stream on whose near bank I saw some of the dark forms now across the marsh. I was on an island of some kind.

My situation was now indeed terrible, for my enemies had hemmed me in on every side. Behind came the quickening roll of the oars, as though my pursuers knew that the end was close. Around me on every side was desolation; there was not a roof or light, as far as I could see. Far off to the right rose some dark mass, but what it was I knew not. For a moment I paused to think what I should do, not for more, for my pursuers were drawing closer.

Then my mind was made up. I slipped down the bank and took to the water. I struck out straight ahead so as to gain the current by clearing the backwater of the island, for such I presume it was, when I had passed into the stream. I waited till a cloud came driving across the moon and leaving all in darkness. Then I took off my hat and laid it softly on the water floating with the stream, and a second after dived to the right and struck out under water with all my might. I was, I suppose, half a minute under water, and when I rose came up as softly as I could, and turning, looked back. There went my light brown hat floating merrily away. Close behind it came a rickety old boat, driven furiously by a pair of oars. The moon was still partly obscured by the drifting clouds, but in the partial light I could see a man in the bows holding aloft ready to strike what appeared to me to be that same dreadful pole-axe which I had before escaped. As I looked the boat drew closer, closer, and the man struck savagely. The hat disappeared. The man fell forward, almost out of the boat. His comrades dragged him in but without the axe, and then as I turned with all my energies bent on reaching the further bank, I heard the fierce whirr of the muttered 'Sacre!' which marked the anger of my baffled pursuers.

That was the first sound I had heard from human lips during all this dreadful chase, and full as it was of menace and danger to me it was a welcome sound for it broke that awful silence which shrouded and appalled me. It was as though an overt sign that my opponents were men and not ghosts, and that with them I had, at least; the chance of a man, though but one against many.

But now that the spell of silence was broken the sounds came thick and fast. From boat to shore and back from shore to boat came quick question and answer, all in the fiercest whispers. I looked back— a fatal thing to do— for in the instant someone caught sight of my face, which showed white on the dark water, and shouted. Hands pointed to me, and in a moment or two the boat was under weigh, and following hard after me. I had but a little way to go, but quicker and quicker came the boat after me. A few more strokes and I would be on the shore, but I felt the oncoming of the boat, and expected each second to feel the crash of an oar or other weapon on my head. Had I not seen that dreadful axe disappear in the water I do not think that I could have won the shore. I heard the muttered curses of those not rowing and the laboured breath of the rowers. With one supreme effort for life or liberty I touched the bank and sprang up it. There was not a single second to spare, for hard behind me the boat grounded and several dark forms sprang after me. I gained the top of the dyke, and keeping to the left ran on again. The boat put off and followed down the stream. Seeing this I feared danger in this direction, and quickly

turning, ran down the dyke on the other side, and after passing a short stretch of marshy ground gained a wild, open flat country and sped on.

Still behind me came on my relentless pursuers. Far away, below me, I saw the same dark mass as before, but now grown closer and greater. My heart gave a great thrill of delight, for I knew that it must be the fortress of Bicêtre, and with new courage I ran on. I had heard that between each and all of the protecting forts of Paris there are strategic ways, deep sunk roads where soldiers marching should be sheltered from an enemy. I knew that if I could gain this road I would be safe, but in the darkness I could not see any sign of it, so, in blind hope of striking it, I ran on.

Presently I came to the edge of a deep cut, and found that down below me ran a road guarded on each side by a ditch of water fenced on either side by a straight, high wall.

Getting fainter and dizzier, I ran on; the ground got more broken— more and more still, till I staggered and fell, and rose again, and ran on in the blind anguish of the hunted. Again the thought of Alice nerved me. I would not be lost and wreck her life: I would fight and struggle for life to the bitter end. With a great effort I caught the top of the wall. As, scrambling like a catamount, I drew myself up, I actually felt a hand touch the sole of my foot. I was now on a sort of causeway, and before me I saw a dim light. Blind and dizzy, I ran on, staggered, and fell, rising, covered with dust and blood.

'Halt la!'

The words sounded like a voice from heaven. A blaze of light seemed to enwrap me, and I shouted with joy.

'Qui va la?' The rattle of musketry, the flash of steel before my eyes. Instinctively I stopped, though close behind me came a rush of my pursuers.

Another word or two, and out from a gateway poured, as it seemed to me, a tide of red and blue, as the guard turned out. All around seemed blazing with light, and the flash of steel, the clink and rattle of arms, and the loud, harsh voices of command. As I fell forward, utterly exhausted, a soldier caught me. I looked back in dreadful expectation, and saw the mass of dark forms disappearing into the night. Then I must have fainted. When I recovered my senses I was in the guard room. They gave me brandy, and after a while I was able to tell them something of what had passed. Then a commissary of police appeared, apparently out of the empty air, as is the way of the Parisian police officer. He listened attentively, and then had a moment's consultation with the officer in command. Apparently they were agreed, for they asked me if I were ready now to come with them.

'Where to?' I asked, rising to go.

'Back to the dust heaps. We shall, perhaps, catch them yet!'

'I shall try!' said I.

He eyed me for a moment keenly, and said suddenly:

'Would you like to wait a while or till tomorrow, young Englishman?' This touched me to the quick, as, perhaps, he intended, and I jumped to my feet.

'Come now!' I said; 'now! now! An Englishman is always ready for his duty!'

The commissary was a good fellow, as well as a shrewd one; he slapped my shoulder kindly. 'Brave garçon!' he said. 'Forgive me, but I knew what would do you most good. The guard is ready. Come!'

And so, passing right through the guard room, and through a long vaulted passage, we were out into the night. A few of the men in front had powerful lanterns. Through courtyards and down a sloping way we passed out through a low archway to a sunken road, the same that I had seen in my flight. The order was given to get at the double, and with a quick, springing stride, half run, half walk, the soldiers went swiftly along. I felt my strength renewed again— such is the difference between hunter and hunted. A very short distance took us to a low-lying pontoon bridge across the stream, and evidently very little higher up than I had struck it. Some effort had evidently been made to damage it, for the ropes had all been cut, and one of the chains had been broken. I heard the officer say to the commissary:

'We are just in time! A few more minutes, and they would have destroyed the bridge. Forward, quicker still!' and on we went. Again we reached a pontoon on the winding stream; as we came up we heard the hollow boom of the metal drums as the efforts to destroy the bridge was again renewed. A word of command was given, and several men raised their rifles.

'Fire!' A volley rang out. There was a muffled cry, and the dark forms dispersed. But the evil was done, and we saw the far end of the pontoon swing into the stream. This was a serious delay, and it was nearly an hour before we had renewed ropes and restored the bridge sufficiently to allow us to cross.

We renewed the chase. Quicker, quicker we went towards the dust heaps.

After a time we came to a place that I knew. There were the remains of a fire— a few smouldering wood ashes still cast a red glow, but the bulk of the ashes were cold. I knew the site of the hut and the hill behind it up which I had rushed, and in the flickering glow the eyes of the rats still shone with a sort of phosphorescence. The commissary spoke a word to the officer, and he cried:

'Halt!'

The soldiers were ordered to spread around and watch, and then we commenced to examine the ruins. The commissary himself began to lift away the charred boards and rubbish. These the soldiers took and piled together. Presently he started back, then bent down and rising beckoned me.

'See!' he said.

It was a gruesome sight. There lay a skeleton face downwards, a woman by the lines— an old woman by the coarse fibre of the bone. Between the ribs rose a long spike-like dagger made from a butcher's sharpening knife, its keen point buried in the spine.

'You will observe,' said the commissary to the officer and to me as he took out his note book, 'that the woman must have fallen on her dagger. The rats are many here— see their eyes glistening among that heap of bones— and you will also notice'— I shuddered as he placed his hand on the skeleton— 'that but little time was lost by them, for the bones are scarcely cold!'

There was no other sign of any one near, living or dead; and so deploying again into line the soldiers passed on. Presently we came to the hut made of the old wardrobe. We approached. In five of the six compartments was an old man sleeping— sleeping so soundly that even the glare of the lanterns did not wake them. Old and grim and grizzled they looked, with their gaunt, wrinkled, bronzed faces and their white moustaches.

The officer called out harshly and loudly a word of command, and in an instant each one of them was on his feet before us and standing at 'attention!'

'What do you here?'

'We sleep,' was the answer.

'Where are the other chiffoniers?' asked the commissary.

'Gone to work.'

'And you?'

'We are on guard!'

'Peste!' laughed the officer grimly, as he looked at the old men one after the other in the face and added with cool deliberate cruelty: 'Asleep on duty! Is this the manner of the Old Guard? No wonder, then, a Waterloo!'

By the gleam of the lantern I saw the grim old faces grow deadly pale, and almost shuddered at the look in the eyes of the old men as the laugh of the soldiers echoed the grim pleasantry of the officer.

I felt in that moment that I was in some measure avenged.

For a moment they looked as if they would throw themselves on the taunter, but years of their life had schooled them and they remained still.

'You are but five,' said the commissary; 'where is the sixth?' The answer came with a grim chuckle.

'He is there!' and the speaker pointed to the bottom of the wardrobe. 'He died last night. You won't find much of him. The burial of the rats is quick!'

The commissary stooped and looked in. Then he turned to the officer and said calmly:

'We may as well go back. No trace here now; nothing to prove that man was the one wounded by your soldiers' bullets! Probably they murdered him to

cover up the trace. See!' again he stooped and placed his hands on the skeleton. 'The rats work quickly and they are many. These bones are warm!'

I shuddered, and so did many more of those around me.

'Form!' said the officer, and so in marching order, with the lanterns swinging in front and the manacled veterans in the midst, with steady tramp we took ourselves out of the dustheaps and turned backward to the fortress of Bicêtre.

MY YEAR of probation has long since ended, and Alice is my wife. But when I look back upon that trying twelvemonth one of the most vivid incidents that memory recalls is that associated with my visit to the City of Dust.

———————

17: A Visit to Grandpa's

Dylan Thomas

1914-1953

The New English Weekly, 10 March 1938

IN THE MIDDLE of the night I woke from a dream full of whips and lariats as long as serpents, and runaway coaches on mountain passes, and wide, windy gallops over cactus fields, and I heard the old man in the next room crying, 'Gee-up!' and 'Whoa!' and trotting his tongue on the roof of his mouth.

It was the first time I had stayed in grandpa's house. The floorboards had squeaked like mice as I climbed into bed, and the mice between the walls had creaked like wood as though another visitor was walking on them. It was a mild summer night, but curtains had flapped and branches beaten against the window. I had pulled the sheets over my head, and soon was roaring and riding in a book.

'Whoa there, my beauties!' cried grandpa. His voice sounded very young and loud, and his tongue had powerful hooves, and he made his bedroom into a great meadow. I thought I would see if he was ill, or had set his bed-clothes on fire, for my mother had said that he lit his pipe under the blankets, and had warned me to run to his help if I smelt smoke in the night. I went on tiptoe through the darkness to his bedroom door, brushing against the furniture and upsetting a candlestick with a thump. When I saw there was a light in the room I felt frightened, and as I opened the door I heard grandpa shout, 'Gee-up!' as loudly as a bull with a megaphone.

He was sitting straight up in bed and rocking from side to side as though the bed were on a rough road; the knotted edges of the counterpane were his reins; his invisible horses stood in a shadow beyond the bed-side candle. Over a white flannel nightshirt he was wearing a red waistcoat with walnut-sized brass buttons. The over-filled bowl of his pipe smouldered among his whiskers like a little, burning hayrick on a stick. At the sight of me, his hands dropped from the reins and lay blue and quiet, the bed stopped still on a level road, he muffled his tongue into silence, and the horses drew softly up.

'Is there anything the matter, grandpa?' I asked, though the clothes were not on fire. His face in the candlelight looked like a ragged quilt pinned upright on the black air and patched all over with goat-beards.

He stared at me mildly. Then he blew down his pipe, scattering the sparks and making a high, wet dog-whistle of the stem, and shouted: 'Ask no questions.'

After a pause, he said slyly: 'Do you ever have nightmares, boy?'

I said: 'No.'

'Oh, yes, you do,' he said.

I said I was woken by a voice that was shouting to horses.

'What did I tell you?' he said. 'You eat too much. Who ever heard of horses in a bedroom?'

He fumbled under his pillow, brought out a small, tinkling bag, and carefully untied its strings. He put a sovereign in my hand, and said: 'Buy a cake.' I thanked him and wished him good night.

As I closed my bedroom door, I heard his voice crying loudly and gaily, 'Gee-up! gee-up!' and the rocking of the travelling bed.

In the morning I woke from a dream of fiery horses on a plain that was littered with furniture, and of large, cloudy men who rode six horses at a time and whipped them with burning bed-clothes. Grandpa was at breakfast, dressed in deep black. After breakfast he said, 'There was a terrible loud wind last night,' and sat in his arm-chair by the hearth to make clay balls for the fire. Later in the morning he took me for a walk, through Johnstown village and into the fields on the Llanstephan road.

A man with a whippet said, 'There's a nice morning, Mr Thomas,' and when he had gone, leanly as his dog, into the short-treed green wood he should not have entered because of the notices, grandpa said: 'There, do you hear what he called you? Mister!'

We passed by small cottages, and all the men who leant on the gates congratulated grandpa on the fine morning. We passed through the wood full of pigeons, and their wings broke the branches as they rushed to the tops of the trees. Among the soft, contented voices and the loud, timid flying, grandpa said, like a man calling across a field: 'If you heard those old birds in the night, you'd wake me up and say there were horses in the trees.'

We walked back slowly, for he was tired, and the lean man stalked out of the forbidden wood with a rabbit held as gently over his arm as a girl's arm in a warm sleeve.

On the last day but one of my visit I was taken to Llanstephan in a governess cart pulled by a short, weak pony. Grandpa might have been driving a bison, so tightly he held the reins, so ferociously cracked the long whip, so blasphemously shouted warning to boys who played in the road, so stoutly stood with his gaitered legs apart and cursed the demon strength and wilfulness of his tottering pony.

'Look out, boy!' he cried when we came to each corner, and pulled and tugged and jerked and sweated and waved his whip like a rubber sword. And when the pony had crept miserably round each corner, grandpa turned to me with a sighing smile: 'We weathered that one, boy.'

When we came to Llanstephan village at the top of the hill, he left the cart by the 'Edwinsford Arms' and patted the pony's muzzle and gave it sugar, saying: 'You're a weak little pony, Jim, to pull big men like us.'

He had strong beer and I had lemonade, and he paid Mrs Edwinsford with a sovereign out of the tinkling bag; she inquired after his health, and he said that Llangadock was better for the tubes. We went to look at the churchyard and the sea, and sat in the wood called the Sticks, and stood on the concert platform in the middle of the wood where visitors sang on midsummer nights and, year by year, the innocent of the village was elected mayor. Grandpa paused at the churchyard and pointed over the iron gate at the angelic headstones and the poor wooden crosses. 'There's no sense in lying there,' he said.

We journeyed back furiously: Jim was a bison again.

I woke late on my last morning, out of dreams where the Llanstephan sea carried bright sailing-boats as long as liners; and heavenly choirs in the Sticks, dressed in bards' robes and brass-buttoned waistcoats, sang in a strange Welsh to the departing sailors. Grandpa was not at breakfast; he rose early. I walked in the fields with a new sling, and shot at the Towy gulls and the rooks in the parsonage trees. A warm wind blew from the summer points of the weather; a morning mist climbed from the ground and floated among the trees and hid the noisy birds; in the mist and the wind my pebbles flew lightly up like hailstones in a world on its head. The morning passed without a bird falling.

I broke my sling and returned for the midday meal through the parson's orchard. Once, grandpa told me, the parson had bought three ducks at Carmarthen Fair and made a pond for them in the centre of the garden; but they waddled to the gutter under the crumbling doorsteps of the house, and swam and quacked there. When I reached the end of the orchard path, I looked through a hole in the hedge and saw that the parson had made a tunnel through the rockery that was between the gutter and the pond and had set up a notice in plain writing: 'This way to the pond.'

The ducks were still swimming under the steps.

Grandpa was not in the cottage. I went into the garden, but grandpa was not staring at the fruit-trees. I called across to a man who leant on a spade in the field beyond the garden hedge: 'Have you seen my grandpa this morning?'

He did not stop digging, and answered over his shoulder: 'I seen him in his fancy waistcoat.'

Griff, the barber, lived in the next cottage. I called to him through the open door: 'Mr Griff, have you seen my grandpa?'

The barber came out in his shirtsleeves.

I said: 'He's wearing his best waistcoat.' I did not know if it was important, but grandpa wore his waistcoat only in the night.

'Has grandpa been to Llanstephan?' asked Mr Griff anxiously.

'We went there yesterday in a little trap,' I said.

He hurried indoors and I heard him talking in Welsh, and he came out again with his white coat on, and he carried a striped and coloured walking-stick. He strode down the village street and I ran by his side.

When we stopped at the tailor's shop, he cried out, 'Dan!' and Dan Tailor stepped from his window where he sat like an Indian priest but wearing a derby hat. 'Dai Thomas has got his waistcoat on,' said Mr Griff, 'and he's been to Llanstephan.'

As Dan Tailor searched for his overcoat, Mr Griff was striding on. 'Will Evans,' he called outside the carpenter's shop, 'Dai Thomas has been to Llanstephan, and he's got his waistcoat on.'

'I'll tell Morgan now,' said the carpenter's wife out of the hammering, sawing darkness of the shop.

We called at the butcher's shop and Mr Price's house, and Mr Griff repeated his message like a town crier.

We gathered together in Johnstown square. Dan Tailor had his bicycle, Mr Price his pony trap. Mr Griff, the butcher, Morgan Carpenter, and I climbed into the shaking trap, and we trotted off towards Carmarthen town. The tailor led the way, ringing his bell as though there were a fire or a robbery, and an old woman by the gate of a cottage at the end of the street ran inside like a pelted hen. Another woman waved a bright handkerchief.

'Where are we going?' I asked.

Grandpa's neighbours were as solemn as old men with black hats and jackets on the outskirts of a fair. Mr Griff shook his head and mourned: 'I didn't expect this again from Dai Thomas.'

'Not after last time,' said Mr Price sadly.

We trotted on, we crept up Constitution Hill, we rattled down into Lammas Street, and the tailor still rang his bell and a dog ran, squealing, in front of his wheels. As we clip-clopped over the cobbles that led down to the Towy bridge, I remembered grandpa's nightly noisy journeys that rocked the bed and shook the walls, and I saw his gay waistcoat in a vision and his patchwork head tufted and smiling in the candlelight. The tailor before us turned round on his saddle, his bicycle wobbled and skidded. 'I see Dai Thomas!' he cried.

The trap rattled on to the bridge, and I saw grandpa there; the buttons of his waistcoat shone in the sun, he wore his tight, black Sunday trousers and a tall, dusty hat I had seen in a cupboard in the attic, and he carried an ancient

bag. He bowed to us. 'Good morning, Mr Price,' he said, 'and Mr Griff and Mr Morgan and Mr Evans.' To me, he said: 'Good morning, boy.'

Mr Griff pointed his coloured stick at him.

'And what do you think you are doing on Carmarthen bridge in the middle of the afternoon,' he said sternly, 'with your best waistcoat and your old hat?'

Grandpa did not answer, but inclined his face to the river wind, so that his beard was set dancing and wagging as though he talked, and watched the coracle men move, like turtles, on the shore.

Mr Griff raised his stunted barber's pole. 'And where do you think you are going,' he said, 'with your old black bag?'

Grandpa said: 'I am going to Llangadock to be buried.' And he watched the coracle shells slip into the water lightly, and the gulls complain over the fish-filled water as bitterly as Mr Price complained:

'But you aren't dead yet, Dai Thomas.'

For a moment grandpa reflected, then: 'There's no sense in lying dead in Llanstephan,' he said. 'The ground is comfy in Llangadock; you can twitch your legs without putting them in the sea.'

His neighbours moved close to him. They said: 'You aren't dead, Mr Thomas.'

'How can you be buried, then?'

'Nobody's going to bury you in Llanstephan.'

'Come on home, Mr Thomas.'

'There's strong beer for tea.'

'And cake.'

But grandpa stood firmly on the bridge, and clutched his bag to his side, and stared at the flowing river and the sky, like a prophet who has no doubt.

18: Doodle's Discovery

H. D. Umbstaetter

1851-1913

The Black Cat, July 1909

JOHN JEFFERSON DOODLE derived a large amount of pleasure from the knowledge that he was considered a crank. In Doodle's opinion cranks were persons who, knowing the right way, refused to have things done in any other. John Jefferson demanded full value for his own money and persisted in giving the same in return for the money of others. Business back-steps, fool fakery, and lame excuses were foreign to his methods, so when he opened his restaurant success was assured. Doodle's was the most up-to-date café in the entire eating zone. The food, service and appointments were of the best, and from the opening day the future prosperity of Doodle was something that a fifth-rate prophet could foretell without running the risk of a headache.

But Doodle's Cafe was in the direct line of a trouble cyclone. In the wash-rooms connected with the establishment the proprietor supplied the finest toilet soap that money could buy, but unfortunately for the peace of mind of John Jefferson he was called upon to supply much more than legitimate demands required. Expensive soap proved a tempting bait to unprincipled patrons, and Doodle soon discovered that something like forty dollars' worth of soap was required to meet the daily demands of his six hundred patrons. Legitimate hand-washing could not possibly be responsible for this enormous outlay, so Doodle set his brain the task of devising a plan by which the thieves could be detected.

As all the world knows, various ingenious schemes have been tried with he object of protecting the soap in the washrooms of hotels and restaurants. The cakes have been chained to the washstands, for example, only to be cut away by well-to-do people who take things as they come. Again, hotel proprietors have put up liquid soap in fixed contrivances, but the kleptomaniacs outwitted the vigilance of the worried owners. The soap was carried away in bottles, and the unfortunate proprietors, finding it impossible to circumvent the ingenuity of the thieves, furnished common soap in large quantities as the only means of lessening their loss.

But Doodle continued to buy the finest toilet soap that was on the market, and he was determined that no thief would make him change his methods. On this account he set his wits to work and Doodle's Soap Thief Detector was the result.

The café owner was in rapture over his invention. Its ability to do all that he claimed for it was beyond question. He had it patented, fitted to the wash-stands, and then awaited results.

The Detector was a simple contrivance. It consisted of a small kodak-like arrangement concealed behind the mirror that hung above each wash-bowl, the eye of the camera being hidden among the electric light fixtures. The picture-taking device was connected with the soap tray in such a manner that a person lifting the soap relieved the pressure upon a button in the bottom of the tray and was by this means immediately photographed by the unseen instrument. When the soap was replaced a self-developing film was moved up in readiness to snap the next person who lifted the tablet, but if it was not replaced the photographic apparatus stopped working and the picture of the soap thief was, therefore, the last on the film.

Doodle gave orders to his staff to immediately report to him when they found a cake of soap missing from its tray, and on the first day he waited anxiously. John Jefferson had philanthropic ideas and he considered the exposure of a soap thief an act for the benefit of the community. He had not long to wait. Dinner had scarcely begun when a cake of soap was reported missing and the proprietor immediately stepped to the washroom and took the film from its place of concealment. The last snapshot was that of a well-dressed middle-aged man, and Doodle, with the long film in his hand, walked down the big dining-room in search of the original. At the very last table he found his man, and, leaning over, addressed him.

"Pardon me," he said, quietly, touching an overcoat that hung near the customer, "is this your overcoat? "

The diner nodded.

"Then," continued John Jefferson, "will you kindly take out of the pocket the cake of soap you took from the wash-stand a few moments ago? "

The accused man grew red in the face and indignant, but Doodle was persistent.

"Very well," he said, when the customer refused to comply with the request, "I will take it out myself. It belongs to me."

He inserted his hand in the pocket of the overcoat and drew forth the missing soap wrapped in one of the small hand towels also belonging to the establishment.

"As I thought," commented Doodle. "A wet piece of soap calls for a dry wrapper, and I suffer doubly. Now, sir, you had better keep quiet. I have the picture of the fellow who took the soap, and that picture is yours." He pushed the film before the eyes of the astonished diner and that person immediately grabbed his hat and coat, paid his check, and fled.

The Thief Detector did good work on its first day. Twenty-seven prominent citizens were among those detected, and the machine finished up the day's work by photographing the mayor of the city, who was accompanied by three

ladies. The official blustered when Doodle made the accusation, but, like the others, was forced into a corner when confronted with the tell-tale film, and he drew a cake of soap from his pocket when the proprietor threatened to call an officer.

In ten days Doodle had recovered thirteen hundred and eleven cakes of soap, or, more correctly speaking, he had recovered several cakes thirteen hundred and eleven times from the same number of soap thieves, who were ignorant of the fact that their theft had been recorded by the unseen instrument. And in no single instance had the Detector made a mistake.

But Doodle found that the detection of soap thieves was a costly business. The thirteen hundred and eleven customers detected in the act of purloining the cakes of soap did not return, and each day made matters worse. The Detector's average decreased as the patrons fell away, but each day it scored its victims.

And Doodle was determined. He had made up his mind that he would not allow a man who paid seventy-five cents for a dinner to carry off forty cents' worth of soap, and the moment the machine registered a thief John Jefferson lost no time in making the accusation and recovering the stolen property.

On the twenty-fifth day after the installation of the invention Doodle had but ten customers to dinner, and before the meal was over John Jefferson Doodle retired to his office, and throwing himself into a chair spent some two hours in considering the situation. He then arose and acted with sudden energy. He dictated a lengthy telegram and after seeing that it was immediately dispatched, he drafted a circular and had it typewritten. Then, with a satisfied expression upon his face, he sat down and awaited events.

And he had not long to wait. Two hours after the dispatch of the wire a fat man walked into the dining-rooms and asked for the proprietor. John Jefferson inclined his head and motioned the stranger to a seat.

"I am the president of the International Toilet Soap Trust," said the newcomer eagerly, "and I came in response to your peculiar telegram. It is a trifle vague, and we want more information regarding the matter you mentioned."

John Jefferson Doodle stood up, and without speaking led the way to the washroom. With a grim smile upon his face he explained the mechanism of the Soap Thief Detector to the president of the International Toilet Soap Trust, and the fat man breathed heavily.

"There is nothing vague about this," sneered Doodle. "What I wired you is the truth. Nine out of every ten people who steal soap from hotels and restaurants never buy toilet soap. Therefore, the more thieving the more soap

you will sell us, and it stands to reason that you do not wish the Thief Detector to come into general use."

"Into general use?" queried the visitor.

"Yes," snapped Doodle, "I'm going to have this circular printed, which tells the whole story in plain language. If every hotel, café, and boarding-house uses one— but, there, read it, and then I'll talk terms with you."

The president of the International Toilet Soap Trust leaned back in his chair and read the document, then he did some rapid figuring on the back of an envelope.

"What are your terms?" he asked sullenly.

"A quarter of a million for all rights," cried Doodle. "If you don't want it I guess that every member of the Hotel, Restaurant and Boarding House Union will feel glad when they get my circular. There are over two hundred thousand members, and the trifling stun of five dollars a head will yield me over a million."

The other stood silent for a moment, regarding the face of John Jefferson with his keen gray eyes.

"I couldn't do it on my own responsibility," he said at last.

"Get busy on the long-distance 'phone," suggested Doodle. "Call a special meeting of directors and explain matters, and I'll await the decision. If your people don't buy, I'll promise you that the Great Soap Thief Detector will be known from Mindanao to Baffin's Bay inside three months."

Three hours afterwards the fat man returned, and picking up a pen he wrote a check in favor of Doodle for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which he exchanged for a deed, conveying all rights in the Detector. He then stepped into the washroom, tore the picture machine from its hiding place, disconnected the wires leading to the soap tray, and ripped the film into a thousand pieces.

"I've seen enough of that thing," he growled angrily. " 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness,' and the man who stops another man from stealing soap is running pretty near the sin line, I take it."

Then, with a final snort of disgust, he went out into the street, and the doors of Doodle's Famous Dining-rooms were closed. Doodle the Crank was happy and— rich.

19: The Burglar and the Maid

J. S. Fletcher

1863-1935

Courier-Mail (Brisbane) 2 Nov 1934

TO SUCH A PAST MASTER of the art and craft of burglary as Smiler Croome the unperceived and silent entrance to the upper regions of Rivermeade was as easy as if he had possessed an unchallenged right to ingress by the front door.

Rivermeade was the up-river residence of Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby, a modern house built to Sir Samuel's individual tastes. There were more entrances to it than were strictly necessary; doors opening on the lawns, doors admitting to the gardens, doors giving on the river, doors for the emissaries of the tradesmen. There were balconies in front of most of the upper windows, and there was a loggia, and wherever the architect could contrive one, a turret; altogether, this was one of those houses which burglars of the 'cat' variety regard with an approving eye; it offered such a lot of undeniable opportunities.

Smiler (whose real and proper Christian name was Albert) had had his eye on Rivermeade for some time. He was a practical man in his line of business and never did anything without careful and thoughtful planning, and before ever he decided to pay Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby's residence a professional visit he made himself thoroughly acquainted with it and its inhabitants.

Sir Samuel was a city man, reported to be of great wealth. Rivermeade was only one of his residences; he had a town house in one of the most fashionable West End squares, a shooting box on a Scotch moor, and a nice little place on the high ground just above Cannes. Lady Sikes-Wilby was a society woman and celebrated for a very good though not vulgarly ostentatious display of pearls and diamonds.

Both Sir Samuel and his wife were famous for their hospitality, especially when they were in residence at Rivermeade. Their riverside house parties were written about a good deal in the newspapers; nor were these parties held only in the height of summer. Sir Samuel had a great liking for Rivermeade and its sylvan surroundings in autumn, when the leaves of his wealth of wood and coppice were assuming warm tints. And it was at the close of a lovely October day— the evenings being then conveniently dusky— that Smiler Croome elected to make an uninvited entrance into Sir Samuel's luxurious mansion.

ii

SIR SAMUEL SIKES-WILBY dined at 8 o'clock every night, and it was at about 10 minutes past that hour that Smiler, slipping out of a bosky coppice, whose branches made convenient cover, crossed a strip of lawn, shaved by holly and

laurel, and quietly mounted to a certain balcony on the first floor. A slight and delicate manipulation of the catch of a window, and Smiler was inside the house. Everything was very quiet in that part of it. Sir Samuel and his lady were, of course, dining with their guests; the servants were in their own regions; the long range of bedrooms on that floor was destitute of life. And after a little waiting and watching, a little tip-toeing about in his softly soled shoes, a little prospecting of corridors and passages, Smiler proceeded to his exploration systematically, going from one room to another, seeking what was to be found on dressing-tables or kept on mantelpieces.

He knew that the party downstairs was mainly composed of ladies, and his experience was that when ladies have finished their prinking for dinner, having previously had out all their jewellery, they invariably leave something lying about when they go downstairs. The major portion of the harvest would doubtless be on their fair persons, but Smiler knew there would be gleanings and that the gleanings would prove highly satisfactory.

For a quarter of an hour Smiler glided softly about, going from one room to another, picking up whatever he found that had its value in his trained and. particular eye— a ring here, a brooch there, a bracelet, a tie-pin, a set of studs, a watch and chain, this, that, and the other, not to speak of an occasional haul in the way of ready money. One guest, for instance, had left a wad of, crisp Bank of England notes on her table; another a well-stuffed, old-fashioned purse on her mantelpiece.

By the time he came to his sixth room Smiler had a pocket full of good stuff. And in that room he paused, and, taking a piece of chamois leather from a pocket, bundled his finds together into a neat parcel before proceeding further in his quest. He was now on the threshold of the really important adventure. From patient watching of the house he knew that the room in which he now stood was an ante-room to Lady Sikes-Wilby's bedroom. In that bedroom he hoped to get something really good— its occupant would have been sure to leave something worth while lying about.

Half-unconsciously he popped his little parcel of swag on a small table near the communicating door, and cautiously advanced into what he fervently hoped would prove to be a veritable El Dorado.

A minute later and Smiler was in the seventh heaven of bliss. There, lying before his glowing and greedy eyes, lay Lady Sikes-Wilby's famous pearl earrings. Presumably her ladyship— whose jewel-box stood close by, open— had chosen to wear diamonds instead of pearls that evening, and never imagining that a gentleman of Smiler's kidney would enter her room, had gone downstairs, leaving her treasures unguarded.

For one moment Smiler allowed himself to stare. Then his senses came back to him, and the pearl necklace and pearl ear-rings vanished into his right-hand hip pocket. Had he retreated then and there to where his little parcel awaited him in the next room, many things that subsequently occurred would have found no place in Smiler's eventful history.

But the jewel-box was open, and in the soft, shaded light of the adjacent electric lamp its cavity revealed temptations. Smiler stopped to look and to examine. Presently he transferred more of Lady Sikes-Wilby's property to his other hip pocket. And then, feeling highly satisfied with the result of his enterprise, he walked into the anteroom, to pick up the chamois-leather parcel and to clear out. But on the very threshold Smiler pulled himself up, sharply. For the parcel was no longer there!

iii

SMILER did not pause to ask himself if his memory was playing him a trick, for he knew exactly where he had put down that little parcel, not many minutes before, and that it was not now where he had placed it. Without a second's hesitation he ran out of that room, down the corridor, and into the room which he had first entered. Climbing through the window he descended, and a moment more had gained the shelter of the woodland from which he had first appeared.

There, for a few minutes he stood, panting a little, waiting, watching. If there was a definite thought in his somewhat confused mind it was that he had been watched. Seen— watched— followed from room to room! But— by whom? Smiler's notion, now that he had got ; away from the house, and as his brain cleared and his wits sharpened, was that he would presently hear a hullabaloo, see every window lighted, and find men rushing out of the various doors to search the grounds. He had prepared himself for a hurried flight, and he was not afraid; he knew exactly how to effect a satisfactory disappearance from the immediate surroundings of Rivermeade.

But his anticipations were not realised. No sounds indicating sudden alarm came from the house. No lights went up In the first-floor rooms. Nobody came rushing out. There was neither scream nor cry. All that Smiler heard was the rushing of the river over an adjacent weir; all that he saw was a quiet house in a quiet garden in the rapidly darkening autumn night. And presently he went away, and, selecting his own route, returned to town. And all the way there, and until he went to sleep that night at his lodgings in Camden Town, he over and over again asked himself a question: 'Who pinched my shammy leather?'

iv

SMILER'S first concern next morning was to turn to the newspapers. There— but only in the stop-press column was a report of the burglary at Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby's riverside residence, Rivermeade, near Henley. It was a very brief report, and it said nothing about any clue. There was more in the evening papers that afternoon, and still more in the morning issues of the following day. And Smiler learned that the value of the pearls which he had carried off was fixed at about £15,000, while that of the things he had carelessly bundled up in his bit of chamois leather was, lumped together, about £500. There were other particulars, but they gave him no assistance in his endeavours to solve the problem— who picked up his little parcel from the table in the dressing-room while he was busy next door?

He had his own theory, and it was a simple one. Somebody— guest or servant— had detected his entrance, or his presence soon after his entrance, and had watched him as he went from room to room. That Somebody had picked up the parcel from where he had put it down. But what had Somebody done then? Smiler would have expected Somebody to rush downstairs, raise the alarm, and summon the men-folk of the place to the apprehension of the burglar— to wit, yours truly. But Somebody, whoever he or she was, had not done so; he, Smiler, had got away, if not in leisurely fashion, at least comfortably and surely.

What was more, Somebody, as he now learnt from the newspaper, had not given a speedy alarm. The various thefts had not been discovered for quite an hour after Smiler's departure from the scene of his depredations. The discovery had been made by a lady guest who wanted some money wherewith to play bridge, and had gone up to her room to fetch some. Finding her purse gone, to say nothing of some valuable trinkets, she had roused the house, and further discoveries had followed.

A good hour! Now why had the pincher of Smiler's shammy-leather and its contents allowed that hour to elapse? Here was the puzzle. But there was more in it than that. Somebody had the stuff which Smiler had wrapped up in the shammy-leather. But Smiler had the pearls— at least, he had had them; they were now in a very safe place, awaiting further developments. And what Smiler wanted to know was this: Did Somebody get a real good look at him, Smiler? And if it ever came to such a thing, would Somebody know him again?

Such a recognition might be— well, it might be embarrassing.

v

A LOT OF people were concerned about the burglary at Rivermeade— the victims, the police, the insurance companies, the assessors, the press, and there was a great deal of activity, and more publicity, but at the end of a month no arrest had been made, and the missing valuables were still missing. Well known to certain members of the Criminal investigation Department as Albert (alias Smiler) Croome was he was not suspected on this occasion; they, at any rate, did not trouble him with any unpleasant attentions.

So far, Smiler's expedition to the abode of Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby had not profited him at all; you can't get rid of £15,000 worth of real pearls at a moment's notice. But the pearls were put away safely, and it was while he was taking a cup of tea in a certain popular cafe in Oxford Street one November afternoon that Smiler, while thinking of them and wondering how he could best turn his possession of these to advantage, became aware that a young woman sitting exactly opposite to him was looking at him as if his face was something more than familiar to her.

Smiler had a great— a natural— objection to being stared at. His big idea was to go through life unnoticed. Now this girl was staring at him. He looked away, but he was conscious that she was watching him, and when he furtively looked back, her eyes were still fixed. Growing uncomfortable, he finished his tea, picked up his check, and made for the pay-desk. But before he could pick up his change the staring young woman was at his elbow. Their eyes met— and hers were challenging and a little amused. Smiler felt that he had got to speak.

'I ain't met you, any old place, some time, have I?' he inquired. 'Seeing as how you seem to know me?'

The girl picked up her change and gave him a look.

'Come outside,' she answered.

Smiler followed her into the crowds of Oxford Street. They walked side by side for a few yards. Then she turned into an unfrequented thoroughfare, and, turning again, looked Smiler in the face and laughed.

'My face isn't familiar to you, then?' she asked, half-mockingly.

'Can't say as it is,' replied Smiler. 'Ain't no particular recollection. Where was it you see me?'

Again the girl laughed. She was a pretty girl, and smartly dressed; Smiler, for all his knowledge of the world, could not exactly place her. She was puzzling him— and he did not like to be puzzled. But within a second or two his companion cleared up whatever mystery there was.

'What,' she asked, leaning nearer to him, 'what have you done with those pearls?'

Smiler's wits came to his aid. Here was danger!— and when confronted with danger his brain, a naturally sharp one, functioned very well. He gave his questioner a cold, suspicious look.

'Some mistake,' he answered 'You're taking me for somebody else. I thought you was mistaken—'

'Did you?' sneered the girl. 'Well, I'm not, then! Lord, do you think I'd forget your face if I'd once seen it? Come on, now— what have you done with Lady Sikes-Wilby's pearls? There's a policeman round the corner, you know.'

Smiler stood staring at her. Then he realised that he was up against it.

'Was— was it you?' he faltered, 'You as— as was watching?'

'You've got it,' assented his questioner. 'And I've got the bit of a parcel you didn't get. And so, having met—'

'Here!' interrupted Smiler. 'Come out o' this— let's go where we can talk. Come on to my place— quiet, all to ourselves.'

'No!' replied the girl. 'No fear! Back to the tea-shop, if you like— we can find a corner there. I prefer somebody at hand while I do my bit of talking.'

Smiler had no option; he had already decided that this was a young woman of a determined sort, who would stand no nonsense. He meekly followed her back to the tea-shop and sank into the corner seat which she pointed out to him. And in a few minutes he knew all about it, and that his companion had got the whip hand of Smiler Croome, and was very well aware of it.

Lady Sikes-Wilby's maid was one of those young women who are devoid of sentiment, frankly material, and possessed of a practical fashion of looking at things as they are. The situation as she saw it— now that chance had brought her and Smiler Croome together— was this— Smiler had got Lady Sykes-Wilby's pearls, and, as very soon came out, he had not disposed of them, and had no idea as to how their disposal was to be effected. But his companion had ideas— at least, she had one very good idea. From her intimate knowledge of her employer and of Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby, she felt certain that it would be possible to extract a goodly sum from them for the return of the loot— and no questions asked.

The thing was— how to do it without the police poking in their noses? Difficult, perhaps, but it could be done. All that was necessary was contrivance, cleverness, diplomacy — in which she, of course, would take a leading hand.

'You ain't half a smart 'un, no doubt!' said Smiler admiringly. 'But I reckon this'll take as good a headpiece as there is. Wants a bit o' thinking over, what? And how would you perpose to set about it, now, so as neither of us show up, eh? Keep me awake all night this will.'

'Better leave the thinking to me,' replied Smiler's fellow-sinner. 'I'll fix something— I know more about it than you do. What you've got to do is to

play straight— and if you try any games on me, off I go to Scotland Yard. Me and the other bits of things! Oh, don't you bother yourself!— I can explain that. If they turn up, I shall only just have found 'em. You put 'em down somewhere and forgot 'em— see? Now you just leave it all to me— I'm cleverer than you are. You meet me here again to-morrow afternoon, same time, and I'll have a plan ready. And bring those pearls with you, d'you see?— I want an assurance that you have got 'em.'

'Seems to me you want to do it all your own way,' grumbled Smiler. 'Suppose I say I shan't?'

'Then we just walk out to the slop at the corner,' retorted Lady Sikes-Wilby's maid. 'And I ask him politely to take you in charge. Don't be a silly!— we're in for a very nice thing if you follow my lead.'

vi

IT WAS VERY UNFORTUNATE for Smiler and his new-found accomplice that they ever returned to the tea-shop for their conference. For when they did so there were present in another corner of the place, all unobserved by Smiler, just then wholly absorbed in his companion, two detectives who knew Smiler very well indeed, and who, at the mere sight of him, immediately became deeply interested in the fact that he was there, accompanied by a young lady. They were still further interested in noticing— as they could not fail to notice— that Smiler and his companion were evidently discussing highly important business, and that the lady did most of the talking and was, to all appearances, laying down the law, like one who spoke with authority.

This interest grew to such an extent that when the young lady parted from Smiler at the door of the tea-shop one of them took the trouble to follow her, persistently and patiently, with the result that he tracked her to the town house of Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby, in Grosvenor Square, and watched her enter it by the servants' door in the basement. After which, his mind reverting to all he had read and heard about the burglary at Rivermeade, he rang the bell of the front door and asked to see Sir Samuel.

'She was in the company of a man whom we know to be an expert burglar anyway, this afternoon, Sir Samuel,' he said a few minutes later, after listening to the city magnate's warm testimony to the character of Lady Sikes-Wilby's maid. 'Mightn't know what he was, sir? That may be, but there's the fact. The man is one Albert Croome, known as Smiler— cat burglar. I, myself, have wondered more than once if he was in that affair at your riverside house a few weeks ago, but we couldn't connect him with it. Anyway, it's a highly

significant thing, Sir Samuel, that he should be seen in close conversation with Lady Sikes-Wilby's maid.'

Sir Samuel was obviously much upset.

'We had such a high opinion of Meecher,' he muttered. 'A most respectable young woman? You're sure there's no mistake?'

'No mistake in what I'm tell you, Sir Samuel,' replied the detective. 'Seeing is believing, so they say. And I'm telling you what I saw.'

'Most unfortunate!' murmured Sir Samuel. 'Most unpleasant! I don't know what Lady Sikes-Wilby will say about it. I— I suppose you'll want to question this young woman?'

The detective replied that some inquiries would have to be made certainly. And then he began to enlarge on the matter.

'You see, Sir Samuel, it's like this,' he said. 'There's a burglary, a really serious one, at your up-river house. Jewellery worth no end disappears. We get no clue— nobody's suspected. Conclusion come to is that the affair was the work of a very expert burglar. Some weeks elapse. Then by mere chance two of us, who both know him well, see Smiler Croome in conversation with a smart-looking young woman in a tea-shop in Oxford Street. We follow the young woman when she leaves—at least, I do. And I find that she comes straight to your town house and that she's your wife's lady's maid! Requires some explanation, Sir Samuel.'

Sir Samuel regarded his caller with gloomy eyes. 'Uh — I suppose it does, the way you put it,' he said. 'I— I'll just ask Lady Sikes-Wilby to hear what you have to say. And— er— I suppose we shall have to call in the young woman? Most unpleasant!'

vii

THE DETECTIVE, leaving Sir Samuel Sikes-Wilby's front door half an hour later, armed with a full confession from Miss Meecher, lost no time in hastening to headquarters and informing his superior of his discovery.

'And there's no need to wait until Croome goes to keep his appointment with the girl to-morrow afternoon,' he concluded. 'I know where to lay hands on him. He's to be found at a certain West End bar any evening, regular as clockwork. If Sharp and myself walk round there about 6 o'clock—'

Smiler was in the act of lifting a much-desired tankard to his lips, when he felt that tap on his shoulder which struck a chill to his heart. He turned... to look into two faces which he had no liking for. But he tried to put a bold complexion on it.

'Now, then, now then!' he growled, 'what's this about?'

'Little affair along the river, Henley way, my lad,' replied the first man. 'Pearls — and such like. Come on, now, no fuss. But you can finish your drink.'

_____

20: Bilger, of Sydney

Louis Becke

1855-1913

Phil May's Annual, Winter 1898

(as "Bilger".)

A death in the Family brought about my fatal acquaintance with Bilger. A few days after the funeral, as my sister and I sat talking on the verandah of our cottage (which overlooked the waters of Sydney Harbour) and listened to the pouring rain upon the shingled roof, we saw a man open the garden gate and come slowly up to the house. He carried an ancient umbrella, the tack lashings of which on one side had given way entirely, showing six bare ribs. As he walked up the path, his large, sodden boots made a nasty, squelching sound, and my sister, who has a large heart, at once said, 'Poor creature; I wonder who he is. I hope it isn't the coal man come for his money.'

He went round to the back door and, after letting himself drain off a bit, knocked gently and with exceeding diffidence.

I asked him his business. He said he wanted to see my wife.

'Not here. Gone away for a month.'

'Dear, dear, how sad! Broken down, no doubt, with a mother's grief. Is there any other lady in the family whom I could see?'

'What the deuce do you want?' I began angrily; then, as he raised his weak, watery eyes to mine, and I saw that his grey hairs were as wet as his boots, I relented. Perhaps he was someone who knew my wife or her people, and wanted to condole with her over the death of her baby. He looked sober enough, so, as he seemed much agitated, I asked him to sit down, and said I would send my sister to him. Then I went back to my pipe and chair. Ten minutes later my sister Kate came to me with her handkerchief to her eyes.

'*Do* go and see the old fellow. He has *such* a sympathetic nature. I'm sure I should have cried aloud had I stayed any longer. Anyone would think he had known poor little Teddie ever since he was born. I've asked Mary to make him a cup of tea.'

'Who is he?'

'I don't know his name, but he seems *so* sympathetic. And he says he should be so pleased if he might see you again for a few minutes. He says, too, that you have a good and kind face. I told him that you would be sure to take at least a dozen of those in cream and gold. There's nothing at all vulgar; quite the reverse.'

'What *are* you talking about, Kate? Who is this sodden old lunatic, and what on earth are you crying for?'

My sister nearly sobbed. 'I always thought that what you derisively termed "mortuary bards" were horrid people, but this old man has a beautiful nature. And he's very wet—and hungry too, I'm sure; and Mary looks at him as if he were a dog. Do try and help him. I think we might get one or two dozen cream and gold cards, and two dozen black-edged.

And then he's a journalist, too. He's told me quite a sad little story of his life struggle, and the moment I told him you were on the *Evening News* he quite brightened up, and said he knew your name quite well.'

'Kate,' I said, 'I don't want to see the man. What the deuce does he want? If he is one of those loafing scoundrels of undertakers' and mortuary masons' touts, just send him about his business; give him a glass of whisky and tell Mary to clear him out.'

My sister said that to send an old man out in such weather was not like *me*. Surely I would at least speak a kind word to him.

In sheer desperation I went out to the man. He addressed me in husky tones, and said that he desired to express his deep sympathy with me in my affliction, also that he was 'a member of the Fourth Estate.' Seven years before he had edited the *Barangoora News*, but his determined opposition to a dishonest Government led to his ruin, and now—

'All right, old man; stow all that. What do you want?'

He looked at me reproachfully, and taking up a small leather bag, said that he represented Messrs—, 'Monumental Masons and Memorial Card Designers and Printers,' and should feel pleased if I would look at his samples.

He was such a wretched, hungry-looking, down-upon-his-beam-ends old fellow, that I could not refuse to inspect his wares. And then his boots filled me with pity. For such a little man he had the biggest boots I ever saw— baggy, elastic sides, and toes turned up, with the after part of the uppers sticking out some inches beyond the frayed edges of his trousers. As he sat down and drew these garments up, and his bare, skinny legs showed above his wrecked boots, his feet looked like two water-logged cutters under bare poles, with the water running out of the scuppers.

Mary brought the whisky. I poured him out a good, stiff second mate's nip. It did my heart good to see him drink it, and hear the soft ecstatic 'Ah, ah, ah,' which broke from him when he put the glass down; it was a *Te Deum Laudamus*.

Having briefly intimated to him that I had no intention of buying 'a handsome granite monument, with suitable inscription, or twelve lines of verse, for £4, 17s. 6d.,' I took up his packet of *In Memoriam* cards and went through them. The first one was a hand-drawn design in cream and gold— Kate's fancy. It represented in the centre an enormously bloated infant with an

idiotic leer, lying upon its back on a blue cloud with scalloped edges, whilst two male angels, each with an extremely vicious expression, were pulling the cloud along by means of tow-lines attached to their wings. Underneath were these words in MS.: 'More angels can be added, if desired, at an extra charge of 6d. each.'

No. 2 represented a disorderly flight of cherubims, savagely attacking a sleeping infant in its cradle, which was supported on either hand by two vulgar-looking female angels blowing bullock horns in an apathetic manner.

No. 3 rather took my fancy— there was so much in it— four large fowls flying across the empyrean; each bird carried a rose as large as a cabbage in its beak, and apparently intended to let them drop upon a group of family mourners beneath. The MS. inscribed said, 'If photographs are supplied of members of the Mourning Family, our artist will reproduce same in group gathered round the deceased. If doves are not approved, cherubims, angels, or floral designs may be used instead, for small extra charge.'

Whilst I was going through these horrors the old man kept up a babbling commentary on their particular and collective beauties; then he wanted me to look at his specimens of verse, much of which, he added, with fatuous vanity, was his own composition.

I did read some of it, and felt a profound pity for the corpse that had to submit to such degradation. Here are four specimens, the first of which was marked, 'Especially suitable for a numerous family, who have lost an aged parent, gold lettering is. 6d. extra,'—

'Mary and May and Peter and John [or other names]
Loved and honoured him [or her] who has gone;
White was his [or her] hair and kind was his [or her] heart,
Oh why, we all sigh, were we made thus to part?'

For an Aunt, (Suitable verses for Uncles at same rates.)

'Even our own sweet mother, who is so kind,
Could not wring our hearts more if she went and left us behind;
A halo of glory is now on thy head,
Ah, sad, sad thought that good auntie is dead.'

For a Father or Mother,

'Oh children, dear, when I was alive,
To get you bread I hard did strive;
I now am where I need no bread,
And wear a halo round my head.

Weep not upon my tomb, I pray,
But do your duty day by day.'

The last but one was still more beautiful,—

For a Child who suffered a Long Illness before Decease.

[I remarked casually that a child could not suffer even a short illness *after* decease. Bilger smiled a watery smile and said 'No.']

'For many long months did we fondly sit,
And watch our darling fade bit by bit;
Till an angel called from out the sky,
"Come home, dear child, to the Sweet By-and-By.
Hard was your lot on earth's sad plain,
But now you shall never suffer again,
For cherubims and seraphims will welcome you here.
Fond parents, lament not for the loss of one so dear." '

[*N.B.— "These are very beautiful lines."*]

The gem of the collection, however, was this:—

Suitable for a child of any age. The beautiful simplicity of the words have brought us an enormous amount of orders from bereaved parents.

'Our [Emily] was so fair,
That the angels envied her,
And whispered in her ear,
"We will take you away on [Tuesday] night." '

["*Drawing of angels carrying away deceased child, is. 6d. extra*."]

The old imbecile put his damp finger upon this, and asked me what I thought of it. I said it was very simple but touching, and then, being anxious to get rid of him, ordered two dozen of Kate's fancy. He thanked me most fervently, and said he would bring them to me in a few days. I hurriedly remarked he could post them instead, paid him in advance, and told him to help himself to some more whisky. He did so, and I observed, with some regret, that he took nearly half a tumblerful.

'Dear, dear me,' he said, with an apologetic smile, 'I'm afraid I have taken too much; would you kindly pour some back. My hand is somewhat shaky. Old age, sir, if I may indulge in a platitude, is—'

'Oh, never mind putting any back. It's a long walk to the ferry, and a wet day beside.'

'True, true,' he said meditatively, looking at Mary carrying in the dinner, and drinking the whisky in an abstracted manner.

Just then my sister beckoned me out. She said it was very thoughtless of me to pour gallons of whisky down the poor old fellow's throat, upon an empty stomach.

'Perhaps you would like me to ask him to have dinner with us?' I said with dignified sarcasm.

'I think we might at least let Mary give him something to eat.'

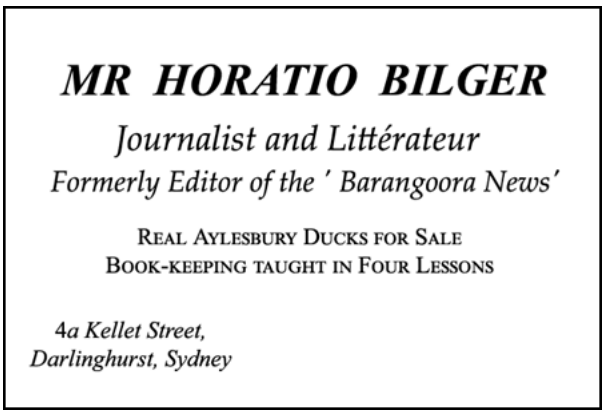
Of course I yielded, and my sister bade Mary give our visitor a good dinner. For such a small man he had an appetite that would have done credit to a long-fasting tiger shark tackling a dead whale; and every time I glanced at Mary's face as she waited on my sister and myself I saw that she was verging upon frenzy. At last, however, we heard him shuffling about on the verandah, and thought he was going without saying 'thank you.' We wronged him, for presently he called to Mary and asked her if I would kindly grant him a few words after I had finished dinner.

'Confound him! What the deuce—'

My sister said, 'Don't be cruel to the poor old fellow. *You may be like him yourself some day.*'

I said I didn't doubt it, if my womenfolk encouraged every infernal old dead-beat in the colony to come and loaf upon me. Two large tears at once ran down Kate's nose, and dropped into the custard on her plate. I softened at once and went out.

'Permit me, sir,' he said, in a wobbly kind of voice, as he lurched to and fro in the doorway, and tried to jab the point of his umbrella into a knot-hole in the verandah boards in order to steady himself, 'permit me, sir, to thank you for your kindness and to tender you my private card. Perhaps I may be able to serve you in some humble way'— here the umbrella point stuck in the hole, and he clung to the handle with both hands— 'some humble way, sir. Like yourself, I am a literary man, as this will show you.' He fumbled in his breast pocket with his left hand, and would have fallen over on his back but for the umbrella handle, to which he clung with his right. Presently he extracted a dirty card and handed it to me, with a bow, which he effected by doubling himself on his stomach over the friendly gamp, and remained in that position, swaying to and fro, for quite ten seconds. I read the card:—



I said I should bear him in mind, and, after helping him to release his umbrella, saw him down the steps and watched him disappear.

'Thank Heaven!' I said to Kate, 'we have seen the last of him.'

I was bitterly mistaken, for next morning when I entered the office, Bilger was there awaiting me, outside the sub-editor's room. He was wearing a new pair of boots, much larger than the old ones, and smiled pleasantly at me, and said he had brought his son Edward to see me, feeling sure that I would use my influence with the editor and manager to get him put on as a canvasser.

I refused point blank to see 'Edward' then or at any other time, and said that even if there was a vacancy I should not recommend a stranger. He sighed, and said that I should like Edward, once I knew him. He was 'a noble lad, but misfortune had dogged his footsteps—a brave, heroic nature, fighting hard against unmerited adversity.' I went in and shut the door.

TWO DAYS LATER Kate asked me at supper if I *couldn't do something for old Bilger's son*.

'Has that infernal old nuisance been writing to you about his confounded son?'

'How ill-tempered you are! The "old nuisance," as you call him, has behaved very nicely. He sent his son over here to thank us for our kindness, and to ask me to accept a dozen extra cards from himself. The son is a very respectable-looking man, but rather shabby. He is coming again to-morrow to help Mary to put up the new wire clothes line.'

'Is he? Well, then, Mary can pay him.'

'Don't be so horrid. He doesn't want payment for it. But, of course, I shall pay his fare each way. Mary says he's such a willing young man.'

In the morning I saw Mr Edward Bilger, helping Mary. He was a fat-faced, greasy-looking youth, with an attempted air of hang-dog respectability, and with 'loafer' writ large on his forehead. I stepped over to him and said,—

'Now, look here. I don't want you fooling about the premises. Here's two shillings for you. Clear out, and if you come back again on any pretence whatever I'll give you in charge.'

He accepted the two shillings with thanks, said that he meant no offence, but he thought Mary was not strong enough to put up a wire clothes line.

Mary (who was standing by, looking very sulky) was a cow-like creature of eleven stone, and I laughed. She at once sniffed and marched away. Mr Bilger, junior, presently followed her into the kitchen. I went after him and ordered him out. Mary was leaning against the dresser, biting her nails and looking at me viciously.

Half an hour later, as I walked to the ferry, I saw Mr Bilger, junior, sitting by the roadside, eating bread and meat (my property). He stood up as I passed, and said politely that it looked like rain. I requested him to make a visit to Sheol, and passed on.

In the afternoon my sister called upon me at the *Evening News* office. She wore that look of resigned martyrdom peculiar to women who have something unpleasant to say.

'Mary has given me notice— of course.'

'Why "of course!" '

Kate rose with an air of outraged dignity. 'Servants don't like to be bullied and sworn at— not white servants, anyway. You can't expect the girl to stay. She's a very good girl, and I'm sure that that young man Bilger was doing no harm. As it is, you have placed me in a most unpleasant position; I had told him that he could let his younger brothers and sisters come and weed the paddock, and—'

'Why not invite the whole Bilger family to come and live on the premises?' I began, when Kate interrupted me by saying that if I was going to be violent she would leave me. Then she sailed out with an injured expression of countenance.

When I returned home to dinner at 7.30, Mary waited upon us in sullen silence. After dinner I called her in, gave her a week's wages in lieu of notice, and told her to get out of the house as a nuisance. Kate went outside and wept.

FROM THAT DAY the Bilger family proved a curse to me. Old Bilger wrote me a note expressing his sorrow that his son— quite innocently— had given me offence; also he regretted to hear that my servant had left me. Mrs Bilger, he added, was quite grieved, and would do her best to send some 'likely girls' over. 'If none of them suited, Mrs Bilger would be delighted to come and assist my sister in the mornings. She was an excellent, worthy woman.' And he

ventured, with all due respect, to suggest to me that my sister looked very delicate. His poor lad Edward was very sad at heart *over the turn matters had taken*. The younger children, too, were sadly grieved—to be in a garden, even to toil, would be a revelation to them.

That evening I went home in a bad temper. Kate, instead of meeting me as usual at the gate, was cooking dinner, looking hot and resigned, I dined alone, Kate saying coldly that she did not care about eating anything. The only other remark she made that evening was that 'Mary had cried very bitterly when she left.'

I said, 'The useless, fat beast!'

THE CURSE OF BILGER rested upon me for quite three months. He called twice a week, regularly, and borrowed two shillings 'until next Monday.' Then one day that greasy ruffian, Bilger, junior, came into the *Evening News* office, full of tears and colonial beer, and said that his poor father was dead, and that his mother thought I might perhaps lend her a pound to help bury him.

The sub-editor (who was overjoyed at Bilger's demise) lent me ten shillings, which I gave to Edward, and told him I was sorry to hear the old man was dead. I am afraid my face belied my words.

———————

21: The Prince Ward

Claude M. Girardeau

fl 1894-1924

The Black Cat, Feb 1896

Little is known about this obscure author. One source gives a birthdate of 1860; known to have published one novel, The Red Wagon*, 1914, and several short stories between 1894-1924.* The Black Cat *specialised in "strange" stories.*

THE HOSPITAL was almost finished, but, as there were several wards still unendowed, the board of managers gave a reception. Ostensibly, to enable a curious public to inspect the building; in reality, to obtain benefactions. Among the visitors was a Mr. Prince, a Southerner, and reputed wealthy. He seemed greatly interested in the hospital, and selected for endowment a single ward on the second floor, department of surgery. It was at once completed at his expense and christened with his name.

Its first occupant was his wife. She looked like a dying woman to the superintendent, but he entered her case on the new books without comment, and she was examined by the surgeons in charge. They advised an immediate operation as the only hope— and that a slight one— of saving her life. In fact, they knew she could not recover either with or without it; but the operation would be an interesting one.

"I did not think I was so ill," said Mrs. Prince pathetically, as the nurse took her back to her room.

"Guess she hasn't looked in a glass lately," was the attendant's unspoken comment.

"She looks for all the world like a starved cat," she said to another nurse, later on, "with her big green eyes and her black hair. Won't I have a sweet time combing all that hair? It's about two yards long. She's more hair than anything else."

The morning of the operation found Mrs. Prince cold with nervous terror.

"Do you think I will suffer much?" she inquired of the nurse tremulously.

"Oh, no, indeed," replied that functionary, with professional cheerfulness, plaiting away at the endless lengths of hair. "If I was you, I'd have about half of this cut off."

Mrs. Prince looked at the long, heavy plaits, then up at the nurse, her gray eyes darkening.

"If you cannot take care of it," she said quietly, "I will tell the superintendent to send me another woman."

The nurse colored.

"Oh, I don't mind," she said awkwardly.

When the toilet of the condemned was completed Mr. Prince came in with a huge handful of roses, smiling genially as his eyes fell on his wife.

"Why, P'tite, you look like John Chinaman in that funny shirt."

She smiled in return, but wanly.

"I suppose I do look absurd." She held out her arms; he filled them with the roses, and sat down by the narrow bed. She turned aside her head to hide the sudden tears. He drew her plaits of hair from neck to heel and bent to kiss her cheek as the doctors came in to administer ether.

"Madame Kanaris is here," he said softly, "and begs to see you. May she come in?"

"Madame Kanaris!" She stared up at him with dilating eyes. "When did she come to B—? What is she doing here?"

"The nurse said I might come in for one little moment," said an exquisitely melodious voice at the door directly facing the sick woman.

The men all looked up. A woman, young, beautiful as the day, stood on the threshold, her tender deep blue eyes fixed upon the patient with an expression of the liveliest emotion.

Her radiant hair, her dazzling complexion, her superb figure enveloped in furs, and the indescribable grace of her attitude made the sick woman appear grotesquely skeleton-like and ghastly.

It was Life confronting Death. Death raised itself upon an emaciated arm, and spoke to Life:—

"I cannot see you now, madame. The physicians have just come in, as you see. I beg that you will go away."

Prince sprang to his feet and approached the visitor.

"I did not know the physicians would be here," he murmured. "Shall I take you downstairs? Will you wait for me in the parlors?"

While he was speaking to Madame Kanaris his wife motioned to a surgeon. "I am ready. But, O doctor, are you sure it will make me quite dead? Are you sure I shall not be just iced over, with a frightful consciousness underneath? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," said the surgeon pityingly, stealing a glance at the figures in the doorway. "You will be blotted out of existence during the operation. Do not be afraid."

He took her cold hand into a warm, compassionate palm. In a few seconds she was carried past her husband and Madame Kanaris, who were still talking in the corridor.

Prince was startled as the procession of doctors and nurses came out of the room.

His companion glanced at them, and her brilliant color faded.

"Do not leave me," she gasped, holding him by the arm. "Take me away. I should not have come."

Prince hesitated. The stretcher was being carried into the elevator. He turned to the beautiful, agitated woman beside him, drew her hand through his arm, and they went downstairs together.

The operation was long, difficult, and dangerous, taxing both nerve and skill. The operating-room was very hot. One of the nurses fainted, and a young doctor, sick at heart and stomach, helped her away, glad to get out himself.

The operating surgeon, a keen, self-possessed practitioner, looked at the patient when all was over, with a deep breath of relief.

"The very worst case of its kind I ever saw," he remarked to a colleague. "It will be a miracle if she recovers, although I would give one of my ears to make it possible."

After three days of delirium and torture the woman died.

It was the twenty-eighth day of February.

Madame Kanaris came into the ward alone, and stood for a few moments looking down at the face on the narrow pillow.

"She could never have recovered in any event?" she said questioningly to the nurse.

"I don't see how she could," was the calm reply.

Madame put out a flashing hand.

"May I see?" she said with delicate curiosity.

The nurse lifted a layer of batting.

The beautiful visitor gave a cry of dismay and clapped the hand to her face.

"I thought it would make you sick," said the nurse quietly. "I guess you had better go to the window."

Madame stood with her lace handkerchief pressed to her lips and gazed upon the ice and snow without.

Presently she said:—

"Mr. Prince desires the hair of his wife. Will you kindly cut off the plaits close to the head."

"It does seem a pity," observed the nurse, snipping at the plaits stolidly, "to take the only thing from her she seemed to care much about. I guess they can bury my hair with me."

"She is not to be buried," replied madame softly, still gazing upon the whiteness without. "It would be a pity to burn such splendid hair, would it not?"

"Oh!" said the nurse, "I see. Going to send her to the new crematory?"

"Are you a New Englander?" gently inquired the lady, turning her dark blue eyes upon the inquisitive attendant.

"I guess I am. Why?"

"I have always heard that New Englanders asked a great many questions."

The nurse colored and snapped the scissors vigorously through the last strands of hair. The thick, short locks stuck out stiffly behind the dead woman's ears. The nurse held out the snakelike braids to Madame Kanaris, who drew back a little.

"Please put them in this box for me," she said quickly. "Mr. Prince will send for it."

In leaving the room she touched the dead forehead lightly with a finger, crossed herself, and murmured something in a strange tongue.

"Catholic, I guess," sniffed the nurse, watching her as she went down the corridor, with that mingling of envy and unwilling admiration that the beautiful Greek always succeeded in implanting in the bosoms of her less-favored sisters.

In a few days' time Prince and Madame Kanaris returned to the hospital with a picture they desired hung in the ward. It might have been an idealized portrait of Mrs. Prince,— the face of a saint against a background of sunset, or the head of a martyr dark against flame, as the imagination of the beholder should suggest.

The frame was oval with an inscription below the head. It was also heavy, of plaited bronze, with a boxlike backing. It was the work of a finished artist, however, and, being idealized, the portrait was beautiful. It was hung above the bed, as the other wall spaces were occupied with cheerful landscapes.

Madame Kanaris laid a loose bunch of pomegranate flowers on the pillow beneath it, and she and Prince left B— the next day— as they thought— forever.

THE NEW HOSPITAL was a popular one, but for some reason the Prince Ward remained vacant. There was nothing mysterious about this; it had been bespoken many times for patients, but a change of mind would occur so naturally that at first nothing was thought of it. In a year or so, however, the continued vacancy began to be a subject of remark among the nurses. But they were too busy and too practical to regard it in any other light than that of a provoking pecuniary loss to the establishment.

One night in January the night nurse of the second floor, at one end of which was the Prince Ward, sat drowsily waiting for medicine periods or the sound of bells from the various rooms.

It was the last night of her watch, and she was worn out from a month's sleeplessness.

Toward midnight the tinkle of a bell roused her. She went from door to door trying to place it. As she neared the Prince Ward it sounded again.

She paused at the door.

"Very strange," she thought; "surely there is no one in here?"

But to make sure she went in. The room was icy cold.

A low moan came from the narrow bed.

"Water!" murmured a voice inarticulately. "Water!"

"Wait until I turn on the light," said the nurse, going towards the chimney-place. She stepped on something, tripped, would have fallen; caught at the bed and grasped a long thick rope of hair. She lifted it and laid it alongside the figure it evidently belonged to.

"Water, water!" moaned the inarticulate voice again, close to her ear. The nurse went out, much puzzled, and returned with a glass. Two icy hands touched hers as she held it to the lips.

"How cold you are!" she exclaimed, "and this room is like a frozen— frozen tomb," she added. "You must get warm."

"No, no!" said the voice, ending in a low, wailing moan.

The nurse looked curiously down at the face on the pillow. Scarcely anything was visible but two large dark eyes and two immensely long snake-like plaits of hair.

"Did you come in to-night? Are you waiting for an operation?" asked the perplexed nurse.

"Yes." The voice was inarticulate again.

"How strange the day nurse or the head nurse did not tell me. I don't know what to make of it, at all. You are sure you do not want any light or heat?"

The reply was so inarticulate that she bent down to listen. A faint odor turned her quite sick. She went out hastily into the corridor, leaving the door ajar. She was worried; nay, more, she was conscious of a feeling a trained nurse has no excuse for. She had a crawly sensation along her spine.

"I must be dreaming," she said to herself angrily.

She went back to her chair and table, and, in spite of heaviness and sleepiness, listened for the bells with a qualm of absolute fright whenever the sound came from the end of the corridor.

At last, just before daybreak, the bell she was straining her ears for, rang again.

She plunged her head into cold water, took a glass in her hand, and approached the Prince Ward. For a second she paused at the door; a wild impulse to dash down the glass of water and rush shrieking through the corridor almost overpowered her for a heart-beat. Then her training reasserted

itself; she smiled satirically in her own face and went in, leaving, nevertheless, the door wide open behind her. She paused beside the bed.

"Thirsty again? I have brought some water for you."

She slid a hand to lift the head. She bent over the pillow with a steady glass.

The bed was empty. It was not even made up. There were no sheets on it, no pillow-slip.

The room was like a frozen tomb. The glass dropped from her hand, deluging the mattress with its contents.

She rushed from the room. Fortunately, her felt slippers made no sound. The door swung to noiselessly behind her. She fled up the corridor, and flattened her back against the wall at its furthest end, shaking as with a mortal chill.

There she remained until the gray light of a snowy day crept through the window at her side.

When the day nurse, rosy and refreshed, came to relieve her, she said, eying the night nurse a little curiously:

"I guess you'd better tumble into bed as soon as you can, Miss Evans. You look as if your month's work had about finished you."

The nurse whose turn came next was the one who had been with Mrs. Prince. The last night of her watch was the twenty-seventh of February. She had had an unusually hard month's work, and was exceedingly tired and not a little cross when, at midnight, a bell rang which she could not locate.

"Some plaguey wire out of gear again," she said, provoked, after a second, fruitless search for the elusive tinkle. She had turned at the end of the corridor, and stood just by the Prince Ward. The bell rang sharply.

"Well, I want to know!" she said aloud. "If it isn't in this ward!"

She went in immediately and would have turned on the light, when she was stopped by a curiously familiar, though indistinct, voice.

"Water— water!"

"For the land's sake," ejaculated the Down-Easter, going toward the bed. "What's this?"

Her foot slipped on something; she tripped and came near falling. She stooped and lifted from the floor a long, heavy plait of black hair. She stood stupidly, holding it in her hands, staring down at the bed.

"If I was you," she said mechanically, "I'd have about half of this cut off."

Two large dark eyes stared up at her.

"Why!" she stammered, too stupid to know when she was frightened, too trained a nurse to understand, "Why, you died!"

A low laugh echoed in the room.

"How cold you are in here," the nurse went on. "What will you have?"

"Water," said the thick voice inarticulately.

The nurse went out. As she closed the door behind her she was seized with a sudden cold shaking.

She went to the room of the head nurse and woke her.

"Say, Mrs. Waxe, who's the patient in the Prince Ward? Why wasn't I told about her?" Mrs. Waxe was wide awake instantly.

"Prince Ward? There's nobody in the Prince Ward, Miss Hall."

"Yes, there is, too. I've just seen her and spoke to her. Seems to me I've seen the woman before. But the one I knew died after the operation."

"What?" asked Mrs. Waxe keenly. She had been in the hospital only six months, but she was a personal friend of Miss Evans. "Who was she?" Miss Hall gave a brief account of the case.

"What was her name?" inquired Mrs. Waxe, sitting up, large and alert.

"Why, it was Prince," said the night nurse. "She was the wife of the man who endowed the ward."

Mrs. Waxe gazed for a moment into the stolid face before her.

"I think you have had a dream," she said calmly.

"I don't sleep on duty, whatever the others may do," retorted Miss Hall.

Mrs. Waxe lumbered out of bed, untying her cap strings.

"Go back to the floor," she said quietly. "I'll be coming to you after a bit."

She dressed quickly and presently waddled into the corridor.

"Now, you go and get to sleep in my room, Miss Hall, and I'll be taking your place to-night."

The hospital was filled to overflowing with grippe cases. The epidemic was raging in the city, and the Prince Ward was the only vacant spot in the place. Its defective register had prevented its use. It could be but insufficiently heated from the fireplace.

Mrs. Waxe went to it at once and turned on the electric light. She then stripped the bed of everything except the springs, carried the small table to the other side of the room, put out the light, took up the hand bell, and locked the door as she went out.

She then sat down at the table in the corridor, opened a Bible, and began to read.

She had read perhaps fifteen minutes when a bell tinkled. Her long experience enabled her to locate it almost immediately. She went to the ward adjoining the Prince.

No; the patient there had not rung for her, but was awake and sure the bell next her on the right was the one. It had rung before.

The Prince Ward was on the right. As Mrs. Waxe stepped into the corridor the bell sounded again.

It was in the Prince Ward. The Englishwoman was convinced that an ugly trick was being played.

Thoroughly indignant, she unlocked the door and stepped within. A low moaning and a peculiar unpleasant odor arrested her progress towards the electric button. The first turned her ruddiness pale; the second made her sick. Her foot slipped; she stumbled, twisted her ankle, and, being a heavy woman, she fell on her knees, catching at the bed-rail. A hand crept upon her shoulder, striking cold through her gingham dress.

"Water!" breathed a hoarse voice at her ear inarticulately. "Water!"

In spite of the strained ankle, the head nurse got upon her feet. She staggered out of the room, followed by the moaning cry of "Water— water."

She shut the door behind her and crept along the corridor, holding to the wall; then called one of the private nurses and bade her light up the Prince Ward. The woman did so, remained in the room a few moments, then came back leisurely.

"Well?" said Mrs. Waxe.

"Well," returned the nurse, "I opened the window. Did not know the ward had been used lately. Pretty bad case, wasn't it?"

"Bad case?" repeated Mrs. Waxe, a light shining through her nostrils to her brain. "Yes; perhaps."

"Perhaps?" repeated the private nurse satirically. "I guess I ought to know by this time. I should say there hadn't been much left of that case to put under ground."

She went back to her case, wondering at the stupidity of the English generally and in particular.

Mrs. Waxe put her aching foot into hot water and meditated.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH of February dawned dark, for a blizzard from the northwest was blowing. It was the worst storm of the last half of the century.

Men were lost and frozen to death in the streets while going from their business houses to their homes.

A lady attempting to alight from a carriage at one of the railroad stations, in order to make an outgoing train, slipped, or was blown down upon the icy pavement. She was taken up insensible and carried to the nearest hospital.

"I do not think we have even a corner vacant," said the superintendent; "but of course she cannot leave the building now."

She sent for Mrs. Waxe.

"The Prince Ward is unoccupied?"

The head nurse glanced at the stretcher and hesitated.

"Yes; but it is next to impossible to heat it, you know, doctor."

"Do the best you can," replied the superintendent. "The woman should have been taken to the Emergency, but you see what the weather is."

Mrs. Waxe divested the traveler of her velvet and furs, her lace and linen, the bag of diamonds secreted in her bosom, her long perfumed gloves, her silk underwear, her jeweled garters and hairpins. She left nothing on her but the black pearls in her ears and the magnificent rings on her fingers; then slipped a hospital shirt on her fair body, and tucked her shining curls into a cap. The fall had fractured the bone of one leg and several ribs.

The ward surgeon, entering, started at the sight of the beautiful face on the narrow pillow. Instantly the scene of two years before renewed its living colors on the sensitive film of memory. He even recalled the name of the woman before him, so deeply had that scene and her beauty impressed him.

"It is Madame Kanaris," he said.

The patient opened her dark blue eyes.

"I am Mrs. Prince," she corrected; "I wish to send a telegram to New York at once."

She turned white; fainted again. The broken bones were attended to with expedition.

Before night the telegram was sent. There had been some delay of letters, some misunderstanding that had sent Mrs. Prince to B— by mistake.

That lady's brilliant eyes examined her surroundings.

"I am in the —— Hospital, in the Prince Ward?" she said presently.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waxe, disturbed by the coincidence of names.

"I selected the fittings and furniture for it," Mrs. Prince went on softly. "But I did not think, at the time, of myself." She looked at the picture above the bed.

"You must have that picture taken down for me, Mrs. Waxe. I do not like to have anything 'hanging over me,' even if it is the counterfeit presentment of a saint."

An ugly sneer disfigured her delicate lips for a moment.

"I will have it taken down as soon as possible," said the head nurse; "but it cannot be done immediately, my dear. We have sent out all the nurses we can spare, and extra beds have been put in nearly every ward. I am too heavy to risk myself on a ladder, but I will see the superintendent about it after a bit. It is well fastened up, I assure you."

Towards night, not hearing from Mr. Prince, madame grew nervous, then feverish.

In a sick-bed for the first time in her life, strapped immovably to its narrow confines, her head beginning to throb with agony, she lay suffocating with

impatience, suspense, and apprehension, she,— the spoiled darling of every good fortune.

The raging storm shrieked unceasingly about the House of Pain like a legion of infernal spirits.

There were so many others more critically ill than herself, and the number of nurses was so reduced, that she was of necessity left alone much of the time.

Just before midnight Mrs. Waxe came in, weary, but the embodiment of strength and kindness.

"I think," she said coaxingly, "you must try and get to sleep. I shall give you something to quiet you, and then turn off the light, and I hope you will soon drop off. I shall be near you in the corridor. If you want anything just tinkle the bell. Close to hand, you see, my dear."

She administered a draught, straightened the pillow, then bent down impulsively and kissed the lovely, disquieted face maternally. Two beautiful arms closed about her ample neck, and the patient was sobbing on her generous bosom.

"Come, come, you must be brave. They did not want me to tell you, but a telegram came half an hour since for you. Your husband will be here sometime toward morning. Will you go to sleep now, like a good child? Ah! I thought so."

She turned off the light and went out, leaving the door half open. After making the round of the corridor she dropped into a chair. Her head fell forward on the table before her. In all her experience as a nurse she had never done such a thing before,— she fell asleep at her post.

She was roused by the sharp, continued ringing of a bell. She sat up, dazed, rubbing her eyes.

The superintendent, the resident physician, and a stranger were coming up the wide staircase. The bell had never ceased its imperious, insistent summons.

Without stopping to think, the head nurse ran, ponderously but swiftly, to the Prince Ward. As she stepped within the threshold the bell suddenly ceased, but the air was vibrating. She ran to the mantelpiece, reached up, and turned on the light.

The three men were at the door, the fur-clad stranger, a tall and handsome apparition, carrying a huge handful of roses. They all stared at the figure of the head nurse.

Petrified in position, her fingers on the key of the electric bulb, she stood with her usually florid face, now paper white, turned over her shoulder, her starting eyes fixed upon the bed.

Mr. Prince entered quickly, then drew back with a loud cry of fear and horror. The roses fell from his hands upon the edge of the bed and over the floor.

The heavy picture had dropped like a stone from its anchor in the cornice. Its edge had struck the sick woman on breast and forehead, but it had fallen painting upward. From beneath it uncoiled on either side two immensely long, ropelike plaits of black hair, between which the painted face smiled upon the white faces by the bedside.

The superintendent was the first to recover his wits. He sprang forward, lifted the picture, wondering at its weight. As he did so, the back, loosened by the fall, fell to pieces; a heavy bronze jar rolled from the face on the pillow, scattering a thin, fine, dust-like ashes that powdered the luxuriant curls, and floated above the stiff, stripped figure in a fine, impalpable cloud.

Then the ashes settled slowly upon the lifeless body, upon the scattered roses on the floor, and upon the splendid furs of the man who shrank against the wall and put up his hands against the dreadful sight.

22: An Awakening

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

The Little Review, Dec 1918

Collected in: *Winesburg, Ohio*, 1919

BELLE CARPENTER had a dark skin, grey eyes, and thick lips. She was tall and strong. When black thoughts visited her she grew angry and wished she were a man and could fight someone with her fists. She worked in the millinery shop kept by Mrs. Kate McHugh and during the day sat trimming hats by a window at the rear of the store. She was the daughter of Henry Carpenter, bookkeeper in the First National Bank of Winesburg, and lived with him in a gloomy old house far out at the end of Buckeye Street. The house was surrounded by pine trees and there was no grass beneath the trees. A rusty tin eaves-trough had slipped from its fastenings at the back of the house and when the wind blew it beat against the roof of a small shed, making a dismal drumming noise that sometimes persisted all through the night.

When she was a young girl Henry Carpenter made life almost unbearable for Belle, but as she emerged from girlhood into womanhood he lost his power over her. The bookkeeper's life was made up of innumerable little pettinesses. When he went to the bank in the morning he stepped into a closet and put on a black alpaca coat that had become shabby with age. At night when he returned to his home he donned another black alpaca coat. Every evening he pressed the clothes worn in the streets. He had invented an arrangement of boards for the purpose. The trousers to his street suit were placed between the boards and the boards were clamped together with heavy screws. In the morning he wiped the boards with a damp cloth and stood them upright behind the dining room door. If they were moved during the day he was speechless with anger and did not recover his equilibrium for a week.

The bank cashier was a little bully and was afraid of his daughter. She, he realized, knew the story of his brutal treatment of her mother and hated him for it. One day she went home at noon and carried a handful of soft mud, taken from the road, into the house. With the mud she smeared the face of the boards used for the pressing of trousers and then went back to her work feeling relieved and happy.

Belle Carpenter occasionally walked out in the evening with George Willard. Secretly she loved another man, but her love affair, about which no one knew, caused her much anxiety. She was in love with Ed Handby, bartender in Ed Griffith's Saloon, and went about with the young reporter as a kind of relief to her feelings. She did not think that her station in life would permit her to be seen in the company of the bartender and walked about

under the trees with George Willard and let him kiss her to relieve a longing that was very insistent in her nature. She felt that she could keep the younger man within bounds. About Ed Handby she was somewhat uncertain.

Handby, the bartender, was a tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty who lived in a room upstairs above Griffith's saloon. His fists were large and his eyes unusually small, but his voice, as though striving to conceal the power back of his fists, was soft and quiet.

At twenty-five the bartender had inherited a large farm from an uncle in Indiana. When sold, the farm brought in eight thousand dollars, which Ed spent in six months. Going to Sandusky, on Lake Erie, he began an orgy of dissipation, the story of which afterward filled his home town with awe. Here and there he went throwing the money about, driving carriages through the streets, giving wine parties to crowds of men and women, playing cards for high stakes and keeping mistresses whose wardrobes cost him hundreds of dollars. One night at a resort called Cedar Point, he got into a fight and ran amuck like a wild thing. With his fist he broke a large mirror in the wash room of a hotel and later went about smashing windows and breaking chairs in dance halls for the joy of hearing the glass rattle on the floor and seeing the terror in the eyes of clerks who had come from Sandusky to spend the evening at the resort with their sweethearts.

The affair between Ed Handby and Belle Carpenter on the surface amounted to nothing. He had succeeded in spending but one evening in her company. On that evening he hired a horse and buggy at Wesley Moyer's livery barn and took her for a drive. The conviction that she was the woman his nature demanded and that he must get her settled upon him and he told her of his desires. The bartender was ready to marry and to begin trying to earn money for the support of his wife, but so simple was his nature that he found it difficult to explain his intentions. His body ached with physical longing and with his body he expressed himself. Taking the milliner into his arms and holding her tightly in spite of her struggles, he kissed her until she became helpless. Then he brought her back to town and let her out of the buggy. "When I get hold of you again I'll not let you go. You can't play with me," he declared as he turned to drive away. Then, jumping out of the buggy, he gripped her shoulders with his strong hands. "I'll keep you for good the next time," he said. "You might as well make up your mind to that. It's you and me for it and I'm going to have you before I get through."

One night in January when there was a new moon George Willard, who was in Ed Handby's mind the only obstacle to his getting Belle Carpenter, went for a walk. Early that evening George went into Ransom Surbeck's pool room with Seth Richmond and Art Wilson, son of the town butcher. Seth Richmond

stood with his back against the wall and remained silent, but George Willard talked. The pool room was filled with Winesburg boys and they talked of women. The young reporter got into that vein. He said that women should look out for themselves, that the fellow who went out with a girl was not responsible for what happened. As he talked he looked about, eager for attention. He held the floor for five minutes and then Art Wilson began to talk. Art was learning the barber's trade in Cal Prouse's shop and already began to consider himself an authority in such matters as baseball, horse racing, drinking, and going about with women. He began to tell of a night when he with two men from Winesburg went into a house of prostitution at the county seat. The butcher's son held a cigar in the side of his mouth and as he talked spat on the floor. "The women in the place couldn't embarrass me although they tried hard enough," he boasted. "One of the girls in the house tried to get fresh, but I fooled her. As soon as she began to talk I went and sat in her lap. Everyone in the room laughed when I kissed her. I taught her to let me alone."

George Willard went out of the pool room and into Main Street. For days the weather had been bitter cold with a high wind blowing down on the town from Lake Erie, eighteen miles to the north, but on that night the wind had died away and a new moon made the night unusually lovely. Without thinking where he was going or what he wanted to do, George went out of Main Street and began walking in dimly lighted streets filled with frame houses.

Out of doors under the black sky filled with stars he forgot his companions of the pool room. Because it was dark and he was alone he began to talk aloud. In a spirit of play he reeled along the street imitating a drunken man and then imagined himself a soldier clad in shining boots that reached to the knees and wearing a sword that jingled as he walked. As a soldier he pictured himself as an inspector, passing before a long line of men who stood at attention. He began to examine the accoutrements of the men. Before a tree he stopped and began to scold. "Your pack is not in order," he said sharply. "How many times will I have to speak of this matter? Everything must be in order here. We have a difficult task before us and no difficult task can be done without order."

Hypnotized by his own words, the young man stumbled along the board sidewalk saying more words. "There is a law for armies and for men too," he muttered, lost in reflection. "The law begins with little things and spreads out until it covers everything. In every little thing there must be order, in the place where men work, in their clothes, in their thoughts. I myself must be orderly. I must learn that law. I must get myself into touch with something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star. In my little way I must begin to learn something, to give and swing and work with life, with the law."

George Willard stopped by a picket fence near a street lamp and his body began to tremble. He had never before thought such thoughts as had just come into his head and he wondered where they had come from. For the moment it seemed to him that some voice outside of himself had been talking as he walked. He was amazed and delighted with his own mind and when he walked on again spoke of the matter with fervor. "To come out of Ransom Surbeck's pool room and think things like that," he whispered. "It is better to be alone. If I talked like Art Wilson the boys would understand me but they wouldn't understand what I've been thinking down here."

In Winesburg, as in all Ohio towns of twenty years ago, there was a section in which lived day laborers. As the time of factories had not yet come, the laborers worked in the fields or were section hands on the railroads. They worked twelve hours a day and received one dollar for the long day of toil. The houses in which they lived were small cheaply constructed wooden affairs with a garden at the back. The more comfortable among them kept cows and perhaps a pig, housed in a little shed at the rear of the garden.

With his head filled with resounding thoughts, George Willard walked into such a street on the clear January night. The street was dimly lighted and in places there was no sidewalk. In the scene that lay about him there was something that excited his already aroused fancy. For a year he had been devoting all of his odd moments to the reading of books and now some tale he had read concerning life in old world towns of the middle ages came sharply back to his mind so that he stumbled forward with the curious feeling of one revisiting a place that had been a part of some former existence. On an impulse he turned out of the street and went into a little dark alleyway behind the sheds in which lived the cows and pigs.

For a half hour he stayed in the alleyway, smelling the strong smell of animals too closely housed and letting his mind play with the strange new thoughts that came to him. The very rankness of the smell of manure in the clear sweet air awoke something heady in his brain. The poor little houses lighted by kerosene lamps, the smoke from the chimneys mounting straight up into the clear air, the grunting of pigs, the women clad in cheap calico dresses and washing dishes in the kitchens, the footsteps of men coming out of the houses and going off to the stores and saloons of Main Street, the dogs barking and the children crying— all of these things made him seem, as he lurked in the darkness, oddly detached and apart from all life.

The excited young man, unable to bear the weight of his own thoughts, began to move cautiously along the alleyway. A dog attacked him and had to be driven away with stones, and a man appeared at the door of one of the houses and swore at the dog. George went into a vacant lot and throwing back

his head looked up at the sky. He felt unutterably big and remade by the simple experience through which he had been passing and in a kind of fervor of emotion put up his hands, thrusting them into the darkness above his head and muttering words. The desire to say words overcame him and he said words without meaning, rolling them over on his tongue and saying them because they were brave words, full of meaning. "Death," he muttered, "night, the sea, fear, loveliness."

George Willard came out of the vacant lot and stood again on the sidewalk facing the houses. He felt that all of the people in the little street must be brothers and sisters to him and he wished he had the courage to call them out of their houses and to shake their hands. "If there were only a woman here I would take hold of her hand and we would run until we were both tired out," he thought. "That would make me feel better." With the thought of a woman in his mind he walked out of the street and went toward the house where Belle Carpenter lived. He thought she would understand his mood and that he could achieve in her presence a position he had long been wanting to achieve. In the past when he had been with her and had kissed her lips he had come away filled with anger at himself. He had felt like one being used for some obscure purpose and had not enjoyed the feeling. Now he thought he had suddenly become too big to be used.

When George got to Belle Carpenter's house there had already been a visitor there before him. Ed Handby had come to the door and calling Belle out of the house had tried to talk to her. He had wanted to ask the woman to come away with him and to be his wife, but when she came and stood by the door he lost his self-assurance and became sullen. "You stay away from that kid," he growled, thinking of George Willard, and then, not knowing what else to say, turned to go away. "If I catch you together I will break your bones and his too," he added. The bartender had come to woo, not to threaten, and was angry with himself because of his failure.

When her lover had departed Belle went indoors and ran hurriedly upstairs. From a window at the upper part of the house she saw Ed Handby cross the street and sit down on a horse block before the house of a neighbor. In the dim light the man sat motionless holding his head in his hands. She was made happy by the sight, and when George Willard came to the door she greeted him effusively and hurriedly put on her hat. She thought that, as she walked through the streets with young Willard, Ed Handby would follow and she wanted to make him suffer.

For an hour Belle Carpenter and the young reporter walked about under the trees in the sweet night air. George Willard was full of big words. The sense of power that had come to him during the hour in the darkness in the alleyway

remained with him and he talked boldly, swaggering along and swinging his arms about. He wanted to make Belle Carpenter realize that he was aware of his former weakness and that he had changed. "You'll find me different," he declared, thrusting his hands into his pockets and looking boldly into her eyes. "I don't know why but it is so. You've got to take me for a man or let me alone. That's how it is."

Up and down the quiet streets under the new moon went the woman and the boy. When George had finished talking they turned down a side street and went across a bridge into a path that ran up the side of a hill. The hill began at Waterworks Pond and climbed upward to the Winesburg Fair Grounds. On the hillside grew dense bushes and small trees and among the bushes were little open spaces carpeted with long grass, now stiff and frozen.

As he walked behind the woman up the hill George Willard's heart began to beat rapidly and his shoulders straightened. Suddenly he decided that Belle Carpenter was about to surrender herself to him. The new force that had manifested itself in him had, he felt, been at work upon her and had led to her conquest. The thought made him half drunk with the sense of masculine power. Although he had been annoyed that as they walked about she had not seemed to be listening to his words, the fact that she had accompanied him to this place took all his doubts away. "It is different. Everything has become different," he thought and taking hold of her shoulder turned her about and stood looking at her, his eyes shining with pride.

Belle Carpenter did not resist. When he kissed her upon the lips she leaned heavily against him and looked over his shoulder into the darkness. In her whole attitude there was a suggestion of waiting. Again, as in the alleyway, George Willard's mind ran off into words and, holding the woman tightly he whispered the words into the still night. "Lust," he whispered, "lust and night and women."

George Willard did not understand what happened to him that night on the hillside. Later, when he got to his own room, he wanted to weep and then grew half insane with anger and hate. He hated Belle Carpenter and was sure that all his life he would continue to hate her. On the hillside he had led the woman to one of the little open spaces among the bushes and had dropped to his knees beside her. As in the vacant lot, by the laborers' houses, he had put up his hands in gratitude for the new power in himself and was waiting for the woman to speak when Ed Handby appeared.

The bartender did not want to beat the boy, who he thought had tried to take his woman away. He knew that beating was unnecessary, that he had power within himself to accomplish his purpose without using his fists. Gripping George by the shoulder and pulling him to his feet, he held him with

one hand while he looked at Belle Carpenter seated on the grass. Then with a quick wide movement of his arm he sent the younger man sprawling away into the bushes and began to bully the woman, who had risen to her feet. "You're no good," he said roughly. "I've half a mind not to bother with you. I'd let you alone if I didn't want you so much."

On his hands and knees in the bushes George Willard stared at the scene before him and tried hard to think. He prepared to spring at the man who had humiliated him. To be beaten seemed to be infinitely better than to be thus hurled ignominiously aside.

Three times the young reporter sprang at Ed Handby and each time the bartender, catching him by the shoulder, hurled him back into the bushes. The older man seemed prepared to keep the exercise going indefinitely but George Willard's head struck the root of a tree and he lay still. Then Ed Handby took Belle Carpenter by the arm and marched her away.

George heard the man and woman making their way through the bushes. As he crept down the hillside his heart was sick within him. He hated himself and he hated the fate that had brought about his humiliation. When his mind went back to the hour alone in the alleyway he was puzzled and stopping in the darkness listened, hoping to hear again the voice outside himself that had so short a time before put new courage into his heart. When his way homeward led him again into the street of frame houses he could not bear the sight and began to run, wanting to get quickly out of the neighborhood that now seemed to him utterly squalid and commonplace.

_____

23: Speed Limit

George Allan England

1877–1936

The Cavalier, 15 Nov 1913

"SHE'S CERTAINLY a jim-slicker!" murmured Judge Amos Bartlett, shifting his quid. He spat accurately, fingered his goatee, and laid a hand on the glossy saddle of the machine.

"By Joe Beeswax! a right smart contraption, ain't she, now that I kin see her by daylight? Looks twice as hun'some as she did last night, when she come. Gosh, I cal'late she wun't take nubbody's dust! Bet two fingers on the choppin'-block, an' resk it, she'll hum!"

With the eye of love he studied his purchase.

Right-o! she surely was a dazzler as she stood there in her bravery of blue and gilt, just uncrated, with the morning sun coruscating her nickel-work.

And, gazing, the old judge felt a thrill of temptation poignant as the long-forgotten passions of a youth now dead these forty years.

"Gosh a'mighty, why not?" he murmured, giving dalliance the rein. "I know I could! I useter navigate a by-cycle as smart as any of 'em; an' the book says this here ain't a mite harder to handle. Dog my cats ef I wanta try her the fust time, with everybody buttin' in an' tellin' me how to break the critter. What I need's a leetle spin all by myself out Pinhook way an' back, jest to git the hang of it like. After that mebbe I wun't s'prise 'em, hey?"

Foreknowing that he would yield to temptation, he still considered a bit.

"Shucks!" he grunted at last "I got any God's amount o' time 'fore court's called. That there Brooks land case ain't docketed till nine. No namable reason I sh'd wait till afternoon. I— I'm a goin' to!"

A new light flashed in the spectacled eye. The judge breathed a trifle faster and spat again.

"I kin!" he exclaimed with emotion. "Reckon I ain't seen my boy Hiram run a wood-cutter an' ensilage-chopper two years fer nawthin'! He allus said it was plumb easy. All ye need's common sense, an' I reckon that's my long shot. I'll take a run right off now, while th' road's clear. Out to Pinhook an' back makes a good route. Jim Hick! I kin an' will!"

Not five minutes higher the August sun had crept when it beheld the judge, there in the barn, communing with the direction book and with the mechanism of the Antelope— consulting them in alternation.

"H-m! Well, that's done now. Tank 'F' is filled with naphthy. Connections at 'B' is all fixed. Leever 'D' is set right. Switch 'X' is turned. Cor-rect!

"'Now,' he read— 'now run the motorcycle along a smooth road a few feet till the ingine begins to explode, then mount, pedal a short distance if necessary, and—' Lawzee! *Ef* that's all they is to it—"

Right glad at heart that his helpmeet, Luella, wasn't visible, he furtively trundled the machine out of the barn, through the straw-littered yard, and out onto the road that led to Pinhook.

"It's jest as well she *ain't* seen me," he muttered. "Women-folks is sech pesky idjits, allus 'skivin' in where they ain't asked ner wanted. Here goes, by gum!"

Back into the toolbox he slapped the half-read book of directions, set the spark, and gave the motorcycle a vigorous push along the road.

At first nothing happened; but all at once, making music to his ears, *put-put! Put! Put! Put-put-put!* the engine caught.

Judge Bartlett made a little rheumatic run, scrambled aboard— though just how he couldn't have told—and, righting the machine that slued hard a lee, Mazeppa was in the saddle!

"Crimus!" he cried as he settled himself firmly, braced his Congress-booted feet on the rests, and gripped the long, curving handles. "The go-darned critter b-b-b-bounces some, d-d-d-don't she?"

But the judge had little time to consider bounces. Already the needle of the speedometer was edging its way past "20," and a sudden wind seemed to have sprung up from nowhere, flailing his long goatee and whiskers as it whipped his wrinkled face.

"G-g-g-gosh!"

All his attention speedily fixed itself on the one problem of keeping the Antelope somewhere in the road. Past him flickered the apple rows of his orchard.

Then the long stone wall that bounded his farm slid away, and right ahead of him yawned the sharp descent of Billings Hill.

The needle now marked 55, and still was rising. With a sickening sensation the judge realized that in his haste to start he had read the instruction book only far enough to learn about starting. The art of stopping he had omitted.

Now some vague, wild notion glimmered through his brain of perhaps trying to get the toolbox open again, find the book, and— but no! Impossible!

He dared not for so much as a single second release the death-grip of even one hand.

To his staring eyes the road had developed into an endless gray ribbon whirling beneath him. Trees, walls, telegraph poles flicked flashing by. The shaking became terrific. Amos felt his store-teeth clatter madly in his gaping jaw.

Crash!

What was it? Only a loose boulder powerless to swerve the force of the great wheels. On sped the machine.

But a twelve-dollar set of "uppers" gyrated through the air, struck the grit far behind, and bounded into the ditch as though in search of the flapping straw hat that but a moment before had sky-hooted rearward in a meteor trail of dust.

The Bean place loomed ahead. Amos glimpsed the huge white barn, the sugar maple grove, the glint of sunlit waters beyond.

"Help! Help!"

The farm lay behind. Vaguely a dog's barking mingled with Ezra Bean's startled shout. The spattering roar of the engine swallowed all.

"Jay Ree-oo! *Team*!"

Delrine Bates reined his ton of hay aside just in time to clear a streaking glint of blue, to which clung a crouching figure— clung with yells, while coattails and whiskers streamed straight behind like gonfalons of woe.

Swerve! Bounce! Slue!

With a sickening yaw to port the Antelope flickered through Pinhook, hazed with dust and hens, and struck the Shag Pond Road— a five-mile circuit, now the judge's only safety.

Dana Cole leaped to the telephone and hurled hot messages broadcast all up and down the farmers' amalgamated lines:

"Ev'body clear th' roads! Teams, youngins, poultry, pigs, keep off! Jedge Bartlett's run away with by a motorcycle! He's lickin' it raound th' lake!"

Thus Amos had a clear track. Hastily all traffic was diverted into barnyards and front doors. Infants and animals were impounded. And fences all along the line began to fringe themselves with an anxious yet a well-pleased populace.

Old Dr. Chase hastily laid out splints, needles, bandages, and chloroform, together with a bottle of Gribbins's Peerless Horse Liniment, the only embrocation in his veterinary stock.

"Reckon mebbe I'll git a job yit!" he murmured, nodding with joyous anticipation.

Thus began the judge's motordrome.

Inside of five minutes, having made the complete circle, he once more leaped through the village. A crowd gathered on the platform of Coffin's general store. Some of the younger bloods on the store platform began to time the judge after the fourth complete circuit.

Silas Hennberry, who once had been an assistant track-manager at the South Paris fair, got his stopwatch into action. The fifth round gave a record of 4.28.

Then the betting began, even money that the judge would be making it in 4.25, inside of half an hour.

Old Pop Bicknall offered two to one that the judge would "come up 'mongst the missin'" before the end of the tenth heat. 'Raish Cole took him, and Uncle Sessions held the total stakes of seventy-five cents.

The news spread over the countryside like an oil-film on water. Observation-parties began to coagulate at vantage points. Every impinging road brought in its quota by "rig" or afoot.

The semi-occasional trolley from Milton Plantation to Pinhook began running specials of the entire rolling stock of one car, with record-breaking crowds aboard.

Luella Bartlett, the judge's wife, arrived at the Bean place at 7.32 behind a lathering nag, just in time to catch sight of a vanishing whirl of dust. At this she waved her umbrella, screaming:

"Amos! You, Amos! My soul an' body, Ame! You stop, this 'tarnal minute! Hear me?"

Then she collapsed in hysterics. They had to throw water over her, which they rushed in pails from the horse-trough at the barn.

Meanwhile, other and more serious matters were shaping. For "Deak" Saunders, driving into town behind his goose-necked calico mare, suddenly became aware of serious trouble impending.

Hardly had he struck into the Lake Road when his ruminations about the Brooks land case received a ghastly jolt.

Thus were his pleasant assurances running:

"I got Jeff Brooks where I want him now, by gary! Ef the case is called, an' don't default— an' it's a goin' to be called or I'm a preacher— *ef* it's called, that there mowin' lot's as good as mine a'ready! Oh, I got him fer sure!"

Into these cheerful reflections exploded impending disaster in the shape of a crackling, fire-spitting comet bestridden by a half-glimpsed form that grimly clung and crouched and vanished down the pike.

"Whoa, durn ye!" he exhorted, sawing at the lines. "By the Gre't Deludian! What's *that*?"

Even as faint cheers became audible from the direction of Pinhook, Ronello Bowker came running, waving wild arms.

"Git out o' the road! Clear th' road!" he panted. "Ain't ye heerd?"

"Heerd what?"

"Jedge Bartlett!"

"Huh?"

"He's in a hell of a quand'y! Went an' got himself run away with on a motorcycle, an'—"

"Sho'! Was *that*—"

"Yup! An' fer Heaven's sake, git off'n the road! He'll be raound agin in less'n no time!"

Deak stared and went yellow.

"But— but—" he stammered. "It can't be! He's a goin' to hear that case at nine, an'—"

"Hear nawthin'! *You* hyper!"

Rudely Ronello hauled the mare into Orrington's barnyard.

"Now, ye 'tarnation fool!" he shouted. "You keep off'n the track! Want a wreck, do ye? Ef he hits ye, neither o' you'll last as long as Jed Perkins stayed in heaven."

"Y' mean that's really th' jedge, Ronello?" insisted Deak. "My crimus! How long—"

"He's be'n goin' better part of an hour a'ready. Raound an' raound th' lake. Dassent git off'n that road looks like. His only chanst is to hang right to it till his napthy gins out or suthin' busts on him."

"My land o' livin! An' ye say he ain't goin' to stop fer court?"

"How in Tunket *kin* he? He's fergot how t' stop her! He'll mebbe keep it up all day— that is, ef he don't peg out fust an' tumble off. Why, what's the matter? You look bluer'n a whetstun!"

Deak Saunders, suddenly vitalized into intense activities, leaped from his buckboard.

"Jeems Rice!" he bellowed. "Ef that 'ar case ain't called I stand t' lose thirty dollars! Quick! Git an auto-mobyle! I'll chase him! I'll holler to him how t' shet her off!"

Ronello snorted.

"Hain't no machine in this caounty kin ketch him!"

Far down the road a distant sound of cheering once more began to float upon the morning air. Then, bursting into the sphere of Deak's consciousness, leaped a crackling roar.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! Zip-p-p-p-p-p-p-p!

Once more the comet streaked and vanished.

"By gosh all lightnin'!" execrated Saunders, clinging to the fence and staring with horror-smitten eyes. "That's *my* finish! Thirty—"

He whirled on Ronello.

"Gimme a sheet— brush— paint! I'll make a big sign— tell him how t' shet off th' spark or dreen th' napthy-tank, an'—

"Sign?"

"Yup! An' hang it 'cross th' road—"

"Idjit! He lost his glasses, teeth, hat an' wig an' every durn thing 't would come off'n him 'fore he'd went raound six times! An' even ef he had his specs, *he* couldn't read no sign, clip he's goin'! Now, you better fergit it an'—"

But Deak heard him not.

Already he had turned and was legging it at full speed through the barnyard toward the lake.

After him stared Ronello.

"Plumb crazed!" he muttered, shaking his head.

Deak, however, was far from crazed.

Even in his seeming madness lay a very definite meaning. At the best gait of his gangling, rawhide-booted legs he racked through the orchard and down to the shores of Shag Pond.

"It ain't more'n half a mile wide here!" he panted, "I kin row over to the icehouse in ten minutes. Say, ef I ever needed t' dig in it's *naow*!"

Mightily he dug in, with Ronello's punt and oars, borrowed sans formalities in the way of asking permission. As never, the waters foamed from that blunt prow; as never, the wake frothed behind.

A reek of sweat under the ardors of the August sun, Deak travailed. Blisters? Weak heart? Asthma? Pooh! The objective of the Chase pasture and the icehouse were lodestones to his fevered soul.

"By gary!" he grunted. "I'll stop him afore he gits killed or thar'll be a dead jedge in these here parts!"

The punt touched mud. Deak leaped through muck and slime, split the cattail jungle, and sprinted across plowed land to the scene of campaign.

Just this side of the big gate into the Chase pasture the Lake Road swerved to the left to clear a broad arm of the pond. This arm, shallow and still, furnished the village ice crop, as the ramshackle building there attested.

Down toward the icehouse ran a road, tangenting off from the main highway which was now functioning as the judge's amphitheater, whereon he was being speeded to make a rural holiday.

To the water this straight, ice-hauling road descended at a passably sharp grade. It terminated in a kind of near-wharf, to which a few boards, though rotten, still adhered.

Heroic as Horatius at the bridge, Deak sprang to the pasture gate.

From its hinges he wrenched it. His strength was as the strength of ten, because—

"*Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!*"

A slatch of wind brought for a second a vicious purring to his ears.

"Jumpin' jews-harps! Comin' a'-ready!" he gulped.

Across the road he dragged the heavy gate.

"He either takes th' water or he stops right here!"

Bracing the barrier erect, he stood there with wide and staring eyes, blanched face, white lips, directly in the path of the on-roaring avalanche.

"*Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r*!"

Deak felt very ill, but stood his ground;

Then, a quarter-mile up the road, a clattering rocket leaped over a crest. Instantly it spun the distance down, trailing dust-banners.

Deak, yelling like a maniac, waved one arm and held the gate up with the other.

The rocket took the tangent. Past Deak flicked a streak of blue, flame spitting.

Then, even as Deak dropped the gate and bolted for the wharf, a high-pitched, rising yell was choked in the middle, and a geyser belched.

White water flung aloft in frothing sheaves. These slapped back into the center of wide-spreading circles, where flailed a dazed and frantic object.

Deak dived.

The rest was just a clinching and a dragging.

"Saved yer life, jedge! *Saved yer life*!" rose Deak's voice, triumphant, from the mélée.

TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES later the judge, with dry clothes on him and hot drinks in him, was nigh himself again, in Deak's kitchen. When Mrs. Saunders had dug the mud out of his ears he felt better. After all, he was still alive.

The motorcycle, intact, stood drying against Deak's barn. On the barn floor Deak was harnessing Kit, his other horse, into the Democrat wagon.

A growing crowd gawked along the fence; but Deak was answering no questions. There was still time to get the judge to court, provided no time was frittered in trivialities.

Suddenly Jeff Brooks, the defendant, drove into the yard. His horse showed signs of hard usage. With Jeff was Sheriff Titus. Both men leaped out and advanced toward the barn.

Deak's heart sank. The newcomers looked alarmingly in earnest. But Deak paid no heed. He wanted no speech with them.

They, however, harshly invaded the barn.

"Where's th' jedge?" demanded Brooks.

"What's that to you?"

"Nemmind! Where is he?"

"None o' your damn business! He's my company now. He's all right 'thout none o' your buttin' in, Jeff Brooks!"

"What you hookin' up fer?"

"Well, I reckon I ain't got no call t' inform *you*, but, between you an' me, I'm gittin' ready t' carry him daown to th' courthouse. Any objections?"

Hotly Deak faced the pair. Brooks grinned, eying the harness that depended from Deak's vigorous hand.

"No, I can't say as I've got any real objections t' your hookin' up, as sech," he answered. "Only, it wun't do ye no good. They ain't goin' to be no land case heard, that's all. It's goin' by default, an' I win!"

"No case?" stammered Deak.

"Why not? Who's goin' t' stop me, or *him*?"

"Titus here is, I reckon!"

"Haow? Consarn ye!"

"Do yer duty, officer!" cried Brooks.

"I got a warrant here fer th' jedge's arrest," announced Sheriff Titus. "An' one fer you, too, Deak Saunders."

"A— Why— wha-what fer?" And Deak's jaw dropped.

"You, malicious mischief, destruction o' property, an' obstructin' the public highway. Him—"

"Huh?"

"Him, exceedin' the legal speed limit of ten miles per hour in this here township. An'—"

Just then the assault and battery took place!

The rest was sheer "propaganda of the deed" all over the barn floor, out into the hen-yard, and ending after some fifteen minutes in the far corner of the pigpen.

This new case, of resisting an officer, is still in court, and has been put over till the March term. Much depends on the status of the set of harness as a dangerous weapon.

There is also Deak's counter-suit against Brooks for attempted mayhem. But the fact that Brooks, though he undeniably bit Deak on the right leg and essayed to chew off one thumb, did no material damage because of a total lack of teeth, has a vital bearing on the matter.

It is a complex case.

Judge Bartlett resolutely declines to discuss it.

———————

24: Nicotine and Cambric

Jeffery Farnol

1878-1952

The Smart Set, June 1904

RUTH LAUGHED; not one of those low, musical laughs most heroines indulge in, but a good, round peal, warranted to carry from where we stood to the farthest confines of the coppice beyond.

I felt annoyed, for, knowing girls as I do, I had been careful to work the affair upon the accepted lines, from the light mood of laughing raillery to seriousness, from seriousness to earnestness, and had almost reached the point where I should have clasped her hand with a "strong yet gentle pressure," when she brought me up short with the laugh as aforesaid.

As I saw the mischief brimming in her eyes— blue eyes they are, by the way— I felt rather glad on the whole that I had not reached the hand-clasping stage; as it was, the situation was decidedly trying. However, I assumed an easy, unembarrassed attitude upon the gate, and flatter myself I did not show it.

"The situation seems rather to amuse you," I said, quite sarcastically for me, after a somewhat lengthy pause.

"I am so sorry I interrupted you," she answered, twisting a lace handkerchief of ridiculous proportions; "do go on, please."

I felt for my pipe, and knocking out the ashes upon the gate-post, shook my head. "Under the circumstances I don't think I will, although it seems to have caused you no end of enjoyment," I said, bitterly; "but, then, I suppose you are used to such—incidents.

"As for me," I continued, and here I grew impressive again—"as for me, the whole affair has been fraught with much pain— with great pain, and— and— I give you my word it has. Good afternoon, Miss Brangwyn."

So saying, I raised my hat, and left her. She seemed rather surprised at my sudden departure, I thought, and for that matter so was I, but I had a feeling that my last speech, which should have been more than ordinarily affecting, had somehow or other "tailed off" ignominiously— hence my flight. That is the worst of me; I can usually carry everything before me, until I make a slip, and then I lose my head completely.

I walked away slowly, with a certain pensive droop of the head which I felt was eloquent of dead hopes and shattered aspirations. More than once, I had an almost overmastering desire to turn my head to see if she was watching, but checked the impulse— I am singularly strong-willed sometimes— and continued my melancholy way, until, having to climb a stile, I took advantage

to glance furtively back. Ruth had disappeared. I sighed—heavily, I remember, and, sitting down, felt for my pipe— it was gone.

A feeling of loneliness and desolation took possession of me. I got down from the stile, and felt through my pockets— carelessly at first, then more slowly, and finally ended by turning out all their contents in a heap; but my search was vain. I remembered knocking my pipe out upon the gate-post— I must have left it behind in my hurry.

I had visions of it lying desolate in the wet grass beneath a night-black sky, abandoned, forgotten— but I would return and find it again at all costs. Acting on this determination, I already had one leg across the stile when I caught the distant flutter of a skirt, and saw Ruth coming slowly down the path toward me. I paused, feeling totally incapable of facing her just then and running the gantlet of her mischievous eyes, with any chance of success.

The path was overshadowed by a tall hedge, just now pink with dog-roses, on the other side of which was a ploughed field. Without a moment's hesitation, I leaped the stile and began retracing my steps, safely screened from view behind this friendly hedge. Presently, I paused to disengage my coat from a thorn, and, as I did so, heard a voice approach, singing.

Was it possible, I asked myself, as I peered cautiously through the brambles, that Ruth could be singing, actually singing, after what has passed so recently? It was possible. I felt pained and annoyed. I lay still, however, and it was well I did so, for she stopped almost directly opposite me, and reached up for a spray of roses, which— in a manner peculiar to the species— immediately swung up gently out of reach. I felt pleased, somehow.

"Bother!" exclaimed Ruth, and stood up on tip-toe. I was lying in a dry ditch, and Ruth was wearing a walking-skirt, so that I could see she was standing on tip-toe.

"You've got to come, you know," Ruth said, addressing the refractory blossoms through clenched teeth; "you've got to come;" whereupon she jumped, the first time unsuccessfully, and the second, but at the third attempt I heard a little cry of triumph, and saw her stand a moment to smooth the petals of the captured blooms with light, caressing fingers ere she went singing upon her way once more.

"That girl," I said to myself, as I sat in the ditch, rolling a cigarette, "that girl has the most wonderful ankles in the world," and I lay back smoking dreamily, until, with a sudden pang, I remembered my lost pipe. By the time I had reached the coppice-gate, I was once more lost in a reverie.

"What was it," I asked myself, as I sat swinging my legs thoughtfully, "what was it about me that she always found so inextinguishably funny?"

I turned myself over, mentally, as it were, and viewed myself with a cold, impartial eye, but for the life of me failed to see it. Becoming aware that my cigarette was out, I pitched it away, and, the action reminding me why I was there, I got down upon my hands and knees, and began a careful search among the long grass.

I had sought vainly for about fifteen minutes, when I saw something white beneath the gate, and, raking it out, I beheld Ruth's handkerchief.

I spread it upon the palm of my hand and laughed. It was a ridiculous affair, as I have said, measuring about four inches square, surrounded by a deep fall of lace.

And yet there was something about it that forbade my laughter. A subtle fragrance, a faint, illusory sweetness, always associated with her, came to me, so that, glancing about me guiltily, I brushed it against my lips, and thrust it into my pocket.

I continued to seek my errant pipe with undiminished ardor and no success, until I at length uncovered a rabbit-burrow, and at once was seized with the idea that here, could I only get deep enough, was the end of my search, and the more I thought over it, the more likely it seemed.

Forthwith, I removed my coat, and, rolling up my sleeve, lay down, and thrust in my hand.

Deeper and deeper I went, and still with no success, and all the while I had tantalizing visions of my pipe lying within an inch of my fingers.

I was kicking furiously in my endeavors to gain that other inch when I was interrupted by a startled exclamation above me. Screwing round my head, I glanced up and beheld—Ruth. Somehow, I felt at a disadvantage.

"A-ah— you'll excuse me," I began.

"Oh, whatever is the matter?" she broke in, and I fancied there was a note of real agitation in her voice. "Are you caught in a man-trap?"

"Thank you, no," I answered, making one last supreme effort for that "other inch;" "it isn't a man-trap."

"Why, then, what is it?" she cried, retreating precipitately, and eying me in unfeigned alarm.

"Merely looking for my pipe," I answered, giving up all hope of finding it, and endeavoring to withdraw my arm.

"Looking for your pipe?" she repeated, with a suspicious tremor in her voice.

"Yes," I answered; "I lost it down a rabbit-burrow, you know."

Of course, I may have looked rather a fool wriggling there, trying to free my arm, but I don't think so; anyhow she had no cause, and certainly no right, to

go off into such a peal of laughter, especially that laugh of hers that always makes me feel so confoundedly "out of it."

"But how do you know it's there— down the rabbit-burrow?" she asked, as I resumed my coat, watching me with a laugh still in her eyes.

"Well, you see, I have examined every blade of grass hereabouts," I answered, rather stiffly for me; "and, for another thing, because I am morally certain that it is down there; a rabbit-burrow is just the kind of place a pipe of mine would choose to hide in."

"What do you intend to do about it?" she went on, more seriously.

"Borrow a spade, and dig him up!" I answered, promptly.

"But you can buy another," she demurred.

"Exactly! that's so like a woman," I said, smiling a superior smile. "I could buy another, of course, but you see a pipe doesn't happen to be a soulless thing like a— bonnet, for instance, that one can cherish for a day and forget the next.

"Besides," I continued, more pointedly, "it is a very prominent trait in my character that I am faithful— faithful even to such an undemonstrative thing as a pipe. How much more so then—?"

"Oh, I forgot," she broke in— "my handkerchief! I lost it this afternoon."

"Anything like this?" I inquired, maliciously, pulling out my own.

"Oh, no," she laughed; "quite different; besides it had lace at the edges and an 'R' embroidered in one corner."

"Lace," I repeated; "oh, then, of course—" and I crammed mine back into my pocket.

"And rather valuable," put in Ruth, beginning to search among the brambles.

I seated myself upon the gate and, rolling a cigarette, watched her. Her hair had become loosened, and hung low upon her cheeks— dark, glossy hair, somewhere between brown and black— and, as the smoke floated up from my cigarette, I busied myself trying to find the right word to describe it.

"I think you are horrid!" she said, turning upon me suddenly, her cheeks flushed with stooping.

" 'Misty' is the word," I exclaimed, with my eyes upon her hair.

"I said 'horrid,' and so you are, to sit there sneering while I grope about and scratch myself horribly among these— these beastly brambles," and she stamped her foot at them.

"Pardon me," I replied, "I can't sneer; that is the worst of me, I often want to, but I can't."

"Well, then, why don't you get down and help me?"

"Most happy, if you really wish it," I said, rising and throwing away my cigarette; "I was only waiting to be asked."

Forthwith I fell to work, peering under bushes while she held up the trailing branches, and all the while the humor of it— and I have a keen sense of humor— seethed and bubbled within me, so that it was as well she could not see my face.

"You say it was a small handkerchief?" I asked, pausing after the vain investigation of a blackberry-bush.

"Yes, rather small," she replied.

"With a monogram in one corner?"

"With a monogram in one corner," she repeated, quite pettishly.

"Then the chances are, it has blown clean away," I said. "After all, you know, a handkerchief is not much to lose; such trifles are not worth while worrying over."

Ruth looked at me with a whole world of indignation in her eyes.

"Only a little while ago," she said, "I found a man writhing himself into the most frightful contortions, with his arm down a rabbit-burrow, and all on account of a pipe, if you please, and a most obnoxious thing at that."

As she spoke, I could not refrain from thrusting my hand into my pocket, and as my fingers closed upon a certain dainty fragment of cambric and lace, I smiled, perhaps a trifle exultantly.

"Ah, but there is a certain indefinable something about a pipe, that is beyond even the best woman's comprehension. Try and think of it lying out there somewhere in the black night, desolate, abandoned, and let it share your pity."

Ruth looked away from me across the meadow.

"And what of my handkerchief?"

"Small, I think you said it was?"

"Small, with an 'R' embroidered in one corner, and edged with lace," she said, ticking off each item upon her fingers with exaggerated deliberation.

"Valuable lace?" I asked.

"Old point," she sighed, pushing aside a stray bramble with her shoe; "I did so treasure that handkerchief!"

"I'm very sorry, of course," I said, at the same time experiencing a strange exhilaration as my fingers wantoned with it in the secrecy of my pocket. "Yes, very sorry, but I'm afraid you must give it up."

Somehow, at this juncture, the situation struck me as so peculiarly humorous that I felt I was going to laugh, so I turned away and coughed instead, rather an odd-sounding cough, I thought, but it passed Ruth, who only sighed again.

"I suppose I must," she said, with a last lingering glance toward the blackberry-bushes, "but I would have given anything to have found it."

At her words, a sudden idea occurred to me. If I could manage to find it who knew what might happen? Involuntarily, I drew my hand from my pocket. As I did so, Ruth uttered a little cry, and next moment had disentangled something that fluttered from the button of my sleeve— it was her handkerchief. I was horrified, and, for a moment, my presence of mind deserted me, then I tried to look surprised.

"By Jove!" I began, but the flash of her eyes rendered me speechless again.

"How dared you?" she cried, facing me in hot anger; "how dared you?"

I felt uneasy; a wild longing came upon me to clear the gate at one terrific bound, and vanish in the woods beyond.

"Oh, how could you?" she cried again. "To let me search and search and scratch myself, and— and— oh, it was cruel!"

I really thought she was going to cry. I took a step nearer, murmuring something about its being an accident.

There were tears in her eyes, and I felt for all the world like some cold-blooded murderer— my utter depravity appalled me.

"I'm awfully sorry, you know," I stammered, venturing a step nearer yet. But she retreated before me hastily, drawing her skirts tight about her.

"Sorry!" she repeated, and whole volumes could not have expressed all the scorn she contrived to put into the single word.

"Please don't cry," I began, "because—"

"Cry!" she repeated, in the same way, and, upon my soul, when I came to look again, her eyes were as tearless as my own. I felt utterly at a loss.

"Go!" she continued; "and never, never dare to speak to me again."

She was wearing one of those short, tailor-made coats that fit close to the figure— Zouave I think they are called, but I won't be sure—and I watched her unbutton it and thrust the unlucky handkerchief out of sight, with a sense of utter desolation upon me.

Then, all at once, I saw something peeping at me from her bosom— something that, as I watched, slipped from its sweet resting-place, and fell at my feet. I stooped and picked up my errant pipe. I gasped with wonder, and turned it over in my hand, scarcely believing my eyes.

"Ruth," I said, softly.

She did not answer, but a wave of rich color crept up from chin to brow, and, for a moment, I hesitated, wondering; but, seeing how her lashes drooped, and how sweetly her mouth quivered, my hesitation vanished— and I understood.

25: A Singular Hallucination

Ernest Favenc

1848-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 17 July 1897

HE WAS indifferently well dressed, and always seemed to have a handful of silver in his pocket when he paid for his drink; but the strangest thing of all was in the way he took his drink. His hand was perpetually shaking, to such an extent that sometimes the attempt to get it to his lips was hopeless. This failure would quite unnerve him, and he would go out, leaving it on the bar counter. When he succeeded in getting it to his mouth he bolted the fluid as though frightened it would he snatched from him, then with a sigh of relief replaced the glass.

In company with a friend I generally visited the hotel he frequented about the same hour that he put in an appearance, and naturally our attention was attracted to this case of chronic 'jumps.' It is a singular fact in the problem of drink that a man suffering badly from the effects of it can lift anything to his mouth but a glass of spirits. Some unaccountable revulsion seems to set in and relax the sinews, even to dropping the glass. My friend and I put this down as a very bad case, and took some notice of him, without making it remarkable. We put him down as a professional failure of some sort, who had enough means left to drink himself to death. He always wore a singularly high collar, and often' a scarf around his neck. And he had a very suspicious way of looking furtively round him, which was not at all genial. He never spoke to anyone, and walked out as soon as he got his liquor safely stowed away inside him.

It was some months after I first noticed him that I was staying at a marine suburb of Brisbane. I was sitting on the beach trying hard to think of nothing, when I noticed a familiar figure approaching, and on its coming closer I recognised the mysterious shaky stranger of the hotel. We had never spoken, but meeting on this retired spot seemed a sufficient excuse for us to exchange a nod of recognition, and he sat down beside me and entered into a conversation on different topics. He was just as shaky as ever, and his hand rattled the mouthpiece of his pipe against his teeth when he put it into his mouth. At last he gained confidence enough to tell me the following story:

'I am a surgeon by profession, and at one time was in fairly good practice, which I lost under peculiar circumstances. Fortunately, I have some independent means, so can live without following it, which, now that I have lost my nerve, would be impossible.

'I had a close friend, who married a pretty and clever woman, but I was sorry to see that their married life was not a particularly happy one, and that my friend, whose name was Hastings, took to taking more than was good for

him. At that time, as my profession necessitated, I was a very temperate man, with a trained nerve. Incompatibility of temper was, I suppose, the original trouble; there was not the least suspicion of infidelity on either side, but they were unfitted and unsuited for mutual life. I am certainly not in favor of a law rendering divorce too easy, but it seems a pity that two people who have married under a mistake as to each other's dispositions should not be able to rectify that mistake without committing some social crime on a large scale. Well, Hastings took to tippling, and his wife to scolding, and their future was a poor lookout. I stuck to him, for he had been an exceedingly good fellow, and was so still if he could be rescued from his surroundings, and much the same could be said of her. With the right man she doubtless would have made a model wife, but as it was, the latent evil in both was developed by their marriage.

'One night Hastings called to see me, and I at once saw that he had been on a long debauch, although, being a man of strong physique, it made no great outward sign upon him. Mentally it was quite different, and I entertained some doubts of his sanity, at least upon one point. He wanted to know if I could perform a surgical operation on his arms, so, that while he could still write, and eat and drink, he yet could not use them with any degree of strength; in fact, he wanted to know whether, by any operation on the muscles or sinews, I could partly, paralyse him. I treated the idea lightly, told him that it was an impossibility, and attempted to turn the subject, but without avail. He left me gloomy and discontented, and I hoped that it was only the after effects of liquor, but still I felt very uneasy. One would have thought that a separation by mutual consent would have somewhat ended the unhappiness, but both had now become morbid in their resentment of each other, and would not seek peace for themselves, if that way would also give peace to the other. So it kept on, and gradually I saw less of them, for it was an unhappy home to visit, and a visitor only made things worse

'Hastings kept on drinking, and his temper gradually lost all check, and from being a popular man with many friends he became shunned and disliked. Months passed, and I had seen very little of either for some time, when Mrs. Hastings came to consult me professionally. She was greatly changed, both physically and mentally I had put her husband down as verging on insanity, and I did the same to her. The verdict I had to pronounce was one that would have affrighted most women, but it seemed to give her a sort of fiendish joy. She was suffering from what would end in a painful death, though possibly a timely operation would prolong her life. She had cancer of the breast, and I guessed the cause, although she did not tell me in plain words Now I understand the meaning of the mad suggestion he had made to me in the past. He had struck

her. This is what it had ended in after all; struck her what would prove to be a murderous blow. And he had foreseen it coming.

'For every, pang I suffer, he will suffer ten,' she said as she left.

'He did, too, and smothered it with drink.

'I did not perform the operation that was at last necessary, but she died from it, and in the moments of consciousness that preceded death she asked to be left alone with her husband. What she said to him, how she cursed him, I never knew in exact words; but from what I gathered afterwards, it was the most appalling concentration of hatred that ever came from a dying woman's lips addressed to the man who once had loved her, and had killed her by an agonising death.

'The day after her burial a hasty messenger came clattering to my door, and I went at once to see Hastings, who had cut his throat.

'To say he had cut his throat is to put it mildly; rather, he had attempted to cut it about a dozen times. Each time his trembling and ineffectual hand had failed to inflict more than a superficial wound, and though he had lost blood he had not succeeded in making a dangerous wound, unless the state of his blood brought on complications. Fortunately, the servant had come straight to me, and the matter was hushed up without the police knowing anything about it. I stitched him up and looked after him myself until he was better, and somewhat restored to reason.

'I had a nice time whilst he was in delirium but especially one night. Then he told me of his wife's dying moments, and how she vowed she would, carry her prayers with her Into the next world; his hands should be palsied and refuse to do their office; and that the hand that struck her might never carry food or drink to his mouth unless it was nerved by drink. Then he had told her that he dreaded the madness that was growing on him, and had begged me to, cripple his arms so that they would not obey him and how I had refused to attempt it. Then she cursed me as well, and upon my soul I was so worked upon by having to watch this lunatic that I began to feel as frightened as he did.

'Well, I nursed Hastings back to life, and he took to drink worse than ever. True enough his hand shook so that he could not lift anything to his lips until he had drunk enough to steady his nerves every morning. Then it came out to me. I found myself nervous and queer one morning, and for the first time in my life took some whisky for a pick-me-up. My hand shook so that I hastily replaced the glass, for fear of dropping it. Again and again I tried. The thing was so unusual that I could not believe it. Then I suddenly recalled what Hastings had told me. I shook worse than ever at the thought of such an

improbable thing, but it was true. When after some trouble I managed to get some spirit swallowed.

'I never got over that. I sold my practice before I had to give it up, for I foresaw the end, and that it would give me up if I had to keep my nerve up with whisky continually.

'Hastings made many more attempts to cut his throat and always failed, and was at last confined to an asylum. But I heard he was released about a year ago. I suppose he'll succeed at last.'

THE MAN arose, and without another word started; for home. I rose and followed him.

He was still only just ahead of me when I turned into the hotel I was staying at. I had a suspicion and asked a man I knew who was standing on the verandah who my late acquaintance was.

'That man,' said he. 'Oh, that's Hastings. Always tight; and occasionally shut up for his own safety.'

'Is he a doctor?"

'He was, I believe; but nobody would trust him now.'

'Did his wife die of cancer, and did he try to cut his throat?'

'Never knew he had a wife, and certainly he couldn't cut his throat if he tried, his hand's too shaky.'

'Well, he's a first-class novelist.'

But all the same, Mr. Hastings did successfully cut his throat that very night; and at the inquest the medical evidence showed that the throat of the deceased bore numerous old scars of former attempts in the same direction.

_____

26: The Jackdaw

Jacques Futrelle

1875-1912

The Popular Magazine, 15 Sep 1912

This story was published posthumously, as the author died in the Titanic in April 1912. It features his popular series detective S. F. X. van Dusen, "The Thinking Machine". The only collection of van Dusen stories, "The Thinking Machine", 1907, contained seven stories. In 2018 I created an omnibus of 50 of the van Dusen stories, "The Thinking Machine Omnibus", which is in the MobileRead library

MONSIEUR Jean Saint Rocheville lived by his wits, and, being rather witty, he lived rather well. In the beginning he hadn't been Monsieur Jean St. Rocheville at all. Born Jones, christened James Aloysius, nicknamed Jimmie, he had been, first, a pickpocket. Sheer ability lifted him above that; and it came to pass that he graduated from all the cruder professions— second-story work, burglary, and what not— until now, when we meet him, he was a social brigand famous under many names.

For instance, in two cities of the West he was being industriously sought as Wilhelm Van Der Wyde, and was described as of the æsthetic, musical type— young, thick-spectacled, clean-shaven, long-haired, and pale blond, speaking English badly and profusely.

In New York, the police knew him as Hubert Montgomery Wade, card sharp and utterer of worthless checks; and described him as taciturn, past middle age, with fluffy, iron-gray hair, full iron-gray beard, and a singularly pallid face. As we see him, he seemed about thirty, slim, elegant, aristocratic of feature, with close-cut brown hair, carefully waxed mustache, and a suggestion of an imperial. Also, he spoke English with a slight accent.

Monsieur St. Rocheville was smiling as he strode through the spacious estate of Idlewild, whipping his light cane in the early-morning air of a balmy June day. On the whole, he had little to complain of in the way the world was wagging. True, he had failed, at his first attempt, to possess himself of the superb diamond necklace of his hostess, Mrs. Wardlaw Browne; but it had not been a discreditable failure; there had been no unpleasant features connected therewith, no exposure; not even a shadow of suspicion. Perhaps, after all, he had been hasty. His invitation had several weeks to run; and meanwhile here were all the luxuries of a splendid country place at his command— motors, horses, tennis, golf, to say nothing of a house full of charming women and several execrable players of auction, who insisted on gambling for high stakes. And auction, Monsieur St. Rocheville might have said, was his middle name.

Idly meditating upon all these pleasant things, St. Rocheville dropped down upon a seat in the shade of a hedge overlooking the rose garden, lighted a cigarette, and fell to watching the curious evolutions of three great velvet-black birds swimming in the air above him. Now they rose in a vast spiral, up, up until they were mere specks against the blue void, only to drop sheerly almost to the earth before their wings stayed them; now with motionless pinions, floating away in immense circles; again darting hither and yon swiftly as an arrow flies, weaving strange patterns in the air. Something here for the Wright brothers to learn, Monsieur St. Rocheville thought lazily.

Came finally an odd whistle from the direction of the house behind him. The three birds swooped down with a rush and vanished beyond the hedge. Curiously St. Rocheville peered through the thick-growing screen. On a second-story balcony stood a girl with one of the birds perched upon each shoulder, and the third at rest on her hand.

"Well, by George!" exclaimed St. Rocheville.

As he looked, the girl flipped something into the air. The birds dived for it simultaneously, immediately returning to their perches. Fascinated, he looked on as the trick was repeated. So this was she, to whom he had heard some one refer as the Jackdaw Girl— the young lady he had caught staring at him so oddly the night before, just after her arrival. He had been introduced to her between rubbers— a charming, piquant wisp of a creature, with big, innocent eyes and cameo features, much given to gay little bursts of laughter. Her name? Oh, yes. Fayerwether— Drusila Fayerwether.

St. Rocheville ventured into the open. Miss Fayerwether smiled, and flung a titbit of some sort directly at his feet. The birds came for it like huge black projectiles. Involuntarily he took a step backward. She laughed.

"They won't hurt you, really," she assured him mockingly. "They are quite tame. Let me show you." She held aloft a slice of toast; the powerful black wings quivered expectantly. "No," she commanded. The toast fell at St. Rocheville's feet. Neither of the birds stirred. "Hold it in your left hand," she directed. Mechanically the astonished young man obeyed. "Extend your right and keep it steady." He did so. "Now, Blitz!"

It was a command. The bird from her left shoulder, the largest of the three, came hurtling toward St. Rocheville with a shrill scream. For an instant the giant wings beat about his ears, then the talons closed on his right hand in no gentle grip, and man and bird stared at each other. To the young man there was something evil and cruel in the beady, fixed eyes; in the poise of the head on the glistening, snakelike neck; in the merciless claws. And, gad, what a beak! It was a thing to tear with, to mutilate, destroy.

St. Rocheville shuddered. The whole performance was creepy and uncanny. It chilled his blood. It seemed out of all proportion, this exquisite, dainty, pink-and-white girl, and the sinister, somber, winged things—

He drew a breath of relief when Blitz, having solemnly gobbled up his toast, flew away to his mistress.

"They are my pets," she said affectionately. "Aren't they beautiful? Blitz and Jack and Jill I call them."

"Strange pets they are, mademoiselle," remarked St. Rocheville gravely. "How did you come to choose them?"

"Why, I've known them always," she replied. "Blitz here is old enough, and I dare say wise enough, to be my grandfather. He is nearly sixty, and was in my family thirty-five years before I was born. He used to stalk solemnly around my cradle like a soldier on guard, and swear dreadfully. He talks a little when he will— half a dozen words or so. Jack and Jill are younger. From their conduct, I should say they haven't yet reached the age of discretion."

"Would you mind telling me," he questioned curiously, "how a person would proceed to tame a— a flock of flying machines like that?"

"Sugar," replied Miss Fayerwether tersely. "They will do anything for sugar."

"Sugar!" Blitz screamed harshly, ruffling his silky plumage. "Sugar!"

Monsieur St. Rocheville went away to keep a tennis engagement. Miss Fayerwether disappeared into her room, leaving the three birds perched on the rail of the balcony. On the court, Rex Miller was waiting for St. Rocheville with a question:

"Meet the new girl last night? Miss Fayerwether?"

"Yes."

"They say she's a bird charmer," Rex went on. "She charmed me, all right. Gad, I always knew I was a bird!"

In his own apartments again, St. Rocheville, hot from his exertions on the tennis court, was preparing for a cold plunge, when Blitz fluttered in at the window and perched himself familiarly on the back of a chair.

"Hello!" said St. Rocheville.

"Hello!" Blitz replied promptly.

Astonished, the young man burst out laughing— a laugh which died under the steady glare of the beady eyes. Again, for some unaccountable reason, he was possessed of that singular feeling off horror he had felt at first. He shook it off impatiently and entered the bathroom, leaving Blitz in possession.

He returned just in time to see the big bird darting through the window with something bright dangling from the powerful beak. He knew instantly what it was— his watch! He had left it on a table, and the bird had taken

advantage of his absence to steal it. He started toward the window on a run; but, struck by a sudden thought, he stopped, and stood staring into the open, the while he permitted an idea to seep in. Finally he dropped into a chair, his agile mind teeming with possibilities.

Suppose— just suppose— Blitz had been taught to steal? Absurd, of course! Blitz was probably an upright, moral enough bird according to his own lights; but couldn't he be taught to steal? Either Blitz or another bird like him? He had heard somewhere that magpies would filch any glittering thing and secrete it. Why not jackdaws? Weren't they the same thing, after all? He didn't know.

A tame bird, properly trained, cunning, wary, with an innate faculty of making acquaintances, and powerful on the wing!

St. Rocheville forgot all about his watch in contemplation of a new idea. By George, it was worth an experiment, anyway!

There was a light tapping at his door.

"Monsieur St. Rocheville!" some one called.

"Yes?" he answered.

"It is I, Miss Fayerwether. I think I have your watch here. One of my birds came in my window with it from this direction. Your window was open, so I imagine he— he stole it."

St. Rocheville pulled his bath robe about him and peered out. Miss Fayerwether, with disturbed face, held the watch toward him— the great, solemn-looking bird was perched upon one shoulder.

"Hello!" Blitz greeted him socially.

"It is my watch, yes," said St. Rocheville. "Blitz paid me a visit and took it away with him."

"Naughty, naughty!" and Miss Fayerwether shook one rosy finger under the bird's nose. "He embarrasses me awfully sometimes," she confided. "I can't keep him confined all the time; and he has a trick of picking up any bright thing and bringing it to me."

"Please don't let it disturb you," St. Rocheville begged. "As for you, Monsieur Blitz, I'll keep my eye on you."

Miss Fayerwether vanished down the hall, scolding.

So Blitz had a trick of picking up bright things, eh? Monsieur St. Rocheville was pleased to know it. It was only a question, then, of training the bird to bring the thing he picked up to the right place. Assuredly here was an experiment worth while. In failure or success he was safe. No sane person could blame him for the immoral acts of a bird.

St. Rocheville seemed to have conquered his aversion to Blitz and Jack and Jill, for during the next week he spent hours with them; and hours, too, with

their charming mistress. Sometimes he would play games with the birds— curious games— always in the absence of Miss Fayerwether. He would toss bright bits of glass, or even a finger ring, into the grass, or into the open window of his room, and the birds would go hurtling off to search. At length they came to know that there would be a lump of sugar for each on their return, with two pieces for the bird who brought the ring. St. Rocheville found it an absorbing game. He played it for hour after hour, for day after day.

All these things immediately preceded the first public knowledge of that series of robberies within a district of which Idlewild was the center. Miss Fayerwether, it seemed, was the first victim. She had either lost, or mislaid, she said, a diamond and ruby bracelet, and asked Mrs. Wardlaw Browne to have her servants look for it. She pooh-poohed the idea of theft. She had been careless, that was all. Yes, the bracelet was quite valuable; but it would doubtless come to light. She wouldn't have mentioned it at all except for the fact that it was an heirloom.

This politely phrased request opened the floodgates of revelation. Rex Miller had lost a rare scarab stickpin; the elderly Mrs. Scott was minus three valuable rings and an aquamarine hair ornament; Claudia Chanoler had been robbed of a rope of pearls worth thousands— robbed was the word she used; an emerald cameo, the property of Agatha Blalock, was missing. Following closely upon these mysterious happenings came word to Mrs. Wardlaw Browne of similar happening at the near-by estates of friends. A dozen valuable trinkets had vanished from the Willows where the Melville Pages had a house party; and at Sagamore, Mrs. Willets was bewailing the loss of an emerald bracelet which represented a small fortune.

The explosion came the night Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's diamond necklace was stolen. There had been an unpleasant scene of some sort in the card room. Rex Miller seemed to think that there was more than luck in the cards Monsieur St. Rocheville held; and he intimated as much. All things considered, Monsieur St. Rocheville behaved superbly. Being the only winner at the table, he tore the score into bits, and it fluttered to the floor. The other gentlemen understood that he disdained to accept money so long as a doubt remained. So the game ended abruptly, and they joined the ladies in the drawing-room. Ten minutes later Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's necklace vanished utterly.

So ultimately it came to pass that The Thinking Machine— more properly, Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph. D., F. R. S., M. D., LL. D., et cetera, et cetera, logician, analyst, and master mind in the sciences— turned his crabbed genius upon the problem. He consented to do so at the request of Hutchinson Hatch, newspaper reporter; and, singularly enough, it was Monsieur Jean St.

Rocheville in person who brought the matter to the reporter's attention. Together they went to The Thinking Machine.

"You know," St. Rocheville took the trouble to explain, "every time I read of a robbery of this sort, either in a newspaper or in fiction, some foreign nobleman is always the villain in the piece." He shrugged his shoulders. "It is an honor I do not desire."

"You are a nobleman, then?" queried The Thinking Machine. The narrowed, pale-blue, squinting eyes were fixed tensely upon the young man's face.

"No." St. Rocheville smiled.

"Extraordinary," murmured the little scientist. "And who are you?"

"My father and my father's father are bankers in France," St. Rocheville lied gracefully. "The situation at Idlewild is—"

"Where?" The Thinking Machine interrupted curtly.

"Idlewild."

"I mean, where is your father a banker?"

"Paris."

"In what capacity? What's his position?"

"Managing director."

"What bank?"

"Credit Lyonnaise."

The Thinking Machine nodded his satisfaction and dropped his enormous head, with its thick, straw-colored thatch, back against the chair comfortably, his slim fingers coming to rest precisely tip to tip. Monsieur St. Rocheville stared at him curiously. Obviously here was a person who was not to be trifled with. However, he felt he had passed his preliminary examination, unexpected as it was, with great credit. Not once had he forgotten his dialect; not for a fraction of a second had he hesitated in answering the abrupt questions. Ability to lie readily is a great convenience.

"Now," The Thinking Machine commanded, his squinting eyes turned upward, "what happened at Idlewild?"

Inadvertently or otherwise, St. Rocheville failed to refer, even remotely, to the three great velvet-black birds— Blitz and Jack and Jill— in his narrative of events at Idlewild. It was rather a chronological statement of the thefts as they had been reported, with no suggestion as to the manner in which they might have been committed.

"Now," and St. Rocheville spoke slowly, as one who wanted to be certain of his words, "I come down to those things which happened immediately before the disappearance of Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's necklace. Frankly my own statement will place me in rather a compromising position— that is, my real

motive may not be understood— but it is better that I should tell you in the beginning things that you will surely find out."

"Decidedly better," The Thinking Machine agreed dryly. He didn't alter his position.

"Well, you must know that at Idlewild the men play auction a great deal, and—"

"Auction?" The Thinking Machine repeated. "What is auction, Mr. Hatch?"

"Auction bridge," the reporter told him. "A game of cards— a variation of whist."

Monsieur St., Rocheville stared from the wizened little scientist to the reporter incredulously. He would not have believed a person could have lived in a civilized country and not know what auction was. Perhaps he wouldn't have believed, either, that The Thinking Machine never read a newspaper. So circumscribed is our own viewpoint.

"At Idlewild the men play auction a great deal," The Thinking Machine prompted. "Go on."

"Auction, yes," St. Rocheville resumed. "It happens sometimes that the stakes are rather high. On the night Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's necklace was stolen, four of us were playing in the card room— a Mr. Gordon and myself as partners against a Mr. Miller and Franklin Chanoler, the financier." He hesitated slightly. "Mr. Miller had been losing, and in a burst of temper he intimated that— that I— that I— er—"

"Had been cheating," The Thinking Machine supplied crabbedly. "Go on."

"As a result of that little unpleasantness," St. Rocheville continued, "the game ended, and we joined the ladies. Now, please understand that it is not my wish to retaliate upon Mr. Miller. I have explained my motive— I don't want to be made a scapegoat. I do want the actual facts to come out." Some subtle change passed across his face. "Mr. Miller," he said measuredly, "stole Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's necklace!"

"Miller," Hatch repeated. "Do you mean Rex Miller?"

"That's his name, yes— Rex Miller."

"Rex Miller? The son of John W. Miller, the millionaire?" Hatch came to his feet excitedly.

"Rex Miller is his name, yes," St. Rocheville shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that's impossible!" Hatch declared.

"Nothing is impossible, Mr. Hatch," interrupted The Thinking Machine tartly. "Sit down. You annoy me." He shifted his pale-blue eyes, and squinted at Monsieur St. Rocheville through his thick spectacles. "How do you know Mr. Miller stole the necklace?"

"I saw him slip it into the pocket of his dress coat," St. Rocheville declared flatly. "Naturally, I had an idea that, when he drew Mrs. Wardlaw Browne aside immediately after we came out of the card room, it was his intention to— to denounce me as a card sharp. You may imagine that I was watching them both closely, because my honor was at stake. I wanted to see how she took it. It seems that he said nothing whatever to her about the card game; but he did steal the necklace. I saw him hiding it."

Fell a long silence. With inscrutable face The Thinking Machine sat staring at the ceiling. Twice St. Rocheville shifted his position uneasily. He was wondering if his story had been convincing. Adroit mixture of truth and falsehood that it was, he failed to see a single defect in it. Hatch, too, was staring curiously at the scientist.

"I understand perfectly your hesitation in going into details," said The Thinking Machine at last. "Under all the circumstances your motive might be misconstrued; but I think you have made me understand." He rose suddenly. "That's all," he said. "I'll look into the matter to-morrow."

Monsieur St. Rocheville was about to take his departure, when The Thinking Machine stopped him for a last question.

"You used a phrase just now," he said. "I am anxious to get it exactly— something about your father and your father's father—"

"Oh! I said"— Monsieur St. Rocheville obliged— "that my father and my father's father were bankers in Paris."

"That's it," said the little scientist. "Thanks. Good day."

Monsieur St. Rocheville went out. The Thinking Machine scribbled something on a sheet of paper and handed it to the reporter.

"Attend to that when you get to your office," he directed. Hatch read it, and his eyes opened wide. "Also, do you happen to know a native Frenchman who speaks perfect English?"

"I do; yes."

"Look him up, and ask him to repeat the phrase, 'My father and my father's father.' "

"Why?" inquired the reporter blankly.

"When he says it you'll know why. Immediately this other matter is attended to come back here."

Monsieur St. Rocheville's troubled meditations were disturbed by the appearance of Miss Fayerwether around a bend in the walk. Fluttering about her were her pets, Blitz and Jack and Jill. One after another they would swoop down, gobble up a beakful of sugar from her open hand, then sail off in a circle. There was something in the sight of Miss Fayerwether to dispel troubled meditations. She was gowned in a filmy white, clinging stuff, with a wide,

flapping sun hat, her cheeks glowing with the sun's reflection, her big, innocent eyes repeating the marvelous blue of the sky.

Monsieur St. Rocheville, at sight of her, arose, bowed formally, and made way for her beside him. She sat down, to be instantly submerged in a fluttering cloud of black wings.

"Go away," she ordered. "I have no more sugar. See?" and she extended her empty hands.

The giant birds wandered off seeking what they might find; and for a time the girl and the young man sat silent. Twice Miss Fayerwether's eyes sought St. Rocheville's; twice she caught him staring straight into her face.

"Detectives were here to-day," she remarked at last.

"Yes, I know," said St. Rocheville.

"They had a long talk with Mrs. Wardlaw Browne, and insisted on searching the house— that is, the rooms of the guests— but she would not permit it."

"She made a mistake."

"You mean that some one of the guests—"

"I mean there is a thief here somewhere," said St. Rocheville; "and he should be unmasked." (And this from Jimmie Jones, erstwhile pickpocket, burglar, and what not— Jimmie Jones, alias Wilhelm Van Der Wyde, alias Hubert Montgomery Wade, alias Jean St. Rocheville.) "I am willing for them to search my room; you are willing for them to search your room— the others should be."

The young man's lips were tightly set; there was an uncompromising glint in his eyes. His simulation had been so perfect that even he was feeling the righteous indignation of the hopelessly moral. Whatever else he felt didn't appear at the moment. Miss Fayerwether was gazing dreamily into the void.

"Have you ever been to Chicago?" she queried irrelevantly at last.

"No," said Monsieur St. Rocheville. As a matter of fact, Chicago was one of the cities in which there was being made even then an industrious search for Wilhelm Van Der Wyde.

"Or Denver?" the girl continued dreamily.

That was another city in which Wilhelm Van Der Wyde was badly wanted. Monsieur St. Rocheville turned upon Miss Fayerwether suspiciously.

"No," he declared. "Why?"

"No reason— I was merely curious," she replied carelessly. And then again irrelevantly: "Nothing has been stolen from you?"

For answer, St. Rocheville held out his left hand. A heavy diamond solitaire which he usually wore on his little finger was missing. The print of the ring on the flesh was still visible.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Fayerwether; and again: "Oh!" She looked startled. St. Rocheville didn't recall that he had ever seen just such an expression before. "When was your ring stolen? How?"

"I removed it when I got into my bath," St. Rocheville explained. "My window was closed, but my door was unlocked. When I came out of the bath the ring had disappeared— that's all."

"Well"— and there was a flash of indignation in the girl's eyes— "you can't blame that on Blitz, anyway."

"I'm not trying to," said St. Rocheville. "I said my window was closed. My door was closed but unlocked. I don't think Blitz can open a door, can he?"

Miss Fayerwether didn't answer. Once she was almost on the point of saying something further; and, for an instant, there was mute appeal in the innocent eyes as her slim white hand lay on the young man's arm. Then she changed her mind and went on to her room, the birds fluttering along after.

Strange thoughts came to Monsieur St. Rocheville. The light touch on his arm had thrilled him curiously. He found himself staring off moodily in the direction of her window. Also he caught himself remembering the marvelous blue of her eyes! He didn't recall at the moment that he had ever noticed the color of any one's eyes before.

'TWAS AN hour after dinner when The Thinking Machine, accompanied by Detective Mallory, the bright light of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and one of his satellites, Blanton by name, with Hutchinson Hatch trailing, appeared at Idlewild. It may have been mere accident that St. Rocheville met them as they stepped out of the automobile.

"I neglected to tell you," he remarked to the scientist, "that young Miller has been losing heavily at auction of late; and I hear that he has had some sort of a row with his father about his allowance."

"I understand," The Thinking Machine nodded.

"Also," St. Rocheville ran on, "there has been at least one other theft here since I saw you. A diamond ring of mine was stolen from my room while I was in the bath. I wouldn't venture to say who took it."

"I know," The Thinking Machine assured him curtly. "I will have it in my hand in ten minutes."

Indignant at the intrusion of the police in what she was pleased to term her personal affairs— the detectives who had been there before were from a private agency— Mrs. Wardlaw Browne bustled into the room where The Thinking Machine and his party waited. Monsieur St. Rocheville effaced himself.

"Pray what does this mean?" Mrs. Wardlaw Browne demanded.

"It means, madam, that we have a search warrant, and intend to go through your house, if necessary." The Thinking Machine informed her crustily. Through the half-open door he caught a glimpse of a slender figure— a mere wisp of a girl with big, wonder-stuck eyes. "Mallory, close that door. You, madam,"— this to Mrs. Wardlaw Browne— "can assist us by answering a few questions."

Mrs. Wardlaw Browne was of the tall, gaunt, haughty type; thin to scrawniness, enormously rich, and possessed of all the arrogance that riches bring. She studied the faces of the four men contemptuously; then, with a little resigned expression, sat down.

"Just how did you lose your necklace?" The Thinking Machine began abruptly. "Did you drop it? Was it taken from your neck? Are you sure you had it on?"

"I know I had it on," was the reply. "I did not drop it. It was taken from my neck."

"Did you, by any chance, wear a low-neck gown on the evening it was taken?" The little scientist's squinting eyes were fixed upon her tensely.

"I never wear décolleté," came the frigid response.

With his great head pillowed upon the back of his chair, his thin fingers tip to tip, and his eyes turned upward, The Thinking Machine sat in silence for a minute or more, the while tiny, cobwebby lines appeared in his domelike brow.

"Can you," he inquired finally, "summon a servant without leaving this room?"

"There is a bell, yes." Mrs. Wardlaw Browne was forgetting to be haughty in a certain fascination which grew upon her as she gazed at this little man.

"Will you ring it, please?"

Mrs. Wardlaw Browne arose, touched a button, and sat down again. A moment later a footman entered.

"Tell Mr. Rex Miller," The Thinking Machine directed, "that Mrs. Wardlaw Browne would like to see him immediately in this room."

The footman bowed and withdrew. Followed an interminable wait— interminable, at least, to Detective Mallory, who impatiently clicked his handcuffs together. Mrs. Wardlaw Browne yawned to hide the curiosity that was consuming her.

The door opened, and Rex Miller entered. He stood for a moment staring at the silent party, and finally:

"Did you send for me, Mrs. Browne?"

"I did," said The Thinking Machine. "Sit down, please." Rex sank into a chair mechanically. "Mr. Blanton"— the scientist neither raised his voice nor

lowered his eyes— "you will undertake to see that Mr. Miller doesn't leave this room. Mr. Mallory, you will search Mt. Miller's apartments. Somewhere there you will find Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's diamond necklace; also a man's diamond ring."

Rex came to his feet with writhing hands, a thundercloud in his face. Mrs. Wardlaw Browne burst into inarticulate expostulations. Blanton drew a revolver and laid it across his knee. Mallory bustled out. Hatch merely waited. Silence came; a silence so tense, so strained that Mrs. Wardlaw Browne was tempted to scream. At last there were footsteps, the door from the hall was thrown open, and Mallory, triumphant, appeared.

"I have them," he announced grimly. The necklace, a radiant, glittering thing, was dangling from one finger. The ring lay in his open palm. "And now, Mr. Rex Miller"— he fished out his handcuffs and started toward the young man— "if you'll hold out your—"

"Oh, sit down, Mallory!" commanded The Thinking Machine impatiently.

Loitering in a hallway, where he could keep an eye on the stairs leading from the lower part of the house, Monsieur St. Rocheville saw Miss Fayerwether creep stealthily up, silent-footed, chalk-white of face, and come racing toward him across the heavy velvet carpet. For the reason that she would surely see him, he walked toward her, amazed and a little perturbed at something in her manner.

"What's the matter?" inquired St. Rocheville calmly.

"Oh, it's you!" Miss Fayerwether's hand flew to her heart. She was frightened, gasping. "Nothing!"

"But something must be the matter," he insisted. "You are white as a sheet."

With an apparent effort the girl regained control of herself, and stood staring at him mutely. 'Twas in that moment that Monsieur St. Rocheville saw for the first time some strange, new expression in the big, innocent eyes— they seemed to grow hard, worldly, all-wise even as he looked.

"There are detectives in the house," she said.

"I know it. What about it?"

"They have a warrant, and intend to search every room."

"Well?" St. Rocheville refused to get excited about it.

"Including, I imagine, yours and mine."

"I'm willing. I dare say you are."

For an instant the girl's self-possession seemed to desert her completely. Her eyes closed as if in pain, and she swayed a little. St. Rocheville thrust out an arm protectingly. When she lifted her face again St. Rocheville read terror therein.

"If— if they search my room," she faltered, "I— I am lost!"

"How? Why? What do you mean?"

"I don't know that I could make any one else understand," she went on swiftly. "The birds, you know— Blitz and Jack and Jill. You saw, and I explained to you, a trick they have of— of thieving; stealing bright things."

She stopped. In his impatience St. Rocheville seized her by the arm and shook her soundly.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Nearly every jewel that has been stolen is hidden now in my room," she confessed. "I knew nothing of it until yesterday, when I came across them. Then, after all the excitement about the thefts, I was afraid to return the things, and I could think of no way to proceed. So, you see, if they search my room it will— — "

St. Rocheville was possessed of an agile mind; resourceful as it was agile. Suddenly he remembered two questions the girl had asked the day before— questions about Chicago and Denver. His teeth snapped. He thrust out a hand, and, opening the nearest door— he didn't happen to know whose room it was— he dragged her in, and turned on the electric light. Then their eyes met squarely.

"You are the thief, then?" he demanded. "Don't lie to me! You are the thief?"

"The things are in my room." She was sobbing a little. "The birds—"

"You are the thief!" There was a curious note of exultation in his voice. "And you do know something about Chicago and Denver?"

"I know that you are Wilhelm Van Der Wyde," she flashed defiantly. "I recognized you at once. I saw you in old Charles' 'fence' there once when you were not aware of it. I could never be mistaken in your eyes."

Monsieur St. Rocheville laughed blithely; came a faint answering smile, and he gathered her into his arms.

"I've always needed a partner," he said.

"Mr. Miller," The Thinking Machine was saying placidly, "isn't the thief at all." He raised his hand to still a clamor of ejaculation. "Monsieur Rocheville, so called, stole the necklace, at least, and concealed it, with a ring from his own finger, in Mr. Miller's apartment." Again he raised his hand. "Mr. Miller caught Monsieur St. Rocheville cheating at cards, and practically denounced him. Monsieur St. Rocheville took his revenge by undertaking to fasten the jewel thefts upon Mr. Miller. He imagined, shallowly enough, that if the necklace should be found in Mr. Miller's room the police would look no farther. It is barely possible that the police wouldn't have looked farther."

Mrs. Wardlaw Browne's aristocratic mouth had dropped open in sheer astonishment. Detective Mallory looked bewildered, dazed. Rex Miller's face was an animated interrogation mark.

"Then who is the thief?" Mallory found voice to express the burning question.

"I'm sure I don't know," The Thinking Machine confessed frankly. "I think, perhaps, it was Monsieur St. Rocheville, so called; but there's nothing to connect him— Please sit down, Mallory. You annoy me. It would do no good to search his apartment. If he stole anything, it isn't here now; besides—"

The door opened suddenly, and the footman appeared.

"Miss Fayerwether is badly hurt, ma'am," he explained hurriedly. "She seems to have fallen from her window. We found her outside, unconscious."

Mrs. Wardlaw Browne went out hurriedly. Obeying an almost imperceptible nod of The Thinking Machine's head, Detective Mallory followed her. The scientist turned to Detective Blanton.

"Get St. Rocheville," he directed tersely.

Ten minutes later Mallory returned. In one hand he held a small chamois bag. The contents thereof he spilled upon a table. The Thinking Machine glanced around, saw a glittering heap of jewels, then resumed his steady scrutiny of the ceiling.

"The girl had them?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "She tried to escape from her room by sliding down a rope made of sheets. It broke, and she fell."

"Badly hurt?"

"Only a sprained ankle, and shock."

Blanton flung himself in.

"St. Rocheville's gone," he announced hurriedly. "I imagine he cut for it. Went away in one of the automobiles."

WHEN Miss Fayerwether recovered consciousness, and the sharp agony in her ankle had become a mere dull pain, she found herself in some large room, rank with the odor of strange chemical messes. As a matter of fact, it was The Thinking Machine's laboratory; and the three men present were the little scientist in person, Mallory, and Hatch. Blanton had gone on to police headquarters to send out a general alarm for Monsieur St. Rocheville.

"There was no mystery about it," she heard The Thinking Machine saying. "That is, no mystery that the simplest rules of logic wouldn't instantly dissipate. A man, presumably French, but speaking English almost perfectly, comes into this room and betrays himself as an imposter five minutes afterward by using, without a trace of accent, the one phrase in all our language which no

Frenchman, unless he is reared from infancy in an English-speaking country, can pronounce as it should be pronounced. This man used the phrase: 'My father and my father's father;' and he pronounced it as either of us would have pronounced it. The French can master our 'th' only with difficulty, and then only at the beginning of a word; otherwise their 'th' becomes almost like our 'z.'

"From the beginning, therefore, I imagined our so-called Monsieur St. Rocheville an imposter. Being an imposter, he was a liar. I proved he was a liar when I made him state who his father was. At my suggestion, Mr. Hatch cabled to Paris, demonstrated that there is not, and never has been a Monsieur St. Rocheville connected with the Credit Lyonnaise; and, this much established, St. Rocheville's story collapsed utterly. He had been accused of cheating at cards; and in retaliation he tried to shift the thefts upon Mr. Miller. He had seen Mr. Miller, so he said, steal the necklace. His obvious purpose in this was to bring about a search of Mr. Miller's apartment, where he had carefully planted the necklace, also his own ring. The remainder of the story you all know."

Miss Fayerwether had listened breathlessly, with closed eyes. The Thinking Machine arose and came over to her. For an instant his slender, cool hand rested on her brow; and in that instant she fought the fight. She was caught. St. Rocheville, alias Van Der Wyde, was free. He had tried to help her. She was to have gathered the jewels together, escaped through her window to avoid attracting attention, and joined him in the waiting automobile. He was free. She would allow him to remain free. Love, be it said, makes martyrs of us all.

"I stole the jewels," she said quietly. "Monsieur St. Rocheville knew nothing of the thefts. My birds—"

That was all. The door opened and closed. Monsieur St. Rocheville stood before them with a vicious-looking, snub-nosed, automatic pistol in his hand.

"Put up your hands!" he commanded curtly. "You, Mallory, you! Put them up, I say! Put them up!" Mallory put them up. "And you, too! Put them up!" The Thinking Machine and Hutchinson Hatch obeyed unanimously. "Now, Miss Fayerwether, can you walk?"

"I think so." She struggled to her feet.

"Very well." There was a deadly calm in his manner. "Take Mallory's gun, his keys, his handcuffs, and his police whistle. Careful now! Stand on the far side of him. I may have to kill him." The girl obeyed deftly. "Are the handcuffs unlocked? Good! Snap one end around his right wrist. Now, Mallory, lower your right hand!"

"I'll be—" the enraged detective began.

"Lower your right hand." The pistol clicked. "Now, Miss Fayerwether, snap the other end of the handcuff around the leg of his chair, above the rungs." It

was done, neatly and quickly. "And I think that will hold you for a few minutes, Mallory. Now, Miss Fayerwether, there's an automobile outside. The motor is running. Get in the car. Take your time. Safely in, honk the horn three times."

The girl hobbled out. Monsieur St. Rocheville took advantage of the pause to sneer a little at the three men— Mallory safely shackled to a heavy chair, which would effectually stop immediate pursuit; Hatch with his hands anxiously stretched into the air, The Thinking Machine placidly meeting his gaze, eye to eye.

"I'll get you yet!" Mallory bellowed in impotent rage.

"Oh, perhaps." Outside, the automobile horn sounded thrice. "Until then, *au revoir*!" and Monsieur St. Rocheville vanished as silently as he had come.

"There's loyalty for you," observed The Thinking Machine, as if astonished.

"Love, not loyalty," Hatch declared. "He's crazy about her. Nothing on earth would have brought him back but love."

"Love!" mused the little scientist. "A most interesting phenomena. I shall have to look into it some time."

As I have said, Monsieur St. Rocheville was a young man of resource and daring. Later that night he burglariously entered the room Miss Fayerwether had occupied at Idlewild, and took Blitz and Jack and Jill away with him, cage and all.

27: Thirty Thousand Yards of Silk

William Nelson Taft

1889-1932

In: *On Secret Service*, 1921

"I'D SURE like to lead the life of one of those fictional detective heroes," muttered Bill Quinn, formerly of the United States Secret Service, as he tossed aside the latest volume of crime stories that had come to his attention. "Nothing to do but trail murderers and find the person who lifted the diamond necklace and stuff of that kind. They never have a case that isn't interesting or, for that matter, one in which they aren't successful. Must be a great life!"

"But aren't the detective stories of real life interesting and oftentimes exciting?" I inquired, adding that those which Quinn had already told me indicated that the career of a government operative was far from being deadly monotonous.

"Some of them are," he admitted, "but many of them drag along for months or even years, sometimes petering out for pure lack of evidence. Those, of course, are the cases you never hear of— the ones where Uncle Sam's men fall down on the job. Oh yes, they're fallible, all right. They can't solve every case— any more than a doctor can save the life of every patient he attends. But their percentage, though high, doesn't approach the success of your Sherlock Holmeses and your Thinking Machines, your Gryces and Sweetwaters and Lecoqs."

"How is it, then, that every story you've told dealt with the success of a government agent— never with his failure?"

Quinn smiled reminiscently for a moment.

Then, "What do doctors do with their mistakes?" he asked. "They bury 'em. And that's what any real detective will do— try to forget, except for hoping that some day he'll run up against the man who tricked him. Again, most of the yarns I've told you revolved around some of the relics of this room"— waving his hand to indicate the walls of his library—"and these are all mementoes of successful cases. There's no use in keeping the other kind. Failures are too common and brains too scarce. That bit of silk up there—"

"Oh yes," I interrupted, "the one that formed part of Alice Norcross's wedding dress."

"And figured in one of the most sensational plots to defraud the government that was ever uncovered," added Quinn. "If Ezra Marks hadn't located that shipment I wouldn't have had that piece of silk and there wouldn't be any story to tell. So you see, it's really a circle, after all."

MARKS [Quinn went on] was one of the few men connected with any branch of the government organizations who really lived up to the press-agent notices of the detectives you read about. In the first place, he looked like he might have stepped out of a book— big and long-legged and lanky. A typical Yankee, with all of the New-Englander's shrewdness and common sense. If you turned Ezra loose on a case you could be sure that he wouldn't sit down and try to work it out by deduction. Neither would he plunge in and attempt by sheer bravado and gun play to put the thing over. He'd mix the two methods and, more often than not, come back with the answer.

Then, too, Marks had the very happy faculty of drawing assignments that turned out to be interesting. Maybe it was luck, but more than likely it was because he followed plans that made 'em so— preferring to wait until he had all the strings to a case and then stage a big round-up of the people implicated. You remember the case of the Englishman who smuggled uncut diamonds in the bowl of his pipe and the one you wrote under the title of "Wah Lee and the Flower of Heaven"? Well, those were typical of Ezra's methods— the first was almost entirely analytical, the second mainly gun play plus a painstaking survey of the field he had to cover.

But when Marks was notified that it was up to him to find out who was running big shipments of valuable silks across the Canadian border, without the formality of visiting the customhouse and making the customary payments, he found it advisable to combine the two courses.

It was through a wholesale dealer in silks in Seattle, Washington, that the Customs Service first learned of the arrival of a considerable quantity of this valuable merchandise, offered through certain underground channels at a price which clearly labeled it as smuggled. Possibly the dealer was peeved because he didn't learn of the shipment in time to secure any of it. But his reasons for calling the affair to the attention of the Treasury Department don't really matter. The main idea was that the silk was there, that it hadn't paid duty, and that some one ought to find out how it happened.

When a second and then a third shipment was reported, Marks was notified by wire to get to Seattle as fast as he could, and there to confer with the Collector of the Port.

It wasn't until after he had arrived that Ezra knew what the trouble was, for the story of the smuggled silk hadn't penetrated as far south as San Francisco, where he had been engaged in trying to find a cargo of smuggled coolies.

"Here's a sample of the silk," announced the Collector of the Port at Seattle, producing a piece of very heavy material, evidently of foreign manufacture. "Beyond the fact that we've spotted three of the shipments and know where to lay our hands on them if wanted, I've got to admit that we

don't know a thing about the case. The department, of course, doesn't want us to trace the silk from this end. The minute you do that you lay yourself open to all sorts of legal tangles and delays— to say nothing of giving the other side plenty of time to frame up a case that would sound mighty good in court. Besides, I haven't enough men to handle the job in the short space of time necessary. So you'll have to dig into it and find out who got the stuff in and how. Then we'll attend to the fences who've been handling it here."

"The old game of passing the buck," thought Ezra, as he fingered the sample of silk meditatively. "I'll do the work and they'll get the glory. Oh, well—"

"Any idea of where the shipments came from?" he inquired.

"There's no doubt but that it's of Japanese manufacture, which, of course, would appear to point to a shipping conspiracy of some nature. But I hardly think that's true here. Already eighteen bolts of silk have been reported in Seattle, and, as you know, that's a pretty good sized consignment. You couldn't stuff 'em into a pill box or carry 'em inside a walking stick, like you could diamonds. Whoever's handling this job is doing it across the border, rather than via the shipping route."

"No chance of a slip-up in your information, is there, Chief?" Ezra inquired, anxiously. "I'd hate to start combing the border and then find that the stuff was being slipped in through the port."

"No," and the Collector of Customs was positive in his reply. "I'm not taking a chance on that tip. I know what I'm talking about. My men have been watching the shipping like hawks. Ever since that consignment of antique ivory got through last year we've gone over every vessel with a microscope, probing the mattresses and even pawing around in the coal bins. I'm positive that there isn't a place big enough to conceal a yard of silk that the boys haven't looked into— to say nothing of eighteen bolts.

"Besides," added the Collector, "the arrival of the silk hasn't coincided with the arrival of any of the ships from Japan— not by any stretch of the imagination."

"All right, I'll take up the trail northward then," replied Marks. "Don't be surprised if you fail to hear from me for a couple of months or more. If Washington inquires, tell them that I'm up on the border somewhere and let it go at that."

"Going to take anybody with you?"

"Not a soul, except maybe a guide that I'll pick up when I need him. If there is a concerted movement to ship silk across the line— and it appears that there is— the more men you have working with you the less chance there is for success. Border runners are like moonshiners, they're not afraid of one man,

but if they see a posse they run for cover and keep out of sight until the storm blows over. And there isn't one chance in a thousand of finding 'em meanwhile. You've got to play them, just like you would a fish, so the next time you hear from me you will know that I've either landed my sharks or that they've slipped off the hook!"

It was about a month later that the little town of Northport, up in the extreme northeastern corner of Washington, awoke to find a stranger in its midst. Strangers were something of a novelty in Northport, and this one— a man named Marks, who stated that he was "prospectin' for some good lumber"— caused quite a bit of talk for a day or two. Then the town gossips discovered that he was not working in the interest of a large company, as had been rumored, but solely on his own hook, so they left him severely alone. Besides, it was the height of the logging season and there was too much work to be done along the Columbia River to worry about strangers.

Marks hadn't taken this into consideration when he neared the eastern part of the state, but he was just as well pleased. If logs and logging served to center the attention of the natives elsewhere, so much the better. It would give him greater opportunity for observation and possibly the chance to pick up some information. Up to this time his trip along the border had been singularly uneventful and lacking in results. In fact, it was practically a toss-up with him whether he would continue on into Idaho and Montana, on the hope that he would find something there, or go back to Seattle and start fresh.

However, he figured that it wouldn't do any harm to spend a week or two in the neighborhood of the Columbia— and, as events turned out, it was a very wise move.

Partly out of curiosity and partly because it was in keeping with his self-assumed character of lumber prospector, Marks made a point of joining the gangs of men who worked all day and sometimes long into the night keeping the river clear of log jams and otherwise assisting in the movement of timber downstream. Like everyone who views these operations for the first time, he marveled at the dexterity of the loggers who perched upon the treacherous slippery trunks with as little thought for danger as if they had been crossing a country road. But their years of familiarity with the current and the logs themselves had given them a sense of balance which appeared to inure them to peril.

Nor was this ability to ride logs confined wholly to the men. Some of the girls from the near-by country often worked in with the men, handling the lighter jobs and attending to details which did not call for the possession of a great amount of strength.

One of these, Marks noted, was particularly proficient in her work. Apparently there wasn't a man in Northport who could give her points in log riding, and the very fact that she was small and wiry provided her with a distinct advantage over men who were twice her weight. Apart from her grace and beauty, there was something extremely appealing about the girl, and Ezra found himself watching her time after time as she almost danced across the swirling, bark-covered trunks— hardly seeming to touch them as she moved.

The girl was by no means oblivious of the stranger's interest in her ability to handle at least a part of the men's work. She caught his eye the very first day he came down to the river, and after that, whenever she noted that he was present she seemed to take a new delight in skipping lightly from log to log, lingering on each just long enough to cause it to spin dangerously and then leaping to the next.

But one afternoon she tried the trick once too often. Either she miscalculated her distance or a sudden swirl of the current carried the log for which she was aiming out of her path, for her foot just touched it, slipped and, before she could recover her balance, she was in the water— surrounded by logs that threatened to crush the life out of her at any moment.

Startled by her cry for help, three of the lumbermen started toward her— but the river, like a thing alive, appeared to thwart their efforts by opening up a rift in the jam on either side, leaving a gap too wide to be leaped, and a current too strong to be risked by men who were hampered by their heavy hobnailed shoes.

Marks, who had been watching the girl, had his coat off almost as soon as she hit the water. An instant later he had discarded his shoes and had plunged in, breasting the river with long overhand strokes that carried him forward at an almost unbelievable speed. Before the men on the logs knew what was happening, the operative was beside the girl, using one hand to keep her head above water, and the other to fend off the logs which were closing in from every side.

"Quick!" he called. "A rope! A—" but the trunk of a tree, striking his head a glancing blow, cut short his cry and forced him to devote every atom of his strength to remaining afloat until assistance arrived. After an interval which appeared to be measured in hours, rather than seconds, a rope splashed within reach and the pair were hauled to safety.

The girl, apparently unhurt by her drenching, shook herself like a wet spaniel and then turned to where Marks was seated, trying to recover his breath.

"Thanks," she said, extending her hand. "I don't know who you are, stranger, but you're a man!"

"It wasn't anything to make a fuss about," returned Ezra, rising and turning suspiciously red around the ears, for it was the first time that a girl had spoken to him in that way for more years than he cared to remember. Then, with the Vermont drawl that always came to the surface when he was excited or embarrassed, he added: "It was worth gettin' wet to have you speak like that."

This time it was the girl who flushed, and, with a palpable effort to cover her confusion, she turned away, stopping to call back over her shoulder, "If you'll come up to dad's place to-night I'll see that you're properly thanked."

"Dad's place?" repeated Ezra to one of the men near by. "Where's that?"

"She means her stepfather's house up the river," replied the lumberman. "You can't miss it. Just this side the border. Ask anybody where Old Man Petersen lives."

Though the directions were rather vague, Marks started "up the river" shortly before sunset, and found but little difficulty in locating the big house— half bungalow and half cabin— where Petersen and his stepdaughter resided, in company with half a dozen foremen of lumber gangs, and an Indian woman who had acted as nurse and chaperon and cook and general servant ever since the death of the girl's mother a number of years before.

While he was still stumbling along, trying to pierce the gloom which settled almost instantly after sunset, Marks was startled to see a white figure rise suddenly before him and to hear a feminine voice remark, "I wondered if you'd come."

"Didn't you know I would?" replied Ezra. "Your spill in the river had me scared stiff for a moment, but it was a mighty lucky accident for me."

At the girl's suggestion they seated themselves outside, being joined before long by Petersen himself, who, with more than a trace of his Slavic ancestry apparent in his voice, thanked Marks for rescuing his daughter. It was when the older man left them and the girl's figure was outlined with startling distinctness by the light from the open door, that Ezra received a shock which brought him to earth with a crash.

In the semidarkness he had been merely aware that the girl was wearing a dress which he would have characterized as "something white." But once he saw her standing in the center of the path of light which streamed from the interior of the house there could be no mistake.

The dress was of white silk!

More than that, it was made from material which Marks would have sworn had been cut from the same bolt as the sample which the Collector had shown him in Seattle!

"What's the matter, Mr. Marks?" inquired the girl, evidently noting the surprise which Ezra was unable completely to suppress. "Seen a ghost or something?"

"I thought for a moment I had," was the operative's reply, as he played for time. "It must be your dress. My— my sister had one just like it once."

"It is rather pretty, isn't it? In spite of the fact that I made it myself— out of some silk that dad— that dad brought home."

Ezra thought it best to change the subject, and as soon as he could find the opportunity said good night, with a promise to be on hand the next day to see that the plunge in the river wasn't repeated.

But the next morning he kept as far away from the girl— Fay Petersen— as he could, without appearing to make a point of the matter. He had thought the whole thing over from every angle and his conclusion was always the same. The Petersens were either hand in glove with the gang that was running the silk across the border or they were doing the smuggling themselves. The lonely cabin, the proximity to the border, the air of restraint which he had noted the previous evening (based principally upon the fact that he had not been invited indoors), the silk dress— all were signs which pointed at least to a knowledge of the plot to beat the customs.

More than that, when Marks commenced to make some guarded inquiries about the family of the girl whom he had saved from drowning, he met with a decidedly cool reception.

"Old Man Petersen has some big loggin' interests in these parts," declared the most loquacious of his informants, "an' they say he's made a pile o' money in the last few months. Some say it's timber an' others say it's— well, it ain't nobody's concern how a man makes a livin' in these parts, s'long as he behaves himself."

"Isn't Petersen behaving himself?" asked Ezra.

"Stranger," was the reply, "it ain't always healthy to pry into another man's affairs. Better be satisfied with goin' to see the girl. That's more than anybody around here's allowed to do."

"So there was an air of mystery about the Petersen house, after all!" Marks thought. It hadn't been his imagination or an idea founded solely upon the sight of the silk dress!

The next fortnight found the operative a constant and apparently a welcome visitor at the house up the river. But, hint as he might, he was never asked indoors— a fact that made him all the more determined to see what was going on. While he solaced himself with the thought that his visits were made strictly in the line of duty, that his only purpose was to discover Petersen's connection with the smuggled silk, Ezra was unable entirely to stifle another

feeling— something which he hadn't known since the old days in Vermont, when the announcement of a girl's wedding to another man had caused him to leave home and seek his fortunes in Boston.

Fay Petersen was pretty. There was no denying that fact. Also she was very evidently prepossessed in favor of the man who had saved her from the river. But this fact, instead of soothing Marks's conscience, only irritated it the more. Here he was on the verge of making love to a girl— really in love with her, as he admitted to himself— and at the same time planning and hoping to send her stepfather to the penitentiary. He had hoped that the fact that Petersen was not her own father might make things a little easier for him, but the girl had shown in a number of ways that she was just as fond of her foster-parent as she would have been of her own.

"He's all the daddy I ever knew," she said one night, "and if anything ever happened to him I think it would drive me crazy," which fell far short of easing Ezra's mind, though it strengthened his determination to settle the matter definitely.

The next evening that he visited the Petersens he left a little earlier than usual, and only followed the road back to Northport sufficiently far to make certain that he was not being trailed. Then retracing his steps, he approached the house from the rear, his soft moccasins moving silently across the ground, his figure crouched until he appeared little more than a shadow between the trees.

Just as he reached the clearing which separated the dwelling from the woods, he stumbled and almost fell. His foot had caught against something which felt like the trunk of a fallen tree, but which moved with an ease entirely foreign to a log of that size.

Puzzled, Marks waited until a cloud which had concealed the moon had drifted by, and then commenced his examination. Yes, it was a log— and a big one, still damp from its immersion in the river. But it was so light that he could lift it unaided and it rang to a rap from his knuckles. The end which he first examined was solid, but at the other end the log was a mere shell, not more than an inch of wood remaining inside the bark.

It was not until he discovered a round plug of wood— a stopper, which fitted precisely into the open end of the log— that the solution of the whole mystery dawned upon him. The silk had been shipped across the border from Canada inside the trunks of trees, hollowed out for the purpose! Wrapping the bolts in oiled silk would keep them perfectly waterproof and the plan was so simple as to be impervious to detection, save by accident.

Emboldened by his discovery, Marks slipped silently across the cleared space to the shadow of the house, and thence around to the side, where a few

cautious cuts of his bowie knife opened a peep hole in the shutter which covered the window. Through this he saw what he had hoped for, yet feared to find— Petersen and three of his men packing bolts of white silk in boxes for reshipment. What was more, he caught snatches of their conversation which told him that another consignment of the smuggled goods was due from Trail, just across the border, within the week.

Retreating as noiselessly as he had come, Marks made his way back to Northport, where he wrote two letters— or, rather, a letter and a note. The first, addressed to the sheriff, directed that personage to collect a posse and report to Ezra Marks, of the Customs Service, on the second day following. This was forwarded by special messenger, but Marks pocketed the note and slipped it cautiously under the door of the Petersen house the next evening.

"It's a fifty-fifty split," he consoled his conscience. "The government gets the silk and the Petersens get their warning. I don't suppose I'll get anything but the devil for not landing them!"

The next morning when the sheriff and his posse arrived they found, only an empty house, but in the main room were piled boxes containing no less than thirty thousand yards of white silk— valued at something over one hundred thousand dollars. On top of the boxes was an envelope addressed to Ezra Marks, Esq., and within it a note which read, "I don't know who you are, Mr. Customs Officer, but you're a man!"

There was no signature, but the writing was distinctly feminine.

"AND WAS that all Marks ever heard from her?" I asked, when Quinn paused.

"So far as I know," said the former operative. "Of course, Washington never heard about that part of the case. They were too well satisfied with Ezra's haul and the incoming cargo, which they also landed, to care much about the Petersens. So the whole thing was entered on Marks's record precisely as he had figured it— a fifty-fifty split. You see, even government agents aren't always completely successful— especially when they're fighting Cupid as well as crooks!"

End